University Computer Club
Box 22, M300
The University of Western Australia

ATTN: Maxine Gamble, John Arfield
CC: Dominic Rose, Jon Stubbs

RE: UCC charged for AARNet usage at 'affiliate' rates

Dear Maxine and John,

As discussed briefly in my informal meeting with Maxine on 14th April, I am writing to ask that ITS consider charging UCC for usage of the AARNet internet connection at 'student' rates, rather than 'affiliate' rates. Having discussed this with the UCC Committee, I believe that there are four reasons to do so, outlined below.

UCC is a unique and historic institution on campus
The University Computer Club was founded in 1974[1] – long before the University itself provided general purpose computer access to students. The club purchased its own computer, an IBM 1620, to facilitate this, and lobbied the West Australian Regional Computing Centre for student access to the few mainframes available in WA at that time. Indeed, the club was founded 2 years before the University's own Department of Computer Science.

The club's 35-year history is unparalleled amongst student computing clubs worldwide, and many UCC alumni have become significant figures in the computing industry both in Perth and abroad.

The 'affiliate' rate is prohibitively expensive for a student-funded club
The club is funded entirely by the contributions of its members (including membership fees and donations), with the exception of the bi-annual grants provided by the Guild's Societies Council (typically amounting to less than $1500 per annum). As such, AARNet connection fees consume a very large portion of the club's yearly budget (and in fact constitute the club's largest expense by far), and prevent investment in more permanent club resources such as computer hardware.

As a result of these high fees, the club is forced to use a separate internet connection (known as 'Resnet', also provided by ITS) with drastically reduced bandwidth for the majority of 'off-net' traffic. This connection is shared with the residential colleges, and is unusable for purposes such as streaming video, which have bandwidth requirements exceeding that provided by the portion of the Resnet link allocated to UCC.

The UCC exists solely to provide benefits to students
The UCC is run entirely by students, and supported by the Guild of Undergraduates. Though UWA alumni/non-students are welcome to join the UCC and utilize its resources, they must pay a higher membership fee, and they are prohibited from holding positions on the Committee.

As such, the vast majority of the club's activity is conducted for the benefit of current University students. I believe it is therefore reasonable, for the purposes of AARNet billing, to treat the club the same way as the University's students.

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[1] http://ucc.asn.au/aboutucc/history.ucc

UCC members are better off using the SNAP VPN than a direct connection to AARNet
As a result of the above, members who require a higher-speed connection than the one offered by Resnet are required to use the SNAP VPN while at UCC. This is less than ideal for two reasons: firstly, it places unnecessary load on the VPN system; secondly, it is inconvenient, as it requires that students have a SNAP full access account, and precludes UCC from configuring the connection automatically/centrally (as UCC is not eligible for its own SNAP account).

If UCC were charged the 'student' rate for internet access, students wouldn't need to connect to SNAP, and the University's costs would be reduced slightly (since, unlike students, the UCC would not receive any allowance for AARNet usage free of charge).

The 'subscription fee' model is unfair
The 'subscription fee' charging model used to charge 'affiliates' for AARNet usage essentially mandates that the club pay a subscription fee based on the previous year's usage, as well as a fee for that year's estimated usage and penalty fees should actual usage exceed estimated usage.

This model is unfair, primarily because it charges retroactively. For 2009, UCC has been charged a $900 subscription fee on the basis of 2008's usage – which was already paid for in full at the old rate of $35/GB. 2009's usage is expected to be substantially lower, as a server which used the AARNet link for most of 2008 has now been shut down.

Furthermore, to a club like UCC with highly variable usage levels, the new charging model is likely to act as a price increase. If the club were to use exactly the estimated usage in 2009, the cost per gigabyte would be slightly lower than the previous rate of $35/GB (excepting the retroactive charge for 2008 usage). If the club were to use less than that, the cost per gigabyte could exceed $35/GB; if the club exceeds the limit, $35/GB charges apply in addition to the subscription charges.

In light of the above, the UCC Committee requests that the club be charged for its usage of the AARNet link at the 'student' rate of $6.60/GB, rather than under the 'subscription fee' model for affiliates. Furthermore, we ask that the $935.00 paid so far, for connection under the subscription fee model for Q1 and Q2 2009, be applied as a credit to UCC's account, subject to the cost of any 2009 usage at student rates.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Scott Young
2009 UCC Treasurer
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