Computing Facilities Manager’s Report
9 May 2003

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System failures and other problems

Air Conditioning (in the server room)

One of the compressors feeding the air conditioning system in the computer room failed on Tuesday 29 April, taking out the half of the air conditioning capacity.

The system should run on just half capacity; so that the system can run at the normally required 50% duty cycle and so that in the even of failure, computing services do not need to be interrupted while repairs are being carried out.

Unfortunately, it became apparent that the air conditioning was under-powered with respect to the heat load in the room. The additional heat load over the last few years has primarily been research equipment. This is consistent with our draft Strategic Plan, but we had not been monitoring the heat load, naively assuming we still had plenty of head room.

Nevertheless, the extra load on the air conditioning system lead to the premature failure of the compressor which took until Friday 2 May to replace. In the meantime we were obliged to shut down a number of not-quite-so-critical computers to reduce the heat load, which were turned back on on Monday 5 April after testing the new compressor over the weekend.

We are now planning to upgrade the air conditioning (two additional compressors) to provide appropriate head-room and redundancy, including any likely expansion in the server room for the next couple of years.
New Servers and Services

Server replacements (and the computer that cried “wolf”)

I mentioned in my report of 14 February 2003 14 February 2003 that we were planning to upgrade a number of our servers. This project has been finished, with the single exception of the new mail server. Unfortunately, the computer hardware proved to have problems since arrival and we have not yet got a satisfactory solution for the problem. The problem itself is trivial: a red warning light is constantly on, even though the system works perfectly; but we would then not know if there was a real problem.

The current mail server, tone continues to work, but does labour a little under load (delays up to fifteen minutes when there is a surge of mail to deliver). Hopefully within days we will have the new server hardware repaired and be able to start work configuring the new mail server.

Staff Stuff

Tanya Warmenhoven leaves

Tanya Warmenhoven has moved on to the CSG retirement village up in the Communications Unit (where she had been working part-time casually for quite some time previously). Tanya has been the longest serving member of the System Support (SS) team and we will sorely miss her quiet competence and friendly smile.

We are currently interviewing for a replacement and should have a new member of the group with a week or two, though it will take them a little while before they know the answers to everything.

A new member to John’s team

The CSG has not been growing as quickly as the rest of the school over the past few years. Also, the type of support provided by CSG has grown as more people are needing support acquiring, installing and managing (non-conformed) research computers, particularly laptops. This has lead to a lot more work for the group, particularly John’s team, which has been working way more hours than a sane person would consider sensible.

We will be interviewing very soon for a new CSGer who will mostly work out of John’s group.

New Nicta Support

Since its inception, the CSG has been providing IT support for Nicta. This has included the move to the old club and to ATP, the specification and procurement of computers and printers, and the set-up and management of networking infrastructure. For a number of months we have been contributing at least a

person’s worth of on-going support that would not have been required if Nicta did not exist. This has lead to a lot more work for the group, particularly John’s team, which has been working way more hours than a sane person would consider sensible.

We are currently trying to arrange with Nicta funding to employ a new person for CSG; and we will then undertake to provide at least a person’s worth of support to Nicta. Well, we are already, but this gives us resources to do that as well as supporting CSE.

We are also considering an arrangement that will have [somebody] spending regular time sitting and working in G17, though of course the rest of the CSG are available when necessary for whatever purpose.

**David Brunato takes a long break**

For the sake of his sanity (and you never realised he had been sane, did you) David is heading off for two months holidays starting late May. John Albani or Peter Chau will be picking up any of his issues in his absence.

**Claire away for Session 2**

One of the System Support (SS) band, Claire D’Este, who is also currently enrolled in a PhD degree, has been offered a research opportunity she cannot refuse and is planning to spend the second half of the year in Paris. This will leave something of a hole in the group, but given the nature of the school budget, we will try to cover her absence by shuffling duties elsewhere in the group. Covering an absence in a critical area like this for six months would normally be a difficult option, but the effect will be ameliorated somewhat by the additions elsewhere in the group. Good luck Claire, please come back.