



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST MEETING – 28 April 2010

Action points in red italics

Present:

Sir Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh & National Library of Scotland)
Margaret Atack (University of Leeds)
John Feather (University of Loughborough)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
David Ingram (University College London)
Vicky Jones (HEFCE)
Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
Kissley Leonor (RIN)
Malcolm Read (JISC)
Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
Jan Wilkinson (University of Manchester)
David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
Jo Wood (University of Leicester)

Apologies

John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
Paul Hubbard (HEFCE)
Joanna Newman (British Library)
Martin Richardson (Oxford University Press)
Mary Ritter (Imperial College London)
Sarah Thomas (University of Oxford)
Evelyn Welch (Queen Mary London)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 18 February 2010 (paper RIN/AB/10/03)

These were approved.

2. Matters arising

From item 3 – proposition for the future of the RIN

The Board noted that John Coggins was seeking to contact Lord Sainsbury; the outcome was now awaited.

3. RIN activities for 2010-11 (paper RIN/AB/10/04)

The Board noted the range of RIN projects that are either nearing completion, recently initiated and/or undertaken in partnership with other organisations. Projects were still subject to delay, often because of the time needed to refine the outputs provided by the contractors commissioned by the RIN. The Board was concerned in particular about the disappointing quality of the work undertaken for the Web 2.0 project, where the RIN Executive Team had had to undertake much re-analysis of the data; this had led to slippage of several months.

Nevertheless, there was a large critical mass of RIN projects coming to fruition around May-June, and the Board felt that this represented a significant showcasing opportunity. The setting out of these various pieces of work therefore required careful scheduling to allow for

- ***RIN Executive Team to set out profile of research projects over the coming financial year***

maximum impact, and it was suggested that a phasing of their publication was desirable over a period of several months, conceivably stretching into the autumn.

The Board's views were solicited about priorities for new studies to be initiated during the summer and beyond. Given that the RIN's capacity and resources do not allow it to undertake all the activities suggested in the paper, members felt that, realistically, no more than three projects (other than those, such as the physical sciences case studies, already in the pipeline) could be commissioned in the foreseeable future.

In selecting future projects, the Board stressed the importance of addressing two key criteria:

- potential for the work to generate collaborations liable to lead to revenue for the RIN;
- opportunities to highlight RIN's distinctiveness.

On that basis, members highlighted three projects in particular from the list:

- work on information-handling training: it was felt that this was very timely, in the light for instance of the [current JISC call](#) on promoting data management skills and of the recent [Postgraduate Review](#);
- continuity and change in peer review: such a project could usefully complement work being undertaken elsewhere on the development of repositories;
- access in collaborative research projects: this could help emphasise the RIN's ability to undertake cross-cutting work.

The successful completion of this remaining body of work, and the way that this was presented, could be crucial in helping to reaffirm the RIN's usefulness and therefore to lay a sound basis for activities beyond June 2011.

4. RIN financial update (paper RIN/AB/10/05)

Members noted the summary of RIN expenditure over financial year 2009-10. However, most of the discussion focused on (i) the full economic costs of RIN work, particularly in future; and (ii) the use that the RIN might make of the income that it has received, and expects to continue receiving, from sources other than its core allocation from the HE Funding Councils and the Research Councils.

- ***RIN Executive Team to set out a budget for the current financial year and beyond on the basis of the assumptions discussed at the meeting***

Full economic costs

RIN budgets (as exemplified in the Annex in the paper) had to date been presented as (i) "programme" expenditure on projects commissioned from external consultants and research groups; and (ii) running costs, principally the salaries of RIN staff who design, commission and manage those projects, and write the reports and other publications arising from the RIN's work. As such, they did not give a breakdown of the full costs of each of the activities undertaken by the RIN. A future RIN would require very different budgetary planning and accounting mechanisms, and an ability to provide breakdowns of expenditure for all its activities on a full cost basis.

There was expertise on the Board to help the RIN address the requirements of full economic costing; offers of assistance would be gratefully taken up

Revenue from sources other than the core grant from the Funding Councils and Research Councils

Members welcomed the high level of revenue from other sources, not least as an indicator of the RIN's success at partnership-building. The Board noted, however, that these funds had been provided to support specific projects, and should be spent as such: they could not be regarded as constituting a reserve fund for the future of the RIN. Rather, the receipt of these funds enhanced the RIN's ability to exploit HEFCE's willingness to allow it to build a "budgetary profile that permitted an orderly completion of projects and transition to a new mode of operation beyond June 2011" (as noted in the minutes of the meeting on 17 December 2009).

The Board agreed that the totality of the funds available to the RIN (both from its core grant and other sources) should be used to sustain its activities at least to the end of 2011, and with the opportunity to extend them beyond then on the basis of a new business model. Members also expressed the hope that the British Library would be willing to host the RIN until the end of December 2011 [*note: there have since been positive discussions with the BL about this*], and to provide until then the necessary accountability mechanisms for the spending of the funds received from HEFCE.

5. The future of the RIN (*paper RIN/AB/10/06*)

The Board noted progress with the market research exercise, for which preliminary results (based on 20 out of 80 interviews) are cautiously encouraging.

Members agreed that it was crucial for the RIN to attempt to demonstrate the need for the services it provides, and to build narratives of the changes that have occurred as a result of RIN's work. Members also noted, however, the challenges in demonstrating needs, which are not always well-recognised by the different stakeholder groups; and perceptions of need might well change themselves if RIN services that were currently provided free of charge had in future to be paid for.

- **RIN Executive Team** to report on results of market research at the June Board meeting

Draft statement on mission, aims, values and strengths

The Board acknowledged the statement as a useful first draft, not least in highlighting key features of the RIN's strengths, and its value proposition for the future. In building the business plan for the future, it would be important to build on that proposition.

Members suggested that the statement needed to say something about the rapidly-changing information environment, which itself provided a key element in the case for the continuance of the RIN. It was also felt that, although the statement struck a cord with those familiar with this environment, for others the text demonstrated less clarity of purpose. Further clarity was also required about the relative place of the UK and international environments in the RIN vision.

- **RIN Executive Team** to refine the statement in the light of the Board's comments

Possible RIN services

The Board agreed that the type of services to be offered in future by the RIN should be determined by the nature of problems to be resolved: the fundamental assumption should be that RIN existed to help stakeholders address and resolve those problems.

Members stressed that the quality of RIN outputs to date depended critically on the work of its staff in adding value to the work undertaken by external contractors. In playing to its strengths, it had to be recognised that the RIN's expertise focused not on fieldwork but on

other key aspects of the research process, notably project design, analysis of results and their implications, and the presentation of findings, conclusions and recommendations.. An understanding of such strengths and weaknesses could help the RIN to determine where to concentrate its offering and seek complementarity with the expertise of others.

Transition period

Although it was now assumed (see above) that RIN would continue in its current incarnation until the end of 2011, the Board agreed about the necessity of starting to run the organisation in its new guise from July 2011. The transition could give rise to complex issues that the Board would need to consider at its future meetings.

6. RIN events 2010-11 (paper RIN/AB/10/07)

The Board noted the rationale for the series of meetings, and generally agreed with the overall programme – although there was also a need to stage additional events focused on presenting the outputs of specific RIN projects.

Some worry was expressed that all three events were scheduled to take place in the evening in London, which could be limiting for non-metropolitan audiences; and some members suggested that events should be held in other parts of the UK.

7. Other business

Members expressed a wish for future meetings, if held in the morning, to start at 10:30 rather than 11:00

Next meeting: Thursday 24 June 2010, 10:30 – 12:30