



RIN Research Communications Group

NOTE FROM THE NINTH MEETING – 25 NOVEMBER 2009

Action points in italics

Present:

Michael Jubb (Chair) (RIN)
Lee-Ann Coleman (British Library)
Nick Fowler (Elsevier)
Fred Friend (JISC)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
Neil Jacobs (JISC)
Robert Kiley (Wellcome Trust)
Cliff Morgan (Wiley-Blackwell)
Frances Pinter (London School of Economics)
David Prosser (SPARC Europe)
Debby Shorley (Imperial College London)
Graham Taylor (Publishers Association)
Mark Thorley (NERC)
Michel Woodman (Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform)

Apologies:

Jeffrey Aronson (University of Oxford)
Paul Ayris (UCL Library)
Juan Bicarregui (STFC)
Bob Campbell (Wiley-Blackwell and Publishing Research Consortium)
Paul Gemmill (RCUK - BBSRC)
Jeremy Giles (British Geological Survey)
Chris Hale (UUK)
Michael Mabe (International Association of STM Publishers)
Ken Peach (University of Oxford and Royal Holloway College)
Ian Russell (ALPSP)
Astrid Wissenburg (ESRC)

1. **Minutes of the meeting of 13 July 2009** (*paper RIN/RCG/09/06*)

These were approved.

2. **Matters arising**

From item 2:

There has been no reaction from RESCOLINC to the feedback provided to them regarding their suggestion for e-book project work.

3. **Transitions in scholarly communications** (*paper RIN/RCG/09/07*)

Publicizing the joint statement:

In considering how the statement might be further publicized, the Group reflected on whether there is evidence of any interest. Are there any metrics on uptake of the document that are being monitored? RIN is aware of some coverage in a variety of newsletters and blogs, but there hasn't been much reporting beyond that. Within the machinery of Government, the initiative has been brought to the attention of Lord Drayson, the science minister. There is a good degree of awareness among publishers

too. The Group was reminded that the document provides a means of ensuring that the various partners are publicly committed to the work package.

Funding:

Funding commitments for project 3 (see below) have so far been received from RIN (£50k), JISC (£50k), RLUK (£10k), PRC (£10k) and Wellcome (amount to be confirmed). RCUK regretted that, because of financial constraints, they are not able to provide any support. The British Library may be in a position to co-sponsor; there is some uncertainty about this because of the difficulty of committing additional funding in the middle of the financial year.

So far, there has not been any firm commitment to funding for project 2 (see below), and this requires some urgent thought. However, this is a smaller undertaking than project 3, and difficulties in supporting the work were not expected.

Relationship between portfolio projects 2 (gaps in access) and 3 (dynamics of improving access to research papers):

The Group considered at length the concerns, expressed particularly by publishing colleagues, about initiating this project before the related study (project 2) on gaps in access. Publishers around the table felt that in the first instance, further understanding is required about the current environment, i.e. where gaps in access remain now, before defining project 3, which in their view is aimed at analysing paths towards reaching 100% access – and thereby, 100% user satisfaction. They argued that project 2 could be undertaken over 3-4 months, and could therefore rapidly provide a baseline for undertaking the more substantive work involved in project 3. They suggested that gaps in access should be investigated from a demand perspective, that is, from the standpoint of users.

Others on the Group recognised the strong interdependence of all four projects in the portfolio, but countered by suggesting that the projects should not be envisaged as a strict sequence. Much work has already been undertaken on access problems, by Wellcome, JISC, PRC and RIN – so there is already a knowledge base in this area. A number of other arguments were put forward to justify initiating project 3 as a matter of priority:

- Gaps change over time; there is a risk in placing too much focus on analysing a situation which evolves very dynamically – possibly more so in the context of the difficult financial environment.
- Arguably, project 3 is *not* just about closing access gaps. It seeks to map, analyse and model processes that are already starting to take place, in different constituencies, to meet their respective priorities – even if these are not consensual – with a view to develop the evidence base and promoting joint understanding. So there are some policy questions that are already known, irrespective of the outcome of any work on access gaps.
- Related to this, some organisations, such as the Research Councils, have taken a philosophical view about desired end-points, notwithstanding the nature and scale of any access gaps.
- At a practical level, a further reason for starting with project 3 is that, following the intensive discussions that have taken

Lee-Ann Coleman to confirm whether BL is in a position to make a contribution.

place these past 3-4 months, this is the study where collective thinking has advanced most, and where a certain momentum has thereby been gained.

These deliberations made it clear that the organisations represented on the Group have contrasting perceptions about starting points. There is little point in trying to reconcile these views, but a compromise solution was nevertheless adopted regarding the phasing of the project work. The Group agreed, in recognition of the interdependence between the two studies, that they should run at least partly concurrently, on the following basis:

- A preliminary call for expressions of interest should be issued immediately for both projects 2 and 3.
- So as to take advantage of momentum, project 3 should be subject to a formal invitation to tender before Christmas (on the understanding that the specification would be finalised in the next couple of weeks – see below).
- Allowing for the practicalities of the tendering process, project 3 should be initiated in late January or early February; given its ambitious scale, it would probably not be completed until mid-2011.
- Further work would be required on scoping project 2. This, including an understanding of what is meant by access, could be achieved in the coming weeks, with the aim of initiating the project around April-May, and completing it, realistically, towards the end of 2010.

The Group noted the possible impact of future legislation on legal deposit of e-journals. It is not known how this might be implemented, but it may be a notable factor, with regard to both projects, at some point in the future.

Finalising specification and end-point/scenarios for project 3:

It was agreed that the project has to be founded on the definition of a starting point, an analysis of where we are now. There is a need for a better understanding of how we have got to current positions within the four models outlined in the draft specification. However, it was also felt that not too much time should be spent on such an analysis of the present, because the scholarly communications environment is so dynamic.

On that basis, the broad lines of the specification were agreed, on the understanding that the following are taken into account:

- The specification should be clear about what is to be delivered, with clarity in particular about the nature of the model.
- It is understood that the aim of the model is to help organisations with a stake in scholarly communications to reach decisions.
- The specification should be articulated around the identification of the key factors and variables inherent in transition processes, and not the description of possible future states – which is an issue more likely to be addressed by project 4.
- The focus should therefore be on practical processes taking place within organisations, at a microeconomic level, with costs and benefits built into the model – although it remains to be seen what level of granularity will be required.

RIN and JISC to issue a joint call for expressions of interest for projects 2 and 3 in the next week, with a view to issuing an ITT for project 3 before Xmas.

RIN and JISC to collate views on framing a specification for project 2.

RIN and JISC to refine the specification for project 3 in the light of these comments, and to circulate an updated draft to the Group in the next couple of weeks.

- The modelling should be complemented by a narrative element.
- The specification should make it clear that the successful contractor(s) would need to display a wide range of expertise in order properly to address the complexities of the project.
- The title of the project may need to be adapted, to better reflect the objectives.

A number of suggested end-points had already been received from various stakeholders, and the Group considered the place of these in the project.

In the first instance, it was agreed that it will clearly not be possible to cover all possible end-points, and that boundaries would have to be drawn to provide some focus for the work. It was also felt that, for the sake of accuracy, the term ‘scenarios’ should be substituted for ‘end-points’ or ‘future states’ (the latter being the term used in the circulated version of the specification). Importantly, these should not be regarded as desired outcomes: more accurately, they should be seen as plausible scenarios which stakeholders would like to know more about.

Following discussion, the Group agreed that it is premature to seek to define the number and scope of the scenarios at this stage, because this implies a degree of second-guessing. It was agreed instead that agreeing on the scenarios could indeed wait until later in the project. However, for this to get off the ground, it would be crucial for a range of policy aspirations (which will inform the scenarios) to be clearly set out at the outset.

The publishers around the table confirmed that they are happy to commit to sharing information with regard to different scenarios, even those – such as further moves towards Green OA – that they do not necessarily agree with.

Importantly, all parties also committed to promoting the research findings of the research, although they are free to interpret and use them for their own purposes.

Management of project 3:

It was agreed that management and oversight of the project would need to take place at several levels:

- Day-to-day management will be undertaken by RIN and JISC, as principal commissioners of the project.
- A steering group will oversee and help steer the project, and provide validation / quality assurance. It would be vital for this body to have representation from all the key constituencies in order to achieve the necessary level of buy-in.
- A group of experts, outside the steering group, should be set up to be called upon, as and when required, to provide advice and guidance on more technical issues.
- The Research Communications Group will retain overall stewardship of the portfolio.

Project 1 - transitions to e-only:

Members noted the outline scoping document. There was no time to discuss this in detail, but broad points were made:

- The study would need to take account of the continued preference, for many groups of users, to print material.

RIN and JISC to work on a draft specification, drawing on views from Group members.

- The study should take account of the fact that, in areas like medicine, many journals continue to rely heavily on advertising as a revenue stream

4. **Conferences and conference proceedings: their role in scholarly communications** (*paper RIN/RCG/09/08*)

The Group agreed that the paper raises some interesting questions, but it is not clear whether there is scope there for a RIN study. If so, it was felt not to be the most urgent priority, given existing RIN commitments.

Members also agreed that the document needs to be refined or distilled further before it is made public.

5. **The global economic crisis and access to research outputs** (*paper RIN/RCG/09/09*)

There was little doubt, conversely, about the urgency of this issue, with the danger of the UK research environment being compromised. The paper stressed the financial problems already being faced by the library sector in particular, with spending cuts now taking effect. Libraries are very reluctant to cut back on acquisitions, but it is something that they are contemplating – with all the consequences that this implies for both users and publishers. The challenge in this context is to maintain as much access as possible and protect the viability of publishers.

Concerns were expressed within the Group that some larger publishers have not reacted very helpfully with regard to their pricing policies. A point was made about the usefulness of greater transparency to avoid double-charging, in hybrid models, for both author fees and subscriptions.

The publishers around the table emphasised their awareness of the gravity of the economic downturn. However, the Publishers Association, as a trade representative body, is not in a position to address pricing issues, as any stance on their part could undermine competition policy. Discussions on pricing could only usefully take place in bilateral settings; the publishers present underlined their commitment to engage on a one-to-one basis with clients to try to address difficulties in a tailored manner. They suggested that, irrespective of pricing differences, they have generally striven to provide more provision for less subscription. This view is disputed by many libraries, who argue that publishers are actually delivering more for more.

Given these constraints, the feeling among members was that there is little scope of any collective action under the auspices of the Group. It was acknowledged with some regret that whatever might be done could only happen in the context of bilateral negotiations. The only realistic collective approach is to move towards national licensing – but that in itself is a significant challenge, and not a short-term undertaking.

The Group noted that the VAT laws are changing in 2015; any change in the VAT regime for e-journals cannot be contemplated until then – so this is not a quick fix.

Agreed, by the end of next week, to provide any thoughts about what can be done in the short to medium term, over and above bilateral negotiations. It is understood that there may not be anything at all.

6. **Other business**

There was none.

Next meeting: date to be agreed, February or March