Strategy for supporting self managed machines

November 2009

- Self help forum

  We shall introduce a web based discussion forum, on the new IS forum service, to create a community of users who mutually help each other with technical problems. The computing staff will be encouraged to actively participate in this forum.

- Documentation

  Our current systems documentation has, in recent years, become somewhat disorganised and hard to navigate. It was originally targeted at DICE desktop users and pays only lip service to providing information and advice to users of self managed machines.

  The user documentation will be restructured, with end-user input, and the following content added :-

  - instructions on how to configure the major platforms (Windows, MacOS, Linux) for each of our services (e.g. AFS, printing, backups, OpenVPN, kerberos)
  - notes on suggested modes of working. For example, staff use a variety of different schemes managing their files, and it is felt that this would be useful to document these to provide guidance to others.
  - recommendations for different software to use for common tasks.
  - HOWTOs, e.g. on how to encrypt your data

  It is likely that we will employ student effort to assist in authoring content.

- Clarification of level of support

  The School will need to consider, and agree on, what level of "hands on" support will be provided to users of self-managed machines. It is possible that different levels of support may be offered to different categories of users (e.g. teaching staff vs postgraduates).

- Develop more Windows and MacOS skills

  The skills of the majority of the computing staff, and particularly the front-line support team, are primarily Unix focused. Where individuals do have Windows and/or MacOS experience, from running machines at home, this does not usually involve DICE services.

  We need to develop more Windows and MacOS skills, particularly amongst the front-line support team and with using DICE and IS services from these platforms. It is difficult to learn any significant knowledge of a platform unless one uses it on a daily basis, so we will encourage some CSOs (and COs) to move to MacOS or Windows as their principal platform.

- CO surgeries

  The majority of users' problems and queries are efficiently handled through the existing

support mechanism by the front-line support team. However there are a number of problems and queries which could be more efficiently solved by personal interaction between users and the COs running DICE services.

We shall introduce a frequent CO surgery with one CO from each unit present.

- Pre-installing at delivery

  We shall provide an option for users to request, on delivery of a new self-managed machine, that the machine be pre-configured for DICE services - e.g. kerberos, printing, AFS, OpenVPN etc. We will need to find some efficient way of delivery this option.

- Promotion

  We shall produce more posters advertising new DICE services etc.

- Platform support

  We developed, in early 2007, a policy on supporting access to DICE services from multiple client platforms : this covered testing, documentation etc. This policy has not been uniformly adopted : we shall look at checking for compliance as part of project signoff.