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CASRAI-UK: Using the CASRAI approach to develop standards for communicating and sharing research information in the UK

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Abstract

This paper explains how the Consortia Advancing Standards in Research Administration Information (CASRAI) might be used to share research information in an open and sustainably governed approach, led by research organisations.

CASRAI is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to reducing administrative burden and improving outcomes and impact reporting through good stewardship of information requirements by research organisations (universities, colleges, teaching hospitals and other research centres). The objective is to improve the flow of information within and between research stakeholders. The approach sees the ‘user-led’ development and maintenance of standard information agreements. These agreements include (a) specifications defining what data elements (entities) are needed for various key business processes in the research lifecycle and (b) definitions for all the terms appearing in these specifications. The open and standardised definitions are curated and maintained in an open online dictionary that can then be used by system providers and others to exchange information in a standard, agreed format e.g. by using CERIF-XML as the transfer mechanism.

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1. Main text

CASRAI (<http://casrai.org>) is well established in Canada and is working to establish its approach in other countries. The process used by CASRAI and the outputs generated can be used anywhere - not just in Canada or the UK.

Between 2013 and 2015 Jisc and other UK stakeholders worked with CASRAI to deliver a pilot of the CASRAI approach in the UK (<http://jisccasraipilot.jiscinvolve.org/wp/>). The Jisc-CASRAI UK pilot ran three working groups:

1. Organisational Identifiers

<http://jisccasraipilot.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2015/03/06/organisational-identifiers-working-group-outputs-and-update>
Outcome: this group recommended an International Standard Name Identifier (ISNI) model for unique identifiers for organisations.

2. Data Management Plans

<http://jisccasraipilot.jiscinvolve.org/wp/working-groups/data-management-plans/>
Outcome: a profile for Ethics Compliance in data management planning was produced. The profile is also being considered for use in Canada. See http://dictionary.casrai.org/Research_Dataset/Ethics_Compliance

3. Open Access Reporting

<http://jisccasraipilot.jiscinvolve.org/wp/working-groups/open-access/>
Outcome: this group produced a profile for Article Processing Charges. See http://dictionary.casrai.org/Open_Access_APC_Report

One of the key benefits of the Jisc-CASRAI UK pilot was the positive networking with fellow stakeholders from a range of higher education institute and partner organisations with different perspectives. These parties worked together to agree the list of entities and associated definitions for each use case.

For example in the case of Article Processing Charges funders, suppliers, and research organisation representatives were able to compare different understandings of key terms and reach agreement on a standard definition. The benefits of the exercise include:

- Common understanding of terminology
- Basis for developing clear technical specifications
- Transferring data more easily:
 - between Research Organisations
 - reporting to Funders
- Avoid duplication of effort in describing entities
- Confidence that we reduce misinterpretation of data during comparison
- Reduced barriers to communication
- Community ownership

Many questions arose during the pilot which must be addressed as we go forward with the UK chapter:

- The process was not clear to all from the start - more explanation should be provided in future for those participating in all roles. For example it was unclear that the concept included incorporating similar previous work or using what had already been produced where that satisfied the requirements.
- Planning and research are essential:
 - A clear and narrow scope is essential. In the Open Access group it became clear that the remit was too wide for the time available in the pilot. The remit could have included UK Research Excellence Framework requirements, UK funder requirements, European Union requirements, and local higher

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