

VRE Synthesis & Evaluation Study

Summary of Interviews/Results

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Fieldwork Approach and Selection of Projects 1/3

- Focus: third phase of the JISC VRE programme – 28 projects (VRE3 including VRE Rapid Innovation)
- 10 projects were funded under the three areas ‘Tools’, ‘Frameworks’ and ‘Interoperability’ with four follow-up projects commissioned in a next step. Stage three funded 14 Rapid Innovation projects (VRERI) with shorter lifetimes
- Taking into account project dependencies and trajectories back to VRE phases 1 and 2 and to other JISC funded and otherwise funded projects

Fieldwork Approach and Selection of Projects 2/3

Aim: provide comprehensive overview, cover feasible number of projects via interviews with diverse project stakeholders under the remit of the following research questions:

- Which VRE projects had/have an impact within communities and why?
- How do projects benefit from previous projects (VRE1, VRE2) and/or other collaborations and how does this have implications on sustainability, community building?

(cont. on next slide)

Fieldwork Approach and Selection of Projects 3/3

(research questions cont.)

- Which VRE are actively used, to what extent and by which communities?
- What enables and hinders the impact, uptake and use of VRE?
- What are useful models to sustain VRE and which other factors contribute?
- What recommendations for successful projects, funding streams and sustainability routes have VRE practitioners/projects – and what does not work in this context?

Interviews: Overview

14 phase three (VRE3/VRERI) projects were selected, grouped into 7 case studies, each of which included one or more individual projects (one covering four, two covering three and four covering one phase three project/s).

- 25 interviews between 13 Nov 2012 and 5 Feb 2013
- 26 interviewees, 23 via phone/Skype, 2 f2f, 1 group interview with 2 interviewees
- average length just under 40 minutes (39.18 min/interview; 16h 22min total time)

Interviews: Structure

- Formation and focus of projects, including project trajectories, dependencies and stakeholders
- User communities and engagement, project approach and methodology
- Impact: outputs, potential (community) uptake, community awareness and dissemination
- Barriers and enablers (cross-cutting theme)
- Sustainability: approach, models, success, plans
- Take aways/lessons learned, future plans
- Recommendations to JISC and overall

Selected Projects/Case Studies

1. ViCo-VRE and follow-on ViCoX (VRE3); OneVRE (VRE3); CritterVRE (VRERI) – University of Manchester
2. IBBRE, VRIC and follow-on ViewMyVRIC (VRE3) – University of Southampton
3. TextVRE and its follow-up Text.Link (VRE3); gMan (VRERI) – Centre for e-Research, KCL; German TextGrid project; D4Science Initiative; SSI
4. SERPent (VRERI) – UCL
5. VRE-CI (VRE3) – University of Oxford, RIC (British Library & Microsoft Research)
6. AMI (VRERI) – University of Cambridge
7. The Brain project (VRE3) – University of Coventry

Findings: Barriers & Enablers

- Reciprocity between Community and e-Infrastructure/Technology is still the main driver for the development, embedding, impact and sustainability of VRE
- Development and Embedding of VREs
 - Choice of technology is a determining factor
 - Institutional Buy-In as major factor
 - Key-Stakeholders are crucial for success
- Usability
 - Making software as customizable and lightweight as possible
 - User-driven, iterative approaches used successfully
 - Not an impeding factor on its own

Impact Factors

Projects and portfolio of projects demonstrated the benefits of *continuity of project teams*, which were able to build on *retained expertise, lessons learned* and *established networks* of users and other stakeholders to build on their achievements.

Some examples..

Potential/Future Impact

A number of projects are currently used to build upon or planned to in follow-up or future activities.

Examples..

Misc Findings/Recommendations

1/2

- Very positive view specifically of the JISC VRE programme and generally of JISC as a funder across its various programmes
- JISC's remit was assessed as very innovative, i.e. in supporting endeavours across disciplines, institutions, themes and, in part, internationally
- Communication with JISC in the VRE programme has overall been perceived as lightweight and functional
- JISC's current transition: There has been some disquiet about the lack of information on what to expect post transition.

Misc Findings/Recommendations

2/2

- JISC programme events have been perceived as quite useful, esp. for providing an overview of each others' activities and as dissemination forums
- Recommendations (but it was acknowledged that resources play a role here):
 - Some kind of way of interaction post-project would be very useful to catch-up on further progress and developments coming out of a respective strand
 - Mostly PIs, PMs, developers and other typical project personnel attend programme events: stronger effort to engage user communities and domain experts (example: JISC ENGAGE) might be useful

Sustainability 1/2

- Sustainability is a most crucial factor for wider VRE adoption
- Good use has been made of continuation funding
- However: this does **not** guarantee that outputs/software can be sustained post-project
- In some cases, sustainability works via funds from follow-on projects, but it remains notoriously difficult to get business plans, sustainability models and crucial high-level stakeholder buy-in at institutions
- Mainly down to institutional factors and not JISC, who as a funder only has limited leverage here

Sustainability 2/2

- Project durations have been seen as mostly too short in the Rapid Innovation strand:
 - This can work if a project is very focused and builds on previous work
 - At least nine months to a year seems to be the minimum time necessary to realise project goals/development
 - Short projects make it sometimes hard to get continuation funding as planning gets more difficult and administrative overhead is quite substantial.
- UK arts and humanities communities stress that funding for their discipline areas seems to have been in decline in recent years overall – there is a feeling that a dedicated programme (esp. by JISC) would be needed

Sustainability Recommendations 1/2

- There are recommendations for JISC on sustainability of software outputs that JISC could help with:
 - funding a maintained and supported repository for software;
 - put mechanisms in place to move software outputs post-project towards sustainability; Open Source is not the universal solution, and does not hinder more commercially viable routes. Resources for maintenance and support are mostly not available in a robust way, if there is not already an established developer community connected to a 'product'.
 - A commercial arm for software is seen as a good way to try to make proper use of invested funding, which otherwise often just vanishes

Sustainability Recommendations 2/2

- Overall: Lessons learned and knowledge transfer and proof-of-concepts are important, but to actually have a supported VRE would benefit the community even more – and maybe allow even more long term evaluation of systems in use.
- Such an approach might also help with some perceptions of the JISC VRE programme having been ‘ahead of the curve’, leading to no adoption because communities are not able to respond quickly enough. Technological innovation is not an effective driver if the community is not at the right stage and time; awareness raising and diffusion evidence of benefits takes time and, most probably, more funding.