

# ISARIC Outbreak Data Analysis Platform

This document provides information for users of the ISARIC data analysis platform hosted in EPCC at the University of Edinburgh.

Revision	Author	Changes
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## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Terminology .....	2
TL;DR .....	2
Procedure for Gaining Access .....	3
Logging Into ISARIC at EPCC .....	4
Summary .....	6
Troubleshooting.....	7
Help using SAFE.....	7
Cannot login .....	7
Virtual desktop problems.....	7
How to use the c19-desktop .....	8
Logging in .....	8
Logging out.....	8
Using desktop software .....	9
How to use Ultra .....	10
What you need to know.....	10
First steps .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Directories.....	10
How to import and export data .....	10
Using Anaconda for R and Python .....	11
Using R Studio .....	11
Using PyCharm on Ultra .....	12
Using R on Ultra .....	14
Using RStudio on Ultra .....	14
Troubleshooting.....	14
Access to external databases from Ultra .....	17

## Introduction

The data analysis platform consists of several components:

- A database in the National Safe Haven where it is safe to store personally identifiable health data.
- A database and file storage outside the National Safe Haven for the storage of data which is not personally identifiable
- Processing systems which can operate safely on the personally identifiable data within the Safe Haven to link with other datasets, produce aggregated reports or to de-identify the data for further use.
- Access to desktops for approved researchers to work on the de-identified data.
- Access to High-Performance Computing (HPC) systems, Ultra2 and Eddie, for working with large datasets or the data which are not personally identifiable
- Access to desktops for deploying a web application for reporting

## Terminology

- ODAP – Outbreak Data Analysis Platform, encompasses all of the above for the purposes of processing ISARIC and related datasets
- FCS – Flexible Compute Space, the systems which lie outside the National Safe Haven
- PDA – Protected Data Access environment, the technical name for the FCS
- Ultra2, SDF-CS1 – both names refer to the High Performance Computer accessed from the FCS
- EIDF – Edinburgh International Data Facility, the organization within EPCC which looks after the HPC and other systems

## TL;DR

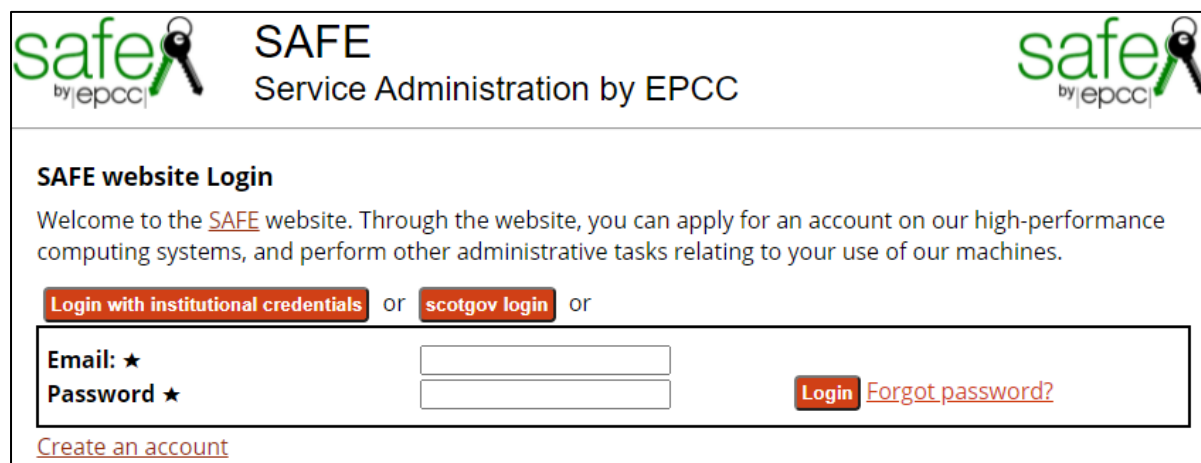
Quick summary:

- Register for an account in SAFE, then apply within SAFE to join project u036 (Ultra PDA).
- Wait for your application to be approved and for your VDI account credentials to be sent to you.
- Login to the Ultra VDI service <https://secure.epcc.ed.ac.uk/eidf01/> using the VDI credentials
- Select the c19-desktop (SSH) option, login using the u036 account, change your password, logout.
- Select the c19-desktop (RDP) option and login using the u036 account with new password.
- Inside this desktop you can SSH to ultra2, and you can use RStudio and PyCharm IDEs.
- Follow the guide to use Anaconda, and to use RStudio or PyCharm in “remote” mode.

## Procedure for Gaining Access

Potential users first need to register in the EPCC “SAFE” which is a user registration and account management system.

<https://safe.epcc.ed.ac.uk/>

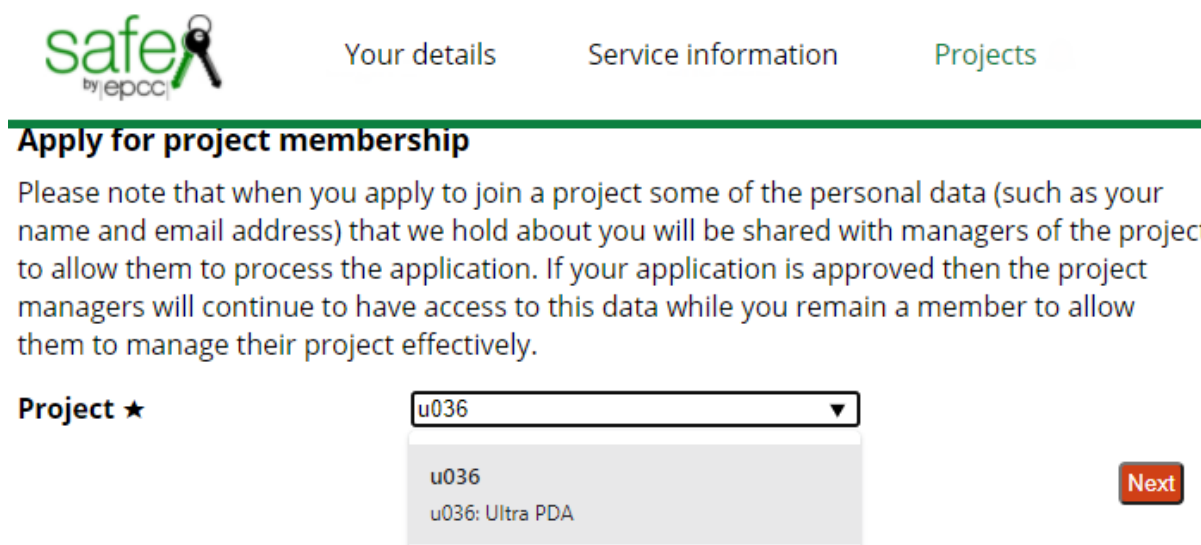


The image shows the SAFE website login page. At the top, there is a header with the 'safe by epcc' logo on the left and right, and the text 'SAFE Service Administration by EPCC' in the center. Below the header, the page is titled 'SAFE website Login'. A welcome message states: 'Welcome to the SAFE website. Through the website, you can apply for an account on our high-performance computing systems, and perform other administrative tasks relating to your use of our machines.' Below this, there are two login options: 'Login with institutional credentials' and 'scotgov login', separated by 'or'. Below these options is a form with two input fields: 'Email: ★' and 'Password ★'. To the right of the password field is a 'Login' button and a link 'Forgot password?'. At the bottom left of the form is a link 'Create an account'.

Click on the link to Create an account. Once your account has been created you can Login.

(You can use your University of Edinburgh credentials (via EASE) to login, but only after you have created a SAFE account and registered your EASE credentials within SAFE).

Use the Projects menu to Request access:



The image shows the SAFE website's 'Projects' menu. At the top, there is a header with the 'safe by epcc' logo on the left and three navigation links: 'Your details', 'Service information', and 'Projects'. Below the header, the page is titled 'Apply for project membership'. A paragraph of text explains that personal data will be shared with project managers if the application is approved. Below this text is a form with a label 'Project ★' and a dropdown menu. The dropdown menu is currently showing 'u036'. Below the dropdown menu, there is a list of options: 'u036' and 'u036: Ultra PDA'. To the right of the list is a 'Next' button.

Type the project code u036 which is a PDA (Protected Data Access) account on Ultra2.

Your project membership request will be sent to a Project Manager for review. The project manager may need to check with an approvals board so access may not be granted immediately.

The next step is to apply for a machine account. The SAFE system has only one option at this point, which is labelled “sdf-cs1”.

### New account policies

If a check-box does not appear beside a machine then the project you selected is allowed to use the machine but one of the policies that apply to the machine is preventing you from applying.

A cross will be marked against the policy that is preventing you from applying.

You would also be able to enable access to this machine by updating your account to meet any policy marked with an arrow.

### Select a machine for the login account

Select	Machine	Type	Description	Policies
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	sdf-cs1			Users must have a public key registered to use the machine ✓

Next

When you click Next you can choose an account username. This is restricted to 8 letters. Please choose a username in the format: first initial plus surname, eg. "jsmith", if possible. The username must be unique across other machines in the SAFE so you may want to append some code or letter to indicate this is your ISARIC account.

### SAFE Login account Request

This form is for requesting new login accounts. To request additional access for an existing account, select it from the navigation menu at the top of the page

Your username will be visible to other users on the system

This machine support ssh key authentication. You can upload a public key to use here.

A SSH public key is required to use this machine.

Requested username ★

SSH public key ★

Choose file No file chosen

Request

The system requires a SSH public key be supplied. This will not be used but unfortunately is a requirement that we cannot change, so at this stage it does not matter what you supply, as long as it looks like a valid key. A key can be generated on the website: <https://cryptotools.net/rsagen> Click Generate key pair and then copy and paste the Public key text into the SAFE SSH public key field. You can save the Private and Public keys to files if you wish.

Once your application has been approved you should login to SAFE and use the option to view your password. The machine name is "sdf-cs1" but the account may be listed as "username@eidf". Note: This is a one-time password; you will be required to change it when you first login.

Your machine account will give you a login to two computers, the "sdf-cs1" (which we will call "Ultra2" from now on) and a Linux desktop inside the ISARIC system. However, the only access to these systems, for security reasons, is via a *virtual* desktop. Access to the virtual desktop is through a VDI (Virtual Desktop Infrastructure)<sup>1</sup>. Again, for security reasons, the VDI requires a separate username and password, and these will be sent to you by email.

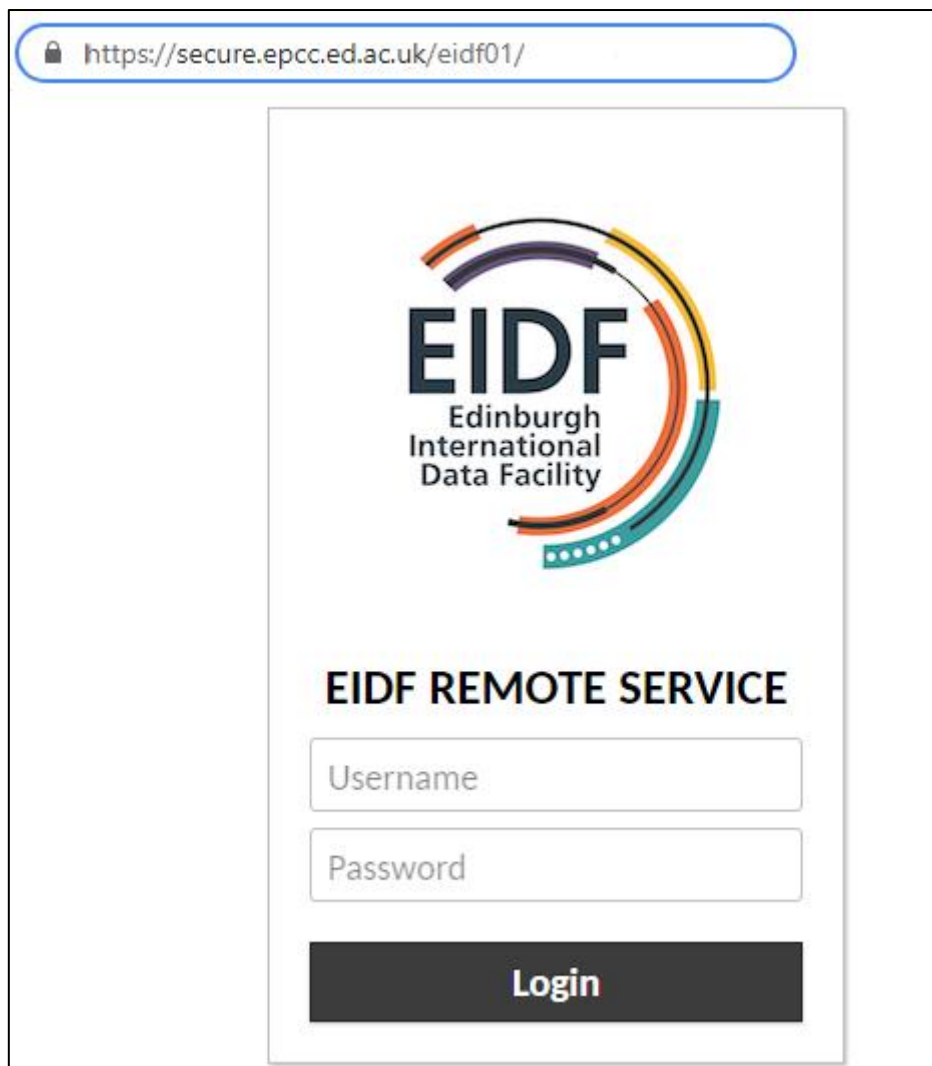
From now on you only need to login to the VDI, not into SAFE, to access ISARIC.

## Logging Into ISARIC at EPCC

The Virtual Desktop Interface gives access to a virtual Linux desktop inside the secure archive area.

<https://secure.epcc.ed.ac.uk/eidf01/>

<sup>1</sup> Some people refer to this as *guacamole* because that is the name of the software which implements the VDI.



https://secure.epcc.ed.ac.uk/eidf01/

**EIDF**  
Edinburgh  
International  
Data Facility

**EIDF REMOTE SERVICE**

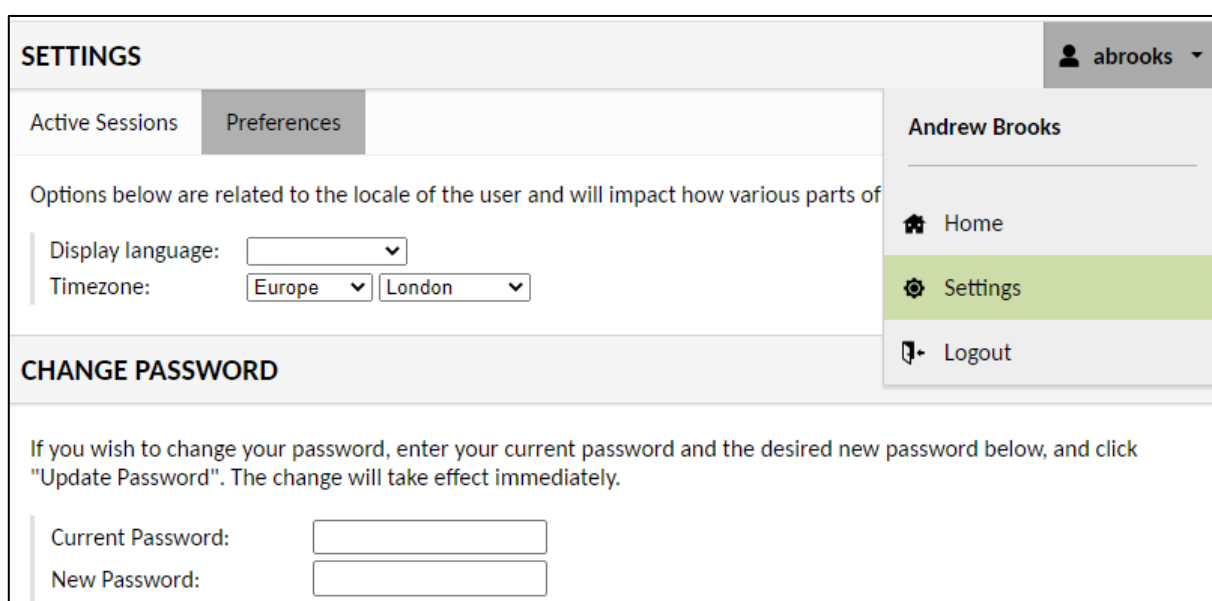
Username

Password

**Login**

Use your VDI account username and password to login here. The VDI account is not the same as your SAFE account, and is not the same as the “sdf-cs1” machine account you requested within SAFE.

When you first log into the VDI please click your name in the top right, click Settings, and change your VDI password from the Preferences tab.



**SETTINGS**

Active Sessions Preferences

Options below are related to the locale of the user and will impact how various parts of

Display language:

Timezone:  Europe  London

**CHANGE PASSWORD**

If you wish to change your password, enter your current password and the desired new password below, and click "Update Password". The change will take effect immediately.

Current Password:

New Password:

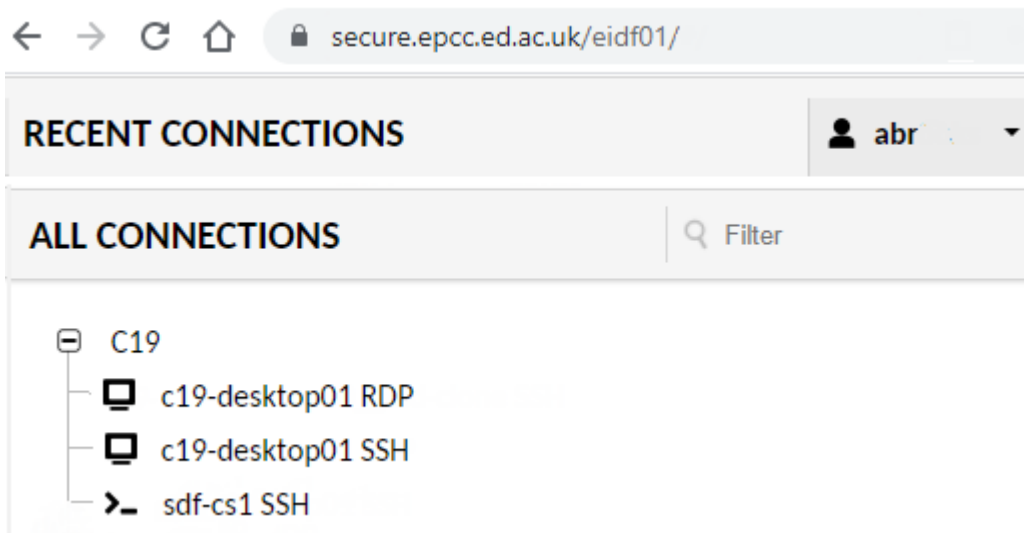
Andrew Brooks

Home

Settings

Logout

The VDI home page will give a list of machines you can log into:



**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Please click on the “c19-desktop SSH” session first and login. This is the sdf-cs1 machine account you created within SAFE and the password which can be found in the accounts section of SAFE. You will be prompted to change your password. This procedure must be done in the SSH session as this will set your password and create your home directory. The window has white text on a black background; if you have problems reading this you can use the menu opened by pressing the Chift + Ctrl + Alt keys together and change the colour scheme. Press that key combination again to hide the menu.

```
← → ↻ 🏠 🔒 secure.epcc.ed.ac.uk/eidf01/#/client/ODkAYwBteXNxbA==

Password: *****
Password expired. Change your password now.
Creating directory '/home/v004/v004/abricsur'.
Welcome to Ubuntu 20.04.2 LTS (GNU/Linux 5.4.0-80-generic x86_64)

* Documentation:  https://help.ubuntu.com
* Management:    https://landscape.canonical.com
* Support:       https://ubuntu.com/advantage

System information as of Mon 23 Aug 21:13:04 BST 2021

System load:  0.08               Processes:            297
Usage of /:   58.9% of 31.51GB   Users logged in:     0
Memory usage: 24%               IPv4 address for docker0: 172.17.0.1
Swap usage:   0%                IPv4 address for ens3:  192.168.133.84

WARNING: Your password has expired.
You must change your password now and login again!
Current Password: █
```

After changing your password you can return to the VDI session page and select the RDP (Remote Desktop) option “c19-desktop RDP”. This will present a login screen to the Linux desktop. Again, use your “sdf-cs1” machine username and the password you have just chosen.

## Summary

You will have three accounts:

1. Your SAFE website login (only needed during account creation)
2. Your VDI website login
3. Your machine account login (for the desktop and for the sdf-cs1/ultra2 computer)

These actions only need to be completed once:

1. Create an account in SAFE
2. Join the ISARIC project u036 and create a machine account
3. Await approval and your VDI account credentials

4. Log into the VDI eidf01 using your VDI account
5. Change your VDI password
6. Choose the SSH session option and login with your machine account
7. Change the password for your machine account
8. Logout

These actions need to be done every time:

1. Log into the VDI eidf01 using your VDI account
2. Choose the RDP session option
3. Log into the desktop using your machine account

## Troubleshooting

### Help using SAFE

Please see the documents <https://epcced.github.io/safe-docs/> and contact the helpdesk if you have any questions.

### Cannot login

If you cannot contact the SAFE website or the VDI website then please try connecting to your institution's VPN.

If you are not sure about your username and/or password:

- SAFE website – use the Forgot Password? button on the SAFE website. If you have problems with this please contact the helpdesk, contact details on the SAFE website.
- VDI website – please contact the helpdesk and ask for your ticket to be assigned to Andrew Brooks.
- c19-isaric desktop – Use the password reset procedure provided on the SAFE website. You will need to request a password reset for the specific machine account, in this case on the “sdf-cs1” as part of the “u036” project. After a reset you will be able to log into SAFE and view the new password by selecting your username@eidf from the Login Accounts menu and clicking the View Login Account Password button. If you have problems with this please contact the helpdesk and ask for your ticket to be assigned to Andrew Brooks.

### Virtual desktop problems

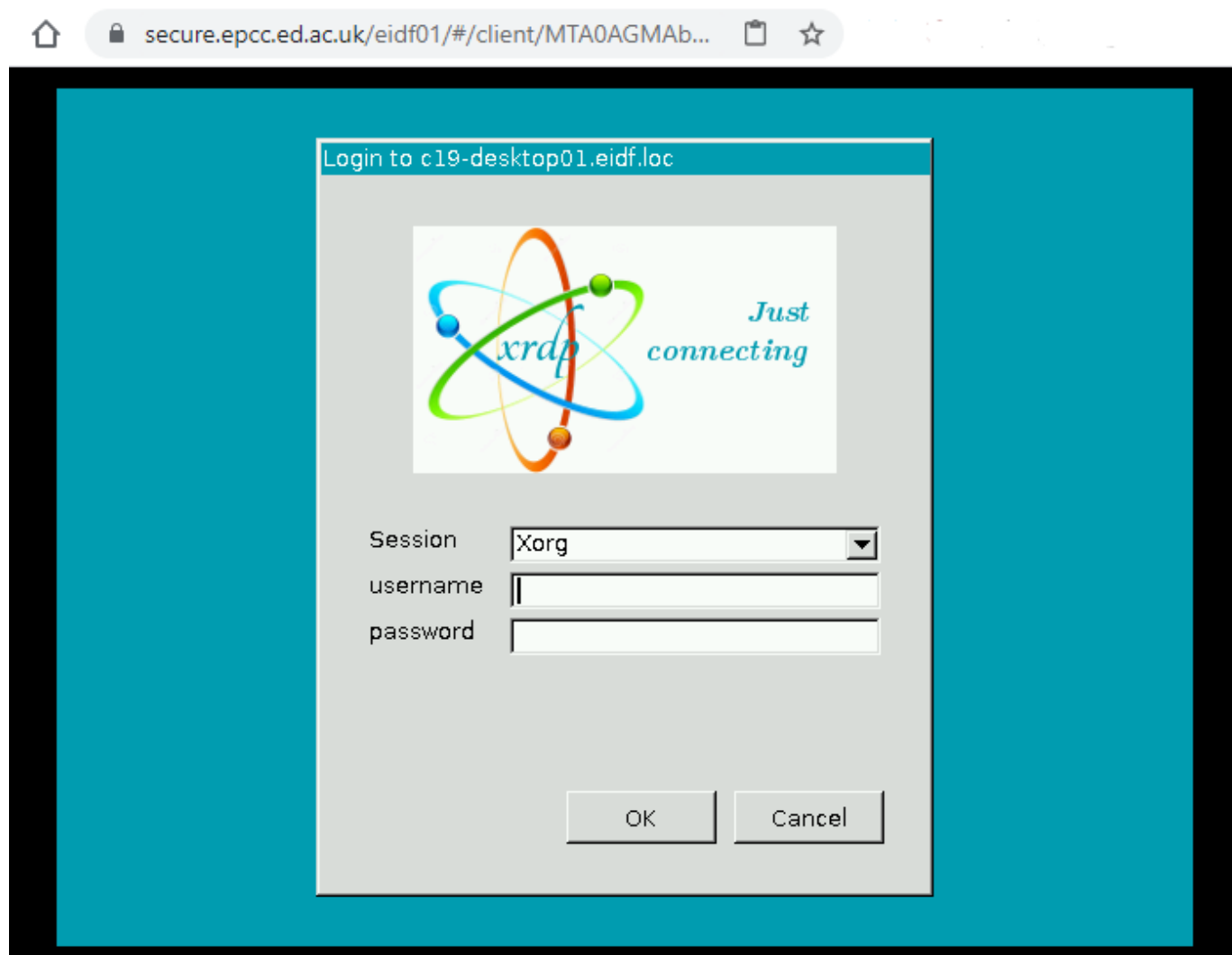
- **Color scheme;** cannot read text in the SSH window – Press the Shift-Ctrl-Alt keys together to get the Guacamole settings and scroll down to change the colour scheme. Press the same keys again to hide the settings.
- The **CAPS-LOCK** key seems to be stuck on. Even if you press it again, the CAPS state remains on. Press the Shift-Ctrl-Alt keys together to get the Guacamole settings and press CAPS LOCK. Press the same 3 keys again to hide the settings. Now CAPS LOCK is off in the virtual desktop and you can press CAPS LOCK again to turn it off on your local desktop.
- Unstable network connection: If your network connection drops then it is possible to log back into the desktop and continue where you left off. However, do not be tempted to rely on this and leave programs running overnight, as there are various reasons why you might come back and find the desktop has been restarted. (Technically, it might still be running but you can no longer access it). Please save your work and log off before disconnecting whenever possible.

## How to use the c19-desktop

### Logging in

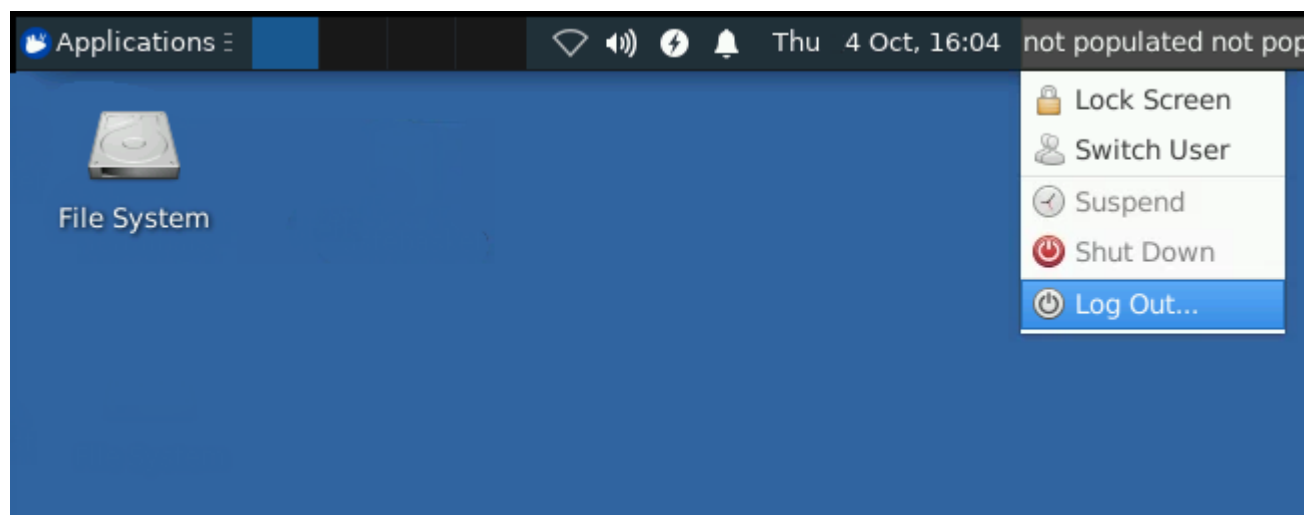
Login to the VDI at <https://secure.epcc.ed.ac.uk/eidf01/> using your VDI account credentials.

Select the c19-desktop (RDP) option and login using your sdf-cs1 (account@eidf) credentials.



### Logging out

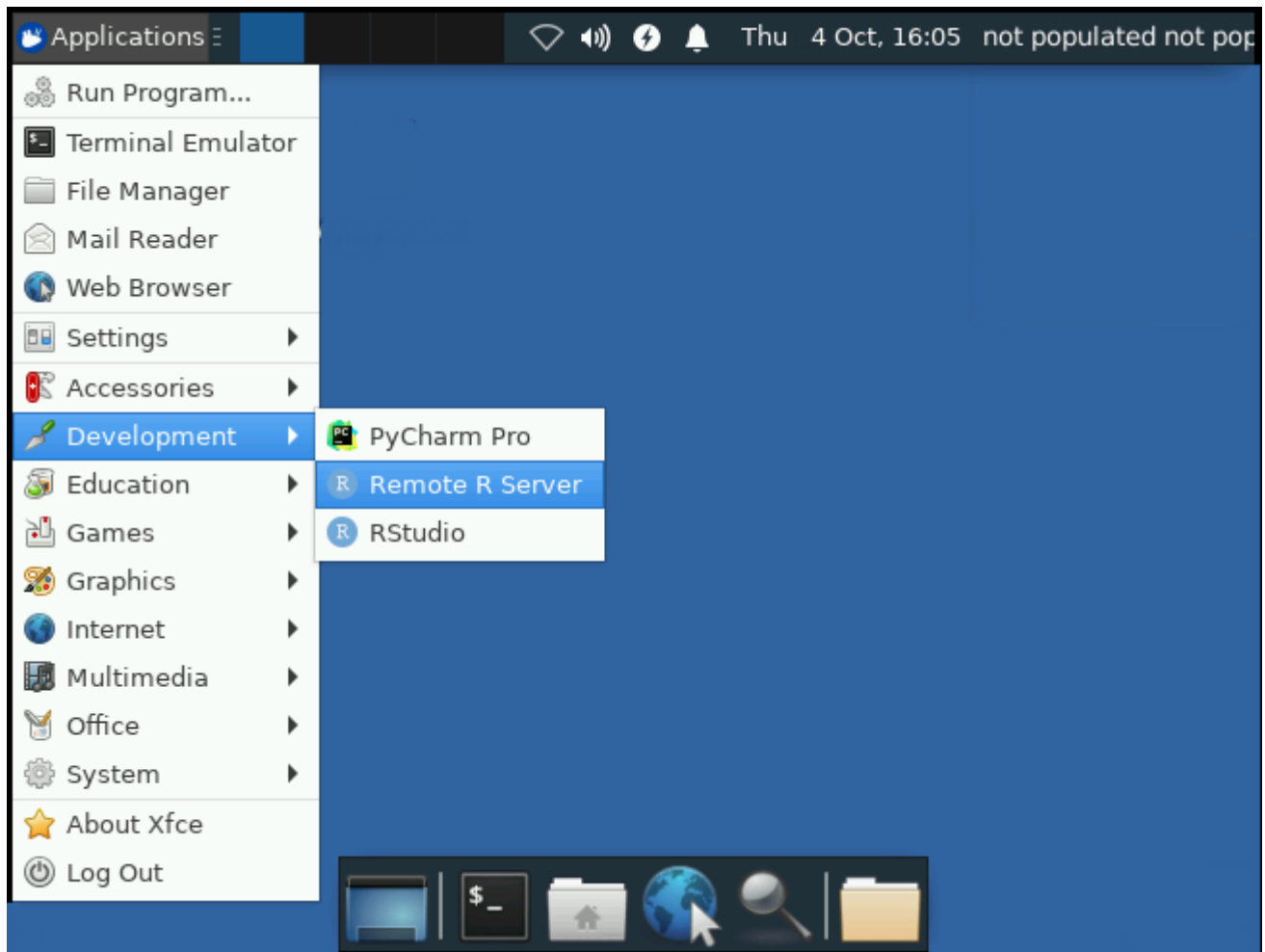
To logout from the desktop use the menu at the top right. It should show your username but in some circumstances may show “not populated”.





## Using desktop software

You can access RStudio and PyCharmPro from the Applications | Development menu:



## How to use Ultra

### What you need to know

- There are two computer systems you will use. The “sdf-cs1” (ultra2) computer is a HPC system (High Performance Computing) with a vast amount of memory and processing power. The virtual desktop “c19-desktop” is much more limited and shared with other users, but it does have RStudio and PyCharmPro. Please do all of your analysis by logging into ultra2, **not** on the desktop, out of consideration for other users. See below for details.
- Your account will be a member of a sub-group of u036, either u036-isaric, u036-phosp or u036-collab. By default the files in one sub-group *cannot* be read by members of a different sub-group.
- Your home directory should not be used for storing project files, please use one of the shared directories.
- Project files are visible to everyone else in the project but to nobody else.
- No personally identifiable data may be stored on the system. Whilst it is a secure environment, it is also shared and it is explicitly not a *safe haven* so is not authorized to hold unconsented PII.

### Directories

Home directories and project files for the u036 (c19-isaric) project live under /home/u036.

There are two sub-projects, “isaric” and “phosp”, and there is an additional sub-project called “collab” which is for external collaborators.

Your project files will be in /home/u036/u036-subgroup/shared/... These files are *only* accessible to members of your sub-group (isaric/phosp/collaborator).

To share files across the whole project, i.e. members of u036-isaric and u036-phosp, you can use /home/u036/shared.

Summary:

/home/u036

/home/u036/shared – files accessible to members of every sub-group

/home/u036/username – your personal files

/home/u036/u036/shared – files accessible to members of every sub-group

/home/u036/u036-isaric/shared – files accessible to members of ISARIC only

/home/u036/u036-phosp/shared – files accessible to members of PHOSP only

/home/u036/u036-collab/shared – files accessible to members of external collaborators only

### How to import and export data

The environment is deliberately restricted to prevent the extraction of data. This is for security reasons and also to prevent publication of data which is not yet approved for publication. The restriction on extraction also implies that data cannot be imported, and thus there is no internet access. However data managers do have permission to import and export data on your behalf.

To import data please contact your data manager.

To export data please contact your data manager.

## Using Anaconda for R and Python

A shared copy of anaconda3 has been installed and can be used by issuing the command:

```
source /home/u036/u036/shared/anaconda3/bin/activate
```

That will activate the base conda environment giving you access to additional environments. Your command prompt will now show (base) to indicate this.

Then you can activate a specific environment to get additional software, for example to use R you can issue the command:

```
conda activate Rv4
```

You will see your prompt change from (base) to (...Rv4).

Use `conda deactivate` when finished with that environment (or simply logout).

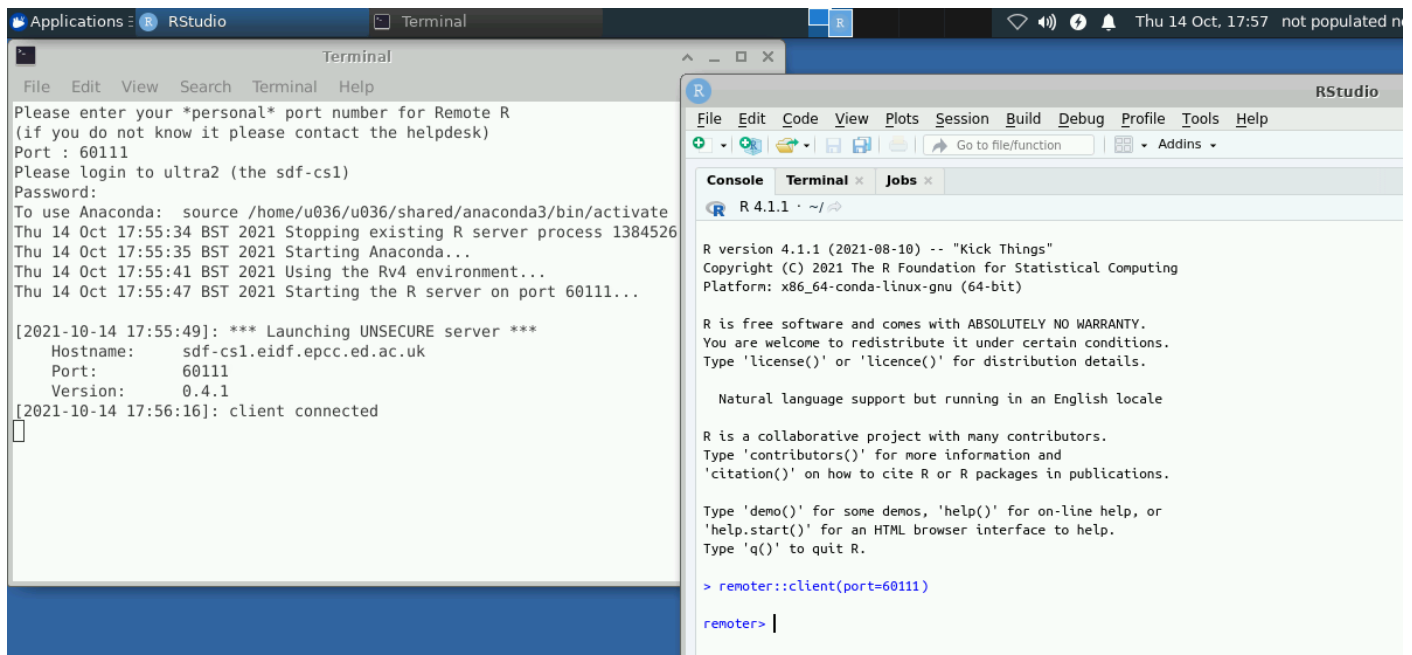
## Using R Studio

Before using R you must activate the Rv4 conda environment, see above.

RStudio can be started from the Applications | Development menu. However, as mentioned above, the resource constraints on the desktop mean that data-intensive work must be performed on the ultra2 computer. This can be done using RStudio and the desktop and connecting to an R Server running on ultra.

The first step is to ask EPCC's HPC Systems Team for a port number to be allocated to you (it will be something like 60123). (When logging the query ask them to check with abrooks).

Start the R Server using the Applications | Development | Remote R Server menu. This will prompt you for your personal port number. If you don't have one please ask the helpdesk. Do not use somebody else's number!



When the server is running you can start RStudio and type:

```
remoter::client(port=N) # where N is your personal port number as above
```

Now all of your variables are stored on ultra and all of your R code will execute on ultra.

When you have finished you can leave the remoter environment by typing:

exit()

and then close the Server window.

## Using PyCharm on Ultra

It is not possible to use PyCharm on Ultra itself, because it is not a desktop environment, but it is possible to use PyCharm on the desktop and have it run the programs on Ultra.

The recommended way to use PyCharm on Ultra is to run it on the desktop and connect to a Python interpreter running on Ultra. This method has the benefit of a fast, responsive Python IDE running on the desktop, plus a Python interpreter running on the same machine as the data – the best of both worlds. You will need a full PyCharm license for this but it's free to students/teachers/etc. The full instructions are on the JetBrains website (links below) but the quick summary is:

File | New Project... | Name "*remote\_ultra*"

File | New... | Python File | Name "*remote\_ultra\_test.py*" and add some code OR re-use existing project

File | Settings | Project: *name* | Project Interpreter

click the cog at the end of the Project Interpreter | Add...

In the Add Python Interpreter window choose SSH Interpreter in the left column

Enter Host: *ultra2.epcc.ed.ac.uk* and Username: your existing username on ultra, click Next

Enter your ultra Password: and tick Save Password, click Next

Choose a Python interpreter, the default */usr/bin/python* is v2.7.5 (old!),

or choose a Python interpreter from an installed Conda environment, such as

*/home/u036/shared/conda\_environments/<environment name>/bin/python*, or

*/home/u036/shared/anaconda3/bin/python*, which is v3.7.6

Sync folders: click on the folder icon at the end of the Sync folders:

click in the Remote Path entry and change it from */tmp/pycharm\_project\_N* to

*/home/u036/<your username>/PycharmProjects/<temporary project name>*, click Finish.

(Note! Change */home/u034* to your own home directory)

(Note! Don't use the same project name as your local copy or they will clash)

File | Settings | Appearance and Behaviour | System Settings | HTTP Proxy

enter hostname *hydra-proxy* and port 800

File | Settings | Build, Execution, Deployment | Deployment

click on the Mappings tab,

change the Deployment path: to the same path you entered in Sync folders.

Click OK (Wait until the Network Transfer tab has finished uploading all the deployment configuration to Ultra.)

Run | Run... | select the name of the configuration to run your code directly on ultra.

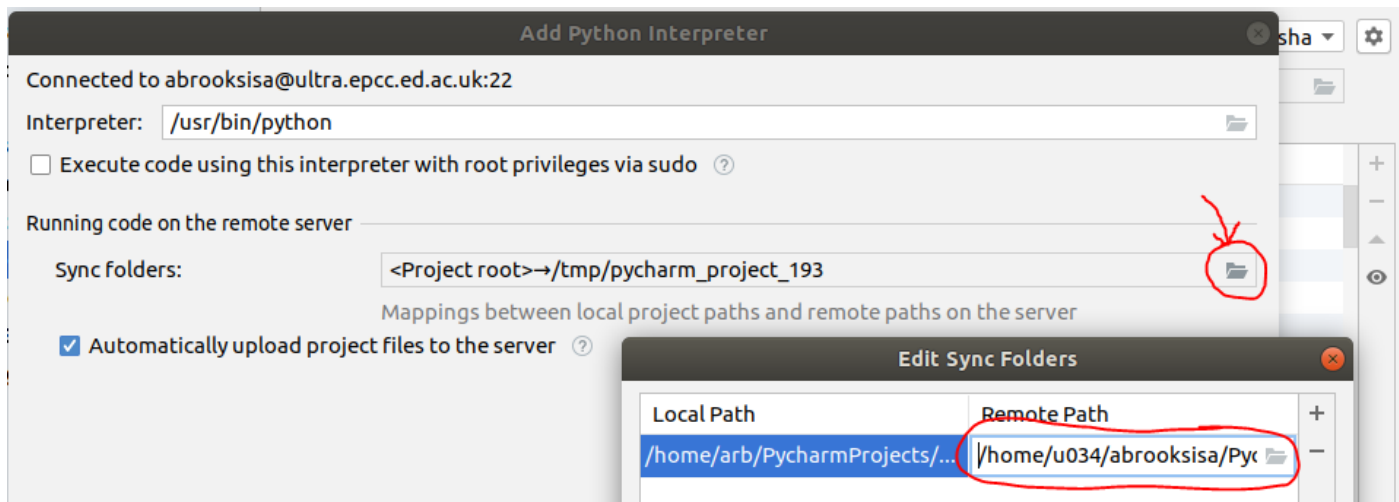
Control the upload of files to ultra from the Tools | Deployment menu.

References:

<https://www.jetbrains.com/help/pycharm/configuring-remote-interpreters-via-ssh.html>

and <https://www.jetbrains.com/help/pycharm/remote-debugging-with-product.html>

The Sync folders dialogue box:



## Using R on Ultra

Before using R you must activate the Rv4 conda environment, see above.

Simple or interactive R tasks can be run using R or Rscript. More complex or time-consuming jobs should be run using the batch job facility. Put your R commands into an R script, for example `batchjobtest.R`, then create a batch file, for example `batchjob.sub` like this:

```
#!/bin/bash -l
#PBS -N RTest1
#PBS -l walltime=1:00:00
#PBS -l select=1:ncpus=1:mem=1G
#PBS -q uv2000
#PBS -j oe
cd $PBS_O_WORKDIR
R --file=/home/u034/username/R/batchjobtest.R
```

Then submit the batch file to be run on a processing node using: `qsub batchjob.sub`

## Using RStudio on Ultra

There is no access to a GUI on Ultra, nor is there web access to an RStudioServer. The recommended way to use RStudio is to install it on your local desktop/laptop computer and connect from there to a copy of R which is running on Ultra. This gives you the convenience of a local GUI with the ability to run the commands on ultra, and connect to databases held within EPCC. It is also integrated so that plots created by R on ultra are visible in the local RStudio plot window, and variables held within R on ultra can be transferred to the local RStudio for further processing using the `s2c(varname)` command. Please read the section about R versions above before proceeding.

If you need to install any packages you will need to add an additional `repos` parameter, for example:

```
install.packages('DOSE', repos='https://stats.bris.ac.uk/R/')
```

You can see plots by using the `rpng()` command first, making the `plot()`, then retrieving it with `rpng.off()`. See the manual for more options.

You can transfer a variable from the remote to the local using: `s2c(varname)` on the server.

## Troubleshooting

### Documentation:

<https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/remoter/vignettes/remoter.pdf>

[https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/remoter/vignettes/remote\\_machines.pdf](https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/remoter/vignettes/remote_machines.pdf)

<https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/remoter/remoter.pdf>

**Bind failed: address already in use** – this means that the R server is already running, please check you are using the correct port number, and if so then you don't need to start a new server. To see if the server is already running on ultra use this command and see if the output includes the command you used to start it: `pgrep -au$(id -u)`

**channel 3: open failed: connect failed: Connection refused** – this might mean that a client process is still running, i.e. inside your RStudio. If restarting RStudio does not help then the simplest solution is to reboot your computer.

**Connection refused** – this means that the R server is not running. If you previously started it then it may have crashed (this can happen due to uncaught R errors or if it would require interaction, such as trying to install a package without using the `repos` parameter). Try starting the server again, or exiting your RStudio.

**Incompatible package versions** – this happens when the versions of ‘remoter’ and ‘pbdZMQ’ on your RStudio do not match the versions on Ultra. In fact if your RStudio has newer versions than Ultra you will not see this message (however, see below). These packages are already installed so please contact the helpdesk.

**Argument is of length zero** (`get.status("method_plot_rpng") == "rasterImage"`) when plotting using `rpng.off()` – this happens when your RStudio version of ‘remoter’ is newer than the one on Ultra, typically if ultra is 0.4.0 and RStudio is 0.4.1. The solution, for now, is to downgrade your ‘remoter’ package in RStudio using the instructions above.

**The R server keeps crashing** – this happens when you try to execute an unknown command, particularly if a package has not been installed or loaded yet. In particular getting the parameters wrong for `ggplot()` will cause it to crash. This is a known bug, see <https://github.com/RBigData/remoter/issues/50> and a fix has been applied 2021-02-22.

If you are using the `start_R_server.sh` script then the actual error message will be hidden in a log file not printed on the screen. The name of the log file is shown when you start the server. After a crash you can see the last few messages with something similar to:

```
tail /home/u036/shared/tmp/start_R_server.12345.6789.log
```

If the server has crashed then you can restart it; there is no need to logout or login again.

If you wish to see error messages as they occur you can use the manual method for starting the R server as given above: login to ultra with ssh, source conda, activate Rv4, use the Rscript command to start the server. After a crash simply run the Rscript command again.





## Access to external databases from Ultra

A database for ISARIC has been created on a separate host, called c19-isaric01. This hostname is accessible from Ultra but if it does not resolve then the IP address (as seen from Ultra) is 10.22.2.6

To request access to the ISARIC database, raise a request with the EPCC helpdesk with your Ultra username and whether or not you need to be able to insert data. You will receive back your login credentials once you have been given the relevant level of access.

The database name is "isaric" and the schema name is "isaric". Once connected to the "isaric" database you can refer to tables as "isaric.my\_table".

### Access from the command line

You can connect to the database from the Ultra command line by running:

```
psql -h c19-isaric01 -U <pg_username> -d isaric
```

where pg\_username is the username you were given when requesting database access. As per the [Postgres docs](#), you can also store your database credentials in the file .pgpass in your home folder, in the format hostname:port:database:username:password, and you will not need to supply your password each time. The port in this case will be the default Postgres port 5432. Postgres will only accept this file if it's accessible only by you and nobody else. To assign the right file permissions, run:

```
chmod go-rwx ~/.pgpass
```

Once in you can run SQL queries, as well as psql commands like:

- \dt isaric.\* to list tables
- \dv isaric.\* to list views
- \d isaric.<table\_or\_view\_name> to show column information for a table or view
- \password to change your Postgres password

The \d... commands can also be appended with a '+' to view extra information like any given table/column descriptions, or the explicit SQL query that a view is made up of:

- \dt+ isaric.\*
- \d+ isaric.<table\_or\_view\_name>

### Access from R

The database server is PostgreSQL, so to connect to it from R on ultra:

```
library('RPostgreSQL')
```

```
pg_con <- DBI::dbConnect(RPostgreSQL::PostgreSQL(), dbname="isaric", host="c19-isaric01", user="myusername", password="mypassword")
```

```
library('tidyverse')
```

```
my_tbl <- tbl(pg_con, sql('select * from my_table'))
```

OR

```
my_tbl <- tbl(pg_con, 'my_table')
```

```
my_tbl %>% select(stuff) %>% filter(stuff)
```

```
dbDisconnect(pg_con)
```

to dynamically create SQL statements using R syntax.

The database name is "isarc" and the schema name is "isarc". Once connected to the "isarc" database you can refer to tables as "isarc.my\_table" but as long as there are no other schema (and none are planned) you can omit the "isarc" prefix.