IS report to SQAEC for FY07-08

This report is a summary of some of the services provided by Information Services for students in direct and indirect support for their studies, and to enhance their general experience whilst at the University of Edinburgh.

Library opening hours & facilities

The Main Library offered extended semester opening hours from the start of FY07-08 (0830-2400 every night) and, for the first time, opened for two days between Christmas and New Year from 1030-1730hr with self-service. The former was in response to requests from EUSA and individual students, and confirmed as desirable by means of a substantial ‘airport-style’ survey over a range of days of the week and hours of the day. There was limited demand for 24hr opening and so midnight was selected, although it is worth noting that there are now several hundred students in the Main Library at closing time in busy parts of semesters.

The other library opening hours have been maintained at the levels of previous years.

The Main Library Redevelopment Project has resulted in major disruption of the building and its services throughout FY07-08 and this will continue for at least 4 more years. The second half of FY07-08 through to late FY08-09 are most problematic with the Ground Floor out of action and the IS Helpdesk relocated to the 1st Floor. It is worth noting that the relocation took place with minimal disruption to services. Towards the end of the session, a service improvement was brought into play, namely the concentration of heavily-used books into a new collection (HUB Collection) by the Helpdesk which has made it less necessary for students to navigate the higher floors for rapid access to their essential course texts. This will be a permanent feature of the ML, and will be located on the redeveloped Ground Floor from summer 2009.

Consultations with students

ASLG – the Academic Services Liaison Group, organised and chaired by EUSA, meets several times each year and promotes discussion of issues of immediate concern to both IS and EUSA, enabling problems to be addressed promptly, and impeding or possible service changes to be discussed to avoid misunderstandings. It is a very productive forum.

Strategic planning meeting with EUSA – each year the IS senior management team holds pre-planning round talks with EUSA (comparable to those with the Colleges and Support Groups) to enable EUSA officials to be aware of the likely major developments (positive and negative) that IS will put forward in its plans, and for EUSA to make IS aware of what changes to facilities and services it would like to see and not see taking place in the coming FY. These are very constructive planning discussions that are of value to both parties.

EUSA on IS Committees – EUSA have active representation on the Library, IT and e-Learning Committees, and are therefore party to discussions about these areas, in terms of future developments and resolving any problems that have arisen.

Miscellaneous items worthy of note in Library, IT & e-Learning services for students

- ISIS – responding to comments in various forums about the need to give better support for students to develop their information and IT literacies, and make more visible our courses and documentation around these, a WebCT course (ISIS) was launched. (See also iSKills below.) The resources are very well used and valued by students.

- Courses – a wide range of courses were offered by IS for students throughout the year. These include IT and information skills sessions, many held as an integral part of the curriculum, especially for M-level classes.

- Wifi - availability has been continuously expanded with libraries and almost all teaching rooms now equipped. The teaching rooms have zones of wifi around them and a few specific public spaces have been serviced, for example Appleton Tower Concourse. Additional funding has been obtained for FY09-10 to expand provision further. In comparison with universities of comparable estate, our coverage is good (even including the US), although clearly those coming from newer universities in more compact and less complex accommodation might find the gaps in coverage annoying. The refurbished ML will have wifi in all locations.
- Laptop printing – a heavily-requested item has been printing to networked printers directly from wifi-connected laptops, removing the need to find a workstation to print from. This service is now in place, and will link to the planned remote crediting of printing accounts via MyEd in the near future.

- ResNet - recognising the serious level of unhappiness with the internet service in university accommodation (ResNet) IS has put a lot of effort into support for the tender for the new service, due to come into effect in FY09-10. The requirement for bundling of network and telephone services by Accommodation Services in the tender precluded IS making a bid to run the network services, but better understanding of the management of service quality will aid us in ensuring that we do not repeat the ResNet problems of the recent past. IS will also work closely with the new service providers to get better induction and problem-resolution by taking an active stance, rather than the more passive stance of the past.

- WebCT/Blackboard VLE – the centrally-provided VLE is heavily used by undergraduate students from all Schools in CSE and CHSS, and by PGT students on distance education courses in CHSS and CMVM. The system was very reliable during AY07-08 but due for upgrade in summer 08. During last AY a review was undertaken of the options for formally procuring a VLE (the existing system has ‘grown’ from a very small start and was not subject to procurement) and a plan for such a formal procurement now exists. However, due to the substantial effort that would be involved in the procurement, the potential cost of a new system at a time when finances are stretched, and the general lack of a substantial ‘noise’ from the great majority of students and staff using the VLE, I decided to postpone any further activity, subjecting that decision to review in summer 2009. Largely, the feedback from students about the VLE is not that it is unreliable or unacceptably difficult to use, but that the use by courses is very inconsistent and uneven, and they would like to see progress by Schools in this respect. (Out of the scope of this report, but worth noting, is the fact that during autumn 2008 reliability fell significantly, partly due to problems with the new version and compounded by a very large effort from IS IT teams being devoted to making sure EUCLID’s PG online application launched successfully.)

Feedback about IS services from the IS surveys

Each spring IS administers a short survey of student (and staff) usages and views of key IS services. In FY07-08 these services were: student email, microlabs, library services, classroom AV, and IT support.

The results of the survey are part of the IS contribution to the University Balanced Scorecard PIs, and the text submitted is given below. Satisfaction has been consistently fairly high since the surveys began. Written responses are analysed and the representative of each IS area on the Committee can use these to help improve communications or service quality.

Response rates in the surveys are generally low (particularly so in this FY) and a new approach to this process will be taken in FY08-09.

BSC text

"User satisfaction with Information Services

Measured using data gathered (individually or combined) for computing services, library services and e-learning, and taking into account impact and value-added on user productivity. The target is for 85% of users to be satisfied or better with services, with no single area below 75% satisfaction.

Data gathered from a representative sample of staff and students via email contact alerting them to appropriate online surveys. Staff members were sampled in the same 4 week period from late April to late May. Samples were drawn up to represent all categories of staff and students with spread across Schools and SGs. For staff, 7 areas of IS activity were examined covering library, IT, e-learning and AV services, and different aspects of services (eg quality, reliability, capacity) were rated. For students the number of services was 5 using the same or very similar questions. Open text expanded answers were invited in addition to 5 point Likert scale ratings (excellent to very poor or equivalent).

The unweighted mean of the percentage of those who felt the services were ‘satisfactory’ or better over all services evaluated was 87.2% (s.d. 6.3%) for staff and 92.9% (s.d. 2.4%) for students (total respondents were 135 and 56 respectively). No service had a value below 78.6% and the maximum value was 95.1%.

An independent survey of student views of MyEd, which all students need to use to access vital services, returned a very high satisfaction rating.
In alternate years IS participates in the international Libqual+ survey which explores in detail various aspects of library provision, and enables comparisons to be made with peer libraries. No data were gathered in FY07-08 – the survey will be carried out again in Autumn 2009.

**Feedback about IS services from national surveys**

IS routinely monitors the results of national surveys which contain questions about services and facilities in the IS domains, although it must be remembered that not all IT is provided by IS, especially for postgraduate students, and ‘library’ also has some degree of ambiguity. The IS Quality Enhancement Group is responsible for keeping a watch on these surveys.

**National Student Satisfaction (NSS) survey:** has 2 questions about IS areas (although analysis is complicated in some due to the provision of some services by Schools as well as IS) and Edinburgh performs well in comparison to its peers (January 2007 - Library mean = 4.1; IT mean = 4.4; top quartiles 4.1 and 4.3 resp).

**International Student Barometer:** has 3 questions about IS areas (Library, technology and IT support) and although we score fairly well (74%, 82% and 82% resp) these are a few percentage points down on the ISB average and on the Russell Group average.

**Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Surveys:** has 8 questions about IS areas (4 library & 4 IT). We scored well in 2008 this survey on average (84% satisfaction for Library, 87% for IT) but have little analysis yet of comparability with peer universities. The caveat on provision of IT applies strongly here.

**Postgraduate Research Experience Surveys:** has 1 library and 1 IT question, and again the IT caveat is very significant here. We scored less well in 2007 in this survey, with 65% of respondents reporting they strongly agreed or agreed with the ‘adequacy’ of library and 63% reporting the same level of agreement with ‘adequacy’ of IT. Again we have limited understanding of the scores achieved by our peers but are investigating this. The variation between the wording in these different surveys make comparison difficult!

We are reviewing the whole area of support for international students, and postgraduates in particular, in a forthcoming IS Awayday, with a view to taking more focussed action in support of prospective as well as actual students in these groups.

**Quality enhancements in process or planned for AY08-09 and 09-10**

**iSkills** – the wide range of courses and self-study materials on offer by IS will be easier to search and book/obtain from Sept 2008 when the iSkills database comes into force. The development will complement the ISI service of web-based self-help materials for students in WebCT.

**Help!** – IS reviewed its help, advice and consultancy provision in summer 2008 and as a result is re-organising two of its Divisions (Library User Services and IT User Services) into a single Division (User Services) which will offer students greater legibility of help and support services. The Helpdesks and Helplines (email, phone, chat, etc) will be managed alongside each other and take responsibility for the quality of information in the new IS website; plus issue service alerts and ensure that the new IT-based services status page is fully effective. The Division will also lead on induction for incoming students (effectively induction on-demand although with special efforts in the lead-in to the arrival of new cohorts).

**Main Library Redevelopment** – the 5th & 6th Floors of the ML opened for AY08-09 and have received high levels of acclaim from students and staff. They are heavily used and the new lockers have been popular. In a IS satisfaction survey carried out in December ’08, 97% considered the space to be good or better with 74% rating it “excellent”. In early summer 2009 the Main Library Ground Floor will re-open with self-service book return at the entrance, renewed emphasis on effective book issue, and the HUB Collection close to the Helpdesk. The Café will provide an interface between social and study activities. In the following year, the 1st Floor will be completed with training rooms, and innovative group study modules and spaces.

**Communicating with students** – IS organised an all-day event with the other student services to assess options for working more closely together and ensuring better communication with students. This will result in more coordinated activities between the various services.

Jeff Haywood