

The YHMAN Regional Network

The new link to SuperJANET III is expected to operate at between 60 and 70Mbps.

The project was conceived at an opportune time to bid for major capital funding support to HEFCE, under its LAN/MAN initiative. This bid was fully successful, and an award of £949,000 has been made, which meets 75% of the setup costs. The remainder are being met by the consortium Universities. As the network will be used to supply all eight Universities with SuperJANET connectivity, the JISC, using UKERNA as agent, has also been able to offer recurrent funding support amounting to over £200,000 p.a., in lieu of providing other means of connectivity to SuperJANET. The overall support package includes costs for two members of staff based at Leeds UCS.

The network backbone links are being delivered by the cable companies in the period to Christmas 1997, during which time individual links will be commissioned. The network as a whole is planned for testing in January and February 1998, and by March it is expected that the YHMAN will start operation, with other sites' existing SuperJANET connections being superseded by Leeds' YHMAN connection to SuperJANET.

The YHMAN spans the Yorkshire and Humberside region, and the creation of the backbone is only the first stage in building what is expected to be a very powerful resource for advancing education in this region. With this in mind, as part of the agreement with the cable companies, advantageous tariffs have been obtained for the supply of further links at a variety of speeds down to 2Mbps. Most sites in the consortium expect to buy such links to complete networking to their subsidiary campuses, and all sites are also planning for links to other organisations which need network connections to consortium Universities. It is planned to consolidate the backbone for an initial period of a few months, but then to exploit it by this latter type of growth.

However, even in its initial form, the YHMAN will be an excellent vehicle for collaboration between the consortium sites, and in this sense it is infrastructure for many of the developments encouraged by the recent NCIHE Dearing Report.

With the provision of a regional inter-University network with speeds normally only found on campus network backbones, it will be sensible to seek collaborations. Examples could be in teaching using shared materials (which could have shared development costs), in delivery of high quality real-time video (e.g. lectures, video-conferencing), or in shared access to data and applications (e.g. in research or consultancy).

Some of these collaborations have economy at their heart, but others represent new ways of working, and will extend the ways in which we currently conduct our principal activities. It is for the Universities to exploit this resource, and the YHUA's new Executive Committee is now taking the first steps by identifying a number of development projects using YHMAN as infrastructure.

Looking at the national picture, YHMAN is one of several emerging regional networks. Its ATM link to the forthcoming SuperJANET III backbone will provide all sites in the consortium with high-speed links into other ATM-connected MANs outside our region.

The YHMAN project has really only just started. By building the backbone, the IT service-providers have set the stage. The extensions and the new applications using it will follow according to the plans and the will of academic staff. It will be for them to extract the value from this tremendous resource.

Readers wishing to know more about YHMAN or its potential can either contact the author (ucsdire@leeds.ac.uk) or Ed Carter (E.J.Carter@leeds.ac.uk). Further information about YHUA and its objectives can be found on the Web resource <http://www.yhua.ac.uk>. Updates of the project will also be given at Leeds in future issues of this Newsletter and the Reporter.

In closing I would like to record my appreciation of the tremendous support given to the project so far by the Vice-Chancellors of the consortium Universities, my colleagues in the Steering Group, the TAG, the YHUA, and our legal advisors, all of whom have contributed most fully and with great enthusiasm.