UK MAN Managers Group

Notes of Meeting held on 26 June 2007 at the University of Manchester

Present:

Mike Byrne (Deputy Convenor)	LeNSE
Kit Powell (Secretary)	SWERN
Jason Bain	NorMAN
Ed Carter	YHMAN
Neil Francis	SWERN
Barry Forde	C&NLMAN
David Hayling	Kentish MAN
Chris Kelly	NIRAN
Paul Kentish	Kentish MAN
Andrew Kerl	LMN
John Linn	AbMAN
Linda McCormick	ClydeNET
Tim Robinson	NetNorthWest
Pete White	LMN
Mike Whitehead	FaTMAN
Roger Williams	WNL

Apologies were received from:

Joe Burns	NIRAN
John Cheeseman	EMMAN
Ian Griffiths	EMMAN
Andy Mason	SWERN
Steve Percival	UKERNA
Malcolm Pitcher	NetNorthWest
David Stedham	North Wales MAN
Dave Vinograd (Convenor)	

1   Jim Hendry

Mike Byrne started by recording with sadness Jim Hendry's death since the previous meeting. The Group remembered the Jim's contribution to networking and to the Group's work with gratitude, affection, and appreciation.

2   Notes of previous meeting

2.1   Accuracy

There were no corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 April 2007.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 Constitution of SLA negotiation team

Ian Griffiths had not drafted the message about RNO involvement in the SLA negotiations and the action was carried forward.

Action: Ian Griffiths

2.2.2 JPA development

None of the actions on UKERNA under this head from the previous meeting had been carried out.

It was agreed that UKERNA staff were overstretched and the Group understood the difficulties under which they were working and were fully appreciative of their efforts; it wished UKERNA to be aware of our feelings in this respect.

2.2.3 SJ5 Operation

John Linn reported that, as promised, he had continued to look into issues of problems with the SJ5 core that were not reported and sometimes apparently not noted. He also pointed out the recent loss of connectivity to the Leeds node resulting from un-notified Global Crossing maintenance work. Others remarked that trouble ticketing was unselective, incomplete, and confused; John Linn gave as an example a recent instance of route flapping affecting AbMAN that had gone unrecorded by the ticketing process. It was recognised that new JANET(UK) staff were involved in this work and there would inevitably be a period of shaking down.

It was agreed that this should be discussed further when Steve Percival had had the chance to comment on the issue, when the Group should agree on a common representation to JANET(UK). Steve had undertaken to mail the Group on the subject by 27 June.

Mike Byrne would pursue with JANET(UK) the possibility of a meeting between them and the RNOs to discuss operational issues, including the perception that not all the implications of the introduction of single points of failure during maintenance operations were always analysed when they were planned.

Mike asked which RNs had carried out resilience testing, which it appeared the majority had. No problems were reported, though none had yet done this in service time. Some RNOs expressed concern at a lack of commitment and involvement of JANET operations staff in resilience testing, which Jason Bain suggested should be taken up with JANET(UK) contract teams.

3 JANET Partner Agreement

The meeting had for consideration two documents, circulated the previous week: JANET Partner Agreement: Changes Required to RPAN2.5 Contract Text (Draft 2, 12 June 2007) with comments from the Group's negotiation team, and JANET Technical Design Authority, Draft Constitution (Version 1.2).

All four members of the negotiation team, Ed Carter, Tim Robinson, Jason Bain, Paul Kentish, were present, who took notes of comments made at the meeting to feed back to JANET(UK) at a teleconference scheduled for 29 June.

3.1 Technical Design Authority

After some exposition from negotiation team members the general understanding was that the TDA would be:

- A UKERNA body, whose activities would be reported on to the Group through UKERNA representatives.
- Responsible for defining standards, including those affecting RNs, but not responsible for enforcing compliance with them.
- Not a complete replacement of the JDAG, some of whose functions would be part of the JANET Delivery Team's responsibilities.

The Group was in full support of the TDA's constitution and objectives. Some concern was expressed that although the expected number of meetings that would have to be attended was defined, there would probably be significant work needed outside meetings, which was not. It was not clear what the relationship between the TDA and the JDT, and their responsibilities, was. In this context, Linda McCormick said that what was needed was a single-page document setting out the responsibilities and relationships of the TDA and JDT and how they related to the various parts of JANET(UK).

There was no opposition to the TDA starting its work before the JPA came into force, but concern that those parts of the JDAG's responsibilities that the TDA would not cover (they would pass to the JDT), would not be attended to in the interim period until October 2008.

The negotiating team would circulate the new draft of the TDA constitution the emerged from the 29 June discussions.

Barry Forde asked whether the TDA concerned itself with the technical requirements of the whole JANET user community, or just HE, FE, and research. Jason Bain said that it was the whole community. Barry pointed out that there were bodies, e.g. BECTA, which had large stakes in JANET and might wish to have their technical requirements recognised in the TDA.

3.2 JANET Partner Agreement

Ed Carter said that he had received comments from Dave Vinograd and Ian Griffiths before the meeting.

The timetable was now:

29 June: teleconference between JANET(UK) and negotiating team
9 July: comments to negotiating team from RNs, by end of business
13 July: final comments on Heads and Principles from negotiation team to JANET(UK)

Tim Robinson reported that a Chairs of MANs meeting was planned for 11 September, to which Bob Day would present the JPA.

It was noted that should insurmountable difficulties be encountered with the production of the JPA, the extension of RPAN 2.5 for a further year would not give most RNOs problems, though as previously reported Kentish MAN would have difficulties.

As well as the contract itself, all the related documents forming part of the JPA would be available in October when it was presented to the RNOs for signature.

Chris Kelly and Linda McCormick said, and the meeting agreed, that any contractually-enforceable undertaking should form part of the JPA contract, and supporting and referenced documents should be purely advisory and descriptive.

The £55,500 paid for development effort each year would be subsumed in the BAP under the staffing head. It was therefore important that when reporting staffing costs as the basis for setting the BAP all staff effort, including development, was included, and not only that devoted to company and network operations and administration.

The meeting then proceeded to review the document clause by clause. Detailed notes of comments were taken by the negotiation team for discussion with JANET(UK).

Items of immediate interest to RNOs include:

Body of document

§17: the rolling contract will be renewed at the end of each year, so would never have less than the contract length minus one year to run. RNOs would be required to produce a matching rolling development plan. JANET(UK) had produced the rolling contract proposal because they thought RNOs wanted it, and were interested to know how it was received. The meeting was enthusiastic about this form of contract. Problems with alignment of supplier contracts with the JPA would arise equally under a fixed-term contract, so were not an impediment. If it were not possible for JANET(UK) to set up a 5-year rolling contract, a 3-year one would be acceptable.

§19: noted that it would be possible to use the reserve accumulated from RPAN BAP payments to pump-prime JPA operation (e.g. by taking on, before the start of the new agreement, any extra staff required).

§25: John Linn enquired when the RNO volunteer members of the TDA would be sought.

(At this point there was a discussion, initiated by Pete White, of the status of UKMMG. There was agreement that despite, possibly because, of its lack of official status, parentage, or reporting mechanism, it appeared to work well as constituted, and attendance at its meetings was evidence of this. However, it would be sensible to review the Group's form and function in the light of changes such as the introduction

of the JDT, which would be expected to contain many members of the Group and have many common interests.)

§30: Pete White said that the branding proposals presented severe difficulties for LMN. LMN was itself a strong brand in its area, with a customer base and services extending beyond JANET provision. The possibilities -- of either losing the LMN brand, or having to use both it and the JANET brand depending on which type of customer was being dealt with -- were both problematical. LMN believed co-branding was the solution, and were pursuing this with JANET(UK) independently of the JPA negotiations.

Many RNOs, notably those who provided only JANET services to their clients, were content with the proposal, though sympathising with LMN's problems. A number of RNOs expressed a strong disinclination to have to employ two branding logos, the JANET-RNO one when talking to HE/FE sites and another one minus the JANET element when talking to non-Education sites. It was agreed that the negotiating team should represent these difficulties to JANET(UK).

§32: Linda McCormick said that the involvement of JANET(UK) in signing off the OR and final offer in major procurements was acceptable so long as it was done in a timely manner. Timescales during procurements were often very tight, and delays on receiving JANET(UK) approval could give severe problems. The maximum time for JANET(UK) to respond to a request for sign-off should be specified in the JPA.

§36: it was noted that some networks were constrained by their regional funding bodies to follow procurement policies which might conflict with the obligation to use framework contracts set up by JANET(UK).

§§44-46: issues relating to full economic costing were discussed. Tim Robinson said that he understood that the JISC's view was that the sort of staff who were employed in the activities of RNOs would not be users of the full range of support services necessary for academic staff, and that FEC should not properly be applied to them.

Regarding §45, Mike Byrne emphasised strongly that when the discussions with JANET(UK) on the running costs of each RN were held in July it was of the utmost importance that *all* costs were identified, including those of development staff. Others noted the problems that RNOs that were consortia had in identifying their company operation costs.

§47: Paul Kentish noted that not all RNOs were in the happy position of having a reserve to pump-prime the operation of the JPA and to carry forward. It was agreed that the reserve was a necessary tool to enable any RN to operate smoothly, to meet minor unpredictable costs.

§§48-50: these clauses, relating to increased hours of cover, were recognised by all concerned with JANET operation as fraught with potential difficulty. Some problems seemed to arise from customers expecting to get the same cover in their JANET service as that provided by their commercial suppliers. However, as well as enjoying economies of scale, commercial operations can benefit in the market from offering a high service level without meeting the cost of actually providing it, calculating that

savings made by under-funding its provision will more than offset the costs of paying off customers occasionally when it under-performs.

Given the variety of RNO sizes, structures, and service offerings, all of which are relevant to out-of-hours cover, it was clear that there was no possibility of achieving agreement with JANET(UK) on hours of cover in the immediate future. The Group recognised the pressure that JANET(UK) was under from its clients, and would actively engage in the process of evolving and defining changes to meet these demands.

Annex B

§57: noted that latency requirements were unchanged. There was a feeling that, particularly as new styles of circuit provision were deployed, high latencies might result. On the other hand, measurement by ping could not be relied on to accurately reflect actual latency, and heavily-loaded circuits always under-performed in this area. As latency could at any time assume a much larger importance (in the context of telephony, for example) the Group was eager to engage with JANET(UK) in this area.

§62: whilst fully recognising JANET(UK)'s desire that circuit installations and changes should not be unreasonably delayed, the meeting noted that telco delivery times themselves were often in excess of both the existing SL9 50 working day allowance and the proposed extension to 75. Ideally, the SL should reflect the time taken by the RNO to perform its part in the process, the clock stopping as soon as the responsibility for progress moved into another's area (the telco, or sometimes JANET(UK) when approval was required to proceed after additional ancillary charges were proposed by the telco during the installation).

§66: the provision of good communications between RN and JANET engineers was welcomed, and it was noted that work to improve this was needed immediately.

Annex C

The negotiating team's impression was that the definition of the duties and responsibilities of the RN JDT members was work in progress. To some extent it appeared that two quite unrelated skill sets (hour-by-hour fault management, for example, and high-level awareness and promotion activies) were needed, which would not usually be found in the same person

Conclusion

Mike Byrne expressed the Group's gratitude for the negotiating team's work. All members were to make any comments to the team's members before the meeting of 29 June.

A special meeting of the Group to discuss the JPA draft would be held on 10 September, immediately before the Chairs of MANs meeting.

4   Report the SLA negotiation team

Jason Bain said that he had received a verbal briefing from Tim Kidd, and would circulate a note about it.

5   Report from JDAG

Mike Byrne said that Rina Samani had produced an updated list of development activities, which he would circulate along with the minutes of the last meeting.

Action: Mike Byrne

David Hayling reported that the company selected to produce the Netsight replacement was at work and it should be ready in early 2008. There would be facilities to make updates to reflect changes in advance, with a simple means of triggering these once the changes were made. (This would make the proposed reduction of the SL allowance for Netsight update after a change from 5 working days to 4 working hours less of a problem.)

6   JANET(UK) issues

Steve Percival had been unable to progress further towards Manchester than Peterborough, as the result of transport disruption by unusual weather. He would mail to the Group the comments he had intended to make.

Action: Steve Percival

7   SuperJANET5

This is a fixed item on the agenda: there was nothing to minute under it.

8   Liaison with Chairs of MANs Group

Ed Carter said that CoM had not met since the last UKMMG meeting. A meeting to discuss the JPA draft was, as noted elsewhere, planned for 11 September.

9   UCISA-NG

Nothing reported.

10 Dates of future meetings

Tuesday 16 October 2007, HEFCE (AbMAN to pay for catering)
Monday 10 September 2007: special meeting to discuss JPA draft, venue to be arranged
Wednesday 16 January 2007 (WNL to pay for catering)

11 Other business

11.1 LMN, and attendance of suppliers at UKMMG meetings

Pete White drew the Group's attention to the event "A World Class Network and more ……." on 17 July; this combined event with the London Metropolitan Network Ltd (LMN) and JANET(UK) aims to review the many opportunities created by key emerging technologies now available to the wider JANET community which include safe, remote and secure storage of critical data, and would be addressed by Tim Marshall.

Mike Byrne said that although the Group had reached agreement not to invite suppliers to address its meetings, it would consider organising special meetings with potential suppliers of third-party services through RNs and to RN clients in the future.

11.2 Procurement of third-party staff effort

Paul Kentish enquired about the processes that had or might be used to procure services used to run RNs, for example technical or operational support, from institutions in the RNO's regions.

David Hayling said that he had consulted OGC on this issue, who had suggested that the provisions of TECL might apply, but had also suggested that legal advice be taken.

Members described a variety of processes used, from which it appeared that there was no clear-cut practice applicable to and usable by all RNOs.

11.3 Secretary

Mike Byrne said that as Kit Powell expected to retire at the end of the year a new secretary would be needed with effect from the January 2008 meeting. There were no immediate volunteers, and Mike asked anyone willing to take the task on to contact him.