

**HECToR comes to Edinburgh**



Arthur Trew, EPCC Director

Computational science has become the third research methodology – alongside theory and experiment. It is now vital, in an increasing number of disciplines, to have access to the most powerful computers. That is why the upgrading of HPCx in November was so significant.

HPCx is a national project run by the University on behalf of the UK Research Councils. The upgraded system is based on a cluster of 20 IBM p575s. It has a peak performance of over 15 Tflops, a memory of 5 Tbyte and storage of 0.25 PByte ('T' is 'tera', 2<sup>40</sup>, or about a million million; 'P' is 'peta', 2<sup>50</sup>, or about a thousand million million). This places the HPCx system as the 43rd most powerful system in the world, and among the top ten university-based systems in Europe.

While this performance is impressive, the challenge is to ensure that researchers can actually make use of it in real applications. That is where EPCC really comes in – we have unrivalled expertise in computational science techniques and algorithms, and work with a wide range of scientists from around the UK to perform some of the most demanding calculations in the world. Examples of these range from climate modelling, through simulation of airflow over aeroplane wings to the design of new materials.

The recent upgrade is the last for the HPCx facility, and the Research Councils have been planning its successor. This follow-on project to provide national high-performance computing services is known as HECToR. The Research Councils have never before given two such projects to the same institution at the same time. This is why our success last month in bringing the £100M HECToR project to Edinburgh has truly changed the landscape of computational science in the UK.

The HECToR system will be provided by Cray and installed at the University next Summer. Further news will appear in subsequent issues of *BITS*.

*Arthur Trew (Director, EPCC)*

**Are you an Officer? Do you Compute?**

Are you employed by the University to enhance its IT environment?

As Professor Trew says above, computers are now essential in research, and they are just as important in all the University's other activities.

Our IT environment is developed and sustained by Information Services and MIS (shortly to merge) – and by a dedicated band of IT professionals distributed throughout the University. The Kenway Review recommended that an independent group be set up for all the University's IT staff, and this is now being taken forward by a small representative working party.

There will be an exploratory meeting (with free lunch) at 12:30pm on Wednesday 24th January: details will be circulated through a mailing list. Full information is available at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucinfo/cttees/itforum/>

*Nick Stroud (IS)*

**contents**

HECToR comes to Edinburgh	1
Calling all Computing Officers	1
Kenway Review: implementation milestones	2
eSkills Seminars are 10	2
IS surveys of User Satisfaction	3
Missing Informatics research papers: help needed!	3
Scottish Digital Library Consortium	3
ITfutures: November's 'stargazing' Web 2.0 conference	4
New SelectPC supplier	5
New version of 'Internet for Social Statistics'	5
Website Development Project	6
What students want from our online systems	6
Software news	7
SFTPDrive	
Apple Maintenance Plan	
Internet Explorer 7	
The new Festival Director	7
Library stalwart retires	8
A service for your creative needs	8
Would you like a taster?	8

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

*May 2007 bring all you could possibly wish for!!*

## Kenway Review: implementation milestones

The following outline summarises current plans for implementing the changes in IT services recommended by the Kenway Review. ('KSC' is the new Knowledge Strategy Committee, formed when the Knowledge Management Committee absorbed the IT Committee.)

Milestone	Status	Target completion
1	Completed	November
2	Completed	November
3	Completed	November
4		KSC Meeting January 2007
5		Group established in January
6		February
7	meeting arranged	December
8		January 31 July 2007  June 2007
9		31 July 2007
10		31 July 2007
11		Roadmap: January 2007; Milestones: July 2007

The latest information is available on the Review website, at [http://www.is.ed.ac.uk/projects/computing\\_review](http://www.is.ed.ac.uk/projects/computing_review)

*Helen Hayes (IS)*

## eSkills Seminars are 10

eSkills seminars were first offered by IS Student Support in 1997, and have become ever more popular; this year nearly 10% of all students will attend.

The two-hour sessions cover key IT skills, mainly for undergraduates. An initial overview of how IT can support study is followed by a practical session to help students get started with a package or technique. Topics include preparing a presentation, writing a dissertation or long essay, drawing charts or graphs using a spreadsheet, and finding study information on the Internet. The laptop workshops introduced last year have been particularly popular.

The seminars can be adapted for use on particular courses; if you would like to use one, please get in touch (email [Student.Support@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Student.Support@ed.ac.uk)).

The full programme of seminars is published on the computing labs online help system at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/usd/student/courses/>

*Noel Millar (IS)*

## IS surveys of User Satisfaction 2007

During February Information Services will be carrying out the IS Staff and Student survey alongside the complementary LibQual+ survey. The IS survey will gather data about usage of several core IS services and the views of users about the quality and range of these services (including email, computing labs, WebCT, lecture theatre AV and some library services). The LibQUAL+ survey was developed by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and is used by some 550 institutions in North America, Europe and Australia. LibQUAL+ allows libraries to measure their users' perceptions of service quality and identifies gaps between desired, perceived and minimum expectations of service.

A random sample of staff and students (postgraduate and undergraduate) will be constructed for each survey and **contact made by email in the week of 29th January**. The samples will be non-overlapping, with selection for one excluding selection for the other. Both surveys will be open for three weeks and each will take less than 15 minutes to complete. In both cases, respondents will have the option to enter for a prize draw for Amazon e-vouchers.

The data we gather on the IS survey contributes to our performance indicators in the University's Balanced Scorecard, and helps us improve the services we offer. The analysis of user satisfaction from last year's survey is at [http://www.is.ed.ac.uk/content/1/c4/11/12/IS\\_Staff\\_and\\_Student\\_Survey\\_2006.pdf](http://www.is.ed.ac.uk/content/1/c4/11/12/IS_Staff_and_Student_Survey_2006.pdf)

In the case of the LibQUAL+ survey, the results go directly to the LibQUAL+ team in the United States. They do the analysis and compile reports for each participating library. Libraries are able to compare user perceptions of service delivery against expectations, and identify where services need improvement in the view of *their* users. They can also compare their service quality with that of peer institutions in an effort to develop benchmarks and understand best practice across institutions.

We participated in the survey in 2003 and again in 2005. Background information and results from the 2005 survey, together with a report presented to the Library Committee on subsequent initiatives, are all at <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/about/libcom/PapersJuno5/libqualpapersindex.html>

Further information on LibQUAL+ is at <http://www.libqual.org/>

For questions or comments contact Jo Hamill (email [jo.hamill@ed.ac.uk](mailto:jo.hamill@ed.ac.uk)).

*Jo Hamill (IS)*

## Missing Informatics research papers: help needed!

The School of Informatics is moving into its new Informatics Forum in central Edinburgh this year, to create a centre for innovation and interaction, and bring together the University's researchers in Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Science. The University Library and the School have agreed that there won't be a physical library in the new building; instead, a digital library will offer ready access to comprehensive Informatics literature to support the School in its research and teaching aims.

The Informatics Digitisation Project is helping to create this new digital library; see <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/projects/infdigitisation.shtml>

Unfortunately we cannot locate some items we wish to digitise – as listed at <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/projects/infdigitisation/missingitems.shtml>

If you have copies of any of these items, please contact Sarah Kelly (email [Sarah.Kelly@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Sarah.Kelly@ed.ac.uk)). Thank you!

*Sarah Kelly (IS)*

## Scottish Digital Library Consortium

The Scottish Digital Library Consortium (SDLC) is the new name for the Scottish Endeavor Consortium.

The Consortium, co-founded by the University and the National Library of Scotland in 1999, is best known for supplying the Voyager library management system to the University, the National Library, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh College of Art, the University of Abertay Dundee, the Signet Library and the Royal Observatory of Edinburgh.

The Consortium has recently diversified its services, and its newest member – St Andrews University – has just implemented a free-to-use, open access digital repository for theses and research publications, based on the Edinburgh Research Archive, provided by the Consortium.

As well as technical input, Edinburgh staff provided expertise in advocacy and the organisational issues involved in setting up a repository. The service is hosted by Information Services.

St Andrews chose the SDLC to provide its digital research repository because this was a Scottish option seen to be working effectively for other library services, and because the University of Edinburgh has strong experience of the softer issues surrounding institutional repositories, including involvement in UK projects. Other Consortium services, including a federated search service based on the WebFeat software already used by the University, are in the process of being launched.

For further information contact Clare Whittaker (email [clare.whittaker@ed.ac.uk](mailto:clare.whittaker@ed.ac.uk)).

*Clare Whittaker (IS)*

## ITfutures: outcomes of November's 'stargazing' Web 2.0 conference

The conference on 24th November was a great success. The capacity audience enjoyed some stimulating and thought-provoking presentations – all of which can be seen and heard again through the recordings on the ITfutures website at <http://www.itfutures.ed.ac.uk/>

Some of the key points made were:

- The risks of doing nothing are greater than the risks of doing something. Universities typically take too long to adopt new technologies. Institutional inertia has been a significant barrier to adoption of Web 2.0, and a change in culture is needed.
- It might not still be appropriate for the University to provide central services such as email and eDiary.
- Social technologies will increasingly force teachers to re-think their role.
- Institutional concerns such as quality control, appropriate content, data protection, policing and administration violate the spirit of Web 2.0, which is all about users generating and filtering large quantities of information for themselves.
- Students prefer commercial tools to University-provided tools. (For example, the University's email service gives them very little storage space, and they can't keep their email addresses when they leave.)
- Students use social networking tools all the time, sharing surprisingly personal information – but not all students use social collaboration software.
- Legal aspects need to be considered at the start of any project – and if they are, the law will facilitate our work, not penalise us.
- Online learning is becoming more *participative* than *receptive* – more collaborative than content-based.
- Mobile technologies are increasingly important.
- New software technologies allow numerical models to be expressed and processed flexibly without the need for hard-coding in Fortran or other programming languages.
- Web 2.0 tools make the online environment sufficiently rich that it may in future not be either possible or desirable to nominate a single tool as the institution's VLE. It is more likely that a mix of tools will be used, each for its own qualities.

As well as watching recordings of the conference through the ITfutures website, you can read the transcript of the 'Gabbly' chat that was going on at the same time amongst people watching over the Internet, and can contribute to wikis which follow up various topics from the conference.

### ITfutures videoseminars

One of the conference speakers noted that Higher Education as a whole is ahead of other sectors, such as museums, in its appreciation of Web 2.0 opportunities, and he thought that within HE the University of Edinburgh is well-placed to exploit these new opportunities, since we are large enough to have and to support the many 'pockets of innovation' that can move us forward. He also emphasised the importance of spotting and learning from mistakes, in order to build robust and resilient services: part of the 'stargazing' role is to absorb relevant experience.

The University's star-gazing group is discussing how best to build on the ITfutures conference, and is organising a series of monthly videoseminars to follow up specific themes. Possible topics include:

- Web 2.0: Getting the Law on your side.
- Which Wiki, Blog, Chat client to use at the University of Edinburgh?
- Websites: which is more important, quality content or quality experience?
- A new process to develop Acceptable Use Policies.
- Developing more sophisticated models for standards.

The first videoseminar takes place at **3pm on 17th January**, and will examine legal issues; it will be available through the ITfutures website. Subsequent videoseminars will be on 14th February, 14th March, 18th April, 16th May and 13th June – all at 3pm.

Brian Kelly – who spoke at the conference – has posted a blog about it and invites comments and feedback, at <http://ukwebfocus.wordpress.com/2006/11/26/star-gazing-conference-2006/>

### Support from the Principal

The Principal spent the whole day at the conference, and gave a thoughtful presentation in the panel session. He emphasised the need for a measured approach to new IT developments, and liked Tim O'Reilly's remark that Web 2.0 represented "Technology with attitude". He mentioned that one in six of the Earth's inhabitants use the Internet, and that navigation and interface problems with IT resources have now largely been overcome. He was clear that security is just as important for a university as for a bank or a hospital, as are issues of authenticity, sustainability and continuity. He particularly looked forward to the increasing use of computers in assessment, urging the University to be "courageous and creative" in this area.

*Jean Ritchie (IS)*

*John Lee (Informatics)*

## New SelectPC supplier for 2006–2007

Following a competitive tendering process during October and November, the SelectPC Advisory Group has chosen the preferred supplier and specification of the SelectPC to the University starting on 1st January.

The successful supplier is **Dell**.

The new specification of the SelectPC supplied by Dell is:

OptiPlex 745 Desktop  
 Intel Core 2 Duo E6300- 1.86GHz/1066MHz/2MB Processor  
 1.0GB 667MHz NON-ECC DDRII Memory  
 160GB (7,200rpm) SATA 3.0Gb/s Hard Drive  
 16X DVD+/-RW Drive  
 On-Board LAN, video and audio  
 Dell 2 Button USB Scroll Optical Mouse  
 Dell Quietkey USB Keyboard  
 36 month warranty

The SelectPC Advisory group recommends that people who require a monitor should consider the Dell 17" Ultrasharp TFT monitor which comes with a DVI interface and height-adjustable stand.

This specification will remain the current recommendation for several months. The SelectPC Advisory Group will be kept closely informed by Dell of 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 Dell, is now the recommended configuration for PCs within the University of Edinburgh. 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 the PC over its lifetime, since the hardware configuration, device drivers and upgrades will be known to support staff and be accommodated in the University's Supported Windows XP Desktop.

Dell is willing to provide a range of upgrades to these specifications, including a range of case designs, processor and RAM upgrades and additional graphics cards. Personal purchasing is available: staff or students can take advantage of the special prices negotiated through the SelectPC scheme.

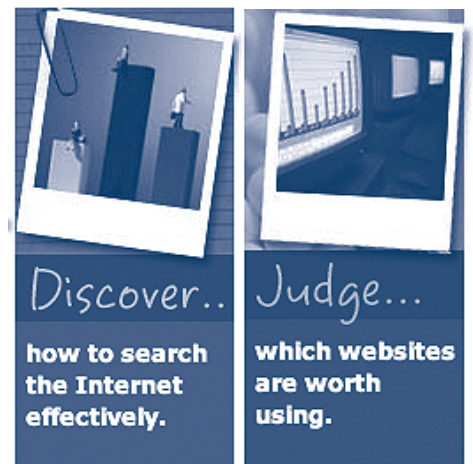
For full details about the SelectPC deal from Dell, covering optional extras available and how to order, please see the Procurement Office website at [http://www.pps.ed.ac.uk/for/staff/computer\\_ordering/pcs.htm](http://www.pps.ed.ac.uk/for/staff/computer_ordering/pcs.htm)

If you require any further information about the SelectPC, please contact your Information Services support team.

The SelectPC advisory group was formed to liaise with the user community in respect of current and future configurations of the SelectPC, and is actively involved in support and purchasing issues relating to the SelectPC. The group is made up of representatives from all three Colleges and the two support units. Its current members are:

Graham Newton (Convenor)  
 Donald Grigor & Justin MacNeil (Science and Engineering)  
 Jessie Paterson & Richard Jones (Humanities and Social Science)  
 Alan Gilchrist (Medicine and Veterinary Medicine)  
 Sally McNaught and Bryan McGregor (Corporate Services Group)  
 Bob O'Malley, Alan Reid and Dave Ross (Information Services)  
 Robert Gormley (Disability Technology Sub Group)

Graham Newton (Convenor)



## New version of 'Internet for Social Statistics'

A new edition of the *Internet for Social Statistics* online tutorial has been released in the *Intute: Virtual Training Suite* at <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/social-statistics>

The tutorial teaches Internet research skills, and has been completely updated and revised by Robin Rice of Edinburgh University Data Library. It is ideal for use in Higher Education courses, particularly in social science or research methods courses.

The tutorial recommends key Internet resources for social statistics; offers advice on Internet searching and website evaluation; and has a new section called 'Success Stories' to illustrate how the Internet can be used to support education and research in a variety of scenarios.

Learn how to use the Internet to:

- find out about your neighbourhood;
- find commentary about statistics in the news;
- find complete information about an academic study;
- find a list of forthcoming conferences;
- locate teaching materials on data analysis.

Debra Hiom (Intute, Bristol)

## Website Development Project update

The Project continues to work towards the delivery of its initial phase – publishing student recruitment-related content – in late Spring 2007.

### Consultation continues

Small-scale meetings in October and November were followed up with larger events in December, with Heads of Schools and Colleges as well as their web publishers and student recruitment representatives. The events consisted of a series of presentations followed by an interactive session using the Personal Response System – replicating a paper-based approach employed successfully in smaller group sessions. This encouraged participants to think about the nature of their online material, and engage more closely with the Project.

These events will be followed up with an open invitation event early in 2007, where we will share the Project's vision for the new website and provide an overview of progress to date.

### Technical development update

Development of the Polopoly content management system is being managed by Charlotte Moon, who leads a development team of three programmers from MIS. Following training from the software providers in June, our programmers have been customising the system to meet the University's needs. Key areas of work include:

- building flexible and easy-to-use entry templates for creating content;
- creating entry templates to hold and manage lists of keywords and categories, for use in searching and grouping related information;
- building workflow procedures so that new content can be approved before it is published, if necessary;
- enhancing the media bank so that all images and documents published on the new website are easy for web publishers to access and appropriately stored;
- building features such as automatically-generated navigation links and menus;
- integration with core University systems such as the IDMS and the proposed University Contacts Directory.

The Project team will start using the system shortly.

Development of training materials will follow, with population of the new website to begin in mid February.

### More information

For more information and latest news on the Website Development Project, see <http://www.ed.ac.uk/websiteproject/>

If you'd like to discuss issues, please contact Dawn Ellis (tel 506379, email [website.project@ed.ac.uk](mailto:website.project@ed.ac.uk)).

*Dawn Ellis (CAM)*

## What students want from our online systems

The University is reviewing the systems it uses to support online teaching and learning, and as part of this we have carried out a survey of students across the University.

We asked students what online provision they had experience of, as part of their studies, and what they thought is important in this area. Predictably, many students reported frequent use of PowerPoint, eJournals and digital resources such as databases, while the great majority had never made use of chat rooms, electronic whiteboards, or simulations.

The following facilities and services are in the order of importance ranked by our students (most important first):

- I can get access to all the readings, notes and web resources for my course online.
- I can communicate with my tutors and course organiser online.
- All my courses are available from the same place with one login.
- I can register for courses and see progress reports online.
- All my courses provide the same broad range of materials online.
- I can manage personal information like change of address online.
- I can find online help (e.g. FAQs) for using technology when I need to.
- I can communicate with other students on the course online.
- I have an email helpline when technology lets me down.
- I have an on-campus support desk where someone will help me with technical problems.
- I can submit assignments online.
- I can continue to see courses I studied in previous years.
- All my courses have the same sort of appearance and structure.
- I can borrow equipment (e.g. a laptop) for coursework when and where I need to.
- I have online courses about using software and technology for my studies.
- I have training courses about using software and technology for my studies.
- I can see other courses for this year even if not registered on them.

Note that even the lowest-ranked facility was considered important or very important by 46.5% of respondents.

The MLE Review Group aims to produce a full report in Spring 2007, with a fuller review of the survey results.

*Wilma Alexander (IS)*

## Software news

### SFTPDrive interest?

IS Software Services has been asked to investigate the possibility of a bulk purchase of 'SFTPDrive', a utility that allows Windows-users to access network files directly and transparently from within applications: see <http://www.sftpdive.com/>

If you would be interested in this, please let us know, with an idea of the number of licences you might want – by emailing [software.services@ed.ac.uk](mailto:software.services@ed.ac.uk).

*Frances Provan (IS)*

### Apple Maintenance Plan

The University's current three-year Apple Maintenance Plan – AMP – will end in June, and we wish to set up another three-year deal for the University's Macs.

The AMP provides maintenance for current users of Mac OS and allows upgrade to new versions of Mac OS without further payment. The AMP can only be taken out for University Macs, not for home computers.

All costs must be recovered, so the cost to each user will depend on the number of people participating. The last three-year deal cost about £16 per Mac per annum; commitment must be given for the full three years.

Further information will be posted on the Software Support web pages. Meanwhile, if you are interested in AMP please contact [Joyce.Anderson@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Joyce.Anderson@ed.ac.uk).

*Joyce Anderson (IS)*

### Check that your web applications work with Internet Explorer 7

Microsoft has released a new version of Internet Explorer. It is being distributed as a Microsoft critical update at the moment but will not be installed on the University's supported desktops until Summer. Non managed desktop users are given the option of whether to install it or not.

The new version, commonly referred to as IE7, has a number of enhancements including improved support for standards. This will fix many of the CSS-rendering bugs that afflicted the previous version, IE6. However, many web developers have used CSS 'hacks' to work around IE6 problems, and these pages may need to be fixed to ensure that they also work in IE7.

For guidance, information, and tools to help you ensure your sites, extensions and applications are compatible with Internet Explorer 7, see the section on the Internet Explorer 7 Readiness Toolkit at <http://www.microsoft.com/> (tiny url <http://tinyurl.com/elqr6>).

For more information about Internet Explorer 7 see <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/>

*Arthur Wilson (IS)*

## University welcomes new Festival Director

On 29th November Vice Principal Helen Hayes hosted a reception in the Talbot Rice Gallery for Jonathan Mills, new Director of the Edinburgh International Festival.

The Festival and the University are world-renowned, represent Edinburgh at its best, and are uniquely placed to work together. The University has long traditions of working with the many festival events that take place throughout the year in the city. In particular the University holds a

pre-eminent position at the heart of the Fringe. Last Summer almost half a million tickets were sold for Fringe events in 43 different University spaces, the University being the largest landlord on the Fringe.

UNESCO has made Edinburgh the world's first City of Literature; past and present authors Scott, Stevenson, Rankin, McCall Smith and Rowling all have connections with the University, and the Library's Special Collections include treasures of modern Scottish poetry, the Enlightenment, and Islamic history.

There are plans to reintroduce visual arts to the International Festival. The Talbot Rice Art Gallery has presented Festival shows since it opened in August 1975, bringing many memorable exhibitions to the public. A 1997 exhibition celebrated 50 years of the New Look of Christian Dior, and included the 'Daisy Suit' which Margot Fonteyn wore when she danced at the first Festival in 1947. There is still talk of cranes hoisting performers high over Old College for infamous Festival Directors (for productions of Medea, Macbeth in Japanese, and the Tempest). There have been Festival Lectures in association with the University, including most recently an outstanding lecture by Alfred Brendel.

The Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities has an annual Edinburgh Festival Creative Fellow, resulting most recently in the opera 'Assassin Tree' by Stuart MacRae, and last year's play 'Blackbird' by David Harrower. The University's Office of Lifelong Learning and the Scottish Universities International Summer School run courses so that people have the opportunity not just to attend festival events but to increase their understanding of them.

The University greatly relishes the prospect of continuing this close relationship with Edinburgh's festivals.

*Sheila Cannell (IS)*



Photo: Drew Farrell

## Library stalwart retires

David Easton has worked for the University and for the Library for a remarkable 41 years.

David was appointed in January 1966 as a Senior Library Assistant to “general duties in the Main Library”, having completed his course in librarianship at the Scottish School of Librarianship, University of Strathclyde. During his 41 years of work, he has indeed been a generalist, carrying out many and varied roles: organising midnight opening, dealing with disaster recovery after a flood, installing library systems – he’s done it. He has worked for five Librarians and seen countless restructurings. He was responsible for the Main Library Service Desk for many years, then developed an interest in library automation, initially around book circulation, but expanding to encompass the whole of the Library Automation Programme as Systems Librarian. He was the Library’s first expert on the GEAC system, much involved in the national GEAC User Group, and when it came to selecting a second system, he managed to ensure that we looked at new systems, only available in the US, which necessitated travel to California to check up on some points. More recently, he has been responsible for estates and facilities issues, initially in the Library, and then for the whole of Information Services. His most recent achievement has been to establish the Library Research Annexe at South Gyle.

David left at the end of the year. His work for the University will be celebrated at an event in February. We will all miss his comprehensive knowledge of the University and the Library, his common sense, and his ability to deal with all manner of people with disarming honesty, courtesy and cheerfulness. He intends to buy a boat in his retirement, and sail across the North Sea. We wish him all the best on this voyage and in his retirement.

*Sheila Cannell (IS)*



## A service to meet your creative needs

Have you ever wanted professional design work and wondered where to go or who to turn to?

You don't have to look any further as the solution is here in the University! Aileen Robertson and Sonia Virdi have been providing graphic design services for the University and to corporate clients for many years. They have now joined WAMS, the new IS team for Web, Application and Media Services based at Moray House. Here they continue to offer comprehensive design services for graphics, websites, multimedia and DVD authoring, to a high standard and at competitive prices.

Please contact them at **graphic.design@ed.ac.uk** and let them take your projects to the next level!

*Ed Dee (IS)*

## Would you like a taster?

Forthcoming IS ‘taster’ sessions for staff and postgraduates, on specific aspects of the software we all use, include:

- Creating reliable numbering systems in Word: 24th January
- Working with sections in Word: 1st February
- What’s new in Word 2007: 8th February
- Use of wikis and blogs in education: 13th February
- Looking good with Word’s styles: 23rd February
- Presentations: design tips for PowerPoint: 6th March
- First look at Windows Vista for XP users: 16th March

All sessions take place between 1pm and 2pm in the Wolfson Teaching Room, Main Library; booking is not required.

*Shona Matchett (IS)*

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Contributions to *BITS* are welcomed.

Copy deadline for February *BITS*:

**Wednesday 17th January**