A shared data service for the UK

Invitation to Tender

Executive summary

1. This ITT has been developed by a joint CURL (Consortium of Research Libraries) and RUGIT (Russell Group IT Directors) project group following a successful bid to HEFCE under its Shared Services initiative. HEFCE have awarded £200K for the feasibility study, which will be undertaken by consultants appointed through the ITT, working with a directly appointed Project Manager. The feasibility study will generate a report which is expected to influence national policy in the area of research data management.
2. The objective of the study is to assess the feasibility and costs of developing and maintaining a national shared digital research data service for UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Such a research data service is seen by the project sponsors as forming a crucial component of the UK's e-infrastructure for research and innovation, and one which will add significantly to the UK's global competitiveness.
3. The need for development of the UK's e-infrastructure was clearly signalled in the Treasury's *Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-2014*. The Office of Science and Innovation subsequently established an e-infrastructure working group. In February 2007 the report of this group was published as *Developing the UK's e-infrastructure for science and innovation*. The report, which was welcomed by the major stakeholders, clearly articulated the areas in which further development of the UK's e-infrastructure was needed. Data curation and management were among the priorities.
4. The report did not characterise the research data infrastructure requirement in detail, nor did it attempt to cost the scale of investment required or assign responsibility to specific actors. This feasibility study now aims to build on the OSI report by addressing these areas and providing a clear roadmap for infrastructure development.
5. The rapidly growing data curation and management requirement is seen by CURL and RUGIT as a particularly challenging aspect of the development of the national e-infrastructure. At the level of individual HEIs there is uncertainty about the extent to which local investment is needed, coupled with concern about the costs involved in managing large data volumes and the availability of a suitably skilled workforce to manage the new challenges posed by data curation.
6. The feasibility study will address the need not just for storage capacity but for active management of the creation, selection, ingestion, storage, retrieval and preservation of research data - the "data lifecycle" - now recognised as a complex process requiring an integrated approach. Increasingly, researchers will require access to previously generated data sets, and the facility to undertake new analyses and syntheses of, and to annotate, existing data.
7. There are numerous stakeholders in the development of an effective research data infrastructure for the UK, including the Research Councils and RCUK; DIUS, JISC, the higher education funding councils, and individual HEIs. The consultants appointed to undertake the feasibility study will be expected to engage with these and other stakeholders during the course of the study.
8. The study will take full account of international developments in research data management.