

Ad-hoc notes from Training Discussion Group

The discussion focussed on the basic skills people need to get started on HPC systems rather than developing new HPC skills at the high end. It was felt that there were two main areas that needed to be covered, but where the local support staff did not have the time to satisfy demand: introductory Linux command-line skills and a basic introduction to using an HPC system (logging on, batch submission etc).

It was agreed that software carpentry (SWC) was a good place to source the command-line training. Although an entire SWC course might cover too much as the new users are not necessarily interested in software development, the bash shell material could be used stand-alone.

Assuming people have basic command-line experience as a pre-requisite, the question was then how to introduce them to using HPC. I explained that this was the intention of the ARCHER course "Hands-on Introduction to HPC": a set of generic lectures covering core concepts, with exercises that could easily be ported to any HPC system. However, there is not enough effort in ARCHER to run this for the entire Tier-2 community, and it would be a significant effort for local staff to give the course themselves based purely on the slides.

A very interesting suggestion was that ARCHER staff could do reasonably high-quality videos of the lectures, split up into small (10 - 15 minute) chunks. These could then be broadcast locally to a new users in a classroom, and the local staff could then assist in the associated hands-on sessions. This enables them to concentrate on the areas where they can add most value, i.e. porting examples to their own machine and providing face-to-face advice to course attendees.

Another area where a recorded video could be useful was in explaining the entire UK ecosystem: what is ARCHER, Tier-1 and Tier-2, and how do you can access them? It was not entirely clear who would be best placed to do this general overview.

A final idea was setting up a forum/venue for discussing generic training issues. For example, I mentioned that for ARCHER we made use of various online quiz packages such as quia and socrative. It would be useful to share experiences and best practice with other trainers but it was not clear where this could be done at present.