EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

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Network
Peer Review

EPSRC Reference: EP/F064462/1

Document Status: With Council

e-Science Networking 2007

Applicant Details

Applicant	Dr Cameron Neylon	Organisation	STFC - RAL

Title of Research Project

The Open Practises E-science Network

Review Information

Response Due Date	15/01/2008	Reviewer Reference:	E3GD1Z

Research Council Contact Details

EPSRC Administration Contact: Mr John Deacon	███████████████████	Telephone: 01793 444037

Collaboration

Ability to Establish New Activity

The Network should be a new collaboration, and should normally have as its key objective the formation of a new interdisciplinary research community. Comment on the degree to which the Network partners are likely to establish a new, cohesive collaboration, of benefit to the associated research communities. Will the Network create a new interdisciplinary research community?

The network proposed is focused on open science, an area which has seen increasing attention and activity in the recent past. As with many grass-roots developments, the open science community has produced some impressive results on the basis of volunteer efforts alone but there are limits to what can be achieved in this way. The aim of the proposal is to strengthen and develop a network of activity that can help to leverage volunteer contributions by providing best practice advice and coordination. As many of those driving the open science movement are in the early stages of their careers, the network offers the potential to form the crucial scaffolding around which a stable community will form.

The open science effort naturally crosses (and challenges) established disciplinary boundaries, both in terms of its potential for uptake in different areas of research and in terms of the expertise required in its formation. While the concept of open science is still relatively young, there is already a good understanding of its promise and of the issues involved. Developing practical ways for promoting open practice is in itself an area for interdisciplinary research and the impact of such work would be felt in a wide range of disciplines.

Are the Network partners prominent in the research area(s)? Where international partners are identified, to what extent will they add value to the Network?

The network members listed in the proposal all have relevant experience with open science. Some are involved in the development of platforms to support open science and all seem to use an open approach in their own substantive research. In a field like this, it is, however, difficult to judge the impact of their activities. The current list of members includes established initiatives such as Open Wetware as well as individual researchers in the early stages of their

careers. In the context of open science, this is probably the right mix.

However, what is missing is a link to the wider e-Science community and other initiatives, for example in the space of repositories (e.g., the StORe project, http://jiscstor.jot.com) or digital curation more generally (e.g., the Digital Curation Centre, http://www.dcc.ac.uk). If the emerging open science community is to have a significant and lasting impact then it will have to engage with and, where appropriate, learn from these existing initiatives. It will also need to consider the impact of Research Councils' data policies as well as institutional policies that may or may not be at odds with the ideal of open science.

The network members are naturally drawn from a wide international context with only a mild UK bias. It seems important that the idea of open science be developed on a world-wide scale even though this has cost implications (see below).

Relevance

How critical is this Network likely to be in contributing to activity in this area? Will the Network be able to identify new interdisciplinary research topics?

Open science is potentially an important topic in many research areas. The challenges involved in making open science work and in widening its uptake throughout the community requires input from a range of disciplines such as social sciences (to study and analyse collaboration), law (to deal with data protection and IPR), computer science (to tackle technical aspects) and so forth.

What is missing from the proposal is a clear view on how how the network might go about finding suitable contributors and how their different kinds of expertise are to be brought to bear on the issues. It seems reasonable to think that with suitable advertising, some researchers in these areas might be brought into the network but given the limited dedicated effort available one cannot be certain that this will be achieved.

Dissemination

Comment on the degree to which the arrangements for dissemination are likely to be effective in informing the academic and, where appropriate, the non-academic community.

The proposal does not contain much information about *concrete* dissemination activities and targets. The emphasis seems to be on wide dissemination through general science publications but no specific names are named. What is also missing is an indication of how the network specifically target new discipline areas.

The group web presence and the recording of talks potentially provide a valuable resource but it is not clear how researchers would become aware of its existence - leaving this to the interest of general science and technology media seems a little bit half-hearted. Surely, stronger forms of dissemination at specific community events would offer alternative ways to "promote [...] the ethos of making research data freely available".

Overall Collaboration and Dissemination

The overall collaboration / dissemination arrangements are:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☒ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

Viability and Planning

Based on the proposed management strategy, comment on the likely viability of the Network beyond the period of Research Council funding applied for.

The resourcing for dedicated staff time for the network is minimal (less than a working day per month). The applicants seem to assume that the organisation of the network's work (other than administration) can be resourced practically entirely from volunteer effort. Given the ambitious aims of the project to work towards best practice and identification of areas for standardisation as well as its ambitions to grow to other subject areas, a larger dedicated effort would seem adequate and the minimal resourcing must be seen as a risk.

The proposal lacks information on specific dissemination plans, evaluation, quality assurance and exit strategies.

Resources Requested

Are the resources requested appropriate and justified?

The resources requested are relatively modest and are clearly directed to the network's core activity of organising events and promoting open science. The amount of resource required per event attendance is relatively high because the network members are distributed worldwide. Clearly, where events or meetings are organised between people who are more closely located, the costs involved will be significantly lower but the proposal does not account for this fact.

The number of network meetings is quite limited. Given that the network members have only recently started to work together, it seems that closer interactions, possibly electronically mediated, would be essential in establishing a coherent group. Unfortunately, the proposal focuses entirely on the importance of face-to-face meetings and leaves this possibility unexplored.

Overall Management Arrangement

The overall management arrangements of this project in order to fulfil it objectives appear:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☒ Adequate	☐ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

My confidence level in assessing this is:

☐ Low	☒ Medium	☐ High

Overall Assessment

Your Conclusions

Please summarise your view of the proposal.

Overall, the proposal presents a convincing case for a network of this type and it states ambitious goals that it can clearly contribute towards. However, because of the level of volunteer effort required to run the network, I would judge the proposal to be high risk. Also, the number of network events is very low and the applicants have not sufficiently explored the opportunities Web 2.0 tools offer for the running of the network itself (perhaps they take this for granted?).

Another concern is the lack of connection to the e-Science community. While the proposal lists a number of institutional links, there are no examples of how these would be activated to ensure that e-Science and open science develop so as to integrate and complement each other.

The overall quality of the proposal, as written, is:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☒ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

Recommendations

I believe this project:

☐ Should not proceed as proposed	☒ Could proceed as proposed	☐ Should proceed

My confidence level in assessing this is:

☐ Low	☒ Medium	☐ High

Reviewer Expertise

Your Area of Expertise

Please indicate the areas of expertise that are relevant to your assessment. Take care not to reveal your identity to the applicant.

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Network
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e-Science Networking 2007

Applicant Details

Applicant	Dr Cameron Neylon	Organisation	STFC - RAL

Title of Research Project

The Open Practises E-science Network

Review Information

Response Due Date	15/01/2008	Reviewer Reference:	CRVJF2

Research Council Contact Details

EPSRC Administration Contact: Mr John Deacon	▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉	Telephone: 01793 444037

Collaboration

Ability to Establish New Activity

The Network should be a new collaboration, and should normally have as its key objective the formation of a new interdisciplinary research community. Comment on the degree to which the Network partners are likely to establish a new, cohesive collaboration, of benefit to the associated research communities. Will the Network create a new interdisciplinary research community?

It looks a very good mix of participants to me from a wide range of disciplines. It should produce a new research community with proper support.

Are the Network partners prominent in the research area(s)? Where international partners are identified, to what extent will they add value to the Network?

The partners include a number of experts from different disciplines from a range of countries. They will add value to the network.

Relevance

How critical is this Network likely to be in contributing to activity in this area? Will the Network be able to identify new interdisciplinary research topics?

It could play an important role in developing this area. In this case the emphasis is on better sharing of data which could indirectly benefit inter- disciplinary research.

Dissemination

Comment on the degree to which the arrangements for dissemination are likely to be effective in informing the academic and, where appropriate, the non-academic community.

In order to succeed with such an effort dissemination will be essential in the academic community. The proposal does not emphasise how this will be achieved.

Overall Collaboration and Dissemination

The overall collaboration / dissemination arrangements are:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☒ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

Viability and Planning

Based on the proposed management strategy, comment on the likely viability of the Network beyond the period of Research Council funding applied for.

Good prospect of legacy network for the longer term

Resources Requested

Are the resources requested appropriate and justified?

Generally reasonable but perhaps the travel costs could be reduced somewhat by less face to face meetings.

Overall Management Arrangement

The overall management arrangements of this project in order to fulfil it objectives appear:

My confidence level in assessing this is:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☒ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

☐ Low	☒ Medium	☐ High

Overall Assessment

Your Conclusions

Please summarise your view of the proposal.

I think this is a timely and well written proposal with the potential to make some impact in this challenging area. There is a lot of support for the general idea of better sharing of research data but as this is such a complex problem it is important to focus on particular aspects of the problem in order to make real progress. This proposal brings together a good mix of participants who look like they could make important new contributions with the appropriate support. I suspect the associated travel costs could be somewhat reduced by using videoconferencing and other remote access facilities for even more of the meetings than described in the proposal but the basic concept looks interesting.

The overall quality of the proposal, as written, is:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☐ Good	☒ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

Recommendations

I believe this project:

My confidence level in assessing this is:

☐ Should not proceed as proposed	☐ Could proceed as proposed	☒ Should proceed

☐ Low	☒ Medium	☐ High

Reviewer Expertise

Your Area of Expertise

Please indicate the areas of expertise that are relevant to your assessment. Take care not to reveal your identity to the applicant.

██

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Title of Research Project

The Open Practises E-science Network

Review Information

Response Due Date	15/01/2008	Reviewer Reference:	E7BALM

Research Council Contact Details

EPSRC Administration Contact: Mr John Deacon	███████████████████████	Telephone: 01793 444037

Collaboration

Ability to Establish New Activity

The Network should be a new collaboration, and should normally have as its key objective the formation of a new interdisciplinary research community. Comment on the degree to which the Network partners are likely to establish a new, cohesive collaboration, of benefit to the associated research communities. Will the Network create a new interdisciplinary research community?

Strictly speaking, the network does indeed represent a new collaboration. However, it appears to be a new collaboration of people who are already in a sense networked. These people form a community that are already aware of each other through their collection of blogs (and wikis although this is less clear). In fact, the PI makes the point that the proposal was prepared in only 5 days through the announcement in a blog and the responses received as a result. In other words, a virtual network already exists.

The concern is that the proposal does not describe at all how the network will be expanded beyond this blog based community that already exists. Specifically, although there is a great level of detail in the proposal about the interesting research that could be one in the area of open research and publication, there is no detail on network membership.

Are the Network partners prominent in the research area(s)? Where international partners are identified, to what extent will they add value to the Network?

The partners mentioned in the track record cover a good cross-section of research relevant to the topic. There is a significant and very appropriate level of international collaboration as well.

Relevance

How critical is this Network likely to be in contributing to activity in this area? Will the Network be able to identify new interdisciplinary research topics?

Although the aims of the network are laudable, the PI by emphasising the ability to prepare the proposal through the use

of existing virtual networking technologies, essentially demonstrates the lack of need for a "real" network. Nevertheless, bringing this virtual community together in the real world has potential benefits and the area of research is interesting and topical. It is inherently interdisciplinary as well.

Dissemination

Comment on the degree to which the arrangements for dissemination are likely to be effective in informing the academic and, where appropriate, the non-academic community.

The dissemination arrangements are appropriate and as would be expected.

Overall Collaboration and Dissemination

The overall collaboration / dissemination arrangements are:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☒ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

Viability and Planning

Based on the proposed management strategy, comment on the likely viability of the Network beyond the period of Research Council funding applied for.

The management strategy consists solely of a steering group whose membership is not defined. This is not sufficient. How is membership of the network going to be managed? Will it be open to anybody? What level of contribution will be required by those that belong?

The network, however, is likely to continue easily beyond research council funding due to its origin from the virtual blog based network.

Resources Requested

Are the resources requested appropriate and justified?

The resources requested are appropriate and fully justified, except for the case of the prizes to be awarded at each of the meetings. These are costed at £1500 per person per prize, assuming two meetings a year for the three years, and are intended to cover the cost of attendance for the winners. However, as 3 of the proposed meetings are virtual, it is difficult to see what costs will be incurred by the winners. Otherwise, all the resources requested are fine.

Overall Management Arrangement

The overall management arrangements of this project in order to fulfil it objectives appear:

My confidence level in assessing this is:

☐ Unsatisfactory	☐ Adequate	☒ Good	☐ Very Good	☐ Outstanding

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Overall Assessment

Your Conclusions

Please summarise your view of the proposal.

The area of research for this network is exciting and very topical. It has the potential to have a high impact on how research is done not only within the UK but also globally, and must be treated as a global issue in any case. As such, I am pre-disposed to think highly about the formation of such a network. However, the lack of detail on how this network will be developed to include researchers outside the existing contacts made through the partners' own blogs and wikis, makes it difficult to support the proposal. Also, although it is useful to have a network of like-minded people, when the research is aiming to change how things have been done for more than a century, the network should really strive to bring together people with different views, including in this case existing publishers of scientific articles.

The key difficulty with this proposal is that it reads more like a proposal to do the actual research necessary (hence the detail on the different aspects of research that are required) and less like a network proposal. I would have rated this proposal higher as a research proposal.

The overall quality of the proposal, as written, is:

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Your Area of Expertise

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Date printed: 24/01/2008 12:51:13
Date saved: 24/01/2008 12:51:01