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A shared Research Data Service for the UK: is it possible?

keynote Item

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A shared research data service for the UK: is it possible?

Jean Sykes

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Overview of presentation

- What's the problem to be solved?
- Are there already seeds of a solution?
- The HEFCE shared services call
- The RUGIT/CURL bid
- Funders and stakeholders
- Aims of the project
- Progress so far
- How can UCISA members help?



What's the problem?

- Research data – an untapped resource
- Often unstructured and inaccessible
- Lack of policies and standards
- The data deluge -not just “Big Science”
- Many formats and disciplines
- HEI computing services and libraries under pressure to help (mainly storage) – unsustainable in the future

What's the problem?

- Not just a question of data storage
- Whole life cycle: creation, selection, ingest, storage, retrieval, review, preservation
- Increasing research requirement to access/analyse/synthesises others' data
- It's the *management* of the data that needs addressing UK-wide

Seeds of a solution?

- OSI e-infrastructure report posed the question – February 2007
- But no follow up, no road map produced
- JISC's Integrated Information Environment provides the infrastructure
- Digital Curation Centre and Digital Preservation Coalition in place
- Beacons of good practice among Research Councils (ESRC, NERC)



Seeds of a solution?

- GRID computing and middleware maturing
- Current JISC project work in the field: data preservation costs, data audit framework, skills/roles/career development of data scientists, federated tools and services
- Current RIN studies: publication and quality assurance of research data, data stewardship principles

Seeds of a solution?

- Work starting in other countries
- US Interagency Working Group on Digital Data working on a national approach to data storage and curation
- ANDS (Australian National Data Service) – a government initiative
- ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures) road map and green paper

HEFCE shared services

- Spring 2007 HEFCE shared services call
- For collaborative feasibility studies
- Maximum grant on offer was £75k
- RUGIT and CURL got together with support from UCISA, SCONUL and JISC
- Set up small working group to draft the bid
- Bid was for UK research data service feasibility study



HEFCE shared services



- HEFCE was very interested in this bid
- Support was gained from many more stakeholders up and down the UK
- A more detailed proposal was submitted
- The RUGIT/CURL group worked on a full ITT for a major consultancy
- HEFCE approved £200k for this study



Funders and stakeholders

- The HEFCE funds were needed for the major consultancy
- The project also needed a project manager and funds for advocacy and dissemination
- JISC provided £35k
- RUGIT and CURL each provided £10k
- Total funding for the project: £255k



Funders and stakeholders

- The project became known as the UKRDS
- A stakeholder list was drawn up and a JISCmail list created
- 30+ stakeholder agencies: all UK HE FCs, RCUK and all research councils, BL and TNA, UUK and Russell Group, UCISA and SCONUL
- 4 case study “volunteers”: Bristol, Leeds, Leicester and Oxford



Aims of the project

- Develop understanding of UK's current and future research data service needs
- Work with other UK stakeholders to identify priorities for action
- Develop a number of scenarios/options for the shared service from “do nothing” to a managed national service
- Develop a detailed business plan for the preferred option(s)

Aims of the project

- Include assessment of costs and benefits in options appraisal
- Indicate both scale of investment required and an estimate of likely ROI
- Present outline governance and management proposals for the preferred option(s)
- Consultants' report expected end Dec 08

Progress so far

- Consultants appointed February 08: SERCO
- Project Manager appointed Feb 08: John Milner
- Project Initiation Document completed and work packages/timescales agreed
- Case study participants contacted and meeting set up



Progress so far

- High-level Steering Cttee established – will meet on 18 March for first time
- RUGIT/CURL group is now Project Board
- Project has own domain for website:
<http://www.ukrds.ac.uk> – watch out for it
- Working Group has already drafted comprehensive Communications and Advocacy Plan

How can UCISA members help?

- Advocacy within your own institution
- Especially with your VCs and Pro-VCs
- With research centre directors and individual researchers as appropriate
- Your institution may not hold research data, but your researchers will want to access other researchers' data
- So watch out for messages coming from John Milner, SERCO, and Jean Sykes!

