

AUSTRALIAN E-RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL (AeRIC)

AeRIC MEETING – 5 AUGUST 2008

AGENDA ITEM 5: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Purpose

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

Issues

Interoperation and Collaboration Infrastructure (ICI/ARCS)

Following the endorsement of the ARCS Annual Business Plan by AeRIC, the Department wrote to ARCS in May indicating its acceptance of the first Annual Business Plan under the ICI Agreement. This letter also highlighted some of AeRIC's concerns, as raised during the meeting, including:

- the need for Key Performance Indicators to be developed which are more specifically focused on the NCRIS capabilities and other emerging research areas;
- the requirement for ARCS to engage with affiliates more explicitly and to work to avoid unnecessary duplication between ARCS and other service providers;
- the need to communicate the current challenges and directions of ARCS to the research community; and
- the need for ARCS to develop a communications plan and establish a clear sense of the audience and the key messages to be communicated.

An advertisement for three ARCS management positions (Collaboration Services, Authorisation Services and Systems Services) has been placed in the Australian's Higher Education Supplement and on Seek.com. A recruitment agency has been hired to assist with the preliminary ranking of candidates and a selection panel is being formed, chaired by the ARCS Executive Director. Following interviews, the ARCS Executive Committee will confirm selections.

Negotiations are continuing on an NCRIS Agreement for ARCS to deliver authorisation services to eResearch service providers and research communities, with a view to enabling them to meet their authorisation requirements in collaboration with the AAF.

The NSW-based INTERSECT is expected to formally join ARCS in the coming weeks. A minor variation will be made to the NCRIS ICI Agreement to accommodate the inclusion of INTERSECT, and also to the ARCS Collaboration Agreement.

As referenced in the ARCS Business Plan for 2008/09, ARCS is seeking a closer engagement with CAUDIT. It is anticipated that the ARCS Executive Director will present to the CAUDIT General Meeting in mid October.

With the chair's indulgence, I have taken the liberty of inviting Professor Williams to provide AeRIC with an update, with the intention of improving communication channels where possible. Unfortunately, Professor Williams is on leave, however his comments on progress with ARCS are expected to be available to the meeting.

Australian National Data Service (ANDS)

Work on the Australian National Data Service Establishment Project (ANDS EP) has continued, and the recent variation to the contract has established a new timeline so that the

Establishment Project is now due to complete its key deliverables by 29 August 2008. These deliverables are:

- a formal agreement (in the form of an NCRIS contract) for the delivery of ANDS;
- a collaboration agreement between Monash University, the ANU and CSIRO; and
- an Interim Business Plan for the period 1 July 2008 - 30 June 2009.

The ANDS EP is due to deliver its final report by 31 December 2008 (or earlier if this is possible) and a shortlist of candidates for the position of ANDS Executive Director must be provided before the conclusion of the project. All deliverables must be acceptable to the Department.

Progress has been made with the ANDS Executive Director appointment. Interviews with the short listed candidates are scheduled for early August

The selection panel comprises:

(Chair) Edwina Cornish, David Toll, Vic Elliott, Paul Bonnington, Cathrine Harboe-Ree, Rhys Francis and Anita Dutt (Monash HR).

A significant issue has developed over the course of the ANDS EP, relating to a frequently reported perception that ANDS has become largely a Monash project, rather than being of and for the entire sector. We are attempting to assist Monash address this perception by:

- being clear that the governance structure for ANDS, once it is underway, should have an independent chair; and
- assisting the ANDS EP carry out sector-wide consultations to support assurance made by myself and the Department that the input and feedback of the sector will be crucial in ANDS and in ANDS developing an Australian Data Commons.

Consultation with the sector has now made progress and it will be important that on-going sector consultation be a self evident, highly visible, feature of ANDS.

National Computational Infrastructure (NCI)

Following the last AeRIC meeting in May 2008, the Department wrote to the NCI Program Delegate advising acceptance of the NCI Annual Business Plan (ABP) and expressing the Department's expectation that NCI would address over time the issues raised by the Council. These issues include:

- the need for Key Performance Indicators which illustrate the extent to which NCI is attempting and succeeding in those activities outlined in the ABP;
- the need to communicate NCI's current challenges and directions consistently and widely both to the broader research community and to the specific communities of interest; and
- the need for NCI to develop a communications plan and establish a clear sense of the audience and the key messages to be communicated.

The evaluation of the ANU-BoM joint tender is expected to be completed in early August. On this basis, the ANU and BoM are expected to let separate contracts with a single preferred tenderer. The aim is to install the new peak facility at ANU in April 2009, with acceptance testing taking place in July 2009.

To provide for the much needed additional cycles between now and the installation of the next peak system, NCI has called a tender to install an HPC system (at the National Facility), expected to be available by the end of August.

To progress the Specialised Facilities program, NCI has sought Expressions of Interest, with a closing date of 20 August, from universities, research organisations and computational research services providers offering specialised computational services, tailored to the needs of particular research communities, which wish to enhance or extend these to the national research community. Through the Specialised Facilities program, NCI aims to extend the range of high-end services available through its Merit Allocation Scheme by investing, through sub-contract arrangements, in facilities operated by other organisations.

In conjunction with the eResearch Australasia conference (29 Sep-3 Oct), NCI is offering a half day workshop at the conference. The purpose is to provide an introduction to different aspects of the National Facility including how to apply for access, an overview of the hardware and software that is available, training courses for users, the handling of large data sets and the visualisation of computational output.

With the chair's indulgence, I have taken the liberty of inviting Professor Lindsay Botten to provide AeRIC with an update, with the intention of improving communication channels where possible. Professor Botten's comments on progress with NCI are attached.

eResearch Australasia

The conference is coming together well, a full program of papers has been accepted, formed from about half the papers submitted.

Keynote speakers include:

- Senator the Hon Kim Carr, Australian Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
- Graham Cameron, Associate Director, European Bioinformatics Institute, European Molecular Biology Laboratory
- Sayeed Choudhury, Hodson Director of the Digital Knowledge Center, Johns Hopkins University
- Michael Fulford, Professor of Archaeology, University of Reading
- Tony Hey, Corporate Vice President of External Research, Microsoft Research
- Kerstin Lehnert, Director of the Geoinformatics for Geochemistry Program at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University
- John Wilbanks, Vice President of Science, Creative Commons

A program of workshops has been developed for the two days following the conference, covering the topics: Authorisation, Australian National Data Service, ARCS Tools, ARCS Data Fabric, ARCS National Grid, National Computational Infrastructure, SEE Grid, Geoinformatics, Arts and humanities, Simple SAMLphp, Web 2.0, and GPU/Stream Computing.

NeAT

Developments with NeAT appear as a separate agenda item.

AAF

Developments with the AAF appear as a separate agenda item.

Action

Members note the report

AeRIC Executive Director

August 2008