



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE EIGHTH MEETING – 27 JUNE 2007

Action points in red italics

Present:

Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
Sally Curry (RIN)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
Paul Hubbard (HEFCE)
David Ingram (University College London)
Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
Ed Pentz (CrossRef UK)
Malcolm Read (JISC)
Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
Jean Sykes (London School of Economics)
Jackie van Bueren (RIN)
David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
Jan Wilkinson (British Library)

Apologies

Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh)
Mike Cruise (University of Birmingham)
John Feather (University of Loughborough)
Roger Kain (University of Exeter)
Elaine Martin (University of Newcastle)
Lyn Pykett (University of Aberystwyth)
Anne Trefethen (University of Oxford)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 25 April 2007 (paper RIN/AB/07/08)

These were agreed.

2. Matters arising

There were none.

3. RIN review and forward look (paper RIN/AB/07/09)

Review

Introduction

Members noted the slippage in the review process. The draft consultant's report was not ready, as originally anticipated, and would not be available until 10 July. It would be circulated to the Board on that day, and members would be asked to comment by email in order to assist the Funders' Group with its decision when it meets on 24 July. The RIN Executive was keen to keep to this timescale, as delaying into the autumn would adversely affect its ability to plan for future development.

For the present, the Board had two documents available: the consultant's emerging findings, drafted in May; and the RIN

Executive's draft forward look.

From HEFCE's perspective, Paul Hubbard apologised for the failure to produce the report on time. He had recently been in phone contact with the consultancy team, and the conversation suggested that the report would not differ substantially from the provisional findings – except in terms of the weight given to the opinions of individuals consulted. Paul Hubbard's expectation was that the Funders' Group would take decisions on RIN's future in principle in July, but that final decisions from individual funders on funding commitments might have to wait until the autumn, to allow time for all of them to go through their due processes.

Discussion

Some Board members had either been interviewed, or had taken part in the focus group meeting organised by the consultant in May. There was significant concern expressed around the table regarding the conduct of the review. Questions were raised about:

- the consultants' approach/methodology, including the line of questioning at the interviews;
- the consultants' understanding of the research information/data environment – particularly the long-term requirements of researchers in relation to information and data management/integration;
- whether enough attention has been paid to the difficulty of meeting the ambitious mission and objectives set for RIN, with limited resources and short timescales;
- the consultants' understanding of how RIN has developed its role, and the value of the work it has produced;
- the difficulty of adding significant value to the emerging findings on the basis of the evidence that the consultants had gathered, including the views of individuals with contrasting attitudes to RIN.

Some members noted, however, that the emerging findings raise a number of significant issues, for example relating to RIN's visibility and the clarity of its mission. Such points had been considered in discussion about future direction and priorities at previous Board meetings; and they pointed to the limitations of what could be achieved with existing resources.

Members also reflected on the ownership of RIN's work, particularly as this moves from evidence-gathering and analysis to policy and strategic advice. The mandate for such advice would derive in large part from the active engagement of key stakeholders in RIN's work. A particular challenge for RIN is to leverage a more effective level of engagement from Research Councils. There were questions about RCs' level of engagement towards research information issues, and about the difficulty of getting a cohesive view from them on such issues.

Conclusion

Members agreed that, in order to reach an informed decision, the Funders' Group requires a review report that provides an effective evaluation rather than a collection of often generalised and contradictory views. The Board looked forward to the consultant providing a well-judged, insightful and balanced view of the evidence that has been collected, with the aim of providing useful pointers for future RIN development. The balance between strategic and operational roles should be central to this consideration.

Forward look

RIN's three proposed core roles (evidence-gathering and analysis;

■ *RIN Executive to*

advice, guidance and policy developments; and communications and advocacy) are the basis of the forward look. The Board agreed that this presents a coherent and logical view of RIN's future development, but sought more clarity about priorities in all three areas, taking account of resource constraints. Members raised the following comments:

- There is a need for further clarity about the requested increase in resources and about what can actually be achieved with these (see also item 6 below); a good understanding is needed of running costs and overheads. There should be a clear presentation of running costs and overheads, and of the resources (including human resources) that RIN could lever from other sources.
- RIN should constantly strive to show how its own work can add value and in what way RIN is unique. Importantly, it needs to demonstrate that it is an organisation that is listened to.
- There should be emphasis on RIN's role as watchdog, ensuring compliance with policy and guidance.
- As RIN is not a service provider, it could develop its distinctive capacity to act as honest broker in many instances; this feature should also be emphasised.
- RIN should maintain and develop its capacity to leverage resources out of partners and stakeholders.
- The forward look is very UK-focused; many of the relevant issues are global, and international dimensions should therefore not be neglected.
- From a biomedical perspective in particular, it is important to explore the relationship between librarianship and data management. Coherent, strategic, long-term approaches to data management and linkage (e.g. in relation to the outputs of longitudinal studies) should be an important priority for RCs particularly. Better mechanisms are required to ensure commitment to long-term resourcing, especially across subject boundaries. This underlines the importance for RIN to develop and sustain excellent relationships with RCs.

Conclusion

Members agreed that the forward look should place much stress on RIN's uniqueness, on where it can add value and on how it can ensure implementation in key areas. It was suggested that the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) might provide a model; and that additional RIN staff should include individuals whose experience enables them to influence at a high level. There is a risk in not getting both the quality and quantity of resourcing to match the sort of ambitions set out in the forward look. However, in addition to the RIN's own staff, there is also an important role for RIN 'missionaries' or ambassadors, not least members of the Advisory Board.

Members asked whether, should additional resources not be forthcoming, there could be justification in trying to meet wide-ranging objectives with an organisation consisting of just four people. In such a scenario, there would be a need to scale back on ambitions and for all stakeholders to accept that RIN would perform a considerably less valuable role.

circulate revised version of forward look asap, on the basis of comments made.

4. Development and commissioning of case studies (paper RIN/AB/07/10)

This is an example of RIN's evidence-gathering role, drawn from ideas discussed at the Board's awayday last November. Members agreed that

- *RIN Executive to continue consulting*

case studies this could be hugely valuable, and lie at the heart of RIN's purpose. Points raised included:

- Might it be best to start with just one case study, in order to establish and test out the methodology?
- The academic social science community might be better suited than consultants to undertake such work.
- It would be important to identify case study areas that can draw both HEIs and RCs.
- There was just one area suggested as a possible study subject: climate change. This has the advantage of having historical and cultural as well as scientific dimensions.

over the summer with a view to defining the scope of an initial round of case studies to be commissioned in the autumn.

5. Collaborative management of library collections (paper RIN/AB/07/11)

Members noted the issues that are being considered as part of the programme of activity, particularly policy development, communications and advocacy – not least with researchers as well as librarians. The focus is on facilitating collaborations which are starting to take place, and providing tools for encouraging this further. It would be best to concentrate on specific areas where practical advances can be implemented and benefits can be clearly demonstrated – but avoiding some of the ground explored in recent times through the CoFoR project.

The Board suggested that attention should be paid to collaborative acquisition, particularly in newer and emerging areas such as Far Eastern Studies. At the same time, there is a need to encourage libraries to stop buying or subscribing in areas where material can easily be obtained from other institutions.

It would be important to develop a strategy for communicating collaborative approaches to non-library audiences; it is clearly difficult to reach out to the research community, and RIN and CURL welcome advice about how best to do this. Learned societies, particularly those that have an interest in publishing, could be useful interlocutors. RIN could also play a useful role in brokering relationships between area studies societies and relevant subject librarians – such relationships are often weak at present.

Members noted the forthcoming outcome of HEFCE's review of research libraries, which could help to encourage greater collaboration between libraries.

6. RIN operating plan (paper RIN/AB/07/12)

Members noted the expenditure report and budget projections, and expressed concern about the significant underspend. In spite of the sound justification for this, including the imbalance between running and programme budgets, there is a danger that the funders could challenge RIN with underperformance. It is therefore important to present such information in the best possible light, which suggests the need to think very carefully about how the RIN wishes to commit resources in future, and to bid for these.

- *RIN Executive to produce a breakdown of how requested additional resources are likely to be spent, in time for October meeting.*

7. RIN update (paper RIN/AB/07/13)

The Board briefly commented on the usefulness of encouraging other organisations to link their websites to RIN's.

8. Summary of activities of the RIN's Consultative Groups (paper RIN/AB/07/14)

KS suggested that, pending the outcome of a bid that he has put in for EU funding, there is scope for collaborating with him on the workshop on persistent digital identifiers planned at the behest of the Life Sciences Consultative Group.

- ***RIN Executive to keep in touch with KS and to liaise accordingly with Life Sciences Consultative Group.***

9. Future dates of Advisory Board meetings (paper RIN/AB/07/15)

These were noted.

10. Other business

There was none.

Next meeting: Wednesday 3 October, 11:00 – 13:00 (to be followed by a sandwich lunch), at the British Library