Basis for Informatics Support of the Tardis Project

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Version 1.9 of August 18, 2017

The Tardis Project was originally formed in the late 1980s by a group of Computer Science students, supported by members of Computer Science staff. A couple of GEC mini-computers\(^1\) had just dropped off the end of an ERCC\(^2\) commercial project, and rather than just scrap them it seemed like a good idea to make them available for the students to manage themselves. The intentions behind this were essentially as follows:

1. It should be a place where students can learn real system administration skills on a reasonably large platform with a realistic user base.

2. It would allow students to bring up systems and services and make them accessible in ways which might not otherwise be possible on managed Departmental systems for various reasons.

3. The above two items were regarded as educationally valuable in themselves, as well as making the students more employable.

On that basis space, power, connectivity and an interface to the University bureaucracy have been provided from then to date by CS and later Informatics.

The project has its own IPv4 address range (193.62.81.0/24) and its own ed-level DNS domain (tardis.ed.ac.uk). Members of the project have sourced various items of surplus equipment from their contacts over the years, much of it from companies who have recruited former Tardis members.

This document is intended to clarify Informatics’s ongoing support for the Tardis Project, and to set some basic conditions which the project will be required to meet in order that that support can continue. In particular, there are statutory and auditability requirements which now require a more formal treatment than when the project was first set up.

1 Requirements

1.1 General

Tardis sits within Informatics, and as such is subject to School policies. The Head of School is ultimately responsible for Tardis, and has ultimate control over how it is run.

There are a number of legal obligations which fall on the University as a result of, for example, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and the Computer Misuse Act 1990. As a result, the Head of School’s explicit permission is required before legally regulated activities are undertaken. The Tardis administrators must respond promptly to requests for information or requirements to act.

The Tardis administrators, and anyone whom they allow to access the physical location of the Tardis machines, are required to abide by the same Health and Safety rules which apply throughout the rest of the School.

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\(^1\)... which were blue and roughly police-box shaped

\(^2\)ERCC later became UCS which later became IS
The Tardis administrators will be responsible for keeping any physical space allocated to them clean and tidy at all times.

The School may undertake spot checks to ensure that the conditions set out in this document are being met.

The School reserves the right to restrict or suspend the Tardis service until it is satisfied that a request has been complied with, or where under the circumstances it believes this to be necessary to ensure that its own interests are adequately protected.

1.2 Contact lists

Making contact with the Tardis administrators has at times been unreliable and frustrating over the years. It will therefore now be required that the Tardis administrators should subscribe individually (using non-@tardis addresses) to a mailing list which will be run for the purpose by Informatics. Any emails sent to this list must be responded to in a timely manner. The list must be kept up to date as Tardis administrators come and go.

1.3 Power, network

Informatics will provide access to power, normally in the form of 13A wall sockets. These must not be overloaded. Care must be taken not to disrupt service for other items of equipment which share the ring. All items of equipment must be safety-tested to a standard acceptable to Informatics.

Informatics will provide network connectivity, in the form of one TP network port, expected to be running at not less than 100Mbps. This will be configured to be on a subnet/VLAN of the School’s choosing. Routing information will be exchanged in a mutually agreed form. As a result of the University’s firewalling policies, Tardis will be behind the Informatics edge filters. A mechanism has been put in place to allow Tardis to request that holes be opened as required.

1.4 Computing Regulations, Acceptable use

As Tardis is connected to the University’s network, the University’s Computing Regulations apply to all Tardis users. This is a fundamental requirement, which must be made clear to all prospective Tardis users.

Onward connectivity is provided by the Janet network, and the Janet AUP therefore also applies to all Tardis users. Note in particular that no activity of a commercial nature is allowed. The Tardis AUP must incorporate by reference the above two items, in addition to a reminder that all activity must of course be legal and not offensive.

1.5 Account eligibility, lifetime and periodic auditing thereof

Only people with a direct connection to the University should be eligible for Tardis accounts. Granting of accounts must be conditional on accepting the Tardis AUP in writing, which must incorporate by reference the University’s Computing Regulations and the Janet AUP, as noted above.

Accounts must be regularly audited for continued eligibility, and the Tardis administrators must put procedures in place to ensure that this takes place. These procedures must include periodic explicit re-acceptance of the Tardis AUP and the validation of any email and paper mail addresses.

As moribund and orphaned accounts are well known to be a security hazard, the Tardis administrators must put in place robust procedures to ensure that all accounts are disabled or deleted if they appear to be no longer in use.

3 http://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/about/policies-and-regulations/computing-regulations

4 https://community.jisc.ac.uk/library/acceptable-use-policy
1.6 Data protection, etc.

The Data Protection Act 1998 of course applies. The University is the Data Controller, and the Tardis administrators must abide by any requirements imposed on them as a consequence. In particular, paperwork must be lodged with the School for safe keeping. Note that as a Public Authority, paper records held by the University are also covered by the Data Protection Act, as amended.

1.7 Network filtering, auditability of address use

As noted above, Tardis is subject to the Informatics firewall policy and rules (as this is rather less onerous all round than being directly subject to the University’s central firewall).

The Tardis administrators must have robust network-address use auditing in place, so that they are able to identify the user of any given IP address as required. Requests from irt@ed may be passed to the Tardis administrators, and these must be responded to promptly.