

Passwords and their Security

Introduction

As a member of Durham University, you are bound to abide by the University Regulations on the Use of Computing Facilities. If you wish to make use of computing facilities managed by the ITS in the University, you must be registered with the ITS, and have a personal *username*. (New students are registered automatically: members of staff should contact the IT Service Desk. You must not use someone else's username *for any purpose*. Also, you must not allow anyone else to use your username.

You are obliged therefore, to ensure that no-one is able to use your username. To do this, you must protect your username with a secure password. The password which you are given when you register should be changed, at the earliest opportunity, to something secure, and known only to yourself. If you do not change your original password within four weeks of your account being set up, access to the account will be withdrawn.

This document provides information which will help you to choose a suitable password, and keep it secure, together with instructions for changing your password. If you do not follow these guidelines, the password change utility is unlikely to accept your choice of password.

Your ITS password is used to authenticate against all ITS services including the Networked PC Service, duo and Unix.

How to choose a password

You should choose a password that is at least eight characters long. It must be a mixture of upper and lower case letters and numbers. You may use special characters, for example ! or + but these are not compulsory. The space, # or £ characters should not be used however.

Your password is case-sensitive, so ensure that the Caps Lock key is not depressed.

When choosing a password, you should not select one which can easily be guessed by someone else.

Therefore, a password is unsuitable if it is a name, a birthday, a telephone number, a car registration number, a place name, a username, the name of a department, or any other personal information.

You should also be aware that people have written programs that attempt to crack passwords. Such programs have access to very long lists of words obtained from various sources. Therefore, you should also avoid a word in a dictionary.

One method to choose a password is to think of a simple phrase you can easily remember, and then use the initial letters of the words in the phrase as your password. For example, the phrase "I have eight fingers and two thumbs" could be used to remember the password **lh8fa2t**. (Do not use that one, find your own!)

When you change your password, the new password must not be the same or similar to the original (existing) password. The system will remember the last 10 passwords used.

Keeping your password secure

Never write your password down on paper. A password that is impossible to remember is worse than one which is easily guessed, because you will end up writing it down. Do not let anyone watch your fingers as you type your password. Change your password from time to time, or whenever you think it may have been compromised.

Changing your password

Your ITS password is changed by visiting the Web page

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/its/utilities/changepassword/>

The page can also be accessed by using the icon on the desktop of the Networked PC Service labelled **ITS Change Password**.

On the ITS Unix service the **passwd** command has been disabled and instead you are directed to use the Web page.

An Internet Explorer window will open displaying the **How to change your ITS password** page. In the appropriate boxes:

- 1 Enter your ITS username
- 2 Enter your ITS password
- 3 Enter your new password
- 4 Enter your new password again.

The new password is typed in twice to check that you have typed what you think you have typed. Do not forget your new password, or you will be unable to log in again.