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## Editorial

You have a new editor. My main qualification is that I have been an enthusiastic reader of *LIRN* for almost 15 years and I am an addicted defender of the value of the printed word as evidenced by VINE, LIBS, LIWW, and the professional journals. (My enthusiasm for information on the web is real but relatively unskilled!) I am however a novice editor despite the imminent achievement of 'three score years and ten' so must crave your indulgence for practical errors and lapses in the teething period.

The Group's gratitude to Ros Cotton, my immediate predecessor, will be formalised elsewhere and at the AGM. I am glad she will continue as Associate Editor and that her mammoth *LIRN 66* stands on the bookshelf as a real challenge to live up to.

As will be obvious to regular readers this number has a new layout design and a new Contents structure. We have a new service agreement in place with the BL/DSC Print and Copy Unit at Boston Spa. Two others are new to the editorial team: Dorothy Williams (RGU, Aberdeen) as associate editor and Steve Morgan (UWE, Bristol) as reviews editor. So we are all set to implement new policies arising from the Group's evaluation of its aims and objectives that Philip Payne has led over the last two years.

### The *LIRN* Niche

The role of *LIRN* in reporting group activities and publicising prize winning essays is straightforward. When it comes to research reports and articles there is congestion and competition. At the academic end researchers are under pressure to publish in prestigious refereed journals and to publicise their research in the large volume professional press and at conferences. At the 'newsy' end we have the splendidly revitalised *BLRIC Research Bulletin* and a great variety of web sites carrying information on projects in progress and reporting. So where can *LIRN* fit in to avoid duplication?

First we assume our readers see the *BLRIC Research Bulletin* regularly - and also that they make regular visits to the web sites of the British Library, UKOLN for ELib and EARL, etc. There is little point in duplicating in *LIRN* information that is already there. (*BLRIC* will mail their *Research Bulletin* free on application to the Support Unit, British Library Research and Innovation Centre, 2 Sheraton Street, London W1V, or e-mail: RIC@bl.uk.) Nor need we duplicate the *UKOLN Newsletter* and *Ariadne* which cover so much JISC ground. But we plan in our next issue to print some helpful www addresses for research in the UK and in other countries. And there may be a place in *LIRN* for occasional summaries of research done and planned - particularly where not covered in the *BLRIC* and *UKOLN* news pages. In the university departments some self funded research, or research that is not funded by BL or JISC, may not be as well publicised as it deserves to be and could figure here.

Then there is the audience, the readership. *LIRN* is intended principally for research enthusiasts and missionaries - the young in heart and mind. While the copy may first land on the chief librarian's desk - as most certainly will the subscription invoice - our primary audience is the active researcher behind the scenes. And our primary task is to provide information and experience to help researchers in their careers and to improve the breadth and quality of LIS research undertaken. That means concentration on methodology issues and on how methods have worked well or badly in practice.

As the new **GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS** make clear, contributions can be either in the form of short comments for the News & Views section or in the form of substantial (2,000 - 5,000 words) contributions. In both instances we would welcome feedback from members.

Let us have your reactions: not so much comment or criticism as discussion of research gaps and of the broader implications of research done. As well as practical methodology we should all spend more time discussing what research results mean and how they add up.

Production delays will not be a continuing feature of *LIRN*. We would like to think that *LIRN* will provide opportunities for speedier publication than the refereed journals. This should allow authors

- to publish draft/unfinished research for immediate feedback
- to publish speculative conclusions suggested by research but not yet proven
- to identify research gaps
- to discuss problems in applying particular methodologies
- to discuss unusually successful applications of a particular methodology

A feature of the competition we would like to avoid is their intense seriousness. Roswitha Poll gave a singular example of the power of humour on the final day of the 1997 Northumbria Performance Measurement Conference. Following in the steps of Bent in *The Bookseller* this editor will award a prize of three bottles of very drinkable claret for the funniest or wittiest contribution (or part of a contribution) to *LIRN* in his first year of office!

There are four other initiatives in mind: all need input from volunteers!

- (1) The 'Research Opportunities' section is intended to allow members to publicise 'Work Wanted/Researchers Available' information.
- (2) Short reviews of the most ingenious masters and doctoral dissertations from LIS teaching bodies would be welcome.
- (3) Many researchers would benefit from knowing about research items in professional journals that may not be covered by standard search procedures. I am looking for volunteers to write a "Keeping Up with the Jones" type column - perhaps once a year to cover and summarise separately the output of organisations such as SCONUL, UKOLN, American Library Association, Scandinavian Libraries, Australasian professional organisations where this is significant for researchers. While we may all have good intentions to display 'international' and 'cross sectoral' attitudes, there are practical difficulties and time limitations to be overcome!

(4) We intend to print on a regular basis a simple list of www and discussion list addresses - in the UK and overseas - which are particularly useful to researchers. *LIRN* should be useful to have around as well as interesting to read.

Needless to say, your reactions to these programme ideas, and your further suggestions, are earnestly solicited - either in print or on the Group's discussion list:

<LIS-LIRG@mailbase.ac.uk>.

But written contributions - short or long - would be even more welcome!

### Introduction to Contents

The last two years have witnessed much activity in mapping research activity and attempts to evaluate research results. This has been considered necessary to formulate plans and strategic objectives. In practice the activity has proved time consuming and difficult to arrive at satisfactorily comprehensive results. It is at least arguable that the final policy documents would have differed little if drafted by knowledgeable professionals two years ago. To evaluate that argument is an exercise on its own! But one indisputable positive result is that many more people have had to think about the place and value of research than would otherwise have done.

On evaluation, Maurice Line's caveat must not be forgotten

"My guess is that good research has a gradual impact on thinking and then percolates through into practice, often without the practitioners realising it."

However, this caveat applies less to development applications than to research proper - and IT networking developments form the area of most intense activity as the century draws to a close.

There are obvious reasons to publish here the LIRG reply to the Commission's proposals. Inclusion of the Public Library Strategy paper is less obvious. First, this paper can serve to illustrate the interesting and important similarities and differences between public libraries in the one

hand and academic/special libraries and information units on the other. Second, this is an example of an initiative by librarians in the sector that pre-dates the Library & Information Commission's work. Third, there are some brief notes advocating a broader approach to project funding and organisation: there does not have to be a one for one relationship between objective and project scope.

There is a connection between these two policy items in this reference in the LIC PROSPECTS consultation paper:

5.45 We will wish to use all available models, including those from other professional communities, and to take particular account of existing work, jointly supported by the Society of Chief Librarians and the British Library Research and Innovation Centre, on "Developing Research in Public Libraries".

The old **Public Library Research Group** that flourished in the 1980s has been wound up. The new PLRG is a committee of the Society of Chief Librarians - with co-opted outsiders - and is concerned with higher level policy and influence. Important outcomes of that committee's work to date are this policy document, a Research Mapping exercise, and the current UCE Project, funded by BLRIC, to develop research expertise (training, dissemination, uptake, etc.) in the public library sector.

The reports by Neil Jacobs and Colette Coles are by young researchers on significant aspects of the IT revolution. Both concern users - but in the hugely different environment, and stage of development, represented by academic and public libraries respectively. Comments from readers would be particularly welcome on the best research categories for users' responses/attitudes to IT developments.

John Crawford's account of the major UK Stakeholder project is important in research terms worldwide. His list of performance measures will afford valuable comparison with similar lists in other countries. The quest for a set of 'most valuable' or 'most valued' performance indicators is hotting up!

These three reports also illustrate the plus and minus features of the impersonal questionnaire survey compared to the structural interview approach.

Finally, your editor has contributed one of the three book reviews - which makes the point that duplicated publication in *LIRN* will be acceptable and indeed encouraged where reproduction of material already in print elsewhere seems to be in our readers' interest.

Enjoy your reading!

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