



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE NINETEENTH MEETING – 17 December 2009

Action points in red italics

Present:

Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
 Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh & National Library of Scotland)
 John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
 Sally Curry (RIN)
 Charlotte Daus (RIN)
 Sarah Gentleman (RIN)
 Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
 Catherine Gray (RIN)
 Branwen Hide (RIN)
 Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
 Joanna Newman (British Library)
 Malcolm Read (JISC)
 Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
 David Sweeney (HEFCE)
 Jan Wilkinson (University of Manchester)
 David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
 Jo Wood (University of Leicester)

Apologies

Margaret Atack (University of Leeds)
 John Feather (University of Loughborough)
 Paul Hubbard (HEFCE)
 David Ingram (University College London)
 Martin Richardson (Oxford University Press)
 Mary Ritter (Imperial College London)
 Sarah Thomas (University of Oxford)
 Evelyn Welch (Queen Mary London)

Given the nature of issues discussed, particularly under item 3, this meeting was attended exceptionally by all members of the RIN Executive Team.

1. Minutes of the meeting of 16 October 2009 (paper RIN/AB/09/25)

These were approved.	
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2. Matters arising

From item 2 – matters arising

Robert Burgess confirmed that he had not received a response from HEFCE on its views of what might be expected from RIN; however, it was recognised that this was no longer relevant in the light of the issues covered under item 3.	
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From item 3 – Board membership

It was agreed that, for the present, it was no longer opportune to recruit additional members onto the Board. Members noted however that RIN was meeting Professor John Wood early in the New Year.	
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From item 9 – RIN 2010 conference

A date had now been fixed for this event, on 25 June. A number of speakers were already confirmed, including Lord May.

RIN Executive Team to circulate a draft programme at the earliest opportunity

3. HEFCE funding for the RIN (paper RIN/AB/09/26)

Context from HEFCE

David Sweeney outlined the financial context underlying the HEFCE Board's decision not to renew RIN funding beyond June 2011. The budgetary situation was extremely grave, and likely to worsen; HEFCE was awaiting its grant letter for 2010-11 in the next few days. Heavy pruning was therefore unavoidable. £263m had already been removed from HEFCE's budget for FY 2010-11, of which £83m for activities that had not yet started; and HEFCE had received a clear steer from the Secretary of State to minimise the impact of cuts on its direct support for teaching and research; hence the HEFCE Board had been encouraged to look at the potential for economies within related bodies, such as JISC and the Higher Education Academy.

David Sweeney said that it would have been unusual for HEFCE to fund RIN beyond two cycles; and under current circumstances his priority was to protect RIN's funding until June 2011, although final decisions would depend on the results of HEFCE's analysis of the implications of the grant letter it would shortly receive. In the current exceptionally difficult financial context, HEFCE was striving to be as equitable as possible in its allocation of reduced resources.

The Board acknowledged the difficult situation in which HEFCE found itself; but members stressed the importance of sustaining the research and the information infrastructure of which the RIN was a part, and risks that would arise if responsibility for this were to be devolved wholly to individual universities. In current circumstances, however, it was particularly difficult to maintain present levels of top-sliced funding for any related body such as the RIN, however desirable that might be.

Setting the scene for RIN

The Director of RIN provided a brief introduction to the paper. He indicated that it was important now for RIN to look forward, to build on its solid foundations in order to maximise the value of the investments that its funders had provided to date. RIN would need to demonstrate how it could move on to new ranges of activities; and the Board had an important role to play in helping to define these. The information about RIN's performance in Paper 09/27 provided a good basis for this forward look.

Two immediate issues stemming from HEFCE's decision had to be addressed: (i) the implications for planned activities over the next 18 months; and (ii) determining RIN's longer term future. The RIN team was eager to meet the challenge of working in a changed context, and of seeking to evolve into a significantly different organisation.

Factors for the redefinition of RIN

The Board agreed that, at a fundamental level, HEFCE's decision meant that RIN had urgently to develop a **new business proposition**. This would involve the RIN's steering away from its current position as a commissioner of research to support the development of policy, to one where it sought funding from a wider range of customers in the HE, research, and information sectors to undertake itself – where appropriate in partnership with others – specific research and related projects and activities. The Board recognised the difficulties in such a shift. RIN could not afford to lose any time with such a reinvention of its role, and the associated defining of a new status.

Members considered some key elements in making such a transition:

- **Demand-side – identification of the market for RIN services:** it was suggested that HEIs themselves would constitute an important element in the market for the sort of high-quality, advisory expertise that the RIN might offer. The RIN's market research should involve some analysis of what universities are doing and where they might need help. Beyond that, other markets might include: learned societies and publishers (equally fragmented); non-HE components of the public sector, such as the NHS; and the commercial sector. Members reflected on whether the review of e-infrastructure recently completed by RIN might yield clues about potential markets.
- **Supply-side – formulation of RIN 'product':** members considered what the RIN's distinctive 'product' might be. It had built up a considerable knowledge base and expertise, and networks of relationships, as well as experience in commissioning and managing complex projects. However, it was questionable whether developing its intermediary role could form the basis of a viable business proposition for the future. Development of such a proposition would require a rigorous analysis of its current strengths – its intellectual capital – and how they could be used to develop new kinds of products and roles.
- **Achieving competitiveness:** the Board acknowledged that there were many players in the research information environment, some of them the contractors in the commercial and HE sectors whose services RIN had used. The market was not, however, characterised by large numbers of specialist contractors with reputations for work of the highest quality, which suggested that RIN might realistically expect to provide a measure of quality that was lacking elsewhere. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate for RIN to think in terms of building partnerships and consortia for specific activities.
- **International context:** some members saw opportunities for the RIN in Europe and the US; but some also stressed the long time-scales before any funding would actually be received from overseas sources.

RIN Executive Team to draw up, by the next meeting, proposals that set out the rationale for a refocused RIN, its products, markets and financial opportunities. This paper should set out different possible options/scenarios, and outline the way operating costs could be covered.

RIN finances and status

The Board considered how the RIN might build up some working capital, and the scope for doing so during the coming financial year. Members noted that it would be difficult for HEFCE to allow RIN to build from HEFCE funds a war chest to spend on new activities beyond June 2011. However, HEFCE had indicated its willingness to let RIN build a budgetary profile that permitted an orderly completion of projects and transition to a new mode of operation beyond June 2011. The Board agreed that HEFCE assistance in achieving this transition

<p>would be very welcome.</p> <p>The transition to a different type of organisation also raised the question of securing a legal identity for the RIN. Experience in the university sector had shown that creating independent organisations embedded within HEIs could indeed be beneficial. HEFCE had been sympathetic in the past to new legally constituted entities having a working amount of capital at the outset.</p>	
<p><i>Announcement</i></p> <p>HEFCE would not be making a formal announcement about its funding decision, and the Board agreed that it would not be appropriate for RIN to do so either. Instead, RIN should present the changed circumstances as a transition to a new way of operating.</p>	

4. The performance of the RIN (paper RIN/AB/09/27)

<p>The description of RIN performance, as envisaged by the Board at its June meeting, was at least partly intended to inform the planned RIN review in 2010. Although this would not now take place, the Board felt that the paper remained a useful account of the RIN story. Members suggested that a more concise version should be prepared urgently as part of the planning for transition. It could serve as a useful basis for a forward-looking document that RIN could present to stakeholders and prospective customers, on what it might deliver as an organisation. The Chairman stressed the urgency and importance of developing a leaflet or brochure of this kind.</p>	<p><i>RIN Executive Team to consider how to make best use of the performance document.</i></p>
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5. E-infrastructure review (paper RIN/AB/09/28)

<p>The Board noted that this was essentially a digest of views harnessed in the course of almost 40 interviews. Deliberately, it did not include any recommendations. It was about to be presented to an expert panel, chaired by Professor Carol Goble, on 18 December. The panel would, on that basis, present its own conclusions to a high-level steering group, chaired by Professor Doug Kell, Chief Executive of BBSRC, which was expected to meet in the New Year.</p> <p>The Board felt that this was a useful and well-written piece of work, but could benefit from an overview that emphasised the extent to which different parts of the infrastructure represented different challenges to the range of interested communities.</p> <p>It was not clear at this stage whether, and to what extent, RIN would be allowed to disseminate the synopsis. The Board would certainly welcome it being produced for a wider audience.</p>	<p><i>RIN Executive Team to investigate the possibility of disseminating the review more widely than the select audience intended by its sponsors.</i></p>
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6. RIN update (paper RIN/AB/09/29)

<p>This was noted. The Board suggested that it could be useful to add further information about how the various activities are being developed; and also about costings and working partners.</p>	
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7. Other business

<p>The next scheduled Board meeting was the awayday, on 25-26 March. Given the urgency of the issues outlined above, it was agreed that there should be a further meeting between now and then, even if only a subset of the Board were able to attend.</p>	<p><i>RIN Executive Team to identify a date for an additional Board meeting.</i></p>
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It was agreed that Board members who did not attend today's meeting should be personally contacted to keep them abreast of issues and to seek their views.

RIN Executive Team to contact Board members who did not attend today's meeting.

Next meeting: date for additional meeting in February to be agreed, before the next scheduled meeting (awayday) on, 25-26 March 2010