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The bimonthly newsletter from UCISA

WE TALK DATA DR

UCISA 2009

Trudy Newton – University of Derby

“In the absence of information the mind fills in the blanks...”

There was little need for my mind to do this during a content rich, engaging and very well presented UCISA 2009, based at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. In the company of well over 300 other delegates I received a warm welcome from Steve Kenny, PVC at Liverpool John Moores who went on to speak about how learning and teaching needs to respond to the changing expectations of our current and future students, alongside an agenda of continuous improvement in both efficiency and flexibility of delivery/approach.

The current economic situation and the impact on HEI’s continued with David Sweeney (HEFCE) challenging us to think hard about how to maintain the quality of the services we deliver set against a climate requiring greater productivity for less cost. Making the case for investment in technology, *grabbing the agenda* and campaigning more effectively for IT to be recognised by the decision makers were only a small number of key messages in his speech.

Content for the Conference was rich and varied. A small selection of the other speakers included:

- Rod Angood plumbing the depths of the drainage system in Bath to deliver high level benefits to students in halls of residence, and utilising technology to bring significant value added service to their University experience
- Ed Gibson, Chief *Cyber Security* Adviser from Microsoft (opening comment as per title) achieving a large turnout of attendees to hear his humorous yet thought provoking session on *cyber crime* and the risks to which we are exposed. He gave much food for thought with his poignant examples about the motivation for some to undertake hacking, and the challenges we face in dealing with their work. His key message – educate the young and help your neighbour.....
- Robina Chatham, in her *Director’s take away*, challenging us to adopt strategies to address

the lack of visibility IT has at the top table within many institutions. Her key message – address and overcome the global stereotypes associated with the IT profession to engage the business and develop the technical, professional and personal credibility to deliver your message powerfully – and retain your sense of humour – people will want to be with you!

Thursday night’s formal dinner was a real highlight. Based at the magnificent St George’s Hall, we were welcomed by an organ recital from Iain Stinson and to a room laid out with the most meticulous detail. The elegance of the evening looked set to continue between courses with the arrival on stage of a string quartet, whom Peter had discovered some 18 months previously and had awaited a suitably illustrious venue in which to use them....or so we thought.....

Aptly named *Graffiti Classics*, the group launched into a series of unique classical interpretations with a clear and much appreciated display of talent, humour and audience participation. They also gave Hilary Sellars from Royal Holloway the opportunity to show her colleagues and peers that she is more than capable of *holding a tune.....*(I will say no more!!)

John Sergeant then gave an engaging, witty and highly entertaining account of his career as political correspondent, broadcaster and sometime (Strictly Come...) dancer. A great after dinner speech and a perfect end to a lovely evening.

A great Conference layout, topical and interesting University and Business Showcases, a varied range of exhibitors and a real opportunity to network with colleagues from across the sector in a great setting – good value from start to finish.

I’m sure that those attending will not underestimate the huge amount of time and effort invested by the organising team in making this event such a success. Huge thanks must go to them, along with a challenge to make UCISA 2010 at least as good, if not better!

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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Network technology gives London South Bank advantage

Andy Butcher – Data Integration Ltd

London South Bank University is one of the capital's oldest universities but its students' expectations when it comes to IT provision are definitely rooted in the present day. In fact, quality of IT provision is a key differentiator for HE organisations when attracting new students.

Meeting these expectations requires a network that has to deal with requests that simply don't arise in the commercial world. In addition to standard business programs, the network has to support many other bandwidth hungry applications, like YouTube and Facebook, 24x7.

Working in partnership with specialist IT services and integration company, Data Integration, LSBU has created a 7,000 port network across 14 buildings. The

University increased its capacity into the SuperJANET network and implemented resilient connections, which Data Integration secured with Juniper ISG firewalls using BGP (Border Gateway Protocol). The University's SuperJANET gateways are also secured with Fortinet multi-vector antivirus gateways.

Data Integration provides 24x7 network monitoring, and a DI engineer is embedded on site. They will also be monitoring key services such as Exchange, Blackboard, and web services. This approach is set to save LSBU in the region of £100,000 per year compared with alternative outsourced support. The network team is kept to a headcount of just 4 – and compared to universities of similar size, it is about 12 IT people less, and £1.5m less in spend.

Wojtek Adamek, Director of ICT at LSBU recently attended the UCISA Conference. "Someone said that networks are now a strategic part of IT, and I couldn't agree more," he comments. "We couldn't achieve our future goals without the network, and we couldn't start to deliver key courses in our Computing and Engineering schools or deliver critical new applications such as CRM. As we grow internally and the number of affiliated students working internationally increases, we must have a robust network for 24x7 delivery and that's now what we've got."

To read the full version of this case study, please go to www.dataintegration.com/lbsbu.

Procurement Group report

Lesley Beddie – Durham University

This is my first year as Chair and also the year when the UCISA Executive reviewed its Groups and their activities. PG and UCISA Exec agreed a need to:

- Continue to support and build upon the good work done by the Purchasing Consortia in providing cost effective contract for HE/FE;
- Continue to work with the Software Group on discussion with Eduserv etc;
- Seek additional members from the UCISA IT Directors in order create a closer partnership between procurement activities and IT requirements;
- Take a more strategic view of procurement.

On the operational level the Group monitors existing contracts and general supplier activity. This year there have

been several mergers and take – overs in the supplier community resulting in fewer truly separate suppliers bidding for a contract than in previous years. Commodity hardware prices are also rising, variously blamed upon the credit crunch and exchange rates. Suppliers are also adjusting their support and warranty arrangements.

The PG Software Group has made excellent progress, in particular working with Eduserv on the negotiation of good deals with Adobe and Microsoft.

This year the Group met with the Procurement Director of JANET (UK) to discuss their framework contracts and how they might be more available sector – wide. The Group also met with staff from ProcureWeb, a JISC funded portal for HE/FE procurement, and fed back on its services and strategy.

The Group has been developing a more strategic focus at its meetings, looking particularly at how to get good engagement between Procurement and IT Directors. The Procurement professionals are keen to hear from the IT Directors about what they see as their strategy for IT and hence what they need to procure. The IT Directors on the PG Group explained the context of the economic climate of IT in a credit crunch with likely reductions on budget, the use of core and contract IT staff, and the environmental agenda.

The outcome is that for the coming year we have identified the following activities which we will take forward:

- An annual workshop with IT Directors and Procurement to look ahead at needs and provision so that the

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Executive report

Peter Tinson – UCISA Executive Secretary

UCISA responded to a consultation on the Digital Britain paper issued by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). The paper included an announcement that the Government were considering legislation to enforce ISPs to address the problem of illicit peer to peer file sharing. UCISA had responded to an earlier consultation highlighting that the sector already has mechanisms in place to address instances where it is found that copyright has been breached or where peer to peer activity is discovered. The latest response further stressed that the sector largely has its house in order in this area and encouraged a clear definition of what is meant by an Internet Service Provider so that academic institutions are not inadvertently caught by a poor definition.

UCISA continues to be involved in the discussions on the implementation of the points based immigration system. The last meeting was held in March,

following which a further set of specifications was issued for the transfer of data between student records systems and the Sponsor Management System (the system being developed by the Home Office to allow administration of applicants for entry). The specifications were published on the UCISA website and a number of issues raised were submitted to the Home Office for consideration. A seminar was held for suppliers and those institutions that have developed their own student records systems in March; two further seminars to outline the processes surrounding international student applications and monitoring and data exchange between the SMS and student records systems have been arranged for 21 May.

Following some years of working closely together, UCISA and JISC (the Joint Information Systems Committee) have formalised their working partnership with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. The signing took place

at the JISC Conference in Edinburgh in March.

This official partnership formalises the already successful collaboration between the organisations. It will help define projects and programmes of work, enabling JISC and UCISA to work together in an even more effective and complimentary way.

JISC's Executive Secretary, Dr Malcolm Read, said "It is essential JISC works in collaboration with professional and expert bodies to ensure our activities are well informed, relevant and provide value for money and high impact. This partnership agreement is a tangible sign of this commitment and is very welcomed."

Peter Tinson added "UCISA and JISC have a long history of collaboration. I look forward to building our relationship further through this partnership and to working together to help institutions meet the challenges of the difficult times ahead."

AGM report

The sixteenth Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 12 March 2009 during the Annual UCISA Conference at the BT Convention Centre, Liverpool. More than 50 colleagues attended.

The Chair, David Harrison, introduced his Annual Report, which has been published on the UCISA website.

The Association had a very busy and productive year which included the first event targeted specifically at Directors on *Leadership*. During the course of the year the Groups had been tasked with reviewing their missions to ensure that they continued to remain relevant. There had been a number of changes as a result, not least the Teaching Learning and Information Group changing its name to the Support Services Group. The incoming Chair, Chris Sexton presented the Executive Committee's

draft Executive Plan for 2009–10. One of the main aims of the Executive this year is to build closer links with the Directors of Estates equivalent organisation, AUDE. The full plan is available on the UCISA website and will be discussed further at the Executive's planning meeting later this month.

Iain Stinson reported that UCISA had made surplus in 2008, largely due to a successful Management Conference, where both delegate numbers and sponsorship exceeded expectation. With regard to the proposed 2009 budget, a comparatively small increase in expenditure was shown, in comparison with the original draft. Given the current financial outlook, the expected income has been modified and includes a planned deficit of £68,000, which would reduce the reserves to 1.2 times the

operating budget.

The proposed 2010 budget shows a larger deficit, which was felt to be realistic given the likely state of the economy. It was assumed that income will be reduced and that there could be a reduction in membership. It is also assumed that the membership fee will remain at the 2009 level. The Treasurer advised that the Executive will keep a close watch on the situation.

In the light of the current financial climate, it was agreed that the membership fees would remain at the current levels. Therefore, the subscription fee rates for 2010 will be:

Full member – Band Z (JISC bands A, B and C)	£2560
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Shared Service Data Centre

Martine Carassik – University of Salford and Richard Maccabee – University of Derby

In August 2006 the Universities of Derby, Salford and Sheffield Hallam came together to consider a response to the emerging issue of *Shared Services*. The common area of concern that emerged was the provision of data centre space. All three universities had challenges relating to the capacity and quality of the existing provision; with underlying concerns about business continuity, access to space, and availability of capital or expertise to make progress in this area. This led us in July 2007 to initiate a feasibility study for a shared data centre, funded by HEFCE.

The feasibility study was completed and submitted to HEFCE in March last year. It found that there is potentially significant benefit to be gained from sharing services, in comparison with in-house provision. This is particularly the case when the service is regional, limiting the network costs. As well as sharing costs, there are qualitative benefits, for instance, sharing expertise, and allowing management to focus on initiatives to meet their Universities' particular needs. We also believe that a data centre service established in this way would be ideally

placed to provide additional and related services.

Furthermore, in the time that the project has been underway, the increasing importance of the green agenda and the opportunities afforded by virtualising services have added strength to the argument.

Since the completion of the first phase, Sheffield Hallam University have opted to join an initiative facilitated by YHMAN, to share capacity amongst the universities in their region. In addition, a subset of the Russell Group universities are looking at the feasibility of a *shared high end datacentre* (nicknamed the SHED), to address in particular the demands for high performance computing that arise from research.

The next phase of our project is about to commence. We have contracted PTS Consulting (a match made at the UCISA Conference last month!) to develop a detailed plan for the implementation of one or more data centre(s) in the North/Midlands. In the near future, we will be actively seeking partner institutions in our respective regions to join us in developing this plan, with a view to

embarking formally on the establishment of a shared service data centre within a year.

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Procurement Consortia can take these forward;

- The development of a training session on public sector/HE procurement of IT facilities and services – what it means, rules and laws, schedules, how to get advice etc. This might be for middle or senior managers, especially those who have recently been promoted or have come from the private sector;
- Put a list of major consortia contracts on the PG website;
- Investigate through the Purchasing Consortia whether a framework contract for the appointment of short term technical/specialist staff is available in the sector (e.g. through OGC) and if not, to consider how this might be provided.

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Full member – Band Y (JISC bands D and E)	£2240
Full member – Band X (JISC bands F, G and H)	£1600
Affiliate	£640
Corporate	£1920

The following were elected unopposed to the Officer positions:

Chair: Christine Sexton (Sheffield)

Vice-Chair: Brian Hackett (Huddersfield)

Treasurer: Ian Stinson (Sussex) (two year term)

Secretary: Tom Mortimer (Dundee)

A full list of the new Executive is available at www.ucisa.ac.uk/groups/exec/committee.aspx. Details of the Executive plan are available at www.ucisa.ac.uk/members/aggm/2009.

Events calendar



May

- 21 **Points based immigration system Seminars**
Universities UK, London

June

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

July

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

September

- 7 **IT training skills**
University of Leeds

November

- 4 **e-Assessment**
University of Bradford
- 18–20 **CISG 2009**
Fairmont St Andrews

Further details and booking forms are available at www.ucisa.ac.uk