

UK MAN Managers Group

Notes of Meeting held on 24 April 2007 at Birkbeck College, London

Present:

Dave Vinograd (Convenor)	
Mike Byrne (Deputy Convenor)	LeNSE
Kit Powell (Secretary)	SWERN
Jason Bain	NorMAN
Ed Carter	YHMAN
Geoff Cooper	LMN
Barry Forde	C&NLMAN
Ian Griffiths	EMMAN
David Hayling	Kentish MAN
Jim Hendry	MidMAN
Chris Kelly	NIRAN
Paul Kentish	Kentish MAN
Andrew Kerl	LMN
John Linn	AbMAN
Andy Mason	SWERN
Linda McCormick	ClydeNET
Steve Percival	UKERNA (<i>from item 9</i>)
Tim Robinson	NetNorthWest
Pete White	LMN
Mike Whitehead	FaTMAN
Roger Williams	WNL

Apologies were received from:

Joe Burns	NIRAN
David Stedham	North Wales MAN
Jem Taylor	UHI

1 Notes of previous meeting

1.1 Accuracy

There were no corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 January 2007.

1.2 Matters arising

1.2.1 Constitution of contract changes team

Ed Carter reported that the team comprised Tim Robinson, Jason Bain, Paul Kentish, and himself. The UKERNA team was led by Steve Percival, with Tim Kidd, Rolly Trice, and Penny Gould.

1.2.2 Constitution of SLA negotiating team

Dave Vinograd reported that, as previously noted, the Group was not formally represented in the negotiations for the root-and-branch restructuring of the JISC-UKERNA SLA. However, he had contacted John Robinson at JISC, and established that the Group would have sight of the final draft before its release. He said that it was planned to remove the reference to 8Mbps as the connection speed for HEIs, replacing it with a reference bandwidth appropriate to the institution.

Tim Robinson said the work was going very slowly, and he had not seen even a draft of the new document. Jason Bain commented that the RNOs seemed to have lost any functional involvement in the re-writing process.

The Group agreed that this issue was important enough to be taken further, and Ian Griffiths volunteered to draft a mail message to John Robinson, Dave Cook, and Bob Day and circulate it to the Group for comment and approval.

Action: Ian Griffiths

2 RPAN3 (JANET Partner Agreement)

2.1 JPA development

Ed Carter had already reported on the constitution of the contract changes team.

He said that Jason Bain had circulated a note based on a paper produced by Steve Percival after the discussions of 15 March, with interspersed comments from the Group's representatives.

It appeared that UKERNA hoped to produce not only a simplification of the JPA by removal of contractual obligations not relevant to the delivery of the service (e.g. notification of end of scheduled maintenance and reporting of complaint handling) and by moving other matter, such as reporting procedures and practices for connecting new sites, to operations documentation. The constitution of a working Technical Design Authority (TDA) appeared to be UKERNA's priority.

Issues relating to the TDA were discussed at length. Mike Byrne expressed his concern that the RN representatives would experience a significant increase in what were already heavy workloads, particularly as it was not at present clear to what degree of detail the TDA would go. Ed Carter said his understanding was that the TDA was there to set standards rather than involve itself in details of implementation. Andy Mason said that he was concerned that although preparations were being made to produce detailed technical specifications of how RNs should be engineered, there was no published definition of exactly the services that they were required to provide, on what principles.

Mike Byrne noted that the differences, for example in scale and of purchasing opportunities in telecoms markets, would make it difficult to mandate technical solutions for universal adoption.

It was clear that there was no common view on what the nature of TDA would, or should, be in the Group (and possibly within UKERNA).

Whilst TDA issues were of concern to the Group, in the light of UKERNA's stated intention that it should be in operation by September these were eclipsed by universal disquiet at the rate of progress in the production of the JPA as a whole, and of its readiness for consideration by RNs in September 2007. Widespread concern was expressed that the timetable for JPA development, promised the previous meeting, had not appeared. RNOs might be presented with a final draft, which they would be expected to comment on and consent to, late in the Summer: given that twelve months was agreed to be the minimum needed for an RNO wishing to stop running its RN to exit the contract and for alternative arrangements to be made, this could make it impossible for RNOs to give due consideration to the draft and for any changes needed to be agreed and made in time. Mike Byrne said he was concerned that key UKERNA staff involved in the negotiations were over-stretched.

Linda McCormick said that some aspects of the JPA, notably financial ones, were much more pressing than others, and sorting them out should be given priority

Tim Robinson said that although there had been good agreement between the Group's representatives and UKERNA on many of the features of the JPA, it was clear there were thorny issues around hours of operational cover.

Contingency measures in case the final draft of the JPA was not available in time were considered. Whilst there was a general feeling that an extension of RPA2.5 would be acceptable, David Hayling said that plans for the development of the Kentish MAN would be affected if the new contract were not finalised by September 2007.

Mike Whitehead suggested that concerns about lack of progress should be expressed to Chairs of MANs, for whom we were, formally, acting in the negotiations.

Jason Bain said that the draft text of the contractual part of the JPA had been promised for two weeks ago, in time for the Meeting to discuss. When it was produced, he would circulate it to the Group together with mail addresses for members to send comments to before the next negotiating meeting on 16 May.

Action: Jason Bain

Mike Byrne reported from the Funding Working Party. RNOs' responses to the questionnaire on their costs had been analysed and discussed with UKERNA. Some apparent anomalies had emerged, for example an RNO with operating costs greater than its BAP but still holding a BAP reserve, and wide variations in company operation costs. It was noted that expenditure against the BAP could vary from year to year, and that some RNOs ran as consortia, without identifiable company operation costs.

The welcome outcome of the analysis was that total RN operating costs were only about £M0.5 greater than current overall payments to RNs, and it was therefore possible to envisage a workable regime of all RNOs' agreed real operating costs being met.

Geoff Cooper welcomed the prospect of real-cost funding, noting however that while LMN enjoyed very affordable circuit costs and was thus likely to lose under this heading, it was on the other hand working in a more costly staffing situation.

Ian Griffiths expressed his concern that funding for expanding RNs, for example the automatic increment to the BAP that currently followed new connections, would be lost. This would make it more difficult to make cases for taking on new clients, particularly in the context of increasing staff requirements. David Hayling said that it was envisaged that new connections would attract two payments: the one-off cost of setting the connection up, and a recurrent uplift to reflect increased operating costs. He expected that agreed staffing levels would be related to number of clients, with agreed break-points triggering funding for additional staff resources.

Mike Byrne asked RNOs to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible in the information they provided about their costs, as the workability of the funding arrangements depended on this. He would circulate working papers of the Funding Working Party on an informal basis as they were produced. The next stage in the development of the new funding model was to use it to produce trial BAPs, and David Hayling said he and Mike would circulate these when received from UKERNA.

Action: David Hayling, Mike Byrne

On the question of branding, raised by Bob Day at the recent SJ5 meeting at Great George St., opinions were many, varied, and strongly held. Although the possibility of simply referring the whole issue to Chairs of MANs, as not being relevant to the interests and responsibilities of the Group, was attractive to some, it was suggested that they were unlikely to accept responsibility for it, and that there were indeed some operational aspects of branding that were within the Group's remit.

In the absence of any clear consensus, the Secretary agreed to receive and collate the Group's concerns and opinions and forward the result to UKERNA. In order for this to be taken into account it would have to be done within the next fortnight.

Action: all, Secretary

2.2 Implications for RNO/RSC roles

Ed Carter reminded the meeting that the new RSC contract would come into force on 1 August, and would remove all responsibility for support of the FE boundary routing equipment, supplied and maintained by UKERNA, from the RSCs. There had been no statement about what the future arrangements for support of these devices would be.

After a discussion in which the wide variety of practices in RNs was apparent, it was agreed that this issue needed to be resolved urgently and to raise it with Steve Percival later in the meeting.

[Nothing of the above applies to Wales.]

3 Report the SLA negotiation team

Jason Bain said that there was nothing to report.

4 Report from JDAG

JDAG had not met since the last Group meeting.

The Meeting decided to ask the Group's JDAG representatives to request that JDAG continue in existence until the TDA was in place; if the deadline for the development of the JPA was met this would not be necessary, but it should be agreed as a contingency. It was noted that whilst JDAG has contractual substance under RPAN2.5, the TDA would not come into formal existence until the JPA was in operation.

5 SuperJANET5

5.1 Special-Purpose Bandwidth

Tim Robinson reported on what he said was now called the JANET Lightpath service.

He had circulated two papers, one describing this service and the other on the proposed JANET Optical Development Programme, which he described as starting the groundwork for SuperJANET6.

Mike Byrne said that during the recent LeNSE re-procurement he had been disappointed by the lack of specific guidance on what provision the RN should make for SPB distribution. This could present similar problems for others in procurements in the near future.

5.2 Service Experience

There was a general discussion of RNOs' perception of the SJ5 backbone service in its first months of operation. The overall impression was that there appeared to be a significant level of faults, and a high requirement for work on the active components. The architecture of the network had prevented these problems affecting service, but it was noted that during such faults and work the network was effectively running to some degree unprotected. It was also suggested that the resilience encouraged a less-rigorous approach to scheduling engineering work (which as already noted could render parts of the service non-resilient), including booking very long windows for quite short operations. Several RNs had experience flapping on their routes to the SJ5 backbone, and these had not been ticketed as faults.

Whilst it was accepted that the higher level at which resilience was implemented in SJ5 made non-service-affecting faults more visible compared with the SJ4 SDH backbone, it was believed that although failovers to the secondary SDH path were indeed not reported, they had been very infrequent.

There was a general feeling that teething problems were understandable and to be expected, but that it would be disappointing if they were not to be squeezed out of the service in the medium term.

6 Liaison with Chairs of MANs Group

Ian Griffiths had nothing to report.

7 UCISA-NG

Ian Griffiths said the NG was to meet next in June.

A number of issues relevant to the Group had emerged from institutions:

1. Scheduled maintenance should be moved out of prime shift, i.e. not after 08:00 or to weekends (preferably Sunday morning).
2. He had been asked to pursue with JCN the fact some institutions had to meet JANET costs individually, as well as through the top slice funding
3. They wished the two Bank Holidays in May to become normal operational days.

8 Dates of future meetings

Tuesday 26 June 2007, Manchester (NetNorthWest to arrange venue and pay for catering)

Wednesday 17 October 2007, HEFCE (AbMAN to pay for catering) *[meeting subsequently moved to 16 October, at HEFCE]*

9 UKERNA Issues

9.1 JPA development

Steve Percival reported on progress in the development of the JPA. Work on funding principles was progressing, and there had been a convergence of opinion on a needs-based, agreed actual costs, model. There would now be a dialogue with each RNO to agree a hypothetical payment for the year from October 2007. He thanked RNOs for their participation in the benchmarking exercise.

The first meeting of the JPA negotiation group had been in March. There was broad agreement on where changes were needed. He thought the main issue that the group needed to work together to resolve was the extension of the hours of operational cover. He would summarise the points that he had made to the negotiating group and circulate them to UKMMG as UKERNA's current official position.

Action: Steve Percival

He expected UKERNA's lawyers to produce a draft of the formal contractual part of the JPA within two weeks.

The other major parts of the Agreement were:

- the funding model
- the remit of the TDA
- the definition of the activities of the JANET Delivery Team

These should be available for discussion at the next meeting of the negotiation group.

In the discussion that followed the general opinion was that whilst there were, currently, no major reservations about the changes that the JPA might introduce (though changes to covered hours were expected to be an issue, and the form and powers of the TDA were a concern), the timescales for the production of a final draft that would give time for legal advice to be taken, and for RNOs to consider the implications of the new contract, were very short. Although there was still no published timetable for the work, it did appear that some targets had already been missed.

Dave Vinograd pointed out that there was only one UKMMG meeting before October, on 9 July, and that drafts of the JPA documents needed to be available by 13 June for discussion at that meeting. The Group emphasised that it would wish to retain the twelve month period between the JPA being ready for signature and the end of RPAN2.5, which would allow RNs to make decisions, and establish alternative arrangements where required. It was generally agreed that, should the JPA not be ready in time, extension of RPAN2.5 was acceptable as a contingency, though it was also noted that delay in the JPA coming into force could cause problems to some RNOs.

Steve agreed to consider the JPA development timetable and provide information to the Group by 7 May.

Action: Steve Percival

Turning to branding, Steve said that only two RNOs had responded to Bob Day's request for feedback on the proposed changes, and others would be welcome. The meeting felt that from the practical operational point of view the form of branding was perhaps less important than that there be clear published rules about how and in what circumstances the brand could, and could not, be used.

9.2 *Boundary router management*

Steve Percival said that, as was widely known, responsibility for support of the boundary routers of JANET clients served by the RSCs no longer appeared in the new RSC contract that would come into effect on 1 August. Rolly Trice was looking in to alternative arrangements, and had had informal discussions with a number of RNOs. Rolly was drafting a service description for boundary router management, and this should be available during the week of 30 April. The experience of the NOSC, which had been performing this function for EASTNET clients for the past 18 months, would be valuable in this task. The RSCs had undertaken to assist in the process of transfer of responsibility, which Steve expected to be complete by the end of October. If an RN declines the boundary router support business UKERNA may either take it up in-house (in the NOSC) or place it with a third party.

Steve said that the routers currently being supplied to LSC sites by UKERNA were Cisco 2851s. It was noted that these required an IOS upgrade to run IPv6, but Steve said that as this was not yet part of the JANET service to clients it was not an issue, and there were no immediate plans to upgrade the routers.

It emerged in discussion that there was a wide variety of technical and organisational practices in client boundary router support between and within RNs. Some already supplied and supported a device, and at the other extreme others simply offered the B-end circuit termination.

[Nothing of the above applies to Wales.]

9.3 SLA changes

Steve said that the root-and-branch report of the JISC-UKERNA SLA was proceeding slowly. It was addressing restructuring the document into a MoU, which would be expected to change infrequently, and a SLD. Consequently, there were unlikely to be significant changes to the SLA for 2007-2008.

It was agreed that the interests of UKERNA and the RNOs coincided in respect of SLA negotiations with the JISC about delivery of JANET connectivity. Steve undertook to circulate the draft of the new SLA to the Group when it was produced.

Action: Steve Percival

Some discussion followed on the measurement of service delivered to clients with more than one circuit connecting them to JANET, and the implications of the variety of ways in which additional circuits might have been funded.

9.4 Administration

The office moves for the UKERNA staff at the Harwell site were now complete. The NOSC staff had moved to new accommodation in Gray's Inn Rd.

9.5 Schools, and other, connections

Steve said that RNOs would have noticed the large number of requests from UKERNA for quotations for connections to schools. The general policy was that state schools should be connected through their RBC. As there were many other, "independent", schools UKERNA was exploring possible agreements with bodies representing them collectively.

Ian Griffiths asked about the status of City Academies: Steve said that it was not entirely clear.

Ian then asked about connections for Local Authorities. Steve said that any potential LA connection should be discussed with UKERNA.

9.6 SJ5 operation

Steve said that Verizon's maintenance practices over recent months had caused concern, and UKERNA was taking it up with them.

The Group expressed various concerns about the new backbone, pointing out that while parts of a resilient infrastructure could be out of service for maintenance, or by failures, without affecting operation, the remaining configuration might well not be resilient. There was also a perception that the fault rate was higher, even allowing for the fact that failovers in the previous SJ4 SDH network might not have had the same visibility. Steve asked for a list of topics in this area that the RNOs would be interested in discussing at a joint meeting with UKERNA; John Linn undertook to receive and collate these.

Action: all; John Linn

It was also suggested that a more general discussion of the principles involved in the operation of resilient communications infrastructures would be of considerable interest.

9.7 Other UKERNA matters

Ian Griffiths asked whether additional funding would be available to cover fibre rating charges. Steve Percival replied that UKERNA was expecting to meet the full costs of communications services.

In response to a query about requirements for passing on full economic costs, Steve said that Dave Cook had given it as JISC's view that FEC did not necessarily need to be applied to the sort of services in which RNs were engaged, but that expert advice was being sought. If FEC did have to be applied, it would be only under new contractual arrangements, not under the current contract.

Ian Griffiths asked when a replacement for Denis Russell would be appointed. Steve replied that Denis had been employed in a specific role, and not to fill an established post. It was fully accepted that Denis's role had and would continue to be important and would have to be fulfilled by someone. Linda McCormick expressed concern that adding this to existing UKERNA staff's duties might overstretch already overloaded people. Dave Vinograd noted that Denis was successful in part due to his knowledge and experience as an RN manager.

Tim Robinson asked if there was any move by the LSC to increase the standard bandwidth provided to FEIs above 10Mbps. Steve replied that there was not.

10 Other business

There was no other business.