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## Editorial

For the first time since taking on the Editor's role I have more contributions than there is space to print - so that is a good excuse for a short editorial.

But first some humble pie. Through overhasty work on my part the wrong unedited version of Alan Bradwell's contribution to the article *Little Acorns: small scale research in the practice setting - how employers can foster research awareness* (pages 25 - 28) was printed in the last number. My embarrassed apology for this mistake. The text that should have appeared is printed at page 50.

There is a thread linking several of this number's contributions. The widening use of electronic and networked information in public libraries (Chris Batt); training web users - whether staff or public (Margaret Kendall); and the two 'Announcements' are all at the core of present Research and Development activity. While government and other funding is important, the evidence seems to show that in many places people are getting on with networking activity without it. The momentum is there, but these articles also show light on the extent to which public libraries lag behind.

We are glad to publicise the thoughtful and comprehensive BAILER position statement on Research. This follows on logically from the Public Library Research Strategy (*LIRN 70*) and Jack Meadows' plea for more basic and long term research (*LIRN 72*). Looking at the various cases made out by BAILER there seems to be some conflict between a demand for 'strong research co-ordination' and 'multiple funding'; many will regard the case for an additional funding body - however logical - as 'pie in the sky'. They seem also to view the Library & Information Services Commission as exhibiting a public library approach rather than its declared cross sectoral interests.

Perhaps the next step should be to expand the BAILER Table of BLRDD/BLRIC Funding

across the decades to include development funding made available by JISC and the Funding Councils (Follett follow-ups, etc.), by charitable foundations (Wolfson's £2 millions, etc.), by the Office of Arts & Libraries direct, by the European Commission for projects managed in the UK, by the DoE, by the DTI, and even by the Audit Commission. Rightly or wrongly there has been a great deal of research funding by bodies such as these - not to mention many projects undertaken and supported by library institutions and authorities themselves - and the scale of this needs to be appreciated.

Come to think of it, this could properly be considered by the Commission itself - since one of its main responsibilities is the general co-ordination of LIS developments in all sectors.

There are two 'unlinked' contributions in this number. Jaspal Kaur's excellently presented research in a large law firm is nominally concerned with an important aspect of the disaster recovery scenario. However it has other virtues. It is further demonstration of the general value of a User Survey. Since it maps the 'information' involved in 'information recovery' it has thereby serendipitous value in describing the inside features of a law firm's L.I.S. and so illuminates the real features and activity that goes on in this type of special library. An example of research taking the place of a conducted tour - and doing it more thoroughly!

Then, in contrast to the electronic focus, Geoffrey Smith describes a series of research initiatives into public library bookstock management. On reflection it hardly seems that so many successive funding projects can be the optimum research arrangement. But there has been too little research in this area since the 1970s and early 1980s - so this attention to it must be welcomed. And even here we find scope for electronic innovation in the management of this traditional resource. There are no regular surveys of stock management practice - in the Batt or LISU mould - and this is a real weakness in times when suppliers and acquisitions departments are experimenting in positive ways.



LISU figures in several places in this number. Under 'Group Activities' is the Group's response to a consultation of LISU's future. This also appears in Ros Cotton's 'News and Views'. And finally there are two reviews of recent LISU publications. (*Maybe Pat Layzell Ward and I should declare an interest as former directors of CLAIM and LISU. Come on the younger generation!*)

I am glad Bob Usherwood was prompted to write on the 'Social Audit' topic - and on the value of qualitative research generally. More letters to the Editor - or challenging messages on *LIS-LIRN* - would be welcome.

The standard of prizewinners' reports - in this issue and in the next to come - is splendid and reflects well on the heights reached by the best of our L.I.S. students and on their supervisors. It has not always been so good!

Enjoy your reading! And think about younger 'research minded' colleagues who are not aware of LIRG and LIRN. I am often alarmed to find very bright graduates in their first years of professional practice unaware of the group's activities and potential - not to mention the very affordable level for individual subscriptions! [*Details of membership and courses are on the Group's web site <http://www.la-hq.org.uk/lirg.htm> or to be had from Jo Glover, LIRG Administration, Calverley Street Learning Centre, Leeds Metropolitan University, LEEDS LS1 3HE, Email: [J.Glover@LMU.AC.UK](mailto:J.Glover@LMU.AC.UK) ]*

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## Correspondence

Dear Sir,

### Social audit

I am not surprised that Ros Cotton (News and Views Autumn / Winter 98) was disappointed in

our social audit report if she expected it to devise a "methodology for quantifying ... 'soft' evidence". This was not the object of the exercise. We state clearly in the report, as we did in our original submission, that, "we do not believe that an objective quantification of concern or social need is possible. However it is...practical to develop a framework for an informed value judgement."

Far from being "forced back onto qualitative assessments" this was our original intention and we make no apology for our approach. These are real world data that have been obtained in a rigorous way. Ros asks, "how does one define 'properly gathered'?" The report devotes a whole chapter to the methodology we suggest, and a further paper will appear in the next *IFLA Journal*.

In passing we can note the IFLA audience, like many others we have addressed, was very positive in its response to our work. In addition, we have had a positive response from members of hard pressed councils. It is arguable that some decisions to close or cut library services have been taken because of an over reliance on the kind of quantification that Ros Cotton seems to support. In just measuring what is quantifiable there is a very real danger that we will miss what is important about the public library service. It is sad that, after 70 years of it being accepted in other areas of social science, some library researchers still regard qualitative assessment as a fall back position. It is to its credit that BLRIC does not take the same view.

Yours faithfully,

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