



RIN Consultative Group for Life Sciences and Medicine
NOTE FROM THE SIXTH MEETING – 25 APRIL 2008

Action points in italics

Present:

John Coggins (Chair) (University of Glasgow)
George Banting (University of Bristol)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
Oliver de Peyer (MRC National Institute for Medical Research)
Vince Smith (Natural History Museum)
Patricia Spoor (University of Leeds)

Apologies:

Kevin Hiom (MRC Lab of Molecular Biology)
Michael Jubb (RIN)
Howard Meltzer (University of Leicester)
Nicola Seare (Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland Strategic Health Authority)
David Shotton (University of Oxford)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 11 December 2007 (paper RIN/LSM/08/01)

These were approved.

2. Matters arising (oral)

There were none.

3. Research Excellence Framework – possible RIN project work (paper RIN/LSM/08/02)

The Group noted today's formal [announcement from HEFCE](#) about the decision to lessen the differences between the assessment methodologies for science and non-science disciplines, and to extend by one year the period for designing the new framework.

Members agreed that the REF proposals do not represent a sufficiently sophisticated methodology for the evaluation of the full range and nature of research outputs, including less conventional methods of publication and dissemination. The RIN project should be geared to help overcome this shortcoming. However, at the same time, there has to be recognition that the HE Funding Councils are under pressure to implement an evaluation framework that is as simple as possible; there is therefore a need to work with them in a way that is realistically likely to influence their agendas. It was understood that the RIN project would have to be articulated around the possible impact on how research information services develop, and how researchers make use of them.

The Group suggested a number of issues that might

→ *RIN Executive Team to take on board the Group's ideas when formulating the scope for its proposed project.*

usefully be considered as part of this work.

- There is a strong case for considering the place of **unique identifiers** for individual researchers. Players such as Thomson and CrossRef are active in this area, and there could be value in charting their experiences.
- Members echoed RIN's own concern about HEFCE's reluctance to consider **self-citation**. It is understood that there are risks with formally considering self-citation as part of any assessment system, but these are worth taking, particularly because of the growing reality of multi-author papers.
- The Group expressed a strong view that RIN should take a comparative look at the experience of **other countries** with regard to the relationship between information behaviour and funding, particularly in similarly-sized economies in Europe (including countries such as France with a very different approach to funding). One of the factors to be considered, for instance, is whether the UK places too much emphasis on numbers of publications.
- **Data** are a major research output in their own right, and should also be considered for assessment – although, bearing in mind the great heterogeneity of data across disciplines, the difficulty of doing this should not be underestimated.
- The growing use of **Web 2.0** approaches as means of discussing research results is also a factor to be considered as part of longer-term views of research assessment – hence the pertinence of RIN's proposed project in this area, discussed below.

The Group underlined the importance of trying to predict researchers' information behaviour, and hence perhaps the need for modelling. However, it is difficult to develop metrics that might predict such behaviour for the REF – although deductions might be drawn on the basis of past experience with the RAE.

4. Use and relevance of Web 2.0 as an information resource for researchers – possible RIN project work (*paper RIN/LSM/08/03*)

Members agreed that an RIN project in this area would be very relevant, especially with regard to the practices of younger researchers – and as noted above, relevant also to ongoing debates about the REF. New methodologies and research cultures are developing all the time, and it would be useful to chart developments. There is anecdotal evidence that Web 2.0 approaches, and the collaborative working stemming from them, do have an effect on the way that researchers operate. There is scope for undertaking a literature review relating to these practices.

It was suggested that organisations such as ALPSP, the Wellcome Trust and the Biosciences Federation are likely to be interested in such RIN activity.

5. Taking forward the conclusions of two RIN projects currently nearing completion (paper RIN/LSM/08/04)

There was general understanding among Group members about the importance of RIN having an impact through influencing the policy and practice players with an interest in information issues. Strategies for the dissemination and implementation of RIN research findings are therefore recognisably important.

In this respect, it was suggested that useful fora for engagement should include **departmental associations** such as [Heads of University Biological Sciences](#) (HUBS).

At a less orthodox level, there could be scope for approaches such as setting up of a RIN page in **Wikipedia** – which had been attempted a while back, but with little success.

Project on training of researchers

It was felt that this report could have significant impact if it were well advocated. The Group agreed that, most obviously, Research Councils' doctoral training schemes need to incorporate ideas contain in the report. There was therefore a very strong feeling that **senior RC managers with responsibility for postgraduate training grants and fellowships** should be targeted individually (i.e. not just through RCUK), through one-to-one meetings, as key recipients of the study's findings. BBSRC and EPSRC, the two RCs supporting the largest number of research students, could be the subject of particular attention. RIN could start contacting such individuals at the earliest opportunity, even before the formal publication of the report, in an effort to make them understand the benefits to be derived from taking forward the report's conclusions.

Understandably, **libraries** are also likely to be interested, and RIN should strive to make us of its networks in the library community to disseminate the findings, not least the identified tension between the acquisition of generic and specialist skills.

Project on scholarly communications costs and income flows

Members noted that the **Biosciences Federation** has produced report on this them; the committee that drew this up should be very interested in RIN's own study. Learned societies in general should also be receptive, as they often have a vested interest.

There was some curiosity about the how the **Wellcome Trust** might react to the report, bearing in mind its own earlier work in this area. It was felt that Mark Walport himself, the Trust's Director, might be highly interested in the RIN report; there is a case for trying to meet with him directly. David Lynn, the Trust's Head of Strategic Planning, with whom RIN has a good relationship, could

→ *John Coggins to help identify names of RC heads of postgraduate training.*

→ *RIN Executive Team to seek to engage with these individuals.*

→ *John Coggins to send information on Biosciences Federation report.*

→ *RIN Executive Team to look at possibility of arranging a meeting with Mark Walport.*

also be involved.

Research Councils should also be key recipients of the report, but the timing of engagement with them on this issue might usefully be deferred until after the publication of the RCUK report on the impact of their own open-access policy, in the autumn.

Group members acknowledged the particular importance of getting good **media coverage**, particularly in publications such as *Times Higher Education* and *Research Fortnight*; RIN had already been in contact with both publications about the range of its forthcoming reports. There could be value, particularly in terms of international reach, of also getting coverage in *Nature*. For the latter, it could be fruitful to arrange an informal presentation of the report's conclusions; Timo Hannay is a good contact at *Nature* for this purpose.

➔ *RIN Executive Team to investigate the possibility of an informal briefing for Nature.*

6. RIN update (oral)

Future of Consultative Groups

Members noted the intention to **increase the membership** of all Groups – but there remains an unresolved question about whether to split the Life Sciences Group into clinical and non-clinical sub-groups. There was understanding about the difficulty of getting commitment from clinicians, who juggle academic and practitioner responsibilities.

It was suggested that RIN might **advertise for new members** in given disciplinary areas, even if only on the RIN website.

There was interest in the idea of arranging meetings of all the Groups in a **joint forum**, which could provide opportunities for cross-cutting connections – but on the strict understanding that such meetings are made to discuss valuable topics.

Other updates

Members noted developments regarding the recruitment of additional members of the RIN Executive Team, and preparations for the workshop on Freedom of Information to take place on 9 September.

7. Other business

There was none.

Date of next meeting: Friday 18 July 2008, 10:30 – 13:00