

School of the Biological Sciences: IT Committee

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 18th December 2018 10:00-11:30am, Department of Pathology Greaves Room

1. Attendance

Present

Mark Holmes (Chair, Veterinary Medicine), Ian Clark (Genetics, acting Secretary), Hugo Tavares (SLCU), Graham Ladds (Pharmacology), Marko Hyvonen (Biochemistry), Wentao Song (PDN)

Apologies

Jenny Barna (SBS), Elizabeth MacRae (Zoology), Gos Micklem (Genetics), Abbi Abbioui (Pharmacology), Al Downie (Gurdon), Phil Brereton (Pathology), Christof Schwiening (PDN), Chris Gilligan (Plant Sciences), Paul Judge (SBS Bioinformatics), Henrik Jönsson (SLCU), Aylwyn Scally (Genetics)

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The Chair suggested that in view of the low turnout it would be appropriate to briefly review the October minutes at the March meeting.

3. Matters Arising

(4) School's IT priorities

The School had been asked to provide details on our requirements. We have sent in information as agreed in the previous meeting but voting on the combined Schools' priorities has been deferred.

4. SBS Research Computing Survey Report

In discussion the following points were made:

The School does not have enough heavy users to have much influence and there were ongoing concerns about management and governance.

It is felt that PIs writing grants need better documentation as without information it is harder to justify using UIS Research Computing (RC) resources rather than buying local hardware. In addition, it is not always clear what is included in each RC service (eg it is not obvious what data are backed up.) Documentation for new PIs should be available to those who advise on grants.

Procedures for getting started can be obscure but are not that onerous. Different people need different training. Postgraduates need to develop basic Unix skills, postdocs need to adapt basic Unix to queuing/parallel systems. Advanced users need to get used to not having administrative access (root access.) SLCU are organizing an HPC workshop; as and when this is completed, they are open to sharing the materials.

The best way to learn is to use the system. There is a forum run by the Gurdon computing team intended for sharing HPC experiences: <https://computing.group.gurdon.cam.ac.uk/hpcforum/>

The priority system seems unfair, where heavy users can use continuously without penalty, meaning that intermittent users wait (cf Sanger fair queuing system.) Genetics are trying to track users and produce quantitative measures of their experiences with HPC.

The Committee approved the Report.

Action JCJB: Add to, and update termly, the existing summary of RC resources explaining in more detail what people writing grants should consider applying for, with examples
<https://www.bio.cam.ac.uk/facilities/computing/>

5. Support for UBS facilities

UBS facilities are embedded in various locations with highly varying levels of IT oversight. A short paper, suggesting to the Council of the School that UBS look at the security implications of this ad hoc provision, was discussed.

The Committee approved the paper.

6. Any other business

Refreshments: it was agreed that there was no need for refreshments at meetings

Format and distribution of papers: It was agreed that an online platform could be used. In addition, an action progress document was proposed.

Action JCJB: Choose platform for online documents.

7. Next meeting

Post-meeting note: in view of very low attendance the Chair and Secretary propose reverting to meetings in Full Term and a new date will be circulated.