

Research Information Network CONSULTATIVE GROUP FOR PHYSICAL SCIENCES, TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING

NOTE FROM THE FIRST MEETING – 24 APRIL 2006

Action points in red italics

Present:

Elaine Martin (Chair) (University of Newcastle)
Simon Coles (University of Southampton)
David Gavaghan (Oxford University)
Stéphane Goldstein (Research Information Network)
Robin Hankin (University of Southampton)
Roger Hines (Sheffield Hallam University)
Michael Jubb (Research Information Network)
Tong Sun (City University)
Suresh Thennadil (University of Newcastle)
Jackie Van Bueren (Research Information Network)
Keith Westhead (British Geological Survey)

Apologies

none

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 Elaine Martin welcomed members to this inaugural meeting of the Group. To encourage awareness of the Group's networking potential, members were invited to indicate briefly the sort of interfaces that they have within their respective communities:

- ▶ Simon Coles: Manager of the UK National Crystallography Service (NCS), a centre of expertise in collection and workup of structural data stretching all the way across the domains of chemistry and materials science. The NCS was a key player in the EPSRC funded (£2.3M) CombeChem e-Science testbed project, which aimed at integrating existing structure and property data sources within a grid-based information-and knowledge-sharing environment. Arising from this was the JISC funded eBank-UK project (SJC Co-PI) which is supporting discovery, access, use and publication of scientific data by means of Open Access Data Repositories. Principal investigator on the Repository for the Laboratory project which is aimed at using digital repositories to capture data and metadata at source in the experimental laboratory, manage this data and then assemble a scientific report compliant with publishers requirements. Crystallographic editor responsible for quality assessment of data submitted to the journals 'Supramolecular Chemistry' and 'Journal of Coordination Chemistry'."
- ▶ David Gavaghan:
- ▶ Robin Hankin:
- ▶ Roger Hines:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Elaine Martin: ▶ Tong Sun: ▶ Suresh Thennadil: ▶ Keith Westhead: undertook a PhD in structural & metamorphic geology, based on fieldwork in Arctic Norway from 1987-1990 and wrote a series of research papers based on this during the 90's. Worked for the British Geological since 1990, as a field mapper and latterly in the information field. Managed the BGS Enquiry Service since 2000 which deals with a wide variety of enquiries each year (numbering 30,000+) and responds with a variety of information services, including online shops, scanned records copies and scientific advice. Also works on the customer side of digital data licensing, and hence has gained experience in the commercial aspect of information supply from the public sector. 	
<p>1.2 <u>Group membership</u>: it was acknowledged that there are gaps in thematic coverage of the membership; physics is a notable example. The current size of the Group is relatively small, and there is scope for increasing this, albeit to no more than fifteen people. Members were asked to reflect on which further individuals might be invited to join. There was one suggestion: Jeff Tseng, a particle physicist from Oxford.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Stéphane Goldstein to approach Jeff Tseng.</i> ▶ <i>All to notify Stéphane Goldstein of further suggestions for Group membership</i>

2. Nature and role of Consultative Groups (paper RIN/PTE/06/01)

<p>2.1. Elaine Martin highlighted the key role of the Groups, namely to provide the RIN with an interface with the research community. This involves a two-way process: bottom-up, to reflect the views of researchers in relation to the information agenda as defined by the RIN's remit; and top-down, to develop awareness of RIN activities. She stressed that the RIN executive team will look to the Groups to determine proactively their own agenda and priorities – with appropriate resources available from the RIN to achieve this.</p> <p>2.2. Members recognised the potential usefulness of the Groups as a communication channel and a co-ordinatory mechanism. There was a query about the rationale for creating four groups rather than one: how would cross-disciplinary issues be addressed? How might effective communication between the Groups be ensured? Michael Jubb suggested that the four-way split minimised unwieldiness, and notwithstanding any overlaps, reflected the genuine cultural differences between broad areas. The RIN executive team and, increasingly, the website provide linkage between the Groups. Moreover, the RIN is keen to see the emergence of common themes (either generic or specific) across the groups; as these become apparent, they can be addressed by common approaches such as joint meetings or initiatives.</p> <p>2.3 The Group was invited to think of possible ideas for consideration at future meetings. Suggestions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Examining how software developed by university-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Stéphane Goldstein to amend the Groups' ToR to spell out more clearly the imperative for the Groups to engage in dialogue with each other and work together where common approaches are called for.</i>
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researchers might be more effectively identified and indexed. It was recognised that this is starting to happen in areas such as computational biology, but that undertaking this task systematically supposes a major international effort – as well as a commitment on the part of researchers to describe properly their software outputs.

- ▶ Investigating the extent to which concerns about IPR might act as brake on the dissemination of data, and how the development of standards or guidelines might help to overcome any reticence felt by researchers.
- ▶ Looking at the implication of the Freedom of Information Act, and maybe also the Data Protection Act, in relation to research information outputs.
- ▶ One way that the Group might develop its role would be to highlight examples of best practice from other organisations relating to the way that they handle research information issues and problems; this could help to identify areas where the RIN might help, through its leadership and co-ordinatory functions, to overcome blockages that occur at institutional level.

2.4 Members were reminded that the RIN's web presence is expected to play a growing (although as yet undefined) role in facilitating the development of interfaces with the research community. Interactive tools such as wikis, using the website as a platform, could play a role in this. It was agreed that this issue could usefully be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

3. RIN Strategic Plan (*paper RIN/PTE/06/02*)

3.1 The Group noted that the Strategic Plan illustrates the RIN's leadership and co-ordinatory role. As well as serving as an overarching strategy, the document provides a context for the RIN's programme of work and networking. The former is typified by surveys and other projects aimed at drawing empirical evidence or establishing policy lines. The £200k p.a. that the RIN is making available to the Consultative Groups forms an integral part of this overall framework of activity.

3.2 The Group considered what might constitute an overall success indicator for the RIN. Members noted that success would be reflected by the organisation's ability to develop a durable, national policy framework (although not a blueprint) for the development of information services for the UK research community. This would serve to aggregate the disparate policy approaches adopted by the range of stakeholders operating in this area, not least JISC, thereby underlining the RIN's key co-ordinatory role. Although it was difficult at this stage to have a clear view about what such a framework might look like, at the very least it would identify priorities and would convey a feel for how these priorities should inter-relate across the broad research spectrum. The framework is likely to incorporate cultural/behavioural and structural/organisational elements; however, there is a question mark about the extent to which the framework should also cover technological issues – see below.

3.3 Members noted that such activity underlines the RIN's key role as a body with responsibility for overarching co-ordination, and also advocacy and opinion-forming.

3.4 Members offered comments on desirable objectives that might stem from the Plan:

- ▶ Overcoming the frustration felt in particular by researchers in smaller institutions relating to limited access to journals: what is the scope for developing common platforms aimed at broadening such access? Members noted that addressing these concerns forms part of the RIN's involvement around licensing for content and walk-in access. Library consortia have had a measure of success in brokering agreements aimed at broadening access, including from home.
- ▶ A more joined-up approach to providing front-end resources, such as [Ovid](#).
- ▶ A greater emphasis on developing interoperability – although it was recognised that this is an area of activity where JISC already has a strong presence.

3.5 This prompted a discussion on the relationship and division of responsibilities between JISC and the RIN. It was suggested that, to fulfil its mission, the RIN could not avoid addressing the need to co-ordinate the defining and development of technological as well as policy frameworks – and not leaving such activity largely to JISC. However, Michael Jubb reminded members that the relationship between the two organisations requires a careful consideration of respective roles and areas of influence. In this respect, the RIN – largely thanks to its solid interfaces with major research funders and its growing relationship with the research community – is better placed than JISC to take the lead on policy-centred issues.

4. Director's report (paper RIN/PTE/06/03)

4.1 Members noted the contents of the report and reflected on the implications of the expected evolution of the RAE. Michael Jubb emphasised that any future metrics-based evaluation system would need to reflect the changing nature of the research output environment. The RIN intends to respond to the review that HEFCE and the Department for Education and Skills will shortly be conducting.

5. Digital content (paper RIN/PTE/06/04)

5.1 Digitisation: members exchanged views on the extent to which digitisation is relevant to the needs of the physical scientists and engineers. Although for them digitisation is often of lesser importance than born-digital material, the Group recognised that for many sectors, digitisation remains of prime importance. For instance, there is still heavy demand for digitised journals in areas such as materials science, where even today some serials are not published electronically. For aspects of environmental research, archival material is still scanned for

<p>backup purposes, to comply with NERC policy. In addition, there is often a cultural preference in given disciplines to working with paper.</p> <p>5.2 The Group emphasised the imperative of ensuring long-term preservation and authentication/version control of both digitised and born-digital material.</p>	
<p>5.3 <u>Digital data</u>: the RIN recognises the importance of taking forward a process that will promote principles and guidance as a starting point for researchers and research funders. Members suggested that, increasingly, researchers themselves are taking the initiative of devising such principles across a range of disciplines, albeit in a disjointed manner. Might the RIN's main contribution in this area be to identify best practice where this emerges, and thereby provide encouragement to such bottom-up initiatives? The Group's discussion pointed to a tension between this sort of approach and the imposing from above of across-the-board standards. How broad should these be, and what might be the cost of imposing them?</p> <p>5.4 Members agreed that the principles and approaches outlined in the document are sensible. Comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There was concern at the definition of data contained in section 2.1 of the document; in particular, it was felt that this should not be restricted to <i>reported</i> results. ▶ The document might more explicitly build technological factors into the principles. ▶ Professional bodies should be drawn into the formulation and setting of standards – although this already happens to an extent. ▶ Might the RIN develop a role relating to accreditation of standards (e.g. attributing an RIN 'kitemark')? Although such an idea seemed appealing in principle, members agreed that, in practice, such a role would be fraught with difficulties. Nonetheless, there could be a case for seeking to set an appropriate ISO standard. 	<p>▶ <i>Michael Jubb / Stéphane Goldstein to revise the definition of data in section 2.1 of the document.</i></p>
<p>5.5 <u>Libraries and e-Research</u>: members recognised that the changing technological landscape has a deep impact on the relationship between libraries and researchers. Important relevant issues included staff time and training for librarians; the relevance of Full Economic Costs; and the role of non-academic institutions, such as learned society libraries. The Group concurred that libraries are still needed to act as guardians of institutional memory, with a continuing albeit evolving role in preservation and curation. The merging of libraries and university IT departments might allow for more effective long-term management of digital content.</p>	

6. Other business

<p>There was none</p>	
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Next meeting: to take place in all likelihood during the week of 17 July 2006 – to be confirmed following consultation with members.

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