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

keynote Item

Original citation:

This version available at: eprints.lse.ac.uk/25608/

Available in LSE Research Online: November 2009

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

Jean Sykes
Librarian and Director of IT Services
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!