UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

THE SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES IT COMMITTEE

Unconfirmed Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 3rd March 2015

Present:

Nabeel Affara (Chair/Pathology)
Phil Brereton (Pathology)
Tracey Brown (Minutes)

Jenny Barna (UIS)

Richard Bartlett (Clinical School Computing Service)

Martin Bellamy (Director of UIS)

Paul Bertone (Stem Cell Institute)
Paul Browne (Systems Biology)
Ian Clark (Genetics)

Alistair Downie (Gurdon Institute)
Mark Holmes (Veterinary Medicine)
Henrik Jönsson (Sainsbury Laboratory)
Gabriella Rustici (Bioinformatics Training Facility)

Christoph Schwiening (PDN)

Derek Smith (Chair of the SBS Computing Review Committee/Zoology)
Paul Sumption (Stem Cell Institute)
Andrew Welchman (Psychology)

1.   **Apologies**
        Apologies were received from Chris Gilligan (Plant Sciences) and Richard Farndale (Biochemistry).

2.   **Declaration of interests**
        No declaration of interests were received.

3.   **Minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2015**
        The Chair informed the meeting that Steve Russell (Genetics) has resigned from the Committee. Jessica Dunne is on leave until further notice. The Chair welcomed Tracey Brown, Divisional Secretary from the Department of Pathology, who has been invited to help run this committee.
        The minutes were reviewed page by page, no points were raised. The Chair tabled an amendment to pages 2 and 3 from Derek Smith (DS), The Chair was happy with these amendments but asked for approval from the Committee. Martin Bellamy (MB) queried the deletion of the text regarding the reference to the 'duplication of services', and that we are still looking at the goal to avoid duplication of services. Derek Smith (DS) confirmed that this was the case and that it was unnecessary to state 'to avoid duplication of services' and that it was an absolute given. The amendment was accepted by the Committee.

3.1   Matters arising
        Updates - The updates from MB, Jenny Barna (JB) and DS are covered in items 6, 7, and 8.

Position Statements - Further to a request for a position statement from those departments that are out of scope (not part of the project to develop a proposed Joint Schools Computing Service), the Chair outlined that papers have been received and circulated from Pathology, the Gurdon Institute and PDN; there is a number of other departments and institutions that have not responded yet. The Chair will follow this up. From the last meeting it was noted that a very clear statement had been received from the Vet School. Papers received from Richard Bartlett were circulated prior to the meeting; these were not for discussion but for information. The Chair asked for any comments, no comments were received from the Committee.   **ACTION:** Chair

4.   **Terms of Reference for the SBS IT Committee and Computer Officer Forum. Papers SBSIT Paper 2.1, SBSIT Paper 2.2 and SBSIT Paper 2.4**

Paper 2.1 - Terms of Reference
The Chair explained that the point of this paper was to have a clear basis on which this Committee is constituted, defining the membership and its purposes. It was explained that the model had been taken from a School of Technology document which has been adapted for the School of Biological Sciences. The Chair felt it covered pretty well what a Strategic Committee should be looking at in terms of the development of IT. The paper was opened up for discussion and the question put forward as to whether it was suitable for our school. A question was raised as to how many people in total the SBS IT committee covered. JB explained that not every department will have a CO (IT) representative, so as things evolve membership will have to be reviewed. It was thought the committee would be around twenty people. JB also expressed the importance of the linkage to ISC (Information Services Committee). There has been no school representative at the top level of IT in the University except for the Head of the Clinical School. It was considered important that the SBS IT committee should be aware of who the representatives are to ensure flow of information. MB added that there were around eight sub-committees of the ISC covering various areas (specialist committees for networks, for teaching, learning and research, for user needs, for information security policy and the schools UIS Liaison Committee on which Richard Bartlett, NAA and JB are members). MB will provide the Chair with a list of sub-committees and their members to enable the SBS IT committee to review representation.   **ACTION:** MB/Chair

Given the re-establishment of the SBS IT committee, Alastair Downie suggested that any recommendation arising from the JSCS project should be routed through the SBS IT committee given that the projects remit was to deliver a plan and not services. As chair of the JSCS review, Derek Smith responded that it was created directly by the SBS Council and that he reports to the council on a monthly basis and expects to continue to do so throughout the year. He would like to continue to represent JSCS to the council as a member of the SBS IT committee. As the JSCS proposal would go to both the SBS and SCM councils in January next year. DS explained that there would be no conflicts of interest. Alistair Downie was content with this response.

DS thought that JB made a good point about representation on the SBS IT Committee with two individuals (an academic and computer officer) from each department/institution, but a single vote for each department/institution. This was agreed. It was also agreed that proxies could be sent to ensure representation. In summary, it was agreed that there would be two representatives but one vote per department/institution, that proxies would

be permitted and that meetings would be deemed quorate with 60% attendance. The Chair would make these changes to the Terms of Reference. JB suggested once the Terms of Reference were finalized that they be placed on the School's website. It was also agreed that the minutes of the SBS IT committee be placed on the School's website. The Chair also noted that these minutes have to go to Council.

ACTION: Chair

SBS IT Paper 2.4
The Chair reported that the second paper on the School of Biological Sciences IT Staff Forum stems from a paper that had been received from Richard Farndale proposing a committee. Given that there would be proper representation of the Computer Officers on the SBS IT Committee, the Chair suggested the creation of a forum (not governed by the TOR of SBSIT, but as a pre-ranging discussion group), a wider body to include all IT staff to enable exchange of ideas and bonding. RF confirmed to the Chair that he was happy with the idea of a Forum, and that it captures the intention that he had originally sought in his paper on the creation of a committee JB reported that there is some money in a budget to fund the lunches at Forum meetings. JB also reported that a pilot forum would be taking place during a lunchtime for IT staff to discuss training. The first meeting will be held at Biochemistry.

5.   **SBS Council request to consider use of IT and Teaching across the School – form review sub-group**
The Chair reported that SBS Council would like the Committee to look at use of innovative forms of IT in Teaching and Administration. This was a very general request and is on the agenda to initiate discussion and exploration of a number of areas. The Chair agreed to seek greater clarity from Council on the goals and objectives and to get a better steer as to where Council want the Committee to focus. The Chair asked Christoph Schwiening (CS) to start off the discussion due to his involvement in the Digital Teaching and Learning Sub Committee. CS explained his involvement was very recent and that so far there had been two events. The first event was not a massive success, where the committee spent most of its time considering grants with a teaching innovations fund which has given out about £140,000 worth of grants to ten sets of individuals across the University to fund elements of innovative specialized bits digital technology based teaching. CS believes these projects should help shape a strategy of digital teaching and learning coordinated by the Digital Teaching and Learning Committee. CS suggested that one area of focus would be the introduction of IT in the conduct of exams and the use by students of digital technology for note taking and exam scripts. It is not clear how prominently this figures in University strategy but it is an area that the committee could push forward. Gabriella Rustici suggested that she might join the committee given her responsibility for Bioinformatics training in the School and engagement at a strategic level with a variety of European projects that might be relevant. CS commented that despite a number of projects and initiatives underway, there was general lack of communication and information. This should be addressed to allow a coordinated and rational approach to avoid duplication. This was echoed by JB. MB added that a number of projects financed from the innovation fund have yielded outputs that are potentially of value to Teaching Officers across the University. The main issue with respect to digital tools is not so much that they do not exist but rather that the challenge is making the tools already in use across Cambridge in different schools more accessible and discoverable

A number of suggestions were made of areas where new initiatives could be taken: digital lecture capture as a service; computer based examinations; potential for digital technology to support the supervision process. Perhaps the starting point for the SBS IT Committee would be to identify what tools are currently available across the University and this might be one of the first tasks for the Digital Teaching and Learning Committee. This may then form the basis of a menu of services deployed at School level and more widely through UIS.

With respect to administration, the Chair asked MB whether there was a clear path for the delivery of digital innovation in admin. MB responded that there is a project looking at the future of the University's business systems and that there is a team in place looking at how the systems might evolve and is due to report to the Information Services Committee in the Easter Term. CS felt that a centralized route is needed for the management for stores and facilities, and needs to be captured by this Committee so there are global systems that work across the faculty rather than through individual solutions. MB confirmed that there is a Student Information Systems Committee which is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education, Graham Virgo, and that this committee has oversight of all university wide initiatives that are to do with administration around students which includes CamSIS. This Committee is also driving the extension to the timetable system and acts as the oversight body for Moodle. This Committee has representation from Schools and Colleges. The Chair noted the actions from the discussion, an initial focus on digital innovation in education and to be informed on this by the activities of the Digital Innovation in Teaching Committee with CS as the SBS representative. It was also agreed that the best way forward with respect deploying digital technology in other areas such as administration was to ensure SBS representation on key committees with reports and recommendations being made to the SBS IT committee. This would allow us to consider what portfolio of tools might be useful in our teaching and administration. MB agreed to send the Chair a list of the various relevant sub-committees and their membership reporting to the ISC. This would allow us to co-opt individuals to inform us of developments around the University.

ACTION: Chair

6. **UIS Developments – Update from Martin Bellamy**
   MB provided an update via PowerPoint slides. He outlined the progressive implementation of the new UIS structure and that this was moving forward without major difficulties. He added that there is dialogue underway with the Joint Schools initiative, with a group visiting the Roger Needham Building next week to discuss how they can work together effectively. The team of relationship managers has been established to liaise with the various schools led by Richard Hey, Head of Institutional Services. JB is the relationship manager for SBS. The intent is to facilitate new developments and to capture feedback to improve services. MB explained that there had been a number of service issues, higher than we can tolerate moving forwards and a number of security breaches. These were being addressed to improve the standards being delivered. MB also reported on a number of projects that have been launched or represent improvements of existing services under development; the new version of online timetable was launched last year and the feedback has been positive both from students and administrators and will have a broader roll-out for the next academic year; Room Booking System, a project intended to make rooms in the University discoverable across the departmental boundaries; online admissions to improve the efficiency of the student application process; a review and restructuring of the portfolio of training courses offered by UIS – UIS are seeking volunteers to join the review

group; Microsoft Agreement – UIS have launched Office 365 ProPlus available to all in the University for up to 15 personal devices; University OneDrive – this was launched last week, is similar to drop box, provides 1TB of storage and is also available without charge to everyone in the University; IT Community Development Project – getting up and running at the moment and is starting with workshops looking at what schools would like to see offered in the form of a programme for Computer Officers - involvement from the school would be welcome to help shape direction; final endorsement of the rollout of the Information Services Catalogue across the University and potential funding to provide resource that can come and work in departments to help capture the services that departments may have to put into the catalogue. The goal is to have the catalogue available across the University in most cases for the start of the next academic year, and where catalogues already exist, migrating them into a common platform by the end of the year.

7.   **BioCloud Project Developments – Update from Jenny Barna**
A revision of the update given at the last meeting and a new update was presented via PowerPoint slides. JB outlined that investigations showed that the HPCS that existed in the past was not user-friendly enough. There is huge demand for storage and hence it is critical to have fast networks to move and run data on high performance resources. There is demand for servers to be maintained by UIS staff as part of the HPC.

The BioCloud project (funded by multiple streams – High Performance Hub for Informatics (Clincal School), the Cambridge Advanced Imaging Service (CAIC), School and University funding) will be part of HPC structure and the general idea is that various workloads will be migrated to this resource. Approximately £2m has already been spent on installing hardware at the West Cambridge Data Centre and after testing it is expected to be available in summer 2016. The cost per core hour has been dropped from 2p to 1.2p. There is continued use of Wilkes and Darwin and upgrade of 10GB links to the CUDN Service which will provide a faster service. JB presented a number of projects (from Zoology, Biochemistry, Obstetrics) generating big data that have benefited enormously from the high performance computing that has been developed enabling the compression of several years of CPU core time into a few weeks.   The Chair emphasised that systems were up and running and that JB is in a position to help people with large data sets of different kinds. MB asked about the dissemination of information about BioCloud and its capabilities. JB explained that there is an HPC list and that several departments have shown an interest in the talks she has given promoting BioCloud. CS reported 10Gb switches are going into multiple departments and was concerned that as more people begin to use the network it will not be able to cope. JB reassured the committee that there are other options for maintaining speed over the network such as installation of a private 40Gb fibre. DS asked about those who have existing clusters and what is recommended. JB reported that there were not that many and that some can be integrated into the HPCS both new and old. The Chair clarified that it would be best to talk to JB about particular needs as it is clear that there are services available now for research computing.

8.   **JSCS proposal developments – Update from Derek Smith and Richard Bartlett**.
Two papers related to the Panel Review Report and a paper with comments from the review panel were circulated. At the last meeting it was noted that the JSCS review project was having an external review by a panel made up of individuals from Oxford, UCL and the Computer Lab in Cambridge. The summary of their initial assessment indicates

that the project seems to be well managed and on track, but that challenges and risk areas were identified for the JSCS project proposal to address. The project at the moment is running two phases, Finance and Governance and Technical Design. The Technical Design phase is running three weeks ahead of schedule. An initial directory design will be available soon for circulation to Computer Officers and this is being discussed with UIS. Finance and Governance is about two weeks behind, but this will not affect the delivery date. There are monthly reports on the JSCS website (http://jscs.biomed.cam.ac.uk). Those who gave feedback, were thanked; not all the feedback has been incorporated yet. Another review will be scheduled in the summer. No further questions or comments were raised.

9.   Any other business
There was no further business to discuss.

10.   Date of next meetings
The Chair has set out a series of dates designed to hold meetings out of term all at 10am - 12 noon. This will allow those who have teaching commitments to attend meetings. Please confirm that these dates are suitable for the majority.

Easter Term 2016:   June 16th
Michaelmas Term 2016:   Sept 29th and Dec 8th
Lent Term 2017:   Mar 23rd
Easter Term 2017:   Jun 22nd
Michaelmas Term 2017:   Sept 28th

ACTION: Chair