RIN Research Communications Group
NOTE FROM THE FOURTH MEETING – 28 JANUARY 2008

Action points in italics

Present:
Michael Jubb (Chair) (RIN)
Juan Bicarregui (STFC)
Bob Campbell (Wiley-Blackwell and Publishing Research Consortium)
Lee-Ann Coleman (British Library)
Fred Friend (JISC)
Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
Michael Mabe (International Association of STM Publishers)
Ken Peach (University of Oxford and Royal Holloway College)
David Prosser (SPARC Europe)
Debby Shorley (University of Sussex)
Graham Taylor (Publishers Association)
Michel Woodman (Department of Trade & Industry)

Apologies:
Jeffrey Aronson (University of Oxford)
Paul Ayris (UCL Library)
Jeremy Giles (British Geological Survey)
Chris Hale (UUK)
Robert Kiley (Wellcome Trust)
Ian Russell (ALPSP)
Astrid Wissenburg (ESRC)

1.   **Minutes of the meeting of 26 September 2007**   *(paper RIN/RCG/08/01)*

These were agreed.

2.   **Matters arising**

From item 2 – membership of the Group: there have been initial expressions of interest from two individuals to cover the arts/humanities and social science research areas; their acceptance is yet to be confirmed.

From item 4 – acknowledgement of funders: progress has been slower than anticipated. To date, there has been sign-up to the guidance from the Publishers Association, ALPSP and RCUK; formal endorsement from the Wellcome Trust is awaited, but this is expected very soon. At this stage, the International Association of STM Publishers is not willing to commit itself, owing to some unresolved issues regarding the wording of the document. Nevertheless, RIN agreed with the PA and ALPSP that the guidance could be issued as it stands. This will be done in the coming weeks.

From item 5 – RIN study on the use of e-journals: the contract for this project was recently awarded to CIBER; anticipated

- *RIN Executive Team to seek confirmation from the two potential new members.*

- *RIN Executive Team to arrange for publication and dissemination of the guidance at the earliest opportunity, with appropriate publicity.*

completion in October.

From item 6 – RCUK study on the cost and impact of open access: this is also underway, with the work being undertaken by SQW, in conjunction with Loughborough University. The expert panel, chaired by Michael Jubb, will hold its first meeting on 12 February.

3.   Scholarly communications statement of principle: next steps *(paper RIN/RCG/08/02)*

Background

Members noted that focused meetings have taken place with the most of the different 'constituencies' of the Group, to consider how the statement might best be used. On the basis of these discussions, there is clearly a desire for a **generic product that could be of practical use to all the relevant stakeholders**. However, there is still much work left before this can be achieved.

Pending this, the general view is that the framework of principles might develop into some sort of **toolkit**, which could offer practical guidance on good practice against each of the principles. Such a toolkit could be a web-based instrument, with short descriptions and appropriate hyperlinks, to help the stakeholders to develop policy; this might be envisaged as some sort of dynamic policy manual, with scope for updating built in to ward against obsolescence.

This idea is rather more ambitious than the original notion of a checklist, and beyond RIN's in-house resources. It was agreed therefore that the production of such a toolkit could only be achieved as a commissioned project. The views of members were sought on this approach.

Discussion

In defining the toolkit, a fundamental and underlying question is *why* anyone might want to use it; there is no point in developing such an instrument if it does not serve a recognised purpose. It is also important to have a view about *how* the various stakeholders might use it in practice, and at what level – the Group strongly agreed that clarity is required here.

Related to this is the question of how might the toolkit might address the very different policy priorities of the various stakeholders. A number of specific points were raised about the principles as currently set out:

■ Principle 1 (generating new knowledge and understanding) does not say anything about resources or prioritisation for the research effort.

■ Under principle 2 (quality of information outputs), there may be some confusion about the meaning of peer review: point (a) underlines the importance of rigorous peer review, whereas point (b) encourages the development different sorts of peer review.

■ Principle 3 (recognition and reward) highlights the problem of addressing the notion of how IP serves the public good; the principle might usefully include some reference to the public service ethic.

- Principle 6 (performance, usage and impact) might benefit from greater clarity about whose performance is being evaluated. In relation to the performance of researchers, a reference could be included to the all-important notion of academic freedom to undertake research.
- More generally, it was felt that clarification is also required about whether libraries and institutions are distinct organisations.

The Group also reflected on the methodology for developing the toolkit, and its presentation:

- In view of the ambitious nature of the project, might it be better in the first instance to pilot the toolkit by focusing on either on a defined set of institutions or on one of the principles? The problem with such an approach is that it could undermine the rationale of addressing the complex and changing interdependencies, and the continuum of activities, inherent in the scholarly communications process.
- Examples of current good practice are often more useful than abstract guidance – a number of these could be included, for instance under each policy goal.
- It was agreed that an interactive presentation would help overcome the confusing appearance of statement as it stands, where it is not easy to gauge what is expected of each group of stakeholder.
- It is crucially important to ensure effective and large-scale dissemination of such principles – the dissemination strategy needs to be thought out at the outset.

Conclusions

In the light of the above, what might be the next steps to get the implementation of this idea under way? For instance, is there a case for piloting against one of the principles, or a particular group of stakeholders? Whatever the approach, members agreed on the fundamental importance, as an initial step, of **gauging the views of those to whom the principles are directed**. How might this be done? How might relevant stakeholders be identified as a means of testing ideas? Could a think-tank such as HEPI, or even a public relations consultant, provide sound practical advice?

The consensus among members was that there is cautious endorsement for the production of practical document that takes a holistic view of the scholarly communications continuum and all the interdependencies that are involved. There may be a case for starting with a subset or principles or stakeholders. The underlying assumption is that ultimately, useful and practical guidance needs to be produced.

- *RIN Executive Team to draw up an initial scoping document to define a RIN-commissioned project, and to circulate this to the Group.*

4.   **RIN study on publication and quality assurance of research data outputs**
      (paper RIN/RCG/08/03)

Members noted that the report from this study, to be published by March, will be largely empirical, analytical and comparative, and will cover the full range of data, in the broadest possible sense; policy recommendations would be developed as part of a

follow-up study.

The Group underlined the importance, as part of the data publication process, of ensuring effective documentation of such data, especially as it develops and is enriched over time.

5. **Future RIN projects** *(paper RIN/RCG/08/04)*

Members noted that RIN has been allocated additional funding until mid-2011; it will be publishing its 2008-11 Plan shortly. This provides a context for RIN's programme of works over the coming three years.

The programme needs to be read in the light of two important criteria:

- Developing the evidence base is undertaken with the explicit aim of improving policy and practice – so RIN is not simply a curiosity-driven research organisation.
- Partnership with other organisations across the research and information communities is fundamental to RIN's approach and helps to underline commitment to relevant issues from the various communities.

The additional three-year timespan, although welcome, is not long; members agreed therefore about the importance of prioritisation, specialisation and building on RIN strengths (e.g. looking at researcher behaviour), rather than branching out too widely. In this light, in the shorter term it is unrealistic for RIN to commission more than two or three projects, other than those to which it is already committed, during the remainder of 2008.

The Group noted with interest the proposed work on the payment of publication fees, which should provide a better idea of how such fees are paid in practice – there is much confusion about this at present. JISC has also discussed further work in this area, and care would be taken to avoid duplication of effort.

There was a single suggestion about a possible further topic of investigation: the impact and pattern of use of commercial software (Google, Yahoo…) on services for researchers. In this area, the British Library has undertaken work on usage of Google among biosciences researchers in particular.

- ■ *RIN Executive Team to liaise with JISC to discuss respective priorities with work relating to payment of publication fees*

6. **Consultation on Research Excellence Framework** *(paper RIN/RCG/08/05)*

RIN's chief interest regarding the REF is on the impact that it might have on the scholarly communications system and researcher publishing behaviour. It was noted that the proposed assessment method for most of the sciences is based essentially on analysis of citations of one particular type of research output, i.e. those recorded in ISI-listed journals. Members felt that this approach to research outputs is conservative and does not pay sufficient heed to alternative types of output (including data), nor to usage.

The Group expressed concern around several points:

- Citation analysis may have been selected not in view of its intrinsic qualities, but because it was perceived as the least unsuitable indicator.

- ■ *RIN Executive Team to submit response to the HEFCE consultation by 14 February.*

■ Moreover, a citation rate per paper (as opposed to per journal) may be a fundamentally unsound indicator, with a large margin of error.	
■ Citation metrics often reflect fashion and possibly randomness. There are problems too associated with citations over long timescales.	
■ The granularity of units of research for normalisation is critical; normalising can be extremely difficult. This is related to the issue of large-scale multi-authorship, which can strongly affect citation rates.	
On that basis, it was agreed that there is a case for RIN to make a strong representation. Members noted that RCUK, and in all likelihood CURL and SSONUL, would also be responding to the consultation.	

7. UKIPO consultation on changes to copyright exceptions *(paper RIN/RCG/08/06)*

Members noted the importance of the issues highlighted in the consultation document. One question raised by the Group was the impact of copyright on practices such as text and data mining. It was suggested that this may be covered by licensing arrangements (and therefore subject to negotiation between libraries and publishers) rather than legislation. Some librarians are concerned about the weakness of the check against using technology preventing users exercising their rights under copyright law.	
The Publishers Association and CURL/SCONUL will be submitting responses to the consultation. It was understood that the PA is unlikely to have strong objections to any of the proposals, which it generally perceives as sensible.	

8. Initiatives from other organisations *(paper RIN/RCG/08/07)*

It was agreed that the list of initiatives could act as a basis for a more ambitious resource to be regularly updated on the RIN website.	■ *All to suggest possible addition to the list of initiatives.*

9. Other business

Members noted the publication, earlier today, RIN's data stewardship principles.	

Next meeting: Tuesday 10 June 2008, 13:30 to 16:00 (lunch from 12:45) – venue tbc