E-research university partnerships revisited

Linda O'Brien

Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, linda.obrien@griffith.edu.au

At EDUCAUSE Australasia 2005 [1] I described the transformation occurring in research practice, a transformation that would, I believed, have a profound impact on the roles of information professionals within higher education. E-research promised whole new areas of valuable research and the ability to see existing research in new ways. Internationally, significant investment was being made in research infrastructure, and whilst physical infrastructure was well developed, solving the technical and organisational issues to enable international collaboration was still challenging. It was proposed that connecting researchers to resources, the 'middleware', was not only as an international issue, but a national, regional and local issue.

Linking researchers to resources – high performance computers and related techologies- was the domain of the information technologist. In 2005 it was clear that researchers understood why access to information technology infrastructue and to the expertise of IT professionals was required to faciltate e-research endevours. On the other hand linking researchers to scholarly information resources, another critical component of the research process, has traditionally been the domain of the librarian. Librarians for centuries had been concerned with managing, preserving and making accessible scholary information resources. Yet few researchers saw the value of librarians to the e-research endevour, choosing to 'manage' their own scholarly information resources, whether data or published works. Researchers weren't identifying expertise in data mining, data management or data preservation as being of value.

The paper, however, advocated the value of both librarians and information technologists to the research process. It urged that as information professionals we needed to partner to achieve research outcomes – to think globally and act locally. It concluded that university information professionals: librarians and information technologists, needed to strengthen their partnerships with each other and with the researchers within their institutions if they were to remain a relevant and important part of the research endevour within their universities.

At the time of the paper $542 million had been provided for a National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) from 2004-05 to 2010-2011 to develop and fund national research infrastructure projects [2]. Since 2005 we have seen seen a review of the national innovation system [3] and a national innovation strategy [4] which has led to a $1.1 billion investment in science infrastructure and $312 million targeted at e-research infrastructure. A raft of national bodies have been established to realise value from these investments. Measuring research quality has become a new science with an obssessive interest in league tables and the implementation of a national research quality framework [5].

In 2007 Borgman [6] noted that libraries are the logical steward for research data management. In 2008 Lynch [7], in considering how the cyberinfrastructure challenge differs at a campus level from the national level, recommended that campuses create a support organisation that can reach out to researchers early in the data lifecycle to assist with data management and curation/preservation strategies. He proposed that this unit include IT professionals, librarians and archivists, and that perhaps the library should take responsibility for the long term curation of data.

So what has changed in the Australian context within these six years? How has our understanding of e-research evolved? How has the Australian e-research landscape changed? Are the same challenges still evident? What progress have we made on linking researchers to resources? Do researchers understand the value of information professionals to their research endevour? Are librarians and information technologists partnering with each other? With their researchers? How are we organising ourselves to meet these challenges?

This paper will explore the national e-research landscape and the role of information professionals six year on. Through several case studies it will show how partnerships are evolving to support a transformed research environment.

REFERENCES

1. O'Brien, Linda, "e-Research: Building Partnerships within your University", *EDUCAUSE Australasia 2005*, Auckland April 2005
2. National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy http://ncris.innovation.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx
3. Cutler, T. *Venturous Australia: building strength through innovation*. 2008.
   http://www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Documents/NIS_review_Web3.pdf (March 2010)
4. *Powering ideas: an innovation agenda for the 21st century*
   http://www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Documents/PoweringIdeas_fullreport.pdf (March 2010)

5. O'Brien, Linda, "The changing scholarly information landscape: reinventing information services to increase research impact", *Publishing in the Networked World: Transforming the Nature of Communication*, 14th International Conference on Electronic Publishing 16-18 June 2010, Helsinki, Finland http://conferences.aepic.it/elpub2009/

6. BORGMAN, C. *Scholarship in a digital age: information, infrastructure, and the Internet*, London: MIT Press, 2007

7. LYNCH, C. The institutional challenges of cyberinfrastructure and eresearch. *EDUCAUSE Review* Nov/Dec 2008, pp.74-88