

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

MINUTE OF A MEETING of the Sustainable IT Group held in the Ochil Room,
Charles Stewart House Geography on Wednesday 22 January 2020.

Present: Dave Gorman (Convenor), Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability
Fiona Carmichael, Computing Support Officer, Literatures, Languages & Cultures
Victoria Dishon, IT Liaison Officer, College of Science and Engineering
Dean Drobot, Head of Energy & Utilities Management
Sheila Fraser, Head of College IT, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Claire Graf, Joint Unions Liaison Committee representative
Peter Hayakawa, Procurement Policy Officer
Chris Litwiniuk, SRS Engagement Manager
Fraser Muir, CAHSS Chief Information Officer
Euan Murray, Head of Learning Spaces Technology
Graham Newton, Desktop Services Team Leader
Ruaridh Stern-Mackintosh, IT & Systems Manager, Students' Association
Rosheen Wallace, Students' Association VP Community
Tony Weir, Director IT Infrastructure
Graeme Wood, Enterprise Services Manager

In attendance: Lucie Scharre, for item 4

Apologies: Michelle Brown, Deputy Director of SRS
Kate Fitzpatrick, Waste & Recycling Manager
David Jack, Energy & Utilities Operations Manager
Jennifer Milne, Deputy CIO, Director Applications Development & Operations
Gemma Stenhouse, Procurement Manager, Information Services

1 Minute

A

The minute of 16 September 2019 was approved as a correct record.

Actions carried forward

Action – DG & RW to continue offline discussions of a possible pop-up drop-off point for students' personal electronic waste.

Action – CL & AH to get back to GW on changing the weighting of draft procurement questions.

Matters Arising

The Travel and Aviation Working Group (TAWG) had met twice so far, with representation from across the Colleges and support functions, and proposals would come forward in due course.

2 Sustainable IT Implementation Plan – Progress Report

B

The Engagement Manager introduced the paper, summarising the highlights and noting objectives which were not at green status.

A1 - Continue to develop an understanding of the energy consumption of IT infrastructure and equipment to establish scope for future measuring, monitoring and targeting

Now a good understanding of consumption had been reached, the Engagement Manager was keen to assess the appetite to initiate a measuring, monitoring and targeting routine for the energy consumption of IT infrastructure. SITG noted that only some areas were being measured (such as the data centres and ACF). It would be a significant challenge for the Schools to measure their consumption, and they would need a lot of support. Members were unclear on the value of isolating energy consumption from IT, which would be picked up in overall building usage. From an institutional viewpoint, the priority was ensuring the data centres' power use was efficient. Measuring and benchmarking at building level would be based on the whole load. The Group noted that it was possible to get reporting tools to establish how heavily a machine was being used, and there were reports that could be run in configuration manager. A baseline had been established (for managed devices, not covering servers or locally managed equipment). A report could be generated based on a mix of models, assuming operation 8 hours per day, 220 days per year (giving a worst case scenario figure). Once the Windows 10 roll out was complete the Group would look again at what could usefully be pulled out in terms of power usage, but with consumption decreasing members were ultimately unsure of the value of this exercise.

Action – CL to update the action point accordingly.

Action – RSM to follow up with Graham Newton on reports that would capture Students' Association machines.

A2 - Promote the Sustainable Campus Fund to all IT practitioners across the University

No IT-related applications had been received to date. The Campus Fund was evolving, retaining the bottom-up aspect where individuals could apply to fund projects in their area, but also broadening to include identifying more strategic blocks of work. One intervention strongly supported by the Group was investing in overhauling UoE's video conferencing facilities. The TAWG report would make clear the need for enhanced VC facilities.

Action – CL to remove objective A2.

A4 Carbon Scope – SRS to develop with Climate Strategy Implementation Plan

SITG noted that the Climate Strategy was being updated.

B6a Explore leasing options as they become available to reduce purchasing and enact Circular Economy principles

There was no update as yet on leasing options. The leasing question had been raised as part of two recent procurements of tablets and PC desktops. The Scottish Government had not yet given its response. Finance had some concerns about the scope of the three-year commitment involved, but the option could be explored further.

SITG noted that efforts were currently ongoing to secure £1.2M in funding for a Circular Economy Innovation Centre to build up UoE's capacity to debate these questions.

Action – CL to follow up with Graham Newton, to feed in to the HP meeting.

C1 Maintain the University's membership of Electronics Watch

Members raised concerns that this activity should not be recorded as at green status. In advance of the Barcelona conference, EW announced that they had facilitated the largest repayment for workers in ICT history – a major validation of the model. However, there were concerns that affiliates were not engaging with EW and were not using their terms and conditions. Current work was focused on mapping extractive industries and mining.

EW had requested the University's help in increasing engagement with the material they have produced and in getting other affiliates up to speed.

Members welcomed proof that the model worked. Conversations were ongoing in this space between ISG, Procurement and SRS. Finding the resource to support EW would be an issue, given that it was not core business. Involvement from students and academic colleagues would be needed.

Action – CL to updated the status to amber.

C2 Monitor the procurement of Fairphones through the University contract and report to the Group

In the absence of uptake, APUC had scrapped the framework. SRS would work with Procurement to establish if there was sufficient demand to set up a direct contract with Fairphone.

3 Personal Computing Policy & Future Sustainable IT Thinking

C

There had been a lot of activity in this area over the last few years, culminating in the 'Sustainable IT: Personal Computing Devices Policy' paper approved by University Executive in November. Support work was currently ongoing to better understand the impact, and how to gather information on client assets. Better inventorying would be needed to support a defined replacement schedule. With the procurement hubs starting to come online in November, there would be additional benefits particularly in terms of speed of delivery of devices.

The internal ISG Sustainable IT Group, which included representation from the Colleges, was also working on green data centres and on sustainable printing, with a new initiative starting soon. A move to 'pull' printing was being considered which should result in major paper savings. There would also be a move away from individual personal printers to large cloud-enabled MFDs (unless there was a proven need for a personal device). These changes would be included in a wide ranging consultation process.

An IT energy audit had recently been rerun, with the last full audit carried out in 2016. The ACF at Easterbush accounted for 80% of UoE IT energy usage. More thought was needed on how to handle energy in data centres in order to improve efficiency and containment. A Data Centre Steering Group had been set up and was currently looking into these issues. Energy saving from desktops had been paused until after the Windows 10 rollout.

4 Ecosia at the University of Edinburgh

D

Members welcomed this proposal from the Students' Association VP Community to adopt Ecosia more widely as a search engine on University computers. An increasing number of students were interested in using Ecosia, and there was greater awareness of the benefits. It was proposed therefore that Ecosia be used as the default for students using University computers. Similarly to Google, Ecosia used adverts to generate revenue, investing 80% of their surplus income in tree planting projects. If Ecosia were as big as Google, it would offset 15% of global emissions. Operating in 15 countries, they worked with local communities, only planting trees that would be useful to people in those areas, and training local people to take care of the trees. As a search engine it was robust and generally performed well, though was less suited to specialist searches. However, students and academics received training from the library pointing them to relevant specialist resources for these types of search.

The proposal would offer a number of benefits to the University, including helping to meet its zero by 2040 target. The University of Sussex had implemented Ecosia as their default

and were averaging 1,000 new trees per month, based on 30,000 students. The proposal aligned with core University business, including a number of biodiversity initiatives. There had been a clear commitment from University senior leadership to invest in forestry to offset carbon emissions, and the Principal had shown definite interest in engaging the staff and student body in tree planting (e.g. at graduations; by international students etc.)

The Group acknowledged that it was not the right body to approve the proposal, it would need to go through a formal governance process and be reviewed by Knowledge Strategy Committee, but SITG could provide advice and feedback. The Chief Information Officer expressed strong support for the proposal. The Desktop Services Team would be available to help make it a reality. SITG saw no insuperable IT technical issues that would prevent implementation, just some due diligence work. Reaching out to Sussex could help accelerate that process.

SITG discussed options for implementation, including installing Ecosia as the default on Microsoft Edge in place of easysearch, or offering it as an alternative to chrome. It could only be applied to new students, and not existing profiles. Following an initial trial, the proposal to use easysearch had gone through Knowledge Strategy Committee, with the Students' Association recommending a charity partner every few years (currently Trees for Life). Given the existing relationship with easysearch and the Turing Trust, it would be important to check which was the stronger priority. A trial period would be needed to unpack the implications. Decisions would need to be made on scope – whether this would just apply to library machines, or also be rolled out within the Schools, and whether it would apply to other devices such as the tablets available for students to borrow. There would be a parallel communications campaign to encourage individuals to install Ecosia on their devices. It would be important to validate Ecosia's claims and complete due diligence around the model they are operating, (e.g. by checking what happens to the trees at end of life), though this could run in parallel with the pilot. Concerns about accessibility would need to be followed up with the IT Disability Coordinator. It would be important to have senior level support and a coordinated communications campaign to ensure it was well received. It was recommended that an awareness raising campaign targeting individual users be carried out first, then an initial proposal be put forward for Ecosia to replace easysearch, using the same approach.

Action – GN to nominate an owner in his team for the technical side of the due diligence investigation.

5 IT Energy Footprint & Prioritised Projects for Energy Savings

This was covered under item 3 – 'Personal Computing Policy & Future Sustainable IT Thinking'.

6 Future Plans for the Group

The Director of SRS outlined recent changes in the area. For years the SRS Department had worked to persuade people to engage with these issues. Now they were becoming embedded across the board, integrated within the University's Strategic Plan, and soon to be included in all Court and University Executive papers. The Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer was committed to developments in this space. It was therefore timely to look at the future of the group, consider whether it should be folded in to developments within ISG, and discuss which elements would be important to retain.

Members had found the group valuable and were keen to see conversations around sustainable IT continue. It would be important to ensure that there was a standing item on sustainability at IT Committee. There was a sustainable IT programme within ISG that

could take these conversations forward. Bringing SRS, Estates the Students' Association, and representatives from the Colleges together had ensured that discussions reflected more of the University. Members valued this cross-section of viewpoints, as well as having a non-ISG chair, and raised concerns that this breadth would be lost. One possible solution would be to make the successor a sub-group of IT Committee, giving sufficient time and focus for in-depth discussion of the issues.

Action – All members to email any further thoughts to DG & TW.