

Research Support Libraries Group

Minutes of the fifth meeting of the Research Support Libraries Group held on Monday 18 March 2002 at CentrePoint, London.

Attendees:	Brian Follett (Chair)	Observers:	Ms Linda Tiller
	Mr Bahram Bekhradnia	Apologies:	Prof. Michael Anderson
	Ms Lynne Brindley		Prof. Arthur Lucas
	Prof. Robert Burgess		Ms Karen Stanton
	Dr Reg Carr	Secretariat:	Ms Vanessa Conte
	Prof. David Eastwood		Mr Mike Crump
	Mr Andrew Green		Mr Paul Hubbard
	Prof. Ian Halliday		Mr Will Naylor
	Ms Mary Heaney		

Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed members and informed them of his recent activity on behalf of the Group, including speeches at two conferences and meetings with librarians and publishers in the UK and Canada.

Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

2. Members agreed two changes to the minutes of the previous meeting:
 - a. To add, "or did not view it as practicable", to the last sentence under **Lessons from the RSLP** (paragraph 3).
 - b. To replace, "serendipitous approach to acquisition," in paragraph 7 with a more appropriate description.
3. The Chair reminded members that the Group needed to make a recommendation on the future of the Access strand grant beyond the academic year 2002-03.
4. The Chair informed members that the secretariat planned to visit the Director of BIBSAM in late May to learn more about the Swedish system of national resource libraries. The secretariat would invite members to join the trip.

Research studies: How researchers use information resources – progress report

5. Paul Hubbard reported an excellent response rate to the questionnaire. Preliminary findings suggested that the overwhelming majority of researchers continue to rely on print material, although the use of electronic resources is increasing quickly. A third of respondents reported that access to external institutions was essential to their research;

while 40 per cent said that access to the British Library was important. The final report would be presented to the Group in June.

6. Several members asked about the methodology of the questionnaire, in particular whether respondents had been asked, given the financial constraints on the sector, to prioritise print and electronic provision. On behalf of the project steering group, Prof. Burgess replied that researchers had not been asked to prioritise provision in this way but that financial and other considerations would be used to interpret the results in the final report.

7. Members applauded the project's focus on the views of younger researchers.

Research studies: Costing study – progress report

8. Paul Hubbard reported that six universities previously involved in the Transparency Review had agreed to participate in this study, which aimed to give a robust estimate of the funds allocated to research support by UK HE libraries. An interim report would be available in April.

The electronic research library

9. The Chair began with a brief summary of the DNER, which he praised for having achieved a national standing. He then offered a vision of a national electronic research library (NERL): a hugely enlarged DNER led by the funding councils and the national libraries and characterised by the participation of a range of cross-sector organisations and a user-driven approach to content. The Chair asked members to comment on the vision and consider whether such a national structure was desirable.

10. In discussion, several members asked if and how the NERL differed from the Information Environment currently being pursued by JISC. The Chair replied that the NERL was certainly not in competition with the Information Environment, but was rather a long-term strategy for the development of the research arm of the Information Environment.

11. The Group debated which organisations should be involved in the NERL. Members agreed in principle that the NERL should be an inclusive body - encompassing HE, the research councils, specialist research libraries, cross-sector organisations including the NHS and eventually cross-domain bodies such as museums. Expansion to achieve this, however, was an incremental process and the NERL should initially be led by HEFCE and the British Library.

12. The Group turned to the question of content in the NERL. Members agreed that any significant growth of content was not viable under current arrangements because a user-driven mechanism to add content did not exist nor were there any incentives to create one. A central body to oversee content development (as opposed to the development of infrastructure, which was best left in the hands of JISC) was desirable, although it was not clear how such a body would be organised and funded.

13. As Chair of the RSLG sub-group on e-science, Prof. Halliday suggested that devolution of responsibility for content to the subject communities might be a pragmatic approach. This would allow users to establish appropriate standards and quality-assurance mechanisms for material within their own disciplines, although it was not clear if tangible subject communities actually existed in many subjects beyond those involved in e-science, such as particle physics and bioinformatics.

14. Members also debated what kind of content would characterise the NERL, in particular whether the NERL would simply aggregate and deliver content procured commercially, or if it would publish material itself. No consensus was reached.

15. The Chair concluded the discussion by asking members to return to the overarching questions: whether the NERL was desirable in principle and the vision outlined feasible. Overall, the Group agreed that the creation of a NERL as part of a national strategy for the competitiveness of UK research was desirable and a priority for the RSLG. The NERL should be user-driven, separate responsibility for acquiring content and developing infrastructure, and offer benefits to all stakeholders.

16. The Chair asked the secretariat to prepare a more detailed proposal for the leadership, responsibilities and potential funding partners of the NERL for the next meeting of the Group in April, possibly with the help of external consultants. Members asked the secretariat to use diagrams and schematic tools wherever possible.

Library collaboration – a possible way forward

17. Will Naylor introduced the paper which asked the Group to consider whether increased library collaboration at a local and/or national level was desirable. In discussion, members reiterated the view that there was an emerging problem in national monograph coverage which could potentially be addressed by deeper collaboration. Members also agreed that it would be difficult in the final report to discuss duplication of print material and not recommend some form of rationalisation.

18. The Group turned to the question of incentives to collaboration. Members agreed that the portfolio of activities already agreed – UK National Union Catalogues for serials and monographs and universal access for researchers to print material – represented important incremental steps to deeper collaboration. Beyond these activities members suggested several potential further steps, in particular:

- a. Revising the conditions of the Access strand grant to reward HEIs engaged in collaborative activity;
- b. Adopting a national strategy to enhance the aggregate collection of foreign language material;
- c. Creating a national office to promote collaboration, through disseminating good practice (such as the experiences of RSLP projects) and other initiatives.

19. Members agreed that local collaboration was valuable, as evidenced by the responses to the Researchers' Use of Information Sources questionnaire.

20. Members also discussed whether it was appropriate to isolate collaborative activity in print material from the draft proposal for the NERL. In discussion it was agreed that, although print and electronic resources were intermingled at an institutional level, from a strategic planning perspective it was appropriate to separate them.

21. The Chair concluded that collaboration in print resources was a priority for the Group, but it should not obscure the more pressing concern of the NERL.

Access to electronic resources – a Research Anywhere Charter

22. Will Naylor introduced the paper which proposed a Research Anywhere Charter - extending universal access rights for UK researchers to cover electronic resources as well as print material. The Group endorsed the Charter in principle, but raised doubts about the steps to achieve it. In particular, several members were sceptical about the potential to expand NESLI, which negotiates nationally for e-journal content on behalf of the HE sector. Moreover expanded national negotiations risked cementing the prevailing purchasing model for electronic resources, which ran counter to the Group's pursuit of an alternative means of scholarly communication.

23. Overall, the Group agreed that national negotiations with publishers for electronic content were an interim measure before the development of the NERL, although they should still be pursued if the proposal for a NERL was abandoned.

Document Supply Centre sub-group interim report

24. Mike Crump introduced the preliminary findings of the sub-group which suggested that, despite the proliferation of electronic delivery, a centralised model of provision remained the most cost-effective way of making a vast amount of new material including minority journals and grey literature available to UK researchers.

25. Members discussed the use of DSC journals by the HE sector and agreed that the service had proved crucial to the success of UK research.

Other business

26. The Chair concluded the meeting by outlining the remaining timetable for the RSLG. He informed members that the HEFCE hoped to publish the final report in the autumn.

Date of next meeting

27. Due to the cancellation of the meeting on 29 April, the next meeting of the Group will be held on 11/12 June 2002.