

Information Services

Edinburgh Bits



Drowning in data, or just waving?



Inside

IT systems cope with demand

WebCT, MyEd, mail systems, the website and the wiki service took the new year in their stride

New service alerts information

IS has set up a new system to report the state of its IT services and record down-times

Make podcasts with ease

IS has opened two DIY studios to simplify the creation of audio and video podcasts

Researching assessment

The Digital Culture and Education research group is to explore this vital area

Magic crystals

A University discovery could transform computer memory

Supporting new research and collaborations at Edinburgh

The IT Futures conference 2009

How can Information Technology help you with your research?

Collaborating, finding, sharing, interpreting, ...?

Humanists and technologists alike have stories to tell and lessons to share. This year's IT Futures conference will include presentations from a diversity of researchers at Edinburgh, and from invited guest speakers.

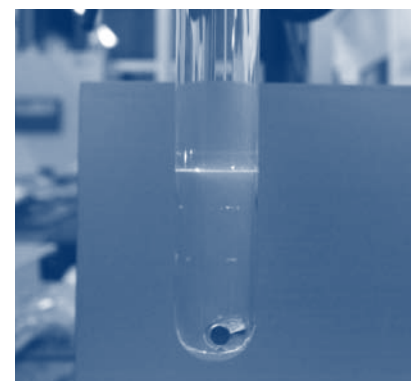
- Collaboration tools: Google Wave? A.notate?
- What might the Grid, the Cloud, the Semantic Web mean for you?
- Mobile phones and maps
- Sharing research data
- The Wode Psalter – a case study of collaborative manuscript analysis
- Where is eResearch going at Edinburgh?

IT Futures 2009 is on Tuesday 15th December in the Informatics Forum. It is a full-day conference including lunch, with half-day registrations also welcome.

There is more information at www.itfutures.ed.ac.uk

Please book your place through MyEd.

Mariza Dima (ITfutures group)



New Service Alerts system in place

A new automated IS Service Alerts system has replaced the old system for communicating changes and new releases to services. A list of all planned and unplanned outages can be found there. There is an option to subscribe to receive alert notifications by email or to subscribe to alert feeds using your favourite RSS reader. The new Service Alerts log is at www.managed-services-index.ed.ac.uk/alerts/

Information Services has also introduced a new web page to show real time service availability of the core IT services, at www.managed-services-index.ed.ac.uk/alerts/Service_status.cfm

Those participating in the new service include IS Applications, User Services Division, ITI Unix, and Library & Collections. Other units such as Network Services will be joining shortly. There will be a second broader phase of consultations about the new Service Alerts system, for all stakeholders, once it has had a chance to bed in.

Liza Zamboglou (IS)

EVES: the easy way to run a great election

The online elections service operated by Information Services and accessed through MyEd has just achieved another significant result.

The Students' Association used EVES – Electronic Voting and Electoral System – for its By-elections and First Year Elections at the beginning of October. The system's ease and convenience helped to achieve a 25% increase in turnout over last year, and one of the best turnouts in a student election in the UK. The system coped effortlessly with the total of 26,640 votes cast, as 117 candidates vied for 40 seats through proportional representation.

You can see the results, and find out how to use EVES for your own elections, at www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/about/organisation/applications-division/apps-division-news/news091014

Andy Fraser (IS)

University Website developing **apace**

The latest additions to the new-look website are Equality & Diversity, Procurement, and the Schools of Biology and Literatures, Languages & Cultures:

www.ed.ac.uk/biology

www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures

www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity

www.ed.ac.uk/procurement

There is an overall 'map' of progress across the University at www.projects.ed.ac.uk/WDP/restricted_docs/project_plan/WDP_Progress_chart.pdf

Our website usability testing course is running again this Autumn, on 24th November and 10th December, from 2pm to 5pm on both days. The course is intended for people who are responsible for website content, information architecture or interface development, and its main aim is to achieve better communication with internal and external audiences. You don't need any technical skills at all for this course, just a desire to make your website better. You will discover what people really think about your online presence.

You can find out more, and book a place through MyEd, at www.ed.ac.uk/about/projects/website-project/activities/training-guidelines/usability-training

Neil Allison (University Website Project)

DIY podcasting and YouTubing

The IS Resource Centres in the Central Area and at The King's Buildings now provide facilities for recording podcasts.

Each has a podcast recording booth equipped with an iMac computer with built-in camera and microphone. At present, Garageband and Audacity are the applications provided for audio capture and editing, and iMovie for video capture and editing. Instructional and support materials are provided at both locations.

The Central Area facility is in the Podcast Recording Booth in the basement of the Hugh Robson Building. At The King's Buildings the Podcast recording booth is on the 3rd floor of the KB Centre.

To use the service, please book one of the rooms by emailing isrc@ed.ac.uk.

David Findlay (IS)



WebCT takes start of **session** in its stride

WebCT usage increased by up to 50% as the new semester got under way, compared to last year. While in 2008 we had about 1,000 concurrent users between 9am and 5pm, in 2009 we had around 1,500 with maximum peaks of just over 2,000. Even usage on Saturdays and Sundays has increased, with 200–300 more concurrent users than last year.

The WebCT Virtual Learning Environment runs on a cluster of five servers to provide high performance and high availability, and the current level of usage is well within its designed capacity. We anticipate steady growth though, and have a project in place to assure ongoing high-quality performance.

Stefan Kaempf (IS)

Digimap enhanced

EDINA has made several significant changes to the underlying technologies which support the **Digimap** mapping service, and updated all the map data. In short, an entirely new GIS architecture now produces the maps you see online.

The new software, from Cadcorp, offers a number of benefits. Maps are of a higher quality, they are generated faster, and the output gives crisp, clear maps as PDF files. (EDINA is now working to provide other formats besides PDF.)

Using the new GIS software, EDINA has developed a new mapping facility called **Roam**. Still in a development phase, this offers the usual search functions and 'slippy maps' – the click-and-drag feature found in other popular online mapping facilities. It is now easier to position your map and to zoom in and out. An additional small scale Ordnance Survey mapping product, **MiniScale**[®], is included, and other datasets (such as Strategi[®] and OS MasterMap[®]) are available.

Roam will run in Beta alongside the current Classic facility until January 2010, when Classic will be withdrawn entirely. Regular updates will be made to Roam to add new functionality, prior to its release as a full service in January 2010.

Roam is in the 'Ordnance Survey Collection' at <http://edina.ac.uk/digimap>

If you have any questions about Roam please email the EDINA Helpdesk at edina@ed.ac.uk.

Emma Sutton (IS)



Latest edition of EDINA newsletter published

The September 2009 edition of *Newsline*, EDINA's quarterly newsletter, is now at <http://edina.ac.uk/news/newsline.html>

Newsline is aimed at support staff and interested users, carrying information on EDINA services and developments. Included in this Issue...

- Digimap 'Classic' becomes 'Roam'
- New Digimap OS Collection licence
- Survey offers help with maps
- SUNCAT links to journals' table of contents
- Digital Images for Education

Paul Milne (IS)

GeoVation looking for good map ideas

GeoVation is an Ordnance Survey initiative to "encourage and support innovation for social, economic and environmental benefit through the use of Geography", and it is sponsoring a competition to find new ideas, and to "make dreams reality".

The three broad areas for the prize are health, crime and the environment, and the first prize is £10,000. The closing date is 4th January 2010.

The BBC account is at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/8330346.stm>

The GeoVation site is at www.geovation.org.uk/

Nick Stroud (IS)

High Performance Computing news

The Autumn edition of *Capability Computing*, the newsletter of the HPCx community, has just been published, and marks the impending closure of the HPCx service (in January 2010) with a summary of a few of the significant advances it has made possible. One of HPCx's proud boasts, among many, is to have run for some three years since the last failure which resulted in loss of service. (HPCx was the UK's main high-end computing resource until HECToR took on that mantle in 2007.) The seventh and final HPCx Annual Seminar takes place in Daresbury on 3rd December, attendance at which is free for all academics.

The newsletter is at www.epcc.ed.ac.uk/library/newsletters/capability-computing/

Alan Gray (EPCC)

Launch of EPCC Research Collaboration web pages

EPCC is committed to making the power of advanced computing available to all areas of research. Our staff work on collaborative projects across a wide range of disciplines, and are enthusiastic about forming new research relationships and taking on new technical challenges.

Please take some time to browse our new-look Research Collaboration web pages, which describe our current activities and give details on how to get involved in collaborations with EPCC. The site is at www.epcc.ed.ac.uk/research-collaborations/

The latest issue of the EPCC newsletter has just been published, one of its highlights being an account of the recent upgrade to HECToR. This system's dual-core processing chips have been replaced with quad-core ones, giving it a total of 22,656 processors, and the overall memory has increased to 45.3 terabytes (45.3 million megabytes) – restoring HECToR's position as one of the world's most powerful academic computers.

The EPCC newsletter is at www.epcc.ed.ac.uk/library/newsletters/epcc-news/

Tracy Peet (EPCC)

Researching assessment and feedback practices on the MSc in E-learning

Jen Ross, Siân Bayne, Hamish Macleod and Clara O'Shea from the Digital Culture and Education (DiCE) research group based in the Department of Higher and Community Education in the School of Education have been awarded funding from the Principal's Teaching Award Scheme for a two-year project called 'Student writing: innovative online strategies for assessment & feedback'.

The project is exploring existing feedback and assessment practices on the MSc in E-learning programme. We are looking particularly at feedback and assessment of online academic writing; the kinds of practices we are exploring include:

- tutor-student communication and formative feedback through reflective weblogs;
- assessing collaborative writing in wikis;
- assessing multimodal and hypertextual work;
- student-nominated assessment criteria;
- co-creating courses through discussion.

The project includes three main strands:

- Analysing archived data from the MSc programme, focusing on our archive of assessed work from the programme's core module 'An Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning'.
- Creating an assessment and feedback wiki to which all students on the programme will be invited to contribute.
- Producing a series of student-led ethnographies of particular courses, where students will act as participant observers and record field notes to be analysed and used as part of the project data.

One of the key outputs from the project will be a set of principles for assessing and giving feedback on digital writing which can inform our own and others' teaching. We will also host roundtables and seminars, create web resources, and write articles for publication.

We anticipate that the project's outcomes will be relevant to teachers and educational developers working in online and blended learning contexts in Higher Education.

You can find out more about the project at www.education.ed.ac.uk/swop/

Please also feel free to contact the Principal Investigator (email jen.ross@ed.ac.uk).

Jen Ross (Education)

LCFG meeting

LCFG is the Edinburgh group which focuses on large-scale Unix configuration.

The annual LCFG Users Day will be held this year on Friday 20th November, in the Informatics Forum. All users of LCFG and anyone interested in using LCFG are encouraged to attend, to find out what has been happening, ask for help on anything tricky and generally get involved in the LCFG community.

This year the day will be split into separate parts. The morning session will consist of a tutorial on writing LCFG components and using the new build tools, aimed at anyone who has at least a bit of experience with using LCFG. The tutorial will be followed by a lunch.

There will be a series of talks and discussions in the afternoon session, covering a broad range of aspects of LCFG usage on both Linux and MacOSX, with reviews of work done in the last year and discussions of what might be happening in the near future.

You can book for either or both sessions through MyEd, under the banner of the IT Professionals' Forum.

There are further details at <https://wiki.lcfg.org/bin/view/LCFG/UsersDay2009>

Kenny MacDonald (IS)

EXSEED set for launch

The EXSEED 'pre-pilot group' was migrated at the end of October, when 29 willing volunteers had their mail and diary data moved to the new service.

These users will be responsible for intense testing of the live system and documentation, in order to sign off the user acceptance stage of the project and highlight priority improvements. This phase will be followed by a pilot phase when around 250 users will be migrated in mid November. The remaining 3,000 active Oracle diaries will be migrated at the end of the month.

The support teams are being fully briefed for the roll-out schedule, with key dates, count down and user implications documented on the project wiki at <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/ITS016/EXSEED+Launch+Information>

There will be news updates in early November via the IS Website and MyEd announcements.

Mark Wetton (IS)

UKUUG Spring 2010 Conference

UKUUG's annual Large Installation Systems Administration (LISA) conference will take place in Manchester on 23–25 March 2010. This is the UK's only conference specifically for systems and network administrators. It attracts a large number of professionals from sites of all shapes and sizes. Alongside the technical talks the conference provides a friendly environment for delegates to meet, learn, and enjoy lively debate on a host of subjects.

If you have a novel solution to a problem, experience of a particular application or hardware platform, tips and tricks for fellow systems administrators, or a favourite tool you could talk about, please submit a paper for consideration by the programme committee – to spring2010@ukuug.org.

The initial closing date for abstracts is 15th November.

For more information see the conference website, at www.ukuug.org/spring2010

Simon Wilkinson (Informatics)

JISC news

The Joint Information Systems Committee is maintaining a high work-rate in serving the needs of the UK Higher Education Community.

JISC Winter Fayre

The JISC Winter Fayre takes place on 15th December 2009 at the National e-Science Centre in South College Street, to showcase the many ways in which JISC can help lecturers, librarians, eLearning managers and support staff in Higher Education.

Notable 'hot chestnuts' will include:

- the launch of the ETNA Report, a new analysis of IT skills and attitudes in Scotland's colleges.
- demonstrations of how free and open source solutions can transform teaching and learning.
- experts on every stall to answer individual queries.
- practical sessions on e-Assessment, Web 2.0 services and mobile learning.
- technology that you can take away and use immediately (all attendees will receive a copy of the award-winning **EduApps** portable suite of applications on a 2GB USB drive).

Keynote speakers will address three important issues:

- how to make the most of emerging and affordable educational technologies.
- how to manage, meet – and even exceed – learner expectations.
- how JISC services can help with all of the above.

The JISC Winter Fayre is open to staff from Higher and Further Education. There are further details at <http://scottish-rscs.org.uk/newsfeed/?p=6217>

Open Source Awards for students

A competition to encourage the innovative use of open source software reaches its climax on 20th November with an Awards Event at the Informatics Forum. There are further details – and you can book a ticket – at <http://scottish-rscs.org.uk/newsfeed/?p=6036>

Three eLearning reports

Three new reports on aspects of eLearning have been published:

- Responding to Learners
- Managing Curriculum Change
- Learning Literacies in a Digital Age

You can find out more about these, and download them, at <http://scottish-rscs.org.uk/newsfeed/?p=5711>

JISC guide to Second Life

This new guide to Second Life is written by lecturers for lecturers, to help others use virtual worlds for teaching. 'Getting Started in Second Life' tackles such subjects as how to set up in Second Life, what the rules of the world are, how to plan lessons, and how to help students use it effectively. The aim is to help lecturers experiment, without getting lost in the detail of the virtual environment. You can find the guide through <http://scottish-rscs.org.uk/newsfeed/?p=5617>

British Library's 'sounds' archive

The British Library's Sound Archive contains over 28,000 rare recordings of music, spoken words and environmental sounds,

the music clips ranging from rowdy pub sessions and music hall performances to Buddhist ritual music and healing songs. Access is free for UK licensed Further and Higher Education institutions. You can find out more at <http://scottish-rscs.org.uk/newsfeed/?p=5701>

eAssessment Awards

The University of Edinburgh was a joint winner in the 'Formative eAssessment' category at the eAssessment Scotland conference in Dundee at the end of September. The conference was one of the most popular ever hosted by the JISC Regional Support Centres, and demonstrated the current high level of interest in using technology to improve assessment. You can find out more about the University's 'e-scape Scotland' project, and the other winners, at <http://scottish-rscs.org.uk/newsfeed/?p=5912>

How big is the Internet

If you printed off all the information accessible via the Internet and managed to read it for about ten minutes a night, it would take you over eight million years to finish it... www.cartridgesave.co.uk/news/if-you-printed-the-internet/

Subscribe to JISC RSC Newsfeed for yourself!

Only a few highlights from the fortnightly 'Newsfeed' make it into BITS. If you'd like to get the full picture for yourself, you can subscribe at www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk

Hugh Daily, Caroline Porteous
(JISC Regional Support Centres)

Digital Curation Conference

The 5th International Digital Curation Conference – "Moving to Multi-Scale Science: Managing Complexity and Diversity" – takes place in London on 2–4 December. The full details are at <http://dcc.ac.uk/events/dcc-2009>

Florence Kennedy (IS)

Remembering the Great War

Last year Oxford University invited members of the public to submit items from the First World War to its digital Great War Archive. You can see the result, and find the link to the ongoing archive on Flickr, at www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa

Nick Stroud (IS)



IT Professionals' Forum **welcomes new Convenor**

Hello!

I recently took over as ITPF Convenor and would like to introduce myself to members of the Forum community who may not have met me in my previous ITPF Committee position of external relations organiser.

My objectives as convenor are:

- to focus on staff development for all members
- to increase member participation in ITPF activities
- to build close working relationships with other University bodies such as ELPP and LAMP, seeking commonality and best practice

I believe the Forum needs to work toward such objectives in order to address the career development concerns of IT members expressed during the Kenway Review. In 2007 the University's Knowledge Strategy Committee recommended that Human Resources engage with both the ITPF and eLPP to support members' career development. To continue this momentum I seek your help in delivering our objectives. If you would like to discuss any aspect, or assist the work of the ITPF, please get in touch! (email iain.dobson@ed.ac.uk).

There is further information in the October ITPF Committee meeting minutes at <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/itpfwiki/2009-12-10+ITPF+Committee+Meeting>

Iain Dobson (Accommodation Services)

eLearners: dream the dream

This year's conference of the Association for Learning Technology, ALT-C 2009, suggested that to meet eLearning challenges, we must "dream and act on our dreams, but evidence must justify the choices we make".

Several colleagues from across the University attended this major conference and will lead a discussion about it at the next in the popular series of eLPP 'brown bag' lunches. This is at 12:30 to 2pm on Monday 2nd November in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House, 9-16 Chambers Street; please bring your own lunch. (There is no need to book, but please email e.jackson@ed.ac.uk if you're coming, so we can set up the room correctly.)

Erin Jackson (Law)

Workshop on **using our knowledge better**

The JISC MOSAIC project is about 'Making Our Shared Activity Information Count'. It is investigating the potential value of our knowledge of user 'attention' and 'activity' in UK HE library and learning services; see www.sero.co.uk/jisc-mosaic.html

The core proposition is that managers (acquiring resources), lecturers (specifying resources, such as reading lists) and students (discovering resources) can benefit from intelligence that could be uniquely derived from HE systems such as Library Management Systems and Virtual Learning Environments on a local and potentially national scale.

Working with colleagues across the sector, the project has developed a number of possibilities which it wishes to assess with practitioners and users of library and associated learning services to generate a fuller vision.

The workshop will take place from 10am to 1pm on Friday 13th November, in Geography, Drummond Street, with lunch provided. Please book through MyEd.

Simon Bains (IS)

Enhancing Higher Education with technology

Two forthcoming meetings may be of interest to academic staff who want to exploit Web 2.0 in their teaching, or audio in their feedback to students:

There is a workshop on the implications of the report *Higher Education in a Web 2.0 World*, in Leicester on 18th November. It is aimed at academics interested in harnessing Web 2.0 tools in their teaching, and there are full details at www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/events/displayevent.php?id=228

'A Word in Your Ear 2009 – Audio Feedback' is a one-day conference about the use of audio to comment on students' work in Higher Education. It takes place in Sheffield on 18th December; full details are available at <http://research.shu.ac.uk/iti/awordinyourear2009/>

Wilma Alexander (IS)



LAMP meeting on 'Social Media'

The next meeting of the Librarians, Archivists and Museum Professionals' Forum will take place on Friday 4th December, with a presentation by Nicola Osborne, EDINA's Social Media Officer. The meeting is at 12.30 in Faculty Room South of the David Hume Tower; a (modest) sandwich lunch will be available from midday. Please book through MyEd.

There are details of Nicola's presentation on the LAMP wiki at <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/LAMP/Library%2C+Archive+and+Museum+Professionals%27+Forum>

Anne Donnelly (IS)

IS skills development courses in November and December

The IS Skills Development team runs IT courses and short sessions for Edinburgh University staff and students.

Dates of half and full-day taught courses and one-hour taster sessions, primarily for staff and postgraduates, are listed below. Please see our web pages for further details and bookings: www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/usd/cts/courses/

We also run iSkills seminars for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Each seminar consists of a 45 minute presentation, followed by up to one hour of self-paced practical work at a computer with the tutor on hand to help. Please see the MyEd event booking channel (www.myed.ed.ac.uk) for details.

Jenni Reeves (IS)

Date	Course	Location
Nov 2	Getting sectioned: creating variable page layouts in Word (T)	DHT
9	Using EDINA Digimap	BP
9	Introduction to Visualising Data in ArcGIS 9	BP
9	Writing for the Web	DHT
10	A brief introduction to Second Life (T)	DHT
11	Producing a Thesis using Word	BP
12	Intermediate Access Database Management (Part 1)	BP
12	Creating Leaflets and Posters with InDesign	BP
16	Excellent formatting: making your Excel spreadsheets look good (T)	DHT
17	Mail Merge with Word	BP
17	Creating Web Pages with HTML	BP
17	Formatting Web Pages with Cascading Style Sheets	BP
18	Managing Bibliographies with EndNote	BP
18	Introduction to Wikis	BP
19	Intermediate Access Database Management (Part 2)	BP
24	Creating and Editing Web Pages with Dreamweaver 8	BP
24	Creating Templates and Managing Websites with Dreamweaver 8	BP
24	PowerPoint: Basic Skills for Creating a Presentation	BP
24	Testing the Usability of your Website	BP
25	Basic Image Manipulation Techniques using PhotoShop	BP
26	Introduction to Unix	BP
Dec 1	WebCT Communication Tools	BP
2	Managing Bibliographies with Reference Manager	BP
2	WebCT Assessment and Assignments	BP
3	Intermediate Unix	BP
3	Excel Introduction: Creating Basic Spreadsheets and Charts	BP
7	Managing Bibliographies with EndNote	BP
8	Introduction to Access Database Management	BP
8	Producing a Thesis using Word	BP
8	Editing Web Pages with Contribute	BP
10	WebCT Vista Fundamentals	BP
10	Testing the Usability of your Website	BP

Venues:

BP – 19 Buccleuch Place

DHT – David Hume Tower

(T) denotes lunchtime taster session – bring your sandwiches!

University scientists' breakthrough could transform computer memory



Scientists in the University's School of Chemistry have found a way to use low-energy lasers to make salt crystals in gel, a technique which could be used to make tiny optical storage devices. Desktop computers using these could potentially hold a hundred times more data than present-day computers. It should be possible to store a terabyte of data (a thousand gigabytes) in a space the size of a sugar cube – enough space for 250,000 photos, or a million books.

The process of producing solid crystals from salt in solution is difficult to control, requiring a critical mass of molecules to be herded together at one point. Many scientists regard making crystals as a black art, but the Chemistry researchers have overcome the difficulty by focusing low-energy laser beams on a salt solution to provide exactly the right amount of energy to form a crystal. Practical devices could be available within a decade.

If you would like to find out more about this discovery, please contact Dr Andy Alexander (email andrew.alexander@ed.ac.uk) of the School of Chemistry, who developed the technique.

Nick Stroud (IS)

The WORM is 30

In 1979, John Shoch and Jon Hupp of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center invented the computer 'worm', a short program that searches a network for idle processors. Initially designed to provide more efficient use of computers, and for testing, the worm had the unintended effect of invading networked computers, creating a security threat.

Shoch adopted the term from the book 'The Shockwave Rider' by John Brunner, in which an omnipotent 'tapeworm' program runs loose through a network of computers.

Liam McDowell (IS)

If you require this document in an alternative format (e.g. large print, Braille) please contact Nick Stroud, Information Services, University of Edinburgh, Main Library, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LJ, or by email to BITS@ed.ac.uk.

Edinburgh BITS

Editor:

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Design and Layout by:

IS Multimedia Team
www.ed.ac.uk/is/design

Published by:

Information Services, The University of Edinburgh

Contributions:

Email: BITS@ed.ac.uk
Telephone: 0131 650 3345

Distribution queries:

BITS is distributed through School offices; please notify changes in requirements to Carla Zaccardelli:

Email: C.Zaccardelli@ed.ac.uk
Telephone: 0131 650 4999

Printed by:

University of Edinburgh Printing Services
www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/printing

BITS on the Web:

www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/bits/

BITS RSS feed:

www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/bits/bits.rss

Some acronyms explained:

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Contributions to BITS are welcomed.

Copy deadline for December BITS:

Monday 16th November