

Division of Informatics

Management of Computing Staff

Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management is essentially the concept of each unit within an organization (no matter whether that unit is an individual, group, committee or component organization) working in such a way that the services that they supply to others within (and/or outwith) the organization both meet the needs (not the wants) of those receiving those services and are of a high quality. Each unit within an organization both provides and receives services. Effective communication between supplier and receiver of services is essential to establish needs and give feedback regarding the extent to which the services supplied meet the needs.

Let us look at TQM in the context of the management of computing staff within the Division of Informatics:

The Division as a provider and recipient of a computing service

According to the remit of the Computing Committee the computing policy agreed within that committee (and endorsed by the Policy Committee) has as its objective to 'support the aims of the Division and in particular ensure effective and manageable computing provision across the Division'. The responsibility for defining the objectives for the computing support service within the Division and the strategies to achieve those objectives lies with the Computing Executive Group but those objectives and strategies should be aligned with these policy statements. The channels of communication between the users of the Division's computing service and the Division's computing staff (the providers of that service) are at various levels and are summarized by the escalation procedures (<http://www.informatics.ed.ac.uk/admin/computing/escalation.html>).

Allocation of tasks and responsibilities to computing staff

Objectives and strategies need to be implemented by CEG in terms of allocation of tasks and responsibilities which follow those strategies to achieve those goals. This process of allocation involves a choice of whom to assign the tasks and responsibilities to. This choice needs to be informed by an understanding of the skills, knowledge, experience and potential of the individual computing staff members. Wherever possible the preferences of the individual computing staff members should also be a consideration (although not the overriding one) when assigning these tasks and responsibilities.

Most staff appreciate variety in their work and many also enjoy the occasional change in the responsibilities that they bear. This is likely to lead to a broader knowledge and experience for the individual concerned than would otherwise be the case. This in turn makes them a more valuable member of staff for the Division (and any other future potential employer).

Procedures for allocating responsibilities should be so arranged as to allow for such occasional changes in the responsibilities assigned to computing staff. Allocating responsibilities on an open-ended as opposed to fixed term basis would give rise to fewer occasions (and possibly fewer than the optimum number of occasions) on which a reallocation could be made. An opportunity to reallocate a responsibility that had been allocated on an open-ended basis would normally only arise if the person to whom the responsibility had been allocated voluntarily relinquished that responsibility. In these circumstances, if it was in the Division's best interests to reallocate a responsibility that was not being voluntarily given up by the current holder then there would be the potential for serious ill feeling on both sides. Allocating responsibilities on a fixed-term basis avoids this difficulty. Please note that there is nothing to stop a responsibility being reallocated to the current holder if that is the decision that best meets the needs of the Division and the wishes of the individuals concerned.

It should be noted that to avoid single points of failure for critical services it would be desirable to allocate a second person as a backup for the one that has been asked to take on the responsibility for

a service. The distribution of responsibilities should be reviewed periodically to ascertain whether or not it would be advisable to assign individual responsibilities to another person (the timing of that review would normally coincide with the end of the period of assignment of a responsibility). If all are in agreement it is quite possible that there would be no reassignment of the responsibility, but if it should be decided to reassign the responsibility then the most likely person to take it over, under normal circumstances, would be the backup person for that responsibility.

Finally it should be noted that the responsibility for running a service is distinct from the responsibility for development of that service and it is possible that two different individuals will be assigned these two different responsibilities. The person assigned the responsibility for the development of a cross-site service would normally be asked to produce a report on proposed developments that would be presented to the line manager for comment. Once approved by the line manager it would be brought before CEG for consideration.

Cross-Site Management Issues

In order to effectively manage computing staff that have been assigned tasks/projects at more than one site or at their primary site and across the Division it has been agreed that the following will apply:

- Computing Service Managers can initiate tasks undertaken by computing officers associated with their site but should keep the line manager (if not themselves) informed of the situation (for example by forwarding to the line manager(s) notes of meetings with local staff, if these exist).
- Line managers should consult with Computing Service Managers about any tasks undertaken by computing staff that affect their sites.
- Computing Service Managers are responsible for prioritizing the tasks associated with their site that are undertaken by each computing officer (this process would often be in consultation with the computing officer concerned). The line manager of the computing officer and relevant Computing Service Manager(s) should merge the resultant prioritized list(s) with any list of cross-divisional tasks to produce a fully prioritized list, taking into account that an agreed overall balance between the site and Division work should be maintained .