

University of St Andrews

# COMPUTING LABORATORY

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## NEWSLETTER

January 1984



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## USER REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE

The Computer User Representatives Committee met on 15th December 1983. Dr Amson was re-appointed as Secretary, and the convener, Dr Shepherd, welcomed the new representatives and also Mr Shields as the new Director.

Mr Shields declared his intention to maintain the User Services at their current percentage of staff resource in the Laboratory in both mainframe and microprocessor areas. Plans were being laid for a University Networking facility, and plans were to be made for the mid-term enhancement of VAX facilities. It was hoped to provide a colour graphics facility in the next year. He asked that the Laboratory be kept informed of current user needs. He considered that the current purchase of terminals for departmental use could inhibit the acquisition of intelligent terminals - which would relieve pressure on the central VAX facilities, especially towards the end of its ten year life span. He concluded by referring to the complaints procedure (described in the December Newsletter).

In the following discussion, mention was made of the Arts departments' difficulty in funding any terminals from Class Grants - it was necessary to explore possible additional funding; the Representatives were urged to raise this matter at the Faculty level. The University needed an imaginative policy towards the growth area of intelligent terminals used for word processing and data preparation. Co-ordination was required to avoid a large number of incompatible systems, with departments possibly taking on unexpected (and expensive) servicing, insurance and maintenance commitments; advice was available from the Laboratory. It was agreed that the convener should emphasise at the next Computer Committee meeting the urgent need for University policy decisions on word processors.

Charges for consumables: The Director agreed to look into a reported case where an item supplied by the Laboratory had cost more than from an outside source. However, the centralised operation of an advantageous terminal maintenance contract was warmly approved.

Data entry service priorities: There was criticism of the occasional 'monopolisation' of the service by the entry of e.g. Multiple Choice Examination Results. Users were reminded that the MCER occasions were booked and known well in advance, and they were advised to book their own periods as early as possible. The Director proposed publishing the times of known congestion periods, for the benefit of casual users. Optical mark readers should be investigated.

VAX response time: A statistical survey of VAX usage had been started, with a view to improving the service. Little could be done about hardware tuning of the system: the problems of fragmentation of disk files were explained - users were recommended to work habitually with smaller (segments of) files during development stages to help speed up the response time.

Tape queue priorities: Although the Laboratory started the tape batch queue each morning, priority was switched to the disk dumping procedures at 9 am regardless of whether the queue was empty - to the inconvenience of users who habitually stored and backed up large quantities of data to tape. The Laboratory was asked to provide notification on-line whenever the tape queue was to become unavailable, and restart the queue as soon as possible (again notifying users of the restart time).

Christmas vacation: Some members of staff would call in to check on the services during the vacation when the Laboratory was formally closed (a state enforced by the University to save heating costs).

Reports of meetings: It was agreed to make an informal report of User Committee meetings to the Laboratory and Staff Newsletters and to announce forthcoming meetings. It was noted that the User Committee would now be holding more regular meetings, interleaved with meetings of the Computer Committee (which was now required to meet twice a year).

Changes in default protection: The recent changes, made to prevent access to users' directories, had caused some difficulties especially for teaching purposes amongst Computational Science staff. It was agreed to permit Computational Science students to revert to the earlier protection levels.

Data protection legislation: The consequences of recent legislation would soon reach users in the University - affecting for instance the holding of record files on students, examination results, etc. Advice on this was available from the National Computing Centre. The Laboratory was asked for help with communicating this advice to users.

(Note: see the item circulated with this Newsletter, reprinted from the IUCC Bulletin).

Terminal and line connections: The Director reported that the Laboratory had initiated work which would satisfy all known requests for these connections in the next few months. The convener asked for a detailed statement on the distribution of terminals in the University for the next meeting of the Committee.

Next Meeting: Thursday 1st March 1984 at 4 pm in room 2 of John Honey Building.

## STANDREWS HELP FILE

If you want to know what extra commands, packages and other programs are available on the VAX systems at St Andrews, you should use

HELP STANDREWS

It is worthwhile referring to this HELP file from time to time as it is frequently updated; it lists the local additions under various headings and refers you to further HELP files on the different topics.

## SPSS-X

The statistical package SPSS-X is now available on SAVA only (we have a licence to run on only one processor). This is a major extension of the SPSS package which is currently available on SAVA. The proprietors of the package, SPSS Inc., intend that SPSS-X will eventually replace SPSS and they will shortly stop their support of the latter package. However, the Computing Laboratory will continue to make SPSS available until such time as there is negligible use of it. In future, Laboratory courses will be given on SPSS-X and users will be encouraged to move over to the new package.

While SPSS-X has all the facilities of SPSS 9.1 (the current version of SPSS on SAVA) it has much better data handling facilities. For example, the rigid requirement of SPSS that each case has exactly the same number of variables has been relaxed. The major drawback, as far as existing SPSS users are concerned, is that the "control cards" required are different in the two packages. A User Note, similar to that on SPSS, will be produced when time permits. In the meantime, users can refer to the copies of the (bulky!) "SPSS-X User's Guide" available in the Computing Laboratory User Area and the terminal sites in the Library, Mathematics and Psychology.

Users should note that the SPSS-X Graphics Option is not available at St Andrews; this is only supplied at additional cost, which was too high to warrant the purchase of this option. Also, the link to DATATRIEVE will not become available until release 3.4 of VAX/VMS is mounted.

Information may be obtained on-line, using:

HELP SPSS-X

## QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE STATISTICAL FACILITIES IN THE NAG LIBRARY

In the next few months plans will be drawn up by NAG for improvements to, and future developments of, the statistical content of the NAG library. In order to do this, NAG would like to have some indication of the current use of statistical routines, what improvements could be made (e.g. in structure or presentation) and what developments should take place in the future.

If you wish to send your comments to NAG you can obtain a copy of the questionnaire from the Advisory Service. Even if you do not currently use the statistical routines in NAG, your comments could still be useful to NAG.

## BBC MICROCOMPUTER

The Inter-University Purchasing Committee has recently negotiated a discount on the price of the BBC Microcomputer with Acorn Computers. Discounts are also available on single and dual disc drives. Further details are available from either Phil Robertson (ext. 8112) or Bruce Campbell (ext. 8114) in the Computing Laboratory.

## Sample Prices (inc. of VAT)

BBC Model B	£340
+ disc interface	£410
Single (100K) disk drive	£185

## MICROCOMPUTER DEMONSTRATION

Tyseal Ltd. have agreed to lend an Apricot Microcomputer for a couple of days. The provisional dates are 31st January and 1st February. There will not be any formal presentation or display but interested users are welcome to try out the system. Further details from either Phil Robertson (ext. 8112) or Bruce Campbell (ext. 8114) in the Computing Laboratory.

## TEN YEARS AGO

In January 1974, the present monthly Newsletter was started. Previously there had been occasional attempts to reach users with a News-sheet, but this was the first regular publication.

From time to time, we shall include items of interest from Newsletters of ten years ago - mainly to point out similarities or differences between the affairs of the Laboratory then and now.

The January 1974 Newsletter included information about the current IBM 360/44 system (with a whole 256K main memory!) and the system timetable which was complicated owing to different system requirements: 44MFT was run in the morning and evening, and RAX (the timesharing system) was run in the afternoons; overnight, 44MFT or 360/OS was run by operators on a night-shift.

A note was published on the results of a survey of users carried out in October 1973, when there were 200 registered users - with only 1 in Physiology and 4 in Psychology in those days! (The present user population numbers over 1700).

## VAX SERVICEABILITY FIGURES

Overall service from 7 am 10th October to 7 am 7th November 1983.

	SAVA hrs.mins	SAVB hrs.mins
Period covered time	672.00	672.00
Scheduled preventive maintenance	0.00	0.00
Scheduled software maintenance	0.00	0.00
Scheduled back-up dumps	0.00	0.00
Scheduled systems development	7.40	7.50
User service	664.00	663.45

Time lost

Unscheduled maintenance	0.00	0.25 (2)
Hardware faults	0.20 (1)	0.00
Software faults	0.00	0.00
Other lost time	0.00	0.00
System recovery time	0.00	0.00

SAVA: (1) RM03 fault, systems disc swapped to DRA1 so FS could work on Physical Drive 0.  
Reboots in period = 4, 1 bug check, 1 for systems development slot, 1 to move systems disk to physical drive 1 and 1 to move it back to drive 0 once it had been fixed.

SAVB: (2) WCS boards replaced on two occasions. Reboots = 4, 2 hardware faults plus 2 systems development.

Overall service from 7 am 7th November to 7 am 5th December 1983.

	SAVA hrs.mins	SAVB hrs.mins
Period covered time	672.00	672.00
Scheduled preventive maintenance	3.10	3.10
Scheduled software maintenance	0.00	0.00
Scheduled back-up dumps	2.00	2.00
Scheduled systems development	7.50	0.00
User service	664.25	663.10

Time lost

Unscheduled maintenance	0.00	1.00 (2)
Hardware faults	0.00	2.25 (3)
Software faults	0.00	0.00
Other lost time	0.45 (1)	0.15 (4)
System recovery time	0.00	

SAVA: (1) Reboots in period =7, 3 fatal bug-checks, 2 to clear G80 jobs were in MWAIT state, 1 for PM and 1 for Systems Development.

SAVB: (2) WCS boards replaced  
(3) DRA0, Systems Pack corrupted 2.15 hrs, re-boot as console hung  
(4) Bug-check PSIACP process  
Reboots =5 PM, WCS, DRA0, Hung console & bug-check.