



## Top Concerns survey 2007 – Executive summary

### Resourcing the top concern amongst IT Directors

UCISA<sup>1</sup> carried out its third *Top Concerns* survey at the start of 2007. The survey identifies the issues that Directors of Information Service departments feel are the most pressing from four different perspectives: issues of most importance for their institution to resolve for its strategic success; issues which may become more significant in the next twelve months; issues which are taking the most time to address; and issues on which their institutions are spending the most resource (human and/or fiscal). An overall ranked list is produced from the four perspective lists.

*Resourcing for IT* topped the overall list for the first time in 2007. There are, perhaps, a number of reasons for this. Financial pressures on institutions as a whole are resulting in a squeeze on the service departments. However, the main reason is that more and more services are being introduced with the expectation of support from the service department but without commitment of additional resource, either in terms of funding for systems maintenance and replacement or in terms of staffing required to support the new services. This is particularly the case with implementation or development projects and with the introduction to service of new technologies piloted outside the service environment.

One impact of a lack of resourcing is that the bulk of the funding available is spent on maintaining existing systems; the service department has little to investigate new technologies and the impact of new services. Resourcing is inextricably linked to *Strategy and planning* and *Governance*. Both issues feature in the top ten overall concerns with *Strategy and planning* ranking second overall. This suggests that, ten years on from Dearing, there is still a lack of engagement with institutions' senior management executives with regard to planning and a lack of integration of information strategies with other institutional strategies.

E-learning ranked highly in a number of aspects of the survey and was rated third overall. There is still a concern that e-learning systems are not adequately supported within institutions, particularly with respect to supporting academics looking to develop materials. This situation is likely to be exacerbated as enthusiastic teaching staff engage with new technologies such as podcasting and social networking sites like Facebook. There is some concern about the extent to which e-learning is embedded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy of institutions and also about the cost of integrating the e-learning system with other key business systems. There is a growing recognition that the e-learning system is the most business critical that a service runs, with a number of institutions taking steps to ensure continuous operation. A further indication that institutions are adopting a more business like approach is that *Service availability* and *Disaster recovery* both feature within the top ten of the overall ranking.

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<sup>1</sup> Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association [www.ucisa.ac.uk](http://www.ucisa.ac.uk)

Many of the concerns that feature in the top ten have been ranked in the previous surveys carried out in 2004 and 2005. However, the growing awareness of environmental issues has resulted in *Green computing* featuring in the list of concerns that service directors expect to have a greater impact in the next twelve months. Institutions are addressing environmental issues in a number of ways. Some are considering the power consumption when assessing the total cost of ownership of equipment and others are automatically powering down idle equipment. In addition many institutions are encouraging greater home working.

It is interesting to note some of the candidate concerns that did not feature in any of the category lists. There has been some progress towards implementing the outcomes from the Bologna Process but this has had little impact on IT/IS service departments to date. This is also perhaps indicative of the apparent low priority that student mobility receives in institutional planning. Further, *Accessibility issues* were not considered a priority. Although the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) now places a duty on all public bodies to promote disability equality, it would seem that few institutions are engaging their information service departments to help meet the requirements of the Act.

UCISA is considering the outcomes of the survey and identifying activities that will help address the top concerns. In addition to this work, UCISA is seeking to work with other organisations such as the JISC to promote further activities and developments.

## Notes

### About UCISA

The Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association represents the whole of higher education in the provision and development of academic, management and administrative information systems, providing a network of contacts and a powerful lobbying voice. For further information see <http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/about/index.html> or contact Peter Tinson, UCISA Executive Secretary, on 01865 283425 or email: [execsec@ucisa.ac.uk](mailto:execsec@ucisa.ac.uk).

### The Top Concerns process

The survey is a two phase process. In the first phase the senior personnel within Information Services Departments are invited to submit details of issues causing them concern. The wide range of issues submitted is then consolidated into a candidate list. Directors then rank their top twelve issues in each of four categories to produce five lists of top concerns – one for each of the four categories and an overall list. The full results from the survey are available at [www.ucisa.ac.uk/activities/surveys/tc/](http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/activities/surveys/tc/).