

SelectPC delivers best PC value

As intimated in the May edition of *BITS*, the University is standardising on a single supplier of Windows XP PCs for a 12-month period from June 2004. This agreement, known as the 'SelectPC' arrangement, is designed to reduce the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of the University's PC inventory.

Following a competitive tendering process during May and June, EUCS and the Procurement Office have now selected the preferred supplier of the PCs to the University for the next 12 months, starting on 18th June.

The successful supplier is **HP**.

All four current suppliers (Dell, HP, RM and Viglen) responded to a tender and submitted an evaluation PC based on their tender price. As expected, there was very little variation in the technologies supplied as they were all based on the Intel 865 chipset with a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 hyper-threaded processor.

Performance benchmarks were carried out on all four submissions, testing the processor, graphics and RAM capabilities. The **HP** computer performed best due to its faster-rated processor. **HP** also offered the most competitive pricing structure, which includes 36-months warranty as standard.

The current specification of the SelectPC is:

- Pentium 4, 3GHz Processor
- Intel 865G system board
- 512Mb dual channel DDR RAM
- 40Gb Hard disk
- DVD / CD-RW combo drive
- On-Board LAN, video and audio
- 3.5" floppy disk drive
- Keyboard and optical mouse
- 36 month warranty

This specification will remain the current recommendation for several months. EUCS will be kept closely informed by **HP** regarding planned changes to its product line, and when appropriate the SelectPC specification will be upgraded to take account of improvements in technology.

The SelectPC, supplied by **HP**, is now the recommended configuration for Windows XP PCs within the University of Edinburgh. As discussed in May's *BITS*, purchasing the SelectPC will not only attract the best possible prices available to the University but more crucially it will ease the hidden support costs of maintaining PCs over their lifetime. The installation and technical support of the SelectPC will be easier, as the hardware configurations, device drivers and upgrades will be known to support staff and will be supported by the EUCS Managed Desktop.

EUCS has ordered 330 SelectPCs for the annual open-access labs upgrade programme, and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences has ordered 260 to replace older PCs and make more use of the EUCS Managed Desktop.

For full details about the SelectPC deal from **HP**, including details of optional extras available and of how to order, see the Procurement Office website, at <http://www.procure.ed.ac.uk/computer/ordering/new.htm>

If you require any further information about SelectPC, please contact your EUCS Support Team.

Graham Newton (EUCS)
George Reid (Procurement Office)

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Unix Backup Service

The EUCS Unix and Facilities Management Team provides a backup service to Schools and support groups for small Unix workgroup servers. The service is intended for small groups who otherwise couldn't afford their own backup solution or who prefer to use an offsite, managed service. The service is not intended for desktop systems, for which we recommend the periodic saving of user files to a backed-up fileserver, or the use of a CD/DVD rewriter.

Currently we back up 129 systems spread over 23 Schools/units, which comprises roughly 8 to 9 terabytes of data. This data is backed up nightly: one full backup is taken every month and incrementals every other night. We provide coverage for a 90 day period.

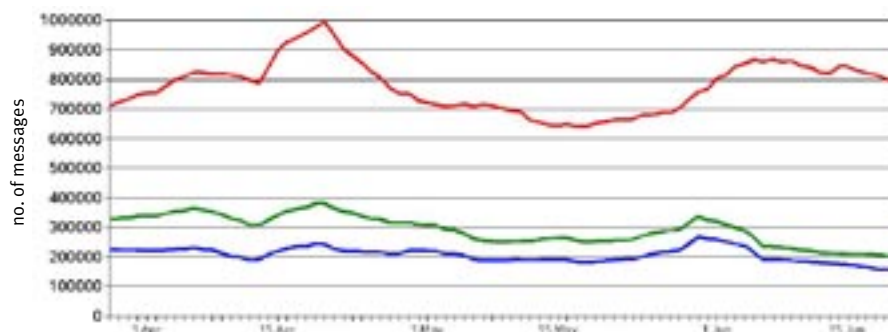
Recently the service has been developed and the previous AIT tape-based backup service has been replaced with a tapeless disk-to-disk service. This is based on two servers each hosting two 4TB IDE RAID arrays. As a result of this move away from tape, we can provide a much more reliable service—tapes are notoriously prone to errors—and can manage a greater number of simultaneous backups, thus reducing the time that we take to do the backups. The time to restore files is also greatly improved as a result, as is reliability.

We can back up all the EUCS supported Unix operating system types (and many others), but there is currently no backup module for Mac OS X.

If you wish to discuss the option of having your Unix services backed up, please contact the EUCS Unix & FM team, or your EUCS Support team.

Graeme Wood (EUCS)

Message Filtering



Graphs show, from the top, the number of attempts to send a message via the main Edinburgh mail relays (peaking at a million a day), the number accepted (peaking at 400,000 a day), and the number for which the SpamAssassin star-rating is less than 4, from the end of March to mid-June.

Enhanced spam blocking

EUCS has enhanced its use of the block listing provided by Spamhaus (<http://www.spamhaus.org/>) to improve its spam blocking. The University mail relays now reject messages from any addresses listed on the Spamhaus Exploits Block List. Indications are that this has resulted in a noticeable decrease in the volume of spam that gets through.

For details of our anti-spam and anti-virus measures please see <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/fmd/unix/docs/mail/junk/antispamvir.html>

Scott Larnach (EUCS)

Adobe price increases

From 15th July 2004 Adobe is introducing new education pricing schemes, which are likely to mean significantly higher prices, and possible minimum order quantities.

If you are planning to purchase Adobe products before the end of the financial year, please place your order with EUCS before 9th July to benefit from the current pricing (see <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/tsd/software/Special/adobe.shtml>).

Charlotte Moon (EUCS)

Large format scanning

A Colortrac 3640 full colour scanner is now available in the University. It can scan up to 91cm (36") wide with no limit on length. It handles paper, fabric and rigid materials up to 1/2" thick. It is reasonably quick, and easy to use. It is ideal for maps, architectural and engineering drawings, charts and posters.

All staff and students can use the scanner, free of charge, in the Graphics & Multimedia Resource Centre at The King's Buildings. For details see

<http://graphics.ed.ac.uk/gmrc/>

John Wexler (EUCS)

Computer faults and installation requests

There are now online webforms for reporting hardware faults and requesting hardware installations of any item of computer equipment:

- for faults: <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/fmd/ops/faultform.shtml>
- for installations: <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/fmd/ops/installform.shtml>

You can also contact the Faults Team direct (tel 504934, email pc.faults@ed.ac.uk), in which case please supply a contact name and telephone number, computer system type, serial number, exact location, a brief description of the item to be installed or the fault, and whether the equipment is covered by the manufacturer's warranty.

Alan Reid (EUCS)

LORE: a Learning Object Repository for the University

Learning objects are small chunks of learning resources, such as user guides, presentations, schematics and lesson plans. Lecturers and support staff can avoid duplication of effort by sharing such resources: if you find a suitable existing resource, you can modify it to suit your own students or users. In general, this should be easier than creating a resource from scratch.

LORE is a learning object repository for the Principal's eLearning projects (listed in *Learning Technology Supplement 13* distributed with June's *BITs*), with the intention of its becoming a University-wide repository. It is funded by the Principal's eLearning Initiative, and its development is led by MALTS.

It is a condition of grant for the eLearning projects that all suitable resources are placed in the repository. The LORE team is working closely with the Library and other support services to ensure that the repository works effectively with existing University systems.

LORE will enable users to deposit, access and share teaching and learning resources. All resources are stored in a standard 'interoperable' format, which can be exchanged between Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), repository systems, and learning object editing tools. Any resource that can be used to facilitate learning and teaching may be suitable for inclusion in LORE.

If you would like to find out more, please contact the LORE Project Officer (email sarah.mcconnell@ed.ac.uk).

Sarah McConnell (MALTS)

Metadata creation

An article in last month's 'Library' issue of *BITs* described the use of metadata. These are the six aspects of planning a successful digital cataloguing project mentioned there:

1. Metadata structure standards

Published metadata structure standards are used by information professionals to ensure consistent structure. Most are developed collaboratively by stakeholders in specific professions or disciplines, and are generally freely available; examples are: Dublin Core, General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) and VRA Core 3.

2. Metadata content standards

These enable consistent data entry and include data entry rules, authority files and thesauri. Examples are AACR2, Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and the UNESCO Thesaurus.

3. Mark-up standards

These make metadata machine-readable and enable automated searches. Two of the most common are XML DTDs and MARC.

4. Data entry

Robust methods for physical metadata creation are required. These should allow simple implementation of data structure or content standards and if possible incorporate mark-up to prevent later manipulation.

5. Data Storage

The storage location and medium need to be considered at the outset of the project, anticipating the size of the dataset and the delivery method.

6. Data delivery

Data delivery methods should be fully specified at the outset. The expected end-use of the data will determine data structure and content standards; for example, to provide a structured search for a personal name, you must index those names. The delivery mechanism will determine the mark-up standards or software used.

To find out more about metadata, contact the Library's Metadata Coordinator, Sarah Higgins (tel 506824, email Sarah.Higgins@ed.ac.uk).

Sarah Higgins (EUL)

June: what a month for eProcurement!

Margaret Lochhead led an eProcurement demonstration of our SciQuest tool involving eight other universities; SciQuest said our institution showed up as a thought leader in procurement automation. The pilot Schools accepted the upgrade of SciQuest to version 3, which will be rolled out soon.

We demonstrated the HEeP tool and held our first project meeting to plan the integration of stationery and other suppliers to eFinancials, and plan demonstrations of ePrint, procurement process document management and e-invoices this month.

Karen Bowman won the Government Opportunities Individual Public Procurement Excellence Award 2004. The whole team deserves this accolade, including special thanks to those assisting in testing eProcurement tools of various types: *you know who you are!*

Karen Bowman (Procurement)



Many congratulations to Evelyn Bain of the Supplies Office, who was awarded her MCIPS (Member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply) at a ceremony in Nottingham last month.

Enhancing the online diary for students

The Edinburgh Student Portal (ESP) includes an eDiary facility that enables students to plan their time, taking account of course timetables and the online diaries of fellow students.

The success of this feature of ESP has created a demand for a more sophisticated eDiary, which would allow students to manage group work and interactions with staff more effectively.

EUCS and MIS already provide an eDiary service for staff, so have set up a joint working party to explore the provision of a single service for staff and students. The group will determine the technical approach, the software required to deliver it, and necessary policies (such as the information students can get from a staff diary), ready to launch the new service for Academic Year 2005–06.

Simon Marsden (MIS)

MyEd update

The MyEd staff pilot closed at the end of May, and a report and results summary based on the 101 online questionnaire responses have been submitted to the Portals Steering Group (see http://www.eportal.mis.ed.ac.uk/PSG_Papers/steering.htm).

The MyEd project is on target, but other MIS projects—relating to year-end changes, matriculation and semesterisation—are needing more attention than expected. MIS has therefore had to reprioritise deployment of its resources over the coming months in order to meet business requirements for the new academic year. As a consequence, the launch of the full staff service of MyEd is being re-planned for the latter half of October this year.

Mark Wetton (MIS)

Desktop videoconferencing

UKERNA has recently been looking at ways of expanding the use of videoconferencing to a wider range of users. A recent project aimed at attracting **desktop users** is now in pilot phase, and is named 'Conferencing on Demand'—CoD.

The CoD project allows you to use an H.323 compliant 'endpoint' to create a multipoint videoconference (with three or more participants) via a web page, without operator intervention. Registration is required to gain access to the pilot which is restricted to '.ac.uk' users. The minimum equipment requirement for an 'endpoint' is to have a camera, microphone, speakers/headphones, monitor, and an H.323 compliant codec.

A wide range of suitable codecs is available on the market, some less expensive than others, and indeed some are free, such as Microsoft NetMeeting which may be installed on your PC.

Further details of CoD, including registration details, can be found at <http://www.ja.net/development/video/cod/>

Feedback is most welcome, via the feedback form which can be accessed from the CoD homepage.

Foad Boroujerdi (EUCS)



Grids: what are they?

The National e-Science Centre is organising a meeting on *Grids: what are they, and where are they going?*

This opportunity to find out a bit about what Grids are and how they are enabling eScience in Europe is free, and takes place on 6th July from 1:30–4:30PM, in the e-Science Institute at 15 South College Street. Further details are provided at <http://www.nesc.ac.uk/esi/events/447/>

David Fergusson (NeSC)

Make the most of the day before the day after tomorrow...

Do you have a reasonably powerful Windows PC which won't be doing much over the Summer?

The film *The Day After Tomorrow* has sparked renewed interest in a distributed climate-modelling program funded by the NERC and the DTI. To participate, visit

<http://www.climateprediction.net/>
(Editor)

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Contributions to *BITS* are welcomed.

Copy deadline for August *BITS*:

Friday 16th July