

ICT STRATEGY STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2005

Present: Dr Macmillan (in the chair), Professor Slack, Professor Silverman, Dr Ashbourn, Dr Biggs, Professor Clark, Professor Dutton, Mr Herriott, Professor Jeffrey, Mr Milne, Mrs Taylor, Dr Tierney, Mrs Treweek, Dr Watson.

Apologies: Mr Burnard, Professor Burnett, Mrs Haworth, Dr Lee, Mr Perrow, Mr Sibly, Dr Trefethen, Mr Worth, Dr Parkinson

In attendance: Vice-Chancellor (for items 1-4), Dr Fraser, Mr Reynolds, Mr Shaw.

1. Welcome and introduction

The chairman welcomed members to the first meeting of the group, noted that this was one of the most important initiatives currently in the University, and introduced the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked in particular the external members of the group, including those from IBM with which the University had developed a valuable relationship over the past two years. He stressed three main points. First, the University's draft corporate plan included a firm commitment to developing a coherent ICT strategy by April 2006. Secondly, there would never be sufficient resources to meet all of the University's aspirations. This underlined the importance of using, to the best possible effect, resources provided for support activities such as ICT. Finally, one of the University's great strengths was its federal structure and none of the thinking behind the establishment of the Strategy Steering Group challenged the federal nature of the University. Indeed, conversely, there was scope for a more coherent ICT strategy and set of policies to underpin the enhanced fulfilment of individual aspirations. It was therefore vital that the group should develop an appropriate ICT strategy as a key feature of the future development of the University. The Vice-Chancellor concluded by encouraging everyone to commit energy to ensure that a visionary ICT strategy was developed, and asked the Steering Group to rise to the challenge of drafting both strategy and policy.

2. Membership

It was reported that the group would be joined by an employee of Microsoft (attending in an individual capacity) and a representative of JISC. The business user representative would be Mr Sibly.

It was suggested, to the approval of the group, that the group should include student representation; otherwise, there were no comments on the membership.

3. Purpose and terms of reference

The purpose and terms of reference of the group were approved.

4. Relationship to other groups within the collegiate University

The chair emphasised the importance of the Steering Group interacting fully with the existing governance structure in the collegiate University. Professor Dutton and

Professor Silverman confirmed that they were content with the group's relationship with ICTC and with colleges respectively.

It was suggested that, while Council had agreed in principle to the establishment of the group, it would be appropriate for it to approve the membership and terms of reference. This could be followed by a brief announcement in the *Gazette*. [Note: the membership and terms of reference were approved by Council on 12 September.]

5. **Developing an ICT strategy for the collegiate University: a position paper**

Professor Jeffreys introduced the Position Paper with a presentation. He emphasised that the paper was not intended to be prescriptive, but to show sufficient detail to determine a viable way to proceed. The development of a strategy could not afford to fail. The process needed to engage the whole of the collegiate University throughout the exercise, so that the end product would come as no surprise.

The vision and the deliverables, as discussed and agreed at the workshop co-ordinated by IBM, were confirmed. It was also agreed to proceed with the Work Tasks (A-J) as outlined in the paper – noting, however, that it would be important to ensure communication between the groups (e.g. by publishing the Work Task pro-formas on the website) and to avoid fragmentation and incompatibility of outcomes.

The ICT development team, led by the Enterprise Manager, would in due course roll out the Enhanced Computing Environment (ECE) to the rest of the University. An ICT consultant, who would hopefully be appointed for up to six months from 1 October, would scope the ECE but would have no wider remit within the strategy project: the ECE was just one part of the strategy, and the Strategy Steering Group (SSG) would sign off the work of the ICT consultant.

Members stressed the importance of communication in attracting support for the project from across the University. For example, in support of the Vice-Chancellor's reference to federalism, it would be crucial to get across the message that, whilst the ECE would provide a minimum level of service and capability (at a higher level than was generally available at present), there would be no ceiling to the level of capability that could be developed for or by individual departments or colleges. The support of departmental IT staff could potentially be particularly valuable in achieving this.

A number of members recognised that the group's primary challenge to develop an ICT Strategy lay in working out the principles before looking at the specifics, in being able to distinguish between the process and the products. The overwhelming *principle* had to be to identify the best and most efficient means of enhancing academic, learning and business environments across the collegiate University through ICT.

It was also recognised that, in addition to the structures and processes required to implement a new strategy, there needed to be a shift in cultures and capabilities, raising the general level of aspiration; this would be considered in particular by Work Task C. (Dr Tierney offered to provide Professor Jeffreys with a chart which illustrated this point.)

At the same time, it was recognised that the great majority of users (possibly as high as 80%) had relatively limited needs; their overriding concern was that basic

systems should be reliable and relatively straightforward to operate. The needs of users would be addressed in particular by Work Task D.

Whilst consultation was essential (e.g. by Work Task B), there was a danger of hitting 'consultation fatigue'. It was therefore important that the right audience be approached in the right way on particular issues. For example, offering a choice of options produced a more directed response than a more open-ended enquiry. In some instances, focus groups might work well (probably as part of Task D?); elsewhere, a broader sample would be needed in order to be statistically significant.

On Task D, it was agreed to amend paragraph 48(a) to read '...requirements of users *in all parts of the University* – colleges, departments, faculties and divisions,...'. It was also agreed that Task E (paragraph 49(c)) should refer to a 'rolling' 5 year ICT plan.

On Task G, it was suggested that useful lessons could be learned from organisations other than universities; on the other hand, experience at Manchester suggested that other universities had specific characteristics, in particular in relation to their federal nature, which ruled out certain strategies found in industry. It was noted that many staff in the University would have recent experience of working in Ivy League universities, some of whose structures bore some resemblance to those at Oxford. More advanced solutions tended to be found in smaller, less federated institutions. In any event, the objective should be to select the best elements of various models rather than adopting wholesale a single approach.

Professor Jeffreys outlined the resources available to the Steering Group and the estimated time commitment required. Mr Brett would provide overall programme management, ensure that the Work Tasks operate coherently, encourage good cross-fertilisation, measure the quality of the deliverables, and ensure that they delivered on time (50% FTE). Dr Fraser, as Technical Secretary, would ensure that each step was documented and all output captured.

It was suggested initially that each Work Task group should have around four members, with up to two-thirds of the members from the SSG. Following discussion, it was agreed that a smaller proportion (up to 50%) would allow a wider involvement of non-members from across the University. There was particular urgency in setting up groups A, C, E and G. Professor Silverman and Mrs Taylor indicated that they would be unable to join any of the groups and it was thought unlikely that Mr Perrow would be able to make a full contribution. Other members of the Steering Group were available to work in the Task Forces.

It was agreed that Professor Jeffreys should chair groups A,C and E. Mr Herriott offered to chair group G. Dr Biggs offered to join group E or G. Dr Watson offered to join (and co-lead) group E. Dr Tierney offered to join groups C and G. Members were invited to contact Professor Jeffreys or Mr Shaw after the meeting with offers to join Work Task groups; the leadership and membership of the various groups would then be agreed in discussion between the chairman and Professor Jeffreys. In due course, the leader of each group would convene a meeting of the group, in liaison with Mr Shaw.

6. **Any other business**

It was suggested that the project might usefully be written up as a case study.

7. **Date of next meeting**

Thursday, 20 October at 2 p.m.

CMMS/JMGU

07/09/05

G:\ICT\ICT Strategy Steering Group\SSG 050906m.doc