

## IT Review Phase 2

# Further Questions to Schools in Science & Engineering

The College Review Group met on Wednesday 2 May to consider the various inputs to the Review which have been generated so far. These are all now available at

[http://www.is.ed.ac.uk/IT\\_ComputingReview\\_PhaseII/index.html](http://www.is.ed.ac.uk/IT_ComputingReview_PhaseII/index.html).

The documents principally considered were:

1. ToR: Terms of Reference for Phase 2
2. BRS: Background Research Summary (Note: a new version was mounted on Monday 7 May; any further corrections or comments of a factual nature should be passed to Scott Currie and Chris Adie, copied to John Martin, by 25 May.)
3. CSE: Input Questionnaires (Summary and Consolidated)

The approach taken at this stage was to formulate further key questions for consideration by the College Review Group and by Schools. Responses are requested on a School basis via their representative on the College Review Group (after appropriate consultation which should include the Head of School and appropriate academic and IT professional colleagues). It is recognised that we have posed some 22 questions, including some very difficult ones, and that Schools may wish to be selective in what they choose to answer. Schools have already submitted copious material to this Review and they are not expected to repeat anything unless they wish to do so. Giving explicit references to material already submitted is recommended to emphasise particular points already made.

CCPAG is also invited to respond. Six questions are flagged as particularly for CCPAG.

Feedback on these questions is requested by Friday 1 June. The intention is to hold a further meeting of the College Review Group soon after this, aiming to formulate (and consult on) the College Report in time for submission to the Main Review Panel.

### Topics & Questions

1. The Phase 1 Report noted the diversity of IT provision across the University and within Colleges and Schools, suggesting that there was scope for restructuring to improve fitness for purpose. It also suggested that developments could benefit from more coordination across Colleges and Schools and that better mechanisms are needed to resolve big contentious issues across the University and to ensure implementation of corporate policy. There was a question of how effective is the linkage between IT planning in Schools and other aspects of the Schools' and the University's planning and budgeting processes.

School responses to the Phase 2 Questionnaire suggested variations in the extent to which School IT groups and their conveners are linked into School Executives with regard to setting strategy, and variations in the extent to which School IT groups took a strategic/planning as opposed to an operational/planning role.

- (i) *Do you agree that more information on School IT strategies and major planning decisions should rise to College and University level in order to identify common themes and general concerns, consider opportunities for efficiency gains, and monitor implementation of agreed policies?*
- (ii) *The College Review Group proposes to recommend that the School representative on CC&ITC should convene the relevant School IT Strategy Group and should have a seat on the School Executive Group. Comments invited. Would it be desirable (through consideration of best practice) to develop a template remit for School IT Strategy Groups?*

- (iii) *Is there merit in trying to develop an explicit College IT strategy? In the interests of optimising Schools' input to such a strategy, is there merit in developing a template for School IT strategies? It was felt that these suggestions might significantly assist the flows of information necessary to develop well-informed and coherent strategy at all levels.*
2. It was noted (BRS p10 et seq) that there is a large variation in the number of IT staff per School, and this may lead to different questions being relevant to Schools with large or small cohorts. (Concerns were raised at the meeting about several of the figures and relevant Schools were asked to make factual corrections/comments as above, especially if these would change any significant messages potentially affecting policy.)
- (i) *Has there been any recent analysis of IT business requirements and mode of delivery leading to an objective decision that the current level of support and IT staff profile are (or are not) optimal? If so, how was this done and are there any lessons which other Schools might learn?*
- (ii) *How do Schools assess the risks to their critical services due to their being run by small numbers of staff, i.e. with limited backup? It is noted that this may apply particularly to Schools with small numbers of IT staff overall, but may also be relevant to Schools running critical services with small numbers of staff having the necessary specialised skill set. Are there problems here that need to be addressed?*
3. The staff roles data (BRS page 14 et seq) were noted. (It is recognised that these data are drawn from JDs provided by HR requiring some rather gross assumptions in categorising roles. There are concerns about how research and commercial roles have been handled. Some Schools have IT staff partly involved in "RA-type" activity not covered in the categorisation, or have staff dedicated to specific commercially funded projects. In general there is a need to differentiate staff funded from general funds, and those funded from specific (e.g. research) funds. Relevant Schools were asked to propose factual corrections/comments as above, especially if these would change any significant messages potentially affecting policy). Noting these concerns, it was provisionally observed that CSE has a relatively high proportion of staff in facility management.
- (i) *What is the scope for some form of greater co-operation between Schools for the provision of facilities / services which are accepted as too specialised to be centrally provided by IS?*
4. At many stages in the Review, concern has been expressed about the channels of communication for technical expertise and professional development between IS and School IT staff.
- (i) *Do we need significantly greater mobility of IT staff between central and School IT roles? If so, how could this be achieved?*
5. The non-staff costs data (BRS page 30 et seq) were noted. (There are some uncertainties relating to these data: distortion by large one-off purchases which need to be disaggregated to give a correct picture; ongoing maintenance agreements, etc may have been included; the software column may give a wrong impression where software cannot be disaggregated in purchases from hardware suppliers.) Noting these concerns, it was provisionally observed there are some apparent large variations in investment in hardware and software.
- (i) *(CCPAG) What scope is there for joint software or hardware purchases in the College? It was noted that such joint purchases may be difficult because of*

*licensing issues and the policies of some vendors; the question here is whether there are benefits if such issues can be addressed.*

- (ii) *(CCPAG) Are there software licenses being bought by Schools which would be better bought at College or University level? Please provide full details of any such cases.*
- (iii) *(CCPAG) With regard to hardware procurement is there scope to increase the consistency of purchases across the College - without prejudicing fitness for purpose? See also section 8 below.*

6. Under the heading of “duplication” (BRS page 41 et seq) many cases were noted where Schools operate services which ostensibly replicate central services. Schools have already commented extensively on the reasons for this, many of which have been summarised in the report (BRS page 48). A very significant point made strongly by SEE and others is that new services have sometimes been initiated by a School when no corresponding central service existed or seemed likely to be agreed; the duplication arises when eventually a corresponding central service is initiated which, however, does not fulfil the local business need as effectively as the established local product. All such points will be included in the College Report. Several Schools also note a policy of migration to central services when such services are identified as fully fit for the local purposes.

- (i) *(CCPAG) It would be most helpful, now, to have a quite detailed assessment of the potential for such migration under each of the service headings (BRS page 42), the “common themes” (BRS page 45), and the specific School cases (BRS, page 45/6). Where migration is thought a likely possibility please indicate the prerequisites that the relevant central service would need to meet. Where migration is not considered likely, please indicate whether this is viewed as due to an inherent academically-justified distinction in requirements (which you accept would not be appropriate for a central service to meet) or a demonstrable fundamental difficulty in what is provided centrally (which should be addressed).*
- (ii) *Do you agree that more coordination is needed in the identification, development and roll-out of innovative services, with explicit discussion on the level at which the services should be provided? Recognising that there may be limits on IS capacity to support non-mainstream activity, would there be support for greater collaboration with IS in the local development of special services which may eventually have wider applicability? (See also 4(i)).*
- (iii) *Is there a continuing need for an IS User Support Unit operated separately from the support available in Schools?*
- (iv) *(CCPAG) If so, what should be the relationship between IS User Support and the IT support in Schools? What is the best routing for user support queries (noting that some Schools route all queries via IS even if they are then referred to School IT staff, while some do the reverse)? Within a School, is a single first-point-of-contact desirable? Should there be different routings for different types of queries? Do we need a common method?*
- (v) *(CCPAG) Shared use of the JCMB server room is now being actively planned; is there potential for much greater sharing of server provision through virtualisation? There have been requests to ECDF management to implement Condor so that local clusters can be integrated with ECDF. Do these examples suggest a possible basis for effective policy to improve efficiency? Are there other examples?*

7. Some Schools are developing “Service Definitions” and Key Performance Indicators, but most continue to operate more informally with regard to performance management.

- (i) *Is the School getting “value for money” for its own IT services, and how does it know?*

- (ii) *Would some form of KPI or other information gathering help to inform strategy and planning?*
  - (iii) *Would it be desirable to develop a recommended template for Service Definitions or Service Level Agreements if a broadly applicable methodology could be determined through consideration of best practice?*
8. The new version of BRS (page 50 et seq) contains a substantial new section 6 on Procurement Issues, written by the Director of Procurement, including an explanation of “future mandatory Cat A contracting arrangements” being imposed in the publicly funded sector by the Scottish Executive to implement the McClelland Review. This section of BRS was not available at the time of the College Review Group meeting. The new section includes the following questions to the Colleges; School input is requested.
- (i) *How should IS, Colleges and Schools implement the requirements of the McClelland Report? These are outlined in BRS section 6.1.*
  - (ii) *How can the University prevent purchases from non-contracted suppliers? There is evidence that this is a significant issue – see BRS section 6.1.3/4.*
  - (iii) *How should the University address the related issues of asset control, physical equipment security and equipment disposal?*
  - (iv) *How should the University take forward the recommendations in BRS sections 6.1.6 and the proposals in BRS section 6.2?*