

Behind the Cloud: The challenges and solutions in developing a nationwide world class support for NeCTAR services

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ABSTRACT

The National eResearch Collaboration Tools and Resources (NeCTAR) Project is an Australian Government project funded under the Super Science initiative enabled Australian researchers access to cloud compute and storage infrastructure. The NeCTAR Research Cloud comprises 8 regional sites (Nodes) operating as a federation of Cells within a single national cloud fabric providing up to 30,000 CPU cores of capacity to the Australian research community.

Providing user support for the research cloud presents some challenges. In particular, the user base is nationwide, cross-institutional, have varying levels of technical knowledge and operate twenty four hours a day. Furthermore, user based relationships are often managed at Node level or through individual research institutions. Ensuring that sustainable and adequate user support is available is important to the quality perception of research based cloud services and to supporting Australian research.

These challenges are currently being addressed through a funded program, which aims to provide world-class user support for NeCTAR services. The program of activity will significantly enhance support at all support levels (Tier 0 to 3) by: investing in the development, upkeep and renewal of Tier 0 support materials; providing shared multi-tenanted, ITIL compliant and contemporary IT service management systems (ITSM); developing a nationally distributed Tier 2 help desk with out of hours support; and developing service level objectives for user support requests.

This session will detail the national approach to delivering and supporting eResearch services to the Australian Research Community. It will provide details of the service developed and how the support model employed can provide additional value to institutional help desks and user support functions. The session will also provide some detail on the NeCTAR research cloud and features offered to the Australian research community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Hamish Holewa is the Project Manager of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Virtual Laboratory. Mr Holewa has led a variety of national collaborative research eInfrastructure projects including the Quadrant health participant management tool, AeRO Tick Maturity Model, the ANDS MODC Open River project and national user support framework for NeCTAR. Mr Holewa has worked in research related e-Infrastructure projects for 3 years and had held research, management and policy development roles for the previous 10 years. He has an extensive research background and has been involved in over 16 research projects across Australia, New Zealand, UK, China, India and Bangladesh and named author on over 35 research publications.

Sarah Nisbet is eResearch SA's Marketing and Communications Manager. Specialising in delivering creative and innovative marketing and communication solutions, Sarah has managed local and national projects for eResearch SA, NeCTAR, NeAT, AeRO and the State Government of South Australia. Having successfully deployed a new tier 0 user documentation system at eResearch SA, Sarah is currently project lead for the tier 0 development for core NeCTAR services, supporting a national initiative to provide world-class user support for the Nectar Cloud. Sarah began her career delivering communications solutions in the health care sector where she mastered the art of working across institutions, departments and organisational silos. Sarah has a Bachelor of Media from the University of Adelaide and an Industry Certificate (Festival & Event Design & Management), she is also a member of the Australian Science Communicators and the Public Relations Institute of Australia.

Nick Golovachenko is the NeCTAR National Cloud Support Manager and is also working as the project lead for the development of a NeCTAR National Distributed Help Desk, which is also part of the national initiative to provide world-class user support for the Nectar Cloud. Nick has also worked as a Project Manager for a number of cloud initiatives within The University of Melbourne (UoM) and in particular on National Infrastructure programs such as NeCTAR National Server Program, NeCTAR Research Cloud, Research Data Storage Initiative (RDSI), UoM Web Enhancement Program and UoM High Performance Computer (HPC) Renewal. Background prior to major project work was within IT Management in the Higher Education Sector as well as the Medical and Health Research Sector.