



### MyEd: "The vision takes shape"

The University's Enterprise Web Portal – described at last April's C&ITC conference and in the June issue of *BITs* – is developing apace. It will be called 'MyEd', and will be launched for alumni in January and for staff next August.

*A web portal acts to unify disparate systems, communities and individuals into a seamless and secure personalised environment. Within the University, the portal will increasingly offer a gateway for easy access to the University's web services and systems – tailored to individual users' personal needs.*

The open standard technology platform 'uPortal' will be used for MyEd, paving the way for the University to implement a broad and inclusive portal strategy. Alumni and staff will be able to log in and access personalised information through distinct modules of functionality known as *channels*.

uPortal offers maximum flexibility to the University. It was developed through Mellon Foundation funding to meet the needs of Higher Education. It is used in around fifty institutions in the US, and boasts active knowledge-sharing environments in the US, the UK and beyond. It can accommodate many web-based legacy developments, and plug-in modules allow integration with third party products such as WebCT.

In September the University hosted one of the UK's first uPortal Advanced Implementation training courses. This successful event attracted participants from institutions as far away as the Middle East and South America.

MIS and EUCS are working to provide portal integration with a central authentication mechanism, piloting a system developed by Yale University, which aims to reduce the number of passwords a user has to remember. This framework will provide a secure gateway to a variety of University Web-based systems from any Internet connection worldwide. Further information will be provided on the Portal Services website, at <http://www.eportal.mis.ed.ac.uk/>

MyEd will offer an individual-oriented service that will develop and mature over coming years. All areas of the University will be invited to host and ultimately develop their own channels for the portal. MIS will continue to implement phased releases so that MyEd will be offered to all who wish to be at the forefront of the University's personalised web-enabled services.

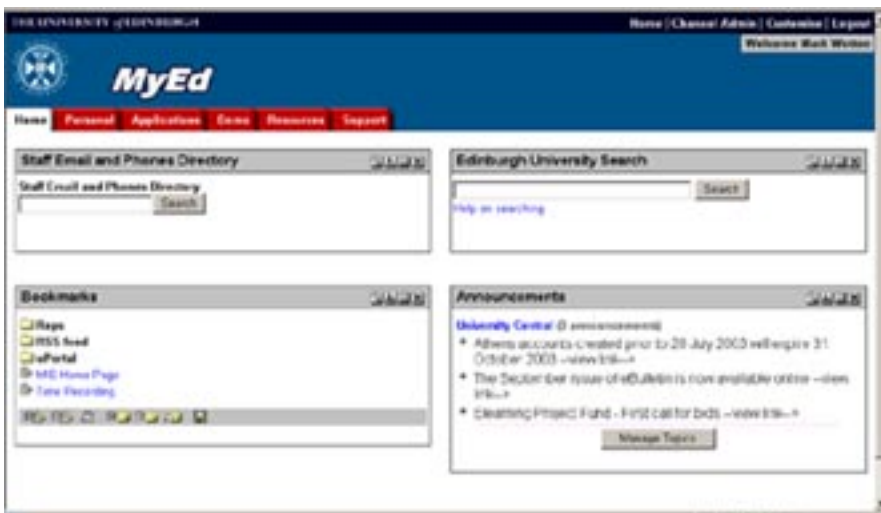
Mark Wetton (MIS)

### [ CONTENTS ]

MyEd: "The vision takes shape"	1
Preferred Web browsers	2
What does your website <i>sound</i> like?	2
Emails to Support Teams	2
The Storage Challenge	3
The continuing battle against SPAM	3
Winmail.dat	3
European Social Survey	3
Graphics & Multimedia Resource Centre: news	4
Learning Technology Supplement	4
Software Services	4
Non staff/student access to the University's Wireless Service	4
Christmas vacation	4

Included with this mailing:

*Learning Technology Supplement no. 12*



MyEd Portal Prototype



## Preferred Web browsers

Much of the information used in the University for teaching, research and administration is now provided on the World Wide Web, where it may be accessed conveniently by a large majority of students and staff. Support units such as MIS and EUCS want to exploit this method of delivering information, but have encountered a slight snag in the wide range of browsers in use.

It is not practicable to check every web page on every browser on all the University's supported computer platforms. The C&IT Committee has therefore agreed that web developers can concentrate on a limited range of browsers. This range will be reviewed annually; to begin with, it consists of Microsoft Internet Explorer on Windows and Mac, and Mozilla on Windows, Mac, Unix and Linux.

The issues are discussed in the (PDF) document at <http://www.mis.ed.ac.uk/services/Browsers/policy.pdf>. The operation of EUCS and MIS web services on the selected browsers is shown at

<http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/browsercompat.html>

[http://www.mis.ed.ac.uk/Services/browsers/Browser\\_matrix.htm](http://www.mis.ed.ac.uk/Services/browsers/Browser_matrix.htm)

If you use a browser which is not one of the supported ones, many of the applications will work – just try them out! However, if you do run into problems it is unlikely that they will be resolved.

Web application developers are not expected to target only the specific browsers but should as a matter of course write their applications to follow good practice, using W3C standards and accessibility guidelines, and avoid writing browser-specific code wherever possible. (There is information about this in the University's Web Publishing Guidelines at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/webpub/>)

*Simon Marsden (MIS)*

## Emails to Support Teams

Email messages sent to EUCS Support Teams, and to some other EUCS teams, are processed automatically by CMS, the EUCS Call Management System. If you have contacted your Support Team with a query you will probably be aware of being given a CMS call reference number.

If your email originates from within the Edinburgh email domain (that is, the *From* part contains *ed.ac.uk*), or if your external email address is known to the support team, the CMS automatically generates a call from the email and passes it directly to the relevant support team. Messages from Hotmail, Yahoo and other non-Edinburgh addresses are generally considered as potential spam, and do not automatically generate a CMS call; they are filed for manual inspection and only become a CMS call if recognised as genuine. As the CMS receives large amounts of spam (over 2,500 messages in the weekend 14–17 November), the inspection for genuine messages has to be fairly cursory; occasionally a genuine message may be missed and discarded – and we apologise if this happens. You can minimise the risk of your message being lost by observing the following simple precautions:

- a. if possible contact your Support Team using an Edinburgh email address.
- b. if you are *expecting to have* to use a non-Edinburgh email address, ask your Support Team to register it in advance.
- c. in any case, please always ensure that the subject line of your email is concise, clear and unambiguous.

*Ed Dee (EUCS)*

## What does your website *sound* like?

For people who can see, good website design means that pages are easy to navigate, information is identifiable, content is useful and the pages are visually attractive. For those who require a *screen reader*, the first two criteria are essential – and unfortunately many otherwise attractive websites are found to be seriously wanting.

Consider what users of audio browsers hear. First, to navigate a site, they must know where they are. The browser tells them the title of the page, but if every page in the site has the same title, it would be like a town where every road had the same name!

To navigate between pages, an audio browser says there is a link and where it points. If links are graphical images without *alt text*, the browser cannot say where they go; it just says there is a link. Imagine navigating around the country if every signpost just said “this way”.

Some otherwise well-designed pages have several links and headers at the top, before the information content. If there is no easy bypass around the headings, users of screen readers must listen through all of them before getting to the information they want. If all the pages in a site have the same heading, listening to this can be wearing to say the least.

Page content can be arranged in blocks across the screen, and if a screen reader cannot distinguish the boundaries, it reads across the blocks. (Try reading across the columns of a newspaper, rather than down!)

With a little care and thought, web pages can be usable with screen readers – and those websites will sound just great! If you publish web pages, check them out for yourself: IBM Home Page Reader is available in the open-access Computing Labs.

*EUCS Web Support*

## The Storage Challenge:

### Securing the vast amount of digital data needed in the modern world

The digital information used in all areas of the University's work demands the continual expansion of data storage. *Gigabytes* (thousand megabytes) have given way to *terabytes* (thousand gigabytes), with *petabytes* (thousand terabytes) on the horizon. This growth is not going to slow down. E-learning and modern research practices mean greater use of online course material, and digitisation projects in libraries, archiving, video streaming and data warehousing all drive the need for more data storage.

Most disk storage needs to be backed up, which in a varied environment like the University's can get very complex. The problems would be considerably reduced if the University were to *consolidate* all its storage. This would also give us better disaster recovery capabilities, which the fire and thefts of recent years show to be crucial.

The current backup schemes are not sustainable, so – following initial consultation throughout the University and significant research of the storage market – EUCS proposes that the University consolidate its data backup using a *Storage Area Network* (SAN). This comprises a centralised infrastructure into which

units of storage can be incorporated. The proposal is that the basic infrastructure would be funded centrally, and the actual storage media would be funded by the service providers.

### Feedback requested

EUCS has launched a consultation phase to check that this proposal addresses service requirements and to refine the details of the specification. The project's phase one report and the proposed solution are available at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/projects/storage/>

If your school or unit is interested in this development, please let me know (email [Keith.Farvis@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Keith.Farvis@ed.ac.uk)).

*Keith Farvis (EUCS)*

## The continuing battle against SPAM

EUCS introduced new block lists on the University's mail relays in November, and will continue to enhance these. Early indications are that they have doubled the number of messages blocked, now nearly half of all messages received. (Sadly the UK law against spam which comes into effect on 11th December is not likely to have much effect, since most spam originates outwith the UK. It does indicate an awareness of the problem at the highest level, which is welcome.)

*Scott Larnach (EUCS)*

## Winmail.dat

Some email users in the University are experiencing problems in exchanging information in email attachments, because the attachment arrives in a file called 'winmail.dat' which the recipient cannot open or do anything sensible with.

The problem occurs when the sender uses Microsoft Outlook 2002 in conjunction with Microsoft Exchange (for example, using Outlook 2002 to access the eDiary system). If you send a message with an attachment by selecting the recipient's address from the Global Address List, that recipient will get the attachment as a 'winmail.dat' file. If the recipient is also using Outlook there is no problem, but recipients not using Outlook will be unable to read the attachment.

A good workaround for this problem is to use the recipient's Internet address, not the address in the Global Address List. Use "F.Bloggs@ed.ac.uk", not "BLOGGS Fred"! (For this workaround to be effective, ensure that the 'Internet Format' settings of Outlook are correct. Select **Tools/Options**, then the **Mail Format** tab, then the **Internet Format** button. Ensure that the method for sending 'Outlook Rich Text' messages to Internet recipients is set to 'Convert to plain text format'.)

EUCS and MIS are working towards a better solution to this very annoying problem.

*Chris Adie (EUCS)*

## European Social Survey

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a biennial multi-country survey covering over 20 nations. The first data release from fifteen of the participating countries can now be accessed from the ESS data website at <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/>

From here data can be downloaded or viewed through a browser (Nesstar). The project is funded jointly by the European Commission, the European Science Foundation and academic funding bodies in each participating country, and is designed to reach a level of consistency across countries and languages higher than any previous cross-country survey.

The project is directed by a team at the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University, London.

Unlike polls or government-funded surveys, the ESS is an academically-driven survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations over time. The data and methodology are documented to a high standard. Assistance with the use of this dataset for research or teaching can be obtained from the Data Library.

*Robin Rice (EDINA)*

## Graphics & Multimedia Resource Centre news

**3D modelling:** We have a collection of ready-made 3D objects for use with 3D Studio Max. Furniture, plants, animals, ships, cars, tools, musical instruments and other categories are available for almost any purpose, royalty-free.

**Internet cameras:** These are video cameras that contain a web server. They simply need plugging in to an ethernet port to provide a website that can be accessed with any web browser – to see whatever the camera is pointing at, continuously updated. (A webcam is different: it has to be attached directly to a computer.) Internet cameras are now reasonably affordable, reliable and easy to use. The Resource Centre has been investigating them, and now has one to demonstrate. We can offer some help and advice if you are thinking of using this technology.

**Managed desktop:** Most of the computers in the Resource Centre will be brought into the University's managed desktop scheme over the coming months. The main change for users will be having to log on to our systems, just as you presently have to log on to systems in the open-access labs. Knowing your username and password will be an advantage.

The Resource Centre is in JCMB room 3901. Contact us by email to [graphics.support@ed.ac.uk](mailto:graphics.support@ed.ac.uk) or call 504965; for further information, see <http://www.graphics.ed.ac.uk/gmrc/>

*John Wexler (EUCS)*

## Learning Technology Supplement

Staff at MALTS have just compiled the latest issue of the University's *Learning Technology Supplement*, distributed with this issue of *BITS*. Activities around the University using technology to support teaching and learning include a number of different viewpoints on WebCT, exciting developments from the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, and details of some useful new software.

*Wilma Alexander (MALTS)*

## Software Services

Because of a retiral and long-term sickness absence, Software Services is very short-staffed just now. We apologise for any delays in responding to phone calls, emails or orders. Urgent steps are being taken to appoint replacements, and the situation should improve in the next few weeks. Meanwhile, please email [EUCS.Software.Service@ed.ac.uk](mailto:EUCS.Software.Service@ed.ac.uk) in preference to phoning, and your message will be answered as soon as possible.

*Charlotte Moon (EUCS)*

## Non staff/student access to the University's Wireless Service

At present the VPN/Wireless self-registration scheme allows University staff and students to register to use the VPN and/or Wireless services.

People who are not University staff or students may also be registered to use the Wireless service. This is done by an 'Authorised Administrator' who can create a temporary username and password for the person and ensure that the Computing Regulations are signed.

Authorised Administrators will usually be Computing Officers but may also be a conference organiser, for example. If you think you require Authorised Administrator privileges to provide access to the University's Wireless service, please contact Bill Byers (email [b.byers@ed.ac.uk](mailto:b.byers@ed.ac.uk), tel 504951).

*Bill Byers (EUCS)*

## Christmas vacation

The University closes for the vacation at 5pm on 23rd December and reopens at 9am on 5th January 2004. Term starts on the 6th.

All University buildings will be closed, as will open-access labs, EUCS Receptions, Support Teams and Resource Centres.

Central computing services such as **holymood** and EdLAN will operate without staff cover for the whole closure period, but with dayshift cover on the 29th to 31st.

There will be no telephone operator service, nor any postal or internal mail deliveries.

*Tricia Cairney (EUCS)*

## EDINBURGH BITS

### Editor:

Nick Stroud, Computing Services.

### Published by:

Computing Services  
The University of Edinburgh  
for the Edinburgh IT community.

### Contributions:

Email: [BITS@ed.ac.uk](mailto:BITS@ed.ac.uk)  
Telephone: 0131 650 3345

### Distribution queries:

*BITS* is distributed through school offices; secretaries please notify changes in requirements to Tricia Cairney:  
Email: [T.Cairney@ed.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cairney@ed.ac.uk)  
Telephone: 0131 650 4931

### Printed 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>

NB: if you fail to access a URL shown in *BITS*, please email [BITS@ed.ac.uk](mailto:BITS@ed.ac.uk)

Contributions to *BITS* are welcomed.

Copy deadline for January *BITS*:

**Tuesday 9th December**