

## **Researchers' Use of Libraries and other Information Sources: current patterns and future trends**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of the study is to provide a detailed, up-to-date picture of what stored information of all kinds researchers in the UK require access to, of how they work with the sources and use the information, and of major emerging trends in these patterns, including variations in needs between academic disciplines. This will contribute of considerations on the options for generating and validating alternative models for building and managing a distributed national research information resource. It will form part of a broader programme of fact-finding and dialogue with the higher education community undertaken by a new group – see paragraph 2 below.

### **Background to the Study**

2. The HEFCE and the British Library, in partnership with the HE funding bodies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the national libraries of Scotland and Wales, have jointly established a new Research Support Libraries Group with the terms of reference at Annex A. The Group is expected to produce a single report, in the summer of 2002, making proposals for a new national strategy to ensure that UK researchers in all disciplines continue to have access to world class information sources – that is, to all of the research materials, including materials in print and electronic form, that they need in order to produce work of national and international excellence. The Group is working to a 10 year strategic planning horizon.

3. As part of its preparatory work the Group will be consulting widely within the academic and library communities to establish what are considered to be the current and emerging future needs of UK researchers, and what provision will be required to meet these. The Group also wishes to undertake a more focussed enquiry to provide objective evidence on how researchers are using libraries and other information sources in practice and how this may be expected to change especially as more material becomes available online. The present study will form a major element in that enquiry.

4. The Group takes as its starting point the observations that:

- a. providing all of the information resources required by UK researchers is now beyond the capacity of any single library;
- b. no individual HEI can maintain library and information resources meeting the needs of all of its researchers;
- c. we do not yet have in place adequate arrangements to ensure that researchers' needs are met through collaborative action;
- d. developments in IT offer a means of improving access but also the possibility of a further increase in the volume and complexity of information to be managed.

5. The Group has adopted a broad definition of research, researchers and research materials:

- a. covering the needs of all UK based researchers, from PhD students to established researchers of international repute and including those who are not employed by HEIs but who require access to broadly the same range of research materials and information. The Group recognises that information needs and working methods may differ for researchers in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.
- b. defining “research materials” and “information” to include all types of structured information and stored research outputs to which researchers may require access; and the full range of media, structures and locations in which these are (or may be) stored and made available including material held in the national libraries and other non HE locations.

6. A key issue for the Group will be to identify achievable changes in the collection and management strategies of research libraries, individually and collectively, which would result in researchers having better access to more of the information sources that they need. In practice this will mean finding a balance, within available funding that may not increase significantly, between:

- a. ensuring that researchers have easy access to materials (especially regularly used materials) in ways which reasonably reflect their preferred way of working and using those materials;
- b. reducing duplication of holdings, especially of less used materials and of those that are also available online; and
- c. ensuring that the total distributed national collection contains more different items that researchers would wish to use than at present, and that they can gain reasonably easy access to these.

## **Objectives**

7. The study therefore aims:

- a. To provide objective evidence of the nature, range and volume of material that researchers in different disciplines require access to, the nature of access required and how they currently use the material in their research. This includes all material, text or other structured data, in printed or electronic form, held in libraries or elsewhere.
- b. To investigate the implications for the research process of where materials are located. Balancing researcher preferences and ways of working against resource constraints, what achievable patterns of location and accessibility of information sources are optimal?

- c. To establish how far researchers currently access research materials on line, the perceived advantages and shortcomings of accessing materials in this way, and the relative significance of the Internet as a research tool.
- d. To identify and analyse evidence for probable changes in how researchers access and use research materials across the next decade, indicating how quickly and in what directions change is occurring or can be foreseen.
- e. For all of these questions, to analyse the extent of difference in needs and practice between identifiable subgroups of researchers, related to research discipline or to other factors.

### **Scope and method**

8. It will be essential that the study covers a sufficiently wide field to draw conclusions with confidence in relation to the needs and practices of researchers at large and to the key differences in these between subgroups of researchers (certainly by subject, possibly also by level of research or employment pattern). The chosen research method should produce a body of evidence which is robust, objective and quantified as far as possible; but should also lead to insights which help the Group to interpret the data. It will be important to collect and present evidence both for how researchers are using information sources now (including identifying forward-looking practice) and for how they would exploit the developments in information provision postulated above.

9. In order to cover the broad field of enquiry set out above, the study will need to engage in some depth with a carefully chosen sample of researchers. In order to test possible hypotheses about age- and discipline-rated variance in working methods and in the type and range of material required, the sample will need to cover a range of academic disciplines and to include younger researchers – those studying for a doctorate or at the beginning of their careers – as well as senior figures.

10. The study will need to be conducted within, and be closely related to, the Group's broader plans for gathering evidence and views on these matters. We would welcome proposals for a study to include some form of focus group meetings with groups of active researchers, which might be run jointly with the Group's secretariat and attended by one or two members of the Group. We also have it in mind the possibility of issuing through the Internet, towards the end of the study, a discussion paper setting out its emerging findings and inviting comments on these.

### **Timescale**

11. In keeping with the timetable adopted by the Group, the workplan for the study should make it possible to include:

- a. Making contact with a significant sample of researchers (perhaps including through focus groups) in time to report to the Group on the main findings from these contacts by 16 November 2001.

- b. Production of an initial written summary of findings, based upon the above and suitable to form the basis for further consultation with the community, by 30 November 2001.
- c. Production of a full report for discussion by the Group at a meeting in the last week of January 2002.
- d. Production of a complete publishable final report by 9 March 2002.

### **Tender Requirements**

- 12. The tender proposal should include
  - a. Names and full contact details of the consultants undertaking the work
  - b. Outline of intended method, including information on sampling and in particular how it is proposed to identify and approach researchers and to secure their co-operation
  - c. A full timetable, including identifying key milestones
  - d. Total costs showing how these were made up, stating whether prices include VAT and/or expenses and with proposed phasing of payments relating to the key milestones (payments will be made through the BACS system upon the achievement of those milestones)
  - e. Evidence of recent relevant work undertaken.

### **Selection Criteria**

- 13. The successful proposal will be selected after consideration of the following elements:
  - a. Understanding of the brief
  - b. Understanding of Higher Education and the research process
  - c. Capability to deal with requirements
  - d. Suitability and feasibility of proposed method
  - e. Timescale
  - f. Cost
- 14. The HEFCE is not bound to accept the lowest of any tender. It is the HEFCE's view that the services outlined in the invitation to tender should be deliverable within a total overall budget of between £50,000 and £75,000 including VAT.

### **Procedure for Selection**

15. Please indicate your ability to meet the study's needs against all the sections listed above, highlighting any problem areas or possible improvements

16. Tenderers should submit four hard copies of their proposal to Vanessa Conte at the HEFCE by midday on 10 July 2001. Proposals received after this deadline will not be accepted.

17. Short-listed proposals may be asked to make a presentation to the HEFCE on 16 or 17 July 2001, to further explain their service and how they can meet the requirements. The Council reserves the right to negotiate with one or more tenderers following the submission of the tender proposals.

### **Further Information**

18. For further information, or to discuss any aspect of this specification, please contact:

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Northavon House  
Coldhambour Lane  
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## **Annex A**

### **Research Support Libraries Group**

#### **Terms of Reference**

1. To make recommendations to the HE Funding Bodies\*, the British Library and the national libraries of Scotland and Wales on a national strategic framework and mechanisms for promoting collaboration in, and integration of the development and provision of library collections, their long-term management, and services to support research. This should include the following:
  - a. Further development of the distributed national research collections through stronger collaborative arrangements between HEIs, the national libraries and other research collections of national significance.
  - b. Within this context to receive relevant reports on library and information matters referred by the HE funding bodies, and recommend action. In addition to provide a focus for building on studies already commissioned by the BL/HEFCE Task Force and relevant RSLP supporting actions.
  - c. To recommend options for a long-term scheme to support integrated access to resources of national importance in the light of experience with the RSLP access model.
  - d. To review ways of taking forward, scaling up and deepening the impact of the access and collection co-ordination strands of the RSLP initiative in a UK-wide, co-ordinated way.
  - e. Further development of a co-ordinated strategy for and provision of materials in printed, electronic and digitised form.
  - f. To assess and make recommendations on how best to use the resources of JISC and the DNER team to facilitate this strategy.
  - g. The development of a strategy for improving the availability of information about research materials and their description, building on Full Disclosure.
  - h. The development of a UK-wide strategy for preservation, including digital preservation to support research and scholarship alongside the preservation of printed materials, and the requirements for technical capacity.
  - i. Commissioning of specialist studies in support of this agenda.

\* The Higher Education Funding Council for England, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Northern Ireland)