

## M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries

### Response to the RSLG Report

1. The Steering Group of the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries welcomes and endorses in principle the RSLG's recommendation that the UK create a new body, the Research Libraries network with a remit "to develop, prioritise and lead a UK-wide strategy for research information provision."

2. The M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries has 44 member institutions. It is by far the largest consortium of its kind in the UK and has developed an extensive range of grass-roots collaborative activities since its foundation in 1993. We have a wide and diverse membership. This ranges from the research intensive and large multi-disciplinary institutions through to the smaller, specialised institutions within the University of London, and also includes the "new" universities. Increasingly our membership also includes other institutions which support research and learning such as the British Library and the Imperial War Museum Library. Details of the Consortium and its membership can be found at <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk>.

3. The Consortium itself supports research, teaching and learning (given it is often difficult to separate them) and facilitates access to our collective information infrastructure resources by means of collaborative resource discovery, access and other mutual support activities. A particular success has been the Inform25 service (see <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/index.html>) which provides simultaneous access to over 140 academic library catalogues within the London area. This is *de facto* a national tool which, given the richness of research resources in London, is used by researchers throughout the UK. Yet despite this, the service is resourced solely by Consortium members.

4. Development of the national research infrastructure has been facilitated by the work of bodies such as JISC, particularly in the exploitation of ICT developments to underpin increased accessibility to, and availability of, collections and services which support research. However, there has been no over-arching holistic and co-ordinated research support approach. As a result much remains that could, and should, be done by the proposed RLN. This includes additional work needed to foster the dissemination of UK research outputs and outcomes, ongoing investment of a nationally-co-ordinated information infrastructure that builds upon, and supports, existing collaborative activities together with consideration of the wider strategic implications in the information infrastructure environment to support UK research productivity.

5. Despite existing endeavours, much has still been regarded as the responsibility of individual institutions. Some areas, quite rightly, should remain the province of individual institutions. However, there is a need for an appropriate and strategic balance between a national framework, regional collaborative activities and institutional responsibilities, together with appropriate supporting structures and mechanisms. This will become even more important as the sector seeks to adapt to, and influence, the exciting but challenging options which scholarly communication trends can bring, once there is clarity about future sustainable business models.

6. To optimise return on investment we believe it will be necessary to adopt an inclusive approach that both recognises and builds upon previous work and also provides system-wide opportunities for stakeholder involvement across all types of HE institutions. We understand that HEFCE has commissioned consultants who will be consulting with stakeholders concerning the suitable governance arrangements for the proposed new body. The M25 Consortium will, of course, be pleased to contribute to that debate.

Suzanne Enright  
M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries  
May 2003