

N8 CIR Centre of Excellence Steering Group

4th Nov 2020

Informal catch up 1.30pm, meeting start 2pm

Zoom

Attendees

SG Members

Matt Probert (Director, York)
Stewart Clark (Deputy Director, Durham)
Alan Real (Technical Director, Durham)
Simon Hood (RIE Theme Lead, Manchester)
Mark Conmy (Leeds)
John Harding (Sheffield)

In Attendance

Gillian Sinclair (Programme Manager, Manchester)
Stephen Parkinson (N8)
Marion Weinzierl (RSE Theme Lead)
Cliff Addison (Liverpool)

Apologies

Roger Jones (Lancaster)
Chris Jewell (Lancaster)
John Cartwright (Liverpool)
Paola Carbone (Manchester)
Mark Turner (Newcastle)

Actions

Action No.	Person	Action
6.1	ANR	follow up with OCF about a dinner or other event at Durham University
6.9	GS	contact Paul Grayson about a potential corpus linguistics training course
8.3	ANR / MW	talk to IBM about training for the RSEs
9.1	GS	amend ToR accordingly and circulate with minutes for approval.
9.2	All	institutions to nominate a Steering Group deputy
9.3	GS	add Steering Group deputies into the ToR
9.4	SP	seek clarification from review panel re: budget
9.5	GS	recirculate the minutes of the last PWG meeting
9.6	GS	add responsibilities and use of RSE effort on the PWG agenda
9.7	GS	add to PWG agenda N8 project application form and user process
9.8	ANR/ MW	inform the Steering Group once the application process has been finalised.
9.9	GS	send round the Polaris application form to the PWG
9.10	GS	add into PWG agenda discussion regarding finite or infinite allocations
9.11	GS	put Bede User Group as a standing item on the Steering Group agenda
9.12	PDG	turn the action summary into a brief table for N8 SEG

Agenda

1. Welcome and minutes and actions of last meeting* (MP) (5 mins)

MP welcomed and introduced MW the new Research Software Engineer Theme Lead. He reminded the group that KP had left to start a new position with the Software Sustainability Institute. This is MW's first week as she started on the 2nd.

This minutes of the last meeting were accepted as were the action updates. Most of the actions from the last meeting were completed with a couple carried over mainly due to the Covid situation.

Category 1 Business

2. Steering Group ToR* (MP) (20 mins)

The review panel brought it to our attention that the Steering Group did not have a ToR whereas the PWG did. GS had drafted and circulate a ToR for the Steering Group to be discussed at this meeting which was based on the N8 HPC Steering Group ToR and including some recommendations from the review panel. A number of recommendations were made including listing roles rather than names, explain the SEG acronym, meeting EPSRC / Bede objectives, reporting to "N8, funders and other relevant stakeholders" etc.

Action 9.1 GS to amend ToR accordingly and circulate with minutes for approval.

The idea of including deputies in the ToR was raised. SP pointed out that in the collaboration agreement there is an "observer role" so that could be rolled into the deputy role. We also need to have 67% of attendees present to be quorate which would be 6 institutions. It was felt that 60% would be more achievable for us i.e. 5 institutions. This would need to be changed in the collaboration agreement and added into the ToR. It was agreed that each institution should official nominate a deputy.

Action 9.2 All institutions to nominate a deputy

Action 9.3 GS add Steering Group deputies into the ToR

MP pointed out that he and SC are doubling up as they have a PDG role and are acting as institutional representatives. He asked if the Steering Group were fine with this and no objections were raised. There would still be only one person eligible to vote from each institution to ensure balance.

MP said that the ToR should not dictate how the Theme Lead representatives are nominated. The theme leads should decide amongst themselves. JH said that the Theme Leads should be observers and not part of the formal voting structure. This was agreed.

The review panel also suggested that the Steering Group minutes should be public but JH said that we need to be able to have reserved business which would not be made public. MP suggested redacted minutes, separate minutes or reserved business? It was felt that reserved business would be better. MP said that the review panel also wanted the events / training budget made public. SP queried the review panel's suggestion and asked if they meant for the budget to be shared not publicly but rather within N8.

Action 9.4 SP to seek clarification from review panel re: budget

It was agreed to split the agenda into reserved and unreserved business and to publish the unreserved business on the N8 CIR website.

3. PWG Update (ANR) (5 mins)

MP explained to the Steering Group that SH had undergone a change of job title. SH was now the Research Infrastructure Engineer Theme Lead and would be taking over the Chair of the PWG. This would be ANRs last PWG update.

ANR said the most important PWG activity that had taken place over the summer were the coffee mornings where issues and questions regarding Bede were discussed. These had proved to be incredibly useful in getting the machine up and running. ANR said that the change in leadership would be good as more and more of his time was taken up with Bede and it ensures that the PWG keeps a broad outlook. ANR thanked the PWG for all their help. The next PWG meeting is the 10th of November.

Action 9.5 GS to recirculate the minutes of the last PWG meeting

4. Tier 2 discussion (ANR) (40 mins)

Launch of the service

Bede is now ready to use. The one and only user is CJ (Lancaster Steering Group representative) who is using the machine for Covid epidemiology. The institutional support groups were brought on earlier to make sure that they are ready to help users. The machine is stable even though they had to change the 2 year old kernel etc to make sure that everything was up to date. They are currently making sure that the documentation is correct and that it works. They have the basic documentation skeleton on a GitHub site. They know that every user will have different software stack requirements e.g. Leeds want IO libraries. It needs to be discussed at PWG where responsibility for what lies where and how best we use the distributed effort. The machine is still at the pilot stage when it comes to the software stack etc.

Action 9.6 GS to add responsibilities and use of RSE effort on the PWG agenda

MW said that MD still regarded it as a pilot service and they still needed people to help test it. CA said that there were very subtle implementation issues which will take time to work through.

Running of the service / RSE support

MW had sent out an email to clarify who the members of the Bede RSE group are. ANR said that we need a partnership model where Bede RSEs help users get on-board. All the stakeholders such as IBM, OCF and Durham University now want a blaze of publicity. He wants to make sure that the user / project registration process all works including the authorisation mechanisms etc. The SAFE integration has been done in terms of user accounts but the main issue now is how do people in N8 get a project and who authorises it? This needs to be fully worked out.

The application mechanism will be done through the N8 CIR website to allow for information capture. This will fire off a chain to the local contact who can then raise a ticket with Durham. CA said that was very similar to what we had with Polaris and that worked quite well. This time we need to make sure that the project is suitable for the machine. The Steering Group needs to keep a watching brief on approved applications etc but how each institution uses their own part of the machine is up to them. The EPSRC section and the Directors share is more important for us to keep an eye on.

Action 9.7 GS add to PWG agenda N8 project application form and user process

Action 9.8 ANR / MW to inform the Steering Group once the application process has been finalised.

Action 9.9 GS to send round the Polaris application form to the PWG

MP said that we also need to decide how long a project should be live for? CA said that the N8 HPC survey helped with this - to make sure people were still using the machine. People should have access for a year and then they will need to provide a summary of what they've achieved using the machine after 12 months.

ANR has talked to EPCC about their ARCHER driving test and having something similar for Bede. In our bid we promised we would have a driving test as a low barrier to make sure people have read the documentation. We should hopefully be able to launch driving test in the New Year. There was an Access to HPC call over the Summer but Bede did not receive any applications as the technical assessment could not be done.

MP asked if N8 people would be given a finite amount of resource or would it be more on a fair share basis? This needs to be discussed at PWG. CA said it would be good to start with infinite amount. MP said that sounds as though EPSRC users will get a finite amount whereas N8 users will be given an infinite amount.

Action 9.10 GS add into PWG agenda discussion regarding finite or infinite allocations

Governance

MP said that this Steering Group will also act as the Bede Steering Group. There will also be a Bede user group chaired by MW and this will be a standing item on the Steering Group agenda. The user group won't just have N8 users but also national users as well.

Action 9.11 GS to put Bede User Group as a standing item on the Steering Group agenda

ANR said that two additional Tier 2 centres now seem to be listed on the EPSRC website – Warwick and Birmingham. The original Birmingham proposal was similar to Bede but they seem to have worked with EPSRC to make it distinct from us.

Coffee break (10mins)

5. Mid-term review* (MP) (45 mins)

MP introduced the review by saying that overall it was good and it said that N8 CIR was good value for money. The decision now lies with N8 SEG as to the continuation of our funding. MP asked if the Steering Group had any comments on the review report. There were no comments apart from CA who pointed out that it was interesting how many times “goodwill” was mentioned and how it's not sustainable. This seemed like a strong hint from the review panel to the N8 SEG that they should give us more money. JH agreed as under “resource recommendations” there was a definite hint at more money required.

MP explained that the PDG have reviewed the report and produced a detailed response. We will be sending a shorter version to the N8 SEG which has an informal meeting next week.

Action 9.12 PDG to turn the action summary into a brief table for N8 SEG.

MP will submit a shortened executive summary and action summary as “actions being considered”. SP will ask the N8 SEG on their call when they want to see the final version. The next N8 SEG is the 21st Jan. MP queried if the forthcoming N8 SEG call was the right meeting for our forward look section / strategy for the future. JH suggested just including the first paragraph of the forward look.

MP asked if our proposed actions were workable and practical? SP said that demonstrating that some of the actions had already been done would be good. MP said that looking at action list apart from the RSE brokerage model, sustainability paper, N8 SEG discussion regarding the Theme Lead role and rewards, everything else seemed to be straightforward. SP suggested we could the actions by time horizon?

MP asked what we should do about the objectives section and in particular the brokerage model. Should we submit a paper on a proposed model? We know that there will be Issues with VAT and charging etc. Do we say we will consider it or do we submit a paper? It was agreed that we should submit a paper. MP went through the actions and a timeline of short, medium and long-term was put on them.

6. Any other business

None

Category 2 Business

NOTE: Approval of Category II business will be assumed unless a member indicates that s/he wishes to bring forward an item to Category I business by noon on the day of the meeting.

1. Budget Update (GS)

There has been no expenditure this financial year apart from salaries.

2. N8 CIR KPI report back* (GS)

3. Confirmation of date of next meeting

No further dates in the diary

4. Events Update (GS) (5mins)

- N8 RDM event - <https://n8cir.org.uk/events/n8-rdm-launch/>
- Training surveys out for Digital Health and Digital Humanities - <https://n8cir.org.uk/news/training-surveys-20/>

*Paper associated with this agenda item.