

Research reports

The Electronic Libraries Programme: A progress report

Introduction

To give a progress report or a "snapshot" of the Electronic Libraries Programme is a challenging task. The programme, while still in its early stages, is progressing and expanding at a rapid rate. As libraries everywhere continue to grapple with and understand new information technologies, the eLib programme also reacts and adjusts to new developments. This article will attempt to give an overview of current eLib status by offering some examples and illustrations which, it must be remembered, form only a part of a much larger whole. Although the eLib programme consists of many projects, its strength is in the knowledge gathered and disseminated by the programme in its entirety. While individual projects have individual deliverables, the main deliverable of the eLib programme is knowledge - it seeks to provide answers to the important question of how UK academic libraries' services can best support and progress their HE Institutions into the 21st century.

In 1992 the UK Higher Education Funding Councils commissioned a review of library services provision in UK academic libraries. The Libraries Review Committee, chaired by Professor Sir Brian Follett, produced a report⁽¹⁾ and recommendations in the autumn of the same year, the effects of which are still reverberating through the higher education community. A great variety of activities have followed in the wake of the "Follett Report" as the funding councils endorse and seek to implement many of the report's recommendations. These activities include spin-off programmes such as the Buildings Programme which seeks to create 250,000 more spaces in more than 70 higher education institutions; the Non Formula Funding Programme, which is providing funding and support for the preservation and conservation of some of the UK's most treasured special collections and archives; or the National Journals Site Licensing programme, involving Academic Press, Blackwell and Blackwell Science Publishers as well as the Institute of Physics Publishers, that will provide electronic access to hundreds of journals. As well as these programmes, other follow up reports include the Anderson Report⁽²⁾ which considers the provision of research materials to scholars in the UK.

Of the follow-up activities created by the report, the Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib), with a budget of £15 million over three years, is certainly one of the most ambitious. The Programme was established to explore ways of shaping the development and implementation of electronic media in academic libraries. eLib is funded through the Joint Information Systems Committee through the Follett Implementation Group on Information Technology (FIGIT). The programme itself is divided into several broad *programme areas* through which over 60 different projects are now funded.

Programme areas

The initial Call for Proposals for the eLib programme was November 1994. From this call projects were funded in 7 programme areas. These are:

- Document Delivery
- Electronic Journals
- Access to Network Resources
- Digitisation
- Training and Awareness
- On Demand Publishing
- Supporting Studies

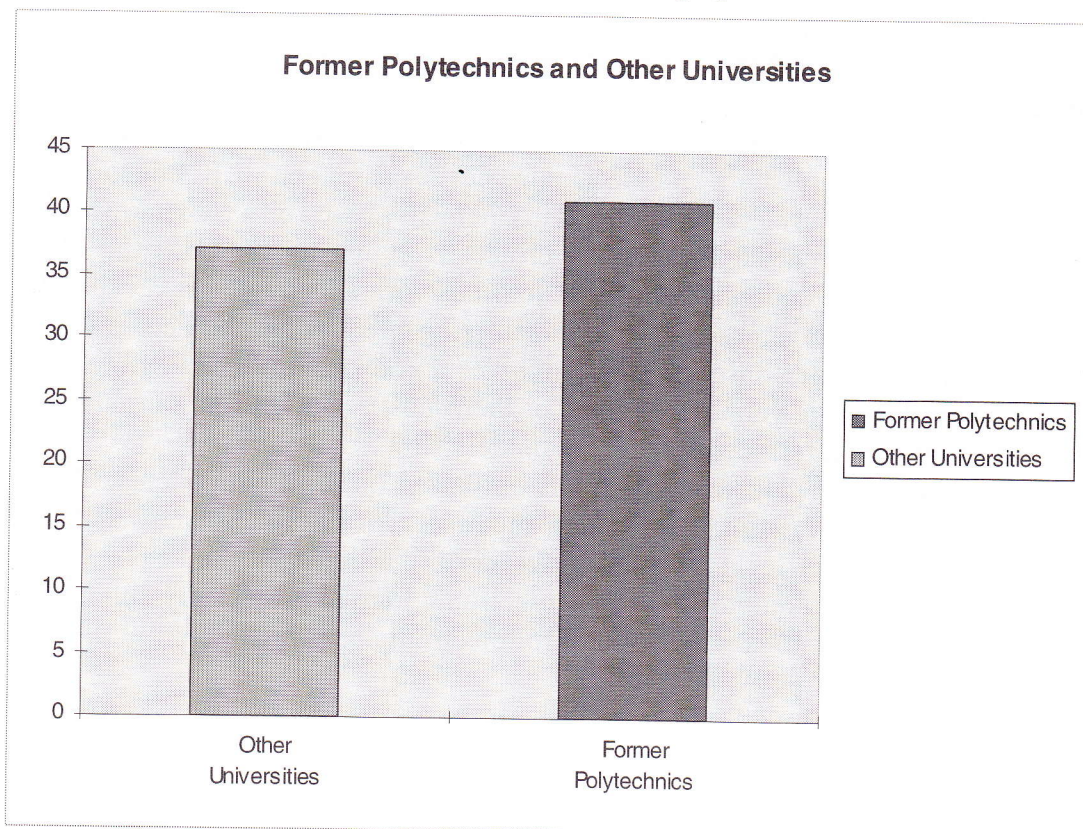
A second targeted call in November of 1995 yielded several new areas including:

- Electronic Short Loan Collections
- Pre-prints/Grey Literature
- Images
- Quality Assurance/Electronic Refereeing

The 11/95 call also asked for expressions of interest in creating a National Digitisation Centre and formal proposals are now being solicited from a short list.

Involvement in eLib

The eLib programme has a broad base including a variety of institutions and covering a wide range of disciplines and subject areas. Although 60 projects are funded, many of the projects involve consortia and partnerships which lead to the direct involvement of well over 85 institutions and more involved as test sites or "silent" partners. There is a healthy balance in the programme between older, established research institutions and newer universities. A breakdown graph can be seen below



An Overview of eLib Projects

Student support

Improving access to students is an important goal for many of the eLib projects. Projects in On Demand Publishing and those establishing Electronic Short Loan Collections seek to facilitate access to course materials and reading lists for students via networks both for full and part-time students. The copyright issues for these projects are challenging but not insurmountable. The projects are working closely with publishers to explore new and effective copyright management and pricing models to ensure document integrity and royalty controls.

For example, project ERCOMS (Electronic Reserve Copyright Management System) led by De Montfort, seeks to create a generic electronic copyright management system which will have built in copyright management capabilities.

The Scottish On-demand Publishing Enterprise (SCOPE) project aims to produce printed course reading packs from electronic copy. Documents are stored electronically for the purposes of customised production of printed packs which are then sold to students at a low cost. The initial subject areas for SCOPE are Sociology and Engineering. The SCOPE consortium includes almost all Scottish HEIs and deals with a great variety of publishers to clear copyright for the materials. The Performing Arts Teaching Resources On-line (PATRON) project aims to deliver digital audio video, scores and text on-demand across a high speed network. The subject area is music and will include music listening lists and dance viewing and reading lists. Of course copyright will present a unique problem for a project using multimedia materials and PATRON will provide a useful forum and model for tackling these difficult issues.

Research support

For the academic researcher, access to information can be greatly enhanced using information technologies. Pre-print material lends itself well to the immediacy and timeliness allowed by electronic access. eLib is funding several projects which provide access to collections of electronic pre-print materials and these initiatives will explore methods of searching, retrieval and delivery to the researcher's desktop. eLib is supporting pre-print projects in the Cognitive Sciences, Education, Economics and Cultural Studies.

Similarly Electronic Journal Projects provide a mechanism for experimenting with options and alternatives for scholarly publishing and electronic peer review. The CLIC consortium based at Imperial College is creating an electronic journal in Chemistry based on a well known print journal in Chemistry. The Open Journal Framework project is exploring the potential of electronic technology to provide close equivalents to print journals with added hypertext capabilities.

Involvement with publishers is crucial when considering production and access to journals in electronic form and the SuperJournal project involves a consortium of 21 different publishers which will produce electronic versions of some of their most popular print journals, and test the usability of different user interfaces and access models with academics.

There will also be some new electronic journals not based on print equivalents. These aim to exploit features not possible in print. For example the Journal of Information Law and Technology provides access to text of key legal resources referenced in articles.

Project ESPERE provides a complement to the electronic journal projects by collaborating with learned societies' publishers to create a system for electronic peer review.

Library user support

Cultural change is fast becoming the library buzz word of the 90s and like all such words and phrases is in danger of becoming meaningless due to over usage. Cultural change involves changing values and expectations - it is change at a very fundamental level. Network technologies and specifically the Internet are the dawn of a new communications medium and, like radio or television, alter the way we access all types of information day to day. In libraries, the implementation and, more importantly, *integration* of these new technologies into daily routine involves long-term changes over a relatively short period of time. The impact that this kind of change can have on the library community (staff and users) is immense. Projects in the eLib Training and Awareness area provide the means of both teaching people to use new technologies and the methods of assessing the impact these technologies are having on libraries and the people they serve.

NetSkills is eLib's largest project and offers courses for library users and library staff in networked technology. Courses begin at an introductory level for those new to Web technology and extend to more advanced courses such as Authoring in HTML. NetSkills courses are offered at many institutions throughout the UK and are advertised widely in library publications and electronic lists. Similarly project EduLib based at University of Hull is providing network training for library and information services staff.

Project TAPin, based in Birmingham, is examining the way in which technology has altered access to information in different disciplines, comparing Law, Life Science and Business Studies.

NetLinkS, based at Sheffield is looking at the profound change in libraries as they struggle to support the learner in a networked environment.

Library services support

Libraries have had to deal with rapidly shrinking budgets, particularly in the past decade - years which have seen a steady and alarming increase in prices for journal subscriptions as research specialisation continues to "splinter". Finding alternatives available electronically free of charge or providing access to article copying services has become a crucial part of library services.

Organisation of subject materials on the Internet is a dilemma for the electronic librarian seeking resources available on the networks. Projects in the eLib Access to Network Resources area aim to provide information gateways to high quality network sites available worldwide in areas such as sociology (the SOSIG project), medicine (the OMNI project) and engineering (the EEVL project). Resources will be assessed and described by subject specialists and catalogued according to current library practice. Standards for Internet resources metadata are still evolving and will be closely monitored through these projects as well as through an eLib Supporting Study entitled Moving to Distributed Environments for Library Services (MODELS). The software backbone for these information gateways will be provided largely by eLib project ROADS which has designed a user-oriented resource discovery system.

Several eLib projects are exploring alternatives and options for electronic document delivery services. There are service-oriented projects, based on existing technologies as well as projects developing software for improved document delivery in both print and electronic source documents. For example, the EDDIS project (Electronic Document Delivery: the Integrated Solution) based at the University of East Anglia, seeks to create a completely integrated system that will include identification, holdings discovery, ordering and electronic supply service for non-returnable items.

Other eLib Issues

Preservation

Preservation is a crucial and, as yet, problematic issue for electronic information. eLib projects working in digitisation aim to alleviate some pressure on libraries for shelf space and improve access by digitising backruns of old and high-demand journal titles. These projects and the eLib national digitisation centre will confront problems of digital archiving head-on and explore options for long-term preservation through the development and implementation of technical standards. eLib is also working closely with the British Library Research and Innovation to bolster efforts directed at the preservation of digital information.

Evaluation

The eLib programme has put great emphasis on formal project evaluations. Although a great deal of eLib evaluation will come from individual project assessment the evaluation remit will also include the programme as a whole. Evaluation on the project and programme level will be ongoing throughout the life of eLib, feeding back into project management and production to improve products and services.

Evaluation procedure has been broken down into three separate phases, the first two of which have been contracted to the Tavistock Institute. As part of the initial stage the Tavistock established a set of Guidelines for the Evaluation of eLib projects, which outline a basic format for project evaluation. Based on this document, all eLib projects will submit an Evaluation Strategy and an annual report which will be synthesised into the Programme Annual report. The Tavistock is also currently running evaluation workshops funded by the programme to teach projects proper evaluation techniques.

Sustainability

Sustainability is an important issue for all the eLib projects because the funding is only temporary - projects are funded for between 1 and 3 years. Projects establishing a service like an information gateway to the Internet or creating a product like an electronic journal must consider alternative sources for funding if they are to continue beyond the initial funding period. Who will pay? For some subject areas there is strong backing of related associations who could perhaps provide future funding but for others alternative arrangements must be made. The alternatives include:

- end user fees (per view, per article, per year)
- subscriptions, site licenses paid by libraries, institutions, individuals
- charging the author community (which would mean a major shift in the paradigm of academic publishing - a situation in which universities no longer pay subscriptions to effectively buy back research they have produced but pay to have it published).

Increasing communication

One issue to which eLib is wholeheartedly committed is communication. The eLib projects offer a forum for combining people with diverse backgrounds around common interests. One of the most encouraging aspects of the programme thus far, has been the facilitating of dialogue between individuals and groups within the HE community by bringing them together around a previously unrecognised common interest.

The eLib programme office also organises "concertation days" for the projects based on specific programme areas such as a "document delivery day" to encourage communication and interaction between eLib projects. These days also include participation of other non-eLib projects and

initiatives to increase communication with areas outside of eLib such as the European Commission and the British Library. These events are an important way to share experiences and increase dialogue amongst eLib but also to widen eLib's scope to include initiatives from other sectors and countries.

Publicity

Further information about the Electronic Libraries Programme can be found at the eLib web site maintained by the UK Office of Library Networking (UKOLN) at the University of Bath:

<http://ukoln.bath.ac.uk/eLib>

The Programme publishes a complete Info Pack which contains information on each eLib project as well as further information about the programme in general. If you would like an Info Pack please contact the eLib Programme office located at the University of Warwick. (Coventry CV4 7AL, tel: 01203 524979), Web site address: <http://ukoln.bath.ac.uk/elib/>

Conclusions

Even in its early stages the eLib programme is having great impact on the HE academic libraries sector. Already the communication lines that have been opened and continue to open as a result of eLib are one of the Programme's greatest strengths. eLib projects cover a wide range of subject areas and technology applications. Therefore the projects bring together participants from different subject areas, computer specialists, librarians and educational developers with very diverse backgrounds and situate them under umbrellas of a hitherto unrecognised common interests. It is hoped that, through the projects' experimentation with various approaches and by dissemination of project results, eLib will provide some of the necessary building blocks for the new electronic library.

References

- 1 Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Group: Report, (Chair: Prof. Sir Brian Follett), HEFCE, 1993 http://ukoln.bath.ac.uk/follett_report.html
- 2 Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Report of the Group on a National/Regional Strategy for Library Provision for Researchers, HEFCE, 1995. http://ukoln.bath.ac.uk/elib/wk_papers/anderson.html

What do people do when their library closes down?

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Summary

This article describes British Library funded research into the Sheffield libraries strike last year. The aim of the research was to investigate the impact of the temporary closure of public library services on user behaviour and attitudes. It examines the robustness of public library use and how easily previous patterns of use were resumed after the strike. Assertions in previous research about the effect of the public library on the local infrastructure are also tested. The full Report is available from the British Library, (Research and Innovation Report 6224).