



Science Festival, 5–16 April

There are a few events with a C&IT dimension in this year's Edinburgh International Science Festival in April:

7th: the search for intelligent websites (see following article)

10th: computer-generated TV (see following article)

14th: 'PCs with personality', by Jon Oberlander

Full details and booking form are at <http://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/>

Nick Stroud (EUCS)

BCS at the Science Festival

The British Computer Society is organising two talks as part of the International Science Festival.

Jared Spool (User Interface Engineering, USA) speaks about 'The Search for Intelligent Websites' on Sunday 7th April at 4pm at the Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street. Jared Spool has been searching for the perfect website since 1996. His informative, entertaining and controversial presentation will give an insight into the challenges of Web design.

'I-Race' is the world's first TV channel to depend entirely on computer-generated content. It creates a new horse race every ten minutes, 24 hours a day, allowing viewers to train the horses and place bets. See how it's done, at 'I-Race—The first computer-generated TV Channel' by Scott Maxwell (VIS Entertainment) on 10th April at 6:30pm at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 36 York Place.

Admission to these events is by ticket only. Complimentary tickets are available from the Edinburgh Branch Secretary: send an email to edin-sec@bcs.org.uk by 3rd April. Tickets are also available from the EISF Box Office (0131 473 2070) for £6 (£4).

David Muxworthy (EUCS)

New University Web site

The new University Web site will be launched on **9th April**. The redesign is the outcome of an extensive consultation and planning process lasting well over a year, which included the creation of the University's Web Publishing Advisory Group under Prof Roland Ibbett, two open meetings last December, and a full programme of discussions with faculties and departments. The new site also meets the stringent requirements of accessibility legislation now coming into force.

Bryan Martin (EUL)

University recycles old PCs

Recent reports claim that hazardous waste from 'recycled' electronics in the U.S. is being dumped in poorer countries such as China, India and Pakistan, with quantities of electronic parts turning up in open fields, riverbanks, ponds, wetlands and irrigation ditches.

Members of the University who have to dispose of old computers will be pleased to learn that Estates & Buildings has negotiated with CCL (North) Ltd of Irvine the free collection and responsible processing of old electrical and electronic equipment, including computers, monitors and printers.

A six-month trial is under way to define and establish a long-term service. If you would like to use this service, please provide Alan Marshall of CCL (tel 01294 278844) with full details of your proposed consignment.

For further information contact Gerry Douglas (email Gerry.Douglas@ed.ac.uk, tel 506719) or look up 'recycling' in EUCSinfo.

David Somervell (E&B)

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Supplement in this issue:

Successful launch of the annual University IT conference

A report of the University's first open meeting to look at how we can best use Information Technology to enhance our teaching, learning, research, admin, and interactions with students and colleagues.

eDIKT: harvesting knowledge through extreme IT

The Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow are working together to pioneer radical ways of harvesting important and ground-breaking knowledge from existing—but largely unexploited—data. This project, called eDIKT, is expected to have far-reaching benefits, not only for the economic infrastructure of Scotland, but also world-wide. It has been made possible by a £2.3 million grant from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

eDIKT (e-Data, Information and Knowledge Transformation) will construct novel software tools to underpin the seamless linking, management and interpretation of the vast amounts of data available on global networks, enabling scientists to harvest the knowledge hidden in the acres of their research data. Bigger datasets should give a more complete picture, but extracting knowledge from them is like looking for a needle in a haystack—without knowing what the needle looks like. eDIKT will develop tools—based on state-of-the-art computer science research—to integrate and search these enormous datasets.

This is called e-Science, an emerging research technique enabled by 'extreme IT'. It uses the largest computers and needs vast, globally-distributed datasets. eDIKT will work in tandem with the new National e-Science Centre to ensure that Scotland is at the forefront of this globally-important science, starting with investigations in astronomy, bioinformatics, particle physics and creating virtual global organisations.

The National e-Science Centre—in South College Street—will be opened by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 25th April.

(from a SHEFC press release)

WISARD

WISARD—the **Web Interface to Student, Admissions and Related Data**—is a powerful Web-based system providing access to an extensive range of related data in the University's Student Record system. It has been developed specifically to assist in academic and support administration, and to provide a common and accessible data source in relation to students.

All academic and support staff who interact with students are encouraged to apply and to make use of WISARD. This is particularly the case for Directors of Studies, Postgraduate Programme Directors, Postgraduate Supervisors, Course Organisers and Course Secretaries, all of whom should find WISARD extremely helpful.

WISARD facilitates flexible querying, viewing and downloading of data, and enables appropriate staff to update selected data within the Student Record system itself. It is relatively intuitive and easy to use. It is available to all members of staff in academic and administrative departments who have a need to access student data, who have been authorised to do so, and who have agreed to comply with the University's *Guidelines on Disclosure of Information about Students*.

In the past two years, WISARD has undergone extensive development, including:

- substantial improvements to the range of data displayed (*e.g.* including student photographs)
- substantial improvements in visual presentation and navigation
- enabling Course Organisers and Course Secretaries to update limited course-related data
- enabling Directors of Studies to register and cancel courses all year round

- enabling Directors of Studies to delegate the course registration/cancellation permissions to another
- enabling Postgraduate Programme Directors to register and cancel postgraduate courses all year round (to be implemented more fully in 2002/2003)
- providing a facility to make queries on all course-related data, and to view that data
- providing a standard report that enables identification of student course registration or cancellation, based on selected parameters.

A full outline of enhancements can be found at <http://www.registry.ed.ac.uk/wisard/WISARDv2changes.htm>

A substantial number of proposed additions will be implemented in the next 18 months, demonstrating the University's continued commitment to WISARD's development. Outlines of the proposed additions can be found under item 6a ('Revised WISARD Developments') at <http://www.mis.ed.ac.uk/PLANNING/Planning2002-2003/MIS/Student/>

Documentation and a support desk are available to support WISARD; training sessions are provided. You can obtain an application form for WISARD and can download a User Manual (which includes screenshots of the main elements of WISARD) at <http://www.registry.ed.ac.uk/wisard/>

Feedback on WISARD itself, and suggestions for improvements, are most welcome and should be forwarded to the Registry helpdesk (email regusers@ed.ac.uk, tel 502224), which will also answer any questions that you may have.

Bruce Johnson (MIS)

eProcurement

- Make effective purchasing easier
- Improve services and supplies
- Reduce processing time/costs

Many people think of 'eProcurement' as buying on the Web with a corporate credit card, or simply sending orders by email. In fact eProcurement encompasses the whole process of procurement – sourcing suppliers, obtaining quotes/tenders, selecting products, ordering, and the whole paper trail from requisition to payment confirmation, ultimately also providing an electronic method of contract management and identifying future purchasing needs.

Work is progressing on a Draft eProcurement Strategy which will be published on the Procurement Office Web site shortly and discussed at the Management Information Committee and the newly-formed Finance and Procurement Systems Steering Group early next term. Comments are most welcome (email Karen.Bowman@ed.ac.uk), and the Director of Procurement is happy to come and discuss the draft strategy with any existing committees or groups of staff who want to know more and feed into the consultation process. Like any strategy, it will only be effective if it addresses the needs of the institution.

We want to develop a strategy for the next three years which will take us well on the way towards the benefits of eProcurement. We want to set ambitious targets for this three-year programme, such as having 80% of authorised purchasers and 80% of our major suppliers, who offer quality and price benefits, linked by eProcurement, and halving the number of paper invoices coming to the University.

Karen Bowman (Procurement)

The 2002 Milner Lecture



Robin Milner

The Laboratory for Foundations of Computer Science presents the 2001 Milner Lecture. Professor Martín Abadi, University of California Santa Cruz, will speak on

'Security protocols: principles and calculi,' at 4.30pm on 22nd May, in the Law Lecture Theatre, Room 175, Old College. Details are at <http://www.lfcs.informatics.ed.ac.uk/milner/>

This is a public lecture, and open to all. It is one of a range of events comprising the University of Edinburgh Informatics Jamboree, 22nd to 24th May 2002. Details will be published at

<http://www.informatics.ed.ac.uk/events/jamboree/>

Ian Stark (Division of Informatics)

e-Tutor of the Year competition

There is a prize of £1,000 in this year's e-Tutor competition. The judges are looking for innovative and effective use of virtual learning environments to support student learning, and identify its use and potential to widen participation. There is a free seminar for potential entrants. You can find out more at <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/projects/elearning/>

Nora Moge (MALTS)

The future for art libraries

**Annual Conference 2002
15–18 August, Glasgow**

The theme of this Art Libraries Society conference will be 'Gateways to the changing landscape of art information', including "the digital imperative" and lifelong learning. For further information see <http://arlis.nal.vam.ac.uk/even/conf.html>

Sonia French (ARLIS/UK & Ireland)

X terminals in lecture theatres

Following discussions between the EUCS Unix team and MALTS, it has been agreed that the X terminals located in JCMB Lecture Theatre A and Appleton Tower Lecture Theatre 4 will be removed from service during the Summer Vacation 2002. The dedicated PCs in these locations include eXceed, and both locations have had monitor upgrades to facilitate the removal of the X Terminals. Details of how to access the dedicated PC facilities are available at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/fmd/mft/accounts.html>

Jim Sheach (MALTS)

Digimap Gazetteer

EDINA has launched the new Digimap Gazetteer service, which supports the search for, and extraction of, specific records from the Ordnance Survey's 1:50,000 Place Names Gazetteer. The database, which is updated annually, holds all place names which appear on the current Ordnance Survey's 1:50,000 Landranger series maps. Each record is categorised as one of eleven feature types. Additional information includes spatial references such as National Grid coordinates, County references and Landranger Sheet numbers.

The service can be accessed under the Advanced Services button. The interface is simple to use, but requires your Web browser to have JavaScript enabled. Details on how to use the service and information about the Gazetteer product are available in the Digimap Help pages. For help with Digimap, including registration instructions, send email to digimap-help@ed.ac.uk.

Emma Sutton (EUCS)



Apple defying IT recession

New hardware—such as the next-generation iMac shown above, software—such as Mac OS X and Photoshop 7—and offers have been pouring out of Apple and its partners recently. A meeting of the Mac Special Interest Group, MacSIG, has been organised to discuss with Apple representatives how the University can benefit from and cope with Mac OS X ('ten'). The meeting is in the Wolfson Suite of the Main Library at 2pm on **Wednesday 3rd April** (contact toby@ed.ac.uk for more information).

The most prominent new hardware is the totally-redesigned, all-in-one **iMac** (pictured above), which is built around the 'G4' chip to give it a performance comparable to some of the desktop Macs. The three versions range in price from £1,149 to £1,515 (depending on memory, speakers and type of CD/DVD drive); all are equipped with the range of connectors necessary to satisfy Apple's vision of the iMac as the core of the 'digital lifestyle'. The older style of iMac is still available, for £643 or £827. (All prices mentioned here include VAT.)

A new member of the portable **iBook** range has a larger screen (14.1" instead of 12.1") and costs £1,488. Meanwhile the price of the most basic iBook has been reduced to £929.

The more 'professional' **PowerBook** has been upgraded, with a 'Combo drive' replacing the DVD-ROM drive to read audio CD, CD-ROM, DVD-ROM and DVD video formats and write CD-R and CD-RW disks. This costs £1,833 to £2,372.

The **desktop** range has been enhanced as well, with the launch of a Mac with dual 1GHz G4 processors giving a performance of 15 gigaflops. At £2,372 for the computer alone (without a monitor) this is not cheap, so news of a price reduction at the bottom of the desktop line may be welcome: a limited number of G4 PowerMacs are being offered to Education customers for £1,092.

All Macs now ship with MacOS X as the default operating system. This combines the stability and versatility of Unix with a (fairly) traditional Mac-style interface to give the best of two sophisticated worlds. The more open system is already attracting new users and developers: for example, a new Mac version of the BLAST software used in biomedical research runs up to five times faster on a dual 1GHz PowerMac than the hitherto conventional implementation. Of more direct relevance to the University, the C&ITC working group on desktop consistency has recommended PDF as a key format for information exchange, and PDF is a native file format on Mac OS X.

Apple has just distributed its first monthly 'eNews' bulletin for the HE/FE sector. If you didn't receive a copy of this (by email) and would like to, please email r.bennett@euro.apple.com.

If you'd like to find out more about any of these developments, do come to the MacSIG meeting on 3rd April (and if possible let toby@ed.ac.uk know beforehand that you are coming).

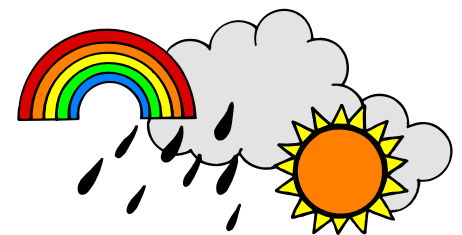
Toby Morris (EUCS)

Spring Holiday

EUCS observes the Spring Holiday on Monday 15th April, so there will be no reception, user support or other staffed services that day, and services such as **holyrood** and the communications network EdLAN will run unattended. The KB Centre and Greenfield Suite computing labs will be accessible 24 hours a day to those with entry cards. All library sites will be closed on this day also, but all (except the Western General) are open on 1st April (Easter Monday).

Summer term begins on Tuesday 16th April; before then, the Main Library's opening hours are 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday (to 9pm on Wednesdays).

David Muxworthy (EUCS)



Edinburgh BITS

Editor:
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Published by:
Computing Services
The University of Edinburgh
for the Edinburgh IT community.

Contributions:
Email: BITS@ed.ac.uk
Telephone: 0131 650 3345

Distribution queries:
BITS is distributed through departmental offices; departmental secretaries please notify changes in requirements to:

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Email: D.Muxworthy@ed.ac.uk
Telephone: 0131 650 3305

Printed on chlorine-free paper from sustainable forests by:
University of Edinburgh Printing Services,
<http://www.printing.ed.ac.uk/>

BITS on the Web:
<http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/bits/>

Some acronyms explained:
<http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/acronyms.html>

Contributions to *BITS* are welcomed from all readers.

Copy deadline for May BITS:

Tuesday 16th April



Successful launch of the annual University IT conference

The challenge of IT

The pace of change in communications and information technology continues to accelerate, bringing with it opportunities and challenges in seemingly equal measure. Just keeping up with new technology and potential innovations in teaching, learning and research can be a full-time job.

We all have to be convinced that the reward for keeping up and innovating is worth the effort. To do this effectively academics, researchers, students, departmental computing officers and the central providers of computing services within the University all have to keep talking to each other at a fundamental level.

Meeting the challenge

The potential benefits to the University are clear, but up to now there has been no open forum for such grass roots discussion within the University planning structure. The inaugural IT conference sought to plug this gap, bringing together the various interested parts of the University into one or two rooms to have an informed discussion based on invited and submitted presentations.

Judged by the quality of the presentations, the conference attendance, the difficulty

convenors had in keeping the discussion within limits that allowed some breaks, and the general buzz at coffee, the conference was an evident success.

C&ITC vision

The conference formed one of three planks of a new structure set up by the Communications and Information Technology Committee (C&ITC) to optimise the use and provision of IT within the diverse structure of the University. (This is not an easy job, and in fact one notable contribution to the conference likened it to herding cats!)

First, a 'star-gazing' working group has been set up to look forward on longer time scales than the hurly-burly of life in a modern University normally allows.

Second, individual working parties have been commissioned to examine more pressing strategic issues on a shorter timescale. Some have now made specific recommendations to C&ITC that are being implemented by central services.

Third, the annual IT conference has been organised by the star-gazing group, and successfully launched.

In all of these elements representation is sought from

across the University, with a balance between academic need and technical practicability reflected appropriately in the composition of the groups and the content of the discussion.

One of the central ideas is that, when specific recommendations are made, a consensus has been reached on technical issues, and a clear route map drawn for any new implementation.

A successful conference

The conference took place over a full day on 20th February 2002, at the John MacIntyre centre at Pollock Halls, which proved just about big enough for the number of delegates. It is possible to give only a very brief summary of the content here. Further details, including speakers, abstracts, and full Powerpoint presentations where available, can be obtained from the conference Web site. (URLs are provided at the end of this report.)

The first plenary session described the work in progress and specific recommendations of the four current working parties:

- Authentication & Directories
- Desktop Consistency
- Windows 2000 Server
- Wireless Networking

The conference then split into two parallel sessions, one on 'System Administration' and one on 'Enabling Teaching, Learning and Research', before concluding with sessions for open discussion. Since this was the first year, most of the presentations centred on 'where we are now' rather than 'where we would like to be in a few years time', but this was natural for the first conference.

Spreading good practice

One benefit of this year's approach was that several examples of good practice were presented that could avoid the need for duplication of effort in other parts of the University.

Edinburgh has a wealth of IT staff spread throughout its many wings, beavering away in their own areas. The system administration track gave the opportunity to focus on a few of the technical solutions that have been developed, with useful discussion and comment from fellow workers—some of which continued, in true conference style, in the pub afterwards... Subjects ranged from network security to disposal of obsolete computers. Three talks illustrated completely different neat solutions to the problem of machine configuration, with the final panel session allowing this to be discussed in the University-wide context.

The use of the technology has to be appropriate

Some truly innovative ideas were expressed for teaching and learning in the 21st century, including making use of the drive towards computing in hand-held gadgets and mobile phones, and maintaining open access for disabled students. To balance the former, there was also a concern that change should be motivated by sound educational thinking, rather than just chasing 'the latest thing'.

Current technology tends to be obtrusive, hard to use, and expensive to develop—academics look forward to a future where the systems disappear into the background, are straightforward to apply to new learning tasks, and cost little (!).

Various contributors argued how this goal might be advanced, for example through re-usable 'learning objects', technology convergence, user participation in software design, and a 'creative anarchy' in which students and teachers would learn by exploration.

However, the plenary discussion also underlined the importance of down-to-earth issues. For instance, tutors may care passionately about deep learning but students often show more concern for what is to be assessed, and more tangible incentives for academics to devote energy to the potential of new learning technologies are plainly needed.

At the forefront

Edinburgh has always been an engine for front-line use of computing resources in research, continued by Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre, now about to launch its M.Sc. in High-Performance Computing. Our Informatics division is part of the new e-Science consortium that is maintaining Scotland's edge in the use of IT in research by making use of the next quantum leap in technology in the form of distributed computing via the 'Grid'. The potential of this technology was illustrated by images of 'cool white dwarves', not as you might at first imagine from the pages of Tolkein's books, but from Hubble's images of the night sky. Mapping and interpreting the humane genome will require a step change in the way information is obtained, logged, annotated, recorded and distributed. Increasingly European collaboration in the large programme of joint projects in the management school will involve information exchange at a level that exceeds indulgence in 'email volleyball'.

...without whom none of this...

Finally a few words of thanks. The organisers would like to thank Vice-Principal Richard Field for his support, allowing us to waive the registration fee this year, and Liz Weir, who almost single-handedly arranged the logistics in her usual calm and efficient way.

See you next year!

The intention is that the IT conference should be an annual event, and that—with the foundations laid this year—later conferences will be able to devote more time to future IT scenarios.

Ian Main (Geology & Geophysics)

Find out more—

C&ITC Site: <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/cttees/citc/>

Star-Gazing Group Site: <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/cttees/citc/sgg/>

Working Groups Site: <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/cttees/citc/work/>

IT Conference Site: <http://www.hcrc.ed.ac.uk/~john/itc/>

(Herding cats: http://www.eds.com/advertising/advertising_tv_catherding.shtml)