



Research Computing Governance Group

Tuesday 14th October 2014 at 14.00
Room 103, 1st Floor, The Podium Building
1 Eversholt Street
London NW1 2DN

Chair:

1. John Brodholt [JBr] – Dept. of Earth Sciences

Present:

2. Nick Achilleos [NA] – Dept. of Physics & Astronomy
3. Mat Disney [MD] – Dept. of Geography
4. Clare Gryce [CG] – Head of Research Computing and Facilitating Services, ISD
5. Nik Kaltsoyannis [NK] – Chair of Computational Resource Allocation Group (CRAG)
6. Angelos Michaelides [AM] – Thomas Young Centre (TYC)
7. Jacky Pallas [JP] – Research Platforms, OVPR
8. Alberto Roldan Martinez – Dept. of Chemistry

Apologies:

9. Richard Catlow [RC] – Dept. of Chemistry and Dean of MAPS
10. Peter Coveney [PC] – Computational Life and Medical Sciences (CLMS)
11. Nora H De Leeuw [NDL] – Thomas Young Centre (TYC)
12. David Jones [DJ] – Bloomsbury Centre for Bioinformatics (BCB)
13. Christine Orenco [CO] – Institute of Structural and Molecular Biology

In attendance:

1. Owain Kenway [OK] – Research Computing Platforms Team, ISD
2. Corrinne Frazzoni [CF] – Administrative Services, ISD (Minutes)

Minutes

1. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising [Chair]

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th April 2014 were approved with no matters arising.

2. Report from the CRAG [NK]

- Legion
 - Changes to scheduling policy have resulted in more equitable wait times
 - Increase in in Core Availability owing to operational process improvements
- Backfill policy for PI purchased nodes: options have been considered and a policy agreed:
 - Backfill jobs on paid nodes to be limited to 2 hours in length.
 - Node owners can disable new backfill jobs from starting on their nodes.
 - Backfill access on paid-for nodes will be automatically re-enabled if the owner has no jobs queued or submitted in the last 48 hours.
 - To be trialled with existing PI project

3. Report from Head of Research Computing [CG]

- Recruitment for Research Computing Platforms Team Leader to replace Bruno Silva
 - Ongoing. Interviews were held in late August but no appointment yet made.
 - JD and advertisement are being reviewed and the post will be re-advertised shortly.
- Key Activities April – September 2014

- Legion IV Project – implementation and commissioning of new servers purchased late in 2013/14, including integration of Intel Phi nodes and PI-purchased nodes
- Implementation of Legion Development and Pre-Production environments – will allow full separation of development work from production enabling the team to test and roll out updates to the software stack more easily.
- Easybuild – the team has been investigating use of the Easybuild software build and installation framework on Legion (see <http://hpcugent.github.io/easybuild/>)
- Application installations (on request) and updates (as required).
- Remedyforce configuration – ISD has adopted a new service desk and user ticketing system. The team has worked closely with the Remedyforce team on User Acceptance Testing and post roll-out configuration.
- iPython Notebook – following the rejection of the capital funding bid, the team has worked with ISD eLearning Environments and David Bowler (Physics and Astronomy) to explore and take forward a possible alternative pilot.
- 'Aristotle' platform for Unix-based teaching – the team has worked with the IT Departmental Managers Forum to develop a tactical pilot platform for use by lecturers in Earth Science. It is planned to extend the pilot to other Departments next term.
- Navigator – the team spend time investigating the installation and integration of a commercial package 'Navigator' on Legion, for School of Pharmacy. This project was recently terminated as the required level of support was forthcoming from the developer/vendor.
- e-Medlab – Clare Gryce and Owain Kenway have been providing input and technical advice to the MRC eMedlab collaboration.
- Centre for Innovation – ongoing liaison with colleagues at Southampton and STFC regarding operation of Iridis and Emerald services, with particular focus on the needs of UCL users.
- Account application form – working with the CRAG, the team has developed and implemented a new online application form for all research computing user accounts.
- Grant collaborations – the team is starting work on a project with Michael Stamatakis (Chemical Engineering) funded under the ARCHER eCSE call. The project will fund 'backfill' staff resource into the core operational team.
- Training and Support
 - Online support – the Research Computing Platforms team has worked with the RITS Facilitators to migrate all user support pages to a new Mediawiki-based platform, see https://wiki.rc.ucl.ac.uk/wiki/Main_Page. This allows the team to create and more easily manage richer content.
 - Training – no training was delivered in the Summer Term. The team have been planning training delivery for 2014/15, which includes a new course 'Introduction to Unix Shell' as a feeder course for 'High Performance and Throughput Computing using the Legion HPC cluster'.
 - User Survey – the Facilitation team have run an (improved) repeat of the annual user survey which took place in 2011/12 and 2012/13. Key results to be reported to this group.

4. Update on 14/15 budget and 'Major HPC Refresh' project [Chair]

Research IT Domain Budget position for 2014-15

Project proposals totaling £3,789,000 were submitted from across the research domain, against available funding of £2,616,000. Decisions on how proposals should be prioritised/cut were made by the Research IT Executive at their meeting on 21st May 2014.

2014-15 Research Computing Bid Outcomes

The Group put forward the following bids in 2013/14:

- Centrally provided iPython notebook service (£16k)
 - This bid was not supported (against competition) by the Research IT Executive (RITE). This is being taken forward as a 'Business As Usual (BAU)' activity in collaboration with eLearning Environments.
- Major UCL HPC Refresh and Expansion (£725k 2014/15, £1.1m 2015/16)
 - This bid was partly supported by the RITE. Funding of £525k was agreed, with £1m earmarked for 2015/16.

- This project will now be started up in the next month in order to be confident of meeting the in-year cash spend constraints on the agreed funding.
- Following an audit of UCL's project delivery processes, a new Project Delivery Framework is being rolled out this financial year.
- RCGG asked to nominate two members of academic staff (one from physical sciences/engineering, one from life/medical sciences) to serve on the Project Board, and to assist in securing their engagement.
- It is expected that Project Board meetings will be held twice a Term, lasting 2 hours. Board members may be required to provide advice/guidance by email in between meetings, but this would be by exception.
- Issues raised by the Group
 - Some difficult questions as to who would be best placed to ensure project meets faculty needs
 - Consider how it fits into existing landscape
 - Concern that this hardware comes in when IRIDIS is lost – need for something similar
 - Sustainability

Action: CRAG to be asked to make recommendations on possibilities for capability and capacity (CG)

5. Research Computing Service Strategy [Chair]

The Group reviewed and discussed a draft Strategy document for Research Computing. The following adjustments were recommended:

- Issues raised
 - Greater emphasis on the collection and use of data regarding use of research computing services, and outcomes, to include both publications, REF submissions, and grant income.
 - In light of the above. should seek to continually revisit the business case for research computing
 - Greater emphasis needed on technical roadmap for research computing in relation to research drivers
 - Greater emphasis on promotion of benefits to UCL arising from continued investment
 - Proposal to focus on aspects that are completely within control of group

Action: Revise Strategy document to respond to feedback from group (CG)

6. Group Membership [Chair]

The Group was asked to consider whether current membership and engagement ensures sufficient representation from all research areas and decide on any necessary remedial actions.

- Issues raised
 - Representation/lack of by school/faculty
 - Perception of what RITS provides
 - What will people get out of it in return for their time?
 - Wider issue of membership/representation across RIISG

7. Review of current Action Items [Chair]

The list of current actions from the previous meeting were not reviewed due to lack of time.

8. Date of next meeting [Chair]

Thursday 15th January 2015 at 2pm.

List of Current Actions

Shaded actions will be deleted after next meeting. New actions in bold type.

No	Date	Minute	Owner	Action	Status and Notes
18	27/04/12	6.3	CG/JP/JP	Consult Research Services to confirm what costs can actually be put on grants, also with regard to need to align allocation periods and processes with the research services costing. To establish what was included in the fixed estates costs for Research Computing.	27/4 – Action opened 21/11/13 – CG working with JP to plan workshop. Ongoing 04/02/14 – Combine with Action 37. Ongoing 08/04/14 - Ongoing
33	3/10/13		JB/JP/RC	RC - ToRs: report back on strategies relevant to research computing at faculty level & produce statement of current role and future strategy.	03/10/13 – Action opened 04/02/14 – Ongoing 08/04/14 – Ongoing; John to chase with JP and RC
35	21/11/13	2.1	CG	CG to look into obtaining quarterly HECToR utilisation report from EPCC.	21/11/13 – Action opened 04/02/14 – CG awaiting response from EPCC - Ongoing 08/04/14 – Ongoing; some data have been provided by EPCC, others outstanding
36	21/11/13	2.2	BS/NK/CRAG	NK/CRAG to report back on new unified Research Computing Resources Access Policy. BS to prepare document for next meeting.	21/11/13 – Action opened 04/02/14 – Ongoing 08/04/14 - Ongoing
38	21/11/13	3	CG	To create a first draft of a new Research Computing strategy document based on meeting outcomes, and noting that £2M in 15/16 is an inadequate level of investment, for review and further work by the group.	21/11/13 – Action opened 04/02/14 – Ongoing – see previously attached Paper (Item 5) 08/04/14 – Ongoing; an analysis document has been drafted and circulated for comment
40	21/11/13	5	CG	To obtain top-line data from Research Services on income	21/11/13 – Action opened 04/02/14 – Ongoing 08/04/14 – Ongoing; pending new account application

47	08/04/14	4.1	CG/OK	Provide 1-line info about each Legion node type, for information	08/02/14 – Action opened
48	08/04/14	4.1	JP	Check Farr contract dates on dedicated allocation	08/02/14 – Action opened
49	08/04/14	7	CG	Re-circulate Data Centre business case to group with summary of process that was followed to produce report	08/02/14 – Action opened
50	14/10/14	4	CG	Major HPC Refresh Project - CRAG to be asked to make recommendations on possibilities for capability and capacity	14/10/14 – Action opened
51	14/10/14	5	CG	Research Computing Service Strategy - revise strategy to define requirements and focus for internal team	14/10/14 – Action opened
52	14/10/14	5	JP/JB	RCGG asked to nominate two members of academic staff (one from physical sciences/engineering, one from life/medical sciences) to serve on the Project Board, and to assist in securing their engagement.	14/10/14 – Action opened