

**AUSTRALIAN eRESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL (AeRIC)**  
**AeRIC Meeting - Thursday, 23 April 2009**

**AGENDA ITEM 4: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Purpose**

To update AeRIC on developments within the Platforms for Collaboration Capability.

**Interoperation and Collaboration Infrastructure (ICI/ARCS)**

The appointment of an Independent Chair for the ARCS E/C has been successfully concluded, with Trevor Powell taking on the role.

ARCS services are beginning to be realised and made available:

The ARCS Data Fabric is available in beta form, providing for access to virtual storage, through a web interface and by remote mounting to user desktops. Access is authenticated from IdPs within the AAF Pilot infrastructure and users can allow access for selected sets of their folders within that virtual storage to any other person authenticated by any IdP within the AAF Pilot.

EVO support is developing through collaboration between ARCS and CAUDIT, so that campus roll out is occurring at Monash and QUT, as exemplars, and EVO sessions can now support telephone dial in and Access Grid integration.

ARCS is developing a solution for 24x7 on call support, likely to be based at VPAC, and is developing a redundant fail-over capability for key services.

However, significant further work is required on all of these services.

In addition, the delivery of AAF-integrated collaboration tools and the development of ARCS' cloud computing service and applications is some way off.

The business plan represents an accurate statement of ARCS' position and intentions.

Constructive responses might include:

- That the steps to measure KPIs should be advanced more strongly, as a thorough measurement needs to be achieved for the Progress Report. ARCS needs to show that measurement drives service development choices and underpins advice to DIISR around the effectiveness of the ICI investment.
- That the development of strong advisory and possibly even specialised governance processes around national services such as the Data Fabric should be explored to ensure its functional relevance and also to assist drive uptake of those services.

Issues that might need further action:

- The Business Plan proposes changes to the ARCS categories of membership and therefore potential members. DIISR could invite ARCS to present its intended changes to membership arrangements and the basis on which additional memberships will be determined for discussion and agreement.

**Australian National Data Service (ANDS)**

The appointment of an independent chair for the ANDS S/C has been successfully concluded, with Ron Sandland taking on the role.

The new ANDS Executive Director has undertaken a highly energised engagement process with sector participants and is now visible and active.

ANDS expects to launch its first service next month, being a national minting service for persistent digital object identifiers.

It is likely that anything up to a further 12 months will be required before a clear set of services is available, as was the case in establishing ARCS.

The business plan represents an accurate statement of ANDS' position but lacks some clarity around the details of its delivery intentions.

Constructive responses might include:

- That a strong focus on service establishment and operation should be maintained, so that ANDS operates as a harbinger of change rather than attempting to be responsible for achieving change in others.
- That meaningful engagement between ANDS and sector interests continues to need attention, so that ANDS might consider implementing specific governance processes for some of its programs. This may be vital in the case of the frameworks program where both activities and outputs can only be meaningful with the buy in of others.

Issues that might need further action:

- The ANDS funding profile is weighted to the last year and expenditure within the project deadline may be problematic. DIISR could invite ANDS to present its strategy for achieving expenditure against its funding profile to understand what contingencies might need to exist.

### **National Computational Infrastructure (NCI)**

Significant progress has been made within NCI.

In March, NCI announced the successful acquisition of a 12,000 core SUN cluster to be installed by end of 2009 that will increase the compute power of the national facility by a factor 12

Investments in two specialised systems are also ready to be made, but until contracts are resolved these details cannot be announced.

The MAS has been revamped to provide greater focus on the quality of the research as well as the specific need for access to a system of this calibre.

Aggregate investment by partners, bolstered by a significant CSIRO investment, is expected to exceed the NCRIS investment of \$26M and additional partners are likely to join in the near future.

More work is required on the strategic allocation of the facility and the means by which that can be related to the MAS.

The business plan represents an accurate statement of NCI's position and intentions.

Constructive responses might include:

- The purpose of the discussion that a high level committee on HPC strategy should be formed, should be clarified.

- That NCI should engage ARCS in a combined cloud computing initiative and ensure the ARCS Data Fabric has effective access to data held at all NCI supported facilities.

Issues that might need further action:

- The arrangements around governance of NCI have been progressed by exchange of letters, since it became clear in late 2007 that the original contract provided conditions on NCI Partners that would mean key parties could not join the NCI S/C. The arrangements put in place by exchange of letters cease in June 2009. Acceptance of the Business Plan should therefore include a specific statement about the on-going governance arrangement which would best be reviewed by the parties (DIISR and ANU) and agreed.
- The development of the “strategic plan for national computational needs” is insufficiently progressed and now urgent, consequently DIISR could reasonably consider a broader means of obtaining this input, inclusive of NCI.
- The NCI budget does not include any BoM contribution in the National Facility whereas the BoM have expended on research computing to date. DIISR could invite NCI to present on the relationship between previous HPC investments by NCI participants and their proposed ongoing investments to be re-assured a net reduction is not occurring.

#### **ASSDA SERVICES FOR e-SOCIAL SCIENCE (ASeSS)**

ASSDA has successfully established this component with the strong engagement of ANU and the other ASSDA Nodes.

Some significant international engagement has been achieved and we may see the emergence of an internationally supported common set of data management and analysis tools over the period of the NCRIS investment.

The project plan for the associated ASeSS-VO NeAT project has taken longer than anticipated to agree between all parties and is only now in a form such that ANDS and ARCS can consider, as the holders of NeAT funds.

The business plan is an accurate statement of ASeSS at this formative stage.

Constructive responses might include:

- That ASSDA should undertake and report on KPI measures in this year’s Progress Report, to create a baseline for later year comparisons and to allow the next Annual Business Plan to adapt to performance outcomes. The baseline for later year comparisons is essential if ASSDA is to be able to advise government at the end of the project on which activities within ASeSS had impact.
- That a summary for the ASeSS-VO NeAT project plan, similar to that provided by ARCS and ANDS, and indeed the same summary, should be appended to the Business Plan and the total budget of the combined activity reported in the financial tables.

Issues that might need further action:

- The relative investment by DIISR in ASSDA overall is unclear from the ASeSS Business Plan, but will be needed if DIISR is to evaluate its relative contribution to eResearch development through this investment. DIISR could

invite ASSDA to present on the inputs to ASSDA and the relative importance of ASeSS within those inputs.

## **eResearch Blueprint**

Paul Davis has been engaged under direct contract to DIISR as an independent consultant to develop reference material for the eResearch blueprint requested by AeRIC in 2008. The project is tightly managed around the following four issues.

### The motivators for eResearch

This section will present the various arguments and rationales for eResearch investment that have been developed over the last few years, starting with the work of the eResearch Coordinating Committee (eRCC), the Review of the NCRIS Roadmap, the NCRIS Platforms for Collaboration (PfC) investment plan and the recent internal arguments that have found support within Government. The section will reference supporting arguments at an international level, accompanied with an annotated collection of background reference documents. The expected outcome of this work is a consolidated summary highlighting the existing key arguments.

### Essential eResearch Services and Infrastructure

This section will identify the key functions that need to be sourced to realise the benefits attainable through eResearch. This section will also identify the enduring infrastructure required to support those functions. This will cover areas such as those identified under the "Requirements" section of the eResearch Chapter of the NCRIS Roadmap Review document. This section will not delve into the delivery modes of functions and services.

### Capabilities

This section will focus on the rate of development of the relevant capabilities, both from a technology and user perspective, and the nature of investment that is occurring internationally. This section will then address Australia's competitive positioning (what is possible, what is being done by whom, what is our comparable capability) and include an assessment of when various functionalities might be commoditised and more routinely supplied. This section will also address skills and expertise.

### Delivery structures

This section forms the core of the blueprint for future services and their scale and delivery arrangements, and is not intended to be based on the traditional technology oriented approach.

This section will canvass arguments around future roles of institutions, governments, research funding agencies and other participants which will be identified through consultations. In particular, this section will highlight the necessary inputs for sustainable delivery models, taking in to account skills and expertise resourcing requirements.

Project stage	Period of activity	Deliverable
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1	8 days during April 2009	<p>Define the audience and the key messages for the Blueprint document in consultation with DIISR</p> <p>Identify key documents to draw on and present a summary for discussion with DIISR</p> <p>Identify key contacts for interviews and discuss with DIISR</p> <p>Synthesise key issues raised in existing documents, and conduct interviews</p>
	17 days during April and May 2009	<p>Draft sections of the Blueprint and present each section to DIISR once completed.</p> <p>Incorporate any DIISR revisions</p> <p>Present complete draft Blueprint to DIISR</p>
2	2 days during May 2009	Revise document to incorporate any DIISR comments
	3 days during June 2009	<p>Final draft provided to DIISR</p> <p>Final comments and revisions to be incorporated upon request from DIISR</p>

### **PfC co-ordination**

The second meeting of PfC Directors was held on 15 April 2009.

Agreement was reached around the focus of the PfC Communication plan, relative to the Communications activities of the components of PfC. A revised document will be prepared for consideration at the next AeRIC meeting.

The matching of PfC services to eResearch needs was also discussed and agreement was reached to develop a combined service approach to Climate research as an exemplar, as all PfC components have an interest in that area.

### **Action**

Members note the report.

AeRIC Executive Director

April 2009