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UPDATE

Guardian summit influences UCISA plans

Peter Tinson – UCISA

A wide range of topics were covered at the Guardian HE summit in early February. Attendance by delegates and speakers alike was badly affected by the heavy snowfall that hit London and the South East the previous night but thanks to a combination of technology and reorganisation, the bulk of the programme went ahead. It was estimated that two thirds of those who could not attend the Conference as a result of the weather watched the streaming video over the two days. In addition, one of the presentations was delivered by telephone!

The highlights of the event were the presentations by Rick Trainor, President of Universities UK, and the Minister for Higher Education and Intellectual Property, David Lammy. Trainor highlighted the results of UUK's recent study on demographical trends and assessed the risks to the sector of those trends. Two key messages from his presentation were that the current unit level of funding needs to be maintained in order to continue to enhance the student experience and that the temptation to reduce student numbers in response to the falling number of 18 year olds should be resisted. He also noted the risk to the sector of unintended consequences of legislation (the recent proposals on addressing illicit peer to peer filesharing may well be a case in point) and urged close monitoring of the impact of the points based immigration system. There was a need to provide increased support of technology based learning, particularly to allow institutions to develop their offerings in the global online learning market. However, Trainor felt that investment had not been strong in recent years in technology based learning and that dissemination of best practice is poor. This is clearly an area where UCISA, together with its sister organisations, can assist and we are already talking to ALT and HeLF regarding response to Sir Ron Cooke's submission to the Denham review of higher education.

David Lammy focused on the widening participation agenda in his response but noted that HEIs needed to focus on diversity and be increasingly flexible. He stressed the need for university management to deliver on strategies and manage their institutions well. The recognition that there are few members of institutional senior management who have a clear understanding of what ICT can deliver places greater emphasis on UCISA's Leadership strand of activity to fill the void and lead their institutions to achieve the flexibility needed to survive these turbulent financial times.

Another highlight was a presentation from Russell Stannard who won the Times Higher award for outstanding ICT initiative of the year in 2008. Russell won the award for establishing his website TeacherTrainingVideos.com which highlighted the use of relatively simple technology to develop a series of short *how to* training videos. He is now experimenting with using the same technology to provide aural and visual feedback to students on their coursework. Russell is speaking at the UCISA Service Desk and IT Support Staff 2009 Symposium at Aston Business School in July.

The summit highlighted a number of areas where UCISA may need to concentrate its efforts over the next few years. The timing of the conference was convenient as it will provide further input to UCISA's plans for the coming year to be presented at the Annual General Meeting in March.

People news

SOAS has appointed John Robinson as Director of Information Services and Learning Support. John is currently working for the JISC Executive as Director of Services. John will start at SOAS on 1 March 2009.

UCISA represents the whole higher education sector in the provision and development of academic, management and administrative information systems providing a network of contacts and a powerful lobbying voice.

For any comments, suggestions or content submission, please email us at: update@ucisa.ac.uk

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PTS Consulting Case Study: University of Cambridge

Beverley Eggleton – PTS Consulting (UK) Ltd

In 2007, the University of Cambridge initiated a two year programme to replace its existing telephone network, covering 17,000 phones across 200 different institutions and departments. The existing University telephony infrastructure was installed in 1985 but was approaching the end of its operational life. The development of the new system was based on 21st century IP and Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) voice solutions, delivered over a single converged network to produce enhanced functionality and facilities to its 17,000 end users. With their vast knowledge and experience of delivering network solutions, PTS Consulting was awarded a contract to provide technical ICT Consultancy and Project Management throughout the project. One of the key challenges faced by the University was

that its estate was spread over many hundreds of different sites and buildings, each with differing requirements, which had historically led to an extremely complex telephony network. From a technical perspective, the new system was required to work over the existing data network and ensure interoperability with open standard handsets, soft clients and applications.

After translating the University's vision and network requirements into a Business Case outlining tangible project objectives, PTS Consulting's team provided consultancy services over the detailed procurement phase, followed by installation and deployment of the telephone handsets. The deployment of the new IP telephony solution will provide the University's telephone users with fast connection to SIP-enabled

networks via open routes such as the public internet. A particular advantage of voice and data integration is the ability for a user to 'click' on a phone number and the system will dial the number, just like clicking on a hyperlink. The project is currently predicted to finish 3 months ahead of schedule with PTS Consulting already having deployed over 9,000 VoIP handsets at the University to date (January 2009). The nature of the project meant that PTS Consulting is effectively managing 200 mini projects as well as managing the core system implementation of the largest global IP Telephony project in Higher Education at this moment in time.

For more information, download the full case study at www.ptsconsulting.com/documents/Case%20Studies/University_of_Cambridge_case_study.pdf.

Glamorgan win 2008 Award for Excellence

The 2008 UCISA Award for Excellence, sponsored by Eduserv, has been won by the University of Glamorgan. The University demonstrated an innovative approach to student induction which was well received by the student body. The GlamStart initiative, which included gaming and inter-active campus maps linked to multimedia clips, was central to their student support service and demonstrated a strong relationship to institutional strategy, understanding of costs related to benefits, elements of good project management and widening participation, continual improvement and ongoing development in response to user feedback. Finally the panel assessed that the project was transferable to other institutions and thus a worthy winner of the UCISA Award for

Excellence. The Award will be presented at the UCISA 2009 Conference in Liverpool on 11 – 13 March. In addition, there will be a presentation from the University of Glamorgan on their winning entry as part of the University Showcase sessions at the Conference.

There were a record number of entries to the Award for Excellence this year; the judging panel was pleased with the large number and the breadth of issues addressed. Of the other submissions, two were worthy of mention as being Highly Commended. The University of Oxford presented a novel crowd sourcing approach in building a World War I document archive. The panel was excited to see the outreach of this project which invited members of the public to scan and tag family

documents appertaining to the period. The methodology was transferable and extendible and potentially very cost effective. Queen Margaret University presented an institution wide case study of the implementation of thin client technology. What marked this submission out as excellent was that it represented a major strategic contribution to the University's environmental aims. The clarity of the benefits, the client focus of the development process followed up by a strong community outreach programme stood out. Presentations will be made to both Highly Commended submissions at the UCISA 2009 Conference.

Executive report

Peter Tinson – UCISA Executive Secretary

There continue to be regular meetings between members of the education community and representatives from the UK Border Authority on the implementation of the points based immigration database. The database is already live for Tiers 2 and 5 which covers workers and temporary positions and will be phased in for students (Tier 4) over the next twelve months. The first phase is for incoming students to be issued with a letter from their institution which they can then use in their application for a visa. Much of the discussion in the meetings on the implementation has focussed on the information to be contained in that letter. There are two main stumbling blocks – the level of detail on the qualifications used to assess the student's academic ability and the evidence of advance payment of fees.

Concern was expressed by the sector representatives about the level of detail required to be provided on the qualifications used in the academic assessment of the applicant. A compromise was proposed such that institutions would only need to list the main qualification used to assess eligibility and who the qualification was awarded by e.g. undergraduate degree from Macquarie University. Consultation with the wider HE community suggests that this compromise is acceptable, although at the time of writing it was not known whether the Home Office have accepted the proposal.

The other area of concern relates to information on any money paid by a student towards their fees and/ or accommodation. As applicants are required to demonstrate that they have the means to support themselves for the duration of the course including meeting their course fees, they will need to present evidence to the assessing officers when applying for their visa. The Home Office is unwilling to accept online receipts as evidence of fees paid by prospective students and wishes to receive paper receipts to indicate

that a certain proportion of fees or accommodation costs have been paid in advance of the visa application, any amounts paid in advance can be counted towards the maintenance requirement. Consultation with the sector has identified this as a potential problem. This concern has been passed back to the Home Office for consideration.

The most recent meeting of the Advisory Group for the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) programme was held in early January. A meeting in December to discuss the benefits of MIAP suggested that overall the higher education sector was not receptive to the programme. Consequently, the MIAP team have been tasked with producing a business case for the implementation. The process flows between the MIAP services and institutional student records systems are such that a number of interfaces will need to be developed. UCISA is looking to ensure that the costs of these are built into the business case to be presented to the sector. The outline business case is scheduled to be circulated to the Advisory Group in early March. One of the strands of the MIAP work is the introduction of the extended character set by UCAS as part of their commitment to the MIAP common data definitions. Following a survey to assess the readiness of the sector to the introduction of the extended character set into UCAS products, UCAS postponed the introduction from October 2009. The current proposal, which is out for consultation, is to introduce the extended character sets in Summer 2011.

Executive Committee News

The Executive spent much of its meeting in January discussing the business plan to be presented to the membership at the Annual General Meeting to be held during the UCISA 2009 Management Conference in Liverpool in March. The Executive reviewed the work achieved over the past year and examined the preliminary results of the Top Concerns survey. The draft business plan will be posted on the UCISA website in the weeks before the AGM for review and comment.

The Annual General Meeting of the Association will take place in Hall 2B in the BT Convention Centre, Liverpool at 1630 on Thursday 12 March. Elections to a number of Executive Committee positions will take place at the AGM. Nominations are invited, which must be proposed and seconded by representatives of Full member institutions. The nominee must also be a representative of a Full member institution and must also indicate willingness to stand for election. A pro forma nomination form and other papers for the AGM will be posted on the UCISA website in due course.



BRAND NEW COURSE
Management skills for
technical staff

22–23 April
6 and 26–27 May
Aston Business School
and online

SSG news

Helen Fletcher – Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

The main activity of the year, the User Support Conference in Reading, jointly with the Staff Development Group, has been reported on in a previous edition of Update. Paul Buckley of Sheffield Hallam University stepped down as Chair and Helen Fletcher of Buckinghamshire New University took over at the end of the Conference.

At the October planning meeting, following a paper from the Executive Committee on the remit of the Group, a decision was made to change the name from the Teaching, Learning and Information Group to the Support Services Group. The four sub-groups also changed their names: Advisory Services to Service Desk Group (SSG–SDG), Learning and Teaching to Academic Support Group (SSG–ASG), User Skills and Development to User Skills Group (SSG–USG) and Communication, Liaison and Information to Communications Group (SSG–CG). These are chaired by Dilys Young (Leeds Met), Richard Walker (York), Amber Miro (LSE) and Sue Cunningham (Leeds).

The Academic Support Group undertook the *Technology Enhanced Learning*

Survey with support from JISC during 2008. This was disseminated at the UCISA User Support Conference in July, ALT in September and at the Heads of E-Learning Forum meeting in November. The Survey findings were referenced by Sir Ron Cooke in his report *On-line Innovation in Higher Education* to John Denham MP.

The Service Desk Group ran a very successful symposium entitled *How do you measure up?* during the year, and re-ran its popular helpdesk survey. The results are on the website. The group also ran some very interesting sessions at the event, including *Nomadic learners and the Help Desk* and *Staleness in Helpdesk staff*.

In June 2008, the User Skills Group ran a one day event in Oxford to assist universities plan and provide end user training for a migration to Office 2007 or Windows Vista. Presentations focused on strategies for introducing a major change, adopting a needs based approach to training staff, and the process of selecting training material, as well as experiencing the training materials from two major suppliers.

USG also ran two parallel sessions at the User Support Conference in Reading, including one on innovative training delivery, modelled after the speed dating format. To the sounds of Nouvelle Vague, delegates circulated round tables of presenters, who each had just three minutes to get across one good idea they have used successfully for developing the skills of end users in their organisation. To find out more about *speed training* visit the Wiki page.

The Communications Group has been busy investigating relationship management: several universities submitted case studies and these were discussed at a workshop. The award for the best case study from the groups *Innovation and Communication* event was presented at the User Support Conference. The group has recently launched its own blog to keep the community informed about Communication Group activities, and to discuss topics of general interest in the communications and liaison area.

Links to the resources mentioned above are available at: www.ucisa.ac.uk/publications/update63.

Events calendar



March

11–13 **UCISA 2009 Annual Conference**
BT Convention Centre, Liverpool

April

20 **Health check your service desk**
LSE

22 **Customer liaison – a framework for HE?**
LSE

April/May

22 **Management skills for technical staff (until 27 May)**
Aston Business School and online

June

17 **Selling IT to universities**
The Oxford Belfry Hotel

July

7–8 **Advisory and distributed staff Symposium**
Aston Business School, Birmingham

Other events of interest

2009

4–6 **March**
IUISC
Galway, Ireland

24 **March**
JISC Conference
Edinburgh