

RUGIT meeting, Thursday 24th July 2014

Imperial

Attending: S. Lee (Secretary, Oxford), S. Macdonald (Glasgow), M. Visser (Nottingham), A. Trefethen (Oxford), R. Moon (Newcastle), J. McAuley (Sheffield), John Shemilt (Imperial), Mike Russell (Imperial), Larry Hearn (Birmingham), John Richards (Bristol), Pete Hancock (Soton), Chris Day (QMUL), Nathan Burden (Exeter), John Cartwright (Liverpool), Gerry Pennell (Manchester), Mike Cope (Acting Chair, UCL), Nick Deyes (LSE – arrived 10:45), Carolyn Brown (Durham – arrived 11.05), Martin Bellamy (Cambridge).

Apologies: Steve Williams (Newcastle), Chris Sexton (Sheffield), Sean Duffy (Birmingham), Eileen Brandreth (Cardiff), Rhys Davies (Leeds), Simon Marsden (Edinburgh), John Gormley (Queen's Belfast), Jeff Heywood (Edinburgh), Steve Kearsley (UCS), Lynne Tucker (Exeter), Steve Paton (Manchester), Dayantha Joshua (Bristol)

1. Introduction

Mike Cope (Acting Chair) reminded the group of the requirements under competition law. Late attendance would also be recorded.

2. Minutes and matters arising

Actions from last meeting:

Action: Lynne Tucker and a possible UCL representative will step forward to assist with Learner Analytics. See item 4.

Action: We should also recommend other RUGIT representatives for these themes. See item 4.

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

The Secretary reminded everyone to the following:

Action: Members to nominate one contact (a lead) to subscribe to RUGITLEAD

Action: Institutions to send details of all contact details for the individual members to be listed on RUGIT web site to pa@it.ox.ac.uk.

3. Visit to Microsoft Seattle (Mike Russell)

Mike (and Nick) outlined the CIO Briefing at MS's centre in Seattle. Items covered:

- Next generation CRM
- Cloud-based services
- Office365 and Azure
- BYOD
- Supporting TEL

HE engagement will be via their SI vendors, and see their role in foundation technologies – interfaces to VLEs, Ellucian CRM, etc. Yammer is seen as a social networking tool for students (may impact discussion forums on SharePoint). Plan to develop on Office365 (“It’s a platform, not just apps” “It’s a new OS”). They have a 12-week coding period per annum on Windows; this explains why the realises are so long apart, but they recognise they need to move somehow to a monthly cadence of software releases (patches etc).

Running Windows GFS Cloud services – a single platform for all MS online services. Can build 10,000 servers at a time, \$15bn investment. Moving to 3 nines availability rather than 5 nines but with <30 second RTO. On this runs Azure – the delivery platform or the cloud, which they say is ideal for burst activity. Only 8 cores, 56Gb memory per VM – Oracle, Linux, Ubuntu, Suse (and Red Hat coming). Azure Pack provides private cloud and cloud bursting options.

Pressured MS on faster updates on Mac platforms.

Seem to be pushing OneNote.

Discussed their MS Business Intelligence work with PowerPivot (now in Excel 2013). Look at Mark Regeura on YouTube. This looked competitive to Tableau.

A key question around Office365 is the privacy issues. This is arising within Imperial.

4. JISC Co-design (Andy McGregor/Rachel Bruce, JISC)

AM outlined the co-design process within the JISC Futures team. Co-design steering group meets annually to set items for focus. This year had a 2-day meeting, 42 participants, reduced 142 challenges down to 5. Presented to JISC board who reduced them to 4.

- 1) Digital Literacy of sector workforce (rather than students)
- 2) Effective learner analytics
- 3) From prospect to alumnus (joined up stored information about students from pre-app to employment)
- 4) Research at risk

Resourcing for each was asked about. In co-design pilot there was a budget of £2m but only £1m spent, expect this whole initiative to be nearer £8m. Distribution across the above 4 still to be defined but expect ‘3’ and ‘4’ will be high (in addition to core recurrent spend on things like DCC).

In project scoping phase at present, announce further details end of September, then to build producing prototypes in mid-2015.

RB then talked about Research data (Research at Risk). This came up as a high priority in the co-design workshops. A lot here to be done in terms of JISC consolidating its main offers at present. Driven by compliance and research excellence. Have a temperature poll on where Universities are at present in terms of this – main weaknesses in implementation (most progress in policy and strategy) within HEIs. Activities focussed on: research data discovery (prototype discovery service which works with institutions and disciplinary research centres), policy compliance (RDM planning tool, technical standards [metadata]), data mgt and preservation (e.g. Archive/Framework agreement from JANET, also discussing around active/repository systems), advice (via DCC), training (sets of training materials available?), incentives funding and sustainability (investigative work here at a funding/national level), standards (protocols, metadata), software suite for managing medical data

(Uni of Leicester and NHS – Brisket(?)), open research data forum (UK national group – see ‘Research as an Open Enterprise’ report). Aim to have a joined up plan and presentation from JISC re its projects, services, and offerings by September.

The issue of EPSCR April 15 deadline was noted. JISC said there is advice and guidance but this needs to be surfaced asap. But it was recognised that EPSRC’s definition of ‘compliance’ was not well defined. There is a danger JISC co-design work may arrive too late to help institutions comply with the EPSCR April deadline. This could mean each institution re-inventing the wheel when a timely JISC initiative providing reusable artefacts and advice would be more efficient. Is there any way to progress this quicker with RUGIT’s assistance?

Chair asked if JISC could review their plan to see how they could better support institutions efforts to meet the EPSRC deadline.

Action: AM/RB to review internally how more timely help could be provided to help institutions comply with the EPSCR deadline.

5. Shared Data Centre (Nick Leake)

Arose out of shared recognition (especially within London) on constraints/demands/rising costs re individual data centres. LSE, KCL, Crick, UCL and others met (with Janet) to look at a shared data centre.

Mandatory requirements included provision of own energy (to get advantage of lower VAT rates) – needs all tenants to be with same supplier.

Chose Infinity SDC, PUE 1.25 (guaranteed), 4-30 kW racks, 34MVA, based in Slough, due to connect to JANET in September with resilience (initially two 100Gbps but more available). Base agreement is straight hosting, can buy added-value from Infinity or other third party suppliers. Forming a Tenants Association so we act as a single virtual customer for the supplier.

Expect there to be zones of racks based on rack types (4kw/10kW and 20kw/30kW etc.) which allows racks to be traded between institutions without penalty.

Also open to NHS organisations. Plan to put N3 network connection in.

15 year deal.

Could be a second one established in the north at some point.

KCL are putting all HPC in this data centre. UCL putting about 200 racks in there, keeping 200 on site. And there is ample space available (each year the tenants will forecast).

On site have some vendor staff (‘smart hands’) to assist with rack and install. For more information contact Jeremy Sharp at Janet (jeremy.sharp@ja.net).

6. Information Hub for HE (Toby Price, TP Information Strategy)

Simple model is have a cloud-based broker whereby institutions deposit data (timed/incremental/controlled) to go to statutory collectors, or back to institution for BI. Broker would allow institutions to build extensions. Can we do this at a sector level (as opposed to at an institutional level?).

Working with Unis of York, Plymouth, Birmingham, and KCL. JISC supporting this (and HEDIP).

Building a prototype now, working with 4-6 institutions, each institution has to commit £5k.

In July confirm support with JISC, start work on prototype September onwards.

The complexity of this, along with the uniqueness of institutions was discussed. Can these be accommodated? A starting point may be an attempt at starting with a common academic data model. Can this be done?

7. JISC Subscriptions

Caroline Brown presented.

There is a RUGIT sub-group, that has agreed monthly meetings with Martyn Harrow and other JISC leaders. Want:

- high level I&E (where funding coming from and major areas of spend) to provide context about where the money is being spent and how these services are valued by customers, access to this information has been difficult, have a bit more detailed information (but not for sharing at present); but lots of gaps here, and this needs pursuing further.

Once we have agreed refined high level costs and then wish to build on this to discuss future services through better engagement.

Subsequent meeting with Professor Brink (Newcastle). Suggested focus on areas of common ground where possible. What is our common ground? [Note: 60% of CIOs now have come from non-HEI background in last four years. JISC engagement with these has been poor.]

- national service – yes but need to know what the ‘service’ is? Some very important ones, some less than important ones, want to see this as a whole. Suggest that as a sector we should be going to HEFCE to argue for supporting JISC on a vfm basis, but we cannot do this without knowing key information.
- Liverpool University have received a list of all services they use against the subscription (broken down service by service)
- the group reiterated again the desire to see a national successful service like JISC
- should we talk to our librarians also re engagement?
- JISC have had to reduce costs at an extraordinarily high rate and this was recognised
- need to help JISC define and describe services
- John C noted how UCISA were trying to align internal UCISA groups with JISC services

RUGIT agreed it should work with UCISA more closely on this.

Action: MC to circulate list of services as is (as presented to sub-group), and begin to consider JISC service catalogue going forward.

Action: RUGIT to place service catalogue on agenda with JISC.

[Outstanding actions from last meeting:

Action: Could we see Pramod's analysis using the JANET benchmarking of JISC spend.

Action: Consider whether we should engage directly with HEFCE about this, or alternative routes (VCs, Trustees, etc)

Action: Depending on outcomes from May 16th we may wish to consider: a one-page briefing for JISC Board/Trustees, and also internally brief VCs and Finance Directors to escalate through other channels, etc.]

8. Ivy+ CIO (Anne Trefethen)

Hosted by MIT. Oxford and Cambridge invited to attend this, very focussed on academic IT.

Topics for discussion: VLEs, MOOCs, Organisational change. For all US institutions MOOCs have had a major disruptive impact on the HEIs. A lot of discussion about EdX or Coursera, the use of analytics from them but it was agreed the data coming from these was less than ideal.

Looked at maker spaces in MIT and Harvard. Also at reconfigurable learning spaces.

At MIT they are building platforms and releasing openAPIs.

Looked at \$50m shared data centre used by five institutions.

9. Top 3 Issues

Top two issues are looking at organisational change and service improvement.