Annual Report
2017/18
Through the course of 2017/18, there has been a number of fundamental advances across our basic infrastructures – upgrading the data network, completing the rollout of our integrated help-desk services (Cherita), and migrating almost all staff email boxes to the Novell ESS service. In addition, a number of our core administrative systems have had major version upgrades – JISC, Tabulae, GAMS, Oracle 11i and Sage. New services have been introduced – the ESRM service (in readiness for research project management) and the self-service capability. The Oxford database work platform continues to be adopted across the university, with almost 200 websites now migrated onto it.

This year also saw the conclusion of several strategic direction initiatives, including the selection of Canvas as the new institutional VLE (virtual learning environment); the decision to move the Cherita system to a cloud service based in Ireland; and the commitment to migrate many data centre platforms to an external Jisc data centre in Slough, operated by VIRTUS. These will enable predictable delivery of projects to meet the business requirements. We continue to evolve and support information security activities to protect institutional and personal data across the university. For staff, the ‘Working Together’ programme has sought to strengthen teamworking and collaboration within IT Services, with a range of workshops and events throughout the year. Innovation initiatives, too, have continued, with a range of great ideas and prototypes for new ICT-enabled capabilities.

Looking forward to the coming year, the immediate focus is on predictable delivery – providing core services which are robust and resilient – and on delivering projects more effectively, with the proportionate levels of rigor and process. We will continue to strengthen our relations with the wider University – divisions, departments, colleges and faculties – to support greater team-working, collaboration and information-sharing, and to extend staff development for the wider IT function.

The process to produce a new IT strategy started this summer, aligning with the new University Strategic Plan and focusing on how information technology can facilitate and support our strategic directions and ambitions.

We look forward to working with colleagues across the institution to develop our skills and services – to build an information technology capability in keeping with the needs of our world-leading university.

Dr Sean Dufy, Chief Information Officer

Photograph: Peter Robinson
Our Year in Numbers

A Day in the Life

- 420,000 incoming emails delivered
- 514,000 spam emails rejected
- 100 phone calls to Service Desk
- 28,000 phone calls made and received
- 68 TB data downloaded
- 4 security incidents responded to
- 10,000 visitors to Oxford Mosaic websites
- 210 events recorded by the media team
- 79 active projects
- 28,000 support requests to IT Services
- 13,783 hours of Lynda.com video watched
- 210 events and conferences broadcast live
- 30 information security service requests
- 64 services offered
- 44 projects completed
- 724 IT Learning Centre courses delivered
- 108 client sites created on Oxford Mosaic
- 1,083 visitors to Oxford websites by the media team
- 636 events and conferences broadcast live
- 30 security incidents responded to

Projects completed:
- 33 in 2015/16
- 47 in 2016/17
- 44 in 2017/18
- 100 projects completed
- 28,000 support requests to IT Services
- 13,783 hours of Lynda.com video watched
- 64 services offered
- 724 IT Learning Centre courses delivered
- 108 client sites created on Oxford Mosaic
- 1,083 visitors to Oxford websites by the media team
- 636 events and conferences broadcast live
- 30 security incidents responded to

The Past Three Years

- Data backed up by HFS service (terabytes)
  - 576 in 2015/16
  - 607 in 2016/17
  - 687 in 2017/18
- Projects completed:
  - 33 in 2015/16
  - 47 in 2016/17
  - 44 in 2017/18
- Network traffic (GBits per second)
  - 3.4 in 2015/16
  - 5.2 in 2016/17
  - 7.3 in 2017/18
- CONNECT PCs/laptops managed
  - 3,492 in 2015/16
  - 3,920 in 2016/17
- Jobs handled by Advanced Research Computing
  - 234,446 in 2015/16
  - 626,707 in 2016/17
- IT Learning Centre courses delivered
  - 108 in 2015/16
  - 108 in 2016/17
  - 724 in 2017/18
- Data backed up by HFS service (terabytes)
  - 576 in 2015/16
  - 607 in 2016/17
  - 687 in 2017/18
- Information security incidents responded to
  - 702 in 2015/16
  - 705 in 2016/17
  - 1,083 in 2017/18

Daily averages during 2017/18

2015/16 2016/17 2017/18

- Information security service requests
  - 636 in 2015/16
  - 940 in 2016/17
  - 1,063 in 2017/18

- Information security incidents responded to
  - 702 in 2015/16
  - 705 in 2016/17
  - 1,083 in 2017/18
New Research Computing Board

Highlights this year

We help researchers in several different ways: advancing research computing in support, and supporting academic systems such as ARC and the new MARS system. We also work with colleagues across the University including the Bodleian Libraries, Research Services and the University IT Services.

This year, we took a leading role in a new initiative to build strategically on and develop the current research computing services and expertise at the University. It includes the Bodleian Libraries, systems such as X5 and the new MARS advanced research computing, research and administrative systems, and improving access to resources.

By departments and divisions.

Research Services range from Research Support Services and Research Services, offering support to researchers across the University.

Data visualisation services

• Research Support Services can help research groups use data visualisations to increase the reach of the original research and make it easier to communicate their outputs and findings to potential collaborators.

• This year, we set up a collaboration with the University of Sheffield to share knowledge and experience. The aim is to increase skills and share approaches for the benefit of researchers at both institutions.

• Students now have a simple, safe and secure way to submit a digital copy of their research thesis and additional materials.

Research thesis digital submission

• Following a pilot last year, we made our new research thesis digital submission applications available to all research degree students.

• Students now have a simple, safe and secure way to submit a digital copy of their research thesis and additional materials.

Help for research administrators

• MARS is a new portal for research administrators to access research data and systems.

• Research Support Services can help.

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Electronic lab notebooks: a new way to document lab research

Research services are often cutting-edge technologies in their work, but when it comes to documenting their processes and findings the traditional tool is a very low-tech one – the lab notebook. These are literally traditional tools are low-tech ones – but when it comes to documenting lab processes and findings, the traditional tool is a very low-tech one – the lab notebook.

That is why the University is investing in electronic lab notebooks (ELNs) – digital alternatives to paper notebooks, used to create, store, and preserve a high-quality record of the research. The cloud-based ELN makes it easier to access and search data, and to exchange ideas; remote collaboration is an important benefit. And if there are patent applications and challenges, or publishing disputes, the ELN offers vital evidence that remains accessible many years later.

Our Research Technology Services team carried out two initial projects to establish demand and high-level requirements for ELNs, and then to shortlist ELN vendors by arranging demos and sampling services in the early adopter group.

The early adopter group is now working with the team to finalise the design and specifications for a two-year project. Co-ordinating the use of ELNs remains a cost-effective way of making the technology available and avoids the risk of fragmenting the research record over years.

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Extreme business continuity: delivering an upgrade in spite of snow

In March this year, we battled the ‘Beast from the East’ to deliver a major upgrade to the University’s research costing and pricing tool, X5. The upgrade was scheduled for 1/2 March, time was tight and postponement was not an option.

With a week’s notice of the snow, contingency planning was activated for carrying out the work with the entire team working remotely – in Oxfordshire and even Wales.

The team from IT Services were asked to connect remotely, so they knew they could work without the need to get to the University. Our support from Research Services had not done this before – for the first time.

There were other issues to think about, too. Clear communication is key when following a step-by-step release implementation guide, so teams had to collaborate using Skype, email and conference calls to ensure everyone knew when they were needed.

The other problem was that remote working meant fewer connections, so the work took longer than it had been due on site, but the team worked late into the night to make it happen.

It was a great example of teamwork, with the Business Systems Support and Microsoft Teams working hand-in-hand with Research Services and the Business Systems team.

Over 900 research staff across numerous departments use X5, and their feedback was very good. This exercise has proved that we can work together to deliver business continuity despite the best efforts of the British weather.

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IT Services provides services and projects to advance the University’s capability in technology-enhanced teaching and learning, along with events to raise awareness of best practice.

**Highlights this year**

**OxTALent awards**
- Our annual awards celebrate the creativity and innovation of staff and students across the University in teaching, learning, research, outreach and public engagement.
- Inspiring examples this year came from numerous disciplines, from classics and English to education, health and science.

**E-exams trial**
- The E-exams project trialled a system that allows students to type, rather than handwrite, their responses.
- Around 70 students from three departments/faculties took part.

**WebLearn**
- Around 70 students from three departments/faculties took part.
- It is expected that a follow-on project will be run during the 2018–19 academic year to investigate how e-exams can be used more widely.

**Looking ahead**

- Inevitably, the virtual learning environment (VLE) review will be completed and as a result a new reactive digital platform has been evolved for the University.
- We believe that this will allow the University to adopt the best teaching innovations that are made possible by digital technology.

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**Workplace Finder: an innovative app to help students study**

Innovation can sometimes be about finding a simple solution to problems, but not one that no-one has thought of before. When DPhil student Joseph Poore from Inhouse, a business about helping students find somewhere suitable to study, we were able to make it happen.

The University has over 150 workplaces, from college and department libraries to common rooms and cafés, but many students end up crowding into the flagship

To look for a new VLE supplier and we were able to start a formal tender process. The time we asked for a detailed proposal covering everything from functionality and navigability to support and cost implications.

The University has now chosen Canvas from Instructure as the new VLE for the University, a product with an excellent balance of functionality and user experience. A series of roadshows in the second term introduced Canvas to potential users, who said it was impressed by the intuitive dashboards and new features such as video feedback and calendar integration.

The project is about much more than replacing technology; in truth it is a chance to make teaching and learning fun. We hope that in the long term the new VLE will provide the structure and support for innovative teaching and learning across the University. A new service providing learning design workshops will help course teams to • It is expected that a follow-on project will be run during the 2018–19 academic year to investigate how e-exams can be used more widely.

Following an extensive University-wide review last year, we had a list of requirements to work from and were ready to see what was available. Our information gathering began by asking potential suppliers for a ‘sandbox’ (testing environment) so hands-on usability testing could be carried out by the people who would be actually using the new VLE:

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Enterprise Administrative Information Systems

IT Services works in partnership with the University’s central administrative units to develop and support the University’s business and information systems. We also carry out University-wide initiatives to improve the quality of information available to administrative and academic users and support their decision making.

Highlights this year

Tableau V9 upgrade completed

- Tableau is a critical tool for analysing business data, with a wide user community, so it is vital to analysing trends such as student statistics.
- It is used for data management, data visualisation and statistical reports, and is used for analysing trends such as student statistics.
- This was a large project, completed three years of work.
- The upgrade means that this key finance application and digital education, 108 new sites were created this year.
- We allocated four days to the upgrade roll-out, and all used to getting ‘resubscribe’ emails coming into force in May this year. We are adopting digital processes rather than paper-based ones.
- The upgrade was replaced with a heart and incorporated into our final communications. We went live scheduled for the week of Valentine’s Day, the A in the DARS logo was replaced with a heart and incorporated into our final communications. We went live with minimal disruption, and more importantly an extremely quiet helpdesk.
- Finally, we arranged a celebration evening for our Super Users, IT project and business teams to thank them for making the project a success – a pop-up pizza evening we continue to serve DARS.

Looking ahead

In response to user requests, we will have a number of new student systems projects in the pipeline. These include the Student Progression project to replace 60 paper forms with a Self-Service application, and four undergraduate forms with an online version which will be available from anywhere with an internet connection, including mobile devices. Paper payslips will still be available until May 2019.

HR Self-Service: access your information online

University staff can now check their HR information online, including HR Self-Service functionality which allows them to access the information that the University holds about them.

This is particularly timely as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) came into force in May this year. We are all used to getting ‘resubscribe’ emails, mentioning GDPR but a more important aspect is the right to know what data an organisation holds about you and that it is up-to-date and accurate. One of the benefits of HR Self-Service is giving staff the ability to view the personal data that the University holds on them and update it themselves.

Another advantage is the ability to view pop-up online, as well as contract details and pay information. People expect the kind of convenience outside of work, as online shopping and banking become the norm, so it’s available at work too.

In this first phase, access to the new systems is through the University network, but the second phase will make it available from anywhere with an internet connection, including mobile devices. Paper payslips will still be available until then, for the benefit of people who don’t have access to an internet-enabled device at work.

Further developments will include a manager dashboard allowing managers to view basic information about their team, and the ability to book leave and manage sickness absence online.

Dr Kate Blackman, Project Sponsor, HR Self-Service
The network switch updates
• We updated all 3,113 fixed network switches that connect departments and colleges to the University’s “seed” and “seed2” secondary data centres.
• The work was carried out early in the morning, with no noticeable disruption.

Looking ahead
In the coming year, we expect to rollout an improved data backup service, relocate the other half of our hardware estate to the new cloud data centre in Slough, and improve wireless networking services, and expand both managed network and cloud-based computing services for the University.

Nexus365: a collaborative migration
Nexus365 is the project to migrate our centrally managed email and calendaring to the cloud-based Microsoft Office 365 service. It sounds simple, until you realize that this involves 42,000 users and 60,000 mailboxes. When you also factor in shared mailboxes and delegated access – reflecting the network of relationships within the collegiate University – things become more complex.

Then there’s the issue of ensuring that the old on-premise systems and the new cloud systems co-exist seamlessly during the eight-month migration. That, and many other technical issues, involved a huge amount of work behind the scenes to set everything up in advance of the actual migration.

Ultimately, Nexus365 is a service that allows better collaboration, along with email and calendaring, scare also get access to other Office 365 applications such as Skype, Groups and Teams. So it’s fitting that the project itself included much collaboration.

While the Nexus team were working on the design, build and testing of the infrastructure, the Project team (responsible for business change and communication) were working on the office. An innovation on the project was that both teams worked together in the same office, improving communication and getting things done more quickly.

The collaboration also involved the wider University through the ITSS technical consultation group which included IT staff support from divisions and colleges. The Service Desk was also involved right from the start, and planning ahead meant they were able to anticipate and manage large call volumes from new users.

By the end of the project, we had migrated nearly 42,000 mailboxes, visited around 190 sites – with over 500 desk worked by our support teams. ‘Flawless’ – said over 551 Terabytes email and calendar data.

Migrating data centres
When a data centre supports the University’s key business applications it is important that these systems remain available at all times. Normally that means using a resilient system for each application. The University identified two secondary data centres: if one goes down, the other takes over. When three of these data centres fail to be migrated, it requires much forward planning.

Over a weekend in February, we migrated half of the University’s administrative systems in the Begbroke data centre to a new hub in the University Shared Data Centre. This meant months of planning to ensure that the services running at Begbroke in a controlled environment could then be seeded to the actual migration, physically relocating the hardware, before getting everything back up and running in as short a time as possible.

This was another step in a series of interlinked projects to upgrade and consolidate our data centre services. For example, the University’s key financial, human resources and student systems are all interlinked with each other and with our capacity, reliability and security with related data centres to support the University’s needs for the future.

The new staffing structure for Infrastructure Services has allowed us to consolidate our two central strategic teams, a new Platform Services group, and improve our responsiveness to end users.

During the year we carried out a programme of hardware replacements or upgrades, and also made improvements to identity and access management as well as Nexus and Chorus. A major project has been the work on our new data centre facilities.

Many projects, like the Nexus365 migration, are much more complex than they might appear to the end user. Much of our work is behind the scenes, and largely unnoticed – to the end user. Much of our work is behind the scenes, and largely unnoticed – to the end user.

The next step is re-cabling of the Examination Schools upgrade with the new cloud data centres.

Finally, we updated over 18,000 devices in more than 250 locations.

Exam Schools upgrade
• We carried out the first phase of an upgrade to the wireless networking service in this Grade I listed, 19th century building.
• The work is re-configuring the building that will allow for a second phase of a wireless upgrade, planned for 2019.

Network switch updates
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Cybersecurity

Our job is both to protect the University from attack and to ensure that everyone has the knowledge and awareness to play their part, enabling everyone in the collegiate University to carry out their business, teaching and research with confidence.

Highlights this year

New Information Security website
- The user-friendly website includes guidelines for staff and students on safe working practices.
- We have expanded the general advice to show how it applies at Oxford. All I.T. and Finance services are on Oxford-specific details, such as keeping your Single Sign-On safe.
- The website is hosted on the Oxford Mosaic platform.

Simulated phishing attacks
- We began a series of campaigns to raise awareness of the risk from phishing and malicious emails.
- The emails were based on common phishing requests.
- The website is now hosted on the Oxford Mosaic platform.

Looking ahead
- Improved security measures for divisions such as PC and servers. We have selected a product, Sophos, and will be implementing improved protection.
- We have selected a product, Sophos, and will be implementing improved protection.
- The structure and focus of our Data Security Standard.

Our Information Security Team is a central component of the University’s Information Governance and Legal Services, as well as data providers such as NHS Digital. All these relationships need to be managed. 

Information governance for medical researchers

When the Medical Sciences Division (MSD) wanted to set up its Information Governance Office, they came to our Information Security Team (IST) for help.

Information governance is about managing information in a way that is consistent with regulatory requirements for medical research, teaching, grant applications and dealing with third parties who handle information on their behalf. Medical and scientific research involves a large number of external bodies and providers. The result is a streamlined service for research.

The project we managed had three aims: to bring standards for card terminals and e-commerce sites to complete where possible, to plan for compliance in other areas such as phone transactions, and to make it easier for parts of the University that want to take card payments to do so, with clear processes and guidance.

The industry standards for data security are set by the Payment Card Industry (PCI), and requiring banks such as Westbay (which process card payments on behalf of merchants) to meet PCI requirements. In the UK, we refer to the Data Security Standard (DSS) and the new processes we now have in place, will ensure that we can achieve and maintain compliance with the DSS.

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We now have in place, will ensure that we can achieve and maintain compliance with the DSS.
As demand continues to grow, we are always looking to improve the way we manage our IT services – with a focus on the customers across the University who need to use them.

Another goal is to work more closely with local departments and colleges. Steps taken this year have included sharing access to best practice Service Desk Institute training, improving self-help, and making IT service management systems (ITSM) tools available to the wider IT community.

Resource planning for predictable delivery

• A new time tracking facility across IT Services will allow for more accurate service delivery and charge plans.
• New processes and tools for allocating resources have been rolled out to help the department predict the cost of delivering services.

Looking ahead

Our Windows 10 project will upgrade all computers managed by IT Services from Windows 7 to Windows 10. Online training and guidance will be available to help staff with the transition.

Remote support to speed up troubleshooting

A new remote access tool, Bomgar, is helping our Service Desk analysts to see through customers’ eyes and resolve customer queries more effectively.

The new tool, which complements the well-established channel of telephone and email, can be used to remotely support customers anywhere in the world and view any data connected devices. Customers are not required to give permission to access their device and are guided step-by-step through the time period for the duration of the session.

Getting connected

Our Desktop Services team has been in much demand this year by new users taking up the CONNECT managed desktop service, which provides ofice computers, network drive storage and local printing, is centrally managed. As the team stepped up to get them on board,

Everything from software and hardware to printing and data storage. There were also another 400 new users to look after, because the University Gardens and Museums also requested the service.

The project will also make it easy for museum members to log into any CONNECT PC anywhere in the world on any device and are guided step-by-step through the time period for the duration of the session. If any follow-up is needed, a record of the remote session is saved and these are incorporated within our customer-facing code of conduct. We have extended use of the software beyond IT Services to look after a completely new type of business compared to UAS.

Once the negotiations are all completed, users will have the benefit of a robust, centrally managed desktop delivery service with regular security updates and a five-yearly refresh of hardware. Individual staff members can log into any CONNECT PC within the university and get a consistent experience. This project will also allow a collaboration between the museums and the Bodleian Libraries to work, because they will all be on the same standardised system.

For more information on the CONNECT service, please visit http://connect.ox.ac.uk.

The year-long project started with an intensive ‘fiding period looking at existing facilities and future requirements: everything from software and hardware to printing and data storage. There were some challenges specific to museums, like how to store research data about museum collections and training about research support such as MuseumsPlus, used for management of collections. The project was launched with a workshop for museum staff to learn about a completely new type of business compared to UAS.

The roll out of CONNECT is a pivotal step in the transition of previously disparate IT support units into a single IT team covering the University’s Gardens and Museums.

Haas Ezzet, Head of IT, Oxford University Gardens and Museums

Annual increase in calls to the service desk

144%

10
15
19
21
21
44%
44%

44%
Widening Engagement

The University’s engagement with the wider community is a key priority. This year we have developed ways of reaching people.

• other museums and gardens followed suit, using Oxford’s unique collections from different perspectives.

We support and enable this engagement and outreach in several ways. Much takes place online through websites and apps, keeping our Application Development team busy.

Museums on Mosaic project on the platform to date.

• The programme included two cohorts, with 40 people taking part this year.

Looking ahead

• Oxford Libraries has a series of mobile-optimised web apps for telling stories about Oxfordshire place and museum collections from different perspectives.

• The improved programme now includes travel to a much larger audience through live streaming the event. Our new ‘Working Together’ initiative seeks to improve the way that we work together and with partners across the University.

• New approaches include filming sessions at a museum’s collections, encouraging more people to attend exhibitions and events, and highlighting research to the academic community or subject enthusiasts.

Widening recruitment

• We have adopted new ways to improve diversity in the department, particularly in terms of age (our average age is 46).

• ITS3 is a single contact point for local IT Support Staff Services (ITS3)

• The programme now includes training for skills and knowledge of the people within the department.

• Leadership programme for IT Services staff

• The programme included two cohorts, with 40 people taking part this year.

• The programme aimed to bring the department together with a common culture that makes everyone feel valued. It is partly about belonging – uniting a department that historically came out of three distinct entities – and partly about improving the way we work together.

• Workshops for team leaders covered serious questions about ‘vision and visible culture’.

• The programme was partly about working together, changing perspectives and improving working relationships both within the department and with partners across the University.