

The ISS Help Desk Advisers Guide

This guide is intended to answer all the questions help desk advisers may have in relation to their duties. Please report any errors, omissions, lack of clarity or suggestions for inclusion to c.h.woodford@ncl.ac.uk

1. The function of ISS Help Desks

Information Systems and Services (ISS) are responsible for the computing infrastructure throughout the University. ISS also provides many kinds of computer related services in particular the computer clusters in locations across the campus. Such clusters are to be found in designated Cluster Rooms and in some of those rooms (OLUA, Robinson, Herschel and Cookson) an ISS Help Desk is provided. The ISS Help Desk is a focal point from which the adviser can offer assistance to users and oversee the smooth running of the cluster.

The Help Desk adviser will either be an experienced PhD student or a member of the ISS.

2. Help Desk support staff

Manager, Teaching and Cluster Room Support:

Az Mohammed. (Az.Mohammed@ncl.ac.uk) Ext 6952

Team Leader: Teaching and Cluster Room Support:

Dave Alsop. (D.G.Alsop@ncl.ac.uk) Ext 3455.

Dave is the main liaison between ISS and the part-time postgraduate advisers. If you are unsure of anything ask Dave.

Timetable management, ISS Customer Services :

Dr Chris Woodford. (C.H.Woodford@ncl.ac.uk) Ext 8118.

Ask Chris if you have any questions regarding the timetable, payments or a change in duties. Timetables for the current and previous month may be found at

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/advice/>

Teaching and Cluster Room Support staff:

Teaching and Cluster Room Support (TCRS) consists of 11 technical staff that supports the clusters on a daily basis, including working as Helpdesk Advisors; you will see them at certain times while you are on duty. They are not expected to maintain equipment while you are on duty as that is something for which you are responsible

Further information on TCRS team members can be found here:

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/tcrs/contacts/contacts.html>

The team can be contacted on 8333 (iss-tcrs@ncl.ac.uk) and can help with the following:

- Supply information regarding the status of services.
- Log equipment faults.
- Deal with faulty printers
- Stop the login names of users who are misbehaving.
- Contact system staff in the event of service problems.

Further details on the team and what they do can be found on the TCRS website:
<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/tcrs/>

ISS Helpline and Reception:

ISS Helpline and Reception are located on the ground floor of Claremont Tower and can also help with certain operational queries. Reception can deal with problems such as passwords, disk space, profiles and printing accounts whereas Helpdesk can assist with all sorts of IT related problems. Contact details below:

ISS Reception Ext 8179 9am-5.pm Monday to Friday
ISS Helpline Ext 5999 8am-5.30pm Monday to Friday
(helpline@ncl.ac.uk)

When telephoning the team, give your name and say that you are a help desk adviser. Give the name of the Cluster Room and if relevant the name and number of the problem PC or printer. Although the Team are not on duty at weekends you may still send email messages. When telephoning the any of the above give your name and say that you are a help desk adviser. Give the name of the Cluster Room and if relevant the name and number of the problem PC or printer. Although the above services are not available at weekends you may still send email messages.

Mentors:

Every new adviser will have an experienced adviser (possibly someone you already know) to act as a mentor. The mentor will help you through your first Help Desk session and be available at other times to answer any questions you may have.

3. Arriving at the Help Desk

You should arrive in time to begin work at the time shown on the timetable. The previous adviser should not be kept waiting. When you arrive or as soon as possible thereafter:

- Sign the Help Desk Diary with your full name.
- Send a short email to Chris with a Cc to Dave Alsop to confirm arrival. A short message of the form 'I am in the OLU' (or wherever you happen to be) is quite sufficient.

Diary entries and emails are required for auditing purposes and for resolving queries regarding pay. Payments for sessions can not be made without the corresponding arrival and departure emails.

In addition to recording your attendance use the diary to record any unusual events, particularly anything of which subsequent advisers need to be aware.

The first adviser of the day may be required to collect keys or perform other duties. Each Cluster Room will have its own requirements, see Appendix A for details.

4. Leaving the Help Desk

Send a short email of the form 'I am leaving the

If you are the last Adviser of the day go round the Cluster Room about 15 minutes before closing to tidy it and check things over. It is not necessary to switch off any computer hardware. The monitors switch themselves off and the computers need to be on so that automatic updates can take place overnight.

The last adviser of the day may also be required to deposit keys or perform other duties. Each Cluster Room will have its own requirements, see Appendix A for details.

5. If the Next Adviser does not arrive

If your successor at the Help Desk does not appear at the appointed time please wait a few minutes. There may be a perfectly reasonable explanation for the late arrival. However if you find you are being delayed by the same person on too many occasions please let Dave or Chris know.

If your successor fails to arrive within 10 minutes you are free to go. On the other hand you may stay until an adviser arrives or until you choose to leave. However if you have to leave the help desk unattended please inform Chris Woodford or TCRS staff. In any event explain what has happened in your leaving email to Chris so that you can be paid for any extra time.

6. Unavailable for a session?

Towards the end of each month you will receive an email from Chris asking if you will be unavailable at any time during the coming month. Your reply (if any) will be taken into account when drawing up the timetable. Even so there may be unexpected events which prevent you from attending a session. You may email other advisers (pg-advisers@ncl.ac.uk) with a view to arranging a 'swap', or simply 'give' the session to another adviser. Inform Chris of any arrangement you make. If there is not time to find a replacement telephone Chris, Dave or TCRS staff as soon as possible so that we may make arrangements. It is important for the reputation of the ISS Help Desk service that continuity is maintained.

7. Lost property

Label everything that you find or is handed to you with the date. Use the sticky labels provided.

Minor items: for example CDs, pencil cases, gloves etc. should be put in the 'Lost Property' box inside the Adviser's Cupboard. There are also boxes for lost disks.

Valuable items: for example Smart Cards, wallets, passports, etc. Keep these with you while you are on duty. If possible e-mail the owner of the item. Tell the next Adviser on duty what was found. Instructions on what to do if the item has not been claimed by the end of your session vary for the different Cluster Rooms. Details may be found in Appendix A.

8. Conducting a session

Divide your time between sitting at the Help Desk and walking round the Cluster Room. Even if it is very quiet, you must frequently walk round the room. Users often sit waiting, hoping that an adviser will pass by, so that they can quietly ask a question.

Be approachable, be polite, even if faced with impoliteness or anger, be understanding of difficulties with the technicalities, or with language and be patient.

Wear your ISS shirt or sweater and your Smart Card at all times while on duty. This is a condition of your employment. It is important that the users can easily identify, the ISS Adviser.

If there is a queue waiting at the Desk, try to ask each person what their question is before actually dealing with any of them: someone may be waiting patiently simply in order to ask where the toilets are!

If the room is busy, five minutes is long enough to spend with a single user, because others will be looking for you. However do not abandon a user whom you have to leave, come back to them later and see how they are getting on.

It is possible to be too helpful. Resist doing too much typing or 'clicking' for the user: it is better that they do it for themselves, under your instructions. If you do too much for a user they may not learn anything, and may continue to think that they are 'no good with computers'. Worse still you may accidentally damage their files.

You are paid by ISS to enforce orderly use of the Cluster Room and to be of service to users. However if none of the users need help, the room is tidy, there is no faulty equipment to report and the printers have full paper trays then you may do your own work. But please make sure that what you do appears to others as academic work, do not be seen using the internet for frivolous purposes, or reading newspapers or magazines. Moreover if you do manage to do some of your own work, you must stop immediately if a user asks for help.

9. Answering User Questions

You may find that being a good listener is sufficient to enable a user to realise the solution to a problem. Otherwise you either know the answer (or you find the answer using the computer or ISS documentation) or you refer the user to a full-time member of staff.

All ISS guides, other useful documents relating to computing services and a collection of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are available at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/>. Some of this material is stored locally in the Cluster Rooms. Each FAQ has an answer provided by relevant ISS staff. If you think you can improve upon an answer, or if it is no longer effective, please contact John Law (J.A.Law@ncl.ac.uk) who will make the necessary changes. Specific guides for help desk advisers answering a range of FAQs may be found at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/advice/guides.html>

Questions regarding the immediate operation of the computing system may be referred to either ISS helpline or TCRS staff.

Users having problems with password, disk space, or printing account should be directed to ISS Reception on the Ground floor of the Claremont Tower.

The ISS has specialist advisers with experience and expertise in specific areas who are able to offer advice:

Statistical Analysis, Dr Simon Kometa (S.T.Kometa@ncl.ac.uk);
Numerical and Mathematical Methods for Science and Engineering, Tex/Latex Document Preparation, Dr Chris Woodford (C.H.Woodford@ncl.ac.uk)

All other questions should be emailed to the ISS Helpline (helpline@ncl.ac.uk). The user should be encouraged to supply as much detail as possible.

10. Maintaining Cluster Room Discipline

It is essential that you know the ISS Rules of Use as detailed in the documents ‘Rules for Use of Computing Facilities’ (available at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/rules/>) and that you are familiar with ‘Responsible Use: Guidelines’ (Pink ISS document G01).

The Rules and Guidelines are to ensure that

- ISS equipment is used to the best advantage in pursuit of academic studies by students and staff of this University.
- Users do not transgress the rules of higher bodies, such as the national network authorities, and do not break the laws of the U.K.

Cluster rooms are provided as areas conducive to academic work. Users must not be inconvenienced or offended by the actions of others. Equipment must be treated with respect.

As a Help Desk Adviser you must:

- Politely point out the rules to anybody who is breaking them. Issue a “Reminder Note” if necessary. At the Help Desk you will find copies of these small notes which according to their colour refer to either ‘Food and Drink’, ‘Mobile Phones’, or ‘Who is allowed to use ISS Cluster Rooms’.
- Inform ISS management via Dave Alsop, Chris Woodford or TCRS staff if any trouble arises.

The best policy when interpreting the Rules is to be reasonable; it is usually obvious if you need to remind a user either gently, or more forcibly.

There are three examples where leniency is not an option:

- Food and drink may not be consumed in a Cluster Room unless permitted in specific areas. Food and drink (including unopened containers) are not permitted on the worktables.
- Noisy users cannot be tolerated: Cluster Rooms are academic work places, not Internet Cafés and not meeting rooms for discussions of any kind.
- Public display of offensive material such as pornography is against University Regulations and may also infringe UK law. If you or any other user is offended by displayed material that is sufficient reason for that material to be deemed offensive.

We do not expect users to switch off mobile phones but we expect replies to incoming calls to be brief and to be continued (if necessary) outside the room. Outgoing calls are not allowed from the Cluster Room.

While we are happy to "turn a blind eye" to parents who are just making a quick visit with children who are under proper control, we do not approve of any longer or more regular visits. Similar comments apply to older visitors who are not members of the University.

If you ever have trouble with a user who refuses to comply with the Rules, and who decides to argue tell them that if they have a problem they should not argue with you, but e-mail helpline@ncl.ac.uk If they continue to argue, ask for their Smart Card and note their Student Number. If this information is not forthcoming make a note of the terminal number. Report as much information as you have to TCRS staff. The login id will be disabled. The user is then interviewed by a member of ISS Management before being re-instated. If an Operator is not available (for example during the weekends) or you feel you would be at risk in confronting the user directly e-mail as much information as you have to Dave or Chris and we will take action.

If at any time you feel a situation is getting out of control call the University Police on **ext. 6345** (or in extreme cases **ext. 6666**), and ask them to deal with the problem.

11. Maintaining Cluster Room Hardware

Check that all items of equipment (PCs, printers, etc.) are functioning properly. When doing this, check the status of the yellow Fault Report forms attached to items of hardware which indicate a fault.

If you see a yellow form, check that the fault is not trivial. If it is simply a matter of a loose cable or incorrect setting you may be able to restore the machine to service within a few minutes. If you succeed, throw away the yellow form.

If you cannot deal quickly with a fault, check that the box on the form showing “Reported to Helpline” has been ticked: if it has not, report the matter yourself.

The other major task involves maintaining the printers. See Appendix B.

12. Emergencies, Fire and other Alarms and Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, phone **ext 6666**, this is as an emergency call to the University Police. The OLU Help Desk has a ‘panic alarm’ which serves the same purpose. Pressing the two red buttons visible under the edge of the desk should bring the University Police within a couple of minutes.

If the fire alarm (a continuous bell or siren) is sounded while you are on duty, you must clear the room of people. It is a University regulation to obey the Fire Alarm. Do not risk your own safety by staying behind to persuade those who refuse to leave. Outside the building, you should see a University Fire Warden (probably in a yellow waistcoat), inform the Warden of the state of the Cluster Room as you left it.

Security alarms are repeated “beeps” or similar, they are not continuous like the Fire Alarm. If a security alarm is sounded, see if you can discover why it has happened. In any event, inform TCRS staff or the University Police (**ext. 6345**).

Appendix A

Help Desk locations

Details of the four Help Desk locations are given below. The times of Help Desk sessions shown apply to term-time. At other times of the year the service may be reduced.

Facilities will vary from location to location. On your first visit to a particular location find out what is on offer to users. Check the names of the clusters, the kind of printers and scanners and if there are any refreshment facilities. The web page <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/iss/clusters/locations.htm> has details.

Herschel Building

Telephone: **ext 3319**

Term-time sessions: 1230–1330, Monday to Friday.

The Adviser's cupboard is in the Refreshments Room in the Brig/Moss Cluster Area. The single key is on a tag attached to a black plastic film cassette container; and is kept in the small box on top of the Adviser's cupboard.

Valuable lost property should be brought to the TCRS office on the ground floor of the Herschel Building and details emailed to Dave (with a Cc to Chris).

Robinson Library

Help Desk Telephone: **ext 3329**

Help Desk Hours: Weekdays 09.00–21.00, Saturday 10.00-16.00, Sunday 11.00-17.00

The Help Desk is in the main Cluster Room on the entrance floor.

The key for the Adviser's cupboard is kept at the Library Reception Desk.

The first adviser of the day should collect the key from the Porter.

The last adviser of the day should return the key to the Porter.

The Barn Cluster at the back of the main Cluster Room is occasionally used by the Library to give courses. If it is not being used in this way it must be made available for general use. If the door to this cluster is locked, and a course is not scheduled, ask at the Library Enquiry Desk for it to be opened.

The Hope and the Tees Cluster are in the basement (Level 1), room 160. Visit these clusters if you have time to check that all is well but if you are asked for advice make it clear that you cannot leave the main Cluster Room for very long. Do not spend more than five minutes assisting such a user.

Valuable lost property should be taken to the Library Reception Desk.

Old Library User Area (OLUA)

Help Desk Telephone: **ext 3325**

Help Desk Hours: Weekdays 0900–2100, Weekends 10.00-16.00.

The keys for the Cluster Room are kept at the University's 24-hour Security Control Room which is located at the side of the Armstrong Building, almost opposite the entrance to the ISS Cluster Room in the Bedson Building.

At weekends the first adviser of the day should first collect the keys from Security Control. One of the staff will accompany you from there to the OLUA to open the room, disable the alarm and give you the keys. The keys are to be kept in the cardboard desk on the Help Desk. On weekdays this procedure will have already been carried out, the first adviser can go directly to the OLUA.

The last adviser of the day should return the keys to Security Control. The room should be empty when you leave so within the final 15 minutes begin to remind users that the Cluster Room is about to close.

There is a Public Address system in the OLUA. The console is in the Store Room. Press the button, you will hear a 'Ding Dong', then speak normally into the microphone. You may use the system to make any necessary announcements.

Valuable lost property should be locked in the Adviser's cupboard and details emailed to Dave or Chris.

Cookson Building

Help Desk Telephone: **ext 3315**

Term time sessions: 1200–1400, Monday to Friday

The Help Desk is in the Fell/Pass Cluster on the Ground Floor of the Cookson Building. The other clusters are Linn, Dene, Glen (5th Floor) ,Fell/ Pass, Pool clusters (Ground Floor). Make sure that you periodically check the printers in all clusters when you are on duty.

Valuable lost property should be handed to the porter at the main desk.

Appendix B

Maintaining the Printers and the Printing Service

You will be given general instructions about printers on your first day by your mentor, but you need to be aware that an ISS printer is part of a network of printers, servers, and a large software system. TCRS staff monitors the behaviour of printers. They can issue commands remotely to disable a printer or re-start it. They can often see problems as soon as they appear on the printer itself, because the error messages which appear on a printer's own display are echoed on a console on their workstations. If you need help with a printer do not hesitate to telephone or email TRCS technicians. Give the name of the printer (for example Turf_psa4a) which you will find on a label on the front panel.

Make sure you are familiar with the content of the ISS document PR00 'Getting the best from the printers'. This will help you deal with most of the questions you are likely to be asked by users.

Filling with paper

Put more paper in the printer trays when they become empty or nearly empty. Do not fill right to the top, leave a small gap. Three arrows on the left-hand side of the paper tray indicate a point slightly below the maximum. A fault will develop if the tray is too full.

Switching Off

It is sometimes necessary to switch off a printer but do not do this before consulting TCRS staff. If they are not available, attach a fault form to the printer and send an email (iss-tcrs@ncl.ac.uk) after switching off. TCRS staff will need to tell the print system that the printer is no longer available for queuing.

Paper jams

If a printer stops and displays the error message "Paper jam", open and check all the doors, if necessary pulling back the flaps you may find there, using the green tabs provided.

Having checked the doors, it is also advisable to remove the toner cartridge and look underneath that, lifting the panel below using its green handle. This may hide jammed paper.

Remove any jammed paper very carefully, taking a good hold of the sheet, gripping as much of it as you can without crumpling it; then pull firmly and slowly. If you tear the sheet, you need to be sure to get every tiny bit of paper out.

Wrong paper

Sometimes, users produce documents which do not have A4 as the Paper Size. (This is often because they first created the document on a non-ISS computer.)

The printers have been programmed to accept documents which require "US Letter" size paper and to print them on normal A4. Any other size will cause the printer to stop and display a message such as: *Load Tray 1 with Legal Size paper*

If this happens, just press the green GO button on the printer, and the document will print on A4.

Do not attempt to load any other kind of paper into ISS printers. No one may use anything but the supplied A4 paper. Any such misuse must be reported to TCRS staff

Toner Low

The *Toner Low* message may appear on a standard printer. Messages *Toner (k y m c) Low*, *Transfer Kit Low*, *Drum Kit Low* or *Fuser Kit Low* may appear on a colour printer. All such messages indicate that the relevant component has up to 20% of useful life remaining. Eventually the word *Low* in a message will change to *Out*.

An *Out* message must be reported to the TCRS staff. As for a *Low* message it is only necessary to observe the quality of print from time to time and if it has begun to deteriorate telephone the TCRS staff for assistance. Notify the next Adviser of any *Low* toner message.

If a user's print job suffers because of poor print quality, advise them to take the whole job to the ISS Reception in Claremont Tower where the cost will be refunded.

Header sheets

A print job's header sheet belongs to the user who submitted the job. Users are expected to dispose of their own header sheets. Use the header sheets to identify print jobs when you lay them out on the table.

Occasionally a print job may consist of only a single header sheet, stating *invalid id* or *no print funds*. Such sheets must be left on the table as the user concerned may be unaware that anything is wrong.

Throwing away old output

Place output which is several hours old into the recycling box (not into a rubbish bin). We can assume that such old output has been abandoned by the user. Where this is not the case, putting it in the recycling box gives the user a final chance of finding missing output.

Please remember that print output has been paid for by the user. Although the printing area must be kept tidy, we must treat output with care.

Paper Recycling

People occasionally ask if they can have header sheets and discarded print jobs for recycling (for example to use at a school). Paper for such purposes may be taken from the recycling boxes, but no one may take what appears to be unwanted output from the tables or the printers except the owner (the user), ISS staff or Help Desk Advisers.

Chris Woodford.

(with grateful acknowledgment to John Law, the author of earlier guides on which this present guide is based)