

e-Research Coordinating Committee

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In announcing, in May 2005, the establishment of the e-Research Coordinating Committee, the Australian government has said that it recognises the enormous potential of e-research for Australia's research community, and that e-research has the potential to usher in a new era of innovation and help overcome the tyranny of distance by allowing our researchers to collaborate at the national and international level.

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) has a seat at the e-Research Coordinating Committee table. When I joined the Committee, I was expecting technical talk of hardware for e-research: instead, the discussion was of information management. E-research, that is, research based on and enabled by technology, is increasingly reliant on information management and information professionals, particularly in ensuring accessibility and preservation. This is the first in an irregular series of articles to keep the LIS audience up-to-date on the library implications of the work of an important committee.

The e-Research Coordinating Committee is chaired by Dr Mike Sargent. He also chairs the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS). NCRIS is providing \$542 million over seven years for major research facilities, supporting infrastructure and networks necessary for world-class research. The e-Research Coordinating Committee, while not itself responsible for any funding, is intended to influence funding bodies' policies and decisions.

The Committee is focussing on capability and accessibility, rather than technical infrastructure. The intention is to create an environment that encourages positive change within research institutions and centres, so that e-research is embraced as fully as possible.

The key area that has been identified as a priority for strategic intervention is data management, or 'digital curation', including storage requirements, standards and common practice, security and intellectual property. The report will include a number of strategies designed to address the need to manage data throughout the research cycle, from the research scoping stage, where access to other people's research is crucial, through to the creation, storage, access, manipulation, dissemination, archiving and preservation of data.

The report will also examine collaboration tools, such as middleware and the semantic grid, the development of e-research information skills and processes, and incentives for participation and access, including wider community access.

Research libraries have always played a major role in the development of Australian research. Research activity is now supported through activities like e-repositories, the creation and management of datasets (and similar resources) and the management of information with metadata and persistent identifiers.

Meeting e-research challenges requires skills, policies and software development; this will only be achieved by information management specialists — including librarians — drawing on each other's areas of expertise to create a new digital library environment, and by training and developing the staff to work in these areas.

Cathrine Harboe-Ree is a member of the CAUL Executive and CAUL representative on the e-Research Coordinating Committee.

Note: The Committee is supported by a reference group, which is open to any interested person. The Committee will release its draft report in September and its final report in December. For further information, and to register online for participation in the reference group, see http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/policies_issues_reviews/key_issues/e_research_consult/.



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