



RIN Consultative Group for Life Sciences and Medicine NOTE FROM THE THIRD MEETING – 28 NOVEMBER 2006

Action points in red italics

Present:

John Coggins (Chair) (University of Glasgow)
Mary Dixon-Woods (University of Leicester)
Kevin Hiom (MRC Lab of Molecular Biology)
Oliver de Peyer (MRC National Institute for Medical Research)
Nicola Seare (Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland Strategic Health Authority)
David Shotton (University of Oxford)
Vince Smith (Natural History Museum)
Patricia Spoor (University of Leeds)

Apologies

George Banting (University of Bristol)
Stephen Kennedy (University of Oxford)
Emily Quinton (University of Birmingham)

1. Welcome

1.1 John Coggins welcomed members to the third meeting of the Group. The paper on “RIN Consultative Groups: what next?” was emphasised as the most worthy of attention, since it is an opportunity to provide the RIN with a view on developing relationships within the life sciences community.	
1.2 <u>Funding</u> : the group noted that a document now exists to explain how small grants are awarded.	
1.3 <u>Group Membership</u> : there remain notable disciplinary gaps in the group’s membership. Members were again invited to suggest names to cover key areas – for example epidemiology or NHS-based research.	▶ <i>All to suggest to the RIN executive team the names of possible additional members</i>

2. RIN Consultative Groups: what next? (paper RIN/LBM/06/14)

2.1. The group was asked to identify any issues which could benefit from RIN support, or could be translated into an RIN project or workshop, in a similar way to the June 2006 data webs workshop.	
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2.2 Persistent Digital Identifiers: The group agreed that this was an area of likely relevance to anyone creating data and for which there is a need for common standards – especially in a Web 2.0 environment. Issues of interest and possibly worthy of investigation include:

- ▶ the potential for PDIs to identify objects at any level of granularity;
- ▶ paid versus free identifiers (e.g. DOIs , LSIDs, the LOTS project, peer2peer technologies);
- ▶ getting a community to adopt standards, or using technology that allows interoperability;
- ▶ using common techniques to note versions of software;
- ▶ the need to train researchers to take these issues seriously during their research, rather than as an afterthought (and who will train them?);
- ▶ the implications of UK PubMed Central and the role of the British Library.

The group noted that it is not the RIN's role to resolve these issues; rather, it can help to work towards understanding them, raising awareness, share best practice and help to resolve conflict between different systems. It was agreed that an exploratory workshop, with oversight and input from Group members, could usefully define an agenda for priorities regarding PDIs.

▶ *Vince Smith and David Shotton to draw up an initial scope and a list of possible speakers for a RIN-sponsored workshop on PDIs during 2007.*

2.3 Particular challenges for clinical researchers: in the course of the above discussion, it was noted that the UK Biobank might have expertise to share on PDIs. However, this was an opportunity for members to raise fundamental questions about ethical obligations (notably regarding patient consent) in relation to usage and linking of human-derived data. The Group noted that the prevalence of patient-centric issues in clinical research posed challenges, in the area of use of research information and data, that are very different from those confronting, say, fundamental biologists. It was recognised that the Group, as currently constituted, did not include enough expertise to provide the RIN with well-informed support on clinical research issues. There are some unanswered questions about how best to address this problem: recruiting more members? Setting up a sub-group? Creating a separate consultative group?

In the first instance, it was agreed that the scope of the PDIs workshop should specifically exclude human-derived data.

▶ *All to reflect on how the RIN might best be advised, within or without the Group, on clinical research issues.*

2.4 Canonical and particular data: members noted that there is a difference between research data that yield a universal truth (such as a crystal structure) and “particulars” which are part of an infinite dataset or part of a theory (such as animal photographs, or an essay). Would it be useful for the RIN to initiate a discussion about the different types of research data and appropriate ways of handling them? The group elaborated on the point by highlighting other distinctions in data types and how no single approach worked best for all.

2.5 Referencing Systems: It was suggested that the RIN could work to address the issue of multiple reference systems and resulting problems in cross-referencing in journals. Is it realistic to advocate a single standard? Members commented that obstacles to this are largely cultural and historical. As such, the focus of any solution

▶ *RIN to raise this the issue of referencing systems with other consultative groups and with its new Research*

might be on encouraging interoperability, rather than pushing for acceptance of an exact standard.

Communications Group.

3. Towards an RIN Communications Strategy (paper RIN/PTE/06/15)

3.1 The Group noted the RIN's current communications activities with regard to the website, events, printed publications and with the specialist media. James Brown explained that the RIN Strategic Plan suggests a two-way communication with the research community whose views it seeks to represent; as such the RIN should look to develop new and interesting ways to engage in a dialogue with stakeholders. The development of the RIN's website should play a significant part, within a communication strategy, in initiating and sustaining such a dialogue. Above all, the website should be useful.

3.2 Generally, the Group felt that RIN should be proactive, especially with the media; well-drafted, interesting press releases, based whenever possible on RIN research, are important. RIN may need to evangelise, and to be outspoken if this is warranted. At the same time, it should exercise care about speaking on behalf of any particular community.

3.3. It was recognised that tools such as wikis and blogs could be useful, but their usefulness varies according to circumstances and users, perhaps in niche areas. Members suggested that there is still a place for email lists, for instance for Consultative Groups themselves.

4. Interfacing with Learned Societies (oral)

4.1 This is an arena which the RIN is only just beginning to investigate – as such the level of participation and possible outcomes from meetings with Learned Societies is difficult to predict. Members commented on the usefulness of communication with learned societies – with regard to societies' journals, libraries, training activities, and as a bridge for communication with the research community at large.

4.2. Suggested organisations with which RIN could usefully engage include the Association of Medical Research Charities and the Linnean Society.

► *RIN to circulate an initial list of possible participants for an exploratory workshop with life science and medical learned and professional societies.*

► *All to comment on this list and on the scope for such an event.*

5. Freedom of information and its impact on information for researchers (paper RIN/PTE/06/16)

5.1 The group noted the small consultation exercise initiated by the LIS Consultative Group, and members were asked to provide informal feedback on whether this is an issue for RIN to further explore. There was some scepticism about the value of RIN involvement: is FoI really an issue for researchers? And are there not benefits to be derived from a level of information restriction, for instance regarding ethical considerations in data retrieval?

► *All to complete the previously-circulated brief FOI questionnaire.*

6. RIN scholarly communications activities (paper RIN/PTE/06/17)

6.1 The group noted the setting up of the RIN Research Communications Group (RCG). Members expressed an interest in being kept abreast of what the group was doing; RIN would provide feedback. In turn, the RIN would gratefully receive views/ideas from Consultative Groups to help develop the RCG's agenda.	
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7. Joint RIN/RCUK/DTI survey of scholarly journals (paper RIN/PTE/06/18)

7.1 The group noted the main conclusions of the report, and suggested that owing to its importance, it should be disseminated widely and with limelight – such as trying to get details into <i>Nature</i> .	
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8. Digital data management (paper RIN/PTE/06/19)

8.1 The group was reminded that the event was a week away, and that their attendance would be welcomed.	
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9. Any other business

9.1 There was none.	
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Date of next meeting: likely to be during the second half of March, to be confirmed as soon as possible