

Research Information Network CONSULTATIVE GROUP FOR LIFE SCIENCES AND MEDICINE

NOTE FROM THE SECOND MEETING – 27 JUNE 2006

Action points in italics

Present:

John Coggins (University of Glasgow) (Chair)
George Banting (University of Bristol)
Mary Dixon-Woods (University of Leicester)
Stéphane Goldstein (Research Information Network)
Michael Jubb (Research Information Network)
Stephen Kennedy (University of Oxford)
Oliver de Peyer (MRC National Institute for Medical Research)
Emily Quinton (University of Birmingham)
Nichola Seare (Leicestershire, Northamptonshire & Rutland Strategic Health Authority)
David Shotton (University of Oxford)
Vince Smith (Natural History Museum)
Patricia Spoor (University of Leeds)

Apologies

Kevin Hioms (MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 20 March 2006 (*paper RIN/LBM/06/06*)

These were approved.

2. Matters arising

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Procedures for RIN funding of suggestions/initiatives from Consultative Group members not yet drawn up – although Groups' ToR have now been modified.
<input type="checkbox"/> JIBS User Group – contact with RIN still not made. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> <i>SG/MJ to draw up procedures in time for next meeting.</i><input type="checkbox"/> <i>JC to raise the issue of such procedures at the Advisory Board.</i><input type="checkbox"/> <i>OP to chase up.</i> |
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3. Update on Group membership

No further suggestions yet about expanding the membership. There is much interest in the idea in attracting a further **graduate student**, on the assumption that s/he could be particularly well attuned to the potential of leading edge information technologies – but on condition also that the individual provides the perspective of a user, rather than a developer.

Another possibility might be to recruit to the Group an individual involved in **graduate student teaching**, for instances in institutions such as the European Bioinformatics Institute. Possibilities: Lisa Mullen (EBI); Georgina Moulton and Andy Brass (U of Manchester); Bela Tiwari (NERC Environmental Bioinformatics Centre, Oxford)

See also under linkage with clinical research at item 5 below.

- All to suggest ideas to SG.*

- JC to make enquiries about identifying one such individual*

4. Synthesis of first round of Consultative Group meetings (paper RIN/LBM/06/07)

Noted with interest the view from other Groups about appealing to researchers' self-interest in defining principles on research data management. Topically, the issue of data quality and citation is related to the definition of metrics for future research assessment exercises. *Discussion on research data management, item 7 below.*

5. Reporting back from Group members

- Recent workshop in Edinburgh, on the establishment of a system of Global Unique Identifiers (GUIDs) for use in biodiversity informatics, using life science identifiers (LSIDs) for that purpose. This raised the broader question of the establishment of systems for allocating **persistent identifiers** to scientific data, and the systems, processes and criteria that might be adopted. Noted that the German government had recently decided to pay the bar coding cost of allocating Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to individual items in some large datasets. Could Research Councils take on a similar role in the UK, acting perhaps as a DOI registration authority?
 - Members were reminded about the RIN's **Data Webs workshop**, on 28 June.
 - Potential for learning **lessons from the private sector**; although this has its own priorities relating to information and data management, many of the issues and challenges are the same as for academic research – albeit with a different resourcing model.
 - Usefulness of developing RIN's interface with **clinical medicine and the NHS**, perhaps through membership of the Group; there are major issues relating to management of clinical research information and data, bearing in mind notably the institutional and ethical parameters.
- *All to consider the need for persistent identifiers, whether there is a need for a national system for allocating them and the issues that would need to be addressed.*
 - *OP to monitor and report back, as appropriate, from relevant conferences organised by commercial organisations.*
 - *JC to explore how RIN might develop linkages with clinical research.*

6. Director's report (paper RIN/LBM/06/08)

- Interest expressed in RIN's emerging programme of activities in **scholarly communications**, notably through the work of the newly-established group of stakeholders. Members stressed the usefulness of developing a real understanding about such issues as cost flows across the scholarly communications process, for instance for evaluating the viability of open access journals
 - Recognition of the importance of keeping abreast of developments relating to the formulation of **research assessment metrics**. The current consultation about what might replace the RAE says little about how bibliometrics might be used as part of future assessment. Moreover, how might data outputs be evaluated in future, bearing in mind the absence of current methodologies on data evaluation?
- *MJ to circulate information about prospective RIN-led activities in scholarly communications as soon as concrete ideas emerge from discussions of the scholarly communications group.*

- ❑ Overcoming the ‘**language soup**’: the glossary on the RIN website might be a useful first step, but more could be done.

- ❑ *SG/MJ to insert hyperlinks where appropriate in papers submitted to the Groups.*

7. Research data principles (*paper RIN/LBM/06/09*)

The Group noted the RIN’s rationale for setting out such principles, which are intended as a means of helping researchers, host institutions, funders and others to ensure that the rich and growing body of publicly-funded data resources are subject to effective stewardship for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders.

Although there was acknowledgement of the well-structured and comprehensive structure of the draft principles, many Group members expressed misgivings about the proposed approach. Particular issues of concern:

- ❑ The statement of principle and associated guidance seems to reflect a **top-down approach**; if the idea is to get engagement from researchers, might it be better to allow them to set their own standards.
- ❑ Consequently, the principles appear **over-prescriptive**; however well-intended and reasonable-sounding, there was a danger that they might be used by institutions, funders, etc, as a prescriptive or binding framework.
- ❑ Creation of a further, **burdensome layer** of regulation – this may be particularly true for medical research involving human subjects, where stringent ethical constraints already apply.
- ❑ **Cost** of applying the principles, both in terms of finance and opportunity.
- ❑ Inappropriateness of **one size fits all** approach.
- ❑ Danger of such an over-ambitious framework acting as a **barrier to the development of datasets** – potentially with a negative impact on research.

Members were reminded that the principles are no more than an early draft, subject to consultation. They are not intended to be prescriptive – re-wording will be necessary to reflect this and address the above concerns. The guidance is intended for a variety of audiences, not just researchers, to help with the co-ordination of provision – e.g. it might apply to funding organisations that have progressed less than others setting out a data management framework.

Agreed that the projected autumn workshop should take place, probably in November, as part of the required consultation. The initial list of possible participants, focused around data centre managers, should be expanded to include in particular:

- ❑ overseas representation;
- ❑ research teams, not least those using population data (including those in the commercial sector).

- ❑ *MJ/SG to revise the statement of principle to reflect views expressed at the meeting.*

- ❑ *MJ/SG to make arrangements for autumn workshop, paying particular attention to ensuring a representative cross-section of participants.*
- ❑ *All to suggest names of possible workshop participant, no later than 28 July to allow for early preparations.*

8. British Library Content Strategy (paper RIN/LBM/06/10)

Two key points about the Content Strategy were noted:

- ❑ It is a content strategy, not a collections strategy – i.e. it relates to any material available through BL and not just material physically stored by it.
- ❑ BL's recognition that, over the years, its STM provision has – relatively – fallen behind what it offers for arts and humanities; therefore there is now scope for historic gaps in strategy to be filled.

Comments from Group:

- ❑ BL features little in the information landscape of many biological and biomedical researchers – difficult to see how it might now add anything of value.
- ❑ Many useful current developments, e.g. digitisation initiatives, are not relevant to what BL has to offer.
- ❑ However, BL could continue playing an important role from the perspective of history of science; digitisation of journal back runs would be a feature of this (cf. JISC's Medical Journals Backfile Digitisation Project)
- ❑ Recognition of the evolving role of librarians, in BL and beyond, as 'knowledge navigators'.

- ❑ *MJ to incorporate Group's views into RIN response to Content Strategy consultation.*

9. Researchers' use of libraries (paper RIN/LBM/06/11)

Agreed that the output from this study could lead to very useful discussions. Possible benefits include: developing awareness of library services; protecting the interests of minority subjects in terms of collection purchasing; and provision of information of use to publishers.

Questioned the use of the word 'libraries' in the study title – 'librarians' may be more appropriate, as some of them offer relevant services outside the context of libraries as institutions.

10. E-Infrastructure – search & navigation (paper RIN/LBM/06/12)

Noted contents.

11 Other business

- ❑ Noted recent publication of interesting JISC report on resource discovery landscape.
- ❑ Request to ensure that the Group's more weighty papers are circulated, if possible, well in advance of meetings to allow members to reflect on content and consult within their own communities.
- ❑ Agreed that meetings should start at 13:00 rather than 14:00 whenever they are set for an afternoon slot.

- ❑ *SG to circulate report asap.*
- ❑ *SG to ensure, wherever possible, that weightier papers are sent out at the same time as the call for agenda items, about 4-5 in advance of meetings.*

Next meeting: Tuesday 28 November, 10:30 – 13:00