

Information Technology

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The year 2000 began with the re-organisation of the IT unit, following the Institute restructuring in the previous year. The Bioinformatics element was separated, with Dr David Marshall, the then head of IT, moving on to commit all his efforts to this field within the Genomics Unit. Dr Bruce Marshall was appointed Head of Unit, with his time split 50% between IT and his scientific activities in the Unit of Vegetation Systems. A new post was created for the role of PC specialist, in line with the recommendations of the review carried out by BBSRC in 1999, which brought the compliment of IT staff to four full and one part time.

During the past few years, the network infrastructure, which was installed in 1991, was beginning to show serious signs of strain, due to larger numbers of computers and the increasing complexity of the technology. A case was made to upgrade much of the old infrastructure to a modern, industry standard, and a capital grant of £300,000 was awarded by SEERAD. A network specification was planned with the Engineering and Maintenance Unit, and Computer Cable Networks, Scone, was appointed as contractor to carry out the installation. The new network covers the six major laboratory blocks and uses Cat 6 class cabling, which is connected to workgroup switch stacks in each building. These stacks operate at 100MBS and the backbone, which uses existing fibre optic cable, has been upgraded to run Gigabit ethernet. A new Cisco 6506 switch was purchased, which acted as the central switch for the Gigabit ethernet, and the connection to the main servers was also upgraded to Gigabit. This work has involved major disruption to the Institute, as whole corridors have had to be cleared, but due to the good co-operation between IT, Engineering and Maintenance, the contractors, and individual scientists, this work has been carried out with very few problems.

An IT interface group, consisting of the members of the IT Unit and representatives from each Division, was set up. The purpose of this group is to communi-

cate the work and plans of the IT Unit to the scientific staff and to get feedback from the other Units on any IT issues they might have.



The issue of computer viruses continues to grow; much time, which could be better spent, being used to deal with actual virus infections and setting up an Institute-wide system for virus detection and disinfection. Due to the Institute not adopting certain mail clients, we were largely unaffected by some of the well-publicised virus outbreaks which have crippled many companies and educational establishments over the last year.

The SCRI Intranet system has now become one of the major methods of communication within the Institute, replacing much of the function of the notice boards and other means of communication.