NEWS

Two more acronyms to get used to

Shortly after the new Government was elected DNH (Department of National Heritage) was declared old-hat by the Government's new Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith. Quoth he: "My Department's old name was backward-looking and did not do justice to the range of work we cover. Today we start a new chapter. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is a Department of the future. It is about creativity, innovation and excitement..." and so on... It will be interesting to see if the DCMS is any different from the DNH and its predecessor, the Office of Arts and Libraries, but at least things augur well because of a new inter-Departmental Creative Industries Task Force which aims to "consider the creative industries in their broadest sense" and which features such luminaries as Richard Branson, Sir David Puttnam and the designer, Paul Smith. Another good sign is the electronic availability of some key individuals: chris.smith@culture.gov.uk and mark. fisher@culture.gov.uk.

The newest acronym is ARCIM - Association of Research Centres in Information Management, formed to "promote cooperative projects, share expertise and encourage practitioners and policymakers to exploit the results of research". It is intended that ARCIM, whose founding members are CERLIM (Centre for Research in Library and Information Management - University of Central Lancashire), the Library and Information Technology Centre (South Bank University), De Montfort's International Institute for Electronic Library Research and the UK Office for Library and Information Networking, based at the University of Bath, will enable the UK to build on its international reputation for its work on electronic libraries, networked information management and applications of information and communication technologies. Let's hope it does achieve this and does not just add another layer of bureaucracy. Further information from CERLIM's Shelagh Fisher (s.m.fisher@uclan.ac.uk).

Threat to charge for BL Reading Room services averted

During the summer literati such as Lady Antonia Fraser and Malcolm Bradbury were up in arms at the possibility that the British Library may introduce charges for use of the reading rooms at St Pancras. Because of the shortfall in Grant-in-Aid, the BL needs to consider certain measures which some would consider drastic. A study involving a questionnaire to readers was carried out and the results presented to the BL Board in July. It seems that any plans to charge have been shelved for the time being so readers will be relieved not to encounter a turnstile when St Pancras opens for business.

Update on Library and Information Commission activities

The Commission is making substantial progress towards developing the UK National Research Strategy for LIS. The Research Mapping and Consultative Exercises were completed in May (see LIRN 67 for more details) and Maggie Ashcroft, the Research Strategy Coordinator, has been drawing the various threads together and having series of meetings with key organisations and individuals, not to mention presenting the draft strategy at Under One Umbrella, Libtech, etc. Maggie's role includes identifying models of good practice in national research strategies, conducting a review of key documents, assisting the Steering Group in developing the objectives and scope for the strategy and in the identification of critical success factors and recommending a process for the ongoing development of the National Research Strategy.

Other significant Commission activities include producing a report, at the then Government's behest, on the future of networking in public libraries, looking at the feasibility of developing a National Information Policy for the UK, and planning joint events with interested organisations on topics related to the Commission's 2020 Vision.

In addition LIC issued a Call for Proposals for a ground clearing study in the area of digitisation of important local authority collections, for which Information North was the successful bidder. For further details of LIC activities contact Margaret Haines on 0171 411 0057 or email margaret.haines@lic.bl.uk

Information Society matters

The Information Society Project Office, a joint activity between the European Commission's DGIII and DG XIII, has released information on the results of its first Call for Proposals. The Call, which focused on actions promoting development of the Information Society, netted 117 proposals, of which only 16 were selected, and these will receive a total of 4.3 million ECU in funding. Further information is available from the ISPO Web site (http:/www.ispo.cec.be/ispo/call/projhome.html) but for a taster the 16 include distance training programme to empower communities in the Information Society; opening up Information Society to women; Quality assessment of consumer information on Internet and Promoting IS for everyone - dissemination and demonstration of best practice in Information Society applications for older people and people with disabilities in Europe.

The European Commission has also launched ESIS - the European Survey of the Information Society, which claims to be the "largest ever inventory of planned and ongoing projects in the IS". Despite the laudable aim of collecting primary data on the status of the Information Society and making it available, one does wonder if the "systematic" method, ie using a questionnaire, will actually result in the desired result of providing a comprehensive picture of IS related activity. For non-sceptics the questionnaire is at http://www.ispo.cec.be/esis, or from Technoplis Ltd on 01273 204320.

Serials investigation in public libraries

Loughborough University's Department of Information and Library Studies has been awarded funding by BLRIC for a project which aims to provide strategic information on the management, exploitation and effective use of newspapers, magazines and journals in both traditional and electronic formats, in UK public libraries.

While the field of electronic scholarly publishing has been the focus of various research projects, less attention has been given to the publication of newspapers, popular magazines and e-zines, and their use and impact in public libraries. Serials as an information resource have generally suffered from neglect in UK public libraries, with serials budgets usually representing a low percentage of library expenditure. Electronic resources might offer opportunities for libraries to develop wider services where there was little or none before, a powerful incentive in developing a marketing strategy for raising the profile of public libraries.

There will be a combination of desk research, library case studies, focus groups, and observation of users' reactions to electronic serials. The research began in June 1997 and a report (including comparative economic models, and evaluative directory of electronic serials, and guidelines for the application of performance indicators to electronic serials) should be available around June 1998. For further elucidation contact Kate Brunskill, Department of Library and Information Studies, Loughborough University. Tel: +44(0)1509 223074. Email: K.L.Brunskill@lboro.ac.uk

Are YOU successful?

Yes, you! The title of a fascinating piece of research being conducted at the Robert Gordon University. Respondents were asked to nominate successful people in library and information science and to give their perceptions of success, some no doubt feeling that success should not be measured solely by status or salary. I had a bit of a field day responding to this and it will be very interesting to see the outcome of the project, which will surely name names. Contact Dr Fiona Campbell at RGU (tel 01224 262957) or email f.campbell@rgu.ac.uk

BL Research and Innovation Centre matters

Although BLRIC was disappointed not to be awarded the then DNH contract for administering the public library development incentive funding, as it had been for the duration of the scheme, it has now been successful in another public library funding venture. RIC is now managing the new Challenge fund, partly supported by sponsorship from the Wolfson Foundation, which is intended to support public libraries' capital projects.

The British Library Research and Innovation Centre is increasingly adopting the practice of issuing Calls for Proposals since its first successful call in the area of digital libraries earlier this year, though RIC makes it clear that funds will still be available for unsolicited proposals. Amongst the successful bidders under the first Call were Loughborough University (serials in public libraries - see above), the National Institute for Social Work (identifying aspects of digital libraries and special libraries in the welfare sector) and Kensington and Chelsea (investigating the possibility of connecting London public libraries to the London Metropolitan Network - currently the province of the M25 higher education institutions). I will be particularly interested in the outcome of Strathclyde University's project on business use of the Internet as an information resource, especially as many seem to be wary of business oriented Web sites. Nice to see a mixture of libraries being successful, rather than just the academic variety. The most recent Call focused on management of libraries and information services and library cooperation and results of this are available from RIC (0171 412 7041) or through the BL's information server, Portico - http://www.bl.uk/ric

Yet another journal

We complain about the information explosion but now there is a mounting number of electronic items to look at, not to mention keeping up with Web sites, to add to the workload. JoDI, the Journal of Digital Information, is a fairly new animal being an electronic journal with no paper equivalent, targeting those in the multidisciplinary field of digital information. It aims to be the "primary electronic source for high quality refereed articles" and the good news is that access will be free at least until December 1998. For further information go to http://jodi.ecs.soton.ac.uk/