

HEIDS

Higher Education Information Directors in Scotland

Minutes of HEIDS Meeting Held on Wednesday 19th May 2004 St Andrews University

Present:

Chair

Paul Dean	Napier University (NU)	PD
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Secretary

Andrew McCreath	Robert Gordon University (RGU)	AM
Peter Kemp	University of Stirling (UoSg)	PK
Stuart McFarlane	Edinburgh College of Art (ECA)	SM
Malcolm Bain	University of St Andrews (UoSStA)	MB
Bill Harvey	SHEFC	BH
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
Alex Wilson	Queen Margaret University College (QMUC)	AW
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

1. Apologies

Peter Glennie	Robert Gordon University (RGU)	PG
Tony Osborne	University of Stirling (UoSg)	TO
Tony Shaw	University of Paisley (UoP)	TS
Louis Lee	University of St Andrews (UoSStA)	LL
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

2. Minutes of previous meeting.

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

3. Matters Arising.

Under Section 4 of the previous minutes, BH noted that the services of the SFC's lawyers to review the forensic investigation procedures had not been taken up to date.

It was also noted that the meeting of the FE ICT Managers Group on 15th December, at which the forensic investigation procedures were to be presented, had been cancelled and there had been no replacement meeting to date. PD agreed to contact Mike Turpie.

Action: PD

It was noted that the forensic investigation procedures drafted by TS had now been agreed by the University Secretaries Group.

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

Action: PD

RM stated that he did not receive many responses to the salary survey he carried out in November 2003. Of 5 responses, the mean was £47,500. LM stated that the UCISA survey of 2002 had reported a median of £52,500.

There was an action arising from the last minute to place a copy of the SCONL document on IT support in libraries onto the HEIDS website. LM thought that this document was primarily concerned with 24x7 support.

Action: PK¹

There was an action arising from the last minute to provide feedback on the situation with Oracle Licensing.

Action: AM

4. Presentation/Discussion on Options for Multi-service Help Desks – PK

PK delivered a presentation on work carried out at UoSg to bring the IT Help Desk and Library Help Desk together into a "1-stop shop". A copy of the presentation will be placed on the HEIDS website.

Some of the key points that PK drew out were:

- Students had not been satisfied with the previous arrangements.

¹ Note from 20/5/04:

"Andrew

I have looked on the SCONUL site for the material mentioned at the meeting yesterday (IT support in libraries - but probably about collaborative 24 hour helpdesks), but could not find it. The 24 hour helpdesk project was led by LSE - there is some information about it on LSE's site at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/itservices/help/Helpdesk/FollowTheSun.htm>

Peter"

- Students found the library more convenient as a place to resolve their IT issues.
- Staffing – there were between 1 and 2 people manning the phones, 1 library specialist and 1 IT specialist on rota.
- Their experience was that users were good at directing their enquiry (IT or Library) into the right queue.
- UoSg were able to use the same system for other services (lecture room problems, CD's, scanner problems etc).
- The new system had received 93% user satisfaction, and was effective in bringing together support staff to solve problems.

Questions

- TM asked what the scope of the service was (e.g. specialist support). PK stated that they worked closely with departments and staff in Faculty support teams. This was helped by a relatively cohesive University. Computing Science, however, was managed separately.
- MB asked if it was 9-5 support. PK replied that it was a bit more than that – generally 08.45 am to 7pm. PK stated that in his experience there had been little demand for support past 7pm.
- PK confirmed to SM that this help desk was now the primary contact point for users to access the IT Department for assistance.
- FG stated that UoAy had put in place similar arrangements. They had split front office and back office. The front desk was face to face and they used hybrid staff with specialist background. PK stated that they found that staff became hybrid quite rapidly after some experience on the help desk, and that IT staff grew in confidence.
- BR stated that UoAn had implemented a converged help desk, along the lines of UoAy. The main desk was in the IT section with sub desks in the library. They used hybrid staff (low grade) to handle 60-70% of requests. They had found cultural differences with library staff initially keen to handle the IT queries, but subsequently having some difficulty with the pressure of this. However, many library people were more people focussed. BR also stated that they would shortly be trialling a system of users logging their own calls. BR also stated that although their School of Medicine provided a separate help desk, they shared the same help desk system and were able to pass on calls.
- RM asked about available statistics. PK stated that the centre processed around 300 calls per week, plus probably another 400 per week solved across the desk and not logged. PK stated that he was hoping that the buildup of a knowledgebase would improve the quality of service. BR stated that "Supportworks" does have a knowledgebase, and that web-based call logging would have access to this to help users fix their own problems. However, BR stated that it was east to degrade the quality of information in a knowledgebase and it was important to have consistence of style and information.
- PD stated that at NU they had also split front and back office support. A most effective tool they had used was an easy to remember telephone number – "3000". PD stated NU had a problem in getting staff to log calls that were answered at first contact. PK stated that they did not log trivial phone calls. PD stated that they used the RMS help desk system which was available through the CHEST agreement. PD observed that students mainly went to the counters while staff mainly used the phone although both could use either route. PK

agreed and stated that their experience was that staff rarely came to the counter, but preferred to use phone/e-mail.

PD thanked PK for his presentation. It was agreed that the use of tools such as Supportworks and the associated use of a knowledgebase would be a suitable topic for a future presentation.

Action: PD.

5. MAN Issues

There was an extensive discussion on the issues surrounding the Superjanet 5 (SJ5) upgrade, and the relationship of this to MAN upgrades.

BG lead the discussion. BG stated that the SJ5 planning group had met the previous Friday. HEFCE were planning to spend £10m for the SJ5 upgrade and MAN upgrades (split approximately 50:50). SHEFC so far were planning to contribute £756k. BG stated that the procurement had started, and that UKERNA had a preference for more managed fibre rather than just buying bandwidth. The procurement process was along the lines of a "Competitive Dialogue" which will take time, but which will allow a substantial discussion with Telco's go reach the best solution.

A 1-year extension to the SJ4 contract had been proposed to the JCN, and the JCN would receive the UKERNA presentations on SJ5 in June. BG stated that generally the feeling was that bandwidth currently being provided was OK and with Worldcom now out of Chapter 11 in the USA the 1 year extension to SJ4 was acceptable.

BG stated that in Scotland, SHEFC had not to date matched the MAN upgrade component of the SJ5 upgrade. BG felt that there were 2 issues to be addressed in Scotland:

- a) BG stated that his understanding was that resilience to the RNO level is a MAN's issue in England. With funding available from HEFCE, that was OK, but in Scotland there will be an issue of no funding is available to the MANs from SHEFC.
- b) (less critical). BG stated that it was likely that SJ5 will be multi-service in England, although the mechanism was uncertain at present. MANs will therefore have some form of multiservice network with IP and managed bandwidth service. This will cost money to MAN's (for example through a requirement to upgrade routers and possibly take on the management of edge routers). This would require additional funding to achieve in Scotland, whereas SHEFC has provided additional money to MANs in England.

In response to these concerns, BH stated that UKERNA had had a meeting in February which had led to these decisions. A PFI initiative for SJ5 had been ruled out, Whereas previous concerns with Worldcom had lead to backup arrangements being put in place with C&W, it was now felt that maintaining 2 suppliers into the future was not a cost effective way forward and that it would be acceptable to take the risk of one supplier as this risk was now lower.

BG stated that a proposed design for SJ5 involved core links around the country and secondary links through the RNO's. If these secondary links were provided by a 2nd supplier, then they could theoretically carry traffic if the main links failed.

BH believed that the main discussion was around the balance between bandwidth and resilience. Substantial emphasis in the past had been placed on bandwidth, but there was a consensus that resilience was the main priority for SJ5.

BH stated that FE contracts would cease in 2005 so that there was a need to take some action, and that the Aberdeen and Inverness links would become part of the backbone.

BH stated that it was important to understand the cost of the whole upgrade in Scotland, and that UKERNA needs to ask MAN's on their issues and needs and present this to the Funding Councils as one bill. Therefore, over the next 3 months it was essential to agree what was required to move the whole network forward – even if this was best guess profiles at this stage. He was aware that there was an issue and confirmed that the Funding Council have requested funding and that they do wish to fund the upgrade in Scotland, including what is required for the MANs.

BH also pointed out that it was important to come forward with sensible, evidence based, figures and to avoid surprises for the Funding Council.

PK wondered if it would be appropriate to include BG in these discussions as he was a member of the JCN. BH stated that formally the requirements had to come from UKERNA but agreed that BG had a key role to play.

LM asked if the secondary loops through the RNO's, described earlier, would provide resilience of some kind. BG stated that they would give more resilience.

PD summarised the discussion by saying that this looked like a useful way forward and that he felt reassured by the response from BH. BG agreed.

BG agreed to supply copies of the relevant presentations to JCN on the web.

Action: BG.

6. Forensic investigation services progress report

AM stated that he had agreed to prepare a document which would advise on procedures appropriate for server based investigations. This would complement the document prepared by TS, which focussed on desktop investigation.

By coincidence, AM had made contact with Andrew Cormack of UKERNA who, it turned out, was preparing such a document in any case and was happy for his document to be adopted in Scotland. At present Andrew Cormack is liaising with the prosecuting authorities in England and Wales with

a view to finalising a Memorandum of Understanding. Andrew Cormack has also made contact with the authorities in Scotland, and J-LIS are in the loop.

A draft of the document from Andrew Cormack had previously been circulated around the group. The following were agreed after some discussion:

- It was important to make sure that TS's document and the one produced by Andrew Cormack were compatible with each other.
- There was a preference for a single guidance document to be available at the end of this process. This might involve Andrew Cormack's document remaining as a UK-wide high level guide, with a more detailed guide being prepared for operational use by HEIDS.
- Whereas Andrew Cormack's document focussed primarily on legal issues, HEIDS required a document that also addressed "inappropriate use" that may in itself not be illegal.

It was agreed that AJM would follow up on these points.

Action: AJM.

7. SSDN Update

JB gave a presentation on progress with the Scottish Schools Digital Network (previously SPARK). Some of the key points that JB brought out in his presentation were:

- The SSDN is effectively another regional network, that will have up to 1 million users. It will be used by schools for educational and corporate purposes and the contracts reflected that.
- The Scottish Executive (SE) and UKERNA had put in place a contractual agreement, and there was also a separate customer agreement between the SE and each local authority.
- They had been able to demonstrate good performance against SLA's for the JANET network and this had been key to persuading the SE that it was an appropriate network to use.
- SSDN has paid for improved reliability, including an additional link from Inverness to Sco-Locate.
- The pattern of usage, and in particular peak loads, was different from that seen in HE.. As a result, the "at risk" time of 6-8am may not suit Councils (e.g. they may need to post information regarding bad weather).
- Potential bandwidth loads would be very high if each Council used their full allocation, but this was not borne out in reality at the moment.
- SSDN Intranet procurement was now in progress, and will impact bandwidth as it rolls out additional services to schools. The target was for an Intranet service introduction in summer of 2005.
- The project was being implemented through a "negotiated procurement".
- With a population of 1m users, JB felt that it was important to keep a dialogue with that community – possibly even a more formal relationship with HEIDS and SMCG.

AM asked about non-educational use of the network and JB confirmed that this was explicitly allowed within the contracts, although commercial use was not.

BG asked how it had been established that there was no cross subsidy. JB replied that UKERNA received payments for transit traffic and new infrastructure that had to be put in place.

AH asked if there was any more public information regarding the intranet. JB stated that information would be available on the web site.

8. Public Information Working Group and HERO Web Site.

BH stated that a draft circular would be issued to institutions for comment next week. Essentially, institutions would be expected to post information on their own web sites with regard to teaching quality information. However, the Public Information Working Group had agreed that the HERO web site should be used to collate this information. Technically, that might require the implementation of metadata tags on institutional web sites so that the HERO web site could "harvest" this information automatically.

BH stated that a workshop would be held in the Autumn for technical staff, and that implementation of any solution by 2005 was being sought.

9. Reports from other groups

a. SHEFC

BH stated that with regard to the items mentioned in the previous meeting, it was hoped to have something on the "toolkit" to support institutional decisions by the Summer. The IT training needs analysis was ongoing.

BH also stated that SHEFC and SFEC had asked for proposals from the HE/FE community on projects to implement a transformational use of e-learning. The formal bidding documents would be issued in June with bids to be submitted by September. To date there had been substantial interest in this opportunity but BH counselled that successful bids would have to be convincingly transformational. For example, a proposal to spend £50k is unlikely to represent a transformational change.

{BH left the meeting at this point}

b. Universities Scotland

PK stated that there were 2 key issues for Universities Scotland:

- 1) The recent proposals to merge the Funding Councils and reclassify Universities and Colleges as "STEPS" (Secondary Tertiary Education Providers).
- 2) The Freedom of Information Act. With regard to this, PK stated that a model publication scheme was now available and indications were that almost all institutions would adopt this. There was a requirement for each institution to submit their scheme by the end of May. A series of meetings/training days were planned to spread knowledge on this

subject, and a practitioners group was being set up to produce guidance.

TM reported that he had found the session interesting, and observed that there were implications for contract negotiations. For this reason, a procurement group was being set up by JCACP. Generally, a culture of openness was expected.

c. JISC

AM queried a recent call for bids, which had been restricted to HEFCE funded institutions only. AH stated that this had been done before, and the requirement was that bids be led by English institutions, although there was no restriction on Scottish institutions being part of a consortium.

d. JNUG

BG reported that this group would probably be wound up.

e. UKERNA

This had largely been covered elsewhere in the agenda. BG raised the subject of “at risk” time. A recent survey had proved inconclusive. There was a suggestion that rewording any bulletins to stress that the network might be down during the “at risk” times would be helpful, rather than implying that it always would be down. However, BG stated that the telecoms companies sometimes just took the network down.

BR stated that perception was very important and that announcements to the user base about “at risk” periods might create poor perceptions about network reliability. He wondered if a better approach might be to contractually keep the “at risk” times but not to communicate these too widely, as in reality very few people were affected.

f. Regional Support Centres.

LM encouraged everyone to complete the online survey (www.hetna.org.uk).

g. SCURL/SCONL.

PK stated that there was nothing particular to report.

10. Reports from meetings attended

Nothing to report.

11. St Andrews University Presentation

MB gave a presentation on IT developments at St Andrews University, and it was agreed that the acetates would be posted on the HEIDS web site after the meeting. ☺

During the subsequent discussion, PK asked if anyone was pursuing a server reduction strategy. His view was that whereas there had been a tendency to

buy “per application” in the past, this may not be the best way forward. MB stated that they were looking at this at present, but had no specific plans.

It was agreed that a discussion on server consolidation should be an item at the next meeting.

Action: PD.

12. Any Other Competent Business

LM stated that UCISA had received money from JISC to prepare templates on security policies.

PD stated that he had attended a meeting on Content Management arranged by UCISA MIS, and observed that in terms of commercial solutions, Microsoft were advancing at a relatively high rate.

RM asked if any institution was doing any significant work in the area of service management, and if so he would appreciate a contact.

Action: All.

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

13. Dates of future meetings

8 th September 2004	University of Paisley
November 2004	Napier University
February 2005	Dundee University
June 2005	UHI, Inverness (afternoon meeting)