



TEMPLATE FOR FP6 PROJECT REVIEWS

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Individual report
Consolidated report

Thematic Priority/Activity	Research Infrastructures Communication Network Development
Instrument type	Specific Support Action
Project no and acronym	RI-026546 OCCASION
Project full title	Organising Caucasus and Central Asian Services for Internet Offerings to NREns
Project start date	1 November 2005
Project duration	24 months
Project coordinator name and organisation	Peter Kirstein, UCL
Period covered by report (from - to)	1 November 2005 – 31 October 2006
Date of (review) meeting	8 November 2006
Name(s) of reviewer(s)	Robin Arak; Hans-Peter Axmann; Rene Belsø

1. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

a. Executive summary

The **OCCASION Project** manages the Silk Project, provides additional features (e.g. network management, VoIP and videoconferencing tools), and services such as information, CSIRTs and operational support. The **Silk Project** provides connectivity to GEANT2 from the National Research and Educational Networks (NRENs) of the 8 Newly Independent States (NISs) of the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Afghanistan. The Silk Project is supported by a number of organisations, with the largest funding coming from the NATO *Security through Science Programme*, with substantial contributions from Cisco and DESY. OCCASION and SILK helps researchers in the Silk countries to collaborate with their colleagues in the European Union. An aspect of the OCCASION project is to identify significant User Groups, active in both the Silk countries and the European Union, who need to use the Silk network for their collaborations. It then fosters the requisite training and joint workshops (co-funded with other bodies) to enable useful collaborations. Finally, it will assist the Silk NRENs to move towards an environment in which their networks will be self sustainable without continued large-scale financial contributions from the EC and NATO.

The **partners** to the project are:

- Three Western partners - UCL (Coordinating Partner, UK), DESY (Germany) and RUG (Netherlands).
- Three National Research and Education Networks of the Newly Independent States (NISs) of the Caucasus: ARENA (Armenia), GRENA (Georgia) and AZRENA (Azerbaijan).
- three of the NISs of Central Asia: KAZRENA (Kazakhstan), AKNET-KRENA (Kyrgyzstan) and TARENA (Tajikistan).

The project is closely linked to, and manages, the Silk Project, which includes also three other NRENs: TURENA (Turkmenistan), UZSCINET (Uzbekistan) and AFRENA (Afghanistan). For different contractual reasons none of these three are normal partners; nevertheless, they are all associated with the OCCASION project and are expected to provide input to it.

The **main objective** of OCCASION is to advance collaboration between European researchers and the *Silk countries* in the Caucasus and Central Asia, by helping to develop the National Research and Educational Networks (NRENs) in the Silk countries - both in technology and facilities. Specifically OCCASION will pursue the following themes:

1. to manage the network linking the Silk NRENs to GEANT2.
2. to coordinate the provision of information services by the Silk NRENs.
3. to deploy and operate a set of VoIP and multimedia conferencing end-stations to provide collaboration facilities between the researchers from the European Union and the Silk countries.
4. to deploy and assist in the operation of a Computer Emergency Response Team in each Silk country.
5. to facilitate training in relevant areas.
6. to set the scene for the Silk NRENs to move to a sustainable NREN infrastructure with good performance within its financial limitations.

The project consists of **six work packages**, with the following specific objectives:

- WP1 OCCASION Project Management
- WP2 Silk Project Management and Information Services
- WP3 Network Management
- WP4 Technical Work and Personal communications
- WP5 User Groups
- WP6 Liaison and Dissemination

The following **deliverables** were due within the period covered by this review report (1 November 2005 - 31 October 2006):

D1.1 Project Description.

D1.2 The impact of the Silk and OCCASION Projects during the first year of the project (M12).

D2.1 The status of the Silk NRENs and their plans for connectivity.

D2.2 Co-funding to Silk during 1st year and agreed funding model for 2nd year.

D2.3 A transition strategy for Silk communications.

D3.1 Description of technical facilities provided and requisite of statistics.

D4.1 Provision of facilities of VoIP for the OCCASION community.

D4.2 Provision of video conferencing facilities for the OCCASION community.

D5.1 Educational programme.

D5.2 The potential User Groups within the Silk countries.

D5.3 Assessment of User Group and Training activities in Year 1.

D6.1 Plan for using and disseminating knowledge.

D6.2 Dissemination during 1st year and plans for 2nd year.

Comments:

The reviewers were provided with the relevant project's documentation and deliverables in due time ahead of the meeting - except as for deliverable D5.2., which was presented as a handout one day before the review day. The review meeting was well organised, the presentations presented by the project were of reasonable quality and the presentations gave the reviewers a good overview of the project's activities and achievements.

The OCCASION project is very closely related to its predecessor, SPONGE as well as the SILK (-1) project. The OCCASION project is (like SPONGE was) an Accompanying Measure to the SILK project, financed by NATO. OCCASION continues to provide overall management for SILK, which via a satellite based ICT network infrastructure aims at connecting the *National Research and Educations Networks (NRENs)* of the 8 Newly Independent States (NISs) of the Caucasus and Central Asia, and of Afghanistan to GEANT - the collective European research and educations network.

Hence, the success of OCCASION is closely related to that of SILK, of which OCCASION though managing it, only has marginal direct control, making a review of OCCASION somewhat more complicated than normally is the case for EC project reviews. For this reason the reviewers found it to be of significant importance, helpful and informative, that a representative from NATO (representing Silk funders) was present at and engaged in the OCCASION review.

Because of the intrinsic dependency on Silk, OCCASION has not yet fully achieved its goals for the reporting period. It is expected that the situation will change significantly once Silk-2, the new network, is up and running at the beginning of 2007.

Despite various difficulties related to the SILK project (e.g. not obtaining necessary US export allowances for certain hardware and software products, mentality and understanding of some project partners for the appropriate handling of the project, etc.) the OCCASION project partners have worked hard to get things moving and have to varying extents tried to prepare for the time the new network is becoming operational.

The reviewers were well informed as to the history of the SILK project as well as the OCCASION predecessor project - SPONGE. The reviewers appreciated the run-through of all the recommendations made in the final SPONGE review, which were aimed at any possible follow-up project - now the OCCASION project. The reviewers took explicit note of the previous analysis and recommendations concerning mainly the subject areas:

1. How NREN **sustainability** might be pursued and ensured in the longer run, and namely the apparent lack of any NREN status/strategy/action-plan documents to this end.

2. National **distribution and use** of SILK bandwidth within the research and education communities.

The reviewers gave significant attention to the OCCASION goal of assisting the Silk NRENs to move towards an environment in which their networks will be self-sustainable, without continued external financial contributions. The subject areas of NREN sustainability, and distribution and use of SILK bandwidth, therefore, consumed a large part of the review time, and changes to the review agenda were done accordingly.

The reviewers expressed considerable concern over the feasibility of recommending the EC to let the project continue, without addressing these subject areas in detailed reports. The reviewers noted that the compilation of such reports had been recommended at all previous reviews of the preceding SPONGE project, but had never been presented in a satisfactory manner to a review panel.

The review panel did, however, at the review experience presentations from some of the project partners, which to some extent eased the above mentioned concerns. Had these presentations been written up as small unified reports and submitted as part of the review background information, the OCCASION project would stand stronger in the sense that some of the concerns raised in this review report would be resolved.

OCCASION NRENs are expected to give more support to the preparation of project deliverables and the pursuit of sustainability. Not doing so, beyond what is financed from the outside, must be understood as lacking commitment from the NREN and bottom-up level.

Top-down commitment from governments and/or universities seems rather limited, or even absent for some countries, though exceptions exist. An example which brings into doubt governments commitment, is the fact that OCCASION seems forced (for political or economic reasons) to use inferior satellite network connections, when in fact government owned telecommunication companies own land lines, perfectly capable of offering sufficient bandwidth of sufficient quality. The fact that many NREN's sell, for profit, the bandwidth they are given for free from NATO, presumably so they may purchase more bandwidth from government owned telecommunication companies makes for a rather odd arrangement.

If neither bottom-up nor top down commitment to the project can be documented, OCCASION is vulnerable to being perceived as a project not worth continuing. The EC cannot justify supporting a project which is not possible for the partners to implement because it is not supported by its main stakeholders, including governments of the NREN stakeholders in several countries.

However it is clear that in some countries there has been commitment to improve NREN infrastructures. This is a good sign, which needs to be encouraged further, so that more positive moves towards sustainability in each NREN are made.

The review panel concluded the review with:

1. Commending some of the project partners (e.g. Georgia and Kazakhstan) for very excellent and in-need presentations at the review, which without the review would have left the reviewers with a much more unclear picture of the merits of the project.
2. Reiterating concerns over what might look like lacking stakeholder commitment to the project, since 1) documentation of such commitment as well as of project impact, is absent, and 2) since the unwillingness to produce such required documentation, further gives an impression of the lack of commitment.
3. Reiterating the fundamental importance of compiling status/strategy/action-plan reports on A) NREN sustainability and B) national distribution and use of SILK bandwidth (project impact).
4. Rejecting three deliverables (D2.1, D2.2 and D5.2), suggesting that the project be given three months from the date of receipt of this Review Report to resubmit the deliverables.

- Good to excellent project (The project has fully achieved its objectives and technical goals for the period and has even exceeded expectations)
- Acceptable project (The project has achieved most of its objectives and technical goals for the period with relatively minor deviations)
- Unsatisfactory project (The project has failed to achieve critical objectives and/or is not at all on schedule)

b. Recommendations

While all the work done in the technical part of the project is quite good and acceptable, much needs to be done in order to achieve network sustainability - understood as viable national NREN's, independent of external/international funding donations. In order to be able to assess progress in this respect it is recommended that:

1. Each NREN produces regular reports highlighting amongst others the current status of, as well as future strategy/action-plans, securing economical **network sustainability**. The following points should be included:
 - Description of the national networks (NREN's), of which in most countries Silk/OCCASION is only a part, and there stakeholders (government agencies, universities, other user organisations and user communities),
 - Funding arrangements for the whole NREN, including an indicative relation (in %) between national funds and contributions from outside.
2. Each NREN produces regular reports highlighting amongst others the current status of as well as future strategy/action-plans, securing **project impact**. Outreach within the country, and plans for inclusion/connection of further users committed to education and science, should be included.
3. The OCCASION management produces regular reports highlighting amongst others the current status of as well as a future strategy/action-plan for sustainable regional NREN cooperation. i.e. a short collective NREN strategy document, "*A Sustainability Roadmap*", arguing whether it might be feasible, and if so how, project partners might harvest the potential merits of joint purchase/ownership of an OCCASION backbone and a joint participation in GEANT.
4. The unaccepted deliverables D2.1, D2.2 and D5.2 should be updated, improved upon and should be resubmitted in three months time. These above mentioned data should go into the appropriate deliverables (D2.1 and D2.2), which may be declared confidential, due to the potential sensitivity of such data.
5. In the light of the shortcomings of OCCASION until now, the reviewers recommend that the EC does not allocate any further funding to the project beyond 1 November 2007, if there is not firm evidence that the project has made some tangible and effective attempts to address the issues and recommendations made in this review (above).

2. OBJECTIVES

a. Have the objectives for the period been achieved?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The project experienced a much delayed start. This was due to various reasons. The project should have started Nov 1, 2005 but first the recommendations of the predecessor project SPONGE had to be taken up into the DoW. The following negotiations resulted in the offer of contract being issued at the end of January 2006. The signed Accession Forms could only be returned at the beginning of March 2006 and after having finalised the Consortium Agreements the project partners received their first payments only in June 2006. This resulted in a very short period of actual work in which the set goals could not fully be accomplished. The progress of the OCCASION project was slower than anticipated.

However, the reviewers' main project concerns and recommendations are independent of this, in the sense that reports asked for in the predecessor SPONGE project, could easily have been, but had still not been compiled. i.e. the delay, which the OCCASION project cannot be blamed for, cannot excuse any of the concerns raised in this review, as it also does not change the nature and urgency of the recommendations.

The reviewers feel that the objective "*... to set the scene for the Silk NRENs to move to a sustainable NREN infrastructure with good performance within its financial limitations*", is impossible to assess if general stakeholder commitment is not documented better. Since demonstration of general stakeholder commitment to the project cannot rest on payments submitted to the project, reports asked for in the predecessor project SPONGE, should have been submitted, hence clearing the way for a much more positive impression of the project.

b. Are the overall objectives (i) still relevant and (ii) still achievable within the time and resources available to the project?

(i) Yes Partially No

(ii) Yes Partially No

Comments:

The delays due to a lengthy but in the end very successful procurement procedure have delayed the timely achievement of the objectives so far, but the overall objectives still remain valid and should be able to achieve within the set timeframe and with the available resources.

c. Do you recommend changes in objectives in order to keep up with the current state-of-the-art?

Yes Partially No

Comments:

Once the new infrastructure is available the project should make quite rapid progress.

It is recommended that the issue of documenting NREN sustainability and national distribution and use of SILK bandwidth within the research and education communities, be given much higher priority. It is recommended that such a change of priority is articulated in a reformulation of objectives and work packages.

3. WORKPLAN AND RESOURCES

a. Has the project as a whole been making satisfactory progress in relation to the Description of Work (Annex I to the contract)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The project has made sufficient progress in its technical part, but has not until now managed to address the important issue of sustainability in a satisfactory manner, which impacts on the project as such, since it is viewed by the reviewers as by far the most important aspect of the project.

b. Has each work package (WP) been making satisfactory progress in relation to the Description of Work (Annex I to the contract)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The project consists of **six work packages**, with the following specific objectives, followed by the review panel's comments:

WP 1 - OCCASION Project Management

WP1 should manage the OCCASION project itself. Most Silk partners have little experience of the procedures for managing international projects like Silk or OCCASION. Thus one objective is to bring the partners into the style of management of EC projects. Another objective is to use more modern methods in OCCASION management than is usual in EC projects - i.e. making more use of audio conferencing by VoIP and videoconferencing for day-to-day management.

The management of OCCASION followed closely the one for Silk, with the same people sitting on both boards, thus creating positive synergy effects. Three board meetings were held. The same situation applies for the Executive Committee, which in addition has two members of each Silk NREN on board. Their meetings are usually organised via the Cisco meeting service.

It seems to be difficult to establish a proper understanding among Silk NRENs for the need for regular reports. Therefore, only quarterly reports are demanded. But more significantly, it would also seem that among Silk NRENs there is little understanding of the need to provide evidence to the project funders of beneficiary's commitment to the project, in terms of contributing to it without external payment, as well as in terms of the willingness to demonstrate (document) project impact.

Some partners still seem to have difficulties in dealing with the EC forms.

The following deliverables have been produced:

- Project Description (D1.1) and
- The impact of the Silk and Occasion projects during the first year of the project (D1.2)

Both were to be delivered in Feb 2006 but were finally available in June and July 2006 respectively. This does not give cause for concern due to the delayed start of the project in general, which was caused by events outside the project (See section 2: Objectives)

WP 2 - Silk Project Management and Information Services

There are four objectives of this Work package. One is to manage the current Silk Project itself, to ensure that it operates efficiently, follows best practice, and meets the needs of the Silk NRENs and its funders. The second is to ensure the medium and longer-term viability of the Silk Project by making the correct arrangements with current funders, and having close links with potential future funders. There is a related activity of liaison with similar projects in other regions, but that is dealt with in WP6. The third is to provide information on the project both to inside participants and outside interested parties. Finally, the project should evaluate and facilitate the best choices for the provision of Internet services during and after the end of OCCASION and Silk.

This work package has been subdivided into seven individual tasks:

- **Silk Project Management**
Apart from the management activities mentioned in WP1 the project manager has also helped with the management of the Silk-2 Request for bids and the interaction with other funders. Members of the Exco have been asked to assist NATO in evaluating its Network Infrastructure grants (NIGs).
- **Silk-2 Procurement**
OCCASION has taken an active role in the procurement of Silk-2 and has achieved a very good result in obtaining a satellite bandwidth of 120/30 Mbps. In addition the use of compressor boxes should improve the useable bandwidth further.
- **Transition Strategy and Liaison with Current and Potential Funders**
There have been specific activities concerning co-funding of satellite bandwidth. These have resulted in 41% co-funding by Silk NRENs in Silk-1. Similar co-funding arrangements for Silk-2 will be discussed as soon as the infrastructure becomes available.
To achieve a common understanding between the principal funders and the Silk NREN partners on sustainability, a workshop was held on NREN sustainability - funded by OSI and NATO, but under the auspices of CEENet.
However, the reviewers are surprised to find that little output from this workshop is visible, in terms of sustainability reports in the line of what was recommended to OCCASION from the reviews on the predecessor SPONGE project.
- **Silk-wide Activities of the NRENs**
All the Silk NRENs took delivery of equipment needed for new Cisco Academy courses. NATO has funded a Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) in each Silk country under another NIG. The equipment is not yet cleared for export to the Silk NRENs.
NATO has funded a video-conferencing facility at each Silk NREN under a third NIG.
- **Extensions of the NRENs**
NREN's report on most of their changes and progress in the regular Quarterly Reports. However, the corresponding activities and/or willingness to document them are not of the same intensity in all countries involved.
- **Measures towards Sustainability in the NRENs**
It was not possible to have serious discussions with the NRENs on the move towards sustainability in the absence of being able to give full details on Silk-2. However, in

D2.1 a status report attempts to outline improvements for each NREN.

Deliverable D2.2 should address co-funding of Silk during Y1 and present a co-funding model for Y2. The first part was described but the second part was delayed on the argument that discussions about co-funding can only be started in earnest once Silk-2 becomes operational.

Instead of the original D2.2 the project offered an alternative report on measures toward sustainability in the Silk/Occasion countries. A crude questionnaire was used to investigate the following areas: International connectivity, National infrastructure, NREN organisation, NREN funding, NREN users, NREN user services. From the results, which bare limited informative value and offer no analysis, it is claimed that sustainability is evenly distributed over these six defined issues, with progress towards sustainability most significant in the areas of “National infrastructure” and “User support”.

Deliverables D2.1 and D2.2 as well as its supposed replacement are so vague and poor in descriptive quality and in terms of their real content that they can not be accepted by the review panel.

- Information and Web Services

An OCCASION web site has been set up with links to the Silk NRENs’ web sites. Not all of them do have an own web site and not all of them are also available in English yet. The reviewers believe that NREN web sites are an important part of NREN outreach to user communities as well as sources of information/documentation, which can demonstrate to the funders, NREN/National commitments to OCCASION, namely to its sustainability and impact on the user communities.

It is recommended that improved versions of D2.1 (The status of the Silk NRENs and their plans for connectivity) and D2.2 (Co-funding to Silk during 1st year and agreed funding model for 2nd year) be reissued within three months time, together with D5.2 (The potential User Groups within the Silk countries).

WP 3 - Network Management

The objective of the Silk NOC is to manage the different components of the Silk network, ensuring that they are correctly and optimally configured for their purpose. The objective of WP3 is the configuration of those components of the Silk Network, which reflect directly on the provision of personal communications, IPv6 and caching which are required for the OCCASION project.

The Silk Network Operations Centre (SNOC) has been operating Silk-1 and will also do so for Silk-2. It has also supported carrying out tests with a Russian satellite, assisting in the writing of the Request for Bids, answering questions from potential bidders, evaluating the bids and negotiating both the technical aspects of the winning bid and the contract. In the process various additional tests, like compression tests.

Bandwidth adjustment for specific user communities and applications for both VoIP and video-conferencing have been in operation.

Caching is still an unresolved issue due to export permissions not granted yet. But the reviewers find this to be of insignificant importance for the project, even if it must be given up. It should also be noted that as web content has become more dynamic and driven from databases the use of caching often gives limited benefit in reducing the bandwidth requirements. Some European NRENs and universities who previous used caching have now abandoned it as the management overhead and costs often outweighs the benefit. However, if static content is being addressed the use of mirror sites in some instances for popular sites could be useful.

The reviewers find that the network, to the extent that Silk-2 is implemented, is managed well, and are confident that the actual network will be functioning technically well as long as the project is funded from outside.

WP 4 - Technical Work and Personal Communications

Technical Developments, which are needed to take maximum advantage of the potential of the Silk Network include deployment of mechanisms for personal communication like Voice/IP, video and shared workspace, their use over IPv6 networks, and caching.

Quality of Service (QoS) for VoIP and Conferencing has been integrated into the SILK hub. VoIP and H.323 Conferencing has been implemented but there was limited use of VoIP due to various problems. Therefore, to use video-conferencing for the OCCASION meetings was preferred. There was no IPv6 activity. This is expected to get started in 2007. The problem with getting caching operational has been mentioned elsewhere.

The reviewers find the technical work and deployment of mechanisms for personal communications to be very good and the project has proven that QoS techniques can be effectively used over relatively low bandwidth links to 'guarantee' the delivery of selected services.

WP5 - User Groups

This WP should identify, set up and help maintain user groups spanning interests between the Silk country researchers and European ones.

Several of the Silk NRENs have taken steps identifying user groups and their respective needs and requirements. These user groups are interested in many fields of scientific work and in collaboration with European partners. However, at present most user group support is directed toward distance education. Virtually no support is given as yet to scientific users. This is expected to change with the availability of Silk-2.

Detailed information on the potential user groups within the Silk countries was to be provided in deliverable D5.2. This was only made available as a very rough draft the day before the review.

Because of its poor quality, deliverable D5.2. could not be accepted by the review panel. A reissue should be more informative as well as analytical about the OCCASION project's current and potential impact on user communities (Which institutions receive services, at present, what proportion of Silk and national bandwidth is used, for which purposes? And how might Silk/OCCASION change this?).

It is suggested that the NRENs also define the different stakeholders involved in universities and other sites connected to their NRENs. Points such as whether users are researchers, teachers, and/or students, and in what subject areas, should be addressed so that a picture of the user communities using the NRENs can be built up. An analysis of which communities of potential users are not using the NREN and the benefits they could get by becoming users should also be developed so that cases can be made for securing additional funding to improve the NRENs' outreach and user base, which will help in moving the NRENs to sustainable positions.

Training of user groups was provided in two CEENet workshops. There is only little indication that contact with users for training purposes has been ongoing on a national scale.

WP6 Liaison and Dissemination

It is important that not only are good things done in the Silk/OCCASION project, but that they are so seen to be done. It is the objective of this WP to ensure that such dissemination is carried out.

Progress in the various activities seems to have been presented by the NRENs to their respective users. The project has been presented at a number of conferences.

However, the foreseen deliverables for this reporting period D6.1 (Plan for using and disseminating knowledge) and D6.2 (Dissemination during 1st year and plans for 2nd year) were not available, and can, therefore not be accepted by the review panel.

c. Have planned milestones and deliverables been achieved for the reporting period?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

Milestones and deliverable were all late. The originally foreseen deliverable D2.2 (Co-funding to Silk during 1st year and agreed funding model for 2nd year) could not be produced at all and the project suggested that its focus on co-funding should be changed to sustainability. D2.1 (The status of the Silk NRENs and their plans for connectivity) was seen by the review panel to be of very poor value and should be reissued.

Both subjects are of utmost importance and both should be pursued further, since without credible progress on these issues, it is hard for the reviewers to believe that the project is a worthwhile endeavour for the funders to support any further.

d. Have resources been deployed as foreseen in Annex I, overall and for each participant?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

Deployment of resources depends much on the availability funds. Pre-payments have not been transferred to the partners in full yet because this was conditional on the presentation of detailed plans on how these funds will be spent; only some were presented so far.

The reviewers regret to experience that partners have not been willing to present detailed plans on how funds will be spent, without first been given payment. Hence, the reviewers applaud the fact that resources have not been deployed. The reviewers can only regret that NATO does not agree to limit the supply of its bandwidth along the same line of reasoning.

e. Have costs incurred, i.e., personnel costs and other major cost items, been 1) necessary for the implementation of the project and 2) economic. Note that both aspects 1) and 2) have to be covered in the answer.

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

Despite the fact that the project has not fully taken off the costs incurred so far where necessary to get things moving at all. The amounts spent are justified.

4. WORK PLANNED FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

Is the proposed plan for the next period satisfactory?

a. from a scientific/technical point of view?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The original objectives are still valid. It is expected that, once the infrastructure is available to the NIS partners, they will also work actively toward achieving them.

The plans presented by the project for the next year were outlined under the following headings:

- Fundamental Services
- Application Services
- Sustainability Activity
- Education Activity
- Short Term Activity
- IPv6 Activity
- Additional Funders
- Preparation for Fibre
- Long Term - Future Steps
- Funding Steps

The reviews found the areas covered to be relevant and well argued, except when it came to the non scientific/technical issues, elaborated below.

b. from a management point of view including use of resources?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The management structure is well established. There is no need for changes of the structure. The full availability of video-conferencing facilities should improve the management tasks significantly. However, there is a need for the management to shift its main focus from scientific/technical issues to issues of a more political and administrative nature. i.e. to put more effort into the non scientific/technical issues, elaborated below.

c. concerning non-scientific activities (dissemination, exploitation, training, science-society issues, further integration etc)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

As emphasised in the review recommendations, there is a need for the management to shift its main focus from scientific/technical issues:

- to how the project aims to fulfil its main objective to “... *set the scene for the Silk NRENS to move to a sustainable NREN infrastructure with good performance within its financial limitations*”,
- to demonstrating how the project has any lasting impact on its target user groups (research and education institutions),
- and to demonstrating that the stakeholders/beneficiaries have real interest in the project, apart from as a source of income.

The reviews found it worrying that so much attention is given to raising funds for the period during and after the project. This could lead one to believe that the project itself does not believe in its own plans for sustainability without continued external financial aid.

The project asked for the reviewers to evaluate a request for help to solve the timing gap between the end of OCCASION and end of the current Silk-2 project. Without a solution to this, the Silk-2 project would be running to its end without support from OCCASION from 1 November 2007. In the light of the shortcomings of OCCASION until now, the review panel decided that they would only recommend that the EC allocate any further funding if there was firm evidence that the project team had made some tangible and effective attempts to address the issues and recommendations made in this review.

The plans for the next year are expected to become clearer if/when the main recommendations of this review are followed (See section 1. *OVERALL ASSESSMENT*; part *b. Recommendations*).

With the availability of the new infrastructure a more credible dissemination campaign can be started. This is reflected by the presentation of a proactive dissemination plan in the Periodic Activity Report Number 1.

5. CONSORTIUM PARTNERSHIP

a. Has the collaboration between the participants been effective?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The collaboration between the partners is somewhat hampered by the fact that there does not exist a common language for communication. Everything has to be translated into/from Russian.

Collaboration between the participants has been effective when it comes to technical network building. But collaboration understood as working together in pursuit of the overall common good of building sustainable national NREN's, and possibly even a regional network, seems to suffer from a lack of a common understanding of what kind of commitment such a project should have from its stakeholders. NATO and EC are supporting a project believed to be in the self interest of the beneficiary countries, but at the same time the beneficiary countries seem reluctant to work in the interests of the project (like reporting) unless they are paid to do so. Hence the reviewers can not understand why the Caucasus and Central Asian countries seem unwilling to contribute and e.g. supply the reports needed, to such an extent, that the lack of them renders the reviewers to believe that there is a serious lack of commitment from their side.

b. Have the partners contributed as planned to the project and tasks assigned to them?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The European partners seem to have been the driving force so far. The actual contribution of the NIS partners seems in many cases very unclear.

c. Do you identify any conflicts or evidence of underperforming partners, lack of commitment or change of interest of any partners? Do you recommend any changes in responsibilities?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

There don't seem to be any real conflicts but, the delayed project start and the fact that funds became available rather late caused a rather reduced commitment by some partners. Therefore, actual work on the project started only a few months ago. A possible lack of commitment from some partners might, however, be apparent from the reports that are recommended by this review.

6. MANAGEMENT

a. Has the scientific/technical management been performed as required?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

This has been primarily the responsibility of the European partners who performed quite well. The members sitting on the Silk and the OCCASION Board are identical and include representatives from all partners. Three board meetings took place in the reporting period. Likewise there is a common Executive Committee (Exco).

b. Has the administrative and financial management been performed as required ((including proper handling of contractual matters, maintenance of the consortium agreement, intellectual property rights, technical collective responsibility, sub-contracting, competitive calls)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The statement under a) above is true also for the financial matters.

c. Have (electronic) information and communication networks been established as required to support interactive working between the teams involved (if relevant)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

For real collaboration between the partners, direct communication between all of them is necessary. By the end of the period, both audio-conferencing and video-conferencing facilities had been installed.

Exco teleconferences used the Cisco system. VoIP proved to be of limited use because of language problems and because of the difficulty in coordinating meetings. Therefore, video-conferencing facilities were used and regular video conferences (every two weeks) were organised.

However, it has not been possible to put in an augmented VoIP system yet. Therefore, there have not been the regular audio meetings of the whole project, or even individual work-packages, which are needed for a project to make real progress on technical matters.

d. Is the consortium interacting in a satisfactory manner with other related 5th and 6th Framework projects or other R&D national/international programmes (if relevant)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

There is great interest in GEANT, as well as in the education programmes of the Cisco Academy and the World Bank.

7. USE AND DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

a. Does the project have significant use potential (if applicable)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

The project should help to improve existing and create new scientific partnerships between NIS and European scientists. There is evidence that the project partners seem willing to work with each other. However, there is a long way to go before the level of commitment and collaboration is sufficient.

b. Is the Plan for the Use and Dissemination of Knowledge developing in a satisfactory manner?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

A number of activities have been started to make the project known and attractive to other institutions outside the partner institutions in their respective countries.

The project was present at IST-2006, EuroIndia 2006 and the TERENA Networking Conference. Now that the Silk-2 infrastructure is known, arrangements with the World Bank and the University of Central Asia as additional outside activities can be made.

c. Have the contractors disseminated project results and information as foreseen by the contract and the plan for dissemination and use of knowledge (publications, conferences...)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

A fair number of dissemination actions have taken place. What is still missing is appropriate information for specific user groups in Europe about the new possibilities of collaboration with partners from the project countries.

d. Are potential users and other stakeholders (outside the consortium) suitably involved (if applicable)?

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

Not really yet. But an attempt has been made already to identify new user groups.

8. OTHER ISSUES

a. Have policy-related and/or regulatory issues been properly handled (if applicable)?

NOT APPLICABLE

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

Since the aim of the project is to establish an effective and efficient use of the Silk-2 infrastructure accepted standards will be applied.

b. Have ethical issues been appropriately handled (if applicable)?

NOT APPLICABLE

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

c. Have safety issues been properly handled (if applicable)?

NOT APPLICABLE

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

d. Has progress on the Gender Action Plan been satisfactory (if applicable for this reporting period)?

NOT APPLICABLE

Yes

Partially

No

Comments:

Name of the reviewer: Robin Graeme Arak

Date:

Signature(s):

Name of the reviewer: Hans-Peter Axmann

Date:

Signature(s):

Name of the reviewer: Rene Belsø

Date:

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