

IS Services
Annual Report
1996/97

Introduction

The 1996/97 year was the second year of the implementation of the recommendations of the Information Systems Policy Development Group (ISPDG) report. Much of the work undertaken during the year was targeted at the projects that had been proposed under the aegis of the ISPDG.

Part of the recommendations of the ISPDG had been directed at the internal structures of IS Services and its mechanisms for delivery of service to the users. The appointment of a full time user support manager during this period has ensured that there is now a central focus for the delivery of technical help to users of networks and computers in College.

Accompanying the installation of the new manager was a movement of existing staff between the four main management streams. This movement has helped to consolidate the new structures and has allowed a more focussed allocation of responsibilities amongst the groups. The current organisational structure is attached.

Student Facilities

With the completion of the new buildings in the East end of the College, four new public computer rooms were opened. These provide an extra one hundred well configured computers for student use. At the same time, some portable machines have been provided for use in the John Stearne library in St. James's Hospital. The new computers brought the ratio of students per computer from 39:1 to 28:1. Despite the increase in the number of student computers, there was an increased demand on these resources with long queues of students waiting for access to the machines at periods during the year.

As well as the addition of new machines, all the public PCs in College were upgraded by the addition of extra memory and a CPU chip replacement, thus ensuring that the facilities for students are kept up to date as far as possible.

Printing facilities for students continue to be a problem, though action was taken during the year to install many small printers in the public computer rooms. The move away from charging for printing has resulted in a more reliable service by removing the complexity of the charging equipment. This change was made without significant increases in costs to the College, due to the fact that users provide their own paper for the printers and thus limit their demands on the service.

An improved training scheme for students was initiated with the intention of providing basic training to all incoming students during the registration period. This, along with an introductory handbook and a series of User Notes, should provide the students with enough material to enable them to start using computer facilities in College.

A programme of work was laid out and initiated to provide computer networking points in all the student residences in College. Wiring of Goldsmith Hall was completed as part of the building project, whilst the Pearse Street residences were rewired for computer networking. Other residences will be wired in due course.

College Networks and Facilities

The internal College network was enhanced in a variety of areas, extra fibre optic cables were laid to enhance the reliability of the network and plan for disturbance to the existing cables due to the College building programme. Part of this internal upgrade was an introduction of faster Ethernet technologies to the desktop. All new connections will now be made at 100Mb rather than the traditional 10Mb

Along with the upgrade of computers and networking in College, a programme of upgrading the central servers that most computers use was also initiated. New servers were installed for many services and special emphasis was placed in providing a fast and reliable electronic mail service. Extra servers were also provided to speed up access to the internet.

The addition of new buildings adjacent to the main campus presented new challenges in connecting these areas into the College network, in one case a duct was provided under the street and in another case a microwave radio link was used. Having several buildings contiguous, such as in Foster Place, provides a cost saving as the number of expensive connections back to the main campus can be minimised.

Research Facilities

The purchase by the College, in conjunction with Queen's University Belfast, of an IBM SP/2 Super-Computer was the culmination of a long standing gap in service provided by IS Services. The lack of this sort of service was identified by the ISPDG as something that was detracting from the College's research potential. The Super-Computer in Belfast is connected to the College network through a special internet connection that is funded by the Irish Department of Education and Science and the Northern Ireland Department of Education for the furtherance of North-South cooperation.

Library and Administrative Developments

The main items of work on the administrative side were the continuation of the Finance and Library projects from the previous year and the initiation of a major overhaul of the Student Administration system.

Whilst much of the development work on the new Finance system was done in the previous year, once the system was introduced on a live basis many tasks were identified that needed action on a priority basis. At several stages during the exploitation of the system tasks were identified that required work in conjunction with the suppliers of the system. As experience with the operation grew, its potential for the provision of management information and control has been enhanced.

Extra demands were put on College systems in relation to financial reporting to both the HEA and Government bodies. This reporting consumes staff time in the development and running of required reports, an example of this during the year, was the requirement for the implementation of a fixed asset register by the Comptroller and Auditor General, a project that was already planned by the College.

The new Library system was introduced at the start of the year and proved very successful from a user, Library and IS Services perspective. The new system has shown itself to provide a very reliable service and resulted in the elimination of the almost daily breakdowns of the previous system.

Following a detailed analysis of the system, it was decided to enhance the internally developed Student Administration system and work started on this project. This project is expected to take two years to complete.

Future Projects

Two major external items that are likely to have an impact on computer and networking services in College were identified and initial work was commenced on a programme to identify the problems associated with the Year 2000 issues and the entry of Ireland into EMU.

Accommodation for IS Services

Office space continues to have some problems, mostly due to the lack of expansion possibilities in the Pearse Street houses. Access facilities to these houses is only available through many staircases and corridors and no lift is available for staff with special needs.

IS Services Organisation Structure 30th September 1997

Includes three contract staff funded from external resources



