Facility Manager’s Report, 24 March 2000

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Mechanical Engineering Undercroft

The refurbishment of the Mechanical Engineering undercroft has two parts:

stage one: rebuild the old bell and spoons labs the make four smaller labs, each with 17+ computers.
**Stage two:** build a new lab in the open area to the west of the old bell lab, including the area used by two small rooms there. This stage would also include moving the Help Desk to the room to the west of the old spoons lab. A doorway will also be opened to the south, allowing easy access to the Mech Eng union cafe, and the School Office in the K17 building.

Stage one is now complete, and the bell, spoons, moog and leaf labs are operational (as of the middle of Week 3). And the labs are being used, although it has only been a few days, and in only week 4, the lab usage logs show that the extra labs are filling up. Graphs of the logs are at [http://www/~stat/lablogins/](http://www/~stat/lablogins/).

We will start panning stage two shortly, and expect to have the fifth Mech Eng lab open by the end of the mid-session break, in time for the end of session peak.

**Printers**

Mechanical Engineering is currently without a printer. The final intention is to secure two printers in a yet-to-be-designed enclosure (to keep prying fingers away from delicate parts). In the meantime, we were going to install one printer in its previous location in the office near the double glass door. Unfortunately, the builders want to demolish that office in the very near future in preparation for stage two of the Mech Eng project.

We will try to expedite the building of the secure enclosures, and in the meantime students will have to walk over to the EE undercroft for printouts. The new printers have arrived, and we will upgrade the second printer in the EE undercroft to a HP8100 to handle to likely load on it.

In due course, each lab area will have a HP8100 and a (slightly slower) HP5si.

The new printers include a printer (HP4050) for K17-6, this should be installed in the next day or three.

**Thesis Lab**

The first 14 computers are now operational (from late Week 3), but problems with Campus Security have made it impossible for most students to get into it. Security are apparently running a week behind. It does not have a printer yet, that is also waiting for a security enclosure.

In the next week or two we should have six more computers in the thesis lab which were left over from other lab shuffles.

Sometime later, but before then end of session, we should have another thirty computer in the thesis lab, to make a full complement of fifty computers.
**Postgraduate Labs**

Similar to last session, we have two labs for the special use of (mostly part-time) postgraduate course-work students in the evening and on the weekend. Currently, the spoons lab is exclusively for postgrad in the evening, and they also have priority access in the leaf lab (meaning that only they have booking rights to it).

**Database server**

The SUN E450 server for database teaching has arrived and is currently sitting in the computer room waiting to be unpacked. I hope to have it physically installed during next week, and available for the database people the week after to play with in preparation for session two.

**Modem Pool**

The new box is here and physically installed in the computer room. The Telstra lines are installed and believed to be working, but may need enabling.

Peter should be powering it up and trying it out in the next day or so. I expect (major dramas not withstanding) that the new modem pool will be doing something sensible by the end of next week (31 March), and we will be looking for people to try stuff out.

By the end of the following week (7 April), I hope that it will be live for serious use.

Several weeks after that, we can consider turning off the old modem pool and the 64 analogue phone lines feeding it.

**Laptop Lab**

Some time ago, the Comms Unit suggested that they could supply technology to lock a particular IP address to a switch port. This is required for the laptop lab to stop people using inappropriate numbers (eg, the number of a neighbouring socket, and so stop someone else from working).

It now seems, after some discussion, that this is more difficult than previously thought, and we are now having to rethink how we manage the laptop lab.

One option is to use a linux box as a gateway. This was indeed the approach we used before, In EE3 when there were only 4 ports and we could install the linux box laplap behind the wall from the public sockets. This is more difficult in K17, one of the problems simply cabling the 16+ UTP leads back to a gateway box. We now have permission from the Comms Unit to stick such a box in their comms cabinets if that helps provide a workable solution (they have previously been very unkeen to allow foreign hardware in their racks).
Staff Issues

Filling Zebee’s position

Applications for Zebee’s position close on 4 April. We will be interviewing in the following week, and hopefully will have someone starting within a few weeks of then (by the end of April).

Help Desk Manager

This is a position that Angie Sweiss has been filling casually (full-time) for almost a year. We are finally about to make it a real position, and the paperwork currently awaits signatures on its way to HR. I hope to be advertising at the end of next week, but it may be the following week.

Extra SS Hours

We decided last FC meeting to increase the number of SS people-hours. The original intention was to increase the number of half-time SS people from four to five, and extra 17.5 hours per week.

After some discussion with the current SS staff, it seemed that the better option was to increase their hours from 17.5 hours (nominally 2.5 days) per week to 21 hours (nominally 3 day) per week. Although this only adds 14 hours (rather than 17.5), it was felt that the reduced number of transitions will be of greater benefit.

This has been put into practise, as of this week (actually, as of last Friday, as NSS has trouble changing arrangements mid-pay-period).

We will review how this is going at the end of session, and consider switching to $5 \times 17.5$ if that seems more useful, or even possibly $5 \times 21$ if the load on SS stays excessively high.

New Desktop Support Person (Mac Support)

There has been some discussion over the past weeks about, amongst other things, re-focusing John’s Group to provide a more complete support of desk-top computers. At the moment, this mostly means Mac and NT support. In particular, I am interested in employing a software oriented person in John’s group.

Independently of that, there is perceived to be a strong need for a support person with a deeper knowledge of Macs than we currently have in the CSG.

I am interested in marrying these two goals, to hire the Mac specialist as the software person in John’s team. Ideally, I see the position as providing Mac and NT support, but we now have solid NT skills elsewhere in the group, and anyone worth their salt should be able to pick up enough NT skills to be useful in that arena as well. Therefore, it is sensible to employ a Mac specialist at this stage.
The position is likely to be described as ‘software, admin and user support, Mac/Unix/NT’, very much like the general description of other CSOs in the group, including Zebee’s position.

We should, therefore, be able to hire this Mac specialist as a second person from the interviews for Zebee’s position and so have them on-stream reasonably quickly.

If we do not find the Mac expertise we want in those applicants, we can consider:

- contacting an agency (AGSM reports good success with agencies, Comms Unit reports poor success)
- advertising in Mac-specific publications

John is back from holidays and will be working on job descriptions for this position and others in his group in the next week or so.

Software Problems

mpage

mpage has become an issue because there are now two standard versions of mpage. For many years, we have been using a version created by Cameron Simpson and Ross Cartlidge which does not generate postscript with well-structured comments, but does work quite well.

There is also a version of mpage which is a standard linux package which also works well, which does generate postscript with well-structured comments, but seems to fall foul of our page-counting software (due to re-definitions of postscript’s showpage command).

It should be made to work, we will try to look at it soonish (within weeks).

Issues from last FC meeting

Assets DB

This has made a lot of progress in the last couple of weeks. Peter Linich set up the new columns in the SQL (back-end) database, then set up a NT box with access for Mok of the Faculty Support Group to play with. Recently, Mok has amended the Access front-end, and it is now ready for David Pisch to come and test.

Mail to Student Numbers

Although student numbers are now deemed personal information, and are no longer used for new accounts, It is convenient for academics to be able to mail student numbers directly without going through the priv upi command.

Neil has now done this.
CSG performance evaluation

There is apparently a requirement that all University salary supplements have a performance related component.

The CSG has started discussing the matter, and I have had some discussion with Peter Ivanov and Keith Burston of the Communications Unit, where they have a performance related component to their broad-band salary scales.

Mail lists proposal

Several of the commonly used mailing lists (particularly cse and cse-astaff) send mail to too wide a group, and can be accessed by too wide a group. I am to make a proposal for how this can be improved. I have not looked at this yet.

In the meantime, Neil is looking at making it so that only people on the cse mailing list can mail to it.

PDF Support

There are still a few questions about support for PDF files. Many of these have been solved by moving to the latest version of xpdf. However, there are still several questions, particularly:

- editing PDF documents
- default font mappings are not always appropriate

There was also recently a question about turning pdf images into eps for inclusion into other documents. This is really a question about eps. pdftops seems to do a fair job of generating postscript, but as yet I have not seen anything which will turn postscript (hopefully only one page) into encapsulated postscript.

PDF generation may still be an issue: is ps2pdf good enough, or do we need to explore distiller or some other tool?

Class Expiries

Neil will look at a new mechanism for UDB class expiries, so that people are not abruptly without appropriate privileges. This is particularly a problem for postgrads at the start of the year, when enrolment information is often slow reaching us. We must do it now, so that we don’t forget for next year. This has not yet been done.

Class administrator to designate tutors

A priv script should be created so that class administrators can designate appropriate people as tutors in the UDB, and so get them on mailing lists and allocate certain privileges. This has not yet been done.
Help Desk Duties

Part of the job description for the Help Desk Manager is (nearly) a list of duties for the Help Desk. It would be useful to extract this as separate description of ‘what the Help Desk does, what can be expected of the Help Desk’. Zain and Angie will do this over the next week or two.

Local Home Directories

We should create home directories on the local machine, for people who have appropriate local machines. An ‘appropriate box’ is a conformed box with at least 1Gb of available storage. Any newish (post-Hypertec) box should be okay.

Any new staff or postgrads will now get this (policy is in place), unless they are keen to be elsewhere. Any existing staff or postgrads will have this offered when next they have a space problem.