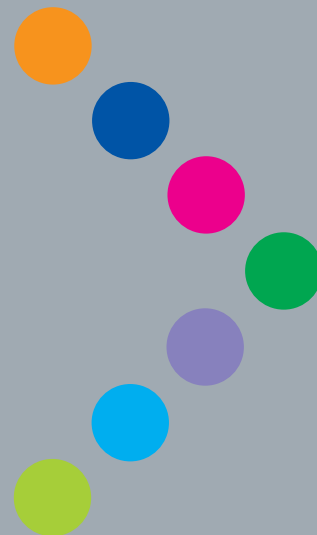


The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Corporate
Information &
Computing
Services.

CiCS Annual Report 2009.





Director's Report

Welcome to the 2009 CiCS Annual Report. I hope you find it both interesting and informative. I would be happy to receive any comments on it.

This year's report has a different format, and reports on our activities across seven different service areas, rather than by structural unit. These seven areas have been chosen to help us introduce improved service management, and to help our users better understand and access all of the services we provide. The areas are:

- Learning and Teaching
- Research
- Communication and Collaboration
- Help and Support
- Infrastructure
- Corporate Information
- Business Activity

Under each heading we have set out our objectives for the last year and highlighted our achievements and progress in reaching them.

Over the year, as part of our implementation of improved service management, we have formalised a number of our internal processes:

problem management, incident management, change management and test management. These, hopefully, are invisible to you the user, but greatly improve our ability to improve services and respond to issues. We have also completed a cycle of strategic liaison meetings with each of the Faculties. These have enabled us to share information and plans, and to better understand and respond to common themes as well as the particular needs of each faculty.

It has been another busy year, and another year of dealing with changing circumstances. Technology continues to develop apace, with new systems and services appearing all the time. In addition, there are financial constraints on the sector and we continue to look at new ways of making processes more efficient. This year saw the first major outsourcing project, resulting in our student email service being hosted by Google. Over the next few years we may have to look at more ways of releasing staff from providing commodity services so that we can concentrate on providing core services with added value.

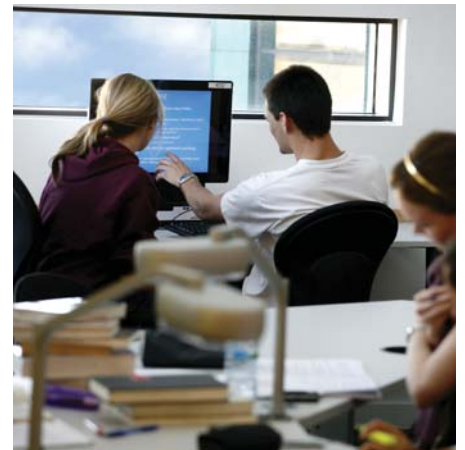
This year also sees the completion of my first year as chair of UCISA, and I would like to thank my colleagues, especially the Assistant Directors, who

have supported me and covered for me when I have been away from the University on UCISA business.

I would also like to thank all CiCS staff for their work during this last year. It has been a difficult one, not least because of the impact of the voluntary severance scheme. In total 20 colleagues left us under the scheme, and we wish all of them well and thank them for their time with us. The leavers were not spread evenly across the department, with some teams losing significant numbers. This has led to some reorganisation, and in some areas service levels have had to change.

Managing effectively in times of uncertainty is one of the University's key challenges – and although reduced resources is a fairly certain feature of the next few years, much else remains uncertain. One thing is certain though: CiCS staff can be relied on to rise to any challenge with professionalism and commitment.

Christine Sexton





Learning and Teaching

CiCS aims to play its part in achieving the University's aspiration 'to ensure that the highest standards of excellence are maintained within the student learning experience' (University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2005-10). We provide a diverse range of learning and teaching spaces, equipped with innovative technologies, computers and software, and an online virtual learning environment available 24/7.

During 2009, our objectives were: to improve the quality of teaching space and to maximise its usage; to introduce systems and services that support innovative teaching; and to realise our commitment to provide the best possible learning experience for students.

Teaching Spaces

To ensure that our lecture theatres and teaching rooms provide the best environment we replaced the lecturer's computer in 120 teaching rooms with the fastest models, refurbished the computer room in Portobello with state of the art PCs and AV equipment and refurbished 60 other pool and departmental teaching rooms.

We also help departments get the best out of teaching rooms via our new teaching space manager who will work with departments to allocate rooms, schedule teaching and plan for long term needs.

Systems and Services

Learning is not restricted to office hours and through MOLE, our virtual learning environment, it is supported 24/7. MOLE is a formidable system running across 14 servers, hosting 5,700 courses with 2,200 concurrent users. During the year we undertook a complex upgrade to the latest version and moved the whole system onto virtual servers. As a result the reliability of MOLE is greatly improved.

We also initiated a new project to review the underlying system that delivers MOLE. This project will consult widely across the University to gather user requirements as well as looking at the technical solutions available. We plan to pilot a new version of MOLE in September 2010.

This year we launched the myEcho service, which makes it easy for lecturers to record teaching material for students. It includes both a video of the lecture and any accompanying material (PowerPoint slides, photographs etc.) that students can subsequently view through the web on a computer or a mobile device.

One of the major service launches this year was uSpace – the University's own secure social web and collaboration environment. Although it has wider uses it is very much aimed at facilitating innovative ways of learning and teaching. We have developed an automatic link between MOLE and uSpace to facilitate the use of blogs and wikis in learning and teaching.

Student Computing

To help in their studies, students enjoy first-rate computing facilities based on the secure, robust Managed Desktop, packed with software. Growth in the service this year has led to some issues with start-up times. This has now been addressed using a series of significant technical changes and start-up times have been improved.

CiCS continues to improve the student computing service. This year saw the following new activities:

- new exam-time arrangements were put in place in the Information Commons to help ensure the best possible conditions for students to study
- focus groups were held with students to elicit feedback about a wide range of subjects
- the 'Quick Print' area was launched in the Information Commons
- induction sessions were held to introduce new students to the Information Commons and basic CiCS and Library services.



Research

CiCS is committed to supporting research in all disciplines and strengthening relationships with all University researchers by facilitating collaboration, providing research computing facilities, supporting research applications, and helping departments with research costing management.

During 2009, our objectives were: to increase support for researchers; to facilitate improved collaboration; and to increase our support for both technical and non-technical researchers.

Advisory Group

The Research Computing Advisory Group continues to be a successful forum for the discussion of our support strategy and priorities, and Faculty Directors of Research have now been invited to attend.

A small group has been looking at creating a business case for the acquisition of a larger supercomputer facility.

Portals

During the year Iceberg, our High Performance Computer (HPC) facility, has had a number of reliability and resilience features applied, and is now exceeding our SLAs consistently.

A good deal of work has been done on the evaluation of web-based portals for the submission and steering of computational jobs.

These have included the establishment of the Biogrid portal for Animal and Plant Sciences, and the CAIMAN project for cancer image analysis. We have also looked at other portal technologies that offer the promise of easier job submission to the High Performance computer, and to the White Rose Grid.

Investigations have also taken place into the use of Sun Global Desktop as a simple way of delivering applications to the local user community.

Support and Training

This year we have assisted with a number of challenging problems in Solar Physics and Aerodynamics with the use of the National Grid Service.

We continue to provide Research Training programme modules, and these are well attended.

Collaboration

The introduction of uSpace, our collaboration environment, has enabled us to provide a flexible way for researchers to work with other researchers and partners within and outside the University.

Strategy

A draft research support strategy has been written, and further discussions about financing for the strategy are now taking place.



Communication and Collaboration

Communication and collaboration are vital functions of University life. CiCS provides a wide range of tools and services to facilitate collaboration, communication and co-operation, from essential email and telephone services to more specialised tools such as myCalendar, myChat and uSpace.

During 2009, our objectives were: to improve the resilience of the communication infrastructure; and to introduce new technology and services to ensure that staff and students had access to the widest range of cutting edge collaboration and communication tools.

uSpace Launched

The CLEX report¹ on 'Higher Education in a Web 2.0 World' urged universities to embrace the social web world in which students spend so much time. To ensure that the University of Sheffield is at the forefront, we implemented uSpace; the University's own secure social web and collaboration environment.

uSpace offers a collection of social web tools for communication and collaboration amongst students and staff, with a flexible collaboration environment for research, breaking geographical barriers in learning, and improving communication within departments.

In addition to implementing our own social web environment, we led the University in the adoption of Twitter as a communication channel between the Department and our customers.

New Email Service

Prompted by surveys and feedback from students we implemented a new email service, for all taught students. Powered by Google, the service is web-based, compatible with mobile phones and other portable devices, and has been very well received.

Alongside the new email service, students have received a new calendaring system and we are working with departments to help populate student calendars with their individual teaching timetables.

In the coming year we will be investigating a replacement for the staff email and calendar service.

The start of 2009 saw an increase in the amount of spam and phishing email reaching the University. It was also getting more sophisticated and more of it was getting through our existing defences. In response, we introduced a new email security system called IronPort, which is now successfully identifying and rejecting 97.9% of all incoming messages as spam.

Website

Visits to the University of Sheffield website have doubled over the last 8 years, and last year numbered approximately 25 million. To meet this demand and improve the resilience of the University website we have replaced the server running the web service, and upgraded the service running departmental web pages. Upgrade of the Content Management system, used by web editors across the University, will take place early in 2010.

Telephony Service

The telephony system was upgraded in 2008 to provide us with greater resilience, and the flexibility to meet the demands of the University's changing estate. The English Language Teaching Centre recently moved to new premises on Hoyle Street and is the first site within the University to move to a telephone service delivered via the Internet.

We are now working towards unified communications in which your computer could also serve as your phone, and your email software would be able to list your voicemail messages.

¹ Committee of Inquiry into the Changing Learner Experience, "Higher Education in a Web 2.0 World", www.jisc.ac.uk/heweb2





Help and Support

In addition to the 1-1 support available from the helpdesk, CiCS performs maintenance on IT equipment, works with staff to ensure they have access to the required systems, produces policies for everybody's security and liaises with faculties to plan for long term needs.

During 2009, our objectives were: to improve access to our help and support by providing self-service and remote access facilities; to work more closely with those who provide IT support within the faculties; and to better target our training offering.

Self Service

The CiCS Helpdesk is a very popular service receiving 120 to 150 telephone calls and up to 50 emails every day. To maximise the availability of helpdesk expertise we have introduced a self-service helpdesk. This is available 24/7 and allows staff and students to perform natural language searches of over 200 knowledgebase articles. If the solution is not found in the list of suitable answers the query can be posted to the helpdesk for resolution. This is already proving to be a popular service and the number of knowledgebase articles is gradually increasing.

We have also integrated the CiCS service status web page with the helpdesk software so it is automatically updated as 'hot issues' and known (planned) outages become known. This information is used to update the CiCS Twitter feed, which gives us a vital communication channel for when our own services are unavailable.

Remote Assistance

Some IT problems cannot be fixed over the phone and it is often impractical or time consuming to send someone out or for a user to bring the computer into the Computing Centre. So during the year we introduced a remote assistance service. This service allows a helpdesk analyst to take control of the user's computer remotely (after obtaining their approval!) and then either fixing the problem or showing the user how to perform a task. This coming year we plan to make this service available through MUSE.

Liaison

During the year we have continued to build on our strategic liaison service, strengthening relationships with key staff within the faculties.

Through operational liaison we are working closely with faculty and departmental IT Support staff on day-to-day support issues. We hope to extend the usage of the helpdesk

software to gather information on the demands on the services in individual departments and plan future developments accordingly.

Training

This year over 140 CICS courses have run for staff and postgraduate research students. A new course catalogue has been created and booking details are available through the CiCS web site. Courses range from introductory Office applications to specialist sessions on High Performance Computing. The CICS training room, K17 in the Hicks Building, has been refurbished with 15 workstations available for on-line classes.



Infrastructure

The majority of the infrastructure work carried out in CiCS is invisible to our users. Hardware upgrades, data storage and backup, server configuration, increasing performance and increasing resilience of services all take place in the background while the University carries out its business.

During 2009, our objectives were: to improve the resilience of key services; to increase data storage capacity; and to improve environmental management.

Resilience

We continue to improve our ability to ensure that services can continue working even if a component fails. Our services are steadily being moved to clusters of computers in two separate machine rooms. A failure in one component or location results in services being diverted to a safe part of the cluster.

We have also connected the University via two separate links to JANET (The Joint Academic Network – and thereby our connection to the internet), and improved the reliability of some of the core network systems that underpin our user-facing services.

Data Storage

The default general and email file storage quotas for staff have each been increased to 500MB and most files and data have now been moved to our central storage system. In addition we are improving and modernizing backups to cope with increasing data volumes, so that services can be restored more quickly in the event of data loss.

Environmental Management

Consolidation of computers and networked storage has enabled us to save physical space and to decrease the heat generated by our computers. This in turn leads to a lower energy bill for the University.

However, despite all the consolidation of machinery, services still depend on physical computers, which need to be cooled. Changing the position of servers relative to each other and relative to the air conditioning units has already had a dramatic effect on the heat flow within our main machine room and further efficiency gains are planned in this area.



Corporate Information

CiCS aims to extend the reach of information to all members of the University community regardless of their location and the technology they are using. This requires integration work between different services and the 'exposure' of data and information in different ways.

During 2009, our objectives were: to make information available to new devices and in new formats; and to change existing systems to meet external requirements and to comply with legislation, as we do each year.

New Services

We have commissioned and implemented a new service for the iPhone, which delivers a range of personalised University information to student mobile phones. The service draws information from the Library, our course information, and our directories, as well as providing other feeds of information from the University and the Students' Union, and presents it in an attractive and simple way on the iPhone. During April 2010, this service will be made available to a range of different smart phones.

We have also provided technical support for the rollout of the eRecruitment service, which streamlines the job application process at the University for both applicants and for those involved in selection.

External Requirements

We responded to changes in external requirements for University information in a number of ways. As a result of the points based immigration system we had to introduce a new interim solution to meet the legal requirements at very short notice, pending a full solution in February 2010. We also introduced a Research Publications Database, for use as part of the Research Excellence Framework, and the Student Loan Company introduced a new Change of Circumstance form, which we integrated within SAP for electronic data transfer.

Reporting

Working closely with Planning and Governance Services, CiCS has developed MI View to provide up-to-date performance indicators to senior managers. In addition, the performance of uReports has been significantly improved to assist the several hundred users who rely on the system.



O2-UK 3G 11:23

Back Information Commons...



NOTES
6 January 11:14: 52 free PCs. Distance : 5m

- View on Map
- Google Map
- Add Favourite
- Directions



Business Activity

CiCS runs a number of business units, which provide specific services to the University. These include the Octagon Centre, Drama Studio, Transport Services, Room and Parking Services and the University Print Service. CiCS also provides Project Management and Records Management services to the University.

During 2009 our objectives were: to project manage the efficient introduction of new services; to review and improve the environmental impact of printing within the University; and to invest in the business units to offer the highest quality services in a competitive market.

Project Management

CiCS has a wide portfolio of projects, with the Programme and Project Unit helping to support and co-ordinate them. Three projects have introduced key new services in 2009: the uSpace service; the new student email and Calendar service; and the eRecruitment system.

CiCS promotes good project management practice within the University by helping departments develop their approach to projects. Our extensive project management website, providing advice and resources, is used by other universities as well as internally.

Recommendations from the Environmental Printing Review Project have resulted in:

- the formation of the University Print Management Team which supports best practice and aims to reduce the cost and environmental impact of printing;
- the photocopier contract being managed by CiCS and the Procurement Office;
- the selection of preferred suppliers for outsourced printing, managed by the University Print Service.

University Records

The Records Centre, established last year at North Campus, is now over half full and holds records from over 30 academic and professional service departments.

Business Units

The University Print Service has installed the latest high volume Mono and Colour Digital Printing equipment. This will improve quality and reduce costs of in-house work.

The Drama Studio continued its drive to maintain its reputation with further developments and improvements. This year saw new additions to our range of theatre lights; the complete replacement of our stock of scenery; step units and extra shapes to add to the staging bought last year; and the installation of a video monitoring system to relay the show to the dressing rooms.

A Work Related Driving Policy was ratified by the University Health and Safety Committee; this policy ensures the University Transport operations will remain safe and legal.



Facts and Figures 2009

Helpdesk

- 48,641 phone calls, emails and visits to CiCS Helpdesk, IT Centres, the workshop and networking staff

Email

- 10.4 million email messages received by the University of which 667,000 delivered – 93.5% rejected as spam

Student Computing

- 37 centrally provided student computer rooms
- 1,567 computers available for student use
- 523 computers available 24/7 in the Information Commons
- 150 bookable PCs in Information Commons and 10 bookable group rooms
- 250+ software applications on student computers
- £800,000 p.a. spent on software purchase and licensing, increased 22% from £655,000 last year.
- 400MB file store for each undergraduate student

Printing

- 7,137,033 pages printed out by students
- 45 printers available in the IC, open access rooms and libraries and 31 printers in departments for students
- 1,200 network printers on the University network

Network

- 2,500 new outlets added to the network this year (10% increase in size of network over last year)
- 300 wireless access points around campus (20% increase over last year)
- 10,000 telephone extensions
- 6,000 voicemail accounts
- 2 Gb/s University connection to the internet, 1 Gb/s on campus and to student residences and 1 Gb/s for grid computing and scientific computing
- Key buildings, such as the Information Commons, have dedicated 2 Gb/s connections into the core

Learning and Teaching

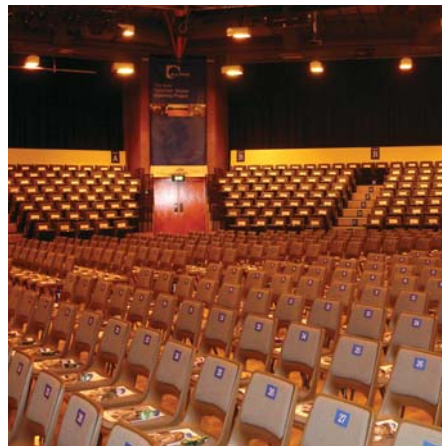
- 160 pool teaching rooms and various others available through Room Bookings
- 74,000 class sessions allocated to bookable rooms and an average of 100 room enquiries daily
- 2 lecture theatres refurbished with new AV equipment
- 5,700 courses in MOLE (My Online Learning Environment)
- MOLE accessed by 2,280 concurrent MOLE users during the day time, running on 14 servers
- 320 ECDL tests were taken with 295 passes, 183 staff currently registered for final season

Administration

- 14 servers and 18 databases used for SAP
- 1,400 reports in the uReports system, in which staff can now create their own reports from central data

Business Units

- 50 vehicles operated within the University on a permanent basis and between 200 and 300 daily rental vehicles hired in each month
- 42 tonnes of paper photocopied at University Print Service
- In excess of 11 million pages printed in total by the University Print Service
- 5,800 Thesis bound each year
- 2,635 estimates produced for customers by the University Print Service
- Approx 1,650 parking spaces available, of which over 1/3 are at the residences, so just over 1,000 in all categories around the campus and parking permits managed by Room and Parking Services
- Parking operations turnover is approx £370,000 of which £40,000 provides the subsidy for staff monthly bus tickets. The annual surplus, usually £30,000 - £60,000 provides funding for other travel and environmental initiatives as planned by the University Transport Policy Group
- The Octagon Centre had a turnover of £160,000 in 2008-2009. About 60% was from external bookings and 40% from internal bookings
- The Octagon Centre was occupied on 279 days last year





“We will be an **innovative** and **influential** department, **respected** by the University and recognised as a **leader** in the sector, delivering **excellent customer-focused** services.”



To
Discover
And
Understand.



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