

JISC Response to RSLG Report

1. Summary

- 1.1 The JISC welcomes the main recommendation in the report - to establish a body (the Research Libraries Network) consisting of national libraries and those university libraries that support research, to manage the information resource needs of research. The JISC believes that the primary role of the RLN should be to identify the information resource needs of the research community and, by acting as an authoritative body, to collaborate with existing agencies.
- 1.2 In particular the RLN could be very effective in enabling universities to make better use of local, regional and national infrastructure (in a wide sense of the word). It is, however, only one such area where closer collaboration will be useful in meeting the huge opportunities presented by the increasing use of the Internet and on-line resources in higher education.
- 1.3 The RLN represents a real opportunity to address the serious problems facing the acquisition and management of information resources for research. We would wish to see a RLN that works within the current environment to promote a modern role for university and national libraries and the librarian profession and be forward looking in building electronic research collections for the future. We do not believe the RLN should subsume existing JISC activities except where they are solely relevant to the management of research library resources (e.g. SUNCAT) as this would seriously undermine coherence in the management of resources across research and education.
- 1.4 Improved collaboration between all major relevant research organisations will be key to the success of the RLN. There would be considerable value to the community from the RLN collaborating with bodies such as the DCMS and the Research Councils. The JISC therefore believes the RLN's membership should be broader than proposed, and include the Research Councils/OST, DCMS/Resource and other major research funding bodies. The JISC would also wish to be a member of RLN.
- 1.5 The RLN should aim to complement what is already working. The JISC is currently undertaking a mid-term strategy review which will be usefully informed by the report and we look forward to collaborating in key areas, as part of the proposed RLN. We feel the remit and responsibilities of the RLN and the development of working relationships with other agencies, in particular the JISC, need considerably more consideration. We therefore propose the establishment of a "shadow" RLN in the first instance led by major players such as CURL, the British Library, Research Councils and the JISC. The JISC has a track record of collaborating with the British Library and would welcome the opportunity to continue the good work of the HE/BL taskforce which ceased during RSLG's deliberations.
- 1.6 The "shadow" RLN should seek to develop a shared vision of a library future based on electronic research collections and how these are to be created, discovered, accessed and maintained. It should consider the level of support necessary, identify gaps and overlaps in provision and consider ways forward. This in turn would inform the strategies of JISC and other key relevant funding bodies.
- 1.7 Recommendation: We recommend the creation of a "shadow" RLN, working as an agent of the Funding Councils, in collaboration with the BL. This body should determine a more visionary and exciting remit with terms of reference along the lines detailed below, subject to an appropriate cross-sectoral funding mechanism being created to support the proposed activities.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) is funded by the UK higher and further education funding bodies. The JISC's mission is "to help further and higher education institutions and the research community realise their ambitions in exploiting the opportunities of information and communications technology by exercising vision and leadership, encouraging collaboration and co-operation and by funding and managing national development programmes and services of the highest quality".
- 2.2 This mission is carried out through committees which advise on programmes of work and the funding of various infrastructure and advisory services. The core budget for 2003/04 AY is £60.77m. This funds infrastructure and development programmes in support of learning and teaching, research and the management of colleges and universities. The proportion of funding from HE and FE, and from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is determined by the funding councils.
- 2.3 The JISC agenda is driven by three major requirements:
- the needs of institutions (colleges and universities);
 - government and funding councils' policies and objectives;
 - technology opportunities.
- 2.4 Through JISC and RSLP programmes, some capacity has been built in the UK library sector for a more collaborative and distributed approach to library provision (e.g. COPAC, SUNCAT and national content licensing).

3. The JISC Response

Key Issues

- 3.1 In terms of the RSLG report itself, the first two chapters make a very good case for why libraries are facing severe and unique problems in meeting both the on-line agenda, and the continuing challenges of 'legacy' collections of more traditional materials. These reasons underpin much of the JISC strategy; and are fully supported by the JISC. Nor would we disagree with the need to create the RLN but we believe there are generic information management problems common to libraries, e-science and e-learning. Thus the RLN would complement the National E-Science Centre (NeSC) and the proposed Academy for Advancement of Learning in HE in working with the JISC to solve these generic problems and to address the specific library challenges described in the report. In creating the RLN there is therefore a strong need to consider the wider needs of e-science, e-learning and e-business within the sector.
- 3.2 Section B of the RSLG report provides a very useful analysis of the information resource requirements of researchers. Four key themes are identified (paragraph 27), the need for: hybrid libraries (paragraphs 29 to 31); better tools for identifying and locating information (increasingly required on line) (paragraphs 38 to 42); extended access to print resources; and good local and national library provision (paragraphs 43 and 44). These conclusions support the JISC's activities which are aimed at addressing many of these issues.
- 3.3 Section C describes the current status of research information provision in the UK and how well it meets the requirements set out in Section B. Of particular interest to the JISC is the section on on-line resources (paragraphs 57 to 62).
- 3.4 The report recognises the generic nature of much of this work in terms of providing common solutions to on-line information management in learning and teaching and the administration of institutions. But this reference is made only in passing (paragraph 172). It would be difficult therefore for the JISC to pursue its work in creating an integrated information environment without great duplication of effort and cost within the model proposed for the RLN.

- 3.5 The report as it stands has not fully explored the role of grid computing in particular. Although the RSLG commissioned a sub-group on e-science (presented as Annex C to the report) this is not discussed in any detail (see paragraphs 110 and 121) and the considerable potential for change in the presentation of research results (for example by linkage of research papers with experimental data and applications) is not fully explored.
- 3.6 Nor is there anything on born digital material or on creating the electronic research collections of the future, nor on institutional repositories, digitisation programmes, or for work on trusted repositories. Indeed, it could be argued that the report is mainly concerned with managing the collections of the past rather than creating the collections of the future. The JISC is already undertaking a much wider and innovative vision for managing all types of on-line information resources. It is also important to consider a more imaginative role for libraries in the future as managers of a wide diversity of information resources within an institution (as for example is happening at the University of Cambridge in relation to the MIT DSpace project).
- 3.7 The JISC does not believe that the RLN should replace some JISC work (mainly the Information Environment) against the narrower remit of research materials; nor that it should manage other areas of JISC work (Content Services and Support for Research). Nor does the JISC concur with the statement that funding to support research should be managed by RLN and “be re-focused to some extent”. There is no serious argument in the report to demonstrate that such issues as discovery and access are specific to research rather than generic. Arrogating these issues to research would cut across the need for national programmes and, crucially, institutions to integrate the management of online information resources. Research and education require common tools and platforms across hybrid and digital libraries, e-science data, grid based datasets and learning materials. The library profession should be key to achieving this but there is no obvious case made for such a split approach.
- 3.8 The JISC is in a unique position to bridge the education sectors, from research to schools. There is an identified need to ensure that the supporting infrastructure in education is interoperable. JISC, through its development strategy, is driving developments in this area. Research funding has been increasing at a steady and impressive rate for the past few years, from both government and private sources (the Wellcome Foundation in particular). Much of this funding is in support of e-science and the Grid. However, there is little appreciation of the additional load this places on ICT infrastructure other than networking, and little additional funding, even from SRIF, has been spent on supporting research through improved ICT. The JISC would be pleased to see an initiative to support the broader infrastructure needs of the research community, such as:
- on line scholarly resources – research datasets, books and journals, multi-media resources etc;
 - management tools and research and development for accessing and using these resource (other than the Grid);
 - skills development in ICT for researchers in some disciplines.

Workplan/Terms of Reference

- 3.9 The key conclusion of the RSLG report is that “*the UK should create a new body to lead and co-ordinate the provision of research infrastructure*” [the Research Libraries Network] *as existing structures are not well placed to meet developments in research methods and information handling*” (paragraph 3). The RLN will provide strategic leadership, an executive function and a role in high level advocacy (paragraph 4).
- 3.10 The RLN’s relationship with its partners is seen as very important and that “*all partners may have to make certain concessions to the RLN, in terms of their current individual autonomy*” and that in time “*the constituent partners will lose visibility as discrete parts of the information network*” (paragraph 169). This includes the JISC (paragraphs 170 and 172).

- 3.11 Section E describes the Research Libraries Network as a “*single overarching body*” in charge of an “*integrated national strategy*” (paragraph 160). The RLN will provide: strategic leadership planned in collaboration with the research community, better discovery tools; wider access to hard copy and electronic materials; sustainability of resources; technical support (partly through JISC); and new platforms and debate on scholarly communications issues (paragraph 161).
- 3.12 Proposed terms of reference for the RLN are not specifically stated but its work plan is described in Section D. This is interesting in that much of it is already underway through JISC. The problem of content procurement (but not creation) is well described in paragraphs 116 to 120 which is in line with and can usefully inform current strategic planning within JCCS.
- 3.13 In considering terms of reference for the proposed RLN, the JISC would recommend the following outline:
- i. To represent and bring together existing agencies and to identify the information resource needs of the research community;
 - ii. To identify and address issues of current interest to research libraries; in particular, through collaboration, to:
 - complete the production of a national on-line catalogue of print and electronic resources held in these libraries;
 - build an appropriate common search engine to access these catalogues;
 - promote the sharing of resources (physical and electronic);
 - develop and disseminate common management procedures and practices where appropriate, working with other university and college libraries (through SCONUL);
 - iii. To exploit and develop local, regional and national infrastructure to improve use, service to users, efficiency and value for money. This will include:
 - document supply;
 - collective procurement;
 - shared library access (RSLP continuation, area funding);
 - consider physical libraries and library resources in the light of HE strategic needs;
 - iv. To work with the JISC and others to help address generic on-line information issues common to libraries, e-learning, e-science and management. This includes:
 - finding tools;
 - access management including authorisation, authentication, accounting and information management including data descriptions, rights management etc.;
 - delivery;
 - preservation and archiving;
 - v. To represent the interests of the research libraries both within the UK and abroad through liaison and working in partnership with other relevant bodies.
- 3.14 Another TOR to consider could be content procurement and acquisition. It is an urgent issue although the report does not overtly press for a role here. The problem is that on-line content is expensive and we should try to break away from the model that says primary and secondary sources, especially e-journals, should all be met from the library budget of the universities. There is a requirement to consider ways of establishing sustainable economic models for the procurement and management of online resources. This issue is, however, wider than the remit of the RLN. It is useful to encourage such resources, while managed by the libraries, to be generated and owned by other departments in universities. The management of such resources

within an institution would benefit from the input of library professionals even where they are not the purchasers or creators.

- 3.15 Scholarly communication is also a complex issue. We believe it is an important objective to seek to mitigate the problem of escalating journal costs. The problems of scholarly communications are discussed in paragraphs 142 to 158. This is largely based on the work of the JISC's Scholarly Communications Group (chaired by Dr Reg Carr) which is included as Annex B to the RSLG report. This supports the work of the Scholarly Communications Group and endorses the need for a full debate noting the relevance of the funding councils RAE review. However, we would not advise the HEFCs to delegate this issue wholly to the RLN. Libraries represent one "side" of the problem, i.e. the purchasers, and they cannot easily act as sole brokers with the publishers. Many of the approaches to this problem lie in the hands of the FCs and RCs; in particular the RAE, rights management within the institutions, and attitudes to e-prints and pre-prints. As an example it would be desirable for the RCs to make it a condition of grant that all resulting papers be made available, free of charge, on a web site.

RLN Membership

- 3.16 A key recommendation for the new RLN is its membership, which will include the national libraries. The JISC serviced a high-level joint BL/HE task force from 1999 – 2001 to identify areas for future collaboration between the British Library and Higher Education. The task force agreed that there was a mutual interest in ensuring more effective and efficient overall provision for academic library users in the context of a distributed national collection of research resources. A jointly funded work programme was agreed, and the task force commissioned a number of relevant collaborative studies. The work of the task force did signal a new willingness and provided proof of an ability to work together to a common end that had not been consistently evident in prior years. There was unanimity on the need for a shared strategic vision and the necessity of building a framework for future sustainable and effective collaboration. A report (http://www.bl.uk/concord/pdf_files/blhe-overview.pdf) summarises the outcomes and recommendations of the task force. A new high-level strategic body, the Research Support Libraries Group, was then formed, and the RLN should be consistent with these earlier promising outcomes.
- 3.17 The creation of the RLN is an opportunity for the BL to move towards a pro-active leadership position for the research library community which is to be welcomed. However, it is important that HE ensures that the risks of this approach are minimised and issues relating to the commercial relationships between the BL and UK HE need to be taken into account. The nature of BL involvement with publishers has prevented it from taking the lead on behalf of the academic sector on important issues such as scholarly communications, licensing, costs and pricing models in order to avoid any repercussions for their "core" business. The BL needs the good will of publishers to pass the proposed legal deposit legislation on non-print materials, and also relies on them for licensing deals to stock its Document Supply Centre.
- 3.18 The JISC would welcome broader membership of the RLN in addition to those universities that hold research resources and the national libraries. For example, other universities and colleges, the museums, galleries, professional societies and private libraries. It would also be helpful to the JISC to consider relationships which should include VCs and relevant PVCs not just libraries. Cross membership with the JISC should also be provided. It is worth noting that two JISC sub-committees have an HE research librarian as chair, and these links should be built upon.