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ST ANDREWS PIONEERS 'CLOUD COMPUTING' RESEARCH

University invests £½ million in moving Scotland's IT 'into the cloud'

Computer experts at the University of St Andrews are leading the way in transforming the way we use IT, by looking to the clouds.

The University has launched a new half million pound research initiative in 'cloud computing', a new approach in computer services that will transform personal and business IT over the next 10 years.

Cloud computing, which moves IT usage from the desktop to the Internet, links hundreds of thousands of computers into a 'cloud' of services available online. Someone using Hotmail or Gmail rather than a desktop email programme is using a cloud service.

Imagine not having to worry about losing emails or hardware crashing. Because it delivers services independent of hardware or software, the idea offers the opportunity for businesses to save money and reduce risk, and is something that computing giants such as Microsoft and IBM are investing in.

A group led by Professor Ian Sommerville at the University's School of Computer Science will prototype ideas in this exciting new area of technology.

Professor Sommerville explained, "If you use Google, Amazon or Hotmail you are already using a computing cloud. More and more people are switching to cloud services which offer word processing and photo editing services, instead of installing software on their own computers.

"For companies, cloud computing has the potential to transform their IT provision. Instead of buying expensive servers and hardware to run their applications, companies will reduce their IT costs by buying computing services from the 'cloud' on a pay as you go basis, in the same way that they now buy other utilities such as electricity and telecommunications."

The approach makes budgeting easier and savings can be made from reduction in the amount of IT support and the need for disaster recovery, since that is the responsibility of the cloud provider.

In terms of the impact of cloud computing on major providers of software, Ian commented, "Even Microsoft are setting themselves up as cloud providers and spending a lot of money in this area. Their plan is to offer cloud services like word processing so that people will not have to have Microsoft Word on their own computers. So, they are preparing for a different way of working."

The St Andrews Cloud Computing initiative (StACC) will fund research student projects and establish a research computing cloud to test new software and prototype new ideas in how businesses can move their systems to the cloud. Appropriately, StACC requires no new buildings – it will be a virtual centre of excellence pooling St Andrews with partners all over the world.

Professor Sommerville continued, "Our new research initiative is a unique development in the UK which will place Scotland at the forefront of research in cloud computing. Cloud computing is an exciting area to work in and a great opportunity for businesses in Scotland. By setting up StACC, we will be able to bring in new research funding and help Scottish companies who want to offer cloud services and who would like to move their IT to the cloud."

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NOTE TO EDITORS

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