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## Editorial

It is a pleasure to introduce you to the Contents of this Issue. We are reminded of the past successes of the Group in Stephen Robert's enthusiastic Appreciation of Ian Malley. We are reminded in the present of the Group's successful prize competition programme in Alison Bremner's sound and informative article on the Open University. We are asked to look forward to an interesting future methodology by Kathryn Ray and her colleagues at Northumbria. Then Steve Morgan has assembled a bumper crop of Reviews and there are Announcements of unusual and significant research projects just under way.

The Chair's Annual Report and the Treasurer's Report & Accounts appear here – along with notice of changes in the composition of the Committee. A formal report of the AGM and a summary of the Annual Lecture will appear in the next issue.

We continue to debate just what changes are needed to *LIRN* to adapt to the electronic networked web of the 21st century. The Group wants to promote more effective networking, both personal and electronic, within the LIS research community. Ways to find and fill the gaps for this are not obvious – but experimentation may be the key. For many of us the web has far more useful stuff than we 'wot of, and prompts come by word of mouth and from the printed word. One new direction I would like to see for *LIRN* lies in providing simple mechanisms for researchers to share what they have found valuable and to get help from those who have already passed their way. Much of this, but not all, can be arranged through the web. So we have as an experiment here a prototype collection of practical experience of E-mail Discussion Groups – with the hope that Group members will add to it for more completeness in future issues and – eventually – on our website.

An extension of this 'sharing unusual experiences' approach might well include SHORT items (100 – 200 words) where members have found particularly interesting items in little known sources – particularly web pages, the professional press and Conference Proceedings overseas.

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These reflections lead me into the main topic for this Editorial – the heady and glorious swan song of **the Last Days of the Library & Information Commission**. It has certainly gone out on a high to beat the 31st March deadline – with a bumper crop of policy papers, formidable progress towards the UK 'People's Network', and a Conference to kick start a National Information Policy. What's more, the quality of the papers is quite outstanding – not only their web and print formats but chiefly for their clear thinking, careful editing and sound judgement.

Looking at this from the communication angle, there are some problems. Typically there is an e-mail press release. The text is on the web but also available in print – either free or at a bargain price (£12) in non-glossy format from Boston Spa. And there is usually visual virtue and practical sense in getting hold of the print copy. But no review copies are sent out as a matter of course – so how do the issues get aired and the proposals subjected to critical appraisal? There seems to be something of a gap here. The experts will of course have no difficulty in following up what they know is important in their field, but the wider professional community may miss out – particularly if the splendid *Research Bulletin* [by LIC out of BLRIC] bites the MLAC dust.

What follows is one likely answer to this communication dilemma. We reproduce here some important extracts and commentary in the knowledge that virtually all our readers can find the documents' full text on the web. We take first some detailed and recent items – then proceed to the weighty and controversial issues of Research Policy and Funding.

To start with, the *impressive 1998/1999 Library and Information Commission annual report* is available glossy or at <http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/policyreports/annual9899/index.html>.

In its last week the LIC published *Libraries: the Essence of Inclusion*, a policy document "which sets out the many ways in which libraries can contribute to **social inclusion**, and which challenges Government, institutions and policy makers to recognise and optimise their potential." This was in response to a DCMS consultation paper on Social Exclusion on the web at <http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/policyreports/inclusion.html>. It came on the scene too late for considered comment here. But interested researchers may like to look at [www.geolib.org](http://www.geolib.org) for a different perspective and a well advanced programme monitoring social/racial inclusion in US public libraries.

A policy leaflet "Keystone for the information age" sets out the LIC's vision of a **national information policy** for the UK. Launched at a prestigious Conference at St Pancras, both the Policy itself and abbreviated Proceedings are on the web at <http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/policyreports/> The policy document looks like a *Prospects* update – and none the worse for that. However, it is specifically aimed at the Cabinet Office rather than at DCMS. There is a danger that the link with museums and archives may distance LIS from the Information Society centre stage – and this initiative is a first step to avoid that.

**Inter sectoral co-ordination.** Also launched at the St Pancras Conference was *Empowering the learning community* the Report of the Education and Libraries Task Group to the two Secretaries of State - for Culture, Media & Sport and for Education & Employment. Chaired by Mark Wood of the LIC the Task Group contained representatives from public libraries, universities, Further Education, and schools. Recommendations went further than ever before in advocating: shared stock resources with 'access maps' for users, partnership, co-ordinated training programmes, and – crucially – cross-sectoral funding arrangements. Sensibly a formal interdepartmental (DCMS & DfEE) working

group is proposed to continue the work. The suggested target end date of 2008 seems unnecessarily distant. The report has commendably specific recommendations for action. Many of these are related to places where practice is already established – although some 'examples' are less convincing when the fine print is read! But this is a huge step forward.

<http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/policyreports/empower/index.html>

Another LIC Report deals with **Lifelong Learning** as a response to the *New Opportunities Fund consultation paper Community Access to Lifelong Learning*. [downloadable in PDF (Adobe Acrobat) from [www.lic.gov.uk/publications/responses/callresp.html](http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/responses/callresp.html)]

Yet another LIC paper dealt with *International Roles for MLAC* mainly by recounting LIC's record in the international field – work which has had relatively little publicity compared to the LIC's network, modernisation, lifelong learning and social policy initiatives. See [www.lic.gov.uk/publications/other/international.html](http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/other/international.html)

In addition to these consultation invitations and LIC responses on particular policy topics a comprehensive document came out in January 2000 *Consultation on the work of the new Museums, Libraries & Archives Council* <http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/other/index.html> to which the Library & Information Co-operation Council (LINC) responded on 11 March and the Library & Information Commission, in greater detail, on 3 March at [www.lic.gov.uk/publications/responses](http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/responses). Research was but one of several important topics: we consider it on its own later. The LIC response concludes "We acknowledge that this response can be no more than a flagging-up at this stage of issues that will require further consideration as MLAC's structure becomes apparent."

Why has the amalgamation proposal resulted in so much policy activity? Bringing together LIS, Museums & Galleries, and Archives could, after all, be done simply by bringing the existing bodies under one umbrella. Whether or not this was the original concept, this is not what is now proposed.

Rather there is a realisation that the funding pattern for Museums & Galleries was quite different from LIS and a determination to start the new organisation from a very different base.

Some of us are disappointed that MLAC is to have an exclusively strategic role. This means, yet again, no move for a national supervision and funding operation for LIS. For the Museums & Galleries it means the removal or transformation of a well developed funding operation. In other countries national bodies typically find the carrot more effective than the stick. Here in the UK we seem unaware of the contrast and of the options. Sticks, Standards and Strategy – the three S's – could well be replaced by adding a further 'C' – Carrots – to the three C's of *Prospects*. Or are we just frightened of the hard work involved in getting into the detail of real life? But that is a digression!

So, having seen LIS research funding reorganised under the British Library from BLRDD to BLRIC, then transferred from the British Library to the new LIC, it is now to be transferred to the MLAC – each time undergoing navel gazing and soul searching reviews: mapping exercises, consultations galore, and tortuous attempts to design effective dissemination and evaluation procedures. To go through this once in a decade is fine: three times is distinctly over the top! Beds are meant to be slept in: airing them should be incidental!

## Research

A really valuable report to the LIC was **Review of research funding for LIS** by David Haynes, David Streatfield and Noeleen Cookman [133p, LIC research report 40 ISBN 1902394224. Ordering information: British Thesis Service, BL, Boston Spa. £12.]

This study was commissioned in Autumn 1998 and conducted between December 1998 and April 1999 with supplementary work between May and September 1999. The date "October 1999" printed on the title page is misleading as publication did not take place until February 2000. Quite an example of how bureaucrats and committees can use up time when not using the web or facing organisational demise!

The overall aim of the study was to provide the baseline about funding of library and information research in order to inform the work of the Commission and others on encouraging investment in such research and collaboration across sectors. The agreed project objectives were to establish the amounts spent on library and information research carried out in the UK, the sources of that funding, the recipients of that funding and an outline of the procedures which need to be followed for accessing each funding source. Appended to the report is a directory of funding available for LIS research.

This is, of course, highly recommended to all *LIRN* readers – and is one of the few pieces mentioned here that appears not to be on the web. But the blurb on this and a host of other LIC research reports is well worth browsing at <http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/researchreports/index.html> for a taste of the research variety currently funded by the LIC.

The report has to deal with distinctions between Research, Development, and 'Related Activities' (the latter being mainly Wolfson Funds for public libraries and post Follett spending for academic libraries). Different estimates made by Researchers and Funders were relatively close. Technically this analysis is far from straightforward, but has been handled convincingly by the authors.

The key Tables can be summarised as follows – though readers are advised to take on board the detail and qualifications in the actual report.

<i>Source of funds</i>	<i>Annualised £000s</i>
<b>LIS Research</b>	
Br Nat Bibl Res Fund	35
Lib & Inf Commission	1,632
Library Association	80
Wales, Scotl, N Ireland Coucils	59
Other	18
TOTAL RESEARCH - Funders	1,824
TOTAL RESEARCH – <i>Researchers' ests incl. Europe</i>	2,500
<b>LIS Development</b>	
JISC (HE) eLib programme	700
JISC National Sci Found'n	500
JISC Resource Disc'y Netw	1,000
<b>R &amp; D Related in LIS</b>	
Br Lib'y Co-op'n & Partnership Programme [from 2000]	500
HE Libraries Review (Res Support Lib's Programme)	9,000
Scottish Cult'l Res'ces Access Network	2,500
DCMS/Wolfson (public libs)	3,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19,026</b>
	<b>19,702</b>

In addition to these 'annualised' amounts there is now substantial one off government Development funding which includes:

	<b>£ 000s</b>
<b>PEOPLES NETWORK</b>	
Hardware	100,000
Content creation	50,000
Staff training	20,000
Bill Gates [for deprived areas]	3,000
Plus share of £230 m for ICT and £50m. for Digitisation for Teachers & Librarians in schools	

Much of the report then considers possible funding sources outwith those organisations on which LIS have traditionally relied.

The different perspective presented by these figures is, to say the least, interesting – and a vital prerequisite to the debate on LIS Research Policy that developed through the Shepherd Report and its reception. While the LIC Research Fund inherited from the British Library has fluctuated recently around £ 1.4 – 1.6 million, and is substantially lower than it was in the 1980s and early 1990s, the profession was now faced with the possibility [or

prospect] of seeing it largely disappear under the new MLAC regime.

MLAC-in-waiting commissioned Professor John Shepherd, a London University geographer, to review the research scene to a tight timetable. His 46 page report *A review of research priorities and practice for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC)* appeared in early December 1999 on the Birkbeck College website [www.bbk.ac.uk/geog/mlacresearch.html](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/geog/mlacresearch.html) - unfortunately a few days after the LIRG Committee meeting.

From the appendices it appears that Prof Shepherd talked to many more people in the library world than in museums or archives – but he concentrated heavily on academics: the List of Interviewees shows no public librarian, no career researcher, and no one representing the Library Association or IIS. Nor do the prodigious research mapping exercises of recent years figure in the ‘Sources Consulted’. In matters of more detail he was, for instance, well briefed on LISU activities but apparently ignorant of the CIPFA and SCONUL statistics and their elaborate survey/performance measurement initiatives and research. So this was - perhaps of necessity - a quick and superficial overview. Some unevenness and factual inaccuracies have come in for heavy criticism – so that the value of this Report is most likely to be seen as setting the agenda for debate and formulation of MLAC policy.

Having the three services (libraries, museums and archives) looked at together by an outsider has certainly produced a fresh and invigorating approach. The concept of research covering all three services is an obvious innovation – and exploring the feasibility of this has already been stimulating. But many fear this could be taken too far, and Shepherd himself recognises this –

The evident need for a cross sectoral agenda should not obscure the fact that there will be elements of strategic policy that elate to individual sectors. As several interviewees pointed out, it would be folly to lose sight of the richness and diversity of the institutions within each sector by forcing all research into the cross sectoral framework.” (4.11)

Hear, hear! And note that our ‘cross sectoral’ problems as between public, school, academic and special libraries – hardly mentioned in the Report – are henceforth subordinate to, or subsumed by, the sectors of Libraries, Museums and Archives.

Linking research with the strategic roles that MLAC envisages presents few problems: there is no difficulty in agreeing that –

“Research underpins the evaluation of the impacts of *policy* and helps decision makers in revising *policies*; it supports *readership* by firming a rational basis for identifying inconsistencies in the provision and uptake of services thus helping to set the agenda for new initiatives and it fosters *synergy* through the concepts and methodologies employed in carrying out studies that address the cross-sectoral agenda.” (2.5)

While in general the Shepherd Report is seen as a threat to the level of current funding, there are passages in it that can be read as seeking to escape from present funding constraints –

“ – there will be need for strategic policy research that is much more closely associated with the ‘big’ societal issues of social exclusion, educational impacts, economic regeneration and links across the sectors. In general this involves larger scale, more widely collaborative research projects than BLRIC/LIC has so far funded, and - compared with the dominance of institutional level, practice oriented research funded under the LIC model, MLAC will have a need for a number of large scale research projects involving rigorous sampling, longitudinal and evaluative methodologies, so as to ensure a focus on evaluation and on national and regional representativeness of research findings.” (3.33)

So these are not recommendations for research ‘on the cheap’ – rather the reverse. But they are likely to involve more researchers from outside the LIS research family. This is in line with Peter Brophy’s plea, at last year’s AGM, for research to be more outward looking. And when one looks back, it is revealing how much influential research in recent years has been conducted – or at least triggered – by outsiders, for example:- Comedia; PLUS (from the government’s Performance Indicator initiative); eLib (from Follett); Fielden; GIS (Geographic Information System) Surveys; Roehampton Inst. More active links with Education, Cultural Studies, Geography, and Social Science can only be beneficial.

Following the Shepherd Report, in January 2000, the comprehensive MLAC Consultation document [<http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/other/index.html>] summarised the proposals on Research as follows:

22. We believe it is essential for our policy agenda to be informed by focussed research and underpinned by meaningful statistics. We therefore aim to develop a research strategy which reflects and informs our key strategic objectives. To help inform this framework DCMS commissioned an independent review of current sectoral research. The report conducted by Professor John Shepherd was published on the DCMS website on 3 December. DCMS is currently seeking views on the various issues raised in his report.

23. We will develop our research strategy in the light of the responses to Professor Shepherd's report. However, we are attracted by some of his proposals, including:

- \* the need to establish a balance between cross-sectoral and sector-specific research.
- \* the need for a fundamental review of the current arrangements governing the collection and development of sectoral statistics.
- \* the need for more longitudinal research in order to assess the impact of particular policies or programmes over time.
- \* the need to develop an improved strategic relationship with organisations in the wider research environment.
- \* the need to develop a new processes for commissioning and administering research which is appropriate to MLAC's needs.

24. We recognise that a number of other issues require further consideration including:

- \* whether we should fund "blue-skies" research.
- \* the relationship between "policy" and "practice" research.

So much for your editor's two pen' worth. These documents are all commended to you – whether you live in the UK or overseas. Indeed reactions from readers overseas to the issues and the way they have emerged would be particularly interesting and welcome. And to consider the issues in more detail the next section of this issue contains large extracts from the thoroughly excellent Responses of the LIC Research Committee and LIC Staff. The whole could make up into an interesting book on the scope, funding, and management of LIS Research and Development!

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*P.S. As this issue goes to press comes the announcement that MLAC will have a different name - Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives & Libraries*