

The future of the CCIRN (a discussion note)

The history of the CCIRN goes back to the 1980s. Research networking worldwide has developed significantly since then, and the role of the CCIRN has changed with it. Initially, the CCIRN was the single forum where research networking people from different continents met to discuss common issues and agree on solutions, in particular as regards intercontinental connectivity. In a second phase (in the 1990s), the CCIRN concentrated more on issues of technical development work, and a number of working groups for specific technical areas were established. In the most recent phase in history, these working groups were disbanded again, and CCIRN meetings consisted mostly of a very large number of presentations on all sorts of developments in the various continents. This is useful, but the effect is limited as CCIRN meetings have a small audience.

On the positive side, we must notice that the organisational structures in research networking worldwide have become much stronger in the past ten years. TERENA has become well-established as the organisation for collaborative activities of National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) in Europe, and DANTE, the joint operational unit of those NRENs, has developed into a very professional company. In the United States, Internet2 was established and it has grown into a strong organisation with all relevant networking organisations in its constituency and a range of activities. In Canada, CANARIE remains a very well-established organisation. In the Asia-Pacific region, APAN has developed further and has in our perception become stronger and more representative. And as a recent development, in Latin America CLARA was established as an organisation similar to TERENA and DANTE in Europe.

All these continental organisations have their own successful conferences, their technical working groups and their network infrastructure management organisation. Thereby they also fill the holes that the CCIRN aimed to fill in the past:

- Arrangements on intercontinental connections are made in direct contacts between the operational organisations from the different continents.
- Technical development work is undertaken and co-ordinated in working groups per continent; it turns out that establishing co-ordination between those groups is a much better solution than trying to set up worldwide working groups, which would be hindered by cultural differences and time-consuming and expensive intercontinental travel.
- And updates on developments in the different continents are presented at the increasingly successful regional conferences: the TERENA Networking Conferences, the Internet2 Meetings, CANARIE's Advanced Networks Workshops and the APAN Meetings.

We feel that the CCIRN should now move to a next phase, building on the much improved organisational structures at the continental level, and position itself as the informal association of the continental organisations (TERENA, Internet2, CANARIE, APAN, CLARA).

With the continental organisations feeling responsible for the CCIRN, it will be easier to provide some support functions to the CCIRN, by sharing them between the TERENA Secretariat, the Internet2 staff, the CANARIE staff, the APAN Secretariat and the CLARA Secretariat. [The fact that the maintenance of the CCIRN website is now officially entrusted to the APAN Secretariat is already a good step in that direction.]

The CCIRN can develop into a body where the relevant managers and experts from the continental organisations meet to discuss issues of common interest.

If needed, they can use the CCIRN to make their views known and to defend their interest at a global level. (A role that was once perhaps undertaken by the Internet Society, which has now moved to a wider field.)

The CCIRN website could develop into a useful instrument. For example, it could serve as a portal that refers, on a per-topic basis, to the development and deployment activities that are ongoing in the continental organisations.

Another idea would be to maintain some world maps on the CCIRN website, to illustrate and measure the progress of research networking. This is to be compared to the well-known Internet maps of the world that Larry Landweber used to publish regularly. While the Landweber maps simply showed which countries were connected to the Internet, current maps could show which countries have Gigabit research networks, which countries have a research network based on customer-controlled fibre, etc.

In the CCIRN meeting in Poznan we would like to discuss these ideas, and to brainstorm about useful functions that could be undertaken by the CCIRN as a "global association of continental research networking organisations".

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