

AUSTRALIAN E-RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL (AeRIC)

AeRIC MEETING – 17 NOVEMBER 2008

AGENDA ITEM 7: AUSTRALIAN ACCESS FEDERATION (AAF)

Purpose

To update members on the progress with the proposed establishment of the AAF.

Background

The AAF is the last component of PfC to be implemented and will be an essential underpinning for researchers adopting eResearch capabilities, particularly with respect to accessing data and research infrastructure.

The AAF Steering Committee met in Melbourne on 2 October following the eResearch Australasia conference. This was a critical meeting as the project was experiencing extensive delays due in part to unresolved differences between the two project teams that are developing the PKI and Shibboleth components of the AAF. This was further complicated by the lack of an AAF legal entity or a company board which could make decisions committing the AAF to preferred technology options and business structures. In addition, the project is funded under the Systemic Infrastructure Initiative (SII), rather than under an NCRIS contract, and so does not have the same governance arrangements common to the other PfCs which may have been able to resolve some of these outstanding issues.

Issues

The project had made some progress towards recommending a governance structure based on collaboration with Higher Education Services (HES). It was proposed that HES would establish a subsidiary company to provide a business and legal framework for managing the AAF. It would have a small board, but importantly, its constitution would establish an advisory group to make decisions on AAF policy.

However, it became clear during recent AAF Steering Committee discussions that key business decisions needed to be made in order to evaluate cost and revenue options so that the risks related to establishing an AAF corporate structure could be assessed. By 2 October, it had become clear that while the AAF project had and could continue to canvas options on AAF business models and service offerings, given the variety that existed, any entity set up to operate the actual AAF would need to make its own business decisions.

Consequently, members of the AAF Steering Committee agreed that it was necessary to accelerate the consideration of the governance model and associated legal issues and work towards establishing the AAF entity as soon as possible, so that a governance structure could be established in which those decisions could be made.

Following the Steering Committee meeting on 2 October, a Transition Group to manage the establishment of an AAF company (AAF Co) was formed; comprising Richard Northam - Executive Officer of CAUDIT to chair the group, Dr Rhys Francis - Executive Director of AeRIC, Peter Nicholson - DIISR and Cynthia Hansen - CEO of HES. This group has met once and discussed issues which exposed the probability of relatively high start up costs of the proposed HES model. It was agreed that other options had to be considered as the anticipated revenue stream of the AAF is unlikely to be sufficient to fund an operating AAF for some time.

Proposed way forward

It appears that sufficient AAF Project funds may remain to maintain effort through to July 2009.

It is therefore proposed that the timeline for the establishment of an AAF Co be set for July 2009 and that the Transition Group undertake activities to develop and agree membership and service level arrangements, particularly dealing with management of liability within the federation.

It also appears, that the governance of the shibboleth test federation established under the Meta-Access Management System (MAMS) Project (and consequently not directly under the control of the AAF Project) fails to engage important customers of the eventual federation in design decisions.

It would be appropriate for a renewal of the AAF project by DIISR to impose a revised governance arrangement on the test federation to create an 'AAF Pilot Federation'.

It is anticipated that a suite of production level services could be on offer by the end of 2009.

Next steps

Essentially the proposal is that the Transition Group assist the AAF Project to address any outstanding technical issues and work towards piloting the Federation utilising remaining SII resources for the project.

Specifically, the Transition Group will:

- Review AAF Project outputs and establish a definition of a Pilot Federation for DIISR to consider in renewing the AAF Project
- Recommend revised governance arrangements for the Pilot Federation, as the Pilot Federation would be expected to evolve directly into the operating federation
- Work with DIISR, CAUDIT and the AAF Project directors to accelerate the establishment of the AAF entity. This is likely to involve the establishment of an operating entity by a small number of sector players who care sufficiently.
- Develop a strategy for PKI which is likely to be that AusCERT establish a sector PKI service, and that AAF Co require members to have PKI capability, noting that it can be obtained from AusCERT, but equally can be obtained in other ways.

Action

For noting.

AeRIC Secretariat
November 2008