

# Virtual Research Environments: supporting research and researcher development

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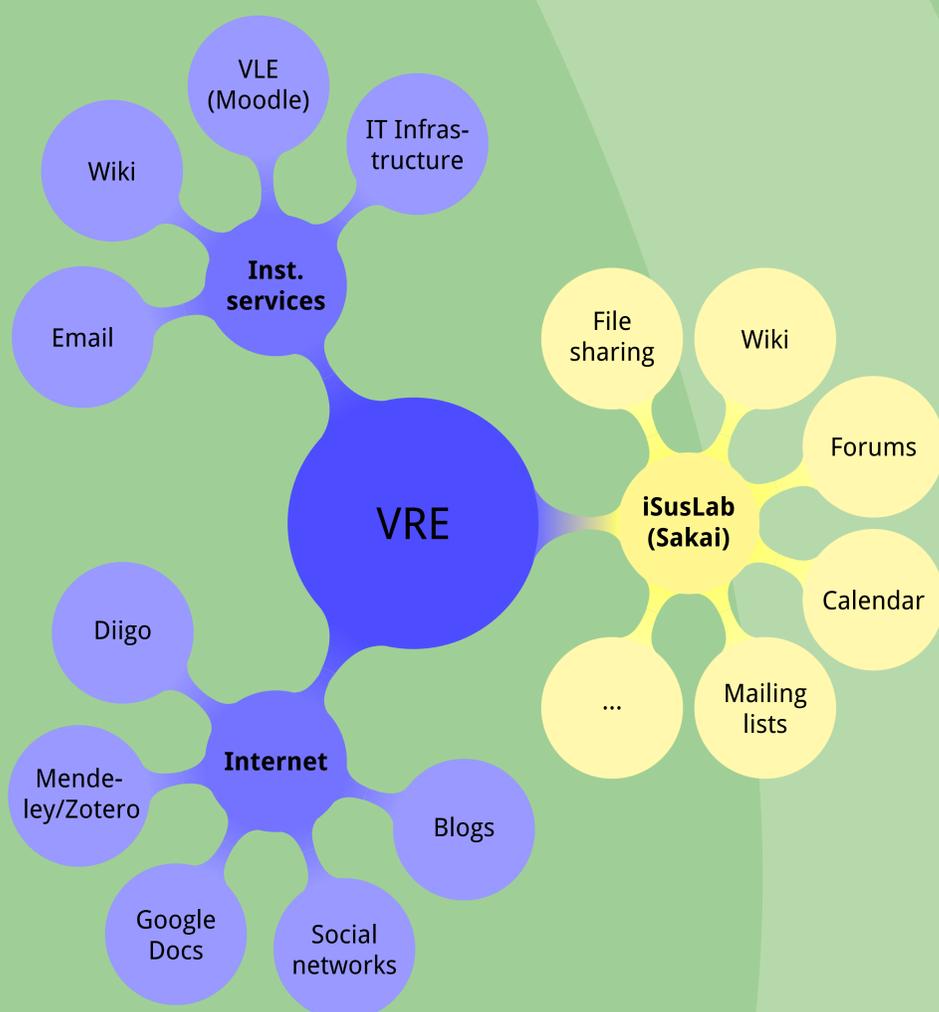
## What is a VRE?

- ▶ A set of online tools to support researchers;
- ▶ Definitions are as diverse as the researchers who use them;
- ▶ Typical features:
  - ▷ Communication & collaboration tools;
  - ▷ Research data management;
  - ▷ Grid computing services;
  - ▷ Portals;
- ▶ Our current focus: **communication & collaboration**;

## Our strategy

- ▶ We have 50+ students, 30+ academics, 4 departments, 14 external/international partners;
- ▶ We want:
  - ▷ to keep geographically-diverse stakeholders in touch;
  - ▷ students to develop communication skills in a variety of media;
  - ▷ to make it easier to archive research artifacts (data, papers, etc.);

To solve these problems, we developed an online collaboration environment called **iSusLab**, based on the **Sakai Collaborative Learning Environment (CLE)**. iSusLab provides a safe, secure environment to learn about a variety of online collaboration tools, and to put them to practical use to carry out industrially-relevant interdisciplinary research.



## Why Sakai?

- ▶ Secure:
  - ▷ Divided into separate "worksites" with individual access control;
  - ▷ Easy to make a private worksite for a particular project;
- ▶ Flexible:
  - ▷ Many communication tools are available (see above);
  - ▷ Each worksite can use as few or as many of those tools as needed;
  - ▷ Use exactly the tools needed for a project or group;
- ▶ Open source:
  - ▷ Low cost;
  - ▷ Easy to customize;
  - ▷ Active & knowledgeable community;
- ▶ Web-based:
  - ▷ Accessible from anywhere;
  - ▷ No software installation;
- ▶ Built by HE for HE:
  - ▷ Designed for research/teaching;
  - ▷ Integrates with institutional systems;

## Connected Researcher @ Bath

We augmented this infrastructure with a series of workshops on social media, covering social networks, blogging, social bookmarking and social citation software. This training was run in conjunction with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences and offered to all research postgraduates at the University. See <http://go.bath.ac.uk/dby0> for more details.