

## **SESSION 2: Experience with access agreements; widening of access**

Report of Discussion (by BBSRC)

### Introduction

At the ERA-Instruments meeting in Vienna (workshop #5) a session was held titled 'Experience with access agreements; widening of access'. This session was initially intended to report upon the outputs from workpackage 2.4, (Deliverable 2.2) 'Rules for access to facilities across borders'. These guidelines were put compiled as part of deliverable 2.2 at the end of year 1 of the ERA-Instruments project. The guidelines themselves were split into guidelines for users, and guidelines for facility managers. This workshop session was intended to discuss experiences with the access agreements one year after they had been proposed.

### Discussion

The initial approaches as they were set out were to set up transnational access agreements and to lay out access guidelines for facility users. It became clear during the preparation of the initial report that all the facilities approached were open for access to researchers across the EU and that formal transnational agreements were not a limiting factor to access. Those facilities that did have formal agreements were set up with co-funding from separate national governments which required transnational agreements between the funding partners to be put in place. Secondly, it was clear that mechanisms of access by users were not a significant limiting factor in preventing access. Users may be limited by knowledge of available facilities, but this is being partially addressed by the compilation of databases of facilities begun in other workpackages.

Deliverable 2.2 detailed different mechanisms of managing facilities, together with some case studies. It was clear from our discussions that the major challenges related to facilities have come from questions focussed on facility management. Deliverable 2.2 has been received and discussed, and some of the issues relating to facility management have been taken forward by the ERA-net Recommendations publications.

The grant agreement stated that the guidelines for access for users should be trialled by users and experiences reported back at workshop #4. The guidelines drafted in the report outlined activities that were considered to be sensible, high level and non-controversial, such as contacting facility managers to gain information regarding transportation, and requirements for materials and training. This made actually directing researchers to use the guidelines unfeasible, as they were considered guidance that the researchers should have been using anyway. Rather, the guidelines were circulated around users who utilised facilities for comment (both suggested by the partners and by facility managers). The feedback received was positive, and agreed that the guidelines were sensible. Some minor amendments were also suggested. The current guidelines are included in ANNEX 2.

With this focus on facility management rather than access, the discussions that followed considered this topic. A number of potential business models were considered; user pays at the point of access, user subscriptions, and institutional subscriptions or per sample charging. Per sample charging was considered as an effective model for managing commercial, high income charging, while subscriptions have advantages, but can be an impediment to bringing in new users. There are clear opportunities to contribute to sample preparation and data analysis and to take advantage of interactions with instrument manufacturers/developers. However, facilities and users enter into a relationship which has some intrinsic uncertainty; users depend of facilities being sustainable and therefore available, and facilities depend on users obtaining funding.

More discussion followed regarding future possibilities for facility funding through the EU. The numbers of research infrastructures increased from 248 in FP6 to 557 in FP7, although the budget for existing RIs did not grow in FP7. This meant that the numbers of RI's doubled, but the number of users supported to obtain access was largely similar. One of the challenges for FP8, therefore, is the necessary increase in EC funds dedicated to Research Infrastructures.

The need to increase co-ordination and integration was also highlighted. As part of this strategy, a number of points were highlighted. Firstly, there is a growing role of distributed research infrastructures for increased capacity and performance as well as better services to researchers including direct or remote access to instruments and related data. There is a need to integrate national resources, and co-ordination and integration must be increased to meet global challenges and growing international “co-opetition” (where competitors work together on areas of mutual advantage). Multidisciplinary approaches in scientific, educational technical and managerial areas can be challenges as they represent a major cultural change for scientific institutions. Human resources are also important not only scientists and researchers, but also staff. A role for ERA-Instruments was suggested in coordination of all of the above areas.

## Conclusions

Deliverable 2.2, Rules for access to facilities, concentrated on guidelines for operating facilities. The guidelines as they have been written in deliverable 2.2 have been published as part of ERA-Instruments Recommendations series. Consultations with users have indicated that the guidelines for facility user are sensible and cover the appropriate areas.

A number of possible business models exist for multi-user facilities; user pays at the point of access, user subscriptions, and institutional subscriptions or per sample charging. These models have different features and should be selected carefully based on the individual facility requirements.

Funding for research infrastructure access did not increase from FP6 to FP7, although the number of research infrastructures doubled. There is a clear challenge in FP8 to support expanded access to RI's in FP8. Part of the EC vision is to increase co-ordination and integration of RI's, and there is a role here for ERA-Instruments going forward.

## ANNEX 1

### Agenda

#### **SESSION 2: Experience with access agreements; widening of access**

##### **Task Leader BBSRC**

***Objectives:** access agreements were presented as part of task 2.4 for access to instrumentation across national borders. The guidelines and the ERA-Instruments recommendations paper will be discussed during this session. It is clear that questions regarding management and operation of facilities are central to operating facilities, and these questions were discussed in deliverable 2.2. Further discussion of these topics will be part of the session. It is also clear that access agreements to facilities on a European level are being ended and information regarding the extent and rationale behind this will be useful in informing our discussions.*

***Participants:** ERA-Instruments SAB members and partners, guests*

***Chair:** Jose Carrascosa, (SAB)*

14.15-15.15 Introductory talks:

- Experience with access agreements (Michael Ball, BBSRC)
- ERA-Instruments recommendations paper (Christian Renner, DFG)
- Access and Facility management of NMR (Michael Overduin, SAB)
- European transnational access programmes (Hervé Perot, EC)

15.15 – 16.00 Discussion

## ANNEX 2

### Up dated guidelines for User Access to Facilities

To some extent, the message to users to simplify their access to facilities is ‘prepare’. Most of the problems encountered by users can be avoided by adequate preparation. It is clear that prospective users should engage with facility managers as early as possible to ensure that samples are supplied in the correct form. It will be up to the user to ensure that samples arrive in a suitable format to analyse – either in the correct form, mounted in a standard way, and/or with appropriate documentation e.g. ensuring that the samples have been obtained in compliance with local ethical regulations.

Preparation is also important when considering selecting a facility. The reasons for deciding to perform a research activity at a user facility are usually due to the advanced instrumentation and experienced experimental staff. Initial contact for the user service is often made via an on-line application that gives details of the experiments performed and the samples used. Users may be interested in other aspects of the facility, for example, they may wish to gain advanced training in operation of a particular instrument or may be interested in gaining skills in data analysis. If a user is unclear how much advanced training they would receive, they should contact the facility.

For obvious reasons, it is worth contacting the facility to find out how much users might be charged for a particular activity. These can often be costed into a research grant prior to application. Similarly, if intellectual property might be generated as part of the project, some discussion with the facility would be prudent to ascertain whether any sharing of IP is to be expected, and if so, to ensure that agreements are in place prior to experimentation. Transport of biological samples can be problematic; particularly those that contain refrigerated gases, liquids, or have the potential to contain infectious agents. These are not necessarily prohibitively difficult, but some liaising with airlines, for example, may be required if the samples are to be transported as freight. The facility managers interviewed indicated that their users did not have great difficulty transporting samples, and that it was possible to transport samples such as highly pathogenic material with correct planning. Many of the problems encountered involve agents who are unsure of how to treat materials, so correct labelling is important. We do not recommend materials are transported in hand luggage. Facility managers may have some idea of how to correctly transport samples, and they should be consulted in the case of any uncertainty.

Users should also be prepared to handle any data produced. They should be aware of any differences in file formats, especially if the data will be generated in a proprietary format that requires conversion to a standard format before use. The users should be clear prior to experimentation

### Conclusions

**Users should liaise with facility managers at the earliest opportunity on matters such as training, costing and transport of samples. Users should be prepared for different data sizes and formats.**

**It is the responsibility of the user to ensure that the sample arrives in a format ready to use. This can mean ensuring transport, that the sample is in the correct form or mounted and prepared correctly, and complies with local regulations**

**It is responsibility of the Facility to provide clear and complete instructions on the protocols for the experiments planned and regarding sample handling and regulations.**