



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING – 10 October 2008

Action points in red italics

Present:

Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
 Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh)
 John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
 John Feather (University of Loughborough)
 Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
 David Ingram (University College London)
 Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
 Roger Kain (University of Exeter)
 Malcolm Read (JISC)
 Ian Snowley (British Library)
 Philip Steer (Imperial College)
 Jean Sykes (London School of Economics)
 David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
 Jan Wilkinson (University of Manchester)
 Jo Wood (University of Leicester)

Apologies

Paul Hubbard (HEFCE)
 Ed Pentz (CrossRef UK)
 Tom Rodden (University of Nottingham)
 Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
 Terry Threadgold (Cardiff University)
 Nigel Weatherill (University of Birmingham)

Ian Snowley was welcomed to his first Advisory Board meeting as the British Library's observer.

1. Minutes of the meeting of 25 June 2008 (paper RIN/AB/08/14)

These were approved.	
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2. Matters arising

From item 2

A short note from the Board's awayday, last February, is now on the RIN website, at <http://www.rin.ac.uk/ab-050208>

From item 2

Most members had still not contacted the RIN Executive Team with their declaration of interests, and it was now urgent for this to happen.

■ ***Stéphane Goldstein to circulate a reminder to all Board members.***

From item 3

The Board noted that there had been no change in the Scottish Funding Council's budgetary situation; the organisation was still committed to no more than one year of funding at a time.

3. Publication/dissemination behaviour of researchers and influence of research assessment (paper RIN/AB/08/15)

Since the discussion on this at the last meeting, and following extensive consultations with HEFCE and JISC, there had been a shift in the focus of this project proposal towards an examination of *all* the incentives, constraints and other factors that underlie researchers' publishing and dissemination decisions; research assessment would be considered as one part, albeit a crucial one, of this equation. It was also now accepted that the study should serve as a baseline for future longitudinal work. RIN's intention was to initiate the project by late November, in order to produce a final or near-final output by May 2009, in time to feed into HEFCE's round of consultations, next summer, following the completion of its REF pilots.

Board members underlined that analysing the **differences between disciplines** was likely to prove very challenging; it would be important to ensure that the successful contractor could properly address this diversity. This suggested that whoever undertook the work was likely to require multidisciplinary know-how.

Members highlighted a number of factors which they deemed important for the successful undertaking of this work:

- Getting the **sample design** right would be crucial. The difficulty of doing so would be a reflection of the different approaches and policies adopted at institutional level towards publication of research outputs. In this respect, the pressure that some institutions placed on researchers was a factor to be considered. However, the Board felt that the encouragement to use repositories was no more than one, possibly marginal, instance of institutional influence.
- The study would be undermined if HEFCE was not forthcoming with regard to making RAE data available for the **sampling frame**. This could include senior institutional managers and information managers as well as researchers themselves.
- There was some concern that the **tight time constraints** of the study were such that it would be difficult for any research group to undertake the work at relatively short notice. Realistically, it was felt that it may not be possible to undertake all of the work suggested in the draft specification – members suggested that it might be necessary to be selective about the scope of the work in order to ensure a **necessary degree of quality**.
- In this respect, the Board underlined the importance of **quality control**. It was noted that this would be ensured to a large extent by the role of the project's expert panel (the RIN Executive Team hoped that a Board member would be willing to sit on this); and by the RIN's newly-increased project management capacity. Members wondered whether, given the strategic importance of the project, the Executive Team might consider making this the main focus of the RIN Project Officer's role over the coming months. The Board also felt that it would be crucial, at say 3-month intervals, to obtain formal progress reports from the contractor – with payment phased accordingly.
- It was noted that, as usual, the report emanating from the study would be published in the name of the RIN, which would have copyright assigned to it. Care would need to be taken to ensure that the RIN also retained **rights (including notably re-use rights) to the data** that would underpin the study.

■ *Michael Anderson to join the expert panel on the Board's behalf.*

■ *RIN Executive Team to incorporate into projects' terms and conditions a requirement for interim reports from contractors as a condition for payments to be made.*

4. RIN communications strategy (paper RIN/AB/08/16)

Members noted the scope of the strategy document and praised its general thrust and approach.

It was suggested that one communication channel that RIN may have overlooked in the past is the Advisory Board itself. The Executive Team was keen to explore how, in future, Board members might be better utilised to assist with RIN's outreach.

Members considered the questions posed in the cover paper.

Should anything else be included in the strategy, or be improved upon? Are there important audiences and communication channels that have been missed?

The RIN was probably unique, internationally, as an organisation with such a remit. This uniqueness could usefully be exploited, by communicating the novelty RIN's remit; this could help to put the UK at the forefront of world-wide efforts to develop the research information environment. 'Citations' from countries beyond the UK could greatly help the RIN's credibility.

Members felt that there could be much value in targeting identified gatekeepers within organisations that RIN interfaces with.

Members expressed surprise about the absence of learned societies from the range of organisation listed in the strategy.

- ***Sarah Gentleman to add learned societies to the list of key audiences in the strategy document.***

How can better contacts and methods of communication be developed with RIN audiences?

Simplicity of language was important for all RIN documents focused on communications; 'managerialist' language should be avoided at all cost.

It was also crucial to **tailor communication material** to given audiences, not least researchers; the RIN was starting to do this, for instance through targeted leaflets.

At the same time, care should be taken not to be over-ambitious in reaching out – as the Board had previously discussed, results and influence stemming from RIN work were more important than contacting as many individuals and organisations as possible.

How can the Executive Team better support the Board in communicating the RIN's work?

Demonstrating the **relevance of the RIN** was absolutely fundamental. Communications material needed to convey this relevance in a simple and pithy manner. Members felt that even concise material, such as the new RIN information card circulated at the meeting, was too wordy and contained jargon which that was difficult to follow. It was recognised that the Executive Team is currently experimenting with different approaches, and was aware of the need to refine such tools.

Once again, there was a strong case for producing accessible material that was **tailored to the needs** of the different RIN audiences or sub-audiences.

What are the views on current RIN branding and looks?

The Board did not delve on this question, although a point was raised about whether, in branding terms, 'Research Information Network' was the best descriptor of the organisation's purpose and activity. Was it really a network? Should the very title be revisited?

Are there features that should be included in the RIN website?

It was agreed that views on the website should be fed offline.

- *All to peruse the RIN website and forward views to Sarah Gentleman at the earliest opportunity.*

5. RIN performance framework (paper RIN/AB/08/17)

The Board recognised the importance of **clearly stating aims and objectives** at the outset of activities as a means of framing possible outcomes and longer-term impact.

As had been noted at previous Board meetings, evaluation of impact and attribution of RIN-generated ideas was a hugely challenging and in some cases near-impossible task. Given the difficulty, it was suggested that the RIN might wish to undertake evaluations only in a small and specific number of instances. It might also consider tapping the expertise on impact evaluation that exists within the research community – for instance, through such centres as the Science Policy Research Unit.

Board members agreed that a framework such as this would serve as a good discipline for the setting up of studies. However, there was concern that, in the form set out, it was **over-complicated**, inflexible and potentially constraining. It was felt that there was a danger that close adherence to what has been set out might diminish the RIN's nimbleness and its ability, where appropriate, to react to circumstances rapidly. Might the framework be generalised somewhat in order to make it more accessible?

6. Follow-up from recent RIN projects (paper RIN/AB/08/18)

Data sharing follow-up project

The Board agreed that there was clear complementarity with the UKRDS project (see below). It was noted that scoping discussions had already taken place with JISC, UKOLN and RLUK; there would shortly be a meeting with John Milner, the UKRDS project manager. It was agreed that an early start to this work would be welcome.

7. RIN update and Operating Plan (paper RIN/AB/08/19)

The Board noted this paper. Given the extensive nature of the activities described, there was some concern that the RIN may be taking on too much, and that the RIN's additional resources were being used to expand the overall workload, rather than help to consolidate existing strands of work.

More specific points covered in the discussion included:

- Regarding the changes in the RIN's project-commissioning process (para. 4 of the cover paper), members highlighted the importance of **strengthening project management and oversight**, to ensure – more categorically than stated in the paper – firm adherence to quality objectives and project plans, with the production of interim reports if appropriate. The Board felt that the RIN is perfectly entitled to threaten withholding of final payments to contractors as a means of ensuring adherence to expectations.

- It was recognised that the production of final sets of **recommendations and resulting policy statements/guidance** were often best undertaken either in-house or by organisations other than those carrying out the empirical work.
- Members reflected on whether there was a case, for each project, for the RIN to assign different Executive Team members in an oversight role, in order not to place too large a burden on the Projects Officer (given the point made above under item 3, suggesting that much of the latter's time would be taken up with the REF project alone).
- The Board noted the concern felt in some quarters about the rapid development of **open access journals** and the additional costs which this might impose on the sector. The RIN should be aware that this is rapidly becoming a serious issue, worthy of possible future investigation.

8. Update on UK Research Data Service feasibility study (*paper RIN/AB/08/20*)

Jean Sykes introduced this update, and it was noted at the outset that a definition of data was not something that would be covered by this project – this was something that was best left to researchers themselves.

- A key challenge for this project was to achieve a balance between meeting the expectations and funding abilities of the Research Councils and HE Funding Bodies.
- For this purpose, the main lesson stemming from the demise of AHDS was that UKRDS needed to demonstrate its utility.
- Changes at CEO level within Research Councils suggested a greater level of strategic interest in data sharing – these contacts were well worth exploiting.

With the project soon reaching a critical phase, it was agreed that a more substantive discussion on the subject might be appropriate at the next Board meeting.

- ***RIN Executive Team to include an update on the feasibility study as a substantive item, high on the agenda of the next Board meeting.***

9. Other business

Board membership

The Board noted that the RIN is still seeking to appoint three additional members, but that identifying individuals is not proving easy – particularly since, to redress the sex balance, there was a strong case for selecting women as members.

- ***RIN Executive Team to pursue the task of identifying three additional Board members, preferably women.***

Next meeting: Wednesday 17 December 2008, 14:00 – 16:00