



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING – 29 April 2009

Action points in red italics

Present:

Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh)
John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
David Ingram (University College London)
Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
Joanna Newman (British Library)
Ed Pentz (CrossRef UK)
Jennifer Rogers (HEFCE)
Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
Jean Sykes (London School of Economics)
David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
Jan Wilkinson (University of Manchester)
Jo Wood (University of Leicester)

Apologies

John Feather (University of Loughborough)
Paul Hubbard (HEFCE)
Roger Kain (University of Exeter)
Malcolm Read (JISC)
Tom Rodden (University of Nottingham)
Nigel Weatherill (University of Birmingham)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 17 December 2008 (paper RIN/AB/09/01)

With a couple of minor corrections, these were agreed.

2. Summary report from Board awayday, 5-6 February 2009 (paper RIN/AB/09/02)

The report was agreed.

3. Matters arising from these two meetings

Meeting of 17 December 2009

From item 2

A number of declarations of interest were still expected.

RIN Executive to issue reminders about need to register interests

Awayday meeting, 5-6 February 2009

From session 1 – future of research libraries

Future for books: members were reminded that this was an issue driven not just by technological factors, but – given the current economic situation – by financial factors as well. This point provided an opportunity to advise the Board of RIN's recent discussions with

RIN Executive to reflect on the possibility of a study examining the impact of financial

publishers, librarians and senior institutional managers to investigate ways of adopting co-ordinated approaches to addressing the effects of current economic and exchange rate difficulties. The Board understood that this applied to books as well as journals. There was an argument that monographs, which are not covered by ‘big deals’, may be under even greater threat than journals – although even ‘big deals’ themselves may be vulnerable in the current climate. The financial pressures on libraries may be compounded by costly demands for them to extend their opening hours, and the continued imposition of VAT on e-journals. Was there scope for a RIN-led project to examine institutional responses and the extent of likely cutbacks, and the implications stemming from this? Members strongly agreed that this would be useful and timely, as a tool for advocacy, and not least as a means of raising the seriousness of the issue within institutional settings.

pressures on libraries

From session 2 – future of scholarly journals

Horizon-scanning exercise: discussions were under way with RLUK, JISC, the British Library and SCOUNL to initiate such an exercise in the autumn..

4. Report from RIN Funders’ Group meeting, 18 February 2009 (paper RIN/AB/09/03)

Members noted that the focus of the meeting had been on the level and quality of engagement between RIN and its funders. The Funders’ Group had agreed that respective expectations would be encapsulated in an agreement between RIN and its funders. In the first instance, RIN was still awaiting a view from Paul Hubbard, at HEFCE, about how this might be formulated.

Paul Hubbard to set out HEFCE’s views on respective expectations regarding RIN activity

The Board also noted that the Scottish Funding Council was still not in a position to commit to RIN support for more than one year at a time.

5. Proposed RIN-JISC study on use and impact of data centres (paper RIN/AB/09/04)

Members noted that the thinking behind this project drew from three antecedents: (i) the July 2008 RIN report on data sharing; (ii) the discussions, notably at Board and Consultative Group meetings during the latter part of 2008, on how to define the value and benefit of research information services; and (iii) the suggestion made at the December 2008 Board meeting to investigate the usage of data curated by the UK Data Archive. The scoping document for the study was further founded on more recent discussions with a range of interested parties, including research funders and JISC.

RIN Executive to fine-tune the scoping document, reflecting views expressed

The Board was supportive of the project and the proposed approach. Members particularly welcomed the collaboration with JISC. The following comments were made:

- It was important that the wording of the document should make clear that the stated aims and objectives did not pre-empt the conclusions of the study.
- Government policy-makers should be included as an audience.
- Members noted that the UKRDS feasibility study, as well as RIN, had already accumulated evidence about the willingness of researchers to share data – but evidence of the benefits of data sharing could be crucial to the future of UKRDS.
- RIN and JISC would need to bear in mind the resource implications for the centres to be investigated, particularly in terms of staff time needed to provide the sort of data required by the study.

- The Board also underlined that the subject in question was a fast-changing one, with new data centres being planned, and new opportunities for infrastructure development, across the globe, constantly emerging. There was therefore some urgency in undertaking such work. However, the point of the study was to set out a story about the perceived value of data that has been used over a long period of time – the long-term, retrospective perspective was important. It remained to be seen how the study might address the question of the value of data that have not yet been created.
- It was noted that economic value (paragraph 7 of the scoping document) could be interpreted broadly, and there might be a case for focusing on a smaller number of centres, to allow for more in-depth analysis.

The Board emphasised the importance of the specific range of skills needed by the contractors selected to undertake the work. RIN and JISC should take great care about addressing this, especially since the suggested timescale (June 2008 – March 2009) was relatively tight. Members reflected on whether this might be extended, and whether there could be useful intermediate outputs from the project.

6. Follow-up to e-infrastructure roadmap (*paper RIN/AB/09/05*)

The Board recognised the challenging nature of this suggested piece of work, particularly since RIN had been given relatively little notice to undertake it. Nevertheless, the Board fully endorsed the RIN Executive's view that RIN has a strong interest in taking on such a strategically important project.

Although it was agreed that RIN should agree to this request, Board members remained concerned about a number of issues:

- *Timing*: a programme of 40-50 interviews in a short period of time was extremely ambitious. Members felt that even an extension of the deadline to October might not be sufficient, and suggested that November-December would be more realistic.
- *Competency*: it was agreed that the RIN Executive Team would require external support to undertake the work, but on the assumption that contractors brought in to assist would be highly skilled and experienced.
- *Buy-in*: the Board asked whether the initiative was supported by a high-level 'champion', such as Adrian Smith, at DIUS. This would be important to ensure commitment and support to the project, including making available resources for RIN. Some Board members urged caution about undertaking the work without assurances of commitment from DIUS and RCUK.
- *European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)*: members were surprised that this was not mentioned in the scoping document, as ESFRI might be engaged in work of a similar nature. It might be useful to engage with them, perhaps using John Wood as an intermediary.
- *NHS Research Capability Programme*: it was suggested that this programme might also provide a useful comparator.

Broadly, the Board thus felt that more clarity was required about aims, objectives, resources, Research Council engagement and crucially about Adrian Smith's stance. The Board was happy for its concerns to be evoked during forthcoming exchanges between RIN and ESRC as the agent of RCUK and DIUS.

RIN Executive to enquire about the scope for extending the deadline

RIN Executive to enquire about the level of commitment within DIUS to pursuing the objectives of this initiative

John Coggins to seek to obtain assurances from Paul Gemmill about RCUK's commitment to the initiative

7. Planned RIN projects (paper RIN/AB/09/06)

This was a very busy programme of upcoming activities, largely reflecting ideas that have been discussed with the Board. Members were impressed by the scale of RIN's increased workload, compared to a couple of years ago; this capacity was recognised as a reflection of additional staffing resources. Members expressed an interest in seeing brief information on timescales and funding profiles associated with the various projects – information which the RIN Executive currently collates for its own internal planning purposes.

The Board noted HEFCE's interest in the proposed study on transitions in scholarly communications and in the work being considered jointly with OCLC on support services for researchers.

The Board felt, however, that one significant activity was missing from the plan: an evaluation, as discussed at the awayday, of RIN's impact. It was suggested that this had to be incorporated in RIN's planning, and discussed by the Board well before the end of the year. Members noted that RIN was now systematically gathering information on outputs and outcomes, relating to the key performance indicators in the Business Plan. These would be presented and discussed at a future Board meeting.

RIN Executive to present to the Board summary information about timings and financial profiling of RIN projects

RIN Executive to present a paper on ideas for evaluating RIN impact, and on the recording of outputs and outcomes

8. Financial update (paper RIN/AB/09/07)

This was noted, particularly the elimination of RIN's end of year underspend.

9. RIN update (paper RIN/AB/09/08)

This was noted. Members were pleased with the new way of presenting this information.

10. Board membership (paper RIN/AB/09/09)

Five newly-identified members would shortly be appointed formally and invited to the June meeting.

This left a further three members to appoint, to bring the Board up to the agreed complement of eighteen. The RIN Executive had almost exhausted its options of identifying individuals through desk research and was therefore considering the possibility of advertising for unfilled slots. If this were to happen, the Board felt that it might benefit from a more positive presentation on the website, for instance through the inclusion of short biographical information.

The challenge of attracting genuinely committed members was also discussed. The Board reflected on the idea of inviting individuals to attend meetings informally before committing to join. Conversely, concern was expressed at the poor attendance record of some existing members. The Board asked whether a 'release' mechanism could be instituted for members who were unable or found it difficult to take part in meetings.

RIN Executive to ensure that an improved presentation of the Board would be incorporated in the revamped RIN website

Jenni Rogers to enquire about the possibility of informal meeting attendance for prospective members

11. Other business

UKRDS

The Board noted that HEFCE would not be able to fund the proposed UKRDS pathfinder from its Shared Services Programme. However, HEFCE had agreed to fund further scoping work, probably until January 2010, to help prepare a bid to its Strategic Development Programme.

It was now very important to secure engagement from Research Councils. With this in mind, HEFCE and JISC were compiling a memorandum of understanding, to seek a commitment from signatories to principles of data sharing and recognition of the centrality of these principles to the research process.

The UKRDS project leaders recognised that more clarity was required about the functions that UKRDS would perform, how it would be organised and its relationships with a range of other organisations. This was being worked on, notably through a series of workshops.

Jean Sykes to draft an update paper for the June Board meeting

RIN printed material

A range of printed versions of recent RIN reports and briefing documentation was tabled at the meeting. Members expressed thanks for the attractive presentation of this material; they were particularly pleased about the continued commitment to produce short and pithy summary material.

Next meeting: Tuesday 9 June 2009, 11:00 – 13:00