An investigation is underway to look at the possibilities of developing a virtual desktop for students in the Library and Computing Centre. Using a virtual desktop allows a user to receive a desktop that follows them around so that if they move to a different computer or are off-campus they get the same desktop with the applications they are familiar with.

A virtual desktop differs from a traditional desktop in that rather than running on a local PC, the desktop runs from a server and is ‘streamed’ down to a thin-client terminal. This can be a piece of specialist equipment or it can be an existing PC emulating a thin-client terminal.

Switching to a virtual desktop offers several benefits including:

- No costly time spent imaging machines. If a new software package is required it can be developed in isolation and allocated to a ‘gold’ image.
- Flexibility – the desktop and applications can follow the user.
- No issues with profiles filling up hard drives on machines.
- The ability to give users additional applications quickly.
- Lower administration costs.
- Good for the environment. Using thin client terminals instead of PCs could save us a considerable amount on our energy bills.

**Timescales**

The first step is to setup a small cluster of machines running as virtual desktops to make sure they work as expected. This cluster will be based on a basic Windows XP student desktop image with a few additional apps such as a web browser, MS-Office, Open Office, SPSS, Minitab, etc.

These machines will then be made available to students from September 2009 and we will attempt to get feedback from them regarding performance, usability, etc. We will also be monitoring performance on the servers which run the desktops to make sure they can handle the load.

If this is successful, we would look to replace the PCs due for renewal in Aug 2010 with a virtual desktop solution.