

**Institution Name** University of Sussex  
**Originating Department** IT Services  
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## **Background information and objectives of the Online Help desk**

The University of Sussex has over 10,000 students and over 2000 staff. IT Services supports and maintains the majority of the University computer facilities, including over 2000 desktop computer systems; the central servers including email and web; wireless, roaming and campus networks; and a large range of software including Microsoft Office.

Client Services manages the IT Services customer support via email and also runs an enquiries and help desk for in person support to staff and students during office hours 9.00-5.00. This support is provided by a team of up to 20 IT professionals with a variety of expertise. They are backed up by over 70 other technical experts who do not normally deal with staff and students directly. Staff and students expect to work and have IT support on and off campus, at home and in their office 24/7.

To provide 'anytime, anywhere support' ITS have developed an Online Help Desk which is a comprehensive set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) It is available via the web, is easy to search with solutions accessed quickly at any time by staff and students. Although it was developed for the University we have found that it is also accessed by people and institutions world wide.

The information content was developed collaboratively. No one person in ITS could provide all the expertise, write and develop appropriate user friendly data and maintain an ever growing system. To ensure that it was not time consuming for ITS staff to contribute, there had to be a simple interface to add, edit and delete FAQs.

## **Description of the Online Help desk**

The Online help desk has grown into a comprehensive knowledge base of over 600 FAQs. Student and staff benefit from being able to access these solutions quickly and easily at anytime. The solution for a new problem can be made available to staff and students online immediately it is resolved. Any support issues and corresponding FAQs that have an affect on a large number of people are likely to be available on the list of 'Top ten FAQs'

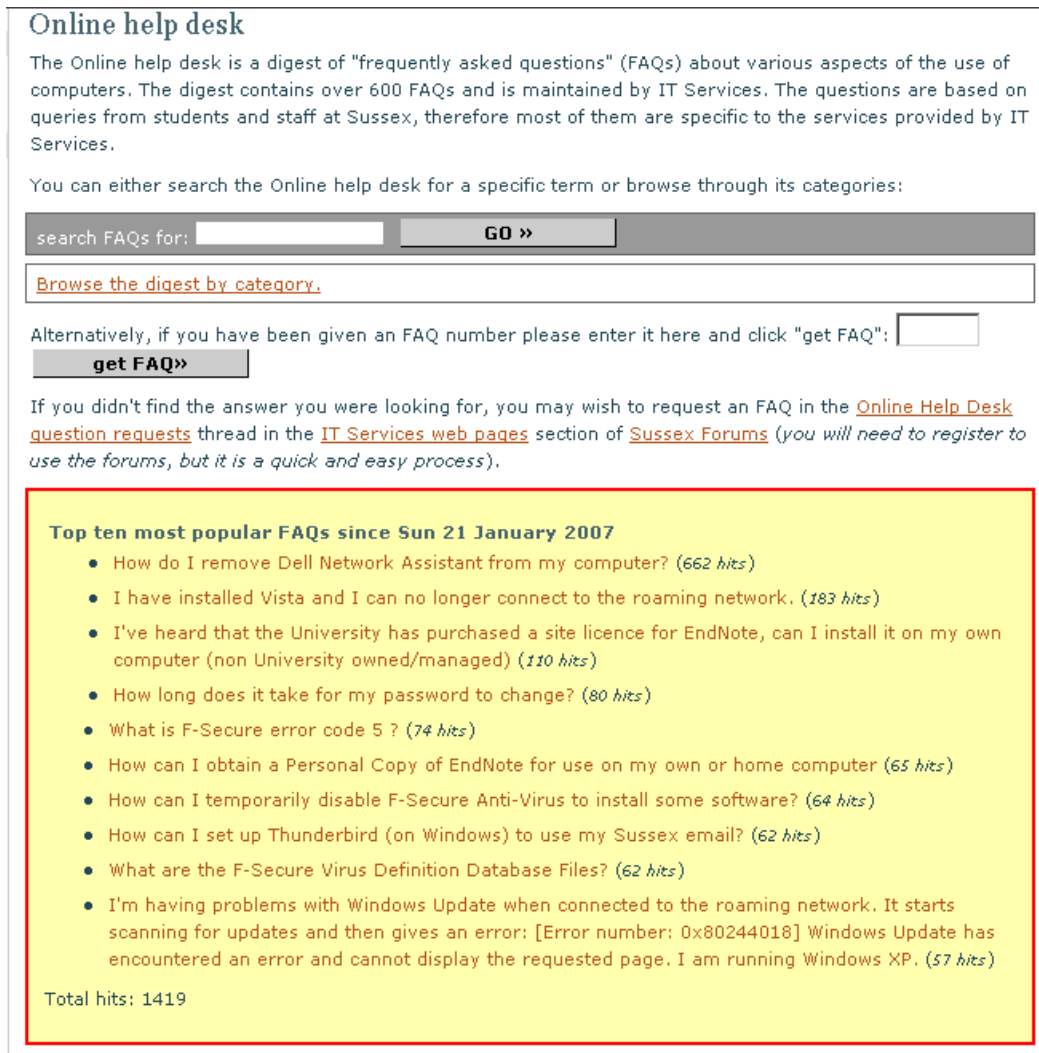
There are a number of benefits for ITS staff. They can save time and give a consistent response when answering email support questions by referring people to FAQs. The response can either refer to the FAQ number or a direct web link. Support staff can collaborate with IT Experts to ensure appropriate information is published. A web interface means that FAQs are easy to add, edit and maintain.

## Easy access to the Information

As mentioned, the FAQs are accessed on-line via a web interface. This web site is widely advertised and is available on all ITS supported PCs via a desktop icon, from the ITS web pages or directly by visiting [sussex.ac.uk/its/helpdesk/](http://sussex.ac.uk/its/helpdesk/). The front page offers you 3 ways of finding the appropriate information, searching using a keyword; entering the FAQ number or browsing the FAQ categories directly.

As a way of highlighting current problem areas we also publish the ten FAQs that have the highest number of hits in the previous 4 weeks.

The screenshot below shows the front page of the online desktop and the methods of searching. The 'Top ten FAQs' indicate that the most popular FAQ gives information about the 'Dell Network assistant' followed by information about 'Vista'



**Online help desk**

The Online help desk is a digest of "frequently asked questions" (FAQs) about various aspects of the use of computers. The digest contains over 600 FAQs and is maintained by IT Services. The questions are based on queries from students and staff at Sussex, therefore most of them are specific to the services provided by IT Services.

You can either search the Online help desk for a specific term or browse through its categories:

search FAQs for:  **GO »**

[Browse the digest by category.](#)

Alternatively, if you have been given an FAQ number please enter it here and click "get FAQ":  **get FAQ»**

If you didn't find the answer you were looking for, you may wish to request an FAQ in the [Online Help Desk question requests](#) thread in the [IT Services web pages](#) section of [Sussex Forums](#) (you will need to register to use the forums, but it is a quick and easy process).

**Top ten most popular FAQs since Sun 21 January 2007**

- How do I remove Dell Network Assistant from my computer? (662 hits)
- I have installed Vista and I can no longer connect to the roaming network. (183 hits)
- I've heard that the University has purchased a site licence for EndNote, can I install it on my own computer (non University owned/managed) (110 hits)
- How long does it take for my password to change? (80 hits)
- What is F-Secure error code 5 ? (74 hits)
- How can I obtain a Personal Copy of EndNote for use on my own or home computer (65 hits)
- How can I temporarily disable F-Secure Anti-Virus to install some software? (64 hits)
- How can I set up Thunderbird (on Windows) to use my Sussex email? (62 hits)
- What are the F-Secure Virus Definition Database Files? (62 hits)
- I'm having problems with Windows Update when connected to the roaming network. It starts scanning for updates and then gives an error: [Error number: 0x80244018] Windows Update has encountered an error and cannot display the requested page. I am running Windows XP. (57 hits)

Total hits: 1419

Figure 1 - Online Help desk front page

For those who prefer browsing for solutions the 'browsing for FAQs' option will allow searching by categories or sub categories. The screen shot below shows all the FAQ categories, the clickable subcategories and a sample of FAQs.

Browsing for FAQs

<p><b>Accessibility</b> Queries about facilities and services for students with disabilities or specific learning needs</p>	<p><b>Computer accounts</b> Registering for username / email address, additional accounts, eligibility, external charges <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[Compliance / misuse]</a></p>
<p><b>Email</b> Queries on electronic mail, such as using a mail client (such as Mulberry and Pine) and connecting from home <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[Addresses]</a> <a href="#">[Forwarding, vacation, filtering]</a> <a href="#">[Mailing lists]</a> <a href="#">[Mulberry]</a> <a href="#">[Pine]</a> <a href="#">[Remote access]</a> <a href="#">[Silkymail]</a> <a href="#">[Spam, email abuse]</a></p>	<p><b>Internet</b> Various aspects of using the World Wide Web such as searching techniques, bookmarking, creating HTML pages, using browsers and plugins <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[Browsing]</a> <a href="#">[Creating web pages]</a></p>
<p><b>IT Services at Sussex</b> Details of Sussex-specific aspects of the services available <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[Administration]</a> <a href="#">[E-learning]</a> <a href="#">[Sussex Direct]</a> <a href="#">[Training]</a></p>	<p><b>Personally owned computers and equipment</b> Advice and guidance regarding your own equipment, including details of how to connect it to Sussex networks <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[ResNet]</a> <a href="#">[Software]</a> <a href="#">[Wireless]</a></p>
<p><b>Printing</b> Details of printing services provided and how to pay for them</p>	<p><b>Saving and storing information</b> Details of the options available for storing and transferring your files <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[CD and DVD burning]</a></p>
<p><b>Software</b> Advice, guidance and help with using various software packages <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[Databases]</a> <a href="#">[Endnote]</a> <a href="#">[Excel]</a> <a href="#">[Maple]</a> <a href="#">[Matlab]</a> <a href="#">[MeetingMaker]</a> <a href="#">[Powerpoint]</a> <a href="#">[Programming]</a> <a href="#">[Scanning and images]</a> <a href="#">[SPSS]</a></p>	<p><b>Unix</b> Details of the IT Services Unix system and facilities available on it</p>
<p><b>Viruses, malware and security</b> Advice on and help with protecting your computer against malicious software</p>	<p><b>Wordprocessing</b> Advice, guidance and help with using Microsoft Word word-processing software <i>also contains subcategories:</i> <a href="#">[Formatting]</a></p>

Figure 2 -Browsing through the FAQs

**Software**  
Advice, guidance and help with using various software packages  
*also contains subcategories:*  
[\[Databases\]](#) [\[Endnote\]](#) [\[Excel\]](#) [\[Maple\]](#) [\[Matlab\]](#) [\[MeetingMaker\]](#)  
[\[Powerpoint\]](#) [\[Programming\]](#) [\[Scanning and images\]](#) [\[SPSS\]](#)

Select the Software category for general software FAQs  
or  
Select a subcategory for subject specific FAQs  
e.g Powerpoint

Browsing for FAQs  
Software > Powerpoint  
[\[<back\]](#)

- How do I create colour transparencies (slides, acetates) from Word Documents, PowerPoint Slides etc?
- Where are the New Identity Word templates and Powerpoint templates.

## **Creating and maintaining FAQs by ITS staff**

The idea of developing an online help desk that contained a knowledge base of frequently asked Questions (FAQs) started as a way of ensuring that all support staff could answer common enquiries in a consistent and comprehensive way. It needed to be a collaborative system that allowed IT experts to add a simple, clear solution to an FAQ. However, once the FAQ was added, it was important that any member of the Client Services team could edit, update refine or maintain the content. To this end the Information Delivery Manager created a set of web pages to create and maintain the FAQs. The detail and screenshots for each feature are shown in Appendix A.

Importantly, the structure of each FAQ is standardised and the WYSIWYG editor allows images and formatted text to be used when writing a solution. When they are created the metatags used for keyword searching are automatically setup by the system. This ensures that keyword searching is particularly effective not only when using the Sussex search engine but also when using Google for more generic IT information searches.

## **Common scenario for identifying and creating FAQs**

Client Services will often identify an IT problem, perhaps, through email support or the 'in person' help desk. They will then contact the in house IT Expert for that particular service and ask for a solution. All IT Services staff can create and edit FAQs, so this can be done directly by the expert.

However, each week any new FAQs are emailed to key Client Services staff to proof read and to check that the information is clear and easily understandable. At this stage the FAQ will be edited if necessary and republished.

## **Maintaining up to date information**

The information is continually updated when services change or new services are introduced. However, it is the role of Client Services to ensure that the information on the Online Help desk doesn't become obsolete or out of date.

Each member of the team has responsibility for a particular category. During the summer they check that old FAQs are deleted, archived or updated in preparation for the new academic year.

## **Summary**

The Online Help desk is an example of an innovative solution to the growing demands of providing 24 hr support on a dwindling IT support budget. It offers the opportunity to collaborate with other IT experts and capture their expertise so that staff and students can self-help by accessing solutions to common or known IT issues. ITS used in-house expertise and existing infrastructure so the system did not require any capital expenditure. The ongoing work is carried out by IT staff as an integral part of their working day. Time spent developing the system will result in support savings made when using the FAQ information for future support enquiries. So the system is cost neutral.

## Appendix A – Supporting Documentation

### Developing/Maintaining the Online Help Desk (OHD)

The Online Help Desk is controlled and updated, like a number of other IT Services web page administrative functions, by a password protected web interface at:

<http://sussex.ac.uk/its/webadmin>

The main front page is straightforward; a short list of links to the main functions of the system.

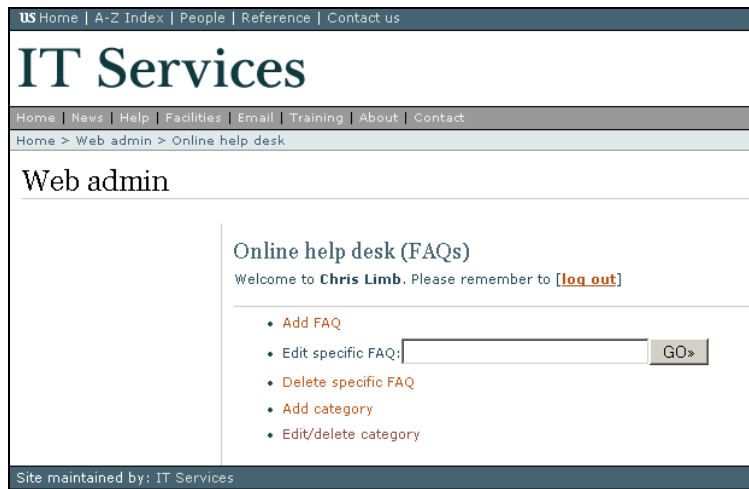


Figure 3

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Management

#### Adding an FAQ

Clicking on the *Add FAQ* link on the front page (*fig.3*) brings up the main editing interface.

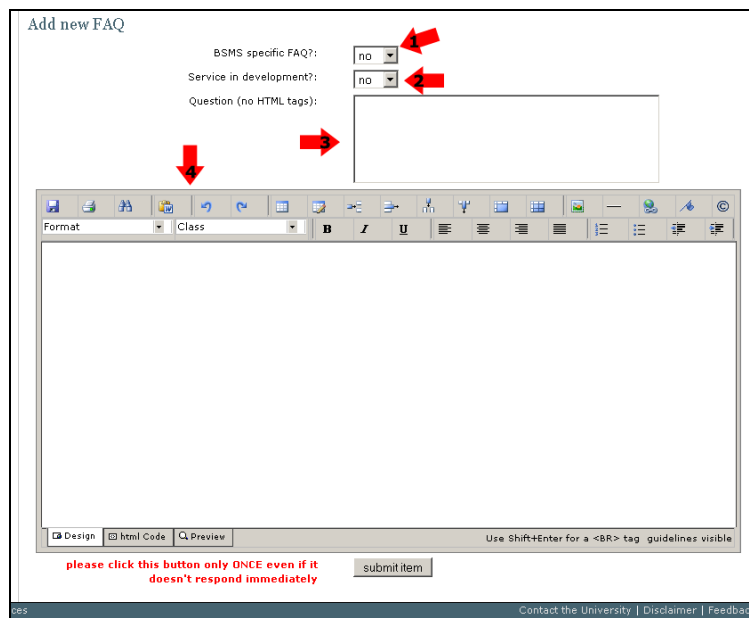


Figure 4

1. **BSMS specific FAQ?** Students at BSMS (Brighton and Sussex Medical School) have different IT requirements from most Sussex students as they are also members of the University of Brighton and therefore use the systems there as well. Setting this flag to “yes” on an FAQ hides it from the standard Online Help Desk and displays it on pages intended for BSMS students.
2. **Service in development?** Occasionally FAQs will be written about a service which is being run as a trial or project and is not yet a full service. Setting this flag to “yes” on an FAQ displays a disclaimer to this effect on that FAQ.
3. **Question.** The FAQ itself should be entered here in plain text with **no formatting** (what is entered here is also used in a metatag for the FAQ to aid searching).
4. **Answer.** The main text of the FAQ can be entered here into this WYSIWYG editor which allows the text to be edited as in a word processor, with similar formatting options (bold, italic etc). NB: General formatting of the text is automatically handled by the site-wide style sheets.

Once the FAQ has been completed to your satisfaction *submit item* should be clicked. This will save the FAQ to the database, although it will not be “live” yet. The next screen visible tells you the number of your newly created FAQ and allows you to choose the categories in which the FAQ will be listed:

Figure 5

FAQs can be added to any number of categories, making them easier to find for those browsing the Online Help Desk. Once you have selected the necessary categories, *add categories* should be clicked. The FAQ is now in its final form although not yet published; a screen will appear that confirms the addition of the categories and reaffirms the FAQ’s number:

Figure 6

At this point you have the opportunity to immediately edit your newly created FAQ by clicking on the *[click here to re-edit FAQ]* link.

## Editing an FAQ

Entering the number of the FAQ you wish to edit in the *Edit specific FAQ* box on the front page (fig.3) and clicking *Go»* brings up the main editing interface. This is similar to the *Add FAQ* interface (fig.4) but with a number of important additions:

FAQ number: 959  
created by: Chris Limb  
created on: 2002-07-29  
FAQ currently appears in categories: Internet > Browsing  
[change categories]  
[delete FAQ]  
question: I have Netscape Navigator 4 installed on my office PC - should I upgrade it?  
BSMS specific FAQ?: no  
Service in development?: no  
Publish?: yes  
submit changes reset  
please click this button only ONCE even if it doesn't respond immediately

Figure 7

1. **FAQ information.** General information about the FAQ including its number, by whom it was created and when.
2. **Category information.** The current categories in which the FAQ is displayed plus a link to allow the addition and/or deletion of categories.
3. **Delete FAQ.** Link to allow deletion of this specific FAQ.
4. **Publish?** When an FAQ is newly created this is automatically set to *no* to allow colleagues to check an FAQ before it goes live. However, this publication state can be manually set to *yes* using this control. Other states are *Archive*, which removes the FAQ from the published Online Help Desk without deleting it, and *HOLD* which prevents the automatic change from *no* to *yes* which occurs on a weekly basis.

Once the FAQ has been edited to your satisfaction *submit changes* should be clicked. This will save the altered FAQ to the database, and display the following confirmation which allows you to view the new version or edit another FAQ:

Online help desk (FAQs)  
Welcome to Chris Limb. Please remember to [log out]  
You have just edited FAQ number 959  
[sussex.ac.uk/its/helpdesk/faq?faqid=959]  
If you wish to edit another FAQ, please enter its number.  
number:   
edit FAQ  
please click this button only ONCE even if it doesn't respond immediately

Figure 8

## Category management

New categories are not added on nearly as regular basis as the FAQs themselves, which helps to keep the category structure simple and easy to browse through for the end user and prevents it becoming baroque and unwieldy.

### Adding a category

Clicking on the *Add category* link on the front page (*fig.3*) brings up a fairly simple interface to enter basic information about a new category should one be required:

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Add category". It contains the following fields and options:

- Category title:** A text input field, indicated by a red arrow labeled "1".
- Description:** A larger text area, indicated by a red arrow labeled "2".
- Show category:** A dropdown menu currently set to "yes", indicated by a red arrow labeled "3".
- Select parent:** A section with a radio button selected for "no parent - new root category", indicated by a red arrow labeled "4". Below this are several categories with radio buttons, including "Accessibility", "Computer accounts", "Email", "Mailing lists", "Mulberry", "Powerpoint", "Programming", "Scanning and images", "SPSS", "Unix", "Viruses, malware and security", and "Wordprocessing".

At the bottom of the form, there is a red instruction: "please click this button only ONCE even if it doesn't respond immediately" and a grey "add" button.

Figure 9

1. **Category title.** One or two word title for category.
2. **Description.** Short paragraph describing scope and purpose of category
3. **Show category.** Can be used to temporarily hide a category from the live web site if set to *No*.
4. **Select parent.** Used to select the category within which the new category will be placed.

Once the details are complete, *submit item* should be clicked. This will save the new category to the database.

## Editing or deleting a category

NB: Categories can only be deleted if they are empty, i.e. contain no FAQs and no subcategories.

Clicking on the *Edit/delete category* link on the front page (fig.3) brings up a list of categories arranged as organised, subcategories listed “within” their parents:

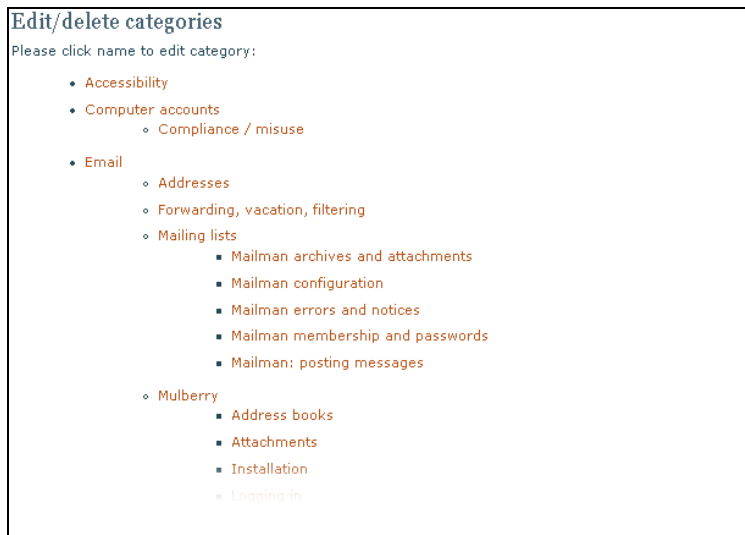


Figure 10

To edit or delete a category, its name should be clicked on. This brings up the following editing page:

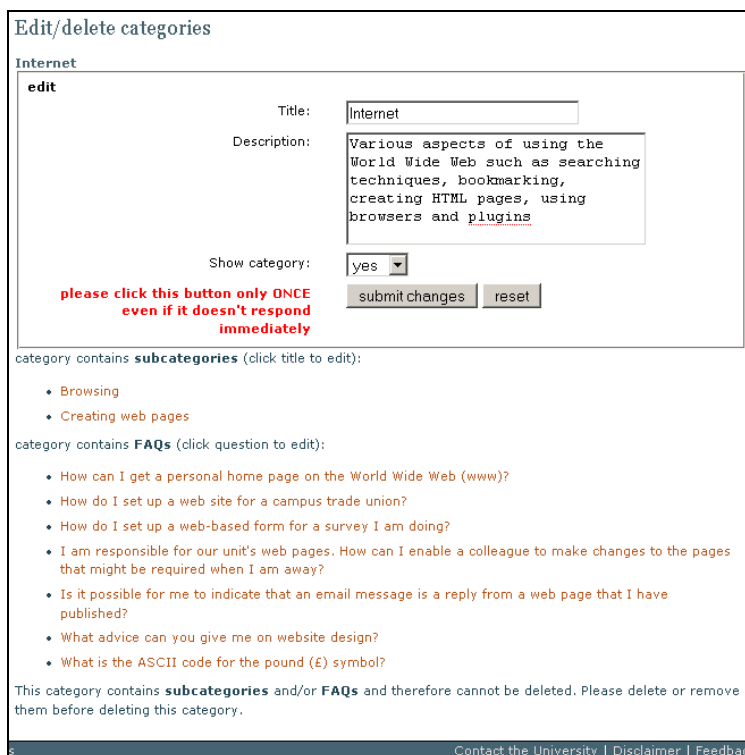


Figure 11

Once the changes are complete, *submit changes* should be clicked. NB: this page also displays a list of FAQs and/or subcategories contained within the categories all of which are directly editable by clicking on their title. If there are no FAQs and/or subcategories, a link for deleting the category is displayed instead.

## ***Email notification and automatic procedures***

Whenever anyone adds to, edits or deletes from the Online Help Desk a message is sent to the few people who oversee it.

When created, the publish flag on each FAQ is set to *no*. Every Thursday an email is automatically sent to members of the Client Services team listing FAQs currently set to *no*. This gives the team a few days to check them before all *no* flags automatically become *yes* every Tuesday and the FAQs are made available.

At the beginning of each month an email is sent to all members of the Client Services team, plus a few additional people, listing all FAQs that have been added or had a major update in the past month.

## **Permission to Publish**

IT Services is happy for other universities to replicate or link to any of the information held on our knowledge base. However the information is often customised to IT systems at the University of Sussex.

### **Names of Staff involved**

Chris Limb, Information Delivery Manager, [c.limb@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:c.limb@sussex.ac.uk)

Peter Croyden, Client Manager (now retired)

Sandy Radford, Head of University Wide Services, [s.radford@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:s.radford@sussex.ac.uk)

All members of IT Services update and maintain the system

### **Support of Institution UCISA Representative**

Trevor Potten, Director (Information and Technology Services)

[t.j.l.potten@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:t.j.l.potten@sussex.ac.uk)