Research Information in Transition:
A series of evening events in Autumn 2010

The Research Information Network welcomes you to this programme of events over the course of autumn to explore the huge changes that are taking place in the way that research information and data are created, managed, used and disseminated; and to consider the implications for all those, in the academic realm and beyond, with an interest in the good health of the UK research base.

11 October: The future of scholarly publishing – where do we go from here?
18 November: Research data – policies and behaviours
13 December: Quality assurance – responding to a changing information world

All three events are free and open to all involved and interested in these issues. We are expecting a lively debate led by experts in their field and hope that we can come to some degree of common understanding of how these changes can be marshalled for the benefit of UK research and what this may mean for the different stakeholders in the foreseeable future.

The events will take place at the Royal College of Physicians in London. Each will run from 17:30-20:30, and will consist of a series of short presentations, followed by discussions and opportunities for networking over drinks and canapés.

To register visit www.event-logistics.co.uk/RIN and complete the online form

Open science case studies

The RIN and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) have undertaken a new collaborative research project to examine the benefits and barriers to using ‘open science’ methods. The project identifies what motivates researchers to work (or want to work) in an open manner with regard to their data, results and protocols, and whether advantages are delivered by working in this way.

Open Science broadly describes science carried out and communicated in a manner which allows others to contribute, collaborate and add to the research effort, with all kinds of data, results and protocols made freely available at different stages of the research process. Proponents of the approach argue that such collaboration will lead to more efficient research and innovation.

This report has been produced to provide researchers, research institutions and funders with a better understanding of why some researchers choose to work in this manner, the benefits that occur and the barriers that prevent others from using open science methodology.

An evening event was held at the Royal Society on 15 September to bring together key organisations, members of the scholarly communications community, researchers and policy makers to discuss the outcomes and recommendations raised by this report.

The report is available to download at www.rin.ac.uk/open-science
If you build it, will they come?
How researchers perceive and use web 2.0

It is suggested that web 2.0 tools, which allow internet users to create, share and repurpose information, have enormous potential for academic researchers, enabling them to communicate their research and its findings more rapidly, broadly and effectively than before.

However, this report suggests that for most researchers the benefits of using web 2.0 tools are not yet sufficiently clear to incentivise uptake. Even frequent users tend to see web 2.0 services as an addition to, rather than a replacement for, traditional scholarly communications techniques.

We are still at an early stage in the development of web 2.0 tools and services, and the uses to which they are put. They do not presage a sea change in scholarly communications, at least in the short to medium term. The processes of experimentation and innovation are currently highly localised and dispersed, and likely to be protracted.

But if experimentation and innovation are to be supported and encouraged, and not stifled, universities, funders and members of the research community will need to:

- encourage open-ended experimentation, and avoid the risk of stifling innovation by attempts to impose particular systems or concepts of how they will be used;
- establish mechanisms through which researchers can share information about useful developments in services and tools;
- undertake further research to understand the ways in which use of web 2.0 develops;
- consider how policy and practice might be developed to ensure that innovation takes full account of – and does not undermine – the long-established key functions of the scholarly communications process, including registration, certification, and preservation.

The report is available to download at www.rin.ac.uk/web-20-researchers

Evaluating the impact of SHEDL

The RIN, in collaboration with the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL), has assessed the impact of the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library (SHEDL) initiative which aims to provide a common set of journals to all Scottish HEIs.

The study looked at changes in patterns of usage in different institutions and in costs per download. It also investigated factors which may be affecting patterns of usage in different subjects in institutions, and any impacts of enhanced access to journals on students and academics behaviour.

The introduction of SHEDL has had an immediate impact on the availability and usage of journal literature in Scotland: institutions is positive and supportive of SHEDL.

- It has increased usage of American Chemical Society (ACS), Cambridge University Press (CUP) and Springer journals over and above the UK average rate of increase of online journals.
- SHEDL has reduced the cost per use of journal articles from ACS, CUP and Springer significantly, by over 20% in one year.
- It has fulfilled its original objective of creating a common information infrastructure to support Scotland’s Research Pools - innovative alliances in a wide range of science disciplines, between university departments, straddling institutional boundaries. Usage within the institutions that participate in Research Pools has, in the main part, increased at a greater rate than across SHEDL generally.
- It has had an impact in Scotland by creating an awareness of a Scottish initiative that has improved online access beyond the norm. It has a national profile that benefits Scottish research, and significantly augments the ability of libraries to support both teaching and research.
- SHEDL is strategically important for small institutions in extending access to research literature that they would otherwise not be able to afford.
- SHEDL ‘bloc’ purchasing has not yet damaged the discretion libraries need in selecting, cancelling and renewing information resources to meet the evolving needs of their institutions.

The report will shortly be available to download at www.rin.ac.uk
Libraries of the future

The last decade has brought profound change in the activities involved in teaching, learning and research, and in the information resources and services that academics and students use in their work. The roles played by libraries, and all the other organisations involved in the scholarly information landscape, have also changed, along with the services they offer. And further change is on the way, with unpredictable implications for students, academic staff, and for libraries.

As they have responded to new developments over the past decade, and changed their operations, most university libraries have seen continued growth in their budgets in real terms. The next few years are going to be much more difficult in financial terms. Libraries therefore face a period in which they will have to cope with continued rapid, perhaps transformational, change, accompanied by reductions in their budgets.

In that context, this publication looks at how the financial position of libraries in the higher education sector has changed over the period between 1999 and 2009 (the latest year for which statistics are generally available). It is based on an analysis of data collected by SCONUL, and also draws some comparisons with the US.

Overall, it presents a picture in which library expenditure has been rising in real terms, but not as fast as expenditure – and activity – in the HE sector as a whole. So libraries face some real challenges as they prepare for a more difficult financial climate, with real and substantial cuts in expenditure.

The report is available to download at www.rin.ac.uk/uk-libraries-trends

Work in progress...

Physical Sciences case studies: information use and discovery

The RIN, along with the Institute of Physics (IOP) and the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) has commissioned a series of case studies to provide a detailed analysis of how researchers in a number of subject or disciplinary areas of the physical sciences discover, use, create and manage their information resources. This follows earlier RIN studies in the life sciences and the humanities.

The overall aim is to:
- develop an in-depth understanding of physical science researchers’ approaches to discovering, accessing, analysing, managing, creating, refining and disseminating information resources;
- provide comparisons between the behaviours and needs of researchers in different subjects/disciplines, research teams or institutional contexts;
- identify barriers to more effective performance in using, creating, managing and exchanging information resources, and suggest how they might be overcome.

This study will be undertaken by the Oxford Internet Institute and is due to be completed in June 2011.

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But to date there has been no systematic attempt to gather and analyse information about key trends that are likely to affect the future of scholarly libraries in the UK. We need to think creatively if we are to ensure that students and researchers continue to enjoy support from world-class library and information services.

This programme, sponsored by the British Library, JISC, the RIN, RLUK and SCONUL, will seek over the next two years to identify the most important issues, and to help libraries plan their responses to the key changes in the wider environment in which they operate. It will involve as wide a range as possible of people from the library and information sectors, along with users and other stakeholders.

Further information is available at www.futurelibraries.info
E-journals: their use, value and impact

Following on from this 2009 report, a follow-up study builds on the findings, with a second round of surveys and quantitative analysis.

Access to and use of full-text digital scholarly journals has risen dramatically over the last ten years – and it continues to rise at a substantial rate, leading to a revolution in scholarly communications, a massive and unprecedented migration to the virtual world. But there are few details and little robust UK-wide evidence about what has actually happened as a result of this revolution in access, especially in regard to how this has formed, and possibly changed, the use and information seeking behaviour of the key stakeholders – the researchers. This study seeks to correct this.

The whole results will be published during the Autumn.

Research Support Services in UK Universities

Universities are increasingly interested in how they can improve their competitive position in attracting, supporting and promoting the work of high-quality researchers. In times of financial stringency, however, they are also seeking to ensure that support and other services operate both efficiently and cost-effectively.

In that context, this study reports on both the provision and the use of information-related support services for researchers in four research-intensive UK universities. It is one half of a pair of projects commissioned by RIN in the UK and by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) in the US. Both studies set out to investigate what kinds of information-related services are available to support researchers through the research life-cycle, and how those services are used and valued.

Benefits of research data centres

Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study is gathering evidence on the extent data centres have been useful to the research community. This evidence will help to build a case for improving data sharing practice in the UK.

It is expected that the study will demonstrate the importance, relevance and benefits of effective sharing and curation of research data for the UK research community. It will look at the long-term usage and impact of data curated by a cross-disciplinary selection of established data centres.

Data sharing and freedom of information

The publication in July of the Muir Russell report, and the controversies surrounding the use of climate research data at the University of East Anglia and Queen’s University Belfast, have highlighted how the sharing of research data is becoming intimately linked to freedom of information (FoI). Ten years after its enactment, FoI legislation has emerged as a significant issue for researchers who create data in universities and public research establishments. The RIN is engaging with the Information Commissioner’s Office, JISC and other interested parties to define ways of helping researchers better understand the challenges, but also the opportunities, represented by FoI.

http://www.cce-review.org/

Researcher Development Framework

In early September, Vitae released an updated version of its Researcher Development Framework (RDF). This document, building on the Research Councils’ Joint Skills Statement, helps researchers to identify the knowledge, behaviours and attitude that they might aspire to at different stages of their career. The RDF recognises the particular importance of information and data competencies, and as such will provide the RIN and other bodies with a valuable tool for promoting information literacy.

http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Open access in Europe

As part of its Science in Society programme, the European Commission has recently published two calls for proposals: on reinforcing European strategies on access, dissemination and preservation of scientific information in the digital age; and on developing a set of indicators to measure open access. Over €1m is being made available to fund both initiatives, which underline interest at European-wide level in promoting better access to research outputs.

http://tinyurl.com/24dm8uv