

Working Group Name: Research Software Engineering in the Arts and Humanities - Community Interest Group

Coordinators

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Potential participants:

The Research Software Engineering in the Arts and Humanities (AH) Community Interest Group (CIG) is open to anyone involved or interested in the Research Software Engineering (RSE) community in the Arts and Humanities, broadly conceived. From software developers to digital humanities researchers, from back- & front-end engineers, UX/UI designers, analysts, systems administrators to product / project and research and infrastructure managers, the CIG can be joined by anyone working, collaborating or researching around AH RSE, regardless of career stage, institutional affiliation, educational background, employability status. By embracing the core values of the Association, the CIG aims to create an open, inclusive, collaborative, and safe space where any form of discrimination, harassment will not be tolerated.

Abstract

The Research Software Engineering in the Arts and Humanities Community interest group aims to offer a forum for the Research Software Engineering (RSE) community working and collaborating in Arts and Humanities across UK and Ireland for more focused discussion, expertise and knowledge exchange, action, advocacy and policy making towards the development of AH RSE capability.

The CGI recognises that AH RSEs belong to the broad category of Research Technology Professionals which UKRI acknowledges are key to the delivery of high quality research. It aims to work in alignment with the UK RSE Society and other relevant national initiatives in the UK and Ireland such as the Software Sustainability Institute and the Society of Research Software Engineers.

Relevance

AH RSEs are often conceived as an invisible workforce in some ways, working in enabling roles at the intersection of research and technology, but have become an increasingly key component in interdisciplinary, computationally intensive research, working alone and in teams and across an extraordinary range of research disciplines and sectors. In addition to being part of a wider professional community, where the challenges of working in interdisciplinary groups bring valuable new skills and methods from other fields, AH RSEs have significant domain knowledge gained through domain-specific work within their immediate stakeholder community and this is essential to the delivery of high quality research and impact outcomes. This requires attention to domain-specific AH RSE experiences and requirements, to maximise the potential for RSEs to contribute to key activities and investments in Digital Humanities in the UK and Ireland.

In addition, AH RSE expertise and perspective are also key to remove barriers and improve access to AH and GLAM data, models, narratives, policies, workflows and connect global datasets to expand research capability and cultural impact as well as to increase the societal impact of research and cultural heritage. AH RSEs can also encourage, enable, and train non-technical AH researchers to lead technical projects to ensure that projects are research- rather than technology-led. At the same time, AH - RSE collaborations force AH researchers to think about collaboration in new ways that span across sectors and expertise and can contribute to the definition of refreshed AH research culture, assessment and values while addressing sustainability and infrastructure needs of the field. Finally, it is crucial to understand and value

the importance of AH RSE as their skills are in high demand in the commercial and government sectors, competition for RSEs is intense and there is broad acknowledgement that investment needs to be made to ensure adequate training, remuneration, and career pathways are available.

UK AH RSE community is a subset of a much larger cross-disciplinary and cross-sector group of RSEs who “combine expertise in programming with an intricate understanding of research” and research infrastructures.¹ Over the past decade the role of software development is increasingly recognised by the UK and Irish research community and the contribution of Research Software Engineers (RSE) to UK and Irish research and science has grown markedly. The RSE community has also been recognised and supported by funding bodies for its contribution and further enabled by initiatives such as [The Society of Research Software Engineering \(SocRSE\)](#) and [The Software Sustainability Institute \(SSI\)](#). A number of HE and IRO institutions have been also been supporting and championing the availability and integration of software skills in UK and Irish research and the RSE community more broadly. The AH RSE community has matured significantly in the last five years, benefiting from the above mentioned national RSE initiatives, and commitment to interdisciplinarity and cultural change at a national and international level. High profile AHRC-UKRI investments in particular, such as [Living With Machines](#) (who benefitted from an AH RSE as acting PI) and [Towards a National Collection](#), as well as the cross-council investment in [Digital Research Infrastructure](#), have demonstrated the pressing need to tap into the collective wisdom of the AH RSE community and to improve AH RSE capacity. Major infrastructural initiatives in Europe, including long-standing projects such as [DARIAH](#) (of which [Ireland](#) is a member) and [CLARIN](#), and the recent [European Cultural Heritage Cloud](#), have also highlighted the central importance of RSEs to the success of major strategic initiatives.

The establishment of a community-driven AH RSE special interest group within the UK-EI Digital Humanities Association has been initially conceived/proposed through a recent ‘blue-sky’ initiative and an AH RSE steering group, as part of the AHRC Infrastructure for Digital Innovation and Curation in Arts and Humanities (iDAH) programme, co-facilitated by Dr Anna-Maria Sichani and Prof James Smithies. These discussions resulted in a report and a set of recommendations to AHRC-UKRI regarding better integration of AH RSE across iDAH and other AHRC and UKRI strategic priorities. However, this AH RSE special interest group’s goals and aims extend beyond iDAH’s scope and provision, to encompass the entire Arts and Humanities research community.

¹ Software Sustainability Institute (SSI), ‘Research Software Engineers’, *Software Sustainability Institute*, <https://www.software.ac.uk/research-software-engineers>. Accessed 07 July 2022.

Aims & Activities

The AH RSE CIG will adopt a bottom-up structure, meeting up (in a hybrid form) biannually, allowing the participants of the group to organise and agree each time on the priorities, needs and actions of the group. Some of the overall goals and suggested initial activities for the SIG include:

1)Community-focused discussions

The AH RSE SIG aims to bring together the AH RSE community across UK and Ireland to discuss and address major community and research challenges including reconsideration of funding mechanisms (to better distribute RSE capacity across the UK and Ireland and incentivise institutions to provide permanent contracts and improve the working conditions of RSEs); changes to research policy (to provide RSEs with the option of acting as PI, ensuring adequate technical review of funding bids, and providing funding for infrastructural development); development of role descriptions, career paths, and training for staff and students; and environmentally friendly and economically sustainable digital workflows, job postings.

actions

- Creation and monitoring of a secure mailing list (using existing Jisc infrastructure)
- Web and social media presence (subject to resources)
- Bi-annual hybrid meetings

2) Advocacy and policy-focused interventions

Community-driven discussions should result in advocacy and policy making initiatives for the AH RSE community in the first instance. From job security and progression, access to research funding, credit and recognition of their work in research contexts, collaboration frameworks, advocacy and policy changes need to strategically occur at this domain-specific level, enhancing RSE support for the AH research community and building the capacity for AH RSEs to contribute their valuable perspectives to the healthy development of the national RSE community, as well as the national AH community in the UK and Ireland.

Also, this CIG will enable connections with national RSE groups and initiatives from widely divergent domains while strategically lobbying and promoting AH RSEs importance in a cross-domain and cross-sector framework to funders and stakeholders. It will thus help to highlight the AH RSE community from an invisible workforce to a central and integral part of the Arts and Humanities in the digital era. One direct action for this CIG is to contribute and liaise with the AHRC RSE Advisory Group and to provide AHRC with actionable, costed, and validated

recommendations for policy, investment, and strategy. In this direction AHRC (and Irish Research Council (IRC)) might also provide modest seed funding for SIG's activities. Efforts will be made to address IRC which is already in partnership with AHRC for the delivery of DH-specific funding schemes as well as other AH funding via HERA. Finally, policy for AH RSEs should be aligned to and inform national and international initiatives in place on RSE related issues and create valuable synergies.

actions

- Collaborate and liaise with AHRC RSE Advisory Group (annually)
- Reach out to IRC to socialise AHRC RSE Advisory Group recommendations
- Monitor and contribute as needed to national and international-level RSE discussions and developments

3) Knowledge exchange and collaboration

This SIG will offer a communication and network forum for the AH RSE community across UK and Ireland to embark on a number of knowledge exchange activities that will further support their talent development, capability building, and enhancement of cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaboration. Knowledge transfer initiatives could range from domain-specific or project-specific knowledge, technologies, tools, workflows and processes, documentation, to working culture hacks and code of ethics. They will include both formal and informal opportunities, such as mailing-list discussions, training, hackathons, code reviews, pair programming, face-to-face Q&A sessions. The SIG aims to develop and provide AH RSEs across UK and Ireland with resources and support as required (possibly delivered via cross-institutional and vendor partnerships) in collaboration with existing RSE-focused initiatives such as SSI, SocRSE, [N8 CIR](#) and [DHTech](#).

actions

- Series of annual training events, in collaboration / complementing other existing training initiatives in UK-IR
- Liaising with relevant national and international RSE initiatives to coordinate or contribute to a plan of KE activities