

Reports from the SRCF AGM

11th March MMXIII

Report from the chair

Delivered by Ben Millwood

Easter 2012

Subsequent to a somewhat downbeat summary from my predecessor and requests for support, we received several generous donations and expressions of interest from several parties. Unfortunately, we didnt manage to respond to all of this interest, but we did manage to appoint Andrew Lee, Andrew Ryrrie, and Tejas Guruswamy as new system administrators, alongside the outgoing chair Daniel Thomas.

We held a successful Garden Party on Friday 15th June; we made good use of the extended sponsorship offered by OpenMarket, with the addition of free pizza to our usual supply of Pimms and various snacks. The outgoing committee advises the incoming committee that Perfect Pizza has shown a willingness to negotiate on prices.

We also distributed some stash: full-zip black fleeces with an embroidered logo.

Michaelmas 2012

At the Freshers Fair we piloted a scheme of printing business cards to hand out to people with our essential details on them. This felt a bit more professional than paper fliers, and looked quite cute. We also featured a live demo of the desktop service, as a consequence of which I accidentally left gnome chess running for several days, whereupon it started consuming a whole CPU to itself. There were over a hundred signups in total, and several responses.

Our welcome social was held on the 15th October, at which we watched my kernel panic a couple of times and appointed a new sysadmin, Daniel Richman.

In November, we appointed two more sysadmins, Ramana Kumar and Hauke Neitzel.

Lent 2013

We appointed Andrew Cooper as a system administrator, whose expertise with our virtual machine software has already been very useful.

We held a well-attended Machine Room Tour on Thursday 7th March, billed as a last chance to see, since the UCS is being moved out of its current location into several disparate temporary locations. Eventually they will regroup when their new room is ready, but until then there will regrettably be no more MRTs.

Membership

The number of active members and societies appears to be declining: last years chair report put it at 2240 users and 880 societies, while we seem to now be at 2094 and 856 respectively. This is somewhat to be expected, since as has been pointed out the needs of users are changing and the SRCF is slowly becoming less relevant, but its clear theres some mileage in it yet. Given that the staffing situation seems better now than it has been in the past, future committee and sysadmin teams are encouraged to look into ways they can innovate to provide a better service.

Progress relative to promise

When writing this report I discovered the manifesto under which I ran for chair, and thought it prudent to compare against my actual achievements. The items on there I failed to fulfill are improving the support system, and providing more managed services for the less technically-literate. Tasks that have met with moderate but not complete success are updating the website and improving automation of sysadmin tasks. I think that my primary promises of recruiting new staff and getting the support backlog under control have been met, although of course more help is always welcome.

Report from the junior treasurer

Delivered by Charles Board

My time as Junior Treasurer seems to have gone by without any significant problems, due in no small part to my predecessor's efforts during his tenure. The accounts were submitted on time at the end of Michaelmas, and did not encounter any problems.

Towards the start of my time I had a small look around to see if there might be any bank accounts paying better

We recorded a slight gain this year, with donations totalling a little over 500 since the last AGM. There seems to be a decent link between the emails we send out about events such as the Garden Party and the AGM, and an increase in donations. It's therefore probably a good idea to remember to use these to remind people that donations are always welcome.

The garden party in May Week was sponsored this year by OpenMarket, for 200.

Our major expenditure this year was the purchase of a new UPS for 300. We also had an expenditure of 170 reimbursing Matthew for stash.

Summary of accounts

A summary of the accounts were circulated at the AGM.

Future

The recent increase in donations, and subsequent increase in our finances is reassuring for our future. It will remain a good idea to ensure that people are aware that we rely on donations, in particular by including a mention in emails that we send to our users, such as event notifications and so forth.

Thanks

Thanks go to CICCUC for their donation as a society, and to OpenMarket for their sponsorship of the Garden Party. Thanks also to Steven Murdoch, Matthew Graham, Alasdair McClymont, Edward Hughes and C.J. Watson, as well as several others, for their personal donations during the year.

SRCF system administrators' report

Andrew Ryrie and Malcolm Scott

March 2013

Recruitment

Seven new sysadmins joined the team this year: Daniel Thomas, Andrew Lee, Tejas Guruswamy, Andrew Ryrie, Hauke Neitzel, Ramana Kumar, Daniel Richman and Andy Cooper. This is a significantly higher recruitment than in previous years, perhaps due to a streamlined recruitment process, and we hope that it will continue in future years.

Hardware

The failure of the SRCF UPS a few months into this year led to its replacement by a second-hand but fully functional 2200VA APC UPS, purchased by the SRCF. The loss of the old UPS was caused by sudden catastrophic failure of the battery packs. It may be possible to sell the old UPS on a 'for parts' basis; this has not been investigated.

Another hardware improvement was the upgrading of pip's memory to 32GiB from 12GiB; the memory was generously donated by Dominic Benson.

There have been several problems with the Tyan servers in the virtual machine cluster; 2 of the 5 of these intermittently fail to boot. The problem is still being investigated, but it may be fixable.

Upgrade to Ubuntu 12.04, Precise Pangolin

The latest long-term support version of Ubuntu was installed on the desktop service at the end of 2012; this provided many software updates to desktop users. The upgrade was installed to pip in January 2013; this provided more recent software to users of the shell service and web server. This upgrade also means that the SRCF's software will continue to be supported until at least 2017.

Virtual machines to support undergraduate research

Last term we were approached by Nicholas Ngorok and his supervisor Jon Crowcroft who needed several web servers on which to test his Computer Science Tripos Part II project, an anti-DDoS system. We have provided him with root access to five temporary dedicated virtual machines. This can be considered an initial trial of an idea we have been considering for a while: the provision of a limited number of virtual machines to individuals and societies, using resources freed up by the virtualisation of our main services.

Ongoing Projects

Recruitment: Although high recruitment this year has put the SRCF in a strong position for the next year or two, a lot of sysadmins will graduate in the near future, and good recruitment will need to continue

to counteract this.

Software development: We (specifically, mostly Ben) have been refactoring the diverse and disorganised set of scripts we use to maintain our services, bringing together common code into a Python library. Daniel is working on a system to try to detect outdated and insecure software installations in users' and societies' accounts, so that those responsible can be warned and will hopefully upgrade before a security incident occurs.

Hardware upgrades: We are currently working to replace earthquake (the storage server for our virtual machine cluster) which has served us well for the past few years but is increasingly suffering from disk performance and reliability problems.

Old hardware: There is some hardware owned by the SRCF which should be disposed of. We may be able to get some money for some of this.

Virtualization: It is planned to virtualize the web and shell servers at some unspecified future date, which would provide improvements in manageability hopefully resulting in increased uptime. This has been made possible by a generous donation from Third Light.