

AUSTRALIAN E-RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL (AeRIC)

AeRIC MEETING – 20 November 2007

AGENDA ITEM 3: AUSTRALIAN ACCESS FEDERATION (AAF)

Purpose

To brief AeRIC members on the outcome of discussions between the Chair of AeRIC, the Executive Director of AeRIC and the Project Director of the AAF.

Issues

At the last meeting, AeRIC members expressed concern about the need to resolve issues of governance and delays in reaching agreement about the appointment of an entity to operate the AAF. There was also some concern that while technical issues may be being addressed, there was a need for better communications with senior management in universities, particularly at the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) level. Professor Cochrane, Ms Lansdown and Dr Francis have since discussed these issues with Mr Nick Tate, Chair of the AAF Steering Committee (SC).

Mr Tate indicated that the AAF SC had developed a communications strategy which specifically targets a range of stakeholders, including senior management in universities as well as IT service departments. The strategy involves running technical workshops, presentations at major conferences and forums and plans to engage senior management in universities as well as those responsible for the implementation of the NCRIS capabilities.

While the communications to date had tended to focus on those responsible for implementing the AAF at the institutional level, plans were in place to engage senior management, particularly the DVCRs. Professor Chris Marlin, DVCR at Flinders University and the Universities Australia representative on the AAF SC, led a presentation to a meeting of DVCRs on 8 November 2007. This was a crucial step to involve high level decision makers in the development of the AAF. Attending with Professor Marlin were Peter Nicholson from DEST and Patricia McMillan from the University of Queensland.

The discussions were very positive and focussed on the long-term benefits to universities of participating in the AAF, rather than on the complex technical issues involved. The DVCRs recognised the benefits not only for research but also in administrative processes and e-learning. Professor Marlin also outlined what universities would have to do in readiness for them becoming members of the AAF. The DVCRs were encouraged to commence conversations within their universities concerning institutional strategies to implement the AAF.

Mr Tate has had a preliminary discussion with Glenn Withers, the CEO of Universities Australia to gauge UA's interest in the AAF, and in particular whether UA or one of its subsidiaries would be prepared to act as the contracting agency for the AAF. This was part of a process of gathering information to put to AeRIC outlining a number of possible options surrounding the governance and operation of the AAF.

As a consequence of the meeting involving Professor Cochrane and Dr Francis, arrangements have been made for Ms Lansdown, Mr Tate, and Mr Nicholson to meet with Dr Withers on 30 November 2007. The purpose of the meeting is to provide a more formal follow up to earlier discussions about how Universities Australia would

like to see the Australian Access Federation (AAF) develop and its relationship with Universities Australia.

The AAF SC met on 15 November 2007 and Dr Francis will provide an update to AeRIC members.

Action

- Members consider whether the recent consultations with the AAF fully address the Council's earlier concerns.

AeRIC Secretariat
November 2007