



SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

David Stewart, User Support Manager, to retire after 32 years



David Stewart, the School's User Support Manager, is to retire after 32 years in the School of Engineering &

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David Stewart, our User Support Manager, will retire in April 2020 after 32 years at the School. We chatted to David about his highlights and memories from a life in IT, and what he's planning next.

David first walked through the School's doors as an undergraduate in the Department of Electrical Engineering (1978-1981), where he remembers being lectured by Alan Owen, Peter Grant, John Mavor and Jim Jordon among others. During this period, David had his first taste of computing but thought "I'll stick to electronics and won't get involved with computing."

After graduation, David started his working life at the UK's state-owned rail transport company British Rail (now ScotRail), first as Technical Officer before rising through the ranks to become Principal Technical Officer in signalling and telecommunications and later Assistant System Manager for the Signalling CAD system. While on a secondment at British Rail, David was "given access to a computer and told to find things to do with it", consequently using databases and word processing to automate tasks, save time and increase accuracy.

Joining the School in 1988 as Computing Officer for the Department of Electrical Engineering, David helped install and maintain Sun Solaris infrastructure and software for administration, and established the Cadence Lab for Scotland. The latter included a practical chip design laboratory exercise for third years which was voted "best lab" by students.

David became Senior Computing Officer in 2002, at a time when the Division of Engineering and Department of Electronics and Electrical Engineering merged, and he helped bring together best practice from both organisations. David supported users through these significant organisational changes, assisting in the move of frontline services from Solaris to Linux and increasing support for users of the Windows operating system. In December 2002 he re-established the web presence of one of the School's research groups after its web server was destroyed in a devastating fire in the Cowgate.

David became IT Service Manager following the retirement of his predecessor in 2009, a role he would continue for the next eight years. As Service Manager, David oversaw the introduction of a physical Helpdesk, Helpdesk Assistants and the beginning of much greater interaction between IT staff and IT users in the School. E-learning started to gain greater emphasis across the University and education sector as a whole, and David's team began to support the Engineering Teaching Organisation as a key part of the IT function.

David stepped back from service management to become User Support Manager in 2017. "The School had expanded considerably since 2002 and so I felt it was time to get someone else to take the reins and for me to get back to doing what I do best, working with our user base." Over recent years, David has focused on maintaining day-to-day IT operations while his colleagues enhanced infrastructure in the background. These years included "finally retiring the old admin software and infrastructure, and having done that it was time too for me to 'retire!'"

David's career spans a period of dramatic change in computing and information technology, from the launch of Microsoft Windows (1983) to the advent of Wi-Fi (1997), Google (1998), and more recently the rise of cloud computing. He remembers some common phrases within his team back in the 1990s and early 2000s included "Are we using this 'www' thing yet?", "We could try this Google site to see if anyone has the same problem...", and "Well, I'm just going to try booking this plane ticket online!"

Alongside his IT work, David has helped keep the School updated with public transport developments and has himself been commuting by train and bus from Fife to the King's Buildings over the last 32 years.

Reflecting on his career, David said “It has been my mission to help people, whether that is IT related or generally in the School. It’s not been easy. I think we all find ourselves under pressure as we seek to be ‘world-beating’ in terms of research and teaching. I have met many co-workers who have enriched my life, and I am very grateful to have been able to work with so many great people.”

David has been married to Evelyn for 34 years, is father to Alison and Rhona (both now married) and now has two grandsons. His hopes for retirement? “I am involved with Viewfield Baptist Church in Dunfermline, drive minibuses and organise travel for Scripture Union, run a Beach Mission in the Isle of Man, help people with travel queries and I am a member of a number of railways and ferry organisations. As well as spending more time looking after the boys I am hoping that my early retirement will allow me some more time for all the other activities.”

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