Information Technology

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The year began with an overhaul of the IT suite. Benches were constructed in the user area, populated with eight flat screen Dell systems - two with scanners. Furniture and carpeting were replaced and a projector screen installed from the roof, creating an IT training area. A PC set up and maintenance corral, a separate alcove to house the central printers, and additional office space were built and the remaining offices redecorated. The computational biology programme is now alongside IT. Finally, a secure server room was constructed with air conditioning, computer cabinets and heavy duty shelving. The efforts of Engineering and Maintenance are much appreciated.

The decision was made to install Windows XP pro OS on all new desktops while leaving existing desktops on Windows NT. Staff received training in the new OS, which has lived up to its reported improved functionality and reliability. The Standard network operating system, Novell Netware v3.12 was upgraded to v5.1, providing many advantages, not least a reboot taking a matter of minutes, not the 45 minutes with v3.12! Two Dell servers were purchased, one as standby should the main server irrecoverably crash. Back up strategy was enhanced with a central facility for all the Institute's systems. The main Unix fileserver was replaced with a faster, larger capacity system. Network management tools were purchased to observe network performance and rapidly troubleshoot problem devices.

Cygnet Solutions Ltd were commissioned to design and implement SIMS (SCRI Information Management System). There were four key requirements: reduce the amount of paper based administration, manage documentation better, improve collaborative working and increase the use of web content to publicise work externally. The solution has a new platform, Windows 2000 Advanced Server running MS Exchange and Sharepoint Portal Server on separate machines. Activedition was chosen as the content management system for both internet and intranet sites. The first prototype of the Portal was rolled out to a pilot group in spring 2003 followed by the new internet site.

Figure 1 The refurbished IT user area.

Honours projects continued with the University of Abertay, producing three excellent outcomes. In the first, students created new search, management and data submission web-pages for DRASTIC (http://www.drastic.org). In the second, Living Field, the students created a prototype web-site aimed at primary schools. This has been well received and should be ready for release in 2004. The third involved T-RFLP (Terminal-Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism), a high throughput, genetic fingerprinting technique that quantifies the proportions of micro-organisms present in a sample, used in studying effects on the diversity of microbial populations. The students produced an award winning, Visual Basic program that automates this complex search.

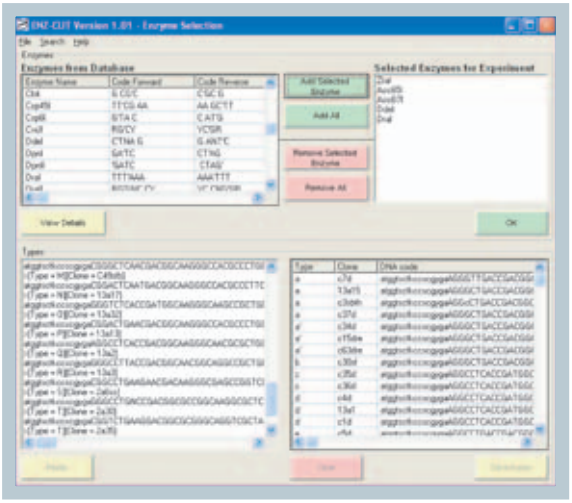

Figure 2 Enzyme cutting program for designing T-RFLP cocktails.