School of the Biological Sciences IT Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2019, 2.15pm in the Stephenson Seminar Room, Department of Biochemistry

Present: Dr Mark Holmes (Chair), Mr Abbi Abbioui (Computer Officer, Department of Pharmacology), Dr Jenny Barna (Secretary), Dr Paul Bays (Chair of IT Committee, Department of Psychology), Mr Philip Breerton (Computer Officer, Department of Pathology), Mr Ian Clark (Computer Officer, Department of Genetics), Mr Alastair Downie (IT Manager, Gurdon Institute), Mr Richard Fieldsend (Computer Officer, Departments of Plant Sciences and Psychology), Mr Nicolas Guillod (Department of Biochemistry, deputizing for Dr Timmers), Ms Elizabeth MacRae (Secretary of IT Committee, Department of Zoology), Dr Gos Micklem (Director, Cambridge Computational Biology Institute), Mr Paul Judge (School Bioinformatics Training Facility, deputizing for Dr Rustici), Mr Wentao Song (Computer Officer, Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience)

In attendance: Mr Barney Brown, (Head of Digital Communications, Office of External Affairs and Communications) for item 4.

1 Apologies: Dr James Fraser (Chair of IT Committee, Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience), Dr Marko Hyvonen (Chair of IT Committee, Department of Biochemistry), Professor Henrik Jonsson (Chair of IT Committee, Sainsbury Laboratory), Mr Andy Judd (UIS) and Dr Hugo Tavares (Sainsbury Laboratory)

2 The Minutes of the meetings of 11th October and 18th December 2018 were approved.

3 Matters arising from the Minutes

SBS Research Computing Survey Report: The Secretary reported that the UIS Director informed the ISC at its meeting on 7th March that a review of the Research Computing Services Division of UIS was being undertaken. We have given our report to the reviewer and meetings are being held with him.

4 University web strategy

This item was taken first. Mr Brown gave a presentation (the slides will be in the Committee’s new SharePoint site). He then took feedback from the Committee. Some technical points were raised that were not of current concern, as planning at this stage is at a strategic level. Members were advised that the effort currently being put into the migration from Plone to Drupal would not be wasted. Dr Micklem suggested that some current external funding that led to some of the less ‘conforming’ current web sites might not be available with a more centric approach as funds arose from grants. Mr Brown, however, reminded the Committee that there were increasing legal obligations and that provision of a compliant system was a significant support to departments. (The Secretary also reminded members that this had been an objective of Project Light, ie the design of the current house-style). It was agreed that a consistent approach was useful but that some flexibility was required. This might be met by providing a range of templates (more flexibly than in the previous Plone-based Falcon service, which required significant work for a department as the template had been designed for research initiatives). The consultation exercise would identify different needs, both for internal and external groups. The Chair suggested that most effort should be put into the parts of the web presence that traffic analysis showed were used most. He also suggested, conversely, that there were important cases requiring effort that
had low or intermittent traffic but high impact eg information on research news for the media. The Committee agreed that a system to harvest news stories arising anywhere in the University, and a development of talks.cam, would be helpful. Overall a cautious welcome was given to the proposals.

5 UBS IT support

The Secretary reported that it has not been possible to clarify responsibilities yet. The Computer Officer for UBS is about to join UIS and a programme of rationalization will be undertaken. We need to agree a detailed plan with UIS to address ongoing concerns about risks in the School.

**ACTION Secretary with UIS and Departmental IT Staff**

6 School IT Priorities

The Secretary reported that work to merge the different Schools’ priorities remained incomplete and hence voting had not occurred. We have been asked by the ISC Operations Committee to reconsider our own priorities, as these were identified the previous summer. The status quo is as follows, for each priority.

1) *Research computing virtual server service*: this is now formally live. We are encouraging the early provision of training in our own (bioinformatics) training facility. Most IT staff have said they need training before they can use the service and they have been encouraged to register interest. It is hoped we will receive confirmed dates shortly. This priority has been met (though very late so significant server room development has taken place meanwhile). Developments for non-research use are awaited.

2) *Integrated scheduling/booking/timetabling* is now the top priority. The School office has representation on the Education Space Scheduling and Modelling project board and is leading the School involvement in this, including expressing concerns about scope, timescale etc.

3) *Data management services for big data*: Mr Downie now considered that it was unlikely the University would be able to undertake such a complex project within a useful timeframe. He also reported some concern about the increasingly expensive cycle of investment required to maintain infrastructure for research data storage and sought feedback from the Committee about the value of initiating a broader (nationwide) discussion about the future of research infrastructure investment/management. The Chair asked him to prepare a short paper for submission. This might be useful for the current review of Research Computing and to the newly reconstituted ISC Research Computing Sub-Committee.

**ACTION Mr Downie, Secretary**

7 Institution File Storage service

The Secretary reported that this is expected shortly to go live for the School. The project team has a list of departments and what Active Directory (AD) they expect to use. It also has a list of relevant contacts, who are generally departmental IT staff. There are, however, various cases for technical and other reasons. Departments without a pre-existing well-developed AD of their own are advised to use the Blue AD. When documentation is available, staff will be able to make detailed queries if required. Each department has been allocated a small amount of storage free at point of use, as already described in a
recent email circular to the Committee (ie between 2 and 7 TB). Each department is encouraged to try
the service and consider this, where applicable, in future. The price when additional storage is required
will be £150 per TB (mirrored, in two data centres managed by UIS).

8 Any Other Business

The Secretary reported that it has been agreed that it would be useful if School IT Committee minutes
were now passed to the ISC Operations Committee. Committees can decide whether to send
unconfirmed minutes (which may be timely) or only confirmed minutes. In this case, as our meeting has
been moved forward, it could be helpful to send unconfirmed minutes to reach the March ISC
Operations Committee meeting and the Chair endorsed this. It was agreed that minutes would be
circulated very promptly to the Committee to enable submission for the next ISC Operations Committee
meeting

The Secretary reported that she is now a member of the ISC Operations Committee, in addition to the
School’s own representative (who is the Chair) but would forward minutes in her role as Secretary of the
School’s IT Committee, on behalf of the Secretary of the School.

9 Date of next meeting 12th June 1415

(Dates of ISC Operations Committee meetings are 28th March, 28th May, 25th July)