Editorial

The last issue of LIRN touched on some of the changes occurring in the UK library and information research infrastructure. Two of particular relevance to LIRG are the establishment of the Library and Information Commission, charged, amongst many other things, with formulating a research strategy, and the arrival of a new director at the British Library Research and Development Department.

The title of Nigel Macartney's editorial for the Department's most recent Research Bulletin" - "These most brisk and giddy-paced times" (from Twelfth Night) is apt indeed, since the pressures being experienced by most libraries, ranging from increased student numbers to inadequate resources, local government reorganization and demise of the Net Book Agreement, are balanced by some quite exciting initiatives and political developments which could really help to raise the profile of libraries where it matters - with funders and policymakers.

The UK has performed well in winning funds from Europe in the form of DG13's Libraries Programme, and to a lesser extent, other telematics areas such as information engineering (focusing on electronic publishing). Further opportunities for European funding are now on the horizon, such as Info 2000 (concerned with the content of multimedia information products), on which there should be a Call for Proposals during 1996, and educational multimedia, which is expected to feature in the Fifth Framework Programme if not before. Whilst not aimed primarily at libraries, these other programmes present a chance to become involved, often once the unsuspecting participants have got used to the rigour of European procedures by cutting their teeth on the Libraries Programme.

The academic sector is set to benefit from all the projects being funded under the Electronic Libraries Programme, and the results should have considerable knock-on effects throughout the whole library and information sector.

Although some will say that only a small number of organizations are sufficiently experienced and resourced to apply for research funds, resulting in a magic circle which excludes others, evidence shows that the net is gradually spreading wider, with more and different types of libraries getting involved, especially in European work. This is partly the result of DG13 targeting SMEs and public libraries in recent years, to increase involvement beyond the academic sector.

Besides the research funds available from BLRDD, the Library and Information Commission, which has now met twice, has limited funds to disburse, and it has been decided that whereas BLRDD will concentrate on the R (research), LIC will focus more on the D (development), by funding implementation and pump priming initiatives. Besides funding the Library and Information Cooperation Council for 1995/96, the Commission has just funded its first piece of work, in the important area of public library networking. The DNH/Aslib Public Library Review recommendation on public library access to the Internet has added to existing professional concern, and the Secretary of State made a Statement in the House of Commons in December which formally responded to the Review. The Commission work has supplied data for this statement and will also give rise to more detailed work to be completed in the spring. An additional catalyst

was Tony Blair's recent statement of a deal with British Telecom to connect institutions such as schools, hospitals and libraries to the Information Superhighway.

Over the last few months, the Commission has been establishing its office, forming relationships with key organizations and planning its priorities for action. The Chairman, Matthew Evans, identified funding, IT and professional fragmentation, as key areas, and many separate but related issues ripple out from these categories, such as improved access to libraries, school libraries, open government and access to Government data, identification and promotion of good practice, retrospective conversion of further education and special collections, and preservation and legal deposit of electronic publications, to take just a few. The Commissioners are keen that a balance be struck between IT and the "physical" library in terms of books and buildings, and see a major role to be the championing of libraries and their promotion as a key part of the nation's economic, educational and cultural infrastructure. Besides tackling a range of important issues, the Commission will promote its function as a single voice to Government by continuing to respond to important documents such as the DNH/Aslib Review, the DTI's Information Society Initiative and the Broadvision Report on Library and Information Plans.

This issue of LIRN contains a mixture of news, including a report on the 1994 Postgraduate Student Prize Award; four research reports by researchers at the Robert Gordon University, University of Northumbria, University of Central England, and Loughborough University; and a clutch of interesting reviews. Also reprinted for the benefit of institutional subscribers to LIRN is Philip Payne's discussion paper on LIRG's future strategy, which was aired at the Group's recent Away Day, plus a challenging response from Bob McKee, Director of Libraries and Arts at Solihull. Personal members of LIRG have already had the opportunity to comment on the paper. If any other readers wish to respond please send your comments, which would be most welcome, to Philip Payne at the address given.

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