

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses from Workshops

Introduction

The headings in the document cover some of the common themes from the workshops. There are things that have been documented that don't fit into one particular heading e.g. the success of clearing and registration, the quality of staff, the argument as to whether central or local provision is better, horizon scanning, the student experience, funding and resources, the morale of staff, culture and politics, a single CRM system, inconsistencies in service and fragmented systems. As the workshops progress, more headings and themes may emerge.

1. Cluster rooms

1.1 Strengths

Students have access to PCs 24/7 and can see pc availability through m.ncl.ac.uk. The clusters and concourses are bright and attractive. There is local responsiveness available to students in clusters.

1.2 Weaknesses

Cluster PCs are used for social networking when others are waiting to use them for academic reasons. Similarly, the cluster rooms are used for teaching purposes. Not all clusters have the same specialist software so it's not easy for a student to just pick any available cluster room. Cluster rooms in student accommodation do not have the same level of support as those on Campus.

2 Common desktop

2.1 Strengths

The standard common desktop attracted a lot of support and the campus management of it with up to date software. This is seen as a strength for both staff and students as there is freedom to use the software necessary to do the job. There is a lot of software available on request and it is not too restrictive on software use. Roaming profiles are a good idea and means you always can gain access to your work wherever you are on Campus. Security from virus' is maintained via controls on things that can be downloaded.

2.2 Weaknesses

H drive too small for storage of large confidential files. Roaming profiles isn't reliable and e mail and files get mixed up when moving from one version of windows to another. Admin rights are too restrictive and there is a time lag between requesting software and getting it downloaded. There is no element of trust for local users to download what they need, including instant messenger. The use of internet explorer as a browser is restrictive (why IE?) and having to access other browsers through RAS is a nuisance. IE7 in King's gate is further restrictive and can't be used with some applications. The timing of updates to the desktop can conflict with teaching times. Upgrades to software can be slow and if not done consistently leads to compatibility issues. There are examples of licences being purchased and software being loaded where ISS are not joined up in the process.

The lack of single sign on capability was mentioned at every workshop.

3 Communications

3.1 Strengths

Communications between ISS and computing officers is improving and growing organically from the initial impetus of NUIT. There are pockets of interaction and collaboration between ISS and their counterparts in ISS. Communications are good when systems are down. SAP superusers are complementary of the relationships they have with ISS as are the QuILT team and SDU.

3.2 Weaknesses

Internal campus communications in general is not perceived to be effective. Although improving, there is consensus and recurring theme that communications between ISS and computing officers isn't good enough. Also that customer relationship management is hindered due to a lack of business understanding. A feeling of a black hole in trying to resolve issues in that once it is with the service desk, people don't know who to contact. A number of staff have also commented that they thought communications had deteriorated since the reorg as lines of communication had been broken when key staff had changed, creating weak links between ISS and users. Developments, ideas and issues can only be raised via service desk and this exacerbates the problems with consultation and knowledge sharing. There is a general complaint that services are not signposted well in ISS. A couple of sessions mentioned that sometimes things fall between the gap between ISS and ESS.

Many workshops mentioned that there was a lack of communication from ISS about policies and procedures and that there was not much relationship management or named support to link between areas.

4 Governance

4.1 Strengths

The workshops were seen as a good way of evolving a governance structure and consultation is appreciated. Tied into this is the positive acceptance of Digital Literacy being one of the main strategic issues that needs to be addressed and that the IT strategy was recognised as being important.

4.2 Weaknesses

The main theme expressed was the lack of balance between governance, compliance and flexibility with systems and software. This is exacerbated by the lack of a governance "big stick" that ensures compliance to regulations.

A lack of transparency and resource allocation is perceived in the prioritisation and consultation of developments. Also a lack of strategy in; research computing; employee self service; social media; T & L systems architecture (and E pedagogy); document management and device support strategy does not support a University wide IT strategy. A hindrance to good governance was expressed as an internal political one. There is also a challenge of IT developments always being ahead of policy.

5 Infrastructure

5.1 Strengths

All the workshops were in agreement that the network is safe, secure, robust and resilient. It works in the background and is invisible to users.

There has been an improvement in wifi coverage and where it exists it is good. Broadband speed is also good. Email is reliable and robust with good access via the web. The infrastructure is flexible and can be accessed via a variety of devices. The NUmed network and wifi are as good as on Newcastle campus.

5.2 Weaknesses

The main criticism is wifi and that it is patchy in some areas, particularly older buildings (Politics, Education and Agriculture) and it is not a good example of a “green” approach to IT. Students do not have wifi in accommodation and the network speed is slow. Questions have been raised about whether Eduroam would be a better wifi solution. There are criticisms around the storage capacity quota for staff e mail.

There isn't an overall architecture vision for the University or a strategy on virtual servers, cloud storage and applications and their use. The bandwidth can be restrictive for some heavy users and the lack of HPC capacity is restrictive. ISS dropbox is too small and restrictive in that it is used internally. Singapore is badly served with network facilities. Server purchasing is not joined up.

6 Innovation

6.1 Strengths

IT staff are flexible, knowledgeable and forward thinking. The University facilitates research in its liberal availability of software and hardware and it recruits creative, talented and innovative staff and students who attract external funding for innovation in technologies. From this there are pockets of creativity and innovation that are people driven. The University has encouraged innovation through the appathon competition for students.

6.2 Weaknesses

There is a general lack of encouragement, space and time for innovation although local things don't always add value and are difficult to support. There is no room for innovation and failure. It is difficult to “sell” innovation as it happens on the sidelines and isn't rewarded. There are no places set aside for networking (a sandbox experience).

7 Multi platforms and BYOD (bring your own device)

7.1 Strengths

Support for different devices and platforms is acknowledged and RAS facilitates the flexibility of approach. Bringing your own device is easy as is signing into University wifi.

7.2 Weaknesses

There is a lack of strategy for device support. Apple device and mobile support is poor. Local IT staff try to support multi devices, there are specialists, but they are thin on the ground. There is a lack of communication and interaction between mac users that could be utilised for support and advice.

There is a perception of a “corporate” negative view of Macs and a lack of flexibility in the support of them.

There is recognition that BYOD brings security and compliance challenges.

8 Service desk

8.1 Strengths

The service desk is known point of contact for all staff and has improved in its service offered despite the limitations of the software. Service desk staff are available by phone and e mail 24/7 and are friendly and helpful. It is an efficient service.

8.2 Weaknesses

People ringing the service desk sometimes just need a quick fix as they know what the problem is but they still have to join the service desk queue as they don't have named contacts or “gold card” access. A criticism is that responses are anonymous and calls get closed without resolution or feedback and the speed of response is slower than support offered in academic units. There is a perception that for none standard issues the service desk doesn't know where to forward them too and that it should be able to handle standard issues themselves. Also that the responses from service desk are often inconsistent. The service desk is under resourced, slow and not fit for purpose for the number of systems it supports. It does not have service level agreements with its stakeholders. There are no web forms or self service for logging issues with the service desk.

9 Social media

9.1 Strengths

9.2 Weaknesses

There is a lack of direction in the use of social media, strategy, etiquette and awareness guidance in trying to communicate with students and how we get into their world.

10 T & L

10.1 Strengths

ISS engage well in the Teaching and learning area and have a strategy to support this . There has been good investment in facilities in T & L spaces. E learning systems like adobe virtual class are good. There has been a lot of positive feedback on AV services.

10.2 Weaknesses

There aren't enough smartboards around campus. T & L systems are following an agenda and are proactive to customer needs. There is no strategy for E pedagogy. Lecturers don't know what systems to use for what and are not using them optimally.

11 Website

11.1 Strengths

The external top level view of the web is consistent and there are good quality web pages. The look of the new websites got positive feedback as did the web app m.ncl.ac.uk. The website is easy to use.

11.2 Weaknesses

There are many broken links on the website caused by poor document management. The intranet doesn't have enough resource to support it and keep it up to date and it is badly organised. No one appears to own it. Google is poorly tuned to the website and doesn't appear to work properly. The web programme "contribute" is clunky and it isn't clear who is responsible for updates in which areas and local support is patchy. Campus maps are static, dull and are not interactive. There are too many individual websites and the quality of them is not consistent, not a good digital impression for visitors and not on a par with other institutions. Navigation needs organising better as you need knowledge of jargon to find things. Video is not supported on the web properly.

12 Data management

12.1 Strengths

Files can be accessed from home or anywhere in the world as required. Data feels like it is being kept safe and secure. Server space and storage is good for administrators. The network drive system is idiot proof – if you delete files by accident they can be recovered. Data storage for research data is good in some areas.

12.2 Weaknesses

We don't value our data enough and don't tell people about data housekeeping. There is patchy awareness of research data storage requirements and curation. Different requirements exist for different funders and policy is slow to surface in this area. Data management is inconsistent across campus, leading to security risks. Communications and advice are poor in the options for storage and archiving and costs. Project funding does not always include the costs of data management, or is not applied for. There is no long term strategy for data storage that guarantees continuity. Access to "big data" storage is limited.

13 Research computing support

13.1 Strengths

Local staff support researchers well, is responsive and dedicated. The research information service is good. We have systems that enable research projects. Researchers can buy the equipment they need to do the job.

13.2 Weaknesses

Central research support is poor. Not sharing software licences and no network for knowing who is using what software. No focus on external collaboration tools. A lack of HPC stops us getting a competitive edge with student and staff recruitment. Hardware is of variable quality and age due to reliance on funding for purchase of equipment and if own devices are brought in then licences and support a problem.

There is a lack of consultation with ISS about IT requirements for projects and costs. A silo of expertise exists in academic units.

Researchers can buy whatever kit they like from research grants, whether they need that particular kit or not.

14 Training

14.1 Strengths

Training and user support provided by the SAP team and SDU, including drop in training. The Faculty of Medical sciences provides IT training for students.

14 Weaknesses

Lack of refresher sessions for IT releases. Training and niche requirements – conflict between internal and external providers and who is best to deliver the training. There is a general deficiency in technical advanced training for IT staff that would give people a chance to upskill. The approach to IT training of skills is too rigid. Communications and rollouts not always efficiently linked up with training. No coherent or mandatory IT induction exists for academic and admin staff. Microsoft training is generic rather than tailored to needs through drop ins. Training needs modernising, we are doing things the old way. A disjointed training community exists .

15 Digital literacy

15.1 Strengths

People are willing to volunteer to offer local support in their areas for people who need it. There is high commitment and engagement with IT training. Local IT staff support and responsiveness, where available, facilitates sharing of knowledge. There is knowledge and expertise in staff e.g. QuILT and learning technologies. There are a range of people interested in change and the overall skill set is strong.

15.2 Weaknesses

There is no clear strategy for digital literacy. There is a general lack of awareness of new technology. People don't know what systems to use or how to use them, a feeling of not knowing what you need to know, or knowing where to find out what you don't know. A shared knowledge base does not exist or central register of experts in particular systems. Some staff lack basic IT skills and we don't test them at the point of recruitment. There is no specialist IT induction for academic staff and the IT induction that does exist isn't mandatory. We don't do enough for researchers and are not reaching staff with no email or network access. Basic IT skills are missing in some areas.

16 Systems

16.1 Strengths

Overall the main comments were that we have good systems but There was consistently good feedback for wiki system, Med Sci VLE and AV services.

16.2 Weaknesses

We are not integrating systems enough leading to duplication of data and lack of clarity in what systems should be used for what purpose. There was criticism about ISS and reluctance to use open source. A general complaint was that there was a lack of support/ use of dropbox and sharepoint. There is a lack of strategy in systems development.

System	Strengths	Weaknesses
RAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General availability • Availability of software • Flexible • Useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not good off campus • Slow • Clunky • Poor solution • Not benchmarked • bloated
SAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Reliable • Aids efficiency and financial analysis • Robust • Integrated • Everything in one place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and having to retrieve data via admin staff • User interface • Complicated • Rely on 3rd party software • Expensive • Used as a “catch all” • Licence availability • Lack of self service • Restricts web browsers • Not good for student records • No exit strategy • Gaining access for new staff • Over reliance on SAP
Blackboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good VLE • Good support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity around copyright • Locked into supplier and therefore lack of flexibility • Too restrictive – can’t see other modules • Stifles creativity • Not enough storage space • Not used consistently • Archaic • Lacks support for maximising it’s usage • Security of e assessment
MyProject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best of breed solution • Sector leading research admin systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clunky • Lack of functionality • Lack of consultation • Not listening to feedback
NESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NESS team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for staff and component marks • Post component marks is less intuitive and has lost functionality • Developments slow • Permissions slow to set up • Not resourced well • Cant see past assignments, contains bad data • Not user friendly
MyImpact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In house systems better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clunky • Lack of functionality • User interface poor • Doesn’t cover post docs and Phds • Slow development • Lack of consultation time

Managers Desktop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and functionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clunky • Duplication for PDRs
E Expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast payments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clunky • Lack of functionality • Exchange rates out of date or not in use • Lack of documentation for self help
P2P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End to end system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clunky • Slow • Too many clicks • Cant amend mistakes easily • Lack of functionality • Loss of control with invoicing • Times out • Inflexible for reporting
Recap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use • Good system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity around copyright • Not sophisticated enough for video • Academic engagement
Microsoft Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training from SDU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling out programmes in different versions • Licence purchase and installation • Slow to upgrade
E2R	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not compatible with selectors (access to docs and pdfs)
E Print	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search facility is poor
Document management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strategy for integration, automation and storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fit for purpose • Lack of webform and e signature functionality – need to print and sign form for ISS