

Get Teachers & Students Talking

When it comes to Information and Communication Technology and its role in the classroom, everyone can talk theory. However Lynda McCreadie, Network Manager at John Cabot City Technology College does not have that luxury. With over 240 computers across the school, 230 of which are networked, plus a significant number of remote users, she is too busy putting the theory into practice.

At the time John Cabot CTC opened in 1993, Lynda was responsible for the installation of the cabling and networks, and began the task of equipping the school with a network of computers.

“We were lucky enough to get our technology funding application accepted by our industry sponsors, Cable and Wireless. We received 180 Apple Macs and the infrastructure necessary to use them effectively. What I then needed was a powerful email system for the College that would be compatible with the inevitable changes and developments in the technology,” explained Lynda.

She began to research appropriate software and realized that her requirements were more demanding than she had first anticipated.

“When I initially started looking at software, I wanted something robust, preferably with a successful track record in education. I was also hoping for a bit more functionality than the more basic products offered,” Lynda continued.



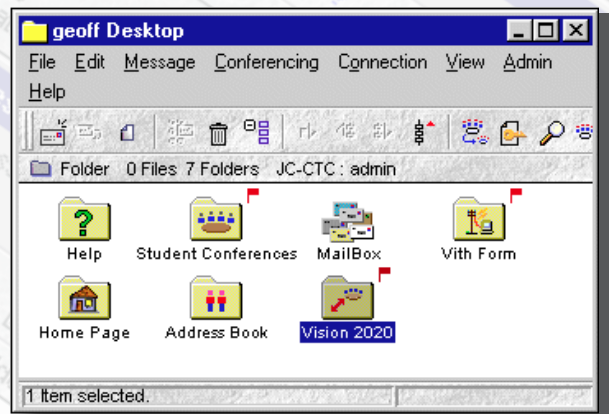
During her search, a colleague suggested SoftArc's **FirstClass Intranet Server**. After a brief assessment, Lynda knew she had located the right product.

“Simplicity was the key. I needed something that the first time users would be happy using,” explained Lynda. “With FirstClass I

could also see a lot of potential with regards to the projects we could develop.”

One of Lynda's many responsibilities involves familiarising new staff and PGCE student teachers with the technology they will have to use during their time at the College.

“Each term we have six student teachers from the University of West England and six from the University of Bath. I train them how to use the FirstClass system. Because FirstClass is so easy to use, I can usually train new users in the space of two school periods. Our students develop their use of FirstClass in no time, many of them using the excellent built-in help facilities. They have access to the system in tutorial periods, as well as at break and dinner times and from home.”



Although the network was initially based on a Mac server, the school has now moved to a Windows NT server, making the system truly cross platform. Remote users, which include GCSE and sixth form students, as well as staff and senior administrators connect to the John Cabot server using TCP/IP or Mac Remote. The school also has a number of laptops, which staff can use to connect from home when required. The original FirstClass software has also been upgraded and the school now uses **FirstClass Collaborative Classroom**.

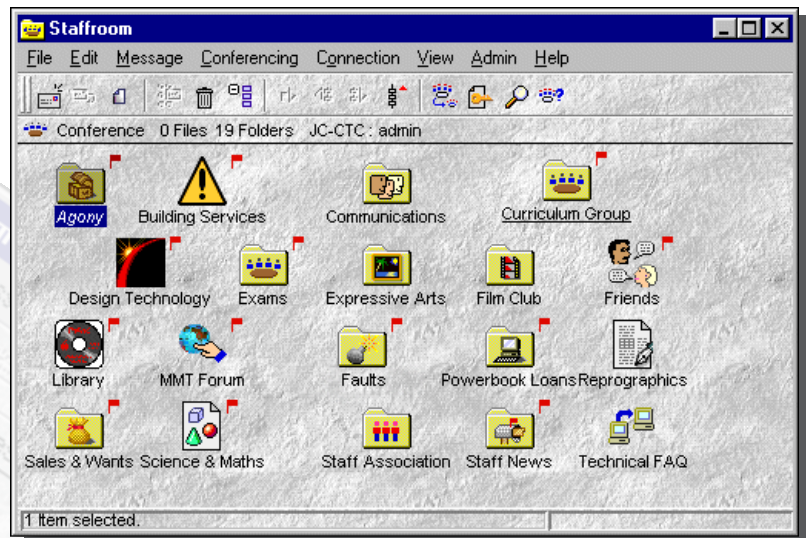


Lynda is proud of the technology systems that have been put in place, and the way it plays a key role in the life of the school.

“Every department has their own online conferences, i.e. forums within FirstClass, where announcements are made and all the issues relating to that particular subject are discussed. We also put the morning meeting minutes into one of the staff conferences every day, so teachers who were unable to make the 8.30am meeting don’t miss out on important information and decisions,” she said. “Students also have a selection of conferences at their fingertips – there are five conferences for the main school and seven for the sixth form.” The online conferences in FirstClass allow teachers and students to choose a particular subject and pull down the information and emails they require as opposed to having their mailboxes overloaded with irrelevant information.

In total, Lynda now administrates approximately 50 online conferences, all with varying access rights and privileges. Of these, she is particularly pleased with the ‘20/20 vision conference’.

“The 20/20 conference is part of a national Technology College Trust initiative, and was set up to allow sixth form students, members of staff and the principal to exchange ideas on their vision for the role if IT in the school for the future,” she said. “On a subtler level, it has



opened channels of communication to the Principal that would have been impossible in the past. Students have the opportunity to talk with the Principal in an informal way.”

Lynda has recently installed FirstClass Rapid Application Developer with which she is now developing a scheduling application for organizing meetings and allocating resources throughout the school.