

World class research needs world class information resources: Expert workshop - brief report

2 December 2008

This workshop, hosted by the Research Information Network (RIN), was viewed by all participants as an innovative and valuable experience. It was agreed that the opportunity the workshop provided for academics and librarians jointly to raise and discuss issues around the importance of the provision and access to essential information resources for research in language based area studies was one which was long overdue and which should be built upon with future meetings.

Key recommendations from the workshop

1. Awareness raising

1.1 It was agreed that there was a need to raise awareness of the issues relating to access to research information discussed at the meeting in the CLBAS host institutions, with the Research Councils, HEFCE, JISC and other potential partners and funders.

1.2 All CLBAS mid-term reviews should include a paragraph on research information resource issues

1.3 Any future bids for a Phase 2 of the Centres, should include the need to consider resource provision issues. (See end note for possible wording)

2. Further meetings

There should be further meetings involving both academics and librarians for discussions on this and related subject. It was agreed that included:

2.1 Further workshops should be held and a larger conference on this subject area should be considered.

2.2 Future workshops could focus on specific themes such as digitization, licensing, coordinated retention, sharing best practice, sharing e-resources.

2.3 Workshops and other future meetings could be based on the needs of a single Centre or have a combined Centre approach.

3. Funding issues

3.1 The costs of additional research information resources should be built into any funding bids.

3.2 Specialist librarians should be much more involved in planning for bids.

3.3 It was also agreed that there is a need to build a base of evidence to demonstrate the issues and the extent to which they are common. It was recommended that the work undertaken by Paul Auchterlonie and the resulting Digilslam report could provide the foundation for some of this work. (Permanent link to the Digilslam report is at: <http://eric.exeter.ac.uk/exeter/handle/10036/30692>)

3.4 Such an evidence base would help bidders to focus on the issues with funders such as HEFCE and JISC. It would also give more weight to any internal bids for funding that librarians might wish to take to library directors.

4. Access to resources

4.1 There is a need to develop a UK wide picture of ownership of and subscription to resources in these specialist subjects. The workshop participants recommended that this information should be brought together into a database indicating which resources

were held where, their format and access conditions. This information should be freely available to all on a website.

Such a database would not only allow researchers to find the resources they need, but would enable more effective collection management, and the ability to maximise the use of funding for resources.

4.2 There is a need for national level negotiation with suppliers of e-resources to enable economies both of effort and of scale. It was recommended that JISC Collections would be an obvious starting point for work in this area.

4.3 The resources researchers need are in an increasing variety of formats. Newspapers, websites, wikis are key resources for research. Strong concerns were expressed about the security of ongoing access to many kinds of resources (for example: when libraries have to rely on a single supplier who may disappear without notice and where websites and wikis can disappear equally without warning). It was recommended that a national archiving programme should be developed for such resources.

4.4 There is a pressing need for digitisation of scarce materials. A national level approach would once again provide both economies of scale and assist in achieving balanced coverage.

4.5 Where the size of collections in these subject areas has to be reduced, the creation of a central, or dispersed, repository for this material is needed. The UKRR is a potential model for such a repository.

5. Involvement of the British Library

It was suggested that resolution of several of the issues could involve collaboration with the British Library (BL). It was reported that the BL is already looking for feedback from libraries to help them to decide how best to identify gaps in the UK wide collection and therefore where their budget could most effectively be spent. The BL is also a key partner in the UKRR programme to preserve important but little used journals. This format could be utilised to help to ensure continuity of access to research materials in a variety of formats.

Opportunities for involvement of the British Library include:

- Hosting a central database of resources
- Hosting the repository for material that has had to be deleted from distributed Library collections
- Provision of a focus for digitisation initiatives.

6. Conclusion

It has become clear from the discussions at this workshop that, since the Centres began their work, in order to develop their research strategy effectively, greater attention needs to be focused on questions relating to the availability of and access to relevant information resources. Academic staff, researchers and specialist library staff need to be actively involved in joint discussions – both now and in the future – if researchers' needs are to be met as efficiently and effectively as possible. This collaboration is an essential aspect of developing the Centres if they are to meet their goal of enhancing research capacity and capability in their specified language based areas.

Funding is needed to support a co-ordinated approach to ensuring that UK researchers in these specialist subject areas have access to the information resources and services they need to develop and sustain their research activities.

We plan in collaboration between the five Centres and the Research Information Network to initiate a review of the specialist information needs of researchers both in the centres and related areas across the UK.

ⁱ Future funding bids

It was also generally agreed that any bids for phase two funding for the Centres should include a more direct acknowledgement of the need for support for additional research information resource. Details of the appropriate phrasing would be left to the relevant staff in each case though wording along the following lines was suggested:

After running the Centre for several years, it is apparent that unanticipated information resource issues have been thrown up, in part as result of the innovative nature of the Centre's activities. Whereas coordinated thinking was involved in the initial bringing together of research, studentships and activities in the creation of the LBAS centres, there was perhaps less clear thinking about the availability and accessibility of information resources to support them.

It is essential that consideration is given to the funding of information resources in the future development of the LBAS centres and that specialist library staff should be actively involved in discussions with academic staff and researchers – both now and in the future – if research needs are to be met as efficiently and effectively as possible.

To this end, and following the first of a series of Research Information Network expert workshops, the LBAS centres intend to undertake a strategic review of the information resource requirements of the research community across the UK.

World class research needs world class information resources: Expert workshop – list of participants

CLBAS directors and academics

- Dr Robin Aizlewood, Director CEELBAS (UCL SSEES)
- Professor Richard Berry, Director, CRCEES (Glasgow)
- Professor Julian Cooper Co-Director CEELBAS (Birmingham)
- Professor Michael Hutt CEELBAS Partner Institution (SOAS)
- Professor George Kolankiewicz CEEELBAS (UCL SSEES)
- Professor Cynthia Marsh, Professor of Russian Drama and Literature CRCEES (Nottingham)
- Ji Meng WREAC (Sheffield)
- Dr Alison Hardie WREAC (Leeds)

Librarians directly involved with CLBAS

- Tania Konn Roberts, Librarian CRCEES (Glasgow)
- Mamtimyn Sunuodula Librarian, CASAW (Durham)
- Rachel Beckett, Librarian, Collections Management, CASAW (Manchester)
- Lesley Pitman, Librarian, CEELBAS (UCL SSEES)
- Shexiao Tong, Librarian CASAW (Edinburgh)
- Gill Goddard, Librarian WREAC (Sheffield)

Specialist Librarians with interests in related subject areas

- Hamish Todd, Convenor Japanese Library Group (BL)
- John Moffat, Convenor Chinese Library Group (Cambridge)

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- Katya Rogatchevskaia, Head of Russian (BL)
 - Graham Camfield, Collection Development (LSE)
 - Paul Auchterlonie, Collections Manager & Librarian for Middle East Studies (Exeter)
 - Nicholas Martland, Librarian for South Asia & South East Asia (SOAS)

Other participants

- Dr Afifi Alakiti, Librarian (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies)
- Ben Taplin, (JISC Collections)
- Anna Marshall, Principle Policy Manager (ESRC)