

# Is a Current Research Information System (CRIS) a critical corporate system for HEIs? A Case Study from the University of St Andrews

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## Keywords

CRIS, Information Management, REF, Enterprise Architecture, Open Access, Research Data Management

## 1. Abstract

With over half of all UK Universities using a commercial Current Research Information System (CRIS) to manage and promote institutional research activity and output, this paper examines the drivers behind this rapid adoption and how the CRIS has raised awareness within central units (Registry, HR, Finance) of how they 'fit into the bigger picture' of research within the University. It also looks at how the CRIS has adapted to the rapidly changing funder policies around open access to research outputs and data.

## 2. A brief history of CRIS in the UK

The Universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen were the first to implement the Pure<sup>1</sup> commercial CRIS in 2009. The main driver then was the recent RAE2008 exercise which had required the preparation, validation and submission of research performance data (outputs, students, project funding, staff ) from the previous 6 years. St Andrews and Aberdeen were by no means unique in finding this process resource-intensive, for both administrative staff and researchers. Issues included the fact that the data required was often siloed in HR, student and finance systems. The key feature of Pure, or similar CRIS systems, such as Converis<sup>2</sup> (Thomson Reuters) or Elements<sup>3</sup> (Symplectic) is that it pulls together research-related information from all areas of the Institution, providing appropriate access to users, including researchers who can manage their publication, activities and impact and highlight any errors in centrally held student or project data, as well as for research managers throughout the Institution.

In the REF2014 assessment exercise the process of data preparation and submission was vastly improved, with all areas of the submission managed through Pure.

According to a report (Russell, 2012<sup>4</sup>) 51 Universities had adopted a CERIF<sup>5</sup>-based CRIS by the end of 2011. More recently a survey by James Toon, University of Edinburgh in Summer 2014 found that all but 7 of the top institutions ranked by RAE2008 research income had a CRIS.

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<sup>1</sup> Pure, Elsevier, <http://www.elsevier.com/online-tools/research-intelligence/products-and-services/pure>

<sup>2</sup> Converis, Thomson Reuters, <http://thomsonreuters.com/converis/>

<sup>3</sup> Elements, Symplectic <http://symplectic.co.uk/products/elements/>

<sup>4</sup> Rosemary, R. (2012). *Adoption of CERIF in UK Higher Education Institutes. A Landscape Study*. UKOLN, University of Bath.

<sup>5</sup> CERIF (Common European Research Information Format) is an internationally recognized standard for research information exchange. It is maintained by [www.eurocris.org](http://www.eurocris.org)

### **3. The St Andrews experience : how corporate is a CRIS?**

Pure is managed by the Research Policy Office at the University of St Andrews, but is used widely in the Library and within Schools. The information exposed via the CRIS has widespread ownership across corporate functions : Registry, Finance and Human Resources, leading to an increased awareness within the central units of how they 'fit into the bigger picture' of research within the University.

Researchers, by and large, engage well with the system and many Schools, groups and individuals reuse the data in Pure on their own or in collaborative websites<sup>6</sup>. There is recognition that the CRIS saves time for the researchers as they can enter/collect their research outputs and activities together in one place for reuse elsewhere. This was reinforced by the overwhelmingly negative response from researchers across many institutions to the introduction of Researchfish in 2014 to collect outputs from Research Council funded grants. Researchfish does not allow bulk upload of outputs institutional CRIS, thus obliging researchers to re-enter substantial amounts of data. The Research Councils are working with the systems suppliers and Universities to build in bulk upload for future collections.

The CRIS also drives the public-facing research portal<sup>7</sup>, a key means for the University to advertise its research activity and outputs, attracting staff and students alike.

Pure is classified as a critical corporate system, subject to the same resilience and business continuity measures as the Finance, HR and Student Record Systems.

Away from the primary uses of the CRIS to manage and make accessible research information, the implementation is a prime example of the application of basic information management principles :

1. Enter data once.
2. Make data accessible on demand (according to security role).
3. Make use of standards. (Pure is CERIF compliant)

### **4. Reacting to policy changes**

Over the last few years, the funder policy landscape has changed rapidly particularly in the area of open access to research outputs, both publications, and more recently, research data. Whilst there are substantial procedural and, in some cases, organizational changes required to support these changes at the institutional level, the modifications required to Pure have been reasonably straightforward. These include adding additional workflow and metadata to support the HEFCE Open Access policy and providing both data catalogue and data repository functionality to support funder data management policies. Integration with standards such as ORCID and Datacite are also provided.

The use of a familiar interface also helps ensure engagement with the new procedures and policies from the researcher community.

### **5. Conclusion**

In answer to the question posed in the paper's title, the CRIS has undoubtedly become one of the key corporate systems at St Andrews, and likewise at many other, particularly research-intensive, universities. The adoption of CRIS has also raised awareness amongst other stakeholders across the research sector - funders, publishers, third party information suppliers - of the importance of standards for building efficient and effective information exchange procedures. As these standards-based exchange procedures become implemented, Universities and other stakeholders will benefit from better quality and more comprehensive data to support decision-making at all levels - from government downwards.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://phyesta.supa.ac.uk/staff/prof-andrew-cameron>

<sup>7</sup> <http://risweb.st-andrews.ac.uk/portal/>

## **6. AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES**

Anna is Head of Research Data and Information Services, moving to the Library from ITS in 2013. She has previously held posts as Programme Manager, Data Architect and Enterprise Architect and was also co-opted to serve as Senior Research Policy Advisor in 2011.

Her current role consolidates her skills and expertise in research information management and policy development. She is a tireless advocate of the basic management information principles of entering data once and using open standards to improve data quality whilst minimizing data collection burden across the research sector.

Anna is Executive for strategy on the euroCRIS Board, a member of the Snowball Metrics Steering Committee and chairs the Pure UK Strategy Group and the CASRAI-UK Data Management Planning Working Group.