

The JISC FAIR Programme: Opening up access to institutional assets

Background

The FAIR (Focus on Access to Institutional Resources) Programme [1] was launched in August 2002 and will run until October 2005. There are 14 projects within the Programme representing a £2million investment over the three-year period. The Programme, in the words of the original call, aims to "... involve members of the Higher (HE) and Further (FE) community in projects to deposit and disclose institutional assets and to gather intelligence about and increase our understanding of the technical, organisational and cultural challenges of these processes. The FAIR Programme will also contribute to developing the mechanisms and supporting services to allow the submission and sharing of content generated by the HE/FE community." The first process indicated is deposit, and repositories, most commonly institutional repositories [2], have been identified within the projects as the location for this. The FAIR Programme is investigating these places of deposit and the technologies that surround them.

With respect to disclosure, the FAIR Programme is "... inspired by the vision of the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) [3] ..." This standard, which has its origins in work to facilitate wider access to e-prints, allows the sharing of digital assets based on a simple mechanism allowing metadata about those assets to be harvested into services. The majority of projects are, thus, actively investigating the use of this standard, and specifically its Protocol for Metadata Harvesting, as a means for disclosure and sharing. OAI works by enabling a relationship between a data provider and a service provider. The data provider makes metadata about their content available in a standard format, using a minimum of Dublin Core [4]. This is made available in a way that allows it to be harvested, collected up, by a service provider. The service provider holds the harvested metadata locally and provides a means to search this. The metadata is harvested again at intervals to ensure any updates are included. The varieties of ways this model can be used continue to be investigated, but the model itself has proved very robust.

Over 40 institutions are involved in the FAIR Programme, covering both HE and FE. The Programme is overseen by myself as Programme Manager, and also by the FAIR Advisory Board (FAB!). The Board is made up from community representatives in the UK, to ensure the Programme maintains its focus on the needs of HE and FE, plus a number of experts from Europe and the USA, to provide international context to the work of FAIR. Many international initiatives that have parallels with FAIR, such as the DARE institutional repository development in the Netherlands [5] and Mellon-funded OAI projects in the USA [6], are taking place, and there is very wide-ranging enthusiasm for OAI and the benefits it can bring to sharing information. FAIR is also closely connected to the open access movement [7], and is particularly aligned to the self-archiving route within this.

The 14 projects are split across three main areas of work, and this is reflected by the clusters of projects that have been formed to facilitate the exchange of experiences between them. The clusters are:

- e-prints and e-theses
- Museums and Images
- Institutional Portals

e-prints and e-theses

Many of the projects within the FAIR e-prints and e-theses cluster are described in greater detail in other articles within this issue of ASSIGNation. These include: DAEDALUS, TARDis, SHERPA, ePrints UK, Theses Alive! and Electronic Theses. Please see these articles for further information on them. Two other projects exist within this cluster:

- HalRST [8]: a project based at the University of Strathclyde, but establishing institutional repositories at a number of both HE and FE institutions. The project is examining how

disclosure across these can be developed, bearing in mind the different materials being deposited (e-prints to learning materials), using OAI.

- RoMEO [9]: a project based at the University of Loughborough and completed in August 2002. This project investigated the legal requirements of the different parties involved in depositing and disclosing e-prints using OAI. It generated a metadata rights solution that is currently being developed into a generic OAI-rights solution [10] in the USA. A list of publisher self-archive policies was also created, providing valuable information on which publishers allow the deposit of assets, usually journal articles, where they may have had the copyright assigned to them. This list has now been picked up by the SHERPA project to maintain access to it. The whole issue of who owns what within an institution, especially with regard to digital assets, is considered unclear amongst those producing the assets and additional work is required to examine this further.

Museums and Images

Two university museums, the FitzWilliam [11] in Cambridge and the Petrie [12] in London, are investigating how OAI can be used to disclose information about the many assets that they hold but which are often hidden away in storage and not available on view. This will help massively in increasing awareness of the collections held by the museum. The BioMed Image Archive [13] is developing a self-archive mechanism for medical images, to facilitate the deposit of assets in a community resource. The Arts & Humanities Data Service (AHDS) [14] are seeking to build a bridge between traditional deposit, as is carried out by the AHDS, and deposit for harvesting, to create more flexible access linked to preservation.

Institutional Portals

The two projects in this cluster, PORTAL [15] and FAIR Enough [16], are examining not the use of OAI, but the presentation of disclosed assets alongside external sources of information. PORTAL is examining this within an institutional portal in a HE institution, whilst FAIR Enough are examining it within a VLE and a FE cultural environment.

Conclusion

The first 18 months of the FAIR Programme has been a period where many issues have been raised, chief amongst them cultural change, IPR, metadata (quality and gathering), and software choice for the repositories being used for deposit. The projects have used this time valuably to spend time encouraging this so that they can be fully addressed within their projects and their institutions. The remaining months of the FAIR Programme will almost inevitably generate as many questions as answers, but this will come out a great deal of experience.

References:

- [1] FAIR Programme, http://www.jisc.ac.uk/programme_fair.html
- [2] OSI Guide to Institutional Repository Software, <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/software/>
- [3] Open Archives Initiative, <http://www.openarchives.org>
- [4] Dublin Core Metadata Initiative, <http://www.dublincore.org>
- [5] DARE, <http://www.surf.nl/en/themas/index2.php?oid=7>
- [6] Information on the Mellon OAI projects can be found at <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/217/waters.html>
- [7] Information on the open access movement can be found at <http://www.soros.org/openaccess>
- [8] HalRST, <http://hairst.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/>
- [9] RoMEO, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ls/disresearch/romeo/index.html>
- [10] OAI-rights, <http://www.openarchives.org/documents/OAIRightsWhitePaper.html>
- [11] Harvesting the FitzWilliam, <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/htf/>
- [12] Accessing the Virtual Museum, <http://www.petrie.ucl.ac.uk/randd/avm.html>
- [13] BioMed Image Archive, <http://www.brisbio.ac.uk/>
- [14] Hybrid Archives, <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/about/projects/hybrid-archives/index.htm>
- [15] PORTAL, <http://www.fair-portal.hull.ac.uk>

[16] FAIR Enough, <http://www.fairenough.ac.uk>