CRIS-OAR in the UK: the current situation

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The following document provides a brief overview of the current state of development of Current Research Information Systems (CRIS) and Open Access Repositories (OAR) in the UK higher education sector. It has been produced as background material for the Knowledge Exchange CRIS-OAR project[1].

Background - how is the UK different?

While repositories (and in particular institutional repositories) in the UK are relatively well developed, the opposite is true for CRIS. The OpenDOAR Directory of Open Access Repositories[2] reveals that of the European countries, the UK has the largest number of repositories, at 175; Germany is next, with 141, then Spain with 63 and France with 54. (These figures do not of course reflect the extent to which repositories are populated, or the percentage of full-text records, as opposed to metadata-only.) CRIS, on the other hand, are less well developed in the UK. Many universities do not hold research information in integrated systems - instead the data is fragmented across different departments and services, often in incompatible formats[3]. A further difference to other European countries is that UK universities tend to use in-house developed software for managing research information – until very recently there has been no use of commercial CRIS software.

CRIS - changes to come

The situation in the UK is likely to change fairly rapidly over the next few years. Just as JISC provided substantial funding to kick start institutional repository development, it has recently initiated a programme which will fund a range of work to help the sector better manage information about research. It will cover institutional and national infrastructures as well as providing guidance, support and shared experience. JISC is also working with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Research Councils and others. (Future work may however be subject to the current UK economic situation and changes made by the new coalition government, as education cuts are being announced at the time of writing.)

New Research Information Management (RIM) projects

As part of the new JISC Research Information Management programme[4], five new projects have recently been funded:

- CRISPool: Using CERIF-XML to integrate heterogeneous research information from several institutions into a single portal
- Enquire: Enrich and Research Outputs and Impact
- Developing tools to inform the management of research and translating existing good practice
- Using Business Process Management Tools and Methods for Building Research Information Management
- Defining a new role: the embedded Research Information Manager

These are short term projects, lasting six months. A further set of projects will be funded based on a planned call for proposals later in the year. It is notable that the Universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen (both partners in CRISPool) have implemented the PURE system; this is the first time that commercial CERIF CRIS software has been used in the UK.

Research assessment

One of the drivers for better management of research information has been the requirements of the system for assessing the quality of research in UK universities. Formerly the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise), this is due to be replaced by the REF (Research Excellence Framework) in the next few years. Bibliometric indicators will play a role in the new system. The specification has not yet been made available but it is likely that, as with the RAE, universities will be asked to submit

structured information about their research. A standard is required to ensure consistency and interoperability, which is why there is currently renewed interest and investigation of CERIF, as well as CRIS software based on the CERIF data model.

CERIF for the UK

In 2009 JISC funded the EXRI-UK (Exchanging Research Information in the UK)[5] study to explore the potential adoption of a UK standard to facilitate the exchange of RIM data, e.g. with HEFCE for REF or the Research Councils. The report recommended that CERIF should be the basis for the exchange of research information in the UK. It also recommended a number of harmonisation activities including agreement on meaning of terms and mapping exercises. It is likely that CERIF will need to be extended to accommodate UK requirements in full.

UKOLN will be working with other experts from universities, national bodies and representative organisations, to coordinate the CERIF harmonisation, mapping and UK specification activities[6]. The Readiness for REF (R4R)[7] project has already mapped CERIF to the RAE schema and also created a 'CERIF4REF' schema; these will be useful starting points for further mapping exercises.

CRIS-OAR integration

Given the lack of standardised CRIS in the UK, there have been few opportunities to date for working towards integration with repositories. However with the current focus on CRIS development, there has been a marked increase in discussion of integration issues. An (over-subscribed) event[8] was held in Leeds in May 2010 to explore synergies and opportunities for integration; a set of very useful short status reports from some of the delegates is available[9].

Several projects and initiatives are already exploring integration issues. These include R4R, which is building an interoperable institutional infrastructure, to include both research information and repository data. The PURE implementations at the Universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen are designed to access their institutional repositories for full-text data, while publication metadata is held within the PURE system. Partner institutions in the CRISPool project will use the same model to access full text (a no-charge instance of PURE is being used for the CRISPool pilot). The University of York is also currently implementing PURE, which will be integrated with their existing publications and multimedia repositories. A number of other institutions are currently undergoing tender processes for a CRIS. Therefore the above initiatives, together with results from the Knowledge Exchange CRIS-OAR project, are likely to provide useful guidance and support for more widespread future CRIS-OAR integration in the UK.

References

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