FROM SYSTEM OF RECORD TO ENGINE OF IMPACT

The Case for Buying Your Research Information System

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Preface

Research institutions are currently making long-term strategic decisions about information infrastructure at an unusually important moment. Artificial intelligence is moving from pilot to operating assumption across higher education — and the institutions best positioned to benefit are those that have already solved the prerequisite problem: clean, structured, continuously maintained research data. A Research Information Management System (RIMS) is not an AI tool. It is the foundation that determines both how well AI tools work and how serviceable they can be in contributing to effective strategic decision-making.

The buy-or-build decision has always carried long-term implications. Today it carries a specific one: institutions that choose well now will enter the AI-native era of research administration with infrastructure that compounds in value. Institutions that delay, or build systems that cannot meet the integration and data quality demands of the next generation of tools, will spend those years catching up.

Building a research information system was once a manageable institutional project. The scope was clearly defined: a database of outputs, a compliance feed, a public-facing portal. That scope has expanded materially. A modern RIMS must automate compliance across multiple funders and national mandates simultaneously, feed validated data into global rankings pipelines, serve as the structured foundation for AI applications, and integrate continuously with a global ecosystem of bibliometric databases, identity systems, and grant platforms. Increasingly, that data must also be openly accessible — structured and machine-readable not just for institutional analytics but for the AI-powered tools that prospective students and researchers now use to discover institutions and evaluate their research output. The decision institutions face today is not the one they were facing five years ago — and the evidence on what building that system actually requires, and what it costs to sustain, has accumulated considerably since then. This report draws on that accumulated evidence to help institutional committees make the decision with clarity.

Executive Summary

The question of whether to buy or build a research information system has not gone away, but the decision has fundamentally changed. This report synthesises evidence from a global survey and stakeholder interviews, and a total cost of ownership (TCO) analysis to assess what the buy-or-build decision actually requires now and in the coming years. The findings point consistently in one direction: the case for buying a proven commercial Research Information Management System (RIMS, also called a CRIS) has never been stronger, and the conditions under which building is justified are narrower than most institutions recognise.

Building a research information database is achievable. Building and maintaining the integration ecosystem that makes that database credible, compliant, and connected to the global research infrastructure is not.

The stakes have risen in every dimension

Four converging forces have made the cost of inaction higher than at any previous moment. First, an accelerating compliance wave (including the US NIH immediate open access requirement in force since July 2025) that has turned funder mandate management into an exponential problem no spreadsheet can reliably solve. Second, intensifying global rankings competition that requires native bibliometric integration most DIY systems cannot credibly replicate. Third, a movement of research talent across national systems. Finally, the emergence of AI as an institutional operating expectation. As AI performance depends on data quality far more than on raw compute, a modern RIMS is the structured foundation that determines whether AI tools deliver reliable outputs.

Building costs more than institutions estimate

A Buy vs. Build analysis in 2020 established that a commercial solution saves 28-41% over a full system lifetime. This report finds that gap remains material in 2026: a five-year DIY build costs approximately USD 1,875,000 for a medium institution versus USD 635,500 for a commercial RIMS. Of 1,347 systems registered in the global RIMS directory, only 6% are built in-house — a figure that reflects not just cost, but the accumulated failure evidence of institutions that tried and abandoned the effort.

The evidence from the field is consistent

This report found that no survey respondent shifted toward "Build" after adopting Pure. Median administrative time savings are 20%; the more durable finding is role transformation — a RIMS like Pure redirects institutional capacity from system maintenance to system management. Geography and institutional type shape the value proposition but not the directional conclusion. For rising institutions in the Gulf, Latin America, and Asia-Pacific, the RIMS is not primarily an efficiency tool — it is a window to the global research landscape; at Manipal Academy in India, 70–75% of incoming PhD fellows report discovering their department through the Pure portal before joining. For smaller institutions, research shows the fixed costs of building do not scale with size, making the buy case structurally stronger, not weaker.

Three recommendations follow from the evidence

1. Buy the core research information infrastructure, because the financial, operational, and strategic case is stronger now than at any prior point.

2. Plan for selective supplementary builds from day one, particularly for grants administration and national regulatory reporting where known module gaps exist.

3. Treat governance readiness (named system ownership, leadership mandate, a data quality plan) as the real condition for value, not go-live.

A system that is launched and left becomes a database. The transition from system of record to engine of impact is not a product decision — it is an implementation decision, made and remade over time. The question is not whether to act, but rather how quickly to act.

SECTION 1:

The Decision Is Urgent: Why This Is A Turning Point

Four converging forces have made the cost of inaction — and the cost of building — higher than at any previous moment in research information management.

1.1 The compliance wave

The compliance landscape has shifted from a single-funder challenge to a multi-layered one. Open Science mandates are accelerating across every major research funding jurisdiction simultaneously, for example: the Taverne Amendment and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Research Excellence Framework (REF) requirements in the UK, CoARA signatories across Europe, and — particularly significant for North American institutions — the US NIH requirement for immediate open access (OA) upon acceptance, in force as of July 1, 2025. Plan S and cOAlition S extend this further, requiring institutions to track funder, embargo status, and OA route for every funded output. For institutions with multi-funder portfolios, this is not a linear compliance burden but rather one that scales with every new grant. The scope is not limited to Europe and North America. ANID in Chile, MinCiencias in Colombia, and DHET in South Africa each impose national output tracking obligations on publicly funded research, each with different schemas, timelines, and reporting authorities. Institutions operating across these environments face a compliance surface that no spreadsheet-based system can reliably cover.

The consequence for institutions without structured, validated research data is concrete: they are falling behind on compliance cycles, and the compliance clock does not wait for development timelines. A commercial RIMS functions in this environment not merely as a database but as an enforcement mechanism and automation layer — one that tracks funder requirements, flags embargo deadlines, and routes outputs to the correct OA pathway without manual intervention. The degree to which this has become operational infrastructure is visible at the record level: RIMS systems are now used to apply Common European Research Information Format (CERIF) metadata tagging that identifies where Rights Retention policies have been applied to individual outputs — automating what was previously a manual, output-by-output tracking task.[1]

1.2 AI readiness has changed the calculus

The integration of AI into research workflows is no longer a future-state ambition — it is an active operational expectation. This is highlighted by the fact that 61% of higher education administrators now use AI for both personal and professional purposes — more than doubling from 26% the previous year, a 2.3x increase in a single year.[2] But AI performance depends on data quality far more than on raw compute — a point consistently emphasised in policy frameworks from the OECD, IMF, and UNESCO, each of which identifies data governance and infrastructure readiness as prerequisites for AI value creation.[3]

AI readiness has an external dimension that is easy to overlook. An increasing number of prospective students now use AI-powered tools (including platforms like ChatGPT) as part of their institution selection process, querying research strengths and faculty expertise in the same way they once used search engines. These tools surface only what is publicly accessible and machine-readable. Institutions with well-structured, openly available research data are represented accurately in that landscape. Those without it risk appearing incomplete or underrepresented in the results those tools return.

In an environment where student recruitment is an increasingly important source of institutional income and competition for new students is high, the RIMS serves a role beyond internal operations — becoming part of the discovery infrastructure that determines how an institution appears to the next generation of students and researchers.

For research offices, this creates a specific and urgent problem. Institutions that lack structured, deduplicated, standards-compliant research data — researcher profiles, publication records, grant histories, collaboration networks — feed AI tools with noisy, siloed inputs and receive proportionally degraded outputs. In higher education specifically, the documented failure mode is well-established. "Colleges and universities sit on vast amounts of data [...] but the result is a federation of siloed data definitions, legacy applications, and human workflows. When AI is added to siloed or inconsistently defined research data, the AI's output will be equally flawed".[4]

A RIMS is not an AI product. It is the AI-ready data foundation — and that distinction matters. Institutions that invest in a RIMS before deploying AI get a compounding return, benefitting from well-governed, validated research data that makes every downstream AI application more reliable. Institutions without a RIMS that begin adopting AI tools may have to continue to invest even more heavily in data quality control and curation to keep up.

> *If something is available, professional, detailed, and has all the features — why put so much resources and effort to build it? It's like reinventing the wheel.*
>
> **— Prof. Kamran Arshad,**
> Assistant Vice-Chancellor Research & Graduate Studies, Ajman University (UAE)

A 2025 scoping review of 122 studies on AI for research funding organisations confirms this sequencing. AI tools can substantially reduce administrative burden, but only once institutions have assessed their "AI readiness" with data quality and governance infrastructure in place first.[5] That readiness assessment is not a technical exercise but rather a strategic one, and it should be embedded in the RIMS decision itself rather than deferred to a later stage. A survey of Spanish universities found that 62% do not yet use AI-related tools in their RIMS systems, despite having formal research information management in place. This is a signal that the window for getting ahead of this is open now, and that institutions which assess readiness before AI adoption will be better positioned than those that retrofit governance after the fact.[6]

Integration unlocks AI readiness, sequential stages, not equivalent. Our survey data confirms this ordering where deeper API integration leads all future priorities at 83%; AI-enabled features rank third at 45%, distributed evenly across regions and institution sizes. The path to AI capability runs through data infrastructure.

1.3 Rankings competition has intensified

Effective coverage by global rankings bodies is increasingly dependent on institutional research infrastructure. Institutions seeking to measure their research performance need parallel access to various ranking ecosystems, which utilize different foundational data sources. For example, THE and QS each rely on Scopus data and Field Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI) for citation-related metrics. For institutions where rankings performance is a strategic priority, this creates a concrete infrastructure requirement: ranking data must flow into the institution's research information system reliably, continuously, and in a validated format that ranking bodies accept.

Building this data flow on ranking data would require licensing a tool like Scopus independently, developing and maintaining a custom data pipeline, and achieving the same validation credibility that commercial platforms have earned through sustained investment across hundreds of institutions worldwide. At Khalifa University in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), data collection and reporting that previously required manual Scopus and SciVal compilation now runs automatically. Khalifa's Research Systems Lead described replicating Pure's bibliometric integration in-house as prohibitively difficult. For institutions where a rankings improvement is an explicit institutional target this is not a secondary consideration. It is a primary architectural one.

> *"The main reason was timeline, not cost. The time to deploy and build a custom solution would have taken longer to buy it at almost the same cost. The institution could no longer wait."*
>
> **— Francisco Durango,**
> Research System Administrator, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia)

1.4 The cost of waiting

The decision to defer acquiring or developing a RIMS is not a neutral one. Every month without a functioning RIMS carries a real operational cost — incomplete data, manual reporting cycles, missed compliance windows, and continued administrative overheads that a modern system would automate. These costs accumulate quietly, which is precisely why they are so consistently underestimated.

The implementation timeline gap makes this concrete. A DIY RIMS build typically requires 15 months to reach basic functionality, and that figure assumes a project that stays on budget and on scope, which the evidence suggests is the exception rather than the rule. A commercial RIMS implementation runs 3–12 months depending on scope. The potential 9-month differential between those two paths is not an abstraction. It is nine months of continued manual faculty profile updates, nine months of incomplete grant reporting, nine months of missed compliance cycles, and nine months of a rankings data pipeline that isn't running. The 2026 interview cohort includes institutions that have experienced both sides of this gap; their experiences are detailed in Section 5.

SECTION 2:

The Technical And Workflow Landscape Has Changed: What "Build" Means Now

Building a RIMS in 2026 is a much more complex project than was the case in previous years — the scope, the integration requirements, and the ongoing maintenance commitment have expanded in ways most institutions systematically underestimate.

2.1 From System of Record to Engine of Impact

A RIMS was originally defined by euroCRIS as the "one-stop-shop for all information related to institutional research activity".[7] Previous iterations of technical requirements might have included a database designed to store outputs, feed government reports, and show a portal.

That definition has expanded significantly. A modern RIMS is now expected to:

- Automate compliance with funder and national reporting mandates
- Power public-facing research portals that drive institutional visibility and rankings performance
- Track researcher lifecycle data for faculty evaluation and HR integration
- Feed analytics and benchmarking tools for research strategy decisions
- Integrate with the full research intelligence ecosystem (for example, bibliometric databases, grant systems, institutional repositories, and ORCID)
- Serve as the clean, structured data foundation for AI applications

Building the original version was a reasonable project. Building the current version is a different undertaking entirely.

2.2 The integration ecosystem problem

Building a research information database is achievable. Building and maintaining the integration ecosystem that makes that database credible, compliant, and connected to the global research infrastructure is a different proposition — one that demands sustained specialist IT capacity, stable resourcing, and institutional continuity that few can reliably guarantee.

A modern RIMS must integrate continuously with:

- **Global bibliometric databases** — for automated, validated publication harvesting and citation tracking
- **Researcher identity systems** — the global researcher identifier standard, for disambiguating profiles across institutions and tracking researcher mobility
- **National regulatory reporting systems** — each country's public research infrastructure has different schemas, update cycles, and validation requirements
- **Rankings data pipelines** — citation impact metrics used by major global rankings flow from specific licensed bibliometric sources; access is not guaranteed for DIY systems
- **Research grants and awards platforms, HR systems, finance systems, and institutional repositories** — each requiring custom API integration and ongoing maintenance as those systems evolve

The precise integration burden varies by institutional context. A teaching-focused institution or one with non-traditional research outputs (such as artistic works, policy research, or grey literature) may need fewer connections than a research-intensive university. But the underlying challenge is consistent: every integration required must be custom-built and maintained in-house, and the scope grows with institutional ambition. Each of these connections requires custom development at the outset and continuous maintenance as APIs change, data sources update, and compliance requirements evolve. This is not a one-time project cost but a permanent operational overhead.

This is a matter of credibility. Research data that feeds into grant applications, national reporting systems, and international rankings assessments must be validated by the agencies that consume it. Commercial RIMS platforms achieve this validation through years of cross-institutional deployment. A DIY system must prove equivalent credibility on a case-by-case basis at every grant agency, every ranking body, every national reporting authority. What "validated" means in technical terms is defined by formal standards. For example, the OpenAIRE Guidelines for RIMS Managers specify the metadata exposure requirements RIMS systems must meet to integrate with the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) — covering persistent identifiers (ORCID, Research Organization Registry (ROR), FundRef, Grant DOIs) and CERIF-based data structures that a DIY system must independently satisfy.[8]

Commercial RIMS vs. In-House Build: Key Capability Differences

Capability	Commercial CRIS	DIY Build
Bibliometric database integration	Direct, native, maintained by vendor	Custom-built; self-maintained per API change
Semantic expertise discovery	Built-in AI-powered matching	Build from scratch or license separately
Cross-institutional interoperability	Tested across hundreds of institutions	Untested schema; single-institution scope
Researcher identifier sync	Certified two-way integration	License and integrate independently
SaaS delivery and upgrade management	Vendor-managed; no internal upgrade burden	Self-managed; requires ongoing technical staff

A research administrator with genuine in-house development capacity described this barrier precisely: building the tool is not the hard part (see Section 5). Validating it and achieving credible integration with standard indexing like Scopus or Web of Science is the challenge a commercial platform has already resolved — but one which a DIY system must solve from scratch, on a case-by-case basis, with every agency and ranking body it seeks to feed.

> *Building a tool would not have been a major task, but the major task would have been to validate the system and how do I interface that system with standard indexing like Scopus or Web of Science.*
>
> **— Santhosh KV,**
> Research Administrator, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (India)

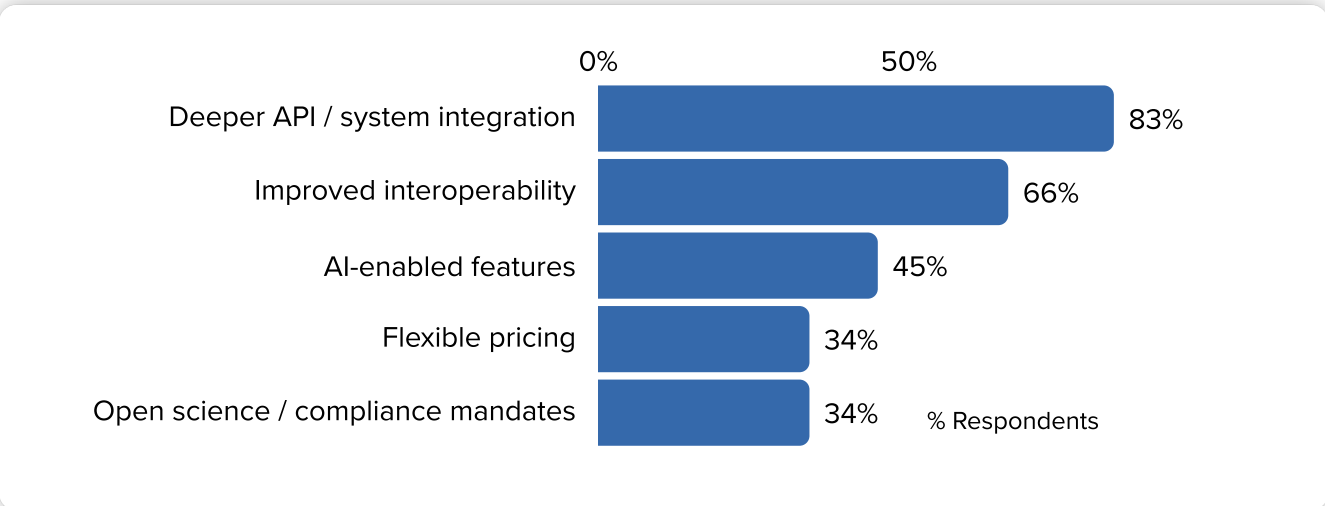
2.3 The API and integration baseline

The survey data is unambiguous on this point: deeper API integration is the single most-cited future priority, named by 83% of respondents. Improved interoperability follows at 66%. These figures come from satisfied users (institutions already running a commercial RIMS) and they still identify integration depth as the primary unmet need. For institutions starting from scratch with a DIY system, that gap is not a future concern. It is the first problem they encounter.

Building a research information database is a bounded engineering project with clearly defined parameters and requirements. Building and maintaining the integrations that make that database useful — with connections to Scopus, Web of Science, CrossRef, ORCID, national repositories, grant platforms, HR and finance systems, and ranking agency data pipelines — is a permanent, and ever-expanding, operational commitment. Every external system that a RIMS connects to has its own API versioning schedule, data schema, and update cycle. When those change, someone at the institution must update the integration. For a commercial platform, that someone is the vendor, working on behalf of hundreds of institutions simultaneously. For a DIY system, it is whoever wrote the integration originally (assuming they are still there).

Top Priorities Among Current Pure Users

Integration leads. AI follows — the path to AI capability runs through data infrastructure first.



***Source:** 2026 Pure user survey (n=29)*

2.4 Research administration has become more demanding, not less

The administrative burden of research management has grown significantly, and the survey data makes this visible. The median administrative time savings after Pure adoption are 20%, with a mean of 27% and a range running from -10% to 85%. That variance matters, because the institutions reporting the highest savings tend to be those that replaced the most manual, fragmented workflows. The consistent pattern across interviews is not that the volume of research administration is reduced following the adoption of Pure, but rather that it is redirected. Teams previously occupied with data compilation, system maintenance, and manual compliance tracking experience a shift towards data quality governance, strategic analysis, and higher-value institutional work. A system that cannot automate the core administrative workflows — publication harvesting, funder tracking, compliance routing — cannot produce that shift.

For institutions in the Gulf, for example, the compliance scope includes a layer not present in European or North American frameworks: national research priority alignment. Saudi Arabia's Research, Development, and Innovation Authority (RDIA) defines four national research priorities (Health and Wellness, Sustainable Environment and Essential Needs, Energy and Industrials, and Economies of the Future) against which all Saudi research institutions are expected to report. An institution's internal research strategy, its accreditation submissions to the National Centre for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), and its ranking KPIs must all map to these priorities. Pure currently maps research outputs to the UN Sustainable Development Goals; it does not yet offer the equivalent configuration for national priority frameworks. Saudi institutions currently perform this mapping manually, exporting raw data and processing it internally to generate the required alignment reports. For Gulf institutions evaluating a RIMS, this gap is a real and current limitation that should be factored into architecture planning — it does not undermine the buy case, but it does mean supplementary manual reporting remains a workflow until the capability is extended.

Research grants administration — spanning pre-award processes through post-award compliance — is where the scope of what a RIMS must cover is most contested, and where the gap between commercial capability and institutional need is most variable. The grants landscape is too nationally fragmented to be fully covered by any single commercial platform, and this is the area where the buy case requires the most honest evaluation. Section 7 addresses this directly, documenting where current commercial coverage holds, where it falls short, and how institutions across the cohort are navigating the gaps in practice.

2.5 Cloud hosting has shifted the default for commercial RIMS buyers

Our survey data captures a market that is in motion: 67% of respondents prefer cloud-hosted infrastructure; only 7% prefer self-hosted. The remainder are unsure or not applicable. This is not a technical preference — it reflects a change in what institutions are willing to own.

Cloud migration is not a convenience. It fundamentally changes the staffing model. On-premises Pure required a dedicated technical team for every upgrade cycle: multi-day maintenance windows, 18 months of advance planning, and a small group of individuals whose availability and institutional knowledge became structural dependencies. The absence of even one of those people could derail an entire upgrade. Cloud-hosted Pure replaces that entire overhead with a support ticket. As recently as April 2026, institutions such as Aalto University were completing this transition — a reminder that for a meaningful share of the installed base, the shift from on-premises to cloud-hosted Pure is not historical but current.

For total cost of ownership purposes, this creates a specific blind spot in most build estimates. Dedicated technical staff for system upgrades is a cost that on-premises and in-house implementations carry permanently — yet it almost never appears as a line item when institutions are costing the build option. Institutions evaluating the full cost of a DIY system should account for this category explicitly; it is among the most consistently underweighted items in any honest comparison.

SECTION 3:

The Global Research Context: Why This Decision Is More Urgent Than Ever

The four forces identified in Section 1 — compliance pressure, AI readiness, rankings competition, and research talent movement — are being amplified by a structural expansion of global research itself.

Science is being produced in more places, by more institutions competing internationally for the first time. This section documents that expansion and its infrastructure implications: the geography of where research happens is shifting, talent is moving across national systems at unprecedented scale, compliance obligations are multiplying, and a new generation of institutions across the Gulf, Latin America, Asia, and Africa is entering the global research arena with serious infrastructure decisions to make.

3.1 The geography of science is shifting

The center of global research output has moved, and the movement is accelerating. China overtook the United States as the leading country for natural-sciences output as of 2022. In the Nature Index, China's Share reached 32,122 in 2024 — a 17.4% increase from 2023 — and the country now accounts for more than half of leading output in applied sciences.[9] India moved from 21st to 9th overall in the Nature Index, with a 14.5% growth in adjusted share from 2022 to 2023, exceeding China's growth rate in that period. India awarded 2.5 million first university degrees in science and engineering in 2020, compared to 900,000 in the United States.[10]

This shift has direct infrastructure implications. Institutions in the Gulf, South East Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa are more visible than ever before. For these institutions, Pure's public portal and SciVal integration are not administrative tools — they are the mechanism by which emerging research programs establish international credibility. An in-house build starts with zero integration credibility — the global discovery infrastructure must be constructed from scratch and kept current with evolving bibliometric standards.

The effect is measurable at the recruitment pipeline level. At institutions in rapidly growing research markets, portal visibility has become a direct driver of PhD and postdoctoral recruitment — researchers finding and choosing their institution through its public research presence before ever making contact. Section 5 documents this pattern in detail.

R&D Investment Context

Country/Region	R&D as % of GDP	Notes
South Korea	5.1%	
United States	3.45%	Declining post-2025 federal cuts
Germany	3.11	
China	2.65	27% of global R&D, up from 4% in 2000
EU average	2.13	
Brazil	1.15	
South Africa	~0.6–0.7	Well below OECD average

Source: WIPO (2025). "End-of-Year Edition: Global R&D Investment 2024."

The center of global research has moved — and is still moving

China overtook the **US** as the leading country for **natural sciences** output in 2022

17.4%

China's Nature Index Share: 32,122 (2024) — **up 17.4% from 2023;** accounts for more than half of leading output in applied sciences

14.5%

India: moved from 21st → 9th in the Nature Index; **14.5% growth** in adjusted Share (2022–2023)

2.5 million

India awarded **2.5 million first university degrees** in science and engineering in 2020, compared to 900,000 in the United States

7,665 → 150,000+

MENAT region: publication output grew from 7,665 papers (1981) to 150,000+ (2019) — **a 20-fold increase;** regional share of global publications grew from 2% to 8%

45%

Asia now accounts for **~45% of global R&D** — up from ~23% in 2000

Sources: Nature Index 2024; WIPO 2025; Clarivate ISI Report 2021

Global R&D reached approximately USD 3.8 trillion in 2024. Asia now accounts for approximately 45% of global R&D, up from approximately 23% in 2000.[11] The institutions that will compete most aggressively for global research talent and funding over the next decade are not exclusively in the United States or Western Europe.

3.2 The movement of research talent

A relocation of research talent is underway, creating specific and underappreciated infrastructure demand. Following significant reductions in US federal research funding, with NIH and NSF collectively cancelling approximately 4,000–5,000 grants across 2025, researchers are moving across national systems more regularly in pace and scale.[12] [13]

The movements include:

- European Research Council early-career grant applicants from the US has risen steadily, from 60 in 2024, to 116 in 2025, and 169 in 2026 — nearly tripling in two years.[14]
- The EU launched a EUR 600 million (2025–2027) "Choose Europe for Science" initiative to capitalise on this trend.[14]
- The UK committed GBP 54 million Global Talent Fund for 5-year relocation and research packages, awarded to 12 research organisations.[15]
- Canada launched a CAD 1.7 billion Canada Global Impact+ Research Talent Initiative covering new Research Chairs, emerging leaders, and doctoral/postdoc training awards.[16]

The mass movement of researchers across national systems means that research information infrastructure needs to adapt and create specific requirements that are easy to underestimate:

1. **Rapid profile onboarding at scale:** Institutions receiving large cohorts of incoming researchers face the challenge of quickly establishing accurate, complete researcher profiles — publication histories from foreign databases, ORCID linking, grant history normalisation. Commercial RIMS systems automated harvesting can handle this at scale; manual processes often can not.

2. **Cross-system profile continuity:** A researcher moving from MIT to a European institution brings a publication history distributed across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and potentially national databases. Pure harvests and reconciles this automatically.

3. **Expertise directory urgency:** For institutions receiving many new hires simultaneously, expertise discovery and internal collaboration matching become immediately valuable. A commercial RIMS with built-in semantic expertise matching delivers this on day one; a new build would take months to reach comparable functionality.

4. **Compliance continuity:** Researchers moving mid-grant must transfer funder compliance obligations. A RIMS tracks the full grant-to-output chain; without one, compliance becomes a manual, error-prone process — particularly high-risk given NIH's tightened immediate OA requirements for North American institutions.

The largest shift of research talent in a generation is underway

Institutions receiving large cohorts of new researchers need profile onboarding that scales. Pure's automated harvesting handles this; manual processes do not.

ERC early-career grant applications from US-based researchers:

60 (2024) → **116** (2025) → **169** (2026)

nearly tripling in two years

The EU launched

€600 million

"Choose Europe for Science" initiative (2025–2027)

The UK committed

£54 million Global Talent Fund

relocation and research packages awarded to 12 research organisations

Canada launched

$1.7 billion

Canada Global Impact+ Research Talent Initiative

Saudi Arabia:

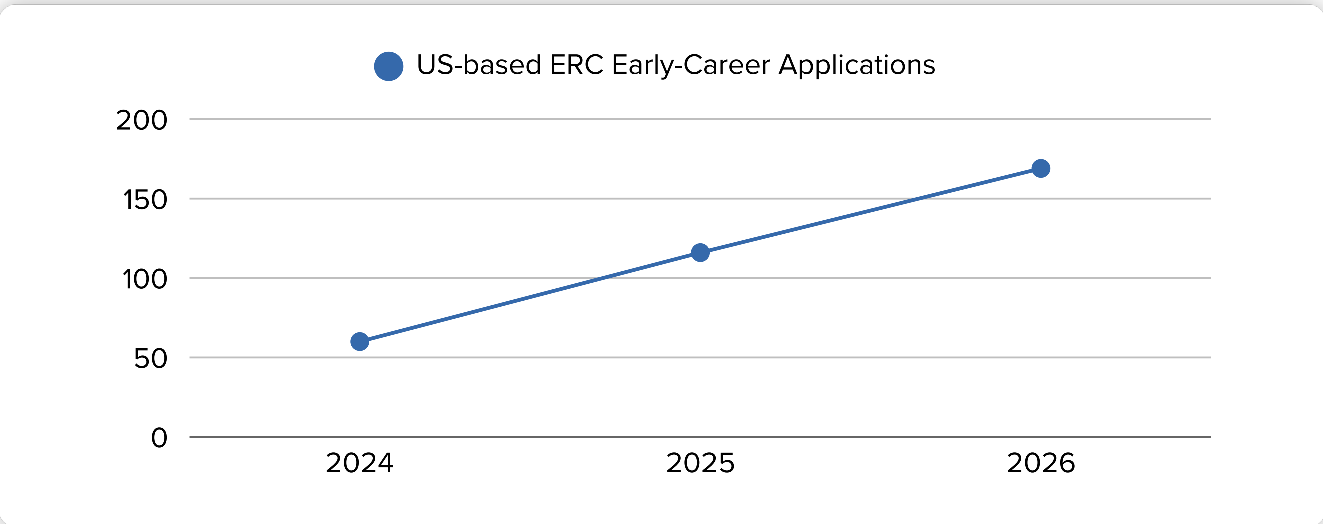
80% of published output carries international co-authors

rapid researcher profile onboarding is not a marginal function

Sources: *Science/AAAS 2025; The Register 2025; Canada.ca 2025; Clarivate ISI 2021*

ERC Applications From US-Based Researchers

Scenario: Small institution (under 200 FTE researchers) | No existing CRIS (greenfield) | 1 IT staff + 1 admin staff



Source: *Science/AAAS, 2025*

3.3 The funder mandate wave

Each funder has different OA requirements, embargo policies, data sharing mandates, and reporting timelines. A RIMS that tracks funder, grant ID, publication, embargo status, and OA route for every output becomes operationally necessary at scale.

Key mandates currently in force or recently implemented include:

- **NIH (US):** Immediate OA required upon acceptance as of July 1, 2025 — the most significant US funder policy shift in a decade
- **Wellcome Trust:** Deposit to PubMed Central and UK PMC within 6 months; ~90% compliance rate with infrastructure support
- **Gates Foundation:** 2025 policy refresh eliminated financial support for APCs — institutions now absorb more compliance monitoring cost
- **Plan S / cOAlition S:** EU-backed; requires immediate OA; demands per-output tracking of funder, embargo status, and OA route
- **ANID (Chile):** Open-Access Policy for Scientific Information — deposit and data management obligations for funded research
- **MinCiencias (Colombia):** Open Science Policy (2022–2031) mandating OA and open data

Compliance is no longer a single-funder problem

Each funder has different requirements. Tracking them manually doesn't scale.

NIH (US): Immediate open access required upon acceptance — effective July 1, 2025

Wellcome Trust: Deposit to PubMed Central within 6 months; ~90% compliance rate where CRIS infrastructure is in place

Gates Foundation: 2025 policy refresh — institutions now absorb more OA monitoring cost

Plan S / cOAlition S (EU): Requires per-output tracking of funder, embargo status, and OA route

ANID (Chile): Green-route OA deposit now mandatory for final technical report approval (2025)

MinCiencias (Colombia): Open Science Policy (2022–2031) — mandates OA and open data reporting

> *"It's not only saving our time — it's about transparency, fairness. These reports can be generated by the colleges, the dean, the VC, the accreditation office."*
>
> **— Prof. Kamran Arshad,**
> Assistant Vice-Chancellor Research & Graduate Studies, Ajman University (UAE)

3.4 Regional RIMS adoption and policy drivers

A RIMS is no longer purely an internal operational decision. Commercial platforms have become the connective tissue of the global research community, the layer through which institutions establish visibility, meet funder obligations, and exchange data with collaborators and rankings bodies. Institutions operating on bespoke systems or no system at all navigate that community without the standard tooling others assume. The regional survey below documents where that consensus has formed and how quickly holdout markets are moving. For any institution evaluating the build option, the question is not only whether it can build a system but whether a bespoke system can participate on the same terms as a commercial one.

Europe remains the most mature market. RIMS adoption is near-universal among Russell Group institutions in the UK, driven by REF compliance and UKRI OA policy. Pure and Symplectic Elements dominate as the platform of choice, and Pure's share is growing.[17] Nordic countries have national RIMS infrastructure. Denmark has a government-mandated national Pure deployment — institutional RIMS decisions were superseded by national standardisation.

North America remains the most fragmented of the major research markets. US institutions have historically favoured in-house builds, departmental tools, or established alternatives: VIVO retains a following in the library community, and Symplectic Elements holds strong US penetration across research offices. Pure's footprint of more than 100 active institutions, spanning research universities, federal agencies, and contract research organisations, is growing but remains a minority position among large public research universities.

A 2024 OCLC Research analysis of live implementations at Carnegie Mellon, Washington University School of Medicine, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign documents the US RIMS reality: adoption is typically library-led, builds gradually across four use cases (public portals, metadata reuse, strategic reporting, and faculty activity reporting), and requires sustained multi-year investment.[18] Illinois Experts — Pure-based since 2016 — now receives approximately 40,000 visitors monthly and has expanded from Scopus publication harvesting to a multi-source dataset spanning patents, press coverage, honors, awards, and researcher datasets. Notably, the open access workflow and compliance monitoring use cases that dominate in the UK, Australia, and Northern Europe have yet to be widely implemented at US institutions — reflecting the absence of mandate-driven pressure that characterises European RIMS adoption.[18]

Latin America has 65 RIMS systems across the region (3 national, remainder institutional). Pure holds approximately 48% market share among those systems; VIVO sits at 31% and DSpace-RIMS at 20%. The countries with most Pure installations currently are Peru and Mexico.[19] National systems partially substitute for institutional RIMS — Colombia (SCIENTI/CvLAC), Ecuador (REDI, 2022), and Chile (Portal del Investigador/ANID) all run mandatory national research information systems that create parallel reporting obligations for institutions.

The MENA region is a rapidly maturing market. Four decades of Web of Science data document the trajectory: MENAT publication output grew from 7,665 papers in 1981 to more than 150,000 in 2019 — a 20-fold absolute increase — while the region's share of global publications quadrupled from 2% to 8%.[20] By 2019, 15 of 19 MENAT countries had reached above-world-average Category Normalized Citation Impact (CNCI). Research mobility compounds the infrastructure demand: approximately one in six of 22 million researchers in the region had been internationally mobile between 2008 and 2017, with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries serving as the primary intra-regional destination.[20] Ambitions to sustain this trajectory are visible in the UAE's National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, the Forum for Open Research in MENA (FORM), and Saudi Vision 2030's goal of placing at least five universities in the global top 200.[21]

Saudi Arabia illustrates the RIMS infrastructure challenge concretely. With 80% of its published output carrying international co-authors, rapid and accurate researcher profile onboarding is not a marginal administrative function — it is central to research operations. Where multiple institutions in a region share the same platform, a cross-institutional discovery effect emerges that is structurally unavailable to institutions on bespoke systems; Section 5.5 documents how this is already playing out between two Saudi universities. Gulf institutions also face a compliance dimension not shared with European or North American counterparts — national research priority alignment mandated by government research authorities — that creates a current product gap affecting workflow planning for Saudi institutions in particular (see Section 2.4).

Sub-Saharan Africa has limited commercial RIMS penetration. The dominant model is public-funded, open-source infrastructure. South Africa's DHET per-publication funding subsidy creates a direct financial incentive for accurate output tracking at all South African universities, but budget constraints impede commercial adoption. Research management capacity across Sub-Saharan Africa is systemically underdeveloped, with a systematic review of 28 assessments across 25 universities in 15 countries finding "poorly developed" capacity as the norm.[22]

> *"Out of 100 incoming PhD scholars and postdoctoral fellows who join Manipal, 70 to 75 percent find out about their guide or the research happening in the department through Pure."*
>
> **— Santhosh KV,**
> Research Administrator, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (India)

SECTION 4:

The Real Costs Of Building

This section updates and extends the cost analysis from the 2020 whitepaper, "Buy or Build: An Exploration of the Total Cost of Ownership for a RIMS".[23] That study established the baseline Total Cost of Ownership comparison between commercial and in-house research information systems, finding that a commercial solution provides savings of 28–41% less than a DIY build over the full system lifetime. Six years on, the 2026 context makes that case materially stronger: the scope of what "building" requires has expanded, integration complexity has grown, and the field evidence of build failure has accumulated further.

Institutions evaluating the build option typically cost the development project; they rarely cost the ongoing operation.

4.1 What the sticker price misses

RIMS-specific evidence sets the baseline. Of 1,347 systems registered in the euroCRIS global Directory of Research Information Systems, only 6% are built in-house — the overwhelming global preference, borne out in practice across every region and institution type, is for commercial or off-the-shelf platforms.[24]

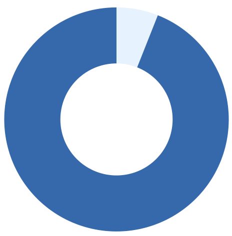
The evidence on large-scale custom software development compounds this picture. McKinsey's long-standing industry benchmark shows large IT projects run on average 45% over budget, 7% over schedule, and deliver 56% less value than predicted. Scope creep affects approximately two-thirds of major custom initiatives, adding 14–25% to total cost.[25] The Standish Group CHAOS Report (2024) found that 35%+ of large enterprise custom software initiatives are abandoned entirely; only 29% are delivered on time, on budget, and with the expected value.[26] An industry rule of thumb holds that 80% of a software product's total lifetime cost occurs after initial launch — custom systems require 15–20% of their initial development budget annually, every year, just for maintenance.

For a large research university RIMS-build specifically, the cost structure may look like this:

The Global Consensus Is Clear

94% Not built in-house

6% Built in-house



Of **1,347 CRIS systems** registered in the euroCRIS global Directory of Research Information Systems, only **6% are built in-house**.

Sources: *Science/AAAS 2025; The Register 2025; Canada.ca 2025; Clarivate ISI 2021*

In Latin America

VIVO	Pure holds	DSpace-CRIS
31%	48%	20%

market share among regional CRIS systems

Source: *Vázquez-Tapia (2024), CRIS2024 Conference Paper*

Institutions cost the project. They rarely cost the operation.

VISIBLE COST

Development team
3–6 FTEs minimum; $210,000–$275,000 per engineer/year (fully burdened cost)

Build timeline
15 months to basic functionality — vs. 6 months for Pure

Security & compliance
Penetration testing, GDPR, access controls — continuous overhead

Annual maintenance
15–20% of initial build cost, every year, indefinitely

HIDDEN COST

Integration maintenance
Each connection (Scopus, WoS, ORCID, HR/finance) requires ongoing upkeep as APIs change

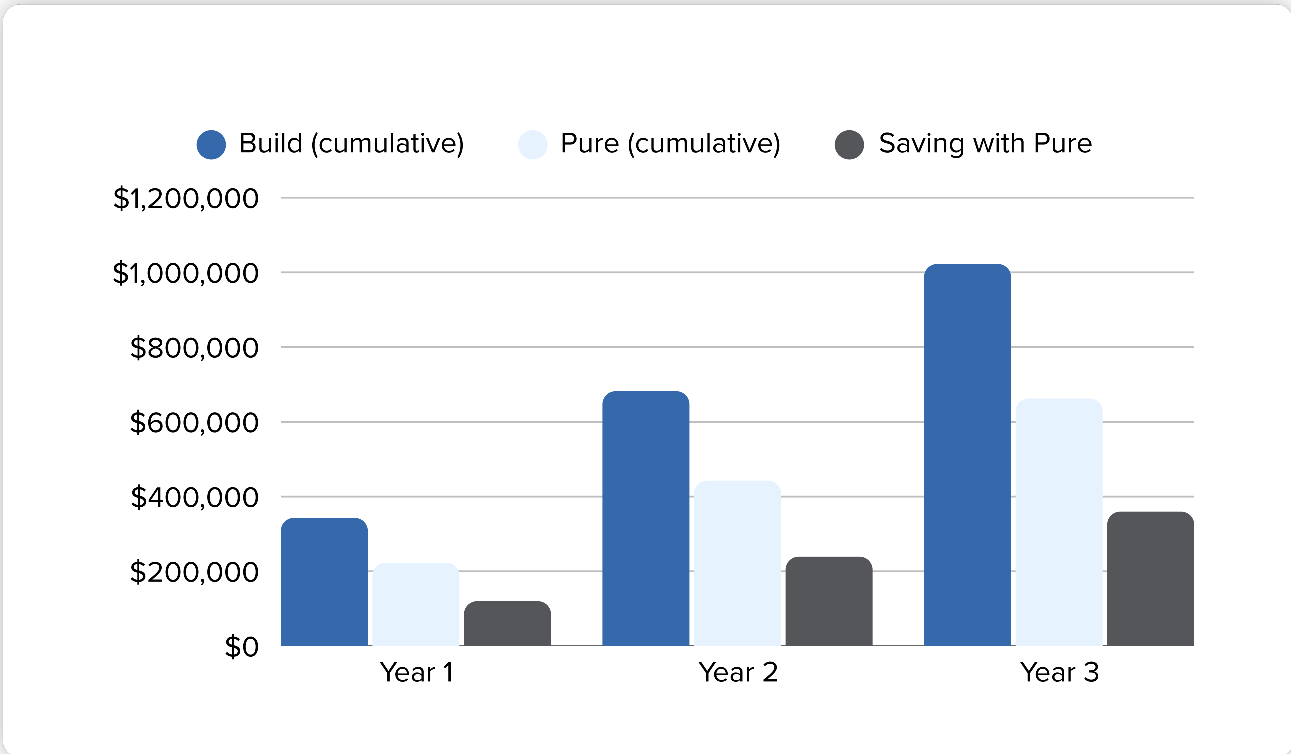
Staff turnover
When the developer leaves, institutional knowledge leaves with them

Opportunity cost
IT capacity diverted from all other institutional priorities

Source: Fully-loaded cost estimates based on senior software engineer/IT director base compensation (BLS OES 2024, 75th–90th percentile: $169K–$211K; Indeed 2026 senior engineer data) plus a 1.3×–1.55× employer burden multiplier per BLS Employer Costs for Employee Compensation (ECEC, June 2025). Upper range reflects Western European markets where statutory employer contributions increase burden rates. Build timeline: Knowledge E consultant synthesis and interview cohort, 2026

5-Year Total Cost of Ownership: Build vs. Pure

Scenario: Small institution (under 200 FTE researchers)
No existing CRIS (greenfield) | 1 IT staff + 1 admin staff



Source: TCO Calculator

Key callout: Pure is cheaper from Day 1 — even before the 9-month implementation gap (15 months Build vs. 6 months Pure) is factored in. By Year 5, the saving exceeds $350,000 for a small institution with a minimal team.

The cost case established in 2020 holds in 2026. The absolute gap has narrowed as Pure pricing has increased, in common with other commercial RIMS, to reflect a more feature-complete platform, but the underlying argument has strengthened: the scope of what building now requires has expanded significantly since 2020, and the current evidence base is considerably richer. The credible TCO argument rests on three pillars:

1. **Development cost parity is rarely achieved** — custom software reaches cost parity with a commercial license only around year 3 in best-case deployments, and RIMS timelines typically run longer than initial estimates.

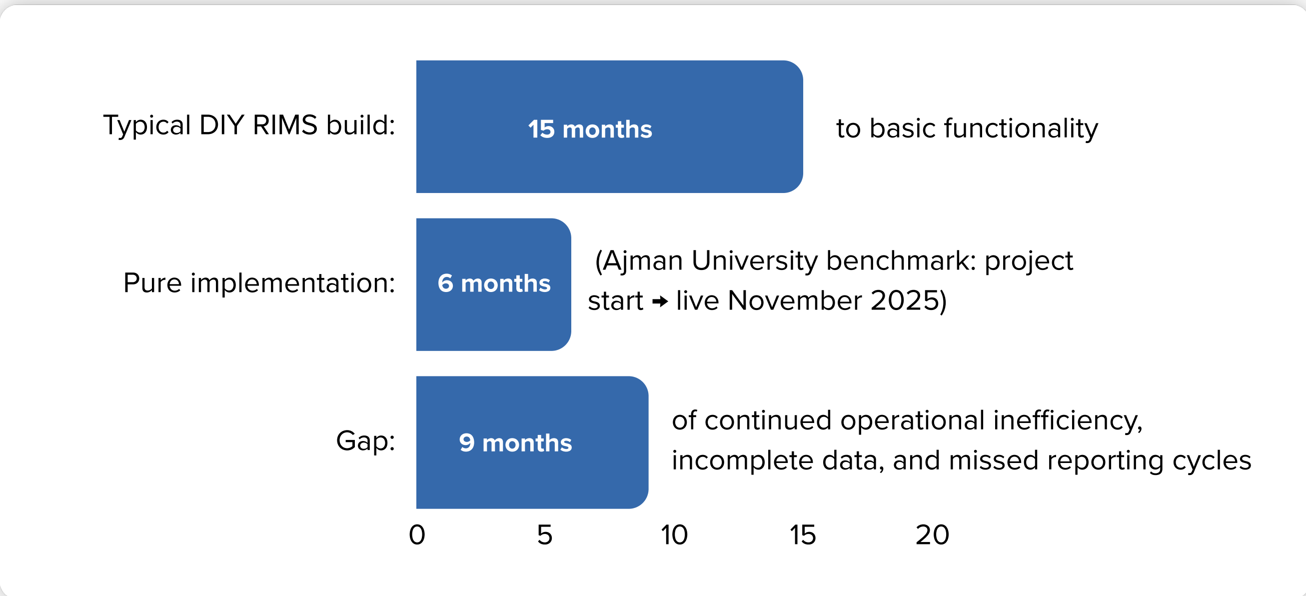
2. **Staffing is the silent killer** — a dedicated RIMS development team is required indefinitely; staff turnover creates institutional knowledge risk that a SaaS vendor relationship does not.

3. **Vendor investment compounds** — years of R&D, a global user community, and annual investments on behalf of customers — no single institution can replicate this at comparable per-unit cost.

4.2 The implementation timeline gap

The interview cohort includes institutions whose DIY build timelines ran to three years or more before collapse followed by Pure implementations that went live in under six months. Even among satisfied current Pure users, 62% required more than six months to implement — and commercial implementations at this complexity level typically land in the 3–12 month range. The gap between that window and a three-year failed build is not merely a scheduling inconvenience. It is the period during which the institution continues absorbing the full cost of its current approach: manual reporting, incomplete data, missed compliance cycles, and an absent rankings data pipeline.

Implementation Timeline: Build vs. Pure



Source: Knowledge E consultant synthesis and interview cohort, 2026

4.3 The build failure pattern

The build failure pattern is not a cautionary tale from an earlier era of software development — it recurs across institutions with very different starting conditions, technical capacity, and geographic contexts. What the documented cases share is not a failure to plan. It is a systematic underestimation of the gap between building a working prototype and sustaining a compliant, integrated, continuously updated system over years. The evidence is consistent enough to constitute a pattern, not an exception.

Moreover, the social and political dynamics of the build decision compound the technical ones. When an internal team has advocated for a build — and spent months or years working toward it — reversing course is not a purely analytical exercise.

The build-and-abandon pattern is documented across regions and decades

Of 1,347 CRIS systems registered in the euroCRIS global directory, only 6% are built in-house. — de Castro & Puuska (2023)

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana — Colombia

Evaluated a Colombian open-source CRIS consortium built by four universities using OpenAlex. Concluded maintenance costs would equal or exceed the Pure license. Chose Pure on the basis of time-to-value.

Denmark — National level

Government-mandated Pure adoption at all Danish universities. National standardisation superseded any individual institution's build-it-yourself considerations. Pure became national research information infrastructure.

Ajman University — UAE

3+ years building an internal research information system. The project eventually collapsed — "nothing to show for it." Purchased Pure. Basic system live in 6 months.

> *We struggled for more than three years. We put so much effort, so much manpower to build it up, and then eventually it all collapsed. At the end we didn't get anything out of it.*
>
> **— Prof. Kamran Arshad,**
> Assistant Vice-Chancellor Research & Graduate Studies, Ajman University (UAE)

4.4 Technical debt and staff dependency

A DIY build creates a dependency that rarely appears in build-vs-buy analyses: the people who built the system. When a core developer leaves, the institution does not merely lose an employee — it loses the accumulated institutional knowledge of how the system actually works, where the undocumented exceptions live, and what will break if the wrong configuration is changed. Practitioners have a name for what remains: a zombie system. It runs, after a fashion, until something changes and nobody knows how to fix it.

> "When we had our own systems, we were heavily reliant on a single tech person that wrote everything. And they leave and suddenly you've got a system that doesn't work anymore" — *Research Systems Lead, UK research university*

A convert from in-house build advocacy identified a practical warning signal: if the core developer or system owner has been in post fewer than three years, the institutional knowledge base is shallow regardless of how functional the system currently appears. Succession risk is not a future concern — it is a present condition that institutional committees should assess before deciding to build.

4.5 The security and compliance cost

Security and compliance are not one-time implementation concerns — they are permanent operational overhead. A DIY research information system must independently satisfy data governance requirements (GDPR in Europe, equivalent frameworks elsewhere), maintain access controls across researcher and administrator roles, conduct regular penetration testing, and manage the institutional liability that attaches to any system holding personal research data. Each of these is a continuous cost, not a setup cost.

For institutions with a commercial RIMS, much of this overhead shifts to the vendor. Security patching, compliance updates, and infrastructure hardening happen on the vendor's maintenance cycle rather than the institution's, and the burden of sustaining a secure system no longer falls on internal teams. What the institution retains is a narrower but still real obligation: evaluating whether the vendor's security posture meets its own standards, and understanding what it is accepting when that alignment is imperfect.

Aalto University, a committed Pure university, encountered this directly when it migrated from on-premises to cloud-hosted Pure in April 2026 — a transition mandated by Elsevier as it phases out on-premises support. Prior to this transition, Aalto had reservations about whether the cloud environment fully met its institutional security requirements. The transition was broadly smooth in practice, but the experience reflects what buying actually involves: an ongoing relationship with a vendor's infrastructure decisions, not a permanent handoff of security responsibility.

For institutions weighing the build-or-buy decision, the honest framing is not that buying eliminates security concerns, but that it changes their shape. Building requires an institution to own, fund, and sustain security indefinitely. Buying transfers most of that burden to the vendor while introducing a different set of dependencies — on the vendor's infrastructure decisions, their update cadence, and their interpretation of what institutional compliance requires.

4.6 Navigating the Market

Once the build-or-buy decision resolves toward buy, a second question opens: which commercial platform? The choice is not arbitrary. Different commercial systems make meaningfully different assumptions about institutional workflow, data strategy, and ecosystem relationships. Three distinctions matter most for the framing in this whitepaper:

Bibliometric ecosystem integration. Not all commercial RIMS platforms have equivalent access to the bibliometric data that drives global rankings. Field Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI) — the specific metric used by THE and QS — flows from Scopus data. The availability of this integration, and its depth, varies materially across platforms. For institutions where rankings performance is a strategic priority, this is not a secondary feature consideration — it is a primary architectural question that should be resolved before any platform decision.

Research grants administration scope. Commercial RIMS platforms differ significantly in how deeply they cover research grants administration, from basic award tracking through full pre- and post-award compliance workflows. Institutions with complex federal or multi-funder requirements should evaluate this function specifically: the grants landscape is too nationally specific for any platform to cover in full, and hybrid architecture (commercial RIMS + supplementary internal tooling for specific gaps) is common even among satisfied users.

User community and shared practice. The accumulated knowledge of institutions running the same system is a real and undervalued asset. Active user communities (whether organised around a commercial platform or an open-source project) provide a channel for implementation experience, module-specific workarounds, and peer validation of approaches that vendor documentation cannot replicate. When evaluating any platform, the health and engagement of its user community is worth assessing alongside its technical capabilities.

4.7 The open source option

Open-source RIMS platforms represent a genuine and widely-used alternative, particularly in Latin America where they hold approximately 51% of the market collectively.[19] The licensing cost is zero. The operational cost is not.

Both leading open-source platforms require significant institutional IT expertise to implement, configure, and maintain — the same ongoing staffing profile as a custom build, without vendor support. Both carry the same structural risk: when the person who built it leaves, institutional knowledge leaves with them. Neither provides native integration with commercial bibliometric databases; institutions must license and integrate those separately, on their own maintenance schedule.

The open-source model serves institutions for whom commercial licensing cost is a hard barrier. For institutions where staffing capacity and maintenance continuity are the actual constraints, the total cost equation typically does not favour open source.

Common questions and assumptions from institutions considering a commercial platform

Question	What the evidence shows
"Won't we be locked in?"	Standards-compliant platforms with open API exports make research data portable. The more significant lock-in risk is internal: custom systems where institutional knowledge resides in one or two staff members whose departure becomes a crisis — the precise failure mode documented across the build cases in Section 4.3.
"Open source is transparent — isn't that more secure?"	Transparency in code is not the same as security in practice. Open-source systems that are not regularly updated accumulate known vulnerabilities — and in markets where phishing and targeted attacks are prevalent, an outdated installation is an exploitable target. The consequences when that vulnerability is exploited extend well beyond a technical fix — uptime, data integrity, and institutional reputation are all at risk. Commercial platforms carry a different security posture: patching, infrastructure hardening, and uptime management happen on the vendor's cycle, without depending on internal capacity that may already be stretched.
"Our requirements are unique"	Every institution in the 2026 cohort operates under unique national mandates, organisational structures, and reporting obligations. All have accommodated these within a commercial RIMS — sometimes with targeted supplementary builds for specific gaps. The question is whether commercial RIMS + selective internal development is faster, cheaper, and lower-risk than a full in-house build. The evidence consistently says yes.
"Our IT team says they can build it"	The documented failure mode is not inability to build — it is inability to sustain. The build-and-abandon pattern (Section 4.3) involves institutions that successfully built initial systems, then found that long-term maintenance, integration upkeep, and staff continuity were the insurmountable challenges. What IT teams estimate is the build cost; what they underestimate is year 3, year 5, and year 10.
"Open source keeps us independent"	Open-source licensing cost is lower; total operational cost is not. Both require the same staffing profile as a custom build, without vendor support. Institutions choosing open source should calculate total cost on the same framework as a custom build — not compare license fees alone.

Source: Knowledge E consultantcy synthesis, 2026

SECTION 5:

Evidence From The Field: What Institutions Actually Experience

Across the 2026 Pure user survey and stakeholder interviews, the directional pattern is consistent — the buy decision holds under extended use.

5.1 Survey snapshot

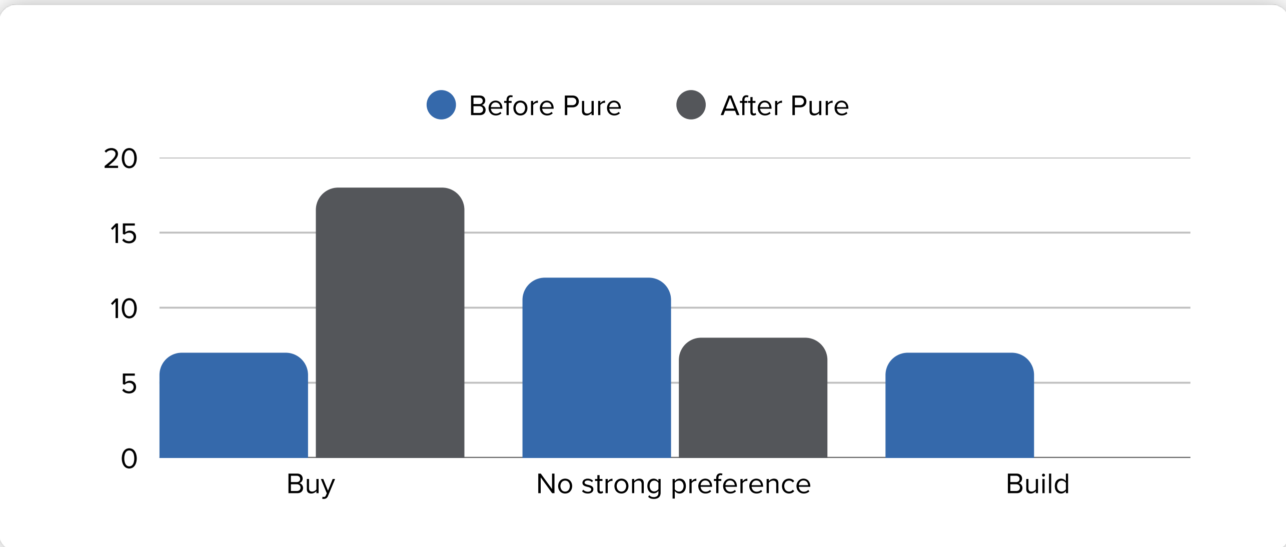
The 2026 Pure user survey gathered responses from current Pure users across seven regions — North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East/Gulf, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia — making it the first systematic cross-regional evidence base on buy-or-build outcomes since the 2020 study. Respondents ranged from small teaching-focused institutions to large research-intensive universities, and from recent adopters to institutions with more than a decade of use.

Key findings:

- No respondent shifted toward "Build" post-adoption
- 20% median admin time savings (range: -10–85%); mean 27%
- 20% median researcher time savings; mean 27%
- Overall satisfaction: 7.0/10 median; value improvement over prior approach median 50%, mean 52%
- 62% required more than 6 months of implementation effort
- Cloud hosting preference: 67% of respondents
- Top future priorities: API/integration (83%), improved interoperability (66%), AI-enabled features (45%)
- Top barriers to deeper use: data entry and curation effort (69%), customisation difficulty (52%), vendor support or documentation quality (48%)
- Awards/Grants module: lowest satisfaction across all dimensions — 39% rated 1 out of 5; mean rating 2.32/5

Buy vs. Build Preference Before and After Pure Adoption

Every institution that preferred Build before adopting Pure shifted to Buy or No preference after. Zero reversed toward Build.



***Source**: 2026 Pure user survey*
(All respondents are current Pure users. Non-adopters and institutions that chose to build are not represented in this sample).

Survey Snapshot Stats Panel

7
Regions represented

4
Continents represented

0
Respondents who shifted toward Build after adoption

20%
Median admin time savings

-10% to 85%
Range of admin time savings

7.0 / 10
Median overall satisfaction

50%
Median value improvement over prior approach

67%
Prefer cloud-hosted Pure

7%
Prefer self-hosted

Source: *2026 Pure user survey*

Taken together, these findings suggest a user base that is satisfied with the core decision but still navigating the operational complexity of extracting full value. The wide range in time savings — from -10% to 85% — reflects not a product variable but an institutional one: the institutions that gain most are those that came from the most manual and fragmented starting points, and those that govern the system most actively after go-live.

Important caveat on sample composition: All respondents are current Pure users. No institutions that evaluated and chose to build, or that no longer license Pure, are represented. These findings reflect a retained user base — they are directional signals, not a statistically representative view of the full market.

5.2 What current users say

The quantitative findings tell one story; the open-text survey responses deepen the narrative. Across regions and institution sizes, survey respondents described the same pattern in different registers: the system works, but the conditions for using it well are unevenly in place.

> "The current Pure makes this decision easier as it answers all the needs for our university and allows us — with trial and error — to add and report on the information we need to pull”
> — *Research administrator, North America*

> "The biggest [barrier to deeper use] is down to our leadership engagement and prioritization — there is limited willingness from management to fully leverage the system's capabilities”
> — *Research systems lead, Northern Europe*

> "I am the only support person for Pure at this moment and it limits our ability to do more than what I am currently doing”
> — *Research information manager, North America*

5.3 What the time savings narrative actually means

A consistent pattern across interviews demands honest framing: no institution in the cohort reduced headcount as a result of adopting Pure. The story is role transformation — fewer people maintaining systems, more people using data.

Across the cohort, the pattern holds regardless of the headline savings figure: research office teams do not shrink after Pure adoption. At institutions reporting high savings, the role profile changes: fewer people maintaining systems and chasing data, more people governing it, analysing it, and using it to inform decisions. At institutions reporting modest savings — or even a headcount increase — the explanation is consistent: having structured research data visible for the first time made its gaps impossible to ignore. The number goes up, and so does the quality of what is being counted.

The time savings are real. The claim requires honest framing.

No institution in the 2026 interview cohort reduced headcount as a result of adopting Pure. The consistent story is role transformation — fewer people maintaining systems, more people using data.

Southampton

BEFORE		AFTER
Team of 6–8 doing daily manual OA checks with poor data quality	→	Same team size, focused on data quality, user engagement, and strategic analysis

RTI International:

BEFORE		AFTER
Staff maintaining a fragile legacy database requiring dedicated specialist knowledge	→	Team operating at reduced capacity on data quality and compliance reporting

PUJ Colombia:

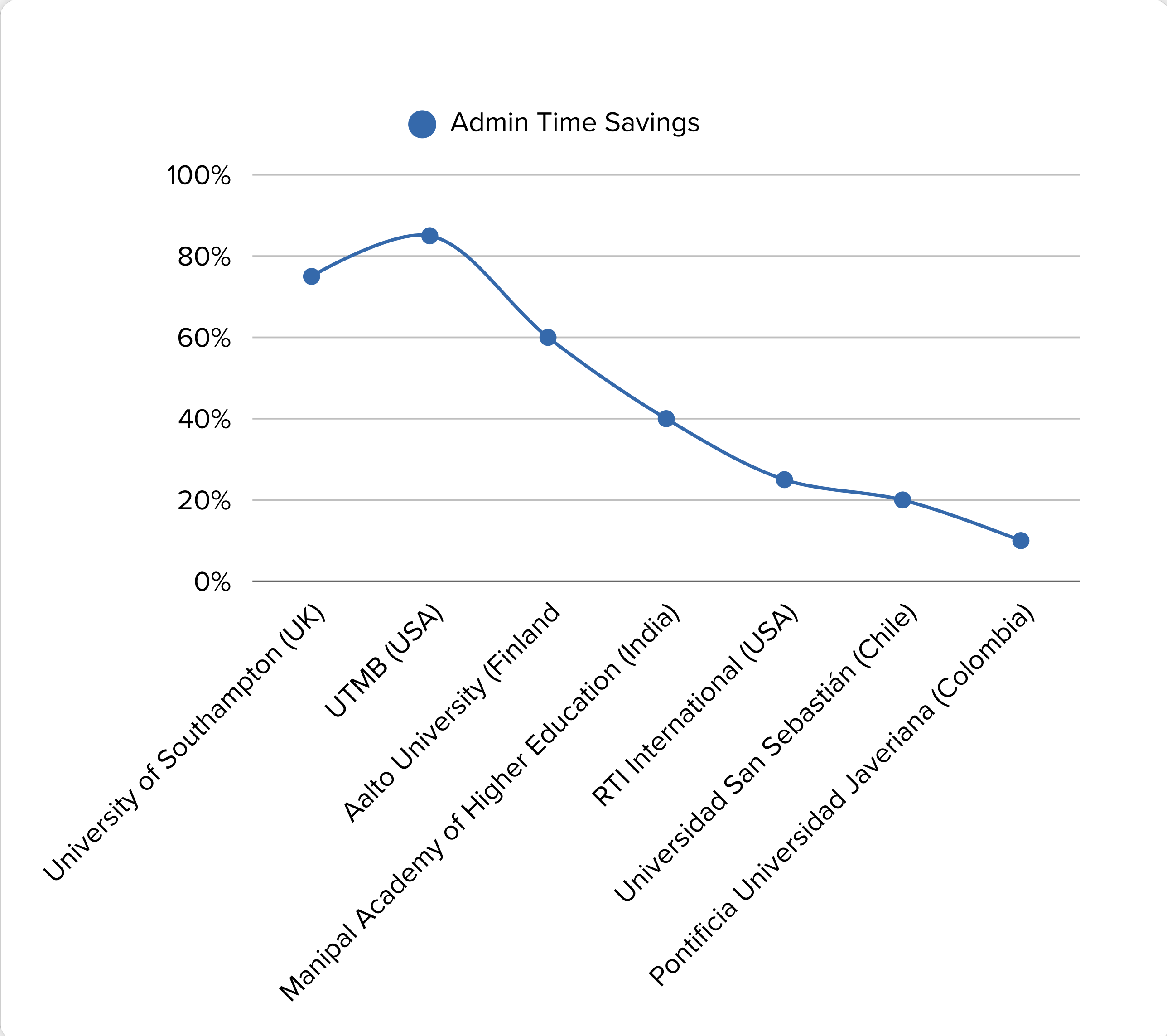
BEFORE		AFTER
2 FTE on manual data management	→	3 FTE doing higher-quality data curation. Pure revealed a higher standard.

Source: *2026 Pure user survey*

Pure will redirect your team's capacity toward work that matters.

Admin Time Savings by Institution

Median line: 20% (survey dataset, n=29) Source: 2026 Pure user survey + interview cohort



***Source:** 2026 Pure user survey*

***Note:** UTMB and Aalto figures are from survey responses (Melodi Moore and Laura Mure respectively). Interview data from May 19 and May 20 may add further qualitative context — chart data confirmed.*

5.4 Implementation snapshots - three institutions, three contexts

The three institutions below represent core regional archetypes from the interview cohort: a Gulf university buying to escape a failed build, a Latin American institution buying for time-to-value over open-source alternatives, and a European research-intensive university with a decade of accumulated evidence. Each is profiled in full in the companion case study series — what follows is the headline finding from each.

5.4.a AJMAN UNIVERSITY | United Arab Emirates

Teaching-focused university with emerging research ambition | ~300+ faculty | MENA

Ajman University's buy decision was not made in the abstract. The institution had spent more than three years attempting to build an internal research information system — a significant commitment of staff time and institutional resources. By the end, there was nothing functional to show for it. The project collapsed.

Leadership needed a working system quickly. The UAE Ministry of Education's new Outcome-Based Framework requires program-level reporting on research outputs, faculty involvement, and student research — data that previously required manual compilation. The institution was also investing in a strategic push toward global rankings performance and research visibility, and needed infrastructure that could support it.

The decision to purchase a commercial RIMS came with a six-month live target — ambitious against the three-year failure it was replacing. The system went live in approximately six months. 300+ faculty research profiles now auto-populate from bibliometric sources; English-language publications, which account for 75–80% of faculty output, require no manual update. 170+ annual research proposals are now linked directly to grant records, replacing a manual verification cycle that previously consumed significant administrative time. Report access has been extended across the institution — colleges, deans, the Vice-Chancellor, and the accreditation office all generate their own outputs without research office intervention.

The implementation was managed without dedicated new hires.

> "We struggled with [our internal system] for more than three years. We put so much effort, so much manpower, and eventually it all collapsed. At the end we didn't get anything out of it”
> *— Prof. Kamran Arshad, Assistant Vice-Chancellor Research & Graduate Studies*

Full case study: Ajman University — From Build Failure to Live System in Six Months

5.4.b PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD JAVERIANA (PUJ) | Colombia

Private research university | Latin America

PUJ's buy decision was an informed one. The institution had assessed the full landscape of alternatives, including a Colombian open-source RIMS consortium built by four universities using OpenAlex — a credible regional option with active institutional backing. The conclusion was that maintenance costs for the open-source system would equal or exceed the commercial license, without the implementation support. The timeline considerations settled the argument. A custom build would have taken too long; the institution could not afford to wait.

The outcomes at PUJ are honest rather than dramatic. Admin time savings are approximately 10%; researcher savings 15%. The primary value is not raw efficiency — it is data quality and institutional visibility. Research that previously had no structured place to exist is now findable, attributable, and connected to the institutional record. Staff grew from 2 to 3 full-time equivalent (FTE) after adoption, not because the system created more work, but because it revealed a higher standard of data management that demanded more attention.

In June 2025, an AI-led mis-tagging merged 1,700 outputs from an unrelated Chicago hospital researcher into a PUJ faculty profile. The RIMS validation layer surfaced the error. A manual or DIY system would not have caught it without continuous oversight.

> "The main reason was timeline, not cost. The time to deploy and build a custom solution would have taken longer to buy it at almost the same cost. The institution was no longer able to wait for a custom build”
> *— Francisco Durango, Research System Administrator*

Full case study: PUJ Colombia — Buying for Time, Staying for Quality

5.4.c UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON | United Kingdom

Large research-intensive university | ~10 years with a commercial RIMS | Europe

Southampton's evidence is the most longitudinal in the cohort. Gemma Fitzsimmons, the institution's research systems lead, began her career as a committed advocate for building in-house. She changed her position through lived experience — watching in-house systems fail when key developers left, and observing what a decade of commercial RIMS use had actually delivered.

Before Pure: a library team of six to eight people performed daily open-access checks and research output management manually. Data quality was still poor. Upgrades to the on-premises system required a dedicated 2–3 person technical team, multiple days of work, and 18 months of advance planning. A single illness in that team was a critical failure point.

After migrating to cloud-hosted Pure: 75% administration saving — nearly four times the survey median. Same team headcount; roles completely reoriented from system maintenance to data quality, communications, and strategic analysis. Upgrades now happen via support ticket. Two structural mandates — REF compliance and Open Access policy — drive unusually clean research output data without requiring active user persuasion.

Southampton is also an active participant in the UK Pure user community, influencing vendor development priorities alongside peer institutions — a community benefit unavailable to institutions on proprietary builds.

> "The best thing I'd say for advice for not building your own is that you will have a single point of failure somewhere. And when they go, you will fail spectacularly"
> *— Gemma Fitzsimmons, Research Systems*

Full case study: University of Southampton — A Decade of Evidence

5.5 Supporting voices - varied contexts, consistent pattern

The four institutions below did not make the buy decision under conditions of urgency or obvious failure. Each represents a more complex entry point — a Gulf university mid-implementation navigating national research priorities, a resource-constrained Chilean institution maximising an investment already made, a US academic health centre where a decade of institutional advocacy has produced the highest portal traffic in the cohort, and a Nordic research university where open science compliance is the structural driver. Together they illustrate a point the headline cases can obscure: the buy decision holds across extremely different contexts.

5.5.a IMAM ABDULRAHMAN BIN FAISAL UNIVERSITY (IAU) | Saudi Arabia

Research university, mid-implementation | Deanship of Scientific Research

IAU is approximately 18 months into its Pure implementation — past initial setup, not yet at full deployment. The Profiles and Networking modules are live and performing well. The award management module has been more complicated.

The headline outcome from IAU is not an efficiency figure. It is a change in how research collaboration happens. Before Pure, the Deanship of Scientific Research (DSR) organized physical workshops once or twice a year specifically to help researchers find collaborators with matching interests across the university — an event-dependent, infrequent process that could only reach so far. Since going live, researchers browse each other's profiles and research interests at any time, without DSR involvement. Team formation that previously required scheduling and logistics now happens continuously and self-directed.

The effect extends across institutional boundaries. King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), a neighboring research-intensive university in Saudi Arabia, also uses Pure. IAU researchers can now discover potential collaborators at KFUPM through the same network — connections that existed geographically but were informationally invisible before.

> "We used to organize workshops and to try to connect people together. This was organized maybe one or two a year. And now, with Pure, the task is much, much easier. Any researcher can easily find out the perfect match for each research project... So we are using the same network to find out the match from next-door university. It was there the whole time, but the connection and knowing the research interest was not as easy as it is now."
> *— Dr. Dina Al Abbad, DSR for Technical Affairs*

IAU's implementation also surfaces a compliance gap specific to the Saudi research context. Saudi institutions are expected to align and report research outputs against the RDIA's four national research priorities — Health and Wellness, Sustainable Environment, Energy and Industrials, and Economies of the Future. Pure maps research to the UN SDGs but does not yet offer a configurable national priority framework. IAU currently performs this mapping manually. It is a genuine gap, and an honest one: the core platform delivers what IAU needed; the national reporting layer requires supplementary work.

5.5.b UNIVERSIDAD SAN SEBASTIÁN (USS)| Chile

Growth-phase private university | Latin American research context

USS's position in the dataset is distinctive. Survey responses show a "no strong preference" on buy versus build — which, without context, might read as ambivalence, but in fact reflects resource exhaustion. Pure was a significant financial investment for the institution. In a Chilean higher education environment where both financial resources and internal technical capacity are structurally limited, the question is not whether to replace Pure or build an alternative. The question is how to extract maximum value from the investment already made.

That framing shapes how USS uses the system. Admin time savings sit at approximately 20%; researcher time savings at 30%; value improvement over their prior approach at 60%. These are solid mid-range figures that understate the directional significance: USS came from a baseline of scattered spreadsheets and manual processes, and the improvement is real even where it is not dramatic.

The awards module is a genuine success story — one of only two in the full interview cohort. USS uses the Funding Opportunities module to manage external and internal grant applications end-to-end, tracking from funding request through to award with full traceability. A Research Administrator at USS describes the comment threads, approval workflows, and information exchange records as the module's strongest feature — a structured alternative to the informal email chains that preceded it.

USS recently received a national Open Science grant from ANID specifically to strengthen open science practices — including formalising data curation governance and positioning Pure as the central infrastructure for OA compliance under Chile's increasingly mandatory green-route deposit requirements. Pure is not peripheral to this initiative, it is its spine.

> "Acquiring and using Pure has entailed a high cost that the institution has borne. And generally speaking in the national context, the resources of higher education institutions are scarce and limited — so having already acquired Pure, the institutional goal is to make the most of it."
> *— Cristobal Castro Vera, Research Administrator*

5.5.c UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL BRANCH (UTMB) | Texas, USA

Academic health centre | Research Development

UTMB sits outside the typical RIMS decision profile. It is not a European research university driven by REF compliance or funder mandates, not a Gulf institution building toward ranking targets, and not an under-resourced institution maximising a sunk investment. It is a US academic health centre that has used Pure for over a decade — and where the primary value proposition has remained consistent throughout: making UTMB's research visible to the world.

Melodi Moore, Research Development Specialist, has managed Pure at UTMB since the institution adopted SciVal Experts in 2013 and migrated to Pure in 2015–16 via the UT System licence. The portal generated more than 2 million visits in the last year — the highest raw traffic figure in the cohort. UTMB researchers consistently rank in the top one to three Google results when searched by name alongside "UTMB". That discoverability is the internal case Melodi makes for the system, and it is not theoretical. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Elsevier built a dedicated COVID-19 research search engine and deployed it through UTMB's Pure portal — putting the institution's infectious disease research capacity, including work from the Galveston National Lab (a BSL-4 facility), in front of global audiences at precisely the moment that exposure mattered. "COVID really worked with our strengths," Melodi observed. "Pure helped us really publicize that”.

The architecture is straightforward: Pure draws from institutional systems of record — InfoEd for grants, PeopleSoft for HR — via a daily synchronisation pipeline. "Pure is not our system of record," Melodi is clear. "It is not the source of truth, but it pulls in from the sources of truth." The distinction matters: Pure's low administrative overhead follows directly from this architecture. "Administratively it hasn't cost the school a lot of money other than paying for it." Melodi's evaluation of alternatives made the contrast concrete. When she asked a competing vendor about HR and grants integration, the answer was: "No, I have 12 data entry people that get that information". Pure's automated integration replaced what its competitor offered as headcount.

UTMB's awards module rating of 1/5 is the sharpest in the cohort — and the most clearly explained. UTMB's grants workflow runs entirely through InfoEd and PeopleSoft; Pure is not in the pre-award or compliance lifecycle. This is standard US academic health centre architecture, where federal grants are managed in dedicated eRA systems (InfoEd, Cayuse, Grants.gov). The rating reflects an integration gap, not a product failure — and it stands as a useful signal for other US health institutions evaluating Pure's fit against their existing eRA infrastructure.

The forward view is characteristically direct. Melodi sees AI as near-term competitive pressure on the RIMS market: "You've got to be a little quicker and a little better than what you are, or you'll be irrelevant in three years". Her overall assessment is equally unambiguous: "Pure is the best product out there. I can't find another product that works. I don't know how come more health systems aren't using Pure. It's really built more for health systems than academic systems".

> "What Pure does for us is really promote our research on a global scale. And that's how I sell it."
> *— Melodi Moore, Research Development Specialist*

5.5.d AALTO UNIVERSITY | Finland

Research-intensive university | Nordic Open Science context

Aalto University is the product of a 2010 merger between three Finnish institutions — the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics, and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. That history matters for understanding its Pure implementation: the university began with three separate publication databases, each inherited from a predecessor institution, with reporting handled by researchers and unit secretaries who lacked formal bibliographic training. When Aalto implemented Pure in 2016, the starting point was fragmented, non-standardised, and manually intensive.

The consolidation that followed explains why Aalto's time savings figures — 60% for administrative staff and 70% for researchers — sit well above the median from the 2026 survey results. These numbers do not reflect Pure automating an efficient process; they reflect Pure replacing a genuinely broken one. Semi-automatic import from Scopus and Web of Science, combined with a centralised team of professional library metadata cataloguers, eliminated the core source of the overhead. The efficiency gain was structural.

The compliance context compounds this. Finland operates at the more demanding end of European open science policy: the Academy of Finland aligns with Plan S and cOAlition S requirements, meaning Aalto must track funder, embargo status, and OA route for every funded output as a condition of grant compliance. Pure handles this through integrations with the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and JISC — which provides publisher-level OA policies drawn from what was formerly Sherpa Romeo — enabling embargo management to run in the background without manual intervention. The public portal extends this further, functioning as a researcher-facing open science record that surfaces open datasets alongside open access publications in one place. For Aalto's researchers, the portal is not just an institutional showcase — it is a visible record of their contribution to open science.

That said, Aalto's adoption of Pure is not total. The award management module is not deployed — not because it lacks capability, but by institutional choice. Aalto maintains a separate internal project system for awards, reflecting a broader philosophy of avoiding over-reliance on any single commercial platform. It is a principled position, though not without cost: maintaining parallel systems creates the same integration overhead that motivated the buy decision in the first place. The hybrid architecture Aalto operates is not a compromise forced upon it — it is one it has chosen, and chosen knowingly.

The Nordic context adds a dimension not present in the Gulf or Latin American cases: a well-established regional culture of open science governance, ORCID adoption, and cross-institutional research infrastructure. Pure's community of practice — the ability to share implementation approaches and collectively influence product development — is particularly valued in this environment, where peer institutions operate similar systems under similar mandates.

For institutions still weighing the decision, Aalto's position is direct. Every Finnish university operates some form of RIMS; the question is not whether to have one, but which approach to take and how far to extend it with in-house development. On the core question, Aalto's experience is unambiguous: buy the system, let the vendor carry the infrastructure burden, and concentrate institutional resources on what Pure enables rather than what it replaces.

5.6 A longitudinal view

Two institutions in the 2026 cohort also participated in the 2020 research programme that produced the foundational Buy or Build whitepaper. Their re-appearance six years later is not coincidence — it is an opportunity to ask a question the 2020 evidence could not answer: does the buy decision hold over time, and what does it look like when it does?

5.6.a RTI INTERNATIONAL — 2020 TO 2026

Independent nonprofit research organisation | North Carolina, USA

In 2020, RTI International was managing its research information across fragile legacy infrastructure — a Cold Fusion database so specialised and brittle that it required a dedicated staff member simply to keep it running. The organisation's 80,000+ research outputs were distributed across two separate databases: one researcher-curated with broad coverage but messy data; one library-managed with clean data but covering only a quarter of total records. The operational burden of maintaining this landscape was significant.

The decision to adopt a commercial RIMS was driven by scale and sustainability. RTI needed to bring its full research record into a single, maintainable system — and it needed to do so while meeting federal compliance obligations across NIH, USAID, and NSF-funded programmes, and supporting business development for a 10,000-person workforce.

By 2026, RTI's implementation has settled into what Anna Wetterberg, a senior leader at RTI Press, describes as a "second period" — past exploration and configuration, at steady-state utility. The numbers reflect it: approximately 75% value uplift versus prior systems; 25% admin time savings; 50% researcher time savings. The Cold Fusion specialist is gone; the two-database landscape is consolidated. Research data that was distributed and fragile is now centralised and maintained.

The primary ongoing value at this stage of maturity is not a feature. It is the outsourced maintenance relationship itself. RTI has absorbed significant organisational change since 2020 — budget pressure, staff reductions, a more constrained operational environment. A system that requires vendor-managed maintenance, security patching, and continuous updates has increasing value precisely when internal capacity is shrinking.

> "The maintenance and the updates and all that that we don't have to manage — that is outsourced, and especially in these times of reduced staffing, if we had to maintain it ourselves it would not happen"
> — *Anna Wetterberg, Senior Leader*

The honest note: RTI's reporting module transition was painful. Approximately 100 scheduled monthly and quarterly compliance reports were eliminated without direct replacement. Data export remains capped at 50 records. These are real limitations that the institution continues to work around. The buy decision holds — but maturity surfaces friction that the initial implementation did not anticipate.

5.6.b MANIPAL ACADEMY OF HIGHER EDUCATION — 2020 TO 2026

Mid-size private research university | Karnataka, India

In 2020, Manipal was an early adopter in the Asia-Pacific region — one of a small number of Indian research universities to have made a deliberate investment in a commercial RIMS at a time when the case for doing so was still being established regionally. The institution had opted for Pure over a DIY build on a specific argument: not that building was beyond them technically, but that integrating and maintaining validated data connections to Scopus, Web of Science, and CrossRef — and having those connections accepted as credible by international grant agencies and ranking bodies — was a fundamentally different challenge from building the RIMS itself.

By 2026, that argument has been vindicated by six years of evidence. A peer-reviewed case study published in 2024 documents the scale of Manipal's implementation: 1,684 researcher profiles, 271 research units, and 37,524 research outputs — a research information infrastructure that functions as the institution's primary interface with the global research landscape.[27] 70–75% of incoming PhD scholars and postdoctoral fellows report discovering their prospective guide or department through the Pure portal before joining. Research visibility has become a direct recruitment mechanism.

Doctoral Recruitment Through Pure Portal (Manipal)

70–75%

of incoming PhD scholars and postdoctoral fellows at Manipal Academy of Higher Education discovered their guide or department through the Pure portal before joining.

Source: *Source: Santhosh KV interview, May 2026; corroborated in peer-reviewed case study (Sab, Ahmed & Bagalkoti, 2024 — Journal of Data Science, Informetrics, and Citation Studies)*

Manipal's 2026 satisfaction rating is 10 out of 10 — the highest in the cohort. The awards module, which has failed or been abandoned at most institutions in the dataset, is active and performing at 4 out of 5 at Manipal — deployed for internal seed grant approval with post-award lifecycle tracking.

The architecture is explicitly hybrid: Pure handles global visibility, bibliometric credibility, and external-facing research infrastructure. Parallel internal systems handle the regulatory reporting obligations of 18 different Indian government agencies, each with different entity definitions and reporting calendars. This is not a failure of the buy decision — it is a mature and deliberate design, built on the recognition that no single commercial system can satisfy both global standards and the full complexity of India's national research regulatory environment.

> "Building a tool would not have been a major task, but the major task would have been to validate the system and how do I interface that system with standard indexing like Scopus or Web of Science"
> — *Santhosh KV, Research Administrator*

5.6.c Looking ahead: RIMS in 2032

The 2020 whitepaper could not have predicted what the landscape would look like six years later: compliance mandates shifting from embargo-based to immediate; AI moving from a research topic to an institutional operating expectation; research emergence in new geographies and regions at a pace not seen in a generation. The institutions that invested in research information infrastructure ahead of those shifts — RTI, Manipal, Southampton — are better positioned to respond to each of them than institutions that deferred the decision or built systems they could not sustain.

The trajectory of the next six years is visible in the 2026 evidence:

AI readiness will sort institutions. The RIMS investments made between 2020 and 2026 are creating a data quality advantage that will compound as AI tools become standard in research administration. Institutions with clean, structured, continuously updated research data (including validated researcher profiles, publication records, grant histories, and collaboration networks) will run AI tools that work. Institutions without this foundation will run AI tools on noisy, siloed inputs and receive proportionally degraded outputs. RTI already rates its data quality as sufficient for AI use. Manipal's hybrid architecture separates the globally-validated layer (Pure) from the nationally-compliant layer precisely because the global layer is where AI credibility is established. The institutions that act on this distinction now will have a compounding advantage by 2032.

Compliance will keep expanding. The funder mandate wave is not cresting — it is deepening. Immediate OA requirements, per-output tracking obligations, national priority alignment mandates, and open data policies are each adding administrative surface area. The institutions already running a RIMS absorb each new mandate as a configuration change. Institutions without one absorb each as a manual process. The gap between those two positions widens with every new requirement.

Regional network effects will compound. As documented in Section 5.5, the cross-institutional researcher discovery that emerges when multiple institutions in a region share the same platform is already visible in the Gulf. As adoption grows across the Gulf, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, that effect compounds in ways that no single-institution ROI calculation captures — and that remain structurally unavailable to institutions on bespoke systems.

The RIMS becomes a data layer, not a destination. RTI's observation — "pour your Pure data into a data lake and use Power BI" — and Manipal's explicit hybrid architecture both point toward the same future: a RIMS that functions primarily as a structured, validated data foundation feeding other tools (AI applications, institutional dashboards, compliance reporting systems, expertise discovery platforms) rather than as a standalone destination. The institutions that understand this now, and design their architecture accordingly, will extract substantially more value from their investment by 2032 than those treating the RIMS as the end point.

SECTION 6:

The Decision Looks Different By Institution Size

The build-or-buy calculus is not uniform — institution size, research intensity, and strategic ambition each shift the decision in predictable ways.

6.1 Large research-intensive institutions

For large research-intensive institutions, a RIMS is not a convenience but essential operating infrastructure. The cost of not having clean, integrated research data at this scale is measured in missed rankings opportunities, compliance failures, and strategic decisions made on incomplete information. Institutions of this type operate within a functional environment of considerable complexity — bibliometric pipelines, faculty evaluation systems, compliance reporting frameworks, and third-party platform integrations — that a bespoke system must match in full and maintain indefinitely.

The build case is credible at this tier, but only under a narrow set of conditions: a proven legacy system already exists, is actively maintained, and has a dedicated technical team with no succession risk. Where those conditions hold, a large institution with significant internal IT capacity may have legitimate reasons to sustain what it has. Where they do not — where the system is aging, understaffed, or dependent on one or two individuals who could leave — the risk profile of continuing to build looks materially different than the cost of switching.

Research grants administration is often the specific decision hinge at this tier. Large institutions with complex federal or multi-funder grant portfolios need to evaluate their pre-award and post-award workflows in detail, not just at the system level. No commercial RIMS fully satisfies every national or agency-specific grants compliance workflow, and hybrid architecture — commercial RIMS for core functions, supplementary internal tools for specific gaps — is standard practice among mature implementations. The question is not whether some internal development will be required. It is whether a full in-house build is faster, cheaper, and lower-risk than a commercial platform plus targeted supplementary tools.

One argument applies most strongly at this tier and is often underweighted: community leverage. Large institutions that join the Pure user group gain disproportionate influence over the product roadmap, shaping development priorities alongside peer institutions. Southampton's research systems team, for instance, has worked through the UK user community to flag and escalate product gaps — most recently the activities module — that would have taken years to surface and address in a single-institution build. A proprietary system has no equivalent mechanism.

> *"With Pure, you get the benefit of both worlds — you get the reliability, but also you get to drive best practice through everyone coming together and influencing the development."*
>
> **— Gemma Fitzsimmons,**
> Research Systems, University of Southampton (UK)

6.2 Smaller and teaching-focused institutions

The structural argument for buying rather than building is actually stronger for smaller institutions and it is stronger for a reason that the cost comparison obscures. The fixed costs of building a RIMS do not scale with institution size. A small institution pays roughly the same development and maintenance cost as a large one, but spreads it across a smaller research base, a smaller IT team, and a smaller budget. The effective cost per researcher is higher. The risk of staff dependency is higher. The recovery cost if the project fails is proportionally larger.

Smaller institutions are also less likely to have dedicated research IT capacity in the first place. The effective cost of building is not just the development budget — it is that budget plus the opportunity cost of diverting whatever IT capacity the institution does have away from other institutional priorities. Pure's vendor-managed implementation and ongoing support have higher relative value precisely in this context, not lower.

The survey data confirms the pattern: small institutions report comparable satisfaction to large ones, and the value proposition scales effectively down to the smallest cohorts in the dataset. Flexible pricing is a named priority for 34% of respondents, concentrated in this tier — a signal of latent demand from institutions that want the functionality but need a pricing model that fits their scale. Ajman University is the prototype case for this segment: Pure live in six months, managed without any dedicated new hires, delivering immediate visibility and reporting gains for an institution that had previously spent three years failing to build an equivalent system internally.

6.3 Rising and aspirant institutions

For institutions building their research profile on the global stage — such as newer universities in the Gulf, rapidly growing institutions in South and Southeast Asia, and emerging research universities in Latin America — the RIMS decision carries a dimension that is absent from the large-institution calculus; it is not primarily about efficiency, but rather visibility.

A public research portal interconnected with platforms like Scopus and ORCID is the mechanism by which an institution establishes credibility in the international research landscape. Rankings bodies, grant agencies, and potential research partners assess institutions through their data presence — through the completeness and findability of their researcher profiles, the validated accuracy of their publication records, and the discoverability of their expertise. A DIY system does not come with a global discovery layer. It comes with whatever the institution can build and maintain, starting from zero credibility with the systems that matter.

Rankings pressure makes this concrete for Gulf institutions. In this environment, a native Scopus-to-SciVal integration is not a feature, it is a strategic requirement. The institutions in the 2026 cohort from this region have absorbed this point: Ajman University and Khalifa University both describe the rankings pipeline function as among the least replicable aspects of the system.

For institutions actively growing their researcher base — whether through structured talent recruitment programs or organic expansion — Pure's automated profile onboarding delivers additional immediate value. Researchers arriving from international institutions bring publication histories distributed across multiple databases and identifier systems. Harvesting and reconciling that history manually is a significant administrative burden at scale; Pure handles it automatically. At Manipal Academy in India, as documented in Section 5.6, the portal has become a direct recruitment channel. The majority of incoming researchers discover their prospective guide or department through it before ever making formal contact with the institution.

> "Having a system like Pure will definitely help an institution in providing better data to the ranking agency in terms of any bibliometrics."
> *— Santhosh KV, Manipal Academy of Higher Education*

A distinct but related value is researcher collaboration facilitation, which is most visible at institutions actively scaling their activity. As Section 5.5 documents, this extends across institutional boundaries when peer institutions share the same platform: researchers who were geographically proximate but informationally isolated from each other become mutually discoverable. For aspirant institutions in regions where Pure adoption is concentrating, this cross-institutional discovery is a compounding benefit with no equivalent in a bespoke-system world.

> *"Having a system like Pure, when many of our faculties write an international grant, they can easily put this as a link and a granting agency — nationally and internationally — are ready to accept the data from here."*
>
> **— Santhosh KV,**
> Research Administrator, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (India)

For aspirant institutions, the RIMS value proposition is not administrative efficiency. It is the infrastructure that makes a research community visible, findable, and connected — to the world outside, and to itself.

6.4 Non-university research organisations

RTI International's experience points to an underserved segment: applied research institutes, contract research organisations (CROs), and government research labs for whom Pure's value is not academic reputation but business development and internal expertise management.

The global contract research organisation market was valued at approximately USD 82 billion in 2024, projected to USD 139 billion by 2029.[28] Major non-university research performers — RAND, Brookings, MITRE, SRI International, Battelle, and dozens of others — collectively employ tens of thousands of researchers and face the same profile management, compliance, and expertise discovery challenges as universities. RTI's experience demonstrates that the model translates directly: the profile management, compliance tracking, and expertise discovery challenges that drive RIMS adoption in universities are structurally identical in applied research organisations. The segment is underserved, not unsuited.

SECTION 7:

The Conditions That Favour Buying

The evidence does not suggest that building is always the wrong choice. There are circumstances where it remains a defensible path. But those circumstances are narrower than most institutions recognise — and the conditions under which buying most clearly outperforms are broader.

When Building Remains an Option

Building has a legitimate case in a small number of specific circumstances. Institutions operating at a very large scale may face licensing costs that are genuinely prohibitive though this condition only holds if the institution can also sustain an indefinite ongoing development commitment, which is a separate and frequently underestimated requirement. Institutions with workflow requirements that have no commercial equivalent, verified through rigorous market assessment, not assumed, may have grounds for custom development. And institutions already operating a mature, actively maintained legacy system, with a dedicated team and no succession risk, may have more to lose from migration than from continued investment in what they have. Where these conditions genuinely apply, the commercial case is weaker.

Where the Evidence Most Strongly Favours Buying.

The commercial case is clearest under three circumstances. First, when an institution is starting from scratch: the full lifecycle cost of custom development — build, integration, maintenance, and staff continuity — is consistently underestimated, and the gap between projected and actual cost widens over time. Second, when the decision is being driven by internal IT advocacy rather than strategic assessment: build decisions made personally tend to be poorly scoped and resistant to course correction. Third, when timeline pressure is real — as it was for PUJ Colombia, Ajman University, and the majority of 2026 survey respondents. A commercial RIMS is operational in months; a custom build takes 18–36 months to reach basic functionality, and longer still to reach the integration depth a commercial platform delivers from day one.

7.1 The partial build pattern

The evidence reveals a consistent hybrid: institutions that choose Pure for core RIMS functions still build internally for specific module gaps. The hybrid is not a compromise — it is where commercial coverage ends and institution-specific workflow needs begin.

Research grants administration — spanning pre-award processes through post-award compliance — is the function most frequently supplemented or displaced by internal development. National funder requirements are unique to each country and organisation; customisation is always required, and no commercial RIMS fully satisfies every institutional workflow.

This pattern reflects a structural limitation of the RIMS category broadly. Commercial RIMS platforms track grants as research information objects; they do not fully replace dedicated eRA systems. Institutions with complex federal grant compliance requirements (US-based NIH/NSF funded organisations) typically run a RIMS alongside dedicated eRA platforms (Cayuse, Kuali Research, InfoEd). The integration gap between RIMS and eRA/finance systems is a known pain point across the sector.

Institution	Status	Reason
Manipal Academy (India)	Active — 4/5 rating	Internal seed grant approval; customised eligibility criteria; post-award lifecycle tracking; full grants-to-outputs loop closed
PUJ Colombia	Permanently displaced	Commercial module not ready at decision point; internal solution deployed and entrenched
Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (Saudi)	Institutional Review Board (IRB) abandoned after 1+ month; grants module still under evaluation	IRB required blind multi-step cross-departmental routing, with anonymisation enforced at each stage. Pure could not satisfy the access-control requirement. Mandatory fields that could not be removed forced a workaround: researchers fill an external form and attach it as PDF, entering the same information twice. Grants module is simpler and remains under evaluation — but compulsory fields still create friction.
Ajman University (UAE)	Partially deployed	Grant-to-output linking implemented; full pre/post-award management not in scope
Universidad San Sebastián (Chile)	Active — 4/5 rating	External and internal grant applications managed end-to-end via Funding Opportunities module; traceability from request through to award; comment threads and approval workflows described as primary value; second confirmed success story alongside Manipal
University of Texas Medical Branch (USA)	Not deployed — eRA architecture	US academic health centre: pre- and post-award managed entirely through InfoEd and PeopleSoft; Pure receives grant metadata post-award only and is not in the compliance lifecycle. Standard US eRA pattern — 1/5 rating reflects an integration gap, not a product failure; a direct signal for other US health institutions evaluating Pure against existing eRA infrastructure

Source: Knowledge E interview cohort, 2026

Activities and impact tracking is an emerging parallel gap. Southampton's research office identified a sector-wide problem at the Pure International Conference: no institution has a working solution for structured activity tracking within Pure. Pure's current activities module offers only a type field, a title, and an open text box — no structured schema, no mapping to standard reporting categories such as UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)/Higher Education Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) requirements. Southampton built a parallel MS Lists + Power Apps system to fill the gap.

National research priority reporting is a third gap, specific to the Gulf and analogous national research mandate environments. Saudi institutions are required to report research outputs mapped to RDIA's four national priorities; similar frameworks exist in other Gulf states and emerging research economies. Pure's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) mapping is the closest existing capability, but does not extend to configurable national priority frameworks. Institutions in these environments currently perform this mapping manually. This is an honest limitation — one that does not undermine the buy decision but should be factored into governance planning and workflow design from day one.

A more accurate framing of the buy vs. build decision may be that a RIMS eliminates the need to build core research information infrastructure, but that it does not eliminate all supplementary in-house development. Institutions should evaluate their specific workflow requirements against known gaps in their specific needs and use case before finalising their decision.

SECTION 8:

How To Decide: A Framework For Institutional Committees

The decision is less about technical capacity and more about strategic position, governance readiness, and honest assessment of what building today actually requires.

8.1 Are you an ambition buyer or a pain buyer?

The entry point to this decision shapes every conversation that follows. Institutions approach the build-or-buy question from one of two motivations — and which one is driving the agenda determines which arguments land and which fall flat.

- **Ambition:** growth and reputation focus, rankings aspiration, international visibility, talent attraction, strategic planning enhancement. The imperative is forward-looking, with a RIMS as the infrastructure for where the institution is going.

- **Pain:** efficiency and cost reduction, compliance burden relief, administrative streamlining, system failure recovery. The imperative is immediate, with a RIMS as relief from what the institution is currently absorbing.

Both are valid but the decision-making room tends to be occupied by different people depending on which type of institution you are.

In ambition-driven decisions, the economic buyer is typically a senior research leader who has tied research information infrastructure to specific rankings targets, talent recruitment goals, or institutional strategy commitments. They are not the day-to-day user; they want the decision framed at the level of institutional impact, not feature specification.

In pain-driven decisions, the buyer is more often a Research Information Manager, Research Systems Administrator, or the sole RIMS support person at a small institution. They are operational, in the weeds, and shopping for relief rather than vision. They know exactly where the system is failing; they need to convince someone with budget authority to act.

In either context, the process typically runs through a University Librarian or senior research information professional who has seen failed implementations, understands what governance failure looks like, and will not sign off without peer evidence and a clear data quality plan. This profile is often the internal champion who has built the business case; they are not slow because they are unconvinced, but because they know what owning a failed implementation costs.

And in most contexts, an IT Director or Head of Enterprise Systems may be in the room — someone whose first instinct, often technically justified, is *we could build that*. This profile rarely owns the budget but can raise important blockers on a deal that is otherwise agreed. The argument that lands here is not technical: it is the distinction between building a research information system and sustaining one through staff turnover, shifting priorities, and accumulating integration maintenance. Section 4.4 and the documented build-failure pattern in Section 4.3 are the evidence that shifts this conversation.

8.2 The Build vs. Buy criteria matrix

Factor	Build favours	Buy favours
Control	Unique requirements, high customisation	Standard workflows, best practices acceptable
Cost	Large IT team already in place	Limited IT capacity, predictable budgeting
Speed	Long timeline acceptable	Urgent need, rapid deployment required
Scalability	Stable size, fixed scope	Growing institution, uncertain future needs
Risk	High risk tolerance, innovation focus	Risk-averse, proven solutions preferred
Integration	Isolated system acceptable	Ecosystem integration critical

Source: Knowledge E consultant framework, 2026

8.3 Red flag checklist for DIY risk

Each of the following conditions increases the probability that a build project stalls, fails, or cannot be sustained. The more that apply, the stronger the case for buying.

- The key developer or system owner has been in post fewer than three years — or there is no succession plan if they leave mid-build or mid-operation.
- The IT team has limited research administration domain knowledge, not just general development capability.
- Current system documentation is incomplete, informal, or held by one person.
- A compliance deadline falls within the next 12 months — REF submission, accreditation review, funder audit, or national OA mandate.
- Leadership has set explicit rankings improvement targets within the next three to five years.
- Significant researcher mobility is expected — international hires, institutional mergers, or rapid growth requiring profile onboarding at scale.
- SciVal, Scopus, or ranking agency integration is needed within the next 12 months.
- The build decision is being driven by an internal IT team with professional ownership of the project rather than institutional analysis.

8.4 Assess your governance readiness — not just your decision

Deciding to buy and being ready to extract value are two separate questions. The survey consistently shows that the binding constraint on deeper Pure use is not product capability, but rather organizational readiness. Open-text responses across multiple regions identify "leadership engagement and prioritization" as the primary barrier; several respondents operate without a dedicated team — one person carrying the system alone.

Before committing, institutional committees should assess four conditions:

1. Is there a named system owner with accountability across libraries, research offices, and IT?
2. Does leadership have an active mandate for the system, or is it a library project?
3. Is there a data quality governance plan beyond go-live?
4. Is there a staffing budget for ongoing operation — not just implementation?

8.5 Clarify your architecture before you sign

The buy decision is not a decision to buy everything — and institutions that treat it as one consistently create the friction and cost they were trying to avoid. The evidence from across the cohort shows a predictable pattern: buy a commercial RIMS for core functions, and support organizational needs with supplementary builds for specific gaps. This is not a compromise position. It is standard practice among the most mature and satisfied implementations in the dataset.

Clarifying your architecture means making three distinct decisions before you sign, not after. The first is straightforward: the core RIMS — researcher profiles, publication harvesting, public portal, OA compliance, bibliometric integration — is what you are buying, and it is where commercial platforms are unambiguous. The second requires honest evaluation against your specific workflows: awards and grants administration, reporting, and activity tracking each have known gaps in commercial coverage, and assuming they will work as needed without prior assessment is where post-implementation friction begins. The third is a budgeting decision: national regulatory reporting, institution-specific grant approval workflows, and BI dashboard integration will almost certainly require supplementary builds, and institutions that plan for this from day one build functional architectures; those that discover it post-go-live treat it as a failure.

The awards module pattern across the cohort makes the stakes concrete: the module was abandoned or never deployed at at least four institutions in the 2026 cohort. The activities module gap is broader still, sector-wide rather than institution-specific.

> "We asked the room: is anyone doing this well? Silence. Everyone has the same problem — there's just no structured data formats, no schema for activity data"
> *— Gemma Fitzsimmons, University of Southampton*

The buy decision and the architecture decision are not the same thing, and conflating them is where implementation plans most reliably go wrong. Knowing what you are buying, what requires case-by-case evaluation, and what will need supplementary development regardless of vendor is not a caveat to the buy case. It is what a well-executed buy decision looks like.

8.6 Set realistic implementation expectations

Buying is not the finish line, it is the starting condition. The return on a RIMS investment accumulates over years, not at go-live: through steady improvement in data quality, progressive activation of additional modules, and the internal alignment work that connects research information to institutional decision-making. Institutions that treat go-live as the outcome consistently underinvest in exactly that work.

A 2024 OCLC Research analysis of mature US RIMS implementations characterises the pattern precisely: this is a marathon, not a sprint.[18] Value does not arrive at go-live but instead accumulates through sustained data enrichment, iterative expansion of use cases, and the cross-institutional partnerships that connect a RIMS to the decisions it is meant to inform. The University of Illinois Library, working in sustained partnership with the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, built Illinois Experts from a Scopus-only publication portal in 2016 into a multi-source dataset spanning patents, press coverage, honours, awards, and researcher datasets by 2023. Washington University School of Medicine began with a conservative focus on expertise discovery in 2019 and expanded progressively from there.

The institutions in this cohort that report the highest value share one characteristic: they have been running the system for years, and its value has compounded with each successive layer of use and governance. That trajectory is precisely what the AI-readiness argument depends on. A RIMS that has been consistently maintained, progressively enriched, and governed with institutional accountability for data quality becomes the structured foundation from which AI tools produce reliable outputs. A system that was launched and left becomes a database. The transition from system of record to engine of impact is not a product decision, it is an implementation decision, made and remade over time.

CONCLUSION:

The Question Has Changed

Conclusion

The 2020 paper asked: should you buy or build a research information system? The answer is not simply "buy", it is “understand what you are deciding”. A RIMS was once a system of record. It is now an operating system for the research office that must feed AI applications, connect to compliance frameworks, integrate with ranking systems, and support strategic decision-making in real time. Building that system from scratch is a qualitatively different proposition than it was even a few years ago.

Four forces have converged to make this decision more urgent than it has ever been:

1. an accelerating compliance wave,
2. AI readiness as an institutional imperative,
3. intensifying global rankings competition, and
4. an unprecedented movement of research talent across national systems. Each of these forces raises the cost of inaction and the cost of building an equivalent system in-house.

Evidence from a new survey, stakeholder interviews, and an updated cost analysis points in one direction:

- The financial case, the operational case, and the strategic case for buying a proven commercial RIMS are stronger now than they have ever been.
- The time savings are real but require honest framing; the more durable claim is that buying a commercial RIMS can lead to role transformation from system maintenance to data use.
- The conditions under which building is justified are narrow and specific; institutions starting from scratch in 2026 rarely meet them.

The question is not whether to act, but rather how quickly to act.

Appendices

Appendix A — TCO Calculator Methodology

The Buy vs. Build TCO Calculator is a companion tool that allows institutional decision-makers to generate a customised total cost of ownership comparison for their specific context. Users input their institution size, configuration scope, current system status, and local staff costs; the calculator returns a five-year cost comparison across all relevant cost categories — one-time implementation, annual staffing, maintenance, security and compliance, and opportunity costs — for both a DIY build and a commercial RIMS.

Methodology:

- Three institution size tiers: Small (under 200 FTE researchers), Medium (200–1,500), Large (over 1,500), with separate cost curves for each
- Five cost categories modelled for the DIY build: implementation and data migration; IT/admin staffing; maintenance and technical debt (benchmarked at 15–20% of initial build cost annually); security and compliance overhead; and opportunity cost of missing integrations and ranking data pipelines
- Commercial RIMS costs modelled on implementation (one-time) and annual license, calibrated against 2026 pricing data and validated against confirmed figures from the interview cohort
- Staff savings assumptions drawn from the 2026 Pure User Survey (admin time savings median: 20%, mean: 27%) and interview data; all figures in USD with an adjustable staff cost input for non-US institutions

Where this whitepaper makes the qualitative case — through field evidence, failure patterns, and institutional context — the calculator makes it quantitative and specific. Decision-makers can stress-test the findings against their own staffing assumptions, adjust for regional cost differences, and arrive at a figure that reflects their institution rather than a generic benchmark.

Appendix B — Survey Methodology

The 2026 Pure User Survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data from current Pure users across seven regions, providing the first systematic cross-regional evidence base on buy-or-build outcomes since the 2020 RIMS TCO study. The survey was designed to capture adoption experience, time savings, satisfaction, and future priorities — with particular attention to the barriers that prevent deeper system use.

Methodology:

- 29 usable responses (34 total; 5 excluded as internal test entries)
- Geographic distribution: North America (8), Europe (8), Asia-Pacific (6), Latin America (3), Middle East/Gulf (2), South Africa (1), Pakistan (1)
- Institution size: mid-size 69%, large 21%, small 10%
- 62% of respondents have used Pure for 3 or more years; 69% consented to follow-up contact
- Fieldwork period: March–April 2026

All 29 respondents are current Pure users. No institutions that evaluated and chose to build, or that churned from Pure, are represented in the sample. Findings should be read as directional signals from a retained user base — they are consistent with interview evidence and the broader literature, but are not statistically representative of the full market. Where the survey provides the quantitative signal, the stakeholder interview programme and desk research synthesis provide the qualitative depth; all three strands are designed to be read together.

Appendix C — Interview Roster

The stakeholder interview programme was conducted between March and May 2026, spanning ten institutions across four continents. Interviews were conducted via video call and averaged 45–60 minutes; written questionnaire responses were accepted where scheduling constraints applied. All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed; quotations are lightly edited for clarity.

Interviewee	Institution	Country
Nikesh Narayanan	Khalifa University	UAE
Dr. Dina Al Abbad	Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University	Saudi Arabia
Francisco Durango	Pontificia Universidad Javeriana	Colombia
Prof. Kamran Arshad	Ajman University	UAE
Matthew Nelson & Anna Wetterberg	RTI International	USA
Gemma Fitzsimmons	University of Southampton	UK
Santhosh KV	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	India
Melodi Moore	University of Texas Medical Branch	USA
Cristobal Castro Vera	Universidad San Sebastián	Chile
Laura Mure	Aalto University	Finland

Interviewees were selected to represent geographic diversity, institutional type, and varying stages of RIMS adoption — from recent implementations to decade-long users. Together with the survey data and desk research, their accounts provide the institutional grounding for the patterns documented throughout this report.

Appendix D — Scoring Worksheet

The Build vs. Buy Scoring Worksheet is a companion tool to Section 7 of this report, designed for use by institutional committees during the evaluation process. It consolidates the decision criteria and risk indicators from the report into a structured self-assessment — one that can be worked through collaboratively in a meeting or used to prepare an internal briefing.

What it includes:

- A needs assessment (Part 1) that establishes whether a RIMS is a strategic necessity before the scoring begins
- A build readiness score (Part 2) across three dimensions: staffing continuity, integration capability, and data quality and AI readiness
- A risk factor deduction (Part 3) covering the eight conditions under which build projects most commonly stall or fail

The worksheet does not produce a binary recommendation — it produces a score. Part 2 awards points for genuine build readiness; Part 3 deducts for risk conditions that most commonly cause build projects to fail. The combined score maps to one of four Decision Profiles — The Pragmatist, The Strategist, The Evaluator, and The Builder — each with a tailored interpretation of what the evidence means for that institution's specific position and a recommended next step.

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