
News & Views

*contributed by Ros Cotton,
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National research strategy for library and information services

For anyone concerned about library and information research one of the most significant events of 1997 must be the appearance after much consultation of the Library and Information Commission's Prospects: *a strategy for action; library and information research, development and innovation in the United Kingdom - proposals for consultation* (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/lic/research>). The LIC's 2020 *Vision* core themes of Connectivity, Content and Competences provide the proposed strategy framework, to which have been added Impact and value of LIS and Economics of LIS.

These seem fairly straightforward and uncontroversial but the sections on the infrastructure, covering such crucial issues as forward planning of research, funding, assuring the quality of research activity, communicating information about research and transferring research into practice, beg some questions. One of the main needs is for clarification of the respective roles of LIC and BLRIC, still a grey area. Another key area is the extent to which the funding bodies with much more money and clout than BLRIC, e.g. the ESRC, will allow themselves to be guided by the strategy. Responses were due by 31 December 1997; the Group's response is reproduced in full later in this number. No doubt one of the Research Committee's first tasks of the New Year will be to plough through all the responses to establish some sort of consensus - no easy task but something that has to be done.

Freedom of Information on the horizon at last?

If the new government has not yet bitten the deposit of electronic publications bullet at least we can expect some action following the long

awaited publication of the Freedom of Information White Paper. If the bullish prophecies of Public Service Minister, David Clark, prove correct (being "determined to get the balance right between disclosure and concerns about privacy and confidentiality") then bodies such as the recently established Coalition for Public Information could be rendered redundant. However, many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, goes the old proverb. At least there should be clarification on one of David Clark's key questions, i.e. crown copyright, which has exercised many minds both before and after the privatisation of HMSO. What indeed should be the approach on crown copyright and the licensing and sale of government information as part of charged services?

British Library remains bullish in face of financial problems

The British Library's new and glossy 24th Annual Report is the usual attractively packaged affair, documenting the BL's achievements, including notable acquisitions, from 1996-97. Amongst these are intensive preparations for opening St Pancras, continued restructuring along functional lines and major IT developments such as the award of the contract for a system that will create an integrated catalogue of the Library's collections.

However, while demand in the reading rooms was the highest ever, at 475,826 visits, financial constraints made necessary some difficult decisions, including the cancellation of thousands of duplicate serials. These pressures have increased organisational stress and although the Library has not yet received a confirmed budget for 1997/98 there are fears that the financial situation will be even worse than last year's £3.3 million shortfall. Perhaps this time round major surgery will be required in order to effect the required savings.

However, it is a relief to many that the long-awaited opening of St Pancras received a good press, which had nothing to do with the champagne served to journalists. Indeed publicity has been so effective that many science, technology and business users turned up at St Pancras and had to be redirected to Southampton Buildings.

Meanwhile, LIRN readers will be pleased to see that "research sponsorship and dissemination of results" remains an "essential service for the library, archives and information world".

Ireland develops national policy on libraries and information services

With the plethora of policy documents mounting to epic proportions, giving UK LIS organisations lots of work to do in responding to them, it is comforting to know that colleagues over the water are not immune. Ireland has just begun a project to develop a national policy on libraries and information services, which will run to the end of February 1999. The results should prove interesting, especially for bodies in the UK like the Library and Information Commission, which is looking into the feasibility of a UK National Information Policy. Further information is available from the Project Manager, John Cullen, based at the Library Council, 53/54 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2, e-mail: lib-pol@leabharlann.iol.ie

Training in survey design and analysis

The October 1997 issue of *Centre for Applied Social Surveys Newsletter* contains its courses programme for 1997/98, designed to help those having to make practical decisions in surveys such as how to draw a sample, how to design a questionnaire and how to analyse a data set. Although these courses are designed for social scientists they would also be valid for LIS and other researchers. Further information can be gleaned from the CASS Web site - <http://www.scpr.ac.uk/cass/> There is an e-mail address to contact if you are interested in receiving the newsletter: cass@socsci.soton.ac.uk

The EARL awards for the best UK Public Library Web pages

EARL, the Consortium for Public Library Networking, was established in 1995 to develop the role of public libraries in providing library and information services over the network. It now has over 130 partners in local authorities, and

associate partners in government, the profession, higher education, and the commercial sector. Through collaboration, EARL aims to demonstrate and extend the ability of public libraries to deliver networked information and knowledge-based services. These are developed primarily through EARL's 17 Task Groups working on new ways to deliver shared services over the network.

The purpose of the awards for the best UK Public Library Web pages is to celebrate the best of what UK public libraries are doing on the World Wide Web. Awards are made in four categories to reflect the features that make a library site informative, interesting, useful and a pleasure to visit. By highlighting the best EARL hopes to establish a benchmark for other public libraries to strive for.

Many of the winners and runners-up are leading the process of information networking in their localities and councils. EARL believes that this is a role that the public library service, not only can, but has a duty to aspire to. The Information Society needs public libraries to commit themselves to networking and these web sites are among the more visible signs that the commitment is being made.

The Awards are as follows:

Best Information Content

HIGHLY COMMENDED (in alphabetical order)

Barnet Libraries :

<http://www.earl.org.uk/earl/members/barnet/>

Essex Libraries :

http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/infoserv/ecc_lib/essex.htm

South Ayrshire Library and Information Services :

<http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/>

WINNER

Leeds Library and Information Service :

<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/library/library.html>

- An excellent presentation of the depth and breadth of the library service with a well judged amount of detail and an exceptional searchable collection of local history photographs.

Best interactive features

HIGHLY COMMENDED (in alphabetical order)

Cambridgeshire Libraries :

<http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/library/libraries.htm>

Croydon Libraries:

<http://www.croydon.gov.uk/index-library>.

South Ayrshire Library and Information Services :

<http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/>

WINNER

Surrey Libraries :

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraries/>

- A welcoming site which invites visitors to contribute book reviews, comment in the guest book and make enquiries.

Best collection of Internet Resources

HIGHLY COMMENDED (in alphabetical order)

Berkshire & Thames Valley Infonet :

<http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ad206/>

Calderdale Children's and Education Unit :

<http://box.argonet.co.uk/users/ceu/>

Essex Libraries :

http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/infoserv/ecc_lib/essex.htm

WINNER

South Ayrshire Library and Information Services :

<http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/>

- An extensive compilation of thoughtfully selected Internet sites, exceptionally well organised with the local community in mind. Accompanied by sensible advice on evaluating Internet resources.

Best design and usability

HIGHLY COMMENDED (in alphabetical order)

Kingston Upon Hull City Libraries :

<http://www.open.gov.uk/hullcc/libraries/>

Leeds Library and Information Service :

<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/library/library.html>

Richmond upon Thames Library & Information Services :

<http://www.richmond.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/library.html>

WINNER

Essex Libraries :

http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/infoserv/ecc_lib/essex.htm

- A large and complex, but well planned, site made exceptionally user-friendly by imaginative design, very quick loading times, consistent graphics and excellent navigation.

The judges were:

Carol Barker, Recent Master's graduate from the University of Loughborough and author of *Web Publishing: a guide for UK public libraries*. Currently working on Staffordshire Net, the Staffordshire County Council web site.

Robert Harden, Co-compiler of the 'UK Public Libraries' web site and consultant to EARL.

Brian Kelly, Currently working on WebWatch at UKOLN; has recently trialled the WebWatch robot by conducting an analysis of UK public library web sites.

For more details about EARL or the awards contact Helen Copeman at EARL, 4th Floor, Gun Court, 70 Wapping Lane, London E1 9RL; tel: 0171 702 2020; e-mail: helen@earl.org.uk.

CATRIONA II Project

The eLib-funded CATRIONA II project - "researching approaches to the creation and management of electronic resources in Scottish universities" - is now entering a phase of its development in which it will seek to disseminate information to, and obtain feedback from, relevant sections of the higher education community in the UK.

The project team want to draw attention to the project Web pages at: <http://catriona2.lib.strath.ac.uk/catriona/> These contain project information, including the annual report, together with raw data and interim results from surveys of over 500 academic staff at six Scottish universities. These were conducted in

order to obtain information on:

- the extent to which quality electronic research and teaching material was being created on Scottish campuses and was accessible to others
- a range of issues associated with Phase Two of the project, which looks at university intentions regarding the provision of services to deliver such resources on-site and beyond, and at related issues such as service design, policy, strategy and the role of the library

Later communications will summarise key results from the surveys and seek feedback on the development of the demonstrator resource delivery service, an embryonic version of which is available at: <http://catriona.lib.strath.ac.uk/>

The demonstrator is designed to be the Library and, ultimately, also the Research Park of the Clyde Virtual University project, which aims to develop and deliver electronic teaching resources to Clydenet users. It has no direct connection with CATRIONA II or eLib but is co-operating with the team on issues of mutual interest. The URL for CVU is: <http://cvu.strath.ac.uk/>

A summary of the contact points:

CATRIONA II Home Page:

<http://catriona2.lib.strath.ac.uk/catriona/>

CATRIONA II Demonstrator:

<http://catriona.lib.strath.ac.uk/>

CATRIONA II Project Heads:

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