

Information Technology

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The SCRI Information Management System (SIMS) was rolled out in Summer 2003 (Fig. 1). It represents a major change in the Institute, both in the technology and culture. The three major components, Exchange 2000, Sharepoint Portal and Activediton Content Management System (CMS), all run on Microsoft 2000 Advanced Servers. A basic email service provided by Pegasus Mail is replaced with a comprehensive collaborative tool incorporating advanced email facilities, shared diaries and tasks, and on-line organising of meetings and resources. Every PC in the Institute was visited, brought up to appropriate patch levels, Outlook 2002 installed and older systems decommissioned. Sharepoint Portal Server provides a single point of access to all electronic information in the organisation. It replaces the traditional intranet - simple web pages with limited access for updating. The Portal enhances the efficacy with which information is shared and is inclusive; all staff are encouraged to contribute. Currently its main functions are to manage documents (version control, quality assurance through approval, advanced search facilities for retrieval) such as policy, health and safety, committee and theme, programme and project documents, electronic forms, funding opportunities and announcements. The CMS provides a means of maintaining a common style throughout the SCRI's Internet and Intranet web-sites, while allowing non-specialist staff to enter content directly from their

desktops using a simple word-processing-like editor. Traditionally, all information had to pass through a single person to ensure a common style. As the migration to the new site progresses, Visual Aids are able to focus on the quality, design and timeliness of content rather than transcribing content for others, and widen the role of the web for SCRI in knowledge transfer.

Training is essential for effective uptake. A comprehensive programme was carried out in the summer of 2003. There were three courses: an overview of the SIMS concepts, the use of Outlook and finally the SIMS Portal navigation and document management. Over 90 per cent of all SCRI staff attended. Outlook was an instant success, with staff being switched over during their training sessions. The Portal has taken longer but is now the preferred location for all formal documents, electronic forms, all new announcements and committee information. The functionality of SIMS will continue to evolve, driven by the needs of the organisation and as staff become more familiar with it. Future training and developments are being lead by the SIMS Champion group which includes Paul Grimmond, our new SIMS systems administrator bringing fresh ideas from industry.

Software compliance is a serious issue. Recent cases of illegal software use have resulted in large fines being charged to the offending organisations. SCRI reviewed its policies and procedures in consultation with the Federation Against Software Theft (FAST). Monitoring software is a key and challenging activity of compliance. The Centennial software auditing tool was purchased. It checks all systems connected to our network and informs us of all new software installed since last audited. Raising user awareness of the issues and their responsibilities is also important.

The Institute continues to invest in the infrastructure of IT. The central data switch was upgraded and a new blade purchased with a further sixteen gigabit fibre optic interface. Most of the remaining, more remote buildings are now connected at this higher data rate and the last of the external laboratory buildings upgraded to Category 6 cabling. The upgrade to Netware V5.1 network operating system was also completed. However, with the introduction of the

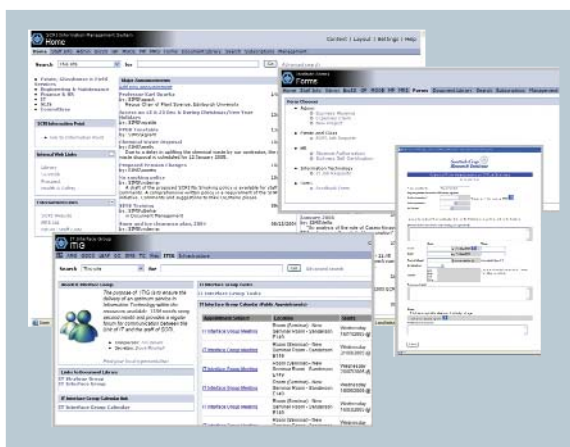


Figure 1 SIMS (SCRI Information Management System) A single point of access which includes document management, announcements, electronic forms and committee workings etc

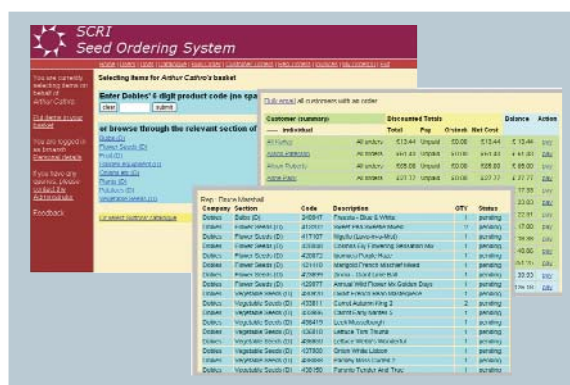


Figure 2 SCRI's on-line seed ordering where profits go to charity. An Honours Project in Computer Science with the University of Abertay.

Microsoft server platform for SIMS the longer term future of Novell at SCRI is uncertain.

Our collaboration with the Computing Honours Projects at the University of Abertay continued to be a fruitful source of new developments. Two new web-database applications were delivered to SCRI. One provides staff with an on-line means of placing job requests and tracking their progress, while IT staff address them and review the nature and scope of jobs that arise. The second provides staff with an on-line means of ordering seeds (Fig. 2). This is a long established service which offers staff significant discounts with "profits" going to charity. Historically, it involved considerable manual effort, now gone.