



RIN Advisory Board

NOTE OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING – 18 February 2010

Action points in red italics

Present:

Robert Burgess (University of Leicester) (Chair)
 Margaret Attack (University of Leeds)
 John Coggins (University of Glasgow)
 John Feather (University of Loughborough)
 Stéphane Goldstein (RIN)
 David Ingram (University College London)
 Michael Jubb (RIN Director)
 Joanna Newman (British Library)
 Malcolm Read (JISC)
 Martin Richardson (Oxford University Press)
 Kevin Schürer (University of Essex)
 Jan Wilkinson (University of Manchester)
 David Walton (British Antarctic Survey)
 Jo Wood (University of Leicester)

Apologies

Michael Anderson (University of Edinburgh & National Library of Scotland)
 Paul Hubbard (HEFCE)
 Mary Ritter (Imperial College London)
 Sarah Thomas (University of Oxford)
 Evelyn Welch (Queen Mary London)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 17 December 2009 (*paper RIN/AB/10/01*)

These were approved.	
----------------------	--

2. Matters arising

From item 2 – RIN2010 conference

The Board noted that RIN had decided not to go ahead with this conference. The Executive team had recently found out that two other major relevant and potentially competing events were being held on the same day. Moreover, the original rationale for the meeting had been overtaken by the new challenges facing RIN. Instead, the Executive Team had started to plan for a series of smaller-scale and short, focused events, very much with RIN promotion in mind, during the course of the autumn and in early 2011.	
--	--

From item 4 – RIN performance

The paper that was presented to the last meeting was being updated, particularly to include measures of impact. It would make an important contribution to the formulation of RIN's business plan. It was also likely to serve as the basis for promotional material that RIN would need to set out in due course.	
--	--

From item 5 – e-Infrastructure

An action plan and recommendations, founded partly on the work that RIN had undertaken last year, was currently in draft form and being considered by a working group chaired by Carole Goble. Until that plan	
--	--

was set out, RIN would not be in a position to publish, in any form, the findings from its own work; however, it was hoped that it would be possible to do so in due course.

3. Proposition for the future of the RIN (*paper RIN/AB/10/02*)

Introduction to the issue

Early consultations with some of RIN's partners suggested that there was strong support for a continuation of RIN's role, albeit with a changed scope. There were some significant questions remaining, for instance relating to RIN's status and hosting arrangements, and the associated issue of the future relationship with the British Library. The BL had already indicated that, beyond mid-2011, it was unlikely to continue hosting RIN under current arrangements, at no charge.

Funding was also a fundamental challenge, and the paper suggested some possible future funding models. Members noted that RIN was expecting to build up a surplus by June 2011, made up of funds that RIN was expected to receive in support of current and forthcoming RIN-led projects. How this money might be used remained an open question at this stage.

The RIN Executive Team was still at an early stage of formulating ideas for the future, and was aware that options for the continuation of the organisation would necessarily involve a trade-off between what RIN would ideally wish to do and what it could actually achieve in practice.

RIN was aiming to produce a business plan, at least in advanced draft form, in time for the June 2010 Board meeting. It was clear that RIN would require external professional help to identify market opportunities. The ability to produce this plan would determine whether RIN could continue as a successful organisation. Should this not be achievable, plans would be set in motion from the autumn for an orderly wind-down.

RIN services: supply and demand

The Board discussed at length the implications from the arguments in the paper. A wide range of views were aired regarding RIN's future prospects, but there was no overall consensus about the likelihood of securing the sort of funding that would be required to keep RIN as a viable organisation beyond mid-2011.

The fundamental question was what exactly – in changed circumstances – could RIN sell as a product that users, whether they were funders or others, might be willing to purchase? It had to be recognised that the benefits brought by RIN were often not easy to explain, so selling the organisation was likely to be particularly challenging. Of necessity, RIN would need to be conceptualised in a rather different way, with its offer tailored to the needs of its future customers.

Some on the Board reflected on the nature of the products that RIN might offer, in a market crowded with potential competitors. They also raised questions about the current RIN staff skillset to take the organisation forward in a changed context.

Other members suggested that potential openings did exist for RIN. A number of ideas were raised:

- It would be worth exploring the possibility of seeking support from private trusts such as the [Gatsby Charitable Foundation](#). It was understood that such bodies were selective about what they funded, and that any approach would need to be carefully arranged. John Coggins would shortly be meeting Lord Sainsbury, Gatsby's funder,

- ***RIN Executive Team to provide the Board, before the April meeting, outline suggestions regarding the key themes in the business plan***
- ***Board members to use their own respective contacts to assist RIN in developing its business case.***

who had considerable experience in science policy issues; this would provide a timely opportunity to raise the question of possible support for RIN.

- With the growing emphasis, from Research Councils notably, on research data analysis, there could be continuing demand for the sort of policy and/or advisory work that RIN had been noted for. It would therefore be useful for RIN to maintain lines of communication with relevant leaders, such as Doug Kell at BBSRC and Alan Thorpe (NERC), in his capacity as Chair of the RCUK Executive Group. It was suggested that dealing directly with individuals at that level could be more productive than using more junior intermediaries.
- The non-UK context could also offer good opportunities for future RIN interaction, although the Board did not elaborate on this option.
- There could be a case for developing a relationship with a training organisation, so that RIN could provide the policy and conceptual basis to underpin service delivery. RIN had successfully started to establish useful links in this area, with Vitae and other bodies.

- *John Coggins to speak to Lord Sainsbury about possible Gatsby support for RIN*

Funding model

The Board then considered how RIN might derive its income. Members reflected on whether a mixed model of funding, based on a range of RIN service offerings, might be appropriate – including, for instance, the possibility of working partly as a membership organisation, with subscriptions pitched at a reasonable level. But who would join?

University libraries, for instance, were unlikely to pay anything more than small subscriptions – probably well under £5k for most of them. Recent discussions within RLUK had indicated that support for RIN from the library sector would be dependent on what RIN might charge. For other types of organisation, such as publishers, there could be a willingness to pay for RIN’s ‘bridge-building’ services. It was suggested that the [Digital Preservation Coalition](#), a membership organisation, might be a useful model. Was there a case maybe even for considering a merger with them? The [Society of Biology](#), which had successfully set itself up in central London with relatively low overheads, might provide another precedent.

Hosting arrangements

There was a strong likelihood that the hosting arrangement with the BL might come to an end after June 2011. RIN had therefore started to explore possibilities for alternative hosting, notably within the university sector in London. Other possible types of host might include larger policy units. RIN was aware that the patronage of the BL, and the address that came with it, had been an important asset. It was understood that there were risks in moving away from the current location to an organisation that was less well-regarded.

Transition process

The Board recognised that it had an obligation to ensure that RIN project activity was well-managed, and that projects that were being initiated now or in the foreseeable future were successfully concluded. There were practical issues to consider about RIN’s capacity to continue managing its workload and discharging its responsibilities and commitments in the event of a run-down, not least the risk of shedding staff. Were RIN not successful in securing longer-term funding, the Board suggested that it might be opportune to issue short-term contracts to staff for continuing to oversee residual RIN project work beyond June 2011. Contingency planning was therefore needed, and in due course, the Board would want to see plans from RIN about how it

would continue to discharge its responsibilities in the event of such a run-down.

The transition from the current RIN model to another would pose challenges with regards to new governance arrangements, transfer of remaining RIN financial assets (notably the income that it had secured, aside from HEFCE and Research Council core funding, in support of individual projects), moving to new employment contracts (including TUPE and pension arrangements; the latter could present particular difficulties)... These problems were not insurmountable, but RIN would need to obtain external professional advice to help address them.

4. Other business

Kevin Schürer asked whether his departure from UKDA later this year required his resignation from the Board. It was agreed that, since appointments to the Board were *ad hominem*, it would be appropriate for him to stay on as long as he remained in the research / higher education sector.

Next meeting: Wednesday 28 April 2010, 10:00 – 13:00