

EUCS support teams for the new Colleges



Jeff Phillips, Manager,
EUCS Support Services

From 1st September the existing Faculty Group support teams in Computing Services will be replaced by three College teams, reflecting the changed University structure. These teams will be building new relationships with Colleges and Schools over the next few months, with the aim of providing members of the University with the most appropriate and effective support services.

In the short term we are concentrating on providing continuity of service, since we realise that the last thing our academic colleagues want is a major upheaval of computing support when they have a hard enough task coping with the restructuring exercise themselves. In the longer term, the restructuring gives us an opportunity to review our practices and introduce improvements, in close liaison and consultation with staff in the Colleges.

Jeff Phillips (EUCS)

Humanities and Social Science

All change ... but no change. That's the message from the new Humanities and Social Science Support Team. The new amalgamated team will provide the same services as they did before: familiar voices will still answer the telephone, and advice and help will still be forthcoming.

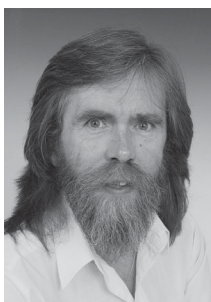
In order to introduce our new identity we have a new email address, HSS-support@ed.ac.uk, and a new telephone number, 513000. (Old telephone numbers and email addresses still work too.)

Gillian Kirkwood (EUCS)



Gillian Kirkwood,
Manager, Humanities
and Social Science
Support Team

Medicine and Veterinary Medicine



Pete Smith,
Manager, Medicine &
Veterinary Medicine
Support Team

The support team remains unchanged at this stage, with the exception that John Welford has retired and I have taken over from him as team leader: I look forward to meeting colleagues in the new College. At least for the moment our contact arrangements remain the same: we are based in the Main Library, tel 503027, email firstaid@ed.ac.uk.

Pete Smith (EUCS)

Science and Engineering

Our support team has not changed: the same people continue to provide the same range of services, and you can contact us in the same ways—in JCMB room 3251, tel 505013, email scisup@ed.ac.uk.

We look forward to seeing you!

Helen Talbot (EUCS)



Helen Talbot, Manager,
Science & Engineering
Support Team

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Edinburgh Student Portal launched

This session sees the launch of **ESP**, the Edinburgh Student Portal. This new Web-based service gives students access to online information, services and resources from one central, convenient point.

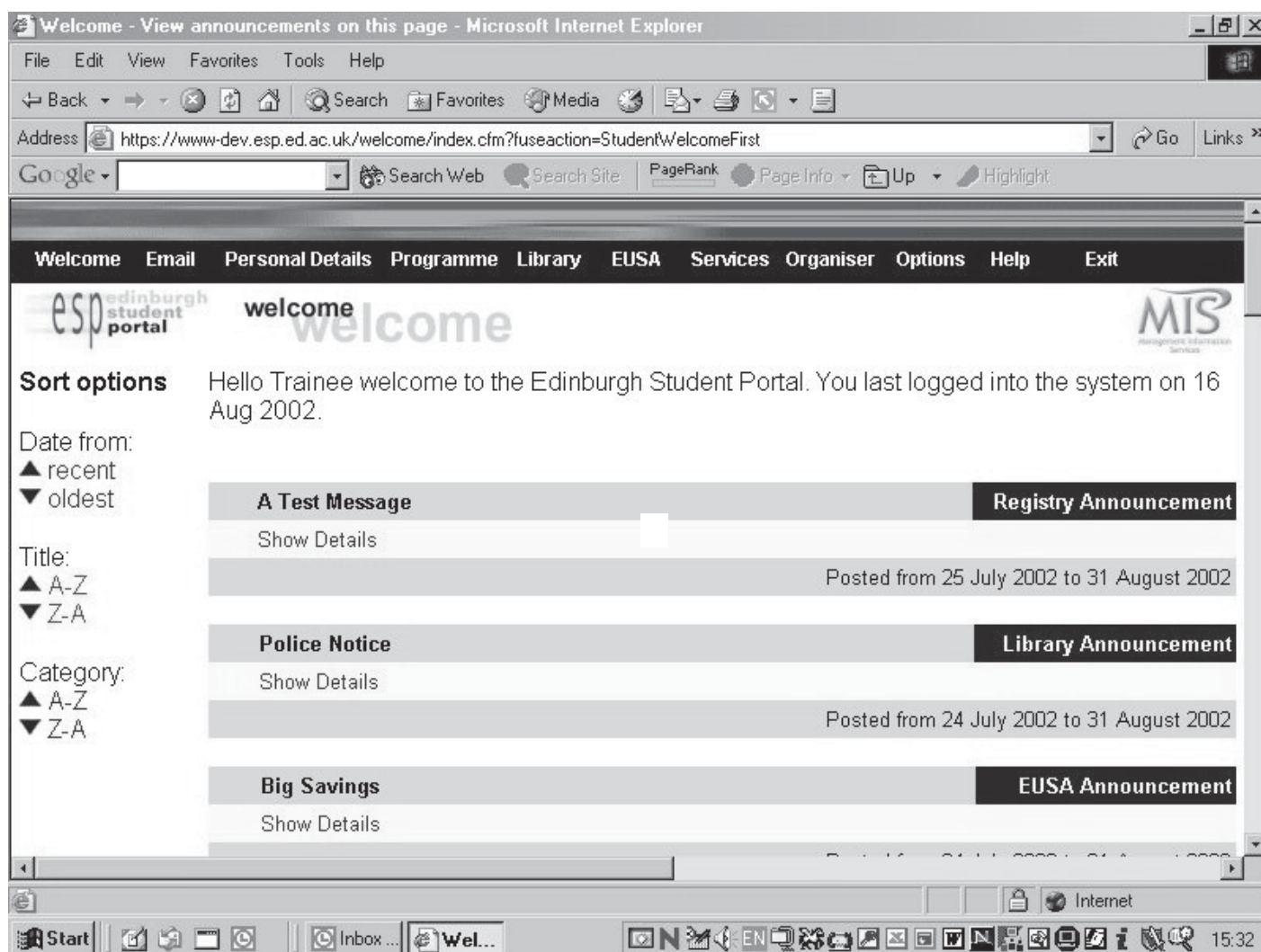
Students can use ESP to access University announcements, their own personal, programme and course details, and services like student mail, Library records and others, as well as personal organiser tools. Students register and log in to ESP by using a Web browser—from anywhere—to access <https://www.esp.ed.ac.uk/>

Students taking part in an ESP test in June not only gave good suggestions for improvement but also liked the system: “This is a fabulous innovation that will really make life easier for me ... it will serve as a lifeline to uni...”

Staff can link online course material into ESP for easy access by students, and authorised staff can make announcements to students through ESP. Management Information Services (MIS) has been in contact with lab support staff who will provide on-site ESP assistance for students, and ESP ‘roadshows’ for EUCS, departmental, Library and Resnet support staff will take place during September.

Originating from the SCWEIMS (Student Centric Web-based Educational and Instructional Management System) project, ESP integrates Cold Fusion 5 and Oracle 9i databases hosted on resilient hardware. The development of ESP will be ongoing, with potential future enhancements including online exam registration, single sign-on for services accessed from ESP (like student mail and Library records), personalisation of the portal by the user, updating of personal and registration details (e.g. address and courses) and online matriculation. To read more about ESP go to <http://www.esp.mis.ed.ac.uk/>

Mark Wetton (MIS)



The long arm of EUCS support

VNC—Virtual Network Computing (available free from <http://www.uk.research.att.com/vnc/>)—provides a method for access to a remote computing desktop. In the same way that one can arrange a telephone to ‘follow-me,’ it is possible to access the desktop of one’s PC or Macintosh (using a password) from another PC, Macintosh, Unix machine or even from a Java-enabled Web browser. What appears on the screen of one computer is replicated in a window on another computer.

The Science & Engineering and the Humanities & Social Science support teams are now using VNC to assist in remote diagnosis and repair of user desktops. Typically, support staff guide users by telephone to set up a VNC session on their computer. This session connects to a VNC listener client at the Support Team’s Helpdesk computer. The support person can then either talk the user through required changes or ‘take-control’ of the remote desktop—though the user retains the power to terminate the session at any time.

Feedback so far indicates that the benefits are twofold—users see a faster resolution of their problems, and support teams see efficiency gains.

James Jarvis (EUCS)

EUCS old-timers retire

Peter Scott and John Welford retired from Computing Services at the end of July after notching up between them around 60 years of dedicated service to the University. Most recently John was manager of the Medicine and Veterinary Medicine Support Team, while Peter was a member of the Arts, Divinity, Music and Library Support Team with special responsibility for C&IT support for students with disabilities.

Peter’s and John’s invaluable skills and experience will be sorely missed. We wish them both a long and happy retirement.

Jeff Phillips (EUCS)



John Welford and Peter Scott

C&IT support for students with disabilities



Robert Gormley

Robert Gormley has taken over from Peter Scott as the member of EUCS staff who has special responsibility for helping students who need to use computers and related equipment to help overcome disability. There are several people and groups around the University who can help students who have disabilities, coordinated by the Disability Office in South College Street (tel 506828, email Disability.Office@ed.ac.uk).

Robert, who also works for the Humanities and Social Science Support Team, can be contacted directly by email to Robert.Gormley@ed.ac.uk.

Jeff Phillips (EUCS)

Summer’s over, time to check your e-courses

As the new term approaches, you will probably be busy updating your courses and preparing for an influx of new students. Don’t forget that your online teaching materials need the same sort of attention. If you have material on a Web site—the IVLE or WebCT—it may need updating, and you should check that none of the content has expired over the Summer. You should also make sure that your new students will know that these materials exist, where they are located, how to get into them, and most importantly, what role they play in the teaching of your course.

If you are unsure about your online teaching materials, or how to introduce them to your students, then the various teaching support groups, including MALTS, will be happy to help out. You can contact MALTS via email to malts@ed.ac.uk.

David Donachie (MALTS)

Videos online

'An Introduction to Edinburgh'

This video—produced by Dario Sinforiani of the MALTS Production Service and narrated by Robin Harper, the University Rector—aims to give potential students, staff and visitors a tour of the city and a guide to the University's place within it. Departmental Web editors are encouraged to link to the video via 'The City of Edinburgh' section of the University Web site, at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/city/>



Enlightenment Lectures

Originally streamed live, recordings of these lectures are now available 'on demand' via the University Web site. All four lectures in the series are available in audio format. The final lecture in the series, 'Can both the Left and Right claim Adam Smith?', featuring Gordon Brown, is also available as a video stream. See <http://www.ed.ac.uk/events/lectures/enlightenment/>



Services for all University staff

The streaming of the Enlightenment Lectures is provided via a collaboration of the MALTS Production Service and the EUCS Streaming Media Service. For more information on these services see:

<http://www.malts.ed.ac.uk/>
<http://webhelp.ucs.ed.ac.uk/services/media/>

Bryan Martin (EUL)

Equipment Exchange

The Procurement Office is coordinating a Web-based facility to enable staff to advertise redundant equipment for sale to other departments within the University. This will be useful for computers and peripherals as well as other types of electrical equipment.

The aims of this facility are:

- to minimise waste
- to reduce the deterioration of unused capital equipment
- to enable departments to recover some of their outlay on surplus equipment
- to reduce the amount of duplicate equipment which is bought.

For full information on this new service, please go to

http://www.procure.ed.ac.uk/procure/resources/equip_exchange.htm

Note that there is a similar online facility for exchanging software, described at <http://webdb.ucs.ed.ac.uk/eucsadmin/exchange/>

George Reid (Procurement)

Payments to the University via the Internet

A new eReceiving application named **Era** was successfully introduced in the last week of July through a joint initiative between the Finance department, MIS and EUCS. This allows credit and debit card payments to be made directly to the University of Edinburgh's bank account via the World Wide Web. It is available for use by staff, students and the public at <https://www.era.finance.ed.ac.uk/>

Customers can log in and select from a list of products and services that have been registered by University departments as available for online ordering. They will then be redirected to the Bank of Scotland Internet Payment Gateway (IPG) to conduct a credit or debit card transaction. Once complete, a departmental contact will be notified of the transaction outcome via email. Aggregate transaction information will ultimately be made available to assist in analysing online customer activity.

This represents phase one of a project whose goal is to enable all University departments to provide goods and services that may be traded anywhere and at any time via the Internet. The next phase will serve those departments that may already have a Web presence, providing a seamless link to the Bank of Scotland IPG.

Subsequent phases include the provision of a centrally-delivered, locally-managed generic online shopping application and a facility to browse and pay debt online.

If your department is interested in using Era now, please email the Finance department support team at fisusers@ed.ac.uk. Further information may be found at <http://www.finance.ed.ac.uk/ePayment/erafrontpage.htm>

Andrew Sim (MIS)

Wireless access to EdLAN

As wireless Internet capability becomes more widespread, the usefulness of being able to connect to the network in many different places without having to plug in a physical cable is proving a useful adjunct to the wired network provision on EdLAN. Prices of the components are also continuing to fall.

However, the well-documented security problems with the current wireless standards mean that we need to proceed cautiously towards connecting this generation of wireless access points directly on to the University network. The risk is that we compromise the integrity of data and computers on EdLAN by opening access to people outside the premises. Some universities and organisations have indeed forbidden such connections outright.

The issues regarding connection to EdLAN have been presented recently by the C&IT Wireless Networking Working Party (their report and policy recommendations are available at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/cttees/citc/>).

One of the main recommendations is that wireless access to EdLAN should be via an authenticated route. EUCS has purchased a wireless authentication gateway, and is moving towards piloting the connection of wireless access points to the University network by means of specifically registered switch ports which will carry the wireless traffic to the wireless authentication gateway before it can join the other network traffic. At least initially there are likely to be restrictions on the kind of traffic that will be accepted into EdLAN from wireless networks.

For more information on connecting your wireless access

point to the network, and on the general use of wireless cards, please visit <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/nsd/access/wireless.html>

VPN access to EdLAN

VPN stands for Virtual Private Network, a method of enabling data to travel in an encrypted form from your computer to a VPN gateway on the University network. This not only hides passwords from an eavesdropper, but also provides a degree of privacy, since it hides the content of your data.

VPN is particularly useful if you access the University network from home, business trip, conference or other non-work location using a public Internet Service Provider. It can also provide access to University resources from outside EdLAN (similar to the way that the authenticating proxy, described by Graeme Wood in last month's *BITS*, allows access to [ed.ac.uk](http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk) Web resources). We are also studying the use of this technology in the wireless access case, since it may permit the use of a wider range of applications when accessing the University network through a wireless access point.

Unless you have one of the more recent Windows systems, you may need to install client software on your computer to support the VPN. More details about the EUCS VPN service are provided on the VPN Web page, at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/nsd/access/vpnservice.html>

Pilot projects

Both wireless and VPN services present considerable configuration and architectural issues, which are being studied with pilot projects. If you wish to be involved in either service please contact Bill Byers (tel 504951, email b.byers@ed.ac.uk).

Bill Byers (EUCS)

Computer price reductions

We are pleased to announce that the University's colleges and schools now pay less for Dell, RM and Viglen products, thanks to pricing policy changes and contractual adjustments.

The University is joining the Inter-regional PC agreement so that extra discount can be passed on to the college/school. Edinburgh contracts were in fact already very keenly priced, so the only real change (to the University as a whole) is with Dell Dimension PCs, for which prices will be reduced by 5% and the carriage charge abolished.

The actual, discounted, prices to be paid by colleges and schools for all ranges and models of PCs from Dell, RM and Viglen are now available in the suppliers' pages.

The other supplier on the Inter-regional PC Agreement is HP/Compaq. Please contact your EUCS support group if you are considering buying any HP/Compaq hardware, as the support may vary.

A similar, national, agreement for Apple should be in place shortly, leading to similar reductions in their prices. Full information is provided at <http://www.procure.ed.ac.uk/computer/>

George Reid (Procurement)

Whole Life Costing workshop

The Procurement Office is running a free half-day workshop on using the Whole Life Costing (Excel-based) tool, on **10th September**. This might interest researchers, technical or admin staff in comparing running costs of equipment, especially if Wellcome grants over £10,000 are involved. Details (though with the wrong date!) are in the new issue of *Staff Development Opportunities*. If you are interested, please contact the Procurement Office (tel 502154, email procurement.office@ed.ac.uk).

Karen Bowman (Procurement)

GeoXwalk Gazetteer

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) is funding a joint EDINA/History Data Service project to develop a demonstrator place and feature gazetteer service for HE/FE. EDINA is a national datacentre based in Edinburgh University Data Library; the History Data Service is part of the UK Data Archive, based in the University of Essex.

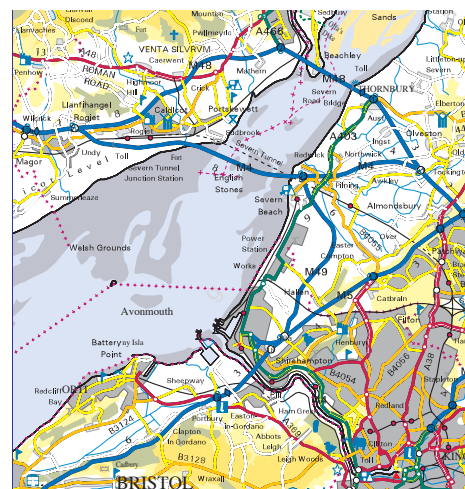
GeoXwalk (pronounced “geo cross-walk”) Gazetteer will provide researchers and teaching staff with access to an online gazetteer for reference and cataloguing purposes, and can operate in the background for other information services which use geographic searching.

This gazetteer will be more than a list of place names and their geographic coordinates. It will also classify features into types, such as city and river, and will store an appropriate spatial ‘footprint’ against each feature: settlements are represented as areas, rivers as lines and so on. It then becomes possible to ‘crosswalk’ across geographies, enabling answers to the following types of query to be returned:

- Where is Ormskirk and what major towns are within 50 miles of it?
- Through which counties does the River Severn flow?
- Which police force areas cover southwest England?

A wide variety of parties both inside and outside UK academia have expressed an interest in the project.

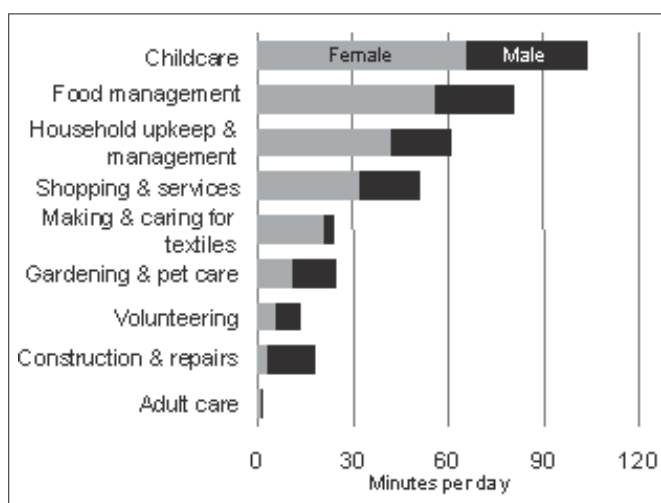
For more information about the project see <http://edina.ac.uk/projects/crosswalk.html>



Crown Copyright. Ordnance Survey.

David Medyckyj-Scott (EUCS)

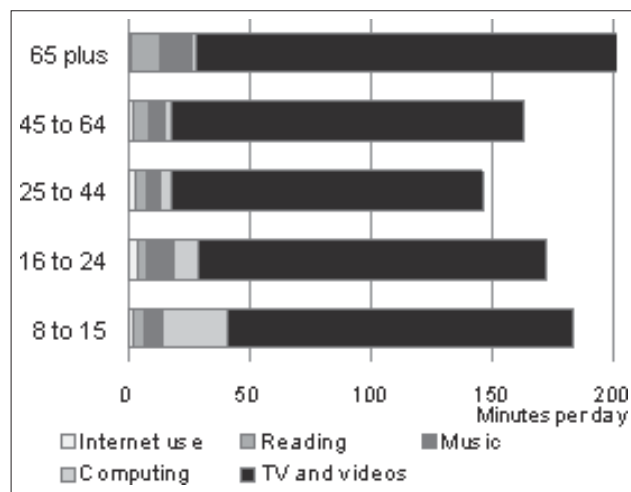
Time Use Survey 2000



You may have heard about this survey in the news when the results were first published: we were told how much time the average Brit spends watching telly, and that we sleep more than some other Europeans. This dataset is now available from the Data Library for direct analysis. Apart from headline figures, the survey can tell us much about modern life, and for different groups of people, not just on average.

The survey topics can shed light on gender roles and hidden

economies such as time spent caring for children or elderly parents, and volunteering. Using the ‘raw’ data in a statistical package such as SPSS, topics can be analysed by recorded demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, ethnicity or housing variables.



Further information is on the ONS Web site at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/> (enter ‘Time Use’ in the search box at the top of the page). To acquire the dataset for analysis, contact the Data Library (email datalib@ed.ac.uk).

Robin Rice (EUCS)

One billion PCs

A new Gartner report estimates that the world’s billionth personal computer was shipped recently. Although it took around 25 years to reach this landmark, the second billion could be here within five or six years, thanks to declining prices, the growth of the Internet, the increasing availability of broadband (high-speed) Internet access, and interest in computers in the developing world.

Nick Stroud (EUCS)

New Horizons

As mentioned last month, the Principal-elect officially launched a series of new information services on 8th July, showing how the University Library, supported by Computing Services, is taking a lead in developing technological solutions to providing access to research collections.

One of the highlighted Web sites, funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme, is 'Navigational Aids for the History of Science, Technology and Environment (NAHSTE)', for which leader Arnott Wilson has received an award of £261,755. The site is at <http://www.nahste.ac.uk/>

This project has created an online database which provides rich access to archival materials on science, technology and the environment in the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Heriot-Watt. Examples of significant achievements by scientists working in these partner institutions include Joseph Black, John Robison and James Watt working together in the eighteenth century on the phenomena associated with latent heat, and 'the Glasgow pair' William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) and William Maquorn Rankine laying the foundations of modern thermodynamics.

The project itself has enabled the Library to develop a new range of standards for describing archives and manuscripts, and for making them available, by exploiting a range of emerging standards based around XML and EAD (Encoded Archival Description). Project staff have also developed thesauri and cataloguing standards.

A further phase is being developed jointly with Cornell University Library.

Ian Mowat (EUL)

Library Online enhancement

The Library is upgrading its online Catalogue during the first week of September. The existing online Catalogue will be available almost continuously throughout this period, though its performance might occasionally be affected. Self-renewal will have to be withdrawn from time to time, and the self-issue machines in the Darwin Library, Erskine Medical Library and Main Library will not work at all during the upgrade process.

For the short periods when the Catalogue is completely unavailable, we recommend the use of COPAC, the combined catalogue of University Research Libraries which includes the Edinburgh University Library Catalogue; this is at <http://www.copac.ac.uk/copac/>

The new version of the Catalogue will introduce features, for example allowing you to customise your use of the catalogue, such as the ability to rerun regular searches, and to download a personal 'bookbag' of records from multiple searches. We will be introducing a Personal Identification Number (PIN) system for access to individual library records. Behind the scenes, the new functionality will result in more efficient administration of the database.

Simon Bains (EUL)

Athens accounts need to be renewed

Athens accounts created before 2nd August 2002 will expire on 31st October 2002.

All Athens accounts expire every 12 months, in order to

ensure that we comply with the licence regulations of our data providers. This ensures that accounts of users no longer at the University are regularly removed from the system.

Students must register for a new account unless there is a very good reason to renew an existing account (*e.g.* for Digimap). Staff are requested to re-register if possible, but may renew existing accounts. Registration is a simple process, and should only take a few minutes to complete. However, it is necessary to be on a University machine to register. For full instructions, see <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/lib/resources/databases/athensreg.shtml>

Off-campus students are requested to re-register when they return to the University in October. Any off-campus user who cannot easily come to the University to re-register may request a renewal using the renewal form at <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/lib/resources/databases/athensform.shtml>

Comments and enquiries should be sent by email to athenshelp@ed.ac.uk.

Simon Bains (EUL)

WebCT Users Forum

Anyone using WebCT, or interested in using it, is reminded of the meeting at 2pm on **12th September** in Faculty Room South, David Hume Tower. Staff who have used WebCT will demonstrate their courses, present feedback from their students, and comment on the effectiveness of their innovation.

This could be the first of a series of informal meetings, establishing a WebCT users' community within the University.

Nora Moge (MALTS)

Virtual Objects

If you have a series of photographs taken from all around an object, it is possible to present them on a computer screen so that the viewer can rotate the object at will and inspect it from any angle. This simple 'virtual reality' has many uses for recording, teaching and display.

The hard part of the job is taking the photographs. This needs time, care and skill, and expensive equipment, to get the images well matched to one another; otherwise the result will be jerky and unconvincing.

Eric Lucey, a retired member of staff, has developed a set-up for photographing objects over a range of sizes from millimetres to about one metre. By courtesy of the Department of Physics and Astronomy, the equipment is hosted in the Applied Optics Laboratory at The King's Buildings. Eric would welcome enquiries regarding possible applications (email Eric.Lucey@ed.ac.uk, tel 0131 667 3081).

The Graphics & Multimedia Resource Centre (open to all staff and students) has software for creating virtual objects from photographs. The GMRC also holds a demonstration CD-ROM showing some of the results that have been produced already. For more sophisticated virtual reality facilities and applications, contact Edinburgh Virtual Environment Centre (EdVEC, on the Web at <http://www.edvec.ed.ac.uk/>).

John Wexler (EUCS)

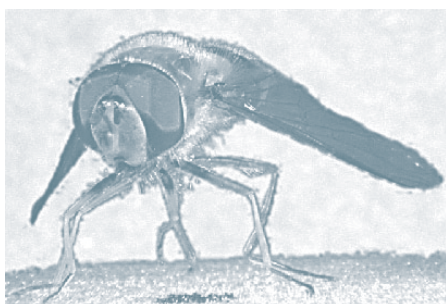


photo: Eric Lucey

Staffmail server: more space

The default disk quota on the staffmail mail server has been increased from 40MB to 100MB for all staffmail users. (Anyone who already has a higher quota is unaffected by this change.)

Graeme Wood (EUCS)

Major Grid conference in Edinburgh

Over a thousand computer scientists from all over the world met in Edinburgh at the end of July for the 5th Global Grid Forum. This was immediately followed by the High Performance Distributed Computing 11 meeting, the first time that the two meetings have been held jointly outside the US.

The scientists were discussing how to apply the world's vast computing resources to major challenges in medicine, physics, astronomy and engineering. The National e-Science Centre (NeSC), based in South College Street, is closely involved in this work.

This is seen as the next phase in the development of the Internet, in which computer power is as readily available as data. Currently being set up by academics and scientists, it is envisaged that the general concept of this computational grid will be of great interest to business and commercial users, and perhaps even in the home.

The NeSC, opened in April by Gordon Brown, has established itself, even in this very short time, as a major player in the development of the Grid—a role which is crucial if the entire concept is to be maintained as a global initiative. The NeSC team has already designed guidelines for a set of standards to promote Grid development around the world, which pave the way for the emergence of the Grid.

For more news, see the NeSC Web site at <http://www.nesc.ac.uk/>

Nick Stroud (EUCS)

Resource centres

If you have any dealings with new students, please let them know about the Resource Centres. These provide many specialist facilities which cannot practicably be provided in the open-access computing labs or by individual schools. You can find out about the Resource Centres at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/graphics.html>

The Graphics and Multimedia Resource Centre is in JCMB room 3901 at The King's Buildings; the Learning and Resource Centre—a joint venture between the Library and EUCS—is on the second floor of the Main Library. The extensive hardware and software resources are free for staff and students, except that printing and other consumables are charged at cost. Facilities are provided for 'DIY' use, with expert help on hand.

Allyson Hayes (EUL)

John Wexler (EUCS)

Edinburgh BITs

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Contributions to *BITs* are welcomed from all readers.

Copy deadline for October BITs:

Monday 17th September