Innovation for a Nation:  
A Model from the UK for Funding in a Down Economy

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Introduction

Next year JISC will celebrate twenty years of providing "leadership in the use of ICT" for UK Further and Higher Education. JISC has successfully managed projects for the UK government (and this is just a brief sample) including: networking projects like JANET (eqv AARNET); access management projects like the 'UK Federated Access Management' responsible for deployment of Shibboleth; grid and cloud infrastructure via the 'Universities Modernisation Fund'; e-learning standards projects such as CETIS which have achieved the the likes of course related information (XCRI); e-research projects like the Digital Curation Centre and the 'Research Data Management' programmes which have changed data management in institutions in the UK & influenced practice worldwide; e-content projects like 'Digging into Data' which are leaders for international collaboration; digital infrastructure projects like OSSWatch and devCSI which have advanced the utilisation of policy for technology and understanding for how developer skills can be optimised in the sector (the latter having presented at last year's conference); and numerous other services that significantly lower the cost of innovation and service provision across the UK further and higher education sector because the UK is co-ordinated under a common joint effort that is the JISC. The simple questions this plenary presents are: a.) how do we maintain ICT innovation in a time of changing economies, and b.) what can Australia learn from the JISC model and vice versa?

About JISC: JISC (as a government affiliated organisation provides coordination, investment, and technical innovation and services for UK universities and colleges so they can meet the challenges and opportunities of technological advancement. JISC has a long standing history a 'an important interface with UK government policy and research council policy'. The JISC model is to enable support for eresearch (as well as coordinate across all other activities within Colleges and Universities, e.g. elearning, digitisation, econtent, eadministration, etc). As has been the case in its previous twenty year history, JISC is currently undergoing reorganisation that will optimise the best elements of JISC for the current changed economic climate (that the UK is going through and that Australia will soon discover); this has meant that there has been some deep sole searching on what works and this presentation will demonstrate the need for an international conversation if we are all going to advance research in a down Economy with limited government funds. In short, the UK and Australia must continue to discuss how best we can achieve our aims, but also learn from how each of us are achieving in our different climates (social, economic and political). This plenary will help create a conversation that will echo throughout the duration of the conference (JISC, 2012)

Innovation in a Down Economy

The success of DIISRTE in funding eresearch for the sector is second to none on a global scale, leading the world in projects such as AARNET, ANDS, NeCTAR, RDSI and several other 'Super Science initiatives'. The launch of the the NCRIS roadmap at last year’s conference (DIISRTE, 2011) demonstrated a continued desire to further build on and advance the sector in its capabilities. However, these plans were formulated just as the Economic down turn for Australia was setting-in. Naturally, these kinds of government funding roadmaps (and resulting funding programmes) suffer from recessions and so greater care and concern must be taken to decide what limited funds are spent and how they are spent. This is where JISC can help.

It is not good to compare JISC with other non-government organisation or projects, but a loose coupling can be drawn between JISC internal innovation team structures and programmes (infrastructure, content, elearning, & organisational technologies) and the SSI projects of AARNET, ANDS, NeCTAR & RDSI. Likewise, JISC is overseen and funded by the UK Government’s Higher Education Council of England (HEFCE), much like the SSI projects are funded by DIISRTE. Budgets are also interesting to compare, as are size of projects, number of people and overarching themes and funding rules. However, none of these comparisons are one-to-one mappings and this comparable metaphor between the two nation-cultures can be more harmful than helpful at times, though this is a necessary analogy to draw to provide context.  

This plenary presentation
is NOT about comparing the two structures for government funding but rather to talk about how JISC has adapted over the past twenty years (and especially the past two years) as it has had to optimise in the ‘down economy’ that has occurred in Europe and in the UK. JISC believes that both Australia and the UK (because of their special relationship) can learn from one another so that we can both benefit from how we plan (or have been) ‘recession-proofing’ our innovation funding.

This plenary presentation will therefore provide a kind of ‘national case study’ for the current state of funding models for JISC in relationship to the UK Government. It is hoped that by presenting this perspective, Australian government and its stakeholders will be able to consider how the UK has responded to the economic crisis and therefore present other ideas for how best to ‘innovate in a down Economy’ (both in the UK and Australia). The topics to be covered will include:

- Introduction by numbers: looking at the people, projects, products and other numbers that fund/further infrastructure development in the UK.
- History of JISC as a twenty year government funding organisation advancing eresearch infrastructure.
- Innovation in an Economic down-turn: what happened in the UK and how did JISC deal with it?
- Consolidation of services and turning innovation into production.
- Utilising a community based approach to build infrastructure services.
- Models for horizon scanning for road-mapping exercises.
- Policy infrastructure, innovation to agreement
- Data-driven infrastructure, open and agile
- Shared infrastructure, community focused
- Emerging infrastructure themes.
- Opportunities for UK and Australia collaboration
- Looking into the crystal ball: how national information infrastructures must continue to grow to become international information infrastructures.

Summary
With an eye to the forthcoming Olympics, one of the great achievements of an international event is the opportunity for Nations to share their methods for achieving greatness. In the same way, the opportunity for JISC to present to the Australia community with regards to how the UK is advancing eresearch is a similar opportunity that should not be missed. The

References

About the Author(s)
Rachel Bruce is JISC’s innovation director for digital infrastructure, and has been with the JISC since 2000. She oversees JISC’s innovation programmes which relate to digital preservation, management of research data, resource discovery infrastructure, open access of scholarly communication, geospatial infrastructure, flexible cloud computing as well as infrastructure for open educational resources. This also includes activities which take place in partnership with JISC’s services, including oversight of UKOLN, the JISC Observatory and the Digital Curation Centre. Rachel has a strong interest in the updating of infrastructure for the creation, sharing and managing of digital resources and related shared services, as well as the policy and practices required to improve their re-use and exploitation to enhance education and research. This also includes issues of sustainability and transferring JISC’s research and development work into services for colleges and universities. Prior to JISC, Rachel managed the 45 million pound Follett programme in archives and special collections. Rachel has an MSc of Information Science from City University, London.

David F. Flanders, previously of the JISC is now at ANDS. His citizenship around the world, living in the US, UK and now Australia has lead to a unique perspective in understanding how various government are funding and modelling eresearch innovation. David is acting as an analyst to collect data fro this plenary presentation.