HEIDS
Higher Education Information Directors in Scotland

Minutes of HEIDS Meeting
Held on Wednesday 8th September 2004
University of Paisley
Unapproved

Present:

Chair
Paul Dean	Napier University (NU)	PD

Secretary
Andrew McCreath	Robert Gordon University (RGU)	AM
Malcolm Bain	University of St Andrews (UoStA)	MB
Fraser Greig	University of Abertay (UoAy)	FG
Andrew McCreath	Robert Gordon University (RGU)	AM
Linda McCormick	University of Glasgow (UoG)	LM
Richard Murphy	University of Dundee (UoD)	RM
Brian Robertson	University of Aberdeen (UoAn)	BR
David Rundell	Heriot Watt University (HWU)	DR
Alun Hughes	UHI Millennium Institute (UHI)	AH
Brian Gilmore	University of Edinburgh (UoE)	BG
George Farquhar	University of Strathclyde (UoSe)	GF
Jim Buchan	UKERNA/SEED	JB
Tom Mortimer	Glasgow School of Art (GSA)	TM
Tony Shaw	University of Paisley (UoP)	TS
Gerry McCauley	University of Paisley (UoP)	GM

1. Apologies

Peter Glennie	Robert Gordon University (RGU)	PG
Tony Osborne	University of Stirling (UoSg)	TO
Stuart Brough	University of Strathclyde (UoSe)	SB
Louise Garden	Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)	LG
David Beard	SHEFC	DB
Graham Pryor	University of Aberdeen (UoAn)	GP
Michael Turpie	FE Colleges ICT Managers' Group (FE)	MT
Alex Wilson	Queen Margaret University College (QMUC)	AW
Stuart McFarlane	Edinburgh College of Art (ECA)	SM
Bill Harvey	SHEFC	BH
Peter Kemp	University of Stirling (UoSg)	PK

It was noted that Michael Turpie has changed jobs and sends his apologies but still wishes to be involved with HEIDS due to his continuing leadership role involvement in the FE ICT Managers group.

2. Minutes of previous meeting.

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising.

PD noted that contact with the FE ICT Managers group had gone quiet, but that he was continuing to liaise with Michael Turpie.

PD stated that there was an action carried forward from the last minute for him to circulate comments from an NCC meeting on the subject of forensic investigation.

Action: PD

AM reported that he had met Oracle in London along with John Townsend of Liverpool John Moore University, and Oracle had agreed that their Campus Agreement would in fact continue as before and that Universities were not expected to fall under the OGC contract – although they could if they wished. Some contracts had been taken out specifying student numbers in FTE's, and some expressed them as just numbers. Oracle was planning to align these in a way that would not disadvantage any users.

It was noted that it was still the intention to have a presentation in the future around the use of tools such as Supportworks and a knowledgebase.

Action: PD

4. Discussion and shared experiences of server consolidation strategies

As agreed at the previous meeting, there was a substantial discussion around the subject of server consolidation.

PD stated that Napier ran most services centrally, and operated 2 SAN's. One has from Dell and one was from HP. Napier ultimately planned to operate 2 SAN's each capable of taking a full load, but not dynamically linked. i.e.in the event of a disaster they would accept they would have to rebuild systems on the remaining SAN. They also planned to host HP-UX in due course.

AM stated that RGU were in the process of implementing an IBM blade centre, and multi-processor box running VMWare, based around a SAN. This was the first phase of a strategy similar to that being considered by Napier – i.,e 2 SAN's for resilience purposes but not dynamically linked.

BR stated that Aberdeen University had purchased a 13TB SAN. There were 3 stakeholders – 2 internally (within their Information Systems Directorate) and the third was the Medical Faculty. They planned to provide storage to the Medical Faculty as a service. This was a new and untested relationship for them – i.e. DISS providing storage, and the Medical Faculty providing servers, and the big test would be during problem resolution. It was a large SAN centrally managed, based on IBM Fast-T and split across 3 geographically separate server rooms. The University Corporate Systems would be mirrored. For their backup, they planned to go to Tivoli – backing up across sites (i.e. the backup for one server room would be located in another). They were aware this would generate backup traffic across the network but believed the network would handle this. In terms of server consolidation, they planned to start on their Corporate Services. Their

implementation had been purchased from Morse, and they were using ETAGON software which allows the rapid replication of blades. The cost of this implementation was in the region of £0.5m.

GF stated that Strathclyde University ran 2 main SAN's approximately 800 m apart, one based around SUN technology and one around HP. GF stated that their Auditors liked the arrangements, and the University was actively encouraging academics to use the SAN's to avoid departmental servers being housed in poor locations. GF believed that the message was getting across, but also stated that they did not wish to take over full management of all departmental services, but more the data storage and backup service. They are using Legato network backup. The cost of their HP SAN was in the region of £300k.

AM stated that RGU would be implementing at the end of the year a SAN as the first phase of a 2 data centre strategy. Associated with the SAN would be the implementation of 2 Blade Centres, and 2 multi-processor servers running VMware for test environments and less heavily loaded server environments. This approach was intended to be the University's main server strategy, and although 2 data centres were envisaged for disaster recovery purposes it was not planned at this stage to implement realtime failover for resilience. The cost of the first phase of this strategy was in the region of £380k.

TM stated that the costs for these implementations appeared to be high and would be difficult for a small institution to afford. However he believed that having 2 separate facilities for resilience/ DR was important.

PD stated that diagnosing problems in these environments had proved to be difficult, and BR confirmed that this technology is quite complex. GF stated that it was important to have confidence in the software that drives the disk drives in a SAN.

GF stated that one of the key benefits was in disaster recovery. TM agreed, but stated that his proposals to GCA had been rejected due to lack of funds. TS reported that his proposals had also been turned down on a cost basis.

BR stated that they had not pushed resilience or DR as a key justification for their SAN, but stated that the University of Aberdeen generally needed capacity, consolidation and a reduced management overhead. DR/Resilience fell out of the proposed solution as a powerful added benefit.

BR also stated that "virtual storage" was emerging as another concept, but it didn't appear that any University's were seriously looking at this at present.

MB asked if anyone was considering the use of Network Attached Storage (NAS) as an alternative. St Andrews University have around 3TB across their servers. They have a budget of around £100k and are able to implement a 5TB NAS for that.

TM stated that they managed a few NAS boxes, but that users had started to consolidate their storage and felt that they may have outgrown NAS.

BR stated that they would be looking at a hybrid – a NAS gateway on a SAN filestore.

PD asked if Universities were backing up any less as a result of SAN implementation, but the general consensus was that they were not.

RM stated that the flexibility of SAN technology was important as a benefit.

AM stated that RGU had worked out the full cost of server replacement based on traditional architecture, and the cost of a SAN based blade-centre/VMWARE alternative, while greater, was only slightly greater overall.

BR stated that the expected lifespan of their SAN was around 5 years.

5. Use of Star Office in Scottish Universities

PD asked those present for their views on the note from DB outlining the agreement between SUN and the Scottish Executive for the use of Star Office across educational institutions in Scotland.

RM asked if there were any differences between this scheme and previous arrangements. BR believed that what was on offer was the full retail package, and that it was legitimate for institutions to give students details of the package via their web site.

TS stated that he had raised the issue, but that there had been no interest in Paisley University.

GF stated that in a survey of students, their feedback was that students wanted Microsoft.

PD pointed out, however, that the use of Star Office free of charge would offer a legal route for students who may at present be tempted to use illegal copies of Microsoft software.

RM pointed out that DB was looking for a response in relation to Microsoft Campus licencing. It was agreed by all present that in the foreseeable future this agreement was unlikely to have any impact on existing Microsoft Campus agreements. MB stated that St Andrews University did not have a Microsoft Campus Agreement.

BG stated that he objected to what he saw was a perceived pressure to move away from Microsoft products. TS stated that he felt that such encouragement was reasonable from a Value for Money perspective.

RM stated that Universities should be aware of potential future implications if the use of Star Office became widespread amongst secondary school children who then moved into HE.

BG felt that it might be best to offer both products on lab machines – i.e. Star Office as well as, but not instead of, Microsoft products.

JB stated that there had been no intention to pressurise institutions into using Star Office. The Scottish Executive had simply thought that it was an appropriate legal agreement that would benefit all educational institutions. It formed part of a £50m procurement exercise for content management and at

the end of the day it was up to individual authorities on the level of takeup of Star Office.

FG stated that file format compatibility would be key to ensuring the success of any widespread adoption of Star Office.

6. **MAN Issues - Super JANET V**

BG stated that things were very quiet on the SJ5 front at present. The SJ5 planning meeting had been re-scheduled and he felt that there had been some slippage in the overall project.

LM stated that she believed that the changeover was still due to happen around December 2006. She also stated that every MAN was being offered £55k per annum for additional staff costs over the next 3 years.

BR asked if there was any clarity on the environmental requirements of the equipment? LM and BG stated that this was not clear, but indications were that a "couple of racks" was what was in mind.

7. **Forensic investigation services progress report**

AM stated that A Cormack had not been able to progress his document on server based investigations and AM had been unable to progress his own actions to date.

There had been no feedback from the University Secretaries group, but the proposals worked up by TS appeared to have reached the HR Directors and had been announced through UCISA.

RM stated that from memory, the HEIDS interest was more from a practical perspective and while Andrew Cormack's document would be a good legal background, what would be of most value to HEIDS was a document which outlined a practical implementation.

LM stated that it was important that a distinction was drawn between issues surrounding illegal use, and issues surrounding inappropriate use which might not in itself be illegal.

AM agreed to pick this up.   **Action: AM**

8. **Reports from other groups**

   a. SHEFC

   Nothing to report.

   b. Universities Scotland

   Nothing to report.

   c. JISC

BG observed that there were a growing number of situations where JISC was receiving money from HEFCE for specific projects and institutions in Scotland were losing out unless there was matching money from the Scottish Funding Councils.

AH agreed and said that there was a general problem with poor articulation between the funding councils north and south of the border. A good recent example had been some of the e-learning programmes. He felt that JISC was not applying enough priority at a strategic level to achieve greater synergy in funding opportunities.

LM stated that there might be some situations where there were genuine differences between Scotland and England and there might equally be some specific projects for Scotland in the future.

It was agree that PD would raise this with BH/PK.

Action PD.

d. UKERNA

BG commented that the SLA availability targets had remained unchanged. There had been a number of breaches – many due to power loss.

e. Regional Support Centres.

LM stated that the results of the HETNA survey would be available soon and would provide feedback on training needs across a number of areas of support – including network security, wireless networks, firewalls etc. She reported that the RSC's were well funded and had a number of programmes, designed to address ICT skills for IT staff, with places still available. One was the e-merge programme targeted at a range of college staff and a variety of ICT skills.

LM felt that the RSC's in England supported a wider range of institutions, whereas in Scotland it tended to be colleges.

f. SCURL/SCONL.

AH stated that there was nothing particular to report.

9. Reports from meetings attended

PD stated that he planned to go to Educause in Denver and that Les Watson would be traveling too. We look forward to a good debrief at the next meeting!

10. Any Other Competent Business

WIRELESS NETWORKS.

RM stated that an approach had been made to the Principal at Dundee University about a subscription based rollout of wireless services and wondered what plans other institutions had.

BG stated that Edinburgh University had wireless access in all public areas and were assisting Schools with their own networks. They had rolled this out in-house.

PD believed that Leeds Metropolitan had a commercial arrangement that covered Halls and the Campus.

TM stated that they planned to put wireless access into Architecture and the Library shortly, but it would be a further 6 months before a full rollout.

BR stated that they had rolled out wireless but at present did not support students' own laptops using this service.

GF stated that it was important to separate trusted VLAN's (e.g. for staff use) from untrusted VLAN's (e.g. for staff/general public). They planned to pilot wireless in the library with a commercial partner for public areas. Students would be able to buy vouchers to use in the town, but this was a separate service.

PD stated that Napier were about to rollout wireless, and AM stated that RGU were in a similar position.

DR stated that they were planning a network refresh next year which would support a wider wireless rollout.

MB stated that they had wireless networks in their library and were currently rolling them out further.

RM stated that having listened to the situation in other institutions, it appeared that they would achieve a short term gain with a commercial partner, but that a subscription based service might not be attractive in the future.

BR asked if anyone was experiencing increased "social traffic" on JANET as a result of wireless networks, wired halls etc. RM stated that the use of video, games, and instant messaging seemed to be driving this and felt that it was an area to watch.

DR stated that in his experience students preferred the JANET network with restrictions rather than a commercial network with charges.

GF stated that now that wireless networks had been running for a few years, Managers think that they have replaced the need for any wired network. BR agreed and cited a recent example where planners proposed a new building with no data wiring whatever.

INFORMATION STRATEGY
PD asked others on their experience on developing an information strategy, as Napier were planning to put one together shortly.

LM suggested that a look at their INFOSTRAT web site might be of use.

http://www.gla.ac.uk/infostrat/

She felt that their experience had been positive with centres and faculties working closely together.

GF stated that they produced their first information strategy in 1995 and that their converged service which emerged as a result has worked well. They are revisiting this now in the light of new technology.

TS stated that there were a number of case studies on JISC that were useful. He stated that Paisley University's new Principal was from Leeds (where one of the case studies was centred) and was keen to get a strategy in place for Paisley.

MIS/ACADEMIC COMPUTING

DR stated that Heriot Watt were revisiting arrangements for their MIS versus Academic side of computing and would welcome any views or comments from other Directors.

Action ALL.

PD thanked TS for hosting the meeting, and for providing the lunch.

11. Dates of future meetings

24th November 2004	Napier University,
February 2005	Dundee University
June 2005	UHI, Inverness (afternoon meeting)

12. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

PD opened the AGM and stated that the main business was to elect a Chair and a Secretary for the next 12 months. PD had previously confirmed his willingness to serve as Chair for a further year, and AM had confirmed his willingness to serve as Secretary for a further year.

PD asked AM if there had been any other nominations, and AM confirmed that there had not.

There being no objections or other nominations, PD and AM were duly confirmed to serve for a further year.

13. Presentation by Paisley University

The meeting finished with an informal presentation from TS on the current situation and planned developments with regard to IT at Paisley University.

A J McCreath
9th November 2004.