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University of East Anglia

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Issue

A paper outlining the proposed approach to providing IT support in respect of mobile devices.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to approve the "enabling" approach of providing advice and guidance for users to manage mobile devices themselves, to be piloted for a period of one year.

Resource Implications

N/A

Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity issues will be the responsibility of Schools and Departments providing mobile devices for the use of their staff.

Timing of decisions

It is intended that the pilot of the proposed approach will come into immediate effect once approved by the Committee.

Further Information

Enquiries about the content of the paper should be addressed to Steve Jackman (s.jackman@uea.ac.uk) – ext 7615).

Background

Use of mobile computing and communications devices is proliferating, and there is a need to establish the levels and modes of support that can be offered by ISD to users of such devices. An approach of enabling users to manage their own devices through the provision of advice and guidance is

proposed. The IT Forum discussed the issue in its meeting on 21st May, and agreed that this approach should be piloted for one year.

Discussion follows:

University of East Anglia

FUTURE IT SUPPORT SERVICE LEVELS

Steve Jackman, Assistant Director Faculty IT Support

14 May 2012

Summary

This paper briefly sets out the challenge facing IT Support in respect of mobile devices, together with a proposed response that articulates a level and mode of support. Agreement is sought in order that the expectations of the user community can properly be addressed, managed, and ultimately met.

Background

The staff/academic community at UEA is increasingly using a range of types and versions of computing device beyond the standard UEA MS Windows desktop. In addition to Windows, MAC and Linux desktops and laptops there has been a recent dramatic growth in the number of mobile devices being purchased and used (tablets, smartphones). The changing expectations of the community need to be understood and reflected in the design and capability of IT services. ISD must be clear about what types and levels of support are available, understand the effect this has on policy and strategy, and then promote this to the community. This is not simply about the introduction of new classes of device; the very nature of IT provision and support expectations is evolving to reflect a different working culture that can be observed through a multitude of requests and innovative working arrangements.

The Challenge

Desktops and laptops increasingly include Apple Macs and Linux machines, especially within the research community; tablet devices are rapidly growing in number in all areas of the community; smartphones are becoming ubiquitous; devices are a mix of university-owned and personally-owned. The picture is further complicated by the myriad versions of hardware and operating systems in use, undermining existing models of controlled upgrade and uniformity that exist to simplify the support requirements and make the user experience consistent.

In terms of working practises, mobile devices are hastening the move towards cloud-based working with a growing community of devices that will never be connected via a cable to the network. The very culture and design of mobile devices in particular is moving users away from the model of centrally-purchased and managed software applications. The sheer range of options available to users and the ability to purchase, experiment with and dispose of apps cheaply and quickly means that users expect and will develop very personalised computing arrangements; that different teams will evolve different ways of working.

Finally, policies that were designed around a corporately-controlled desktop environment need to be evolved and simplified so as to be relevant and useful to a wide-ranging user community. This, along with corporate infrastructure provision, needs to be addressed, but is not the main focus of this paper.

The response?

There has been debate in the IT community about whether tablet devices are similar to (and should be treated like) either laptops or smartphones, viz. "is the iPad a computer?" Experience within ISDMT and amongst other users is that user expectations will vary. It will help the user community and therefore ISD if we clearly explain our service offerings in this context and thereby set those expectations at an achievable level.

Recognising that the University remains primarily a Microsoft enterprise environment, normal desktops and laptops do and will continue to receive 'Full Support' for current and previous versions of the OS. This is to say that we will build, deploy and support such machines in order to ensure that all corporate resources are compatible and available along with the Office productivity suite and a range of other packaged software provision. The managed service includes operating system and antivirus updates which will be proactively managed. Devices that are not on the wired network may not receive updates and could therefore require some user involvement to maintain them.

By contrast, users of mobile devices that are not connected to the wired network, i.e. tablets and smartphones will be provided with 'Advisory Support' to enable and assist them. Users are responsible for configuring their own machines, and for ensuring that OS, productivity software and AV updates (where available) are obtained and applied. Support for corporate resources will be available but is likely to be limited depending on the context and the device. We will provide advice and guidance to assist users in configuring and maintaining their device, including how to gain access to corporate resources. The provision of support in this area could make use of innovative methods, for example a dedicated twitter feed for iPad hints and tips. Students and staff with personally-owned devices always receive this level of support.

The implications of this arrangement are that staff with, for example, tablets receive a level of support along the lines of students with BYOD devices, rather than an equivalent to the support they receive for conventional desktop devices. Security is data-orientated - e.g. via enforcement of passcode locking - but more significantly through education of users.

All devices, whether connected to the wired network or not, can and should take advantage of corporately-provided storage arrangements, with the attendant resilience and security benefits. Irrespective of the type or location of the device, users should always take appropriate steps to ensure that confidential or personal data is handled in accordance with published policies and guidance.