IS Services Satisfaction Survey
What matters to you in IT ...

In late February 2013, IS Services, working with oversight from the School of Computer Science and Statistics, launched our second annual Satisfaction Survey. The survey was primarily to help us:

- find out how staff and students rate the services and support provided by IS Services;
- ascertain factors that contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction;
- give staff and students a voice to influence IS Services priorities and potential initiatives for our continual service improvement programme.

Participation in the survey was very good with a total of 1537 responses:

- 457 staff (13% of the overall number of staff)
- 1082 students (6% of the overall population of students)

The overall level of satisfaction with IS Services is very positive and has shown an increase since our last survey. A total of 80.5% of staff and 73% of students were either ‘Very Satisfied’ or ‘Satisfied’ with IS Services. This was an increase on overall levels of satisfaction of 5% for staff and 15% for students from the 2012 results. Overall, we saw a fall in the level of dissatisfaction by 3.3% for staff and 10% for students.

We are continuing work on the analysis of the data collected and we will publish the full results in the coming weeks.

All participants could enter the survey prize draw. The prize draw winner, pictured below, is Alison Merikangas, a PhD student from the department of Psychiatry.

As always the feedback will be invaluable in assisting us to improve the services we offer and we wish to thank all who took time to participate in this year’s satisfaction survey.
Defining high performance research computing at TCD

Computing plays an active role in our daily lives. Spreadsheets and search engines, email, mobile phones and tablets shape our lives and support the work we do. While we can clearly see the social impact of personal computing, there is a whole other world of technical and research computing that enables advances in science, engineering, medicine and the humanities.

High performance computing (HPC) harnesses the power of hundreds of computers at the same time to tackle a problem that is too complicated to be solved with a single computer and is used in many industries to avoid carrying out expensive or dangerous experiments. Research computing falls in the space between personal computing and HPC. It facilitates the advancement of complex research and utilises computing services in ways that extend beyond simple spreadsheets and word documents.

HPRC in Trinity College

The High Performance and Research Computing unit (HPRC) in IS Services has been providing compute, data management and visualisation services for over 15 years. Users of this service cover all three faculties, 16 schools and many of the College’s strategic research themes.

We are available to discuss any research and IT topics with students and research staff who may need to avail of HPRC services. Drop into one of our workshops on the first Friday of every month from 11am to 12pm in the Lloyd Institute to see if we can help your work.

Service and Support for College

HPRC currently manage a range of compute clusters and storage systems for College generally and specific research groups. The Lonsdale and Kelvin computer systems are available for all members of the College community and their external collaborators. In recent times HPRC has become active in supporting the Digital Humanities and several major initiatives are now hosted by the unit including the Irish Chancery Letters, the Mary Martin Diary and the Library’s Digital Collections.

(... continued on next page)
High Performance Research Computing at Trinity College

Also in 2012, the team became involved in two new data management projects for the Memory Research Unit in TCIN and the Motor Neurone Research group in the School of Medicine. Along with existing projects with the Prostate Cancer Research Consortium, TCIN’s MRI archive and the IMM, data management and long term storage have become key areas for HPRC over the last few years.

Teaching and Training

Teaching and training courses within HPRC supply research staff and students with a thorough understanding of computational techniques for science, engineering and the humanities. To this end, they provide for-credit teaching at postgraduate level in the School of Mathematics’ MSc in High Performance Computing as well as supervising student research projects. The unit also provides an intensive week-long course in Risk Quantification as part of the School of Business’ MSc in Finance.

In addition, we hold half-day to week-long training courses on various topics throughout the year. You can find more information on these not-for-credit courses on our training resources page.

Research and Outreach

During the last year, the team has been active in its own research in HPC tools and systems. The group were invited to present at the annual SLURM user meeting in Barcelona to users of open source software used in supercomputers. We have also been in discussions with European partners and some commercial organisations on a research programme around digital preservation and long-term storage using the Ceph platform. Some staff in the unit are funded from external research funding.

The unit regularly hosts interns from other 3rd level institutions in Europe as part of their final year studies. These students have contributed to projects in Physics, Engineering, Finance, the Library and the Digital Repository of Ireland project.
Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery
Protecting day-to-day IT from disaster ...

Many of the teaching, administrative and research activities in College are heavily dependent on the numerous IT networks and services provided and supported by IS Services. The wireless network, College websites, email and printing services to name just a few are all essential to the day-to-day operation of College life.

With this in mind, IS Services are currently engaged in a project to ensure that all these services are properly protected from disaster events such as floods, fires, cyber-attacks and power failures in a comprehensive way which will minimise any downtime or disruption to staff and students.

IS Services have developed a ‘Disaster Recovery Strategy’ which we plan to implement which will involve running services from multiple data centre locations on campus as well as further protecting all important College information by ensuring that copies are regularly backed up off campus just in case.

The College IT Security Officer is also preparing a ‘Business Continuity Plan’ for IS Services. This is a document which sets out everyone’s roles and responsibilities and records the detailed steps which are necessary to recover information and resume services in the event of a major disaster in one of our computing facilities. This is a long term project involving input from every area in IS Services and many of our customers. We will keep you updated on our progress along the way.

Information Systems Services
eLearning with Blackboard Learn ...

In September 2012, College launched an upgraded virtual learning environment (VLE) known as Blackboard Learn 9.1 (mymodule.tcd.ie).

The upgrade offered a number of teaching and technical benefits to staff and students:

- enhanced communication, collaboration and alert tools;
- customisable, easy to use visual interface;
- improved workflow that supports educational efficiency;
- a document management system which allows easy access to desktop documents and files;
- integrated web tools and technologies, as well as access to modules from any browser and from any where in the world.

The upgrade included migrating staff and students from existing VLE systems, WebCT and the Moodle pilot, to Blackboard Learn 9.1. The usage statistics imply that staff and students are embracing the upgraded VLE; it is being used far more than was anticipated. 4,100 daily logins were recorded in March 2013, with 84,500 unique logins in February 2013. These numbers reflect a very positive development for eLearning in College. As the upgraded VLE is seeing far higher usage than WebCT and the Moodle pilot, it may be necessary to increase the licensed services for the academic year 2013/14.

For more information regarding Blackboard 9.1, please contact bblearn@tcd.ie.

GOOD LUCK FOR EXAMS
IS Services would like to take this opportunity to wish students well in the final weeks of the Academic year as they prepare for and sit their exams!