RIN Advisory Board
AWAYDAY MEETING, 23-24 NOVEMBER 2006

Welcome and introduction	
Opportunity to take stock or strategic directions for RIN, as forum for voice of researchers. Also, preparing for RIN evaluation.	
Session 1 – Information in the research process: how researchers create, use and manage information (introduced by John Feather)	
How can RIN add value to what already happens? How can it avoid the danger of duplication? What is its distinctive role? How can RIN help researchers find out what needs to be done to usefully set out new knowledge? How can RIN help with the cyclical activities described in JF's presentation? Three assumed roles: observer, facilitator, broker. What should balance be between them? How can RIN show that research community benefits from its activities? How can success be measured? Generally good information infrastructure in UK – so what can RIN add that is new and can improve on what is provided? GENERAL DISCUSSION MA – what do we mean by 'observe'? Facilitator and broker are clearer roles – but 'observing' for what purpose? KS – Watchdog role may be more precise, i.e. acting upon observations. Important to look at landscape and monitor changes in it. On that basis, 'nagging' role because RIN may need to act upon what it sees (link to advocacy role). JF – 'Observatory' in EU sense, i.e. keeping a watching brief, but not in a passive sense. The key is who and what RIN is observing. MA – Need to be aware of barriers before being able to move agenda forward. Identify problems, then move forward on that basis. JF – But what is it that RIN is mapping? What exactly is research/information landscape? This is worth exploring; are there existing maps? KS – Cross-disciplinary nature of RIN's role is distinctive, both as strength and a weakness (most other organisations observe *within* a disciplinary area – RIN has a wide overview). JF – Information professionals often look across disciplines – can their experience be useful? LP – Research landscape can be a very abstract concept, needs to be broken down to identify specific issues. MJ – The various contexts within which research is undertaken vary significantly, and they strongly influence the way information is created and used. Challenge is to understand how these different contexts influence the way that researchers use information. But there are also some generic issues that can be pulled out of this variety, and lessons from one particular area might apply to very different areas of research. So how can disciplines learn from each other? BB – Several aspects of JF's model applies to all areas of research, life/physical sciences as well as AHS. Pulling knowledge from different sources may be particularly relevant to RIN's role. Key is to get groups of researchers to talk about their different experience of knowledge creation. MA – At different career stages or in unfamiliar environments, some issues start	

becoming more important, and new problems/challenges may appear; particularly true for researchers moving into interdisciplinary research. This is where observing barriers is important.

DW – For life scientists, natural inclination is to seek advice from others rather than diving into an unfamiliar knowledge pool. So could RIN help with finding appropriate guidance?

JF – But to what extent is lack of information a constraint on research endeavour, especially in the hugely important and intellectually exciting areas at the boundaries of disciplines? Are the hard sciences so precisely defined that this is not an issue for them?

BB – Feels that processes ('model of creativity') are often similar across all disciplines.

DW – True, but only at a fundamental level.

LP – Real advances in knowledge take place at the boundaries; perhaps that is what RIN should focus on, trying to lower barriers there.

DW – Global change has been a factor unifying research approaches a range of disparate disciplines in recent years; how can this unifying trend be extended to further disciplines, such as e.g. economics? Getting communities to talk to each other so that they understand each other, that is the real difficulty – potentially a huge challenge.

JF – But is there a contradiction between accepting the silos in which researchers operate (DW's above comment), and developing the above understanding?

DW – No, because research perspectives from a given area can, upon investigation, prove to be very useful to those from another area, and can provide new and useful research challenges. But how to communicate these perspectives?

MA – Within some established disciplines, it isn't even always clear where information can be found – let alone for researchers outside these disciplines…

JF – A lot of evaluation of researcher behaviour has traditionally been based on how hard scientists work. AHS researchers have therefore tended to adopt the analytical tools (e.g. bibliographic analyses) of disciplines which may not be most relevant to them. Is it possible, at a high level, to identify enough commonality to see how RIN can help with furthering understanding between very different disciplines?

BB – It is clear that there is commonality. The question is about methodology, how RIN would operate.

JF – are there mechanisms that can help researchers find ways of improving understanding between disciplines?

MJ – Is this not too big a set of issues for RIN? Could be more narrowly focused on access, validity and use of information, i.e. how can barriers in these areas be lowered to help cross-disciplinary understanding. Examining the way that information is created is as important as looking at the way that it is used.

LP – One important challenge is what researchers need to do in order to be able to move into another discipline? How can their understanding be furthered? RIN needs to identify specific issues and problems and tackle them. In this respect, what is practicable for RIN to do? Issue of priorities.

KS – Fundamental issue: how can RIN make research more effective? Problem is that most researchers don't think too much about research processes, and how to make these more effective (and also how these processes may change over time). How can RIN demonstrate that it can add value here. Maybe RIN could start by looking at how researcher effectiveness can be measured.

MA – Much of the discussion so far has been about barriers to resource discovery, access, use and enabling discovery to knowledge that has been created (i.e. setting

out research outputs, such as writing of abstracts, in a way that makes them as transparent as possible). RIN might focus on tangible ways of addressing these sort of barriers.

BB – Training in research information techniques, e.g. setting out research outputs, could be important; combining old and new techniques. Training of postgraduates in particular in such skills. Could research be commissioned (perhaps in conjunction with RCs) to look into what is needed?

DW – What happens where the 'market' for the research outputs is not researchers, e.g. consultants? In some areas, journal articles comprise summaries for a non-academic audience, and this is know to be useful and widely-read.

JF – How to most effectively put knowledge into ….

KS – (i) So, what are the RIN's audiences? Not just academics – what about communicating with others, e.g. in the commercial sector. Effective dissemination for one audience may not always be appropriate for another… (ii) Universities need to fundamentally change their learning processes, because of impact of electronic multi-tasking on upcoming generations; that will have increasing impact on both learning and research processes…

BB – Academics are not just people on university payrolls; they also include undergraduates, PhD students, etc. Members of the public also have research skills…

LP – So, how can RIN improve the effectiveness of dissemination across research areas, and also into areas outside the university sector: is this not a very clear challenge for RIN?

KS – Influence of increasing web availability/viability on running of running specialist services, e.g. archiving.

MA – Resource discovery in books, grey literature and conference papers: also a not negligible factor, outside the journals area.

CONCLUSIONS

- Whatever RIN does, it needs to have a practical value, to enable researchers to do good work.
- Value added needs to be demonstrable.
- RIN role in 'upskilling' research community, particularly new entrants that are the product of the Google generation.

Session 2 – Strategic directions: the RIN, its role and strategy (introduced by Michael Jubb)

RIN's remit is hugely ambitious. What has it done so far in its various roles?

- Observatory: evidence-gathering for a purpose, about issues of importance in seeking to develop better information services for researchers.
- Policy development and guidance: likely to become increasingly important part of RIN's work; issue about authority that can be attached to documents stemming from this process, and value that RIN adds – RIN looking to become increasingly authoritative.
- Working in partnership with other bodies – to date, especially library bodies; need to move beyond this.
- Co-ordination and brokerage (but what exactly does brokerage mean?)
- Communicating, consulting and liaising

So, has RIN identified what key roles are? Are there priorities between these roles? Are the activities within each role the right sort of things? Are there other roles that

we haven't thought of?

LP – Is there a distinction between brokerage and facilitation? Is brokerage about bringing people together for a give purpose? The activity is more important than the definition…

SC – Brokerage can be a somewhat invisible role… Important to show the value that it adds, the traces that it leaves in the landscape.

MA – Huge range of activities, quite proper during the first way as a means of getting into various contexts, of making markers. It may be that RIN has done enough of some of these things, and that now there should be more focused effort where a real difference can be made.

KS – There will be things for which RIN will not get credit – so important to monitor RIN activity in a productive way. Also, RIN is still at an early stage of its existence; how does it move into the next stage of its lifecycle, in terms of what priorities it sets.

BB – How can RIN outputs, such as reports, be acknowledged as genuine RIN contribution, even if RIN cannot claim authorship?

JF – Key issue is whether particular area would have been investigated, or taken forward, without RIN – making allowances for hindsight where some projects turn out to be less valuable than anticipated. Importance of identifying what is **unique** about RIN's contribution.

MJ – not always for RIN to take forward the conclusions from RIN work; this could be done by other stakeholders.

JF – But need to be wary of the dangers of being invisible as the broker…

MA – Funders' policy study as an example: the originality of the work is less important than the gaps that it identifies; as such, this piece of work makes an important contribution to policy development, by highlighting differences in practice between key players such as research funders. So such reports can make a difference…

BB – Yes, but it is important to **target the audience** for such work.

MJ – So, it seems that studies of this kind could be important. Two kinds of issues: (i) How to highlight key findings and work through the implications of these findings for key audiences – it is difficult to get commissioned consultants to do this, which implies an important role for RIN to oversee packaging of such commissioned reports, and play a role in its writing. (ii) How to claim ownership of this commissioned work.

SC – Maybe such reports require different executive summaries for difference audiences (to be written by RIN rather than consultants)

BB – This could be very helpful for, say, busy senior managers; what would be useful would be one-page digests.

JF – This sort of targeting is very important, and moreover emphasises the RIN badging.

KS – RIN might want to look for role model(s), organisations that work successfully in their field, e.g. Royal Society: this is a body with a very mixed audience, but very authoritative, with high visibility but also key behind the scenes roles; RS is very effective broker and facilitator. Could such models help with RIN's own positioning?

DW – Sceptical about RS as role model… Role model should be more transparent in its operations. RIN needs to establish its reputation by being transparent: clear trail of activity and reasoning behind this.

MJ – RIN has been fairly open in its evidence-gathering to date. But RIN needs to

use consultative groups and other interested parties more to involve them in developing its work.

LP – Perhaps RIN does indeed need to focus its activities. Authority may derive more from speaking on a relatively small range of projects. Also important for highlights and, crucially, **implications** of RIN reports to be set out clearly for RIN audiences.

MJ – One problem is that small executive team does not always have the necessary expertise; so engagement of bodies such as advisory board is important, and help from members can make a real difference.

MA – Agrees that advisory board members, and others, can indeed add value in this way.

JF – Useful for reports not only to make recommendations, but also to specify which stakeholders/audiences these recommendations (and key messages) are destined for; this means setting out a series of messages clearly labelled for different audiences.

DW – This impinges on the RIN's role as an advocate. Strong advocacy (at the risk of losing, as well as gaining friends) can really move the agenda forward. This inevitably means sending strong messages to clearly targeted audiences.

JF – Two preconditions: evidence-based advocacy, and authoritativeness of RIN advice (itself dependent on solid evidence base).

MJ – Authority may be derived in part from richness of RIN's networking. So there are implications for the way that RIN sets up processes for disseminating its work.

JF – Need to allow time in project work for serious input from expert parties.

DW – Should the advisory board be doing things to increase the standing of the outputs of RIN's work?

MJ – One approach is to use some members of the board as 'champions' for given aspects of RIN's work. Also, RIN looks to consultative groups (with at least some initial success) to take on such a task. Perhaps this sort of thing needs to be formalised – but we are wary that this has an impact on timescales.

KS – But bear in mind that the time of board and group members is precious – not always easy to secure engagement. RIN should look to other partners as well, piggy-backing on other organisations' activities wherever possible.

MA – There is also a particular role for academics, who are not IS specialists, as advocates for RIN. Notable figures in their fields could be very effective as advocates – so perhaps look out for a wider group of people for this purpose.

BB – But this was always envisaged as a role for the consultative groups. Need to think more about how group members are used. They are a wide range of people, who are sometimes at the stage of their careers which suits them to play a role on a national stage on behalf of RIN.

SC – Could consultative group members be associated more formally with RIN reports, which they could then help to disseminate.

MJ – Advocacy clearly needs to be evidence-based – but need to reflect on who are the audiences for advocacy; different audiences may require different types of advocacy. So what are the key audiences?

MA – Depends of what RIN is seeking to advocate…

MJ – Also issue of priorities: not just selecting the key messages, but prioritising the audiences.

JF – Selecting the issues determines the audiences…

BB – RIN MoU is not helpful by talking about talking to audiences at the highest possible level; is this always appropriate?

MA – The funding councils, with their research committees in particular, represent key high-level audiences, possibly the highest level that RIN could usefully interact with. RIN work on future of access funding is a case in point in this particular instance.	
SC – Remember that RIN audiences are not limited to academic researchers: what about, e.g. private industry?	
DW – Does speaking to Govt Depts ensure cascading messages to these Departments' own constituencies? Are some Departments worth targeting in this vein? And at what level: policymakers? What about parliamentary select committees?	
MJ – We need to be clear about what level of policy we are seeking to influence; this may vary according to circumstances.	
MA – Clearly, different Govt Depts may be targeted depending on the nature of RIN's work – although, again, there is the issue about the most appropriate level of engagement (pertinent for instance in the case of DTI/OSI).	
DW – Advocacy needs to be tailored, but it does also need to be **advocacy** in order to move issues up the agenda. Need to build an evidence base to support this, for both high-level and intermediate level audiences and adapted messages for this purpose.	
JF – We are differentiating between two levels of advocacy. But that is different from advocating specific points from specific pieces of work, in order to facilitate research and help researchers make better use of resources. At a broader and political level, a more general advocacy implies working in partnership with more established stakeholders – in this instance, RIN is essentially one contributor (albeit one that contributes a reliable evidence base).	
MJ – RIN's role may be more in relation to evidence-gathering, which suggests advocacy at a fairly specific level.	
CONCLUSIONS ❐ Need to reflect on how best to draw out the evidence from RIN's work, and to actively promote such evidence. ❐ Need to move more into advocacy, especially evidence-based advocacy, picking out messages selectively and targeting them at different organisations and levels as appropriate. ❐ Need for RIN to be on the alert about key policy issues about which RIN should be developing views	
Session 3 – Strategic directions: relationships with the research community (introduced by Mike Anderson)	
Follett was always very concerned that what should follow his reports should be user-driven, tailored to the needs of researchers – so implying the need for active engagement with the research community. So, key questions: ❐ What is the research community? Who are the researchers? This could be a very wide constituency – so can it be engaged with in its entirety? ❐ What is the content of the relationship with researchers? Partly dependent on whether researchers know what their needs are? And how can they be helped to define their needs? ❐ What might be the role of intermediaries? And who are they? Probably not researchers' employers… Not much faith in most learned societies to help in this task, nor in research councils and associated bodies. Content of relationship is probably determining factor	

DISCUSSION

JF – Some researchers are not aware even what questions to ask, in order to define their need. So, what are the reasonable questions to ask? Not clear how RIN can get involved in defining such questions.

MA – In some cases, pioneers in particular faculties are picked out as gatekeepers who act as disseminators/educators, and who are in appropriate positions to fulfil this role.

KS – More than about gatekeeping: there is a need for a bottom-down approach. Gatekeepers and audiences need to understand that there is a demand for issues that RIN advocates.

LP – This emphasises the importance of identifying priorities for engagement.

KS – What about products? What are they? These are the basis for engagement.

JW – Can researchers be incentivised (paid?) to interact directly with them?

LP – What is the resource available for undertaking engagement, and indeed all the other tasks discussed today?

JS – Perhaps, in the light of limited resources, there should be realistic assessment about targeted, well-focused engagement.

KS – Do we need case studies about issues that could be resolved?

JF – What does the research community see as priorities for RIN?

JS – Research data management and use recurs as a concern for researchers across many disciplines; this could be an obvious area where RIN could add value. Digital preservation is another such area.

BB – Agrees strongly about need to focus in the way that it engages; the research community in its entirety and variety may be too ambitious in the first three years – or even ever. There is a case for focusing on the NHS as the one area to move into other than university research. In terms of career stages, probably better not to try to engage too much with highly experienced researchers; better to focus on younger researchers, which could pay dividends as their careers progress.

MA – Agrees with this focus, as a very strong basis.

MJ – Interacting with NHS is very difficult; it is not clear at all what contribution RIN could make to an organisational structure that is investing hugely in information.

MA – Value could be added at the interface between the clinical practitioners and the academic realm.

KS – New NHS Information Service is obviously in need of help and advice…. There is a window of opportunity here, although there is a challenge about knowing where to pitch the interaction.

DW – Need to make it clear that, in NHS context, RIN's interest lies in research information, not patient data – this is important politically. Liaison with practitioners, especially GPs, could be fruitful: could the BMA or the relevant Royal Colleges be of help?

JW – What would be the Funders' Grp view on such direct engagement with practitioners? There is danger of mission creep, inasmuch as many practitioners are not researchers.

MA – A more legitimate target are clinical researchers, including GPs involved in research.

KS – Experience from H of Commons and H of Lords librarians shows that real challenge is to change the way that information flows onto the desks of parliamentarians. There could be much to learn, from a RIN perspective, about how information flows in that particular environment; scope for further RIN

investigation?

MA – What about the role of learned societies, about which MA is sceptical?

JF – learned societies are a very mixed bag; some a clearly more proactive than others. However, subject associations could be a useful channel to researchers, particularly smaller ones.

DW – Royal Soc of Chemistry is interesting, inasmuch as it has an academic and industry remit. Moreover, it covers a very wide remit, is a major publisher, runs databases and also runs training courses. This underlines the importance of carefully choosing societies than are genuinely dynamic – the RSC could be a prime candidate for engagement.

MA – concludes that there is a case for selecting a small number of areas where interaction with learned societies could be tested, particularly if enthusiastic society officers can be identified.

MA – Role of consultative groups: problems of uneven attendance at meetings, and conversely supporting those members that are interested in taking things forward (the website could be one way of helping them).

JF – with consultative groups, focusing on a small number of disciplines could also be a good way forward.

BB – This underlines the usefulness of case studies. These could really help RIN decide where it can act most fruitfully.

MA – Demonstrator case studies could therefore form an important part of RIN strategy for the remainder of its initial term. They can provide a really solid basis for identifying needs.

Session 4 – Volumes and varieties of research data: the changing role of data in the research and scholarly communications processes (presented by Michael Jubb)

Definition(s) of data – these are intrinsic to the research process, but come in a variety of forms, digital, digitised and non-digital. They constitute an important set of the records necessary to evaluate the reported results of research, and associated processes. They come in various formats, and from different sources.

Data are an output of research, the product of researchers as creators. Not necessarily intrinsic output – could be extrinsic (e.g. variations in extent of linkage between data and published outputs). Data are also an input into research, for researchers as users. In this respect, there are barriers to access (institutional, cultural, training…) and to use (technological).

Who are the people who help researchers to create and use data? Who are the mediators and service providers? There is a range of questions concerning the place and role of these, including the role of RIN.

DISCUSSION

KS – There are also sectoral barriers, where different types of user (e.g. academics and Government Departments, and also across international boundaries) have different sorts of infrastructure which may make access to data difficult. This is fairly common across the social sciences and humanities.

DW – It occurs in some sectors within the hard sciences.

MR – Cultural barriers are important: issue of rewarding researchers.

MA – Because much data often doesn't get published as such, it does not even get cited – so reward does not even apply at that level. A big challenge is to find ways of publishing data in a way that makes citation possible.

BB – Nowadays, ethical considerations are such that displaying data is an intrinsic part of the work.

DW – Not an easy issue to resolve; NERC have been trying to address this for a long time. Researchers are often resistant to meeting standards for data management and curation as part of their research effort; research funders may need to become more demanding in terms of their expectations.

JF – A lot of problems occur as a result of the way the data was collected in the first place, so there is an important cultural issue about managing data as a research output, in order to make it as usable as possible as an input.

MA – Research funders' grants need to make proper allowance for data outputs to be properly managed.

KS – Selection and retention policies: mustn't assume that all data is equally worthy of preservation. Research projects need to include an appraisal of the durability of data, to ensure proper transition of data over longer research life-cycles where this is appropriate.

MR – Each university, in the way that it develops its repository, needs to address these issues as well.

DW – Some RCs (notably NERC) have already addressed this issue.

MR – Yes, RC's often have the necessary expertise; but is this always the case of universities?

MA – All data should be kept at least for a while. The data that have short term value may only require minimal curation, but that is different from long-term data…

MJ – RIN role may be to encourage early intervention to ensure that researchers manage their data properly from the outsets; this is akin to ensuring the good record keeping that has long been a feature of lab-based research.

KS – There is often a focus on large resources, but small datasets can also be very valuable, even if they are narrow and specific, if they are related or similar to other such datasets – and therefore can form part of important collections.

MR – Question of universities providing resources and support for data management in a coherent and structured way.

MA – Don't forget that data are dynamic: they evolve and are enriched over time, they may also be corrected; the manner in which they are annotated is therefore important (i.e. version control). Data can be said to be akin to a wiki – which poses the issue of credit and citation for those who enrich and add to the data.

MJ – This tends to happen in an ad hoc way…

DW – Not necessarily true

JS – How can researchers with no RC funding be persuaded about the need to properly manage data?

MJ – How can data management issues be effectively addressed at university level?

JF – Perhaps better to address them at discipline, rather than university level, in the light of major differences (including cultural) in disciplinary practices. The disciplinary environment provides a more basic level for intervention; universities provide an institutional overlay which comes later.

MR – Very unlikely that university could oblige its staff to deposit their data in a repository.

BB – There is also the issue of ownership of data, and the extent to which researchers tend to take their data with them when they move to different institutions.

MA – there is considerable ambiguity about ownership issues; RCs have not properly thought about the implications from this, e.g. issues such as exclusivity.

DW – NERC has addressed this problem. The amount of time is related to the objectives and nature of projects, so that issues of exclusivity should also be

addressed at the outset, as part of the specification for projects.	
BB – The nature of sponsorship of research is also important: data produced by commercial sponsors …	
MA – There are clearly a wealth of conditions/situations regarding the way that data are managed, with little overview/comparison across disciplines and practices. Providing such an overview, and posing appropriate questions, could well be a niche role for RIN. This would be another aspect of its observatory function.	
MJ – What about cross-sectoral barriers? How can relationships be set up to develop greater interoperability across different main groups of players? What might RIN do in such areas?	
BB – Might be difficult for RIN to address these particular problems outside the context of its approach to data management.	
MJ – Start by focusing on some specific disciplines…	
BB – Agrees – there are limitations because of RIN's resource.	
MA – Judicious selection of disciplines could allow for evaluation of full range of barriers.	
MA – There is much valuable data kept by commercial organisations, which they might be persuaded to share, under certain conditions, with academic researchers – even if they would not consider doing so with their competitors.	
KS – Once again, case studies in given areas could prove very valuable. These could provide sound knowledge upon which protocols and practice can be built.	
MJ – Consensus seems to be to focus on practice within certain disciplines. This is part of the RIN's role as an observatory with a purpose, drawing out lessons from evidence-gathering and implications thereof. This is about finding out what is going on in different disciplines, drawing out good practice.	
LP – Must be mindful of the limitations of RIN resources, and the consequent need to focus in a small number of areas.	
BB – Who will undertake such studies? Probably better to commission projects from university sector, where is much expertise, and not necessarily go out to tender with potentially unreliable contractors. Such research could well be undertaken in a decentralised way, but with effective co-ordination.	
MA – Short-term expert panel could play an important role in overseeing such work.	

Session 5 – Evaluation and review of the RIN: issues, opportunities and challenges (introduced by Bob Burgess)

Key issue is what ought to be the focus of the review. The context is an organisation that has been started from scratch, and with a limited resource.	
The review needs to be evidence-based – so what evidence can be used?	
Also, is review formative or summative, or both?	
Roles of respective key players:	
❏ RIN itself: nature of self-assessment, how it will evaluate the depth and breadth of RIN's work to date. To complete this, there is already a rich vein of existing documents (minutes, etc).	
❏ Advisory Board: BB believes that the whole Board should be interviewed, probably individually largely by phone, and also collectively; Board members, as well the RIN executive team, have a story to tell. It may also be useful for evaluators to observe at a Board meeting.	
❏ Consultative groups: could be useful to consult them as well, but there is a	

concern about how the groups are working (e.g. in terms of attendance at their meetings). At the same time, is would be important to tap into researchers' views – but how can this be done?

Fundamental issues for consideration:

- What is unique about RIN? The self-assessment document will need to underline the nature of RIN's unique contribution, especially in relation to other players such as JISC.
- Mapping of partnerships with RIN, and levels of engagement within these.
- What has been innovative about RIN? One unusual characteristic is the wide range of its sponsors – but what else?
- What impact has RIN had in a range of areas (research, policy, practice)? What benefits have been derived, or do these not occur until further downstream?

Problems:

- What story should be told, what is the narrative? Are there many stories, and if so, how do they interrelate?
- What are the future needs of researchers?
- What is the future role of the organisation, bearing in mind that many RIN aims and objectives are long term?
- RIN workload.
- Timescale and depth of review: is this appropriate for an organisation with just 5 people?

DISCUSSION

JS – We need to persevere with the consultative groups; they are only just starting to engage in practical activities, and there is much potential for useful work – it is still early days (it is important to emphasise this, in relation to the groups, and indeed much of the rest of RIN activity); it would therefore be important for consultants to talk to the groups.

BB – if there are concerns about turnouts at consultative group meetings, it may be interesting for consultants to talk specifically with those that don't turn up… Remember that the groups form a ready made audience of researchers, RIN's key constituency.

JF – The groups are important, and it is worth taking the risk of getting a range of messages.

DW – the Board should make it quite clear that it is unreasonable, after just 18 month, for effective engagement to have taken place.

MA – need to stress that RIN surveys have also been major opportunities to engage with the research community.

JW – RIN hasn't yet attempted to market itself to researchers; much of RIN activity is behind the scenes.

MA – Hence important to stress that RIN work is indeed intended to address researcher needs – and in the first instance, to identify such needs. RIN survey work to date has provided a sound basis.

JW – Even once the needs have been identified by RIN, it may in any case be up to others to address them...

MR – JISC sees RIN's role as providing a synthesis of researchers' views and needs.

JW – That is the beginning of the story – but it might be politic to avoid enumerating everything that RIN is doing, but to focus instead on the activities that

RIN can bring a distinctive contribution to.

BB – Reiterates the point made yesterday about the need for RIN to focus activities in future, and to move away from the deliberately broad agenda of the first year. Also important to underline the uniqueness of RIN's contribution.

JF – Not only what RIN has done that no-one else has done, but more especially what no-one else could have done.

MA – Review consultants must have a very sound level of sophistication and understanding; there are real dangers that many consultants may not have those qualities.

BB – this underlines the importance of the self-assessment document as a starting point, laying out the context and pointing to the terrain.

MJ – RIN's evidence-gathering role is relatively easy to point to, but brokerage role – as we have seen – is less visible. The extent to which this is based firmly based on evidence needs to be drawn out. Growing RIN evidence base provides opportunities for RIN to showcase the brokerage that stems from such work

BB – RIN has shown great strength in the way that it handled and turned around a potential failure in the form of the funders' policy report.

MA – Another example of work not done elsewhere is the scholarly comms dialogue; could any other body have done this? RIN's neutrality, and small size, is assets here.

JW – RIN should not worry too much about deliverables being difficult to achieve; achievements may not become obvious until several years down the line.

JF – Bearing in mind that RIN has been around for such little time (and that its influence/impact can only be felt in the medium to long term), we should not worry about achievements to date; rather more important to think about how these are presented.

MA – all this suggests that strategic plan (especially in term of developing a national strategic framework) was over-optimistic. The evaluation should focus on whether RIN is moving along the right path to achieve strategic objectives, rather than on whether the objectives have been achieved.

BB – The self-assessment needs to contain a number of important claims (not a lengthy catalogue) based on evidence. It should be about explaining the story.

MJ – agrees that the narrative should not appear self-congratulatory, and should seek to explain as well as set out.

BB – What should be the background documentation provided to the reviewers?

KS – Important to explain the expectations stemming from strategic plan objectives, in a practical way; the objectives should not be seen in an abstract way. The operating plan does this to an extent.

JF – it could be useful to trace back developing RIN activities to objectives originally set out by the Follett agenda (although it should also be understand that the RIN cannot deliver much of this agenda owing to its limited resourcing).

BB – This suggests that consultants should be encouraged to speak to Brian Follett.

MA – Concern about the specification's definition of stakeholders: are HEIs stakeholders, in practical terms? Who/what are the representative bodies? The vagueness of this definition poses some research methodology issues.

BB – Some of the questions posed in the specification are extremely wide-ranging, and could be problematic in practice.

MA – Both the scale and timescale of the review are challenging.

BB – the timescale implies that the funders' group will not discuss the final output until December – so at what point, and how, will the outcome of the review be

made known?	
MA – at what point will RIN itself be given the opportunity to comment (even only on factual matters) on emerging findings? This really should be incorporated in the timetable.	
GR - HEFCE expects to reach a decision during autumn 2007.	
MJ – what exactly will consultants be doing during March to May 2007? Bearing in mind the early stage of RIN's existence, what will they achieve during those 100 days?	
MJ – lack of clarity about whether exercise is formative or summative?	
LP – Given the stage in existence, any formal summative element needs to be at least partly forward-looking; this can be done in the self-evaluation.	
BB – agrees that self-evaluation absolutely needs to include description of where RIN expects to go.	
LP – What exactly are the terms on which the reviewers will engage with the stakeholders? It is important for the latter to see the self evaluation, or to be aware of RIN's plans for the future; stakeholders cannot comment only on past achievements.	
GR – review will incorporate views from stakeholders about what should be future path of RIN.	
JS – But how can this be done without a view from RIN itself about its future plans?	
BB – The self-evaluation is crucially important: this provides the consultants with the story, which can then be 'tested' against the views of stakeholders.	
BB – the next Board meeting isn't until April; it may be necessary to touch base beforehand with the Board about the self-evaluation. RIN needs to reflect on how this can be done, and how the Board can be used to help with the refining of this document.	

Recapitulation and review	
MISSION AND FOCUS	
Overall Follett mission too ambitious with current resources, need to narrow/focus down and avoid mission creep.	
Case studies are part of the business of defining focus (see below)	
SUCCESS MEASURES AND VALUE ADDED	
Making the research process more effective, and identifying inefficiencies; understanding and reduction of barriers (eliminating barriers may be too ambitious at this stage).	
Evidence-gathering, that itself spawns activity in a brokerage/ facilitation capacity (understanding the risk that success in this area is less visible than failure)	
OBSERVATORY ROLES	
Observatory role is very fundamental, as long it involves gathering information for a purpose, using a variety of methods.	
Building better understanding of how researchers actually operate, e.g. how researchers combine old and new knowledge.	
BROKERAGE AND FACILITATION	

Key aim is bringing people together to make things better. Issue of where to lead and where to partner.

Looking at cross-sectoral issues, but first looking at issues within key disciplines.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy role needs to be evidence-based, drawing out key messages and implications from evidence gathered by RIN. Much effort is required to draw these out from the body of evidence.

Organisations need to be approached at different levels according to the nature of the advocacy.

DISCUSSION

BB – Still worried about how even this refocused programme can be achieved with small resources. Need to be very rigorous about selection and scope of case studies, and expectations from these. So, RIN should reflect very carefully about how to select disciplines for case studies, and what it hopes to achieve by contrasting disciplines. It is critical to know what the case is of… Selectivity is also important when choosing which learned societies to interact with.

MA – How could cases be selected? Start by looking at the diversity of the underlying domain to get a view of the spread of practice. This helps to position individual cases within a spectrum of practices, to make a selection that reflects this span. There is still an argument for looking outside the HE sector (e.g. yesterday's suggestion about the two parliamentary libraries). The next issue is then who does the work – but the first task is to identify the three or four principal barriers that need to be investigated, as a basis for identifying cases.

BB – Consider for instance starting with NHS as a case study in its own right, which could then be contrasted with learned societies. Subsequent studies could be subject based. The RIN could then end up with a series of contrasting cases. Between now and April, the executive team could reflect on how RIN might specify such work. Choosing the case studies will provide focus and heavily influence the path that RIN follows over the next period.

MA – Expertise on selecting cases probably lies within academic sector.

KS – Royal Statistical Society is another learned society that is well worth approaching, as with RSC because of its scope and level of organisation.

JW – Is it immediately obvious what RIN now needs to stop doing?

MJ – It may be opportune to abandon, for the time being, some brokerage work – and maybe some observatory work as well, in areas where reports have been completed.

JS – Could NHS actually fund any case study that involves it, bearing in mind that the information produced could be very useful for the Health Service? Important issues here include the barriers between NHS-based researchers and those working in HE.

JF – Focusing is key. Need to be clear about why cases are being picked, and what expectations can be derived.

BB – Thereby can case studies set a framework for much of RIN's activities.

JF – Starting point in defining programme of case studies is to reflect what we want to know, and usefulness of outcome – once again, evidence-gathering for a purpose.

MA – using appropriate learned societies to help understand the nature of the problems that RIN would want to investigate.