



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE TWENTY-SECOND MEETING – 24 June 2010

Action points in red italics

Present:

Sir Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh & National Library of Scotland)
John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
Vicky Jones (HEFCE)
Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
Jan Wilkinson (University of Manchester)
Jo Wood (University of Leicester)

Apologies

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

1. Minutes of the meeting of 28 April 2010 (paper RIN/AB/10/08)

These were approved.

2. Matters arising

From item 3 – RIN activities for 2010-11

The Board noted that draft outlines for three new projects have now been set out: information handling in collaborative research; information-handling training; and the future of peer review. Work should get under way in the autumn, to be completed by June 2011. It was understood that the RIN would not commission any studies to be completed later than June 2011.

3. The future of the RIN (paper RIN/AB/10/09)

Introduction

The IRN report confirmed much of what the RIN had been able to establish through its own consultations these past few months: the organisation was well regarded, its independence was an important factor and its reports were valued. It also confirmed the view that the RIN, in its new guise (RIN-2), would have to rely on a mixture of funding sources, notably subscriptions and revenue from project work. Given IRN's conclusions, it was clear that one of the fundamental

questions for the RIN was what an organisation consisting of 2-3 people and a limited budget might be able to achieve that was both useful and distinctive. Other key issues included maintaining the RIN's independence and credibility; the balance between those RIN outputs that were open and those that might in future be restricted (i.e. available only to certain categories of subscribers); and the need for a Board that would take a strongly proactive, championing role.

It was suggested that the RIN faced three major challenges in the near future:

- firming up a view on sources of funding;
- formulating a business plan for RIN-2;
- developing a transition plan for moving from the current set-up to RIN-2, including addressing the future legal status and staffing matters.

Addressing these points would lay the ground for a decision at the October Board meeting about the future of the organisation beyond the end of 2011.

General discussion

Members agreed that since its inception, the RIN had provided a national capability; some on the Board referred to this as a public good. However, the approach of providing reports and other outputs free of charge would not be feasible without the kind of funding that had been provided to date by HEFCE and the other RIN funders. This raised very fundamental questions: what exactly should the RIN try to preserve and take forward? What would it want to achieve? What could it achieve in practice? If the RIN were to disappear, would the gap it left behind be filled – and if so, would there be an opportunity for a reinvented offering from another source?

Practically, this related to further questions about the form that the RIN might take in future; the extent to which RIN activities might be taken over by others; and the prospects for current RIN staff members. With regards to the latter, the Board strongly agreed that the RIN's prospects in the short to medium term depended on the continued leadership of Michael Jubb.

Financial situation

In a difficult context for public finances, where organisations such as Research Councils were not well-placed to make financial commitments for the foreseeable future, members expressed scepticism about the RIN's ability to survive on its own as a subscription-based organisation, particularly one where RIN reports and other products might have to be paid for. Were RIN-2 to be set up, there was a danger that its resources would be too small to sustain the reputation that it has acquired over the past few years as a source of good-quality research and advice. Members felt that the models set out in the IRN report would not play to the RIN's current strengths.

The Board considered options that might provide additional revenue:

- Bidding for project funding in response to calls; however, even as a legal entity, the RIN would realistically only be able to respond to bids as a junior partner in a consortium, for both UK and European calls – although it was suggested that RIN affiliation to another body (see below) could help overcome this constraint.
- Taking advantage of any opportunities that might follow from the possible setting up of [UKRDS](#); a decision about the funding of this initiative was currently awaited from HEFCE. A role for the RIN (for

instance, as an observatory) in the framework proposed by UKRDS could in principle be envisaged.

- Securing funding from non-public sources.
- Securing funding from non-UK sources.
- Sharing costs with consortia such as RLUK.
- Improved marketing.

Members agreed that the RIN's future survival could be aided significantly by the provision of a 'dowry', seed investment to launch the RIN in a new guise. It was understood, however, that any such investment would inevitably be considerably smaller than the funding provided to the RIN to date by its sponsors. Moreover, it was extremely unlikely that HEFCE or the Research Councils would be able to provide this.

Partnerships

There was a strong consensus among members that the RIN's neutrality and independent stance were essential foundations for its credibility – so that disproportionate funding from any set of players, such as publishers, could be detrimental, and adversely influence the RIN's programme of work. Nevertheless, the Board felt that this did not preclude the possibility of merging with another body, particularly if both parties felt that they could benefit from such a deal. Indeed, it was argued that continuity for the sort of activity undertaken by the RIN was more important than maintaining the RIN as a separate and distinct organisation. The IRN report had suggested the eventuality of a merger with either the [Digital Preservation Coalition](#) (DPC) or the [Higher Education Policy Institute](#) (HEPI), but there were differences of view on the Board about whether either of these two bodies would constitute a useful partner – although it was noted that the DPC's forthcoming review of its subscription / funding model might provide a window of opportunity for discussions between the two organisations.

Organisations such as DPC and HEPI were themselves vulnerable, and the Board considered whether another possible form of partnership – not considered in the IRN report – might be the absorption of RIN personnel into a university department. The Board reflected on the inducements, financial or otherwise, that the RIN might be able to offer a university to secure such a move. It was noted that the risk to a university could be minimised if the RIN were able to provide a suitable 'dowry' and to enter into an agreement that was initially time-limited to, say, two years.

Conclusion

The issues raised in discussions would contribute to the deliberations at the Board meeting in October. Members agreed that it would be necessary on that occasion for the Board to give clear advice to the RIN.

It was also agreed that in October, the Board would require an update on RIN's current work programme, to obtain reassurance that the final round of projects would be completed by June 2011 – this was crucial, because project overruns would adversely affect RIN's capacity to prepare the ground for its future.

- ***RIN Executive Team to set out, in time for the October meeting, a business plan, transition plan and a work programme until June 2011.***

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

The Board noted the update, in particular the information on income from other sources, which, as discussed in April, would enable the RIN

in its current guise to extend its term until December 2011.

5. Board membership (oral item)

Five Board members had been due to step down in July. In the light of circumstances, Michael Anderson, Kevin Schürer and David Walton agreed to stay on for the present. The remaining two relevant members, John Feather and David Ingram, who were not present, would be approached to ascertain their intentions. It was also agreed that no additional members should be recruited to the Board.

▪ ***RIN Executive Team** to ask John Feather and David Ingram whether they would consider staying on the Board for the present.*

6. Other business

Given the importance of decisions to be taken at the next meeting, on 20 October, it was agreed that its duration should be extended and that exceptionally it would run from 10:30 to 14:00.

Next meeting: Wednesday 20 October 2010, 10:30 – 14:00