Additional support for IT support staff

Notes from the IT Supporters discussion session held on 15 May 2007

Background

The relevant parts of the minutes of the Senior Management Board meeting of 10/4/06 were sent to IT Supporters on 1/11/06.
The points relating to IT support staff in schools and IT Services’ response were detailed in Mike Roch’s presentation to the Easter Conference:

IT support staff

Currently we have a self-subscription email list (though subscriptions must be approved), Not all staff employed to provide IT support are members.
Conclusion: ITS will work with HR to obtain a list of all staff paid to provide IT support.

Remedy

Remedy is the workflow management system used by ITS, FMD IT staff, Finance & RISIS. Work requests are entered into the system as tickets and progress is recorded. Tickets can be passed to others. Priorities, due dates etc can be set. Staff in ITS are organised into teams and tickets can be passed to a team rather than an individual (who might be away). ITS use Remedy to record staff leave and Remedy will give a warning if a ticket is about to be assigned to someone who is away.

There should be a net benefit to the University if IT support staff in other schools use the Remedy system. Tickets could be assigned by ITS to staff in schools and tickets could be submitted into ITS. For emailed fault reports and work requests, it would be possible to automatically generate a ticket and assign that ticket to the IT support staff in a school (the email could have the school name in the subject or be sent to a specific mail address, e.g. school-it-help@reading.ac.uk).

IT staff in schools could use Remedy to record all work requests. This is useful to allow work to be picked up by others in the team and also for reporting on work undertaken.

Conclusion: Remedy will be trialled with a few schools so that best modes of working can be identified.
Training

Training courses can be a cost effective way of learning new technologies (should be quicker than teaching yourself).

Qualifications can demonstrate competency in a particular area (e.g. management of PCs, servers, project management).

Costs for appropriate training for IT staff in schools will need to be paid by schools. It is the responsibility of Heads of School to develop their staff, but CSTD will be involved.

It was noted that the central funds for IT staff will be transferred to the school in four schools in a/y 2007-8. It is expected that others will follow in 2008-9.

HERA is the system chosen by the University for job grading (and therefore pay).

SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age, http://www.sfia.org.uk/) is a model for describing roles and responsibilities. It provides a way of determining required skills (and therefore training) to move to a different level in the same type of role or what is required to move to a different IT role.

**Conclusion:** ITS will produce a set of standard job descriptions for various roles which could pull in SFIA elements. Sussex has done a lot of work in this area. Standard descriptions should help with grading.

Line management & appraisals

There was discussion of the effectiveness of some schools at line managing and appraising IT staff.

**Conclusion:** ITS will provide information on training and development opportunities for IT support staff to Heads of School, probably via CSTD.

Directory of expertise

It would be really useful if there was a directory of expertise of IT support staff. It would make the IT support staff network much more useful. IT staff could contact IT staff in other schools for advice on particular topics. The directory could tie in to Remedy.

It was felt that most Heads of School should be for such a network as, even if their IT staff are providing occasional advice to other schools, their staff will be able to get advice from others if they need it.

Hotline

There was some discussion about bypassing the current Help system and phoning experts direct. There are problems with this for ITS: the person may be working on higher priority work; the work needs to be recorded so that we have a log in case anything goes wrong.

ITS Help now has a person that can handle systems queries. Also, if problems are urgent, ITS Help can quickly call on staff in other teams to assist.

The wider use of Remedy may solve this. Remedy could highlight mail messages from IT support staff or indicate that the person phoning is an IT supporter and the call could then be treated differently from other calls.
Conclusion: Revisit in the light of experience of rolling out Remedy.

**IT Supporters forum**

The it-supporters email list is reasonably well used. The archives of the list can be viewed by thread.

The wiki has not been much used by staff outside of ITS.

It was suggested that a forum would worth trying to increase communication within the IT Supporters network.

**Conclusion:** School of Systems Engineering will create a test system. This could be handed over to ITS to manage later.