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2010 - 2011

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# Introduction

During my Industrial Year I worked in the Customer Services team within the Information Services department at Aberystwyth University from the 1st July 2010 to the 29th July 2011. The department supplies, supports and maintains the University’s main computer facilities, network and libraries for students, staff and the public.

There were five Industrial Year students working for the department, two of whom were in the same team as me. The placements were secured through applications and interviews.

# Organisational Environment

## Aberystwyth University

Aberystwyth University is a University located in Ceredigion, Mid Wales. It was founded in 1872 and currently has over 12,000 students.

The University is divided into academic and non-academic departments, each with their own sub departments and teams. The main customers to the University are the students; they will each have an academic department, and will interact with numerous non-academic departments during their time at the University.

The main University campus is where most of the student halls of residence are located; it is also where most of the departmental buildings are situated. There are also University buildings and residences around the town and on the outskirts of Aberystwyth.

Each department uses the University’s computer network and systems. The University also has X workstation rooms on campus which are used by students in their studies. These rooms contain computers, printers and other equipment such as scanners and microfilm readers. There are also internet ports in each of the rooms in the halls of residences and wireless internet covers most of the campus.

Students and staff at the University have a computer account with their own unique username and email address associated with the University. These are used for logging into the University and departmental resources, using the network and communication between students, staff and departments.

## Information Services

Information Services is a non-academic department within the University. The department is split into a number of different teams each with different roles and responsibilities. The main role of Information Services is to supply, support and maintain the University’s network and computer systems for staff and students. The team also supports the different academic departments and their access to the University network and resources, as well as maintaining the departmental file stores, accounts and mailing lists.

When I joined the department on my Industrial Year a major merge and reorganisation of structure was taking place within the department. Different teams within the department were being relocated to new offices and teams were being split and merged.

The teams within Information Services have to work closely together; ensuring faults are reported and passed on to the relevant team to handle to problems. The department’s teams can be categorised as frontline support who deal with the customers face to face with any problems, 2nd line support who have customers passed through to them from frontline support for more in depth problems and 3rd line support who generally don’t communicate with customers, but handle the University’s network and computer systems.

### Customer Services

The Customer Services team is the result of the old advisory and library team merging; this took place during the first few weeks of my placement. The team provides the department’s frontline support for staff and students with both computer and library enquiries, the team is also responsible for fault reporting.

#### Development

The development team created and maintained most of the tools that were used by the whole department such as Reg and webmail (mentioned later in report). They would rarely need to communicate with customers such as staff or students.

#### System Support

This team was responsible for monitoring the University servers, networks and printers. They would also assign jobs to different teams depending on the nature of the call placed on Sunrise (see Applications and Software).

#### Media & Technical Services

This team was also known as the workshop, they would handle more in depth problems with users laptops and equipment such as hardware faults and repairs. We would refer customers to the team. They went out to staff and students to fix problems, or took their laptop for a length of time while the fault was repaired. They also maintained the public computers.

#### Media & sales

Media and Sales provided services such as printing, binding, the sales of computers and equipment and they loaned stock such as laptops and projectors.

#### Network & Telephony

The Network and telephony team would repair faults on the network, maintain network ports, handle the University telephone system and maintain Interzone (see Applications and Software).

#### Business Information Services (BIS)

BIS were responsible for maintaining the University’s main data base for staff and students. They provided support accessing and using the database know as Astra.

## My Team

When I joined the team there were 6 people in my team known as advisory before the merge. After the merge took place and new members of staff joined the team there were in excess of 20 people working for Customer Services, as well as casual staff, part time staff and graduate trainees.

The team can unofficially be split into library staff and IT support staff. The library staffs main role is library support, subject support, loans and fines, shelving, and staff and student cards. The IT team primarily support user accounting, general computer enquiries, virus/spyware removals, fault reporting, account and mailing list requests, network set up and computing advice. However, due to the merge both sections of the Customer Services team have undertaken duties for both library and computer enquiries. Training both sections of the team in all areas of Customer Services has been an on-going process throughout the year.

In my direct team, in the IT section of Customer Services there were three Industrial Year students including myself, three full time members of staff, and our team leader. However during the last few weeks of my placement the Network Operations team was split and merged with other teams, three of whom joined Customer Services.

The team was organised by a weekly rota of tasks, the three industrial year students and the three other members of staff were timetabled for different tasks such as telephone support or helpdesk. We were also timetabled for ‘task shifts’ where we completed our own tasks and projects which we received from our team leader. Breaks and lunch hours were also timetabled.

# Technical and Application Environments

## My Office

The office where I spent the majority of my time working in was located on the ground floor of the University’s main library. Each of the industrial year placement students were provided with a desk and our own computers. My computer ran on Windows 7 and I had full administrator permissions to the computer allowing me to install any software required during my time in Customer Services.

When working on the help desk I would remotely connect to my computer in the office which allowed me to access my own email handler and any tools I needed whilst helping customers.

In our office we had a computer which was set up to dual boot on multiple operating systems which was useful when troubleshooting user problems or creating FAQs for all operating systems. We also had a disaster laptop which ran on Windows 7, an Apple Mac, an iPad, an Acer tablet amongst other equipment used for testing, troubleshooting and for gaining familiarity with different platforms.

We also had numerous network ports within the office for the different networks available such as staff networks and student networks as well as USB Ethernet ports and wireless cards, all of which were used for testing and troubleshooting in order to find solutions to user’s problems.

## workstation rooms and public service machines

The University has XX workstation rooms and approximately XX public computers. The majority of which are maintained by Information Services (some exceptions include two computer suites in the Computer Science department).

The workstation rooms contain computers, printers and scanners which can be accessed by students and staff at the University. The computers in these rooms all use Windows 7 and all use a centrally created image containing all settings and programs. The computers in the workstations rooms are on a domain named PSV which the user logs in to. This means the account is stored on the network, rather than locally allowing settings and things such as favourites to ‘follow’ the user between different computers. The computers also have a network drive known as the M: Drive mapped, this is the user’s (who has logged on) personal storage space. It is available on any computer they log into on campus and can also be accessed from personal computers on and off campus.

Workstation rooms known as Green Card Areas are also found on the University campus. These are available to students with disabilities and learning difficulties and have extra equipment available such as braille printers and book readers.

## Other Equipment

Whilst working for Information Services I had to be able to use an array of equipment available to users. This included microfilm and microfiche scanners, braille printers, card production machines, book readers and VOIP telephones.

## Applications and Software

I had to use many applications and pieces of software during a working day, they were used for organisation, troubleshooting, fault reporting and to solve users problems.

Reg  
  
Reg is a web based application which is used to manage user accounts. It is used for managing user passwords, locking and unlocking accounts, merging records, and is a useful tool to check information about a user. It is a simple text based menu system with a search feature which had to be logged into with my staff username and password.

#### Sunrise

This is a web based database application which was logged into using my staff username and password. It is primarily used for fault reporting. The fault may be on a student or member of staffs computer, a printer, the network or any other resource or piece of equipment maintained by Information Services.

The fault is recorded on the system with the user’s details and given a unique call reference number, it is then assigned to the team within Information Services whose responsibility the kind of fault is, where it will then we assigned to an individual within that team who will investigate the problem.

A reported fault or ‘call’ may be passed from team to team and have many members of staff working on it. A call history is kept with the call where different members of staff can comment on any thoughts or changes made to it.

Calls in the Sunrise system can be searched, tracked or flagged. When a call is opened an email is automatically sent to the user reporting the fault and the person logging it providing the reference number and any detail recorded. When a call is closed another email is generated and sent to both user and logger stating that the job is finished.

#### Interzone

Interzone is a tool used to manage users and departments network registrations. Each piece of equipment that uses the University’s network has to be registered on Interzone. The MAC address and category of the machine (for example staff laptop or student handheld device) is registered with the username of the owner and is placed on a certain VLAN depending on their department. The machine is then assigned an IP address on the network which then allows the user to connect to the network once they authenticate using their credentials assuming their settings are correct.

Interzone is also used for troubleshooting problems with devices connectivity and can be used to block machines. It is web based, secured by username and password and has numerous search methods available.

#### Outlook

I used Outlook daily whilst working for Information Services as it was the email handler used for all of my staff emails. We also received emails into a shared mailbox from users which were responded to by the member of staff on the email shift. Emails were also received whenever an important change was made to the network or a system we depended on, this kept me up to date with any issues I or the user may experience.

We also depended on Outlook for our daily timetable which was stored on shared calendars in Outlook.

#### Astra

Astra is the main database that stores all user information within the University. It is used by many departments within the University, all of which have different access rights and permissions within the program.

The Astra database fed information daily into Reg via updates ran during the morning. The main use for Astra in my team was to find extra information about a user for security reasons, or to check if a user existed on the system. I also used Astra when creating and printing staff or student cards.

#### PCounter

PCounter is an application used to run the printing service in the University. It stored users printing account information and allowed you to view or edit their printing credit. It was used for refunds or to charge users for printing when they didn’t have their cards.

#### Remote Assistance

Remote Assistance was a tool being pushed when I joined Information Services. A web based application called ‘showmypc’ had been purchased which required a user to access it via the internet and provide me with a secure pin provided by the application. I would then log into the application and enter the pin, this allowed me to view and control the users screen remotely.

We also used the Windows Remote Assistance tool for members of staff on the University network.

#### Spam Filters

I accessed users email account spam settings using a PHP web application, I could add or remove addresses to the spam filter for any account. This application allowed me to investigate why a user hadn’t received an expected email or to block phishing email addresses or web pages from the University’s network.

#### SharePoint

SharePoint was used by many departments within the University. It was used for centrally saving documents and information which could be accessed by numerous members of a team or department. The documents could be edited and saved by one member of staff at a time allowing document sharing by many users in one central location to take place without multiple, different copies of one document being created.   
  
Voyager/Primo

Voyager and Primo are library catalogue tools; they are web based pieces of software that allow users to search for items to check location, availability and recall or reserve.

#### Circulation

Circulation was a piece of software used to manage users library accounts, it was where details of what loans a user had taken out and what fines they had outstanding were stored. When a user paid a fine it was taken off their account using Circulation.

# My Roles and Responsibilities

# Core Duties

## Help Desks

Whilst working for Information Services one of my main roles was to man various help desks on the University campus when timetabled to do so. The main help desk was in the Hugh Owen Library which is the University’s main library; I also manned a help desk once a week in another University library which was situated off campus.

The help desk was available to students, members of staff and visitors to the University and the nature of enquiries varied greatly. Many of the customers queries were solved at the desk, however if they were too complex, time consuming or required a different teams input the customer would be referred. The query would be recorded on the Sunrise system mentioned above and the customer would be put in touch with the relevant team.

When working on the desk I would mainly deal with enquiries regarding user accounting, networking, virus removals, file recovery, office and club accounts, web accounts and personal web sites, personal file stores, VPN access as well as general enquiries about customer’s personal computing problems.

Problems were often solved at the help desk as the customer would usually bring their problem or query with them, for example they would bring their laptop or you would be able to see the issue if a user logged into their account at the desk.

Other responsibilities involved with the help desk shift include recording statistics about the number and length of queries received, maintaining the printers close to the help desks and providing library and general support and advice.

One of the most challenging aspects of working on the help desk was having to deal with foreign students laptops, for example a simple network setup would be made very difficult on a Chinese language laptop. I eventually overcame this problem by learning or memorising the icons associated with different menus and also the location of different settings in a window.

## Telephone Support

I was timetabled to provide telephone support during my placement, I was given my own VOIP (Voice Over IP) telephone log in credentials and also a team log in which was used whilst on the phone support shift. This allowed numerous members of staff to log in to the teams number and answer calls.

One of the main tools I used during a telephone shift was remote assistance. This made answering queries a lot easier as i could view and control the users screen real time, allowing me to provide a solution manually instead of having to provide instructions.

Queries received during the shift were generally user accounting issues, network problems and things such as email set up. Remote users such as distance learners who studied away from the University were regular callers as well as members of staff. I also received calls unrelated to my team varying from advice for new students to telephone sales. I would try to help as many of these callers as possible, however some had to be forwarded on to more relevant teams.

As well as answering live phone calls and dealing with queries over the telephone I had to monitor the answerphone and work through Sunrise calls assigned to our team. During quiet periods I would also answer emails and work on my own tasks.

The most challenging aspect of the telephone shift was dealing with non-computer illiterate customers, often retired members of staff. It was difficult to provide instructions as they didn’t know basic computer terms or jargon and often got frustrated with themselves for not understanding. However, other members of the team often passed these callers over to me as I handled the calls well.

## Email and Web Support

When timetabled on an email support shift I would sit at my own desk and work through the team’s mailbox replying to emails received from customers. I would work through the emails in the order they were received unless any email required urgent attention. I would also be logged into the teams MSN, Twitter and Facebook accounts answering any queries that came through.

Most queries related to my team and were easily solved by email, often by referring the customer to an FAQ already created which contained the solution to their problem. Some customers were asked to call the team by telephone so that remote assistance could be used or for security reasons.

## FAQs and Reporter

Our team provided and maintained an FAQ support website. The site used a database of written FAQs and was searchable by the user. I was assigned FAQs to be written and checked during my task shifts. The topic of these FAQs varied greatly from how to set up an iPhone with the University network to what can be recycled through Information Services.

I also took responsibility for the reporter which was a monthly task that was undertaken to check any FAQs that were awaiting reviews or missing information. I had to run an online query which would search through the databases and select any FAQ that needed to be checked. I would then print off a list of the FAQs and distribute them to people in my team; each person would complete their share of the reporter and give the finished lists back to me.

## Evening Shifts

Each member of the team worked an evening shift every other week; this was an extra two hours of work manning the help desk until 7.30pm, which you would be given back in time off in lieu. When working the shift you were the only member of full time staff in the building and took responsibility for the till, turning off equipment and fire marshalling. I took on another member of my teams evening shift meaning I did one every week.

# Other Duties

## Library Duties

Due to the merge with the library support team I had to take on library duties during my placement. I found these new roles quite easy and quickly picked up the skills required.

Duties included taking and processing library fines, issuing and returning loaned items, located items in the library, creating and printing library cards and selling items available from the main desk.

## Training

I was involved in training the library staff with our systems after the merge as well as the graduate trainees when they arrived. I created a folder containing instructions on all of our different systems and different scenarios which could be referred to when dealing with an enquiry. Library staff would also be trained via shadowing when I was on the help desk and they would happily ask me questions or for support with issues they encountered.

## Computer and Workstation Room Audit

Two of my larger projects when working for Information Services were conducting audits of the department’s computers and the University’s workstation rooms. I created a spread sheet and recorded details about all of the departmental computers such as their spec and condition. I also travelled around all of the workstation rooms using a departmental van recording information such as the condition of the rooms, what equipment was present, whether the noticeboards were up to date and checking the telephone lines.

## Other

Other roles and responsibilities included reformatting the HTML of our online FAQs and creating procedures for members of staff to refer to. We held activation sessions where groups of overseas students would come to activate their user accounts and set passwords, this was challenging due to the language barrier. There was an element of admin work where I had to fill out and file forms to register new accounts or record statistics.

I had the responsibility of driving the departmental vans and also had to maintain and repair printers around the campus. I was involved in a roll out of voice over IP (VOIP) telephones; this involved setting up the phone for the members of staff and provided a demonstration on how they were best used. I occasionally created posters and signs which were placed on departmental noticeboards around the campus.

# Training Completed

During my time working for Information Services I attended and completed numerous training courses. These included:

**Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist: Windows 7 (MCTS)**

We had weekly training sessions on the MCTS course, we used the text books supplied by Microsoft. After 6 months of training we applied for funding to enter for the exam, however the University declined our request. I plan on sitting the exam in my own time in the near future.

**Dealing with difficult customers**

I received training on how to deal with difficult customers, this was a three hour session where we were told how to handle different situations. We were split into groups and worked through examples of various circumstances.

**Health and safety**

We were given health and safety training which included things such as heavy lifting, working alone, and workstation health and safety.

**Discrimination and Disability**

I was told how to approach situations where customers had various disabilities and how to avoid discrimination in the workplace.

**Data Protection and Freedom of Information**

I was given training on different aspects of freedom of information and data protection.

**University Systems**

During my first two weeks on my placement I was given a lot of training on how to use the University systems, how to handle sensitive data and how the University’s network, account system and servers worked. This made me more aware of the structure of the different systems and allowed better troubleshooting of many problems that arose during the year.

# Critical Evaluation

The merging of teams at the start of my placement greatly affected my year, I feel the merge is still an on-going process and won’t be complete for some time. This is because the ‘computer’ side of the new Customer Services team have quickly adapted and taken on the library roles which came with the merge, however the library staff, most of whom are of an older generation are finding it difficult to adjust and learn the more technical roles they have received due to the merge. Although some members of staff struggled with the merging, I found it beneficial as it presented me with the opportunity to provide training and support to an older generation who were unfamiliar with even the basic aspects of computing.

I believe I had a very good relationship with my boss Jan Litton whilst working for Information Services, I felt I could ask her about any issues I encountered at work and her office door was always open. I think this was one of the reasons why I enjoyed the placement.

At times I found the repetitiveness of being timetabled to do certain shifts everyday frustrating, especially when a new batch of students had arrived and a day was spent doing the same task on each student’s laptops. I also feel that although I have enhanced personal skills such as communication and patience, I did not learn many technical skills that would be transferable to other jobs. For example the roles and responsibilities of the placement didn’t involve any PHP or Java coding that would have been beneficial for both my final year project and further work.

During the placement I have learnt that I am good with time keeping and organisation. I also found that I am good at clearly explaining things, I was often asked to draft emails which were sent out in bulk to staff and students. I also found that I have good patience when dealing with customers and can communicate easily.

I learnt a lot about the organisation and how the University ran. I saw how important it was that different teams within my department communicated with each other, and even more so how important it was that different departments communicated well. For example we often had to contact the academic office and finance about students.

If I was the manager of the team I worked for I would consider changing, or loosening the timetabled nature of the role. Although it worked well and ensured every point of call was covered, I found it tedious at times.

Overall I enjoyed my time working for Information Services in my industrial year, I enjoyed working with customers and felt confident dealing with their issues. I think I was an important member of my team and contributed throughout the year. I felt I was a valued member of staff in the department and have been asked to work part time during my final year in University. I enjoyed the responsibilities I took on as part of the job and enhanced personal skills such as communication with customers and time keeping due to our timetables.