

Introducing new students to C&IT

Freshers' Week is 13–19 September this year, and teaching begins on Tuesday 21st September. If you will be seeing new students, please let them know of the various sources of help in getting started with the University's IT environment.

The EUCS 'Introduction to IT' sessions (in the Learning and Resource Centre, Main Library, from 2pm to 4pm on Wednesday to Friday in Freshers Week and throughout Week 1) offer an easy way to develop key computing skills; for details see <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/usd/student/>

The Student Helpdesk can help with both lab and home computers, and can be contacted by email to Student.Support@ed.ac.uk, or at <http://www.students.ucs.ed.ac.uk/helpdesk/>.

Help and information are also available from the Supervisor in any open-access computing lab.

Noel Millar (EUCS)

How to arrange services:

Centrally or Distributed?

The issue of centralised and decentralised services was raised during the Knowledge Management consultation process, and has been discussed by the Information Services Group (ISG), MIS and the Colleges. The resulting (short!) discussion paper is on the ISG website at http://www.isg.ed.ac.uk/CvD_o8-07-04.pdf

This is an important aspect of planning future ISG services, so please send your comments by mid-September to the Vice Principal at Information.services@ed.ac.uk.

Jo Hamill (ISG)

Apple credit offer

In response to a request from the National Apple Group, Apple has reintroduced its ten-month interest-free offer for staff and students. Details can be viewed at <http://promo.euro.apple.com/promo/creditooffersummer2004/10months/uk/>

George Reid (Procurement)

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Spot the Difference...



Appleton Tower



Appleton Tower

All is revealed on page 3.

WCMS

an acronym coming to the assistance of the University's Web publishers—see page 2.

A Web Content Management System for the University

The EUCS-led project to implement a Web Content Management System—WCMS—for the University has selected the **Polopoly** system, a Java-based, flexible and extensible product from Polopoly A.B., a company based in Sweden.

The Polopoly system has a simple, forms-based web interface for creating and updating web pages, and for managing permissions, workflow and metadata. On top of the standard product, we intend to integrate a WYSIWYG editing tool for greater flexibility in editing.

The selection process involved an EU advertisement which elicited around 40 responses. Polopoly was chosen from a short-list of five suppliers as offering the best combination of features, flexibility and cost. The tender and evaluation were carried out by a project group with representatives from all three Colleges, MIS, EUCS and MALTS. The Polopoly system is already in use at two UK universities—Sheffield and Coventry—as well as other organisations in the UK and Europe, including a major Swedish newspaper and part of IKEA.

Polopoly's website is at <http://www.polopoly.com/>

What is a Web Content Management System?

And why might it be important for you?

A Web Content Management System (WCMS) holds the contents of a website—text, images, links, style sheets, forms—not as individual HTML files but in a central database, along with management information such as who owns the content item, who has permission to change it, and when it should be published or reviewed.

To create new web pages or change existing ones, you use a browser-based editing interface, instead of a tool like Dreamweaver or FrontPage. A template controls which parts of the page you can update. You can schedule pages for publication on a particular date, and optionally send them to be reviewed by someone else.

When someone browsing your website requests a page, the WCMS assembles the HTML from the page components, according to the chosen layout and page design, and delivers it to the browser.

The components of a page can just as easily be presented in other formats, for example XML, since they are held separately from the HTML code. The WCMS can hold non-HTML documents such as PDFs and Word files, although it's not possible to edit these from within the system. Metadata elements—such as keywords for search engines, the page author and the publication date—can be stored, and made mandatory if required.

What a WCMS doesn't do

Content Management might sound like the ideal solution to all your website woes. However, it is only one part of the jigsaw. The maxim “garbage in, garbage out” applies as much as it always has.

A WCMS is a computer program. It won't design a wonderful page layout, or an easy-to-use navigation system. It won't automatically eliminate inaccurate information and waffle. It won't decide who should be responsible for which pages, and who should approve changes. It won't create a policy on which non-HTML documents should be in the system. It can prompt people to review content, but cannot make them actually do it. And while it can greatly assist with creating valid and accessible web pages, you will still have to understand these concepts and how to edit content accordingly.

Implementing the system

Before we can invite people to use our new WCMS, a lot of work has to be done to install hardware and software, and configure it to work with our IT infrastructure. The plan is to put one or two small websites into the system as initial projects, to learn how best to migrate content. We should then be able to open up the system for general use, and provide support and training so that Schools can transfer their own websites. A timetable is still being discussed, but if you would like to register an interest, please email C.Moon@ed.ac.uk.

The project website (accessible from within ed.ac.uk only) will be updated as the implementation progresses, at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/projects/wcms/>

Charlotte Moon (EUCS)

Redevelopment of the University website

Vice Principal Helen Hayes has convened a working group to review the University's web presence and to make recommendations on its future development. The group notes that “UoE is a university of international standing, and the website should reflect this status. It is the University's primary vehicle of interaction with external users and customers, and the requirement now is to rethink the site in terms of what users both want and expect.”

The group will work with an external consultant and is expected to report by the end of 2004. Details of its work and progress will be posted on the ISG website.

Jo Hamill (ISG)



The new Informatics Forum

The University has applied for planning permission to create a spectacular new building in front of Appleton Tower. Phase One—the front section in the accompanying illustration (looking north from George Square)—would accommodate the University’s prestigious School of Informatics, currently operating on five different sites.

The rear block, to be added in Phase Two, is earmarked for part of the College of Humanities and Social Science and various student support services. A central courtyard will provide an attractive new open space for the University.

Further information will be provided on the Informatics website at <http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/building/>

Formal news will be released by CPA, at <http://www.cpa.ed.ac.uk/releases/>

Feeding news into *Library Online*

The ‘Net Search’ page in the Library’s website has its first RSS newsfeed—Heriot Watt’s Internet Resources Newsletter—one of the range of resources to help find obscure information on the Web. Net Search is at <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/resources/netsearch/srchtool.shtml>

This page has a link to information about RSS, a common format for distributing news. Several RSS news ‘channels’ are available on MyEd, for example.

Steve Scott (EUL)

MyEd Portal Launch Date

The MyEd portal for staff is to be launched on 29th October, and will be available through the EASE central authentication interface.

MyEd aims to integrate useful web-based services into one easily accessible portal gateway. Functional content will expand over time, but will from the outset include some key existing service areas such as:

- University web and staff search tools
- HR Self Service and HR Manager Workflow
- Selective Library services and Athens Resources
- WISARD • WebFirst
- Staffmail • WebCT

In addition MyEd will include newer functionality such as Announcements and Internal Transfers, and a wealth of further news, learning and teaching resources that can be added as required by each individual user. Further details are given at <http://www.eportal.mis.ed.ac.uk/>

Mark Wetton (MIS)

The world: a hostile place for a computer

New research by the SANS Institute’s Internet Storm Center suggests that an unprotected PC will be infected by a virus within *20 minutes* of being connected to the Internet—less time than it takes to locate and download the patches and antivirus software that would protect the computer. This is the sort of problem which the EUCS managed desktop is tackling; there will be news about this in next month’s *BITs*.

Meanwhile, as Internet Service Providers and even the United Nations tackle the unwanted email we know as spam, a new irritation has arrived on the Internet. “Spim” exploits the immediacy of Instant Messaging to spread via unwary users. If you use Instant Messaging you should stick to three basic rules: only accept connections from people you know, don’t download attachments from people you don’t know, and keep your operating system and virus-checking software up to date.

Editor

Meet the people who turn the pages

The June issue of *BITs* included a brief mention of the British Library’s service which provides online access to such priceless treasures as Vesalius’ *Anatomy*, George III’s own copy of *Blackwell’s Herbal*, and the *Diamond Sutra*, a Buddhist scroll which is the world’s oldest dated printed book. *Turning the Pages* is at <http://www.bl.uk/collections/treasures/digitisation3.html>

The team behind these online treasures will be at the Museums Association Exhibition at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre on 13th and 14th September. If you would like to meet them, and also see a range of services for museums and galleries, you can pre-register for a free pass at <http://www.museumsassociation.org/>

Rachel Savory (British Library)

EUCS loses a wealth of accumulated talent

Four long-serving members of Computing Services staff have retired—taking 115 years' worth of accumulated wisdom and experience with them.



Gerry Coughlan came to Edinburgh in 1974, as an operator on the ICL 4/75s running EMAS, Edinburgh's own multiaccess operating system. He switched to the DEC-10 when that national service opened, and remained with it until it closed in 1985. He then ran one of the University's first 'microlabs', supervising a collection of BBC microcomputers and Apple Macs amongst the gas-taps and other paraphernalia of one of the old chemistry labs in Appleton Tower.

From here Gerry progressed very naturally to become the technical expert who kept the EUCS training suite operating smoothly—attending to all the problems with hardware, software and accounts, and keeping an expert eye on the Open Learning Centre which was the precursor of the Learning and Resource Centre. At the same time, Gerry ran the EUCS disk conversion service, transferring documents usually from an Amstrad to PC or Mac format. When this service eventually closed, Gerry moved to the Medical Support Team, where his Mac expertise, his ability to 'knock up' a database, and his constant desire to help were all much valued.

Gerry's personal life was never an easy one, as he had to look after his ill mother for many years. Nevertheless he was a leading member of his church, he relished his adventurous foreign trips, and he completed all but one of the computing courses he needed for his OU degree. For the past several years he had to battle against various illnesses, and having taken medical retirement a couple of months ago, he died in August. His knowledge, reliability and gentle wit will be greatly missed.



Norman Douglas came to EUCS from MIS in 1992, to work alongside Mike Baillie as operations manager for the open-access computing labs in the central area.

Neil Hamilton-Smith arrived in August 1967 as a trainee programmer, but will be best remembered for his broad knowledge and meticulous attention to detail in producing the monthly ERCC Newsletter for many years and for his major contribution more recently to training and user support.



Roy Middleton started work for the University in 1968 as a programmer before becoming the driving force behind several initiatives in computer graphics, including the Graphics and Multimedia Resource Centre and Edinburgh Virtual Environment Centre (EdVEC). Roy now runs his own company to carry forward the work begun in EdVEC.



Nick Stroud (EUCS)

Public holiday this month

The University is observing the public holiday on Monday 20th September, and staffed EUCS services will be closed. Major Library sites will be open, so open-access computing labs in Library sites will be accessible, as will the 24-hour labs in the KB Centre and Greenfield Suite (access requires a matriculation card and associated PIN; Lab Supervisors can help with this).

Another Procurement success



Stuart McLean, the University's Print Procurement Manager, has become a Member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply after doing a Diploma via NVQ level four in Procurement.

Happily Stuart will continue to lead the Printing Department which is such a valuable asset in the University, producing *BITS* amongst other things...

Nick Stroud (EUCS)

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

Contributions to *BITS* are welcomed.

Copy deadline for October *BITS*:

Thursday 16th September