LIRG : Twenty Years On!

The Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) was formed in 1977. Its formation followed informal discussions between researchers who felt it was important to link LIS research with practice and who believed that existing professional organizations were not adequately fulfilling this task.

The Group remains active in its central mission of bringing together those with an interest in library and information research and its application. The Group publishes Library and Information Research News (LIRN). it organizes meetings and conferences, and it has a range of awards and prizes. The liveliness of the Group, despite its small membership, is a tribute to the efforts of a succession of people who have participated actively in it over the years.

The Group has had many successful activities over the last few years incuding a major conference on quality, some excellent seminars, the continued production of LIRN, and the establishment of the LIRG Student Prizes. However, the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Group is an opportune time to review what we are doing and how we operate. We cannot ignore that the research environment has changed markedly over the last twenty years and that the needs of our members and potential members are likely to have evolved and changed. The Group needs to move towards agreement on our future mission, aims, operation, activities, and priorities.

A new Committee came into office at the last Annual General Meeting in April. It is a pleasure that we have some new Committee Members who wish to become fully involved with the Group. They join a strong core of existing Committee Members who wish to continue their work for the Group. The new Committee met for the first time in July and initial consideration was given to a discussion paper on a future strategy for LIRG which I, as Chair, had prepared.

The Committee felt that may substantive issues were raised by the paper and felt that it should be more widely circulated to the membership for comment and that the Committee should set aside a longer period of time than our usual business meeting to consider future strategy. The discussion paper has already been sent to every personal member of LIRG. However, it is reproduced here so that those who read LIRN on an institutional subscription have the opportunity to comment too. I urge you to take this opportunity to comment on the Group and make suggestions as to how it should develop. We are starting on a process of managing our own change and developing the Group to meet the needs of existing and potential members into the 21st. Century. Our success depends upon your input.

Philip Payne
Chair

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESEARCH GROUP
A Discussion Paper on Future Strategy

Introduction

The Library and Information Research Group was founded in 1977 as an independent professional association. It aims to foster and stimulate research amongst the library and information community through organized events (conferences, seminars, workshops), short courses on research methods, publications (notably through its newsletter, Library and Information Research News, but also the proceedings of its conferences), research awards (Daphne Clark and Elsevier), and its student prizes.

Twenty years later, the Group remains largely unchanged in its mission and activities despite considerable change which has affected library and information work. Furthermore, much of what we have to sought to achieve has been realized. Research in the broadest sense has moved from being a peripheral activity for libraries and information units to an essential element underpinning both management and innovation.

There is no doubt that interest in research is growing amongst the library and information community and there has never been a greater appreciation of the value of research within the community. This has been fostered by initiatives in respect of PIs, a realization of the importance of user surveys, new sources of funding for research (especially the EU) to complement existing ones (BLRDD), and the need for research arising from technological and cultural change in library and information work.

Recent changes to the composition of the Group's committee and a change in Chair is an appropriate time to review the current mission and activities of the Group. We may decide to continue exactly as we have been but I feel that we should at least take stock of where are and review where we seek to go. However, I believe that we must maintain the momentum of the group during this period of review, and set ourselves realistic targets of what we hope to achieve over the current year, whilst we consider and plan the future direction of the Group.

Membership

The membership of the Group has always been and remains small - about 100 personal members. Most members are located in the UK and, although there is a broad range of interests represented amongst the membership, it is generally believed that academic libraries are over represented and public libraries are under represented amongst the membership. There are also 118 institutional subscribers to LIRN. **We know remarkably little about our membership and what they desire from the Group.**

What we do

We have four main areas of activity: Library and Information Research News, events, awards and prizes, and influencing the LIS profession.

Library and Information Research News represents the main benefit of personal membership of Library and Information Research Group. It is a major asset of the Group. Despite its name, Library and Information Research News (LIRN) consists predominantly of articles, features, and reviews. It has very little news content. The Committee already appreciates that there are major issues to consider concerning the production and presentation of LIRN but, more fundamentally, we may have to address about what we are seeking to achieve through LIRN. Ros Cotton, as Editor, has developed the foundations for a library and information research journal which would represent LIRG well and represent a considerable

membership benefit to members. But is this what we want from LIRN? **The development of LIRN has to be a high priority in any strategy for LIRG and this may well involve difficult decisions on direction, content, and production.**

LIRG courses, seminars, and conferences are our second main area of activity. We have every reason to be proud of the events that we have organized. We offer opportunities for researchers to meet one another, opportunities to disseminate research, opportunities to encourage good research practice, and opportunities to facilitate the development of good research skills. We also offer good value for money. But our choice of topics sometimes appear *ad hoc* and lacks coherence. I believe that there is a serious danger that we will be sidelined by other groups and professional bodies who are taking an interest in research for the first time and organizing context specific events about research. There is also a risk that we move away from core areas of concern to a research group towards more general themes and topics of concern to the profession. **We need to be clear about what we can uniquely contribute, where we have the competitive edge or fulfil a unique role, or where we should be collaborating with other groups and associations.**

Our range of awards and prizes is our third major area of activity. This has grown considerably over the last few years. We now have the Daphne Clark and Elsevier Awards plus the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Student Prizes. This range of awards and prizes raises our profile within the profession, encourages new members, and, perhaps most importantly, encourages new research. On the other hand, **we have not defined sufficiently clearly the differences between the Elsevier and Daphne Clark Awards, we have difficulties in obtaining good proposals for the research awards, and the workload in assessing both proposals and student dissertations is demanding.**

Our fourth area of activity is to act as pressure group to further the development of research within the profession. We make representations to the British Library and other bodies on research issues. However, **the small size of the Group limits its potential influence.**

Considerations

Basics
1.　**Is there still a role for LIRG? What is that role?**

Mission
2.　**What are we seeking to achieve?**
　　We need to reexamine our mission in the changed information world in which we now operate. We then need to set ourselves clear objectives for the future development of the Group. Our present activities need to be reviewed in the context of our mission and objectives.

3.　**What do we mean by 'research'?** We have sought a broadly based membership from full-time researchers to practitioners who undertake internal investigations of use and need as part of their work. Do others perceive research in the same terms as we do and, indeed, would many practitioners use the term, *research*, for their internal investigations at all? On the other hand, we do little to facilitate the transfer of new ideas about research methods drawn from the social sciences and elsewhere and encourage an assessment of their applicability to the LIS field and, where appropriate, their use and adoption within the profession.

Operation of the group
4.　**Should we remain as an independent group?**
　　We are an independent group which enables us to recruit from across the library and information profession. It is an interesting question whether we might have more influence on research matters if we were a specialist group within the Institute of Information Scientists or the Library Association. If we remain independent, should we be collaborating more with other groups and, if so, which ones?

5. **What does a professional group of the 21st century look like?**
   How can we use technology to encourage networking and communication between members? Should we be using technology to become a worldwide group?

Membership

6. **Who are our members?**
   We need to profile our membership and undertake a questionnaire survey of what they want from the membership of the Group. We should follow up on those who leave and find out their reasons for leaving.

7. **Do we wish to expand our membership? Is small beautiful?**
   We need to decide whether to grow and, if we do wish to grow, we to define more fully our potential audience. We should ask ourselves how library and information researchers can operate effectively without being members of LIRG? We then need to investigate what might attract the various segments of this population into membership.

8. **Who constitutes our target audience?** Why is our membership focused on academic libraries? Why are public libraries and information units poorly represented amongst our membership? Are we interested in people concerned with *information research* as well as those interested in *library research*? Are we just UK based? Are we seeking to attract users of LIS research as well as researchers?

Membership benefits

9. **Is our membership package right?** We need to look at how our activities meet the aspirations and needs of our members and potential members. We may need to tailor our package of membership benefits more to particular segments of our existing and potential membership (eg research students, full-time researchers, practitioner-researchers, etc.)

   What should LIRN become? How does it contribute towards fulfilling our mission? There are issues to be addressed about the balance between short courses and seminars/conferences. Should events be cost recovery or make a profit for the Group? Should we subsidize some events and which ones? Even, more critically, we need to address why we choose certain topics for events and not others.

   Researchers tend to work on their own and can feel isolated. Many would welcome more systematic ways of networking with people in similar roles in other institutions and undertaking similar responsibilities. How can we facilitate improved networking between members?

What can realistically be achieved?

10. **Are we trying to do too much?** We are a small group and, yet, we are engaged in a broad range of activities. LIRN, events, and our awards draw involve Committee Members in a considerable amount of work. How can we sustain and develop our range of activities when Committee Members are already heavily committed? How do we involve other members of the Group in the organization of activities?

Comments on this paper can be sent to:
Philip Payne, Chair, Library & Information Research Group, Leeds Metropolitan University, Calverley Street Leeds LS1 3HE Fax: (0113) 283 3123 Email: P.PAYNE@LMU.AC.UK

Philip Payne

Letter

(Sent to Philip Payne by Bob McKee, Director of Libraries and Arts, Solihull MBC.)

LIRG future strategy

I hope this note reaches you in time for your weekend retreat. I have sent it by fax and by post so that it arrives with you as soon as possible.

The starting point has to be - why is LIRG <u>needed</u>? What "added value" benefit is gained for individuals by membership of LIRG ("ordinary membership not Committee activism) that they would not have without LIRG membership?

To me, the answer <u>should</u> lie in two areas of activity. One is information (through <u>LIRN</u>) about: research outcomes; research in progress; and research opportunities. The need is not for a refereed research journal nor for an abstracting/indexing service. What is require is a "newsletter" which gives brief details of research activity in a suitably accessible style - say six times a year with occasional "briefing bulletins" between issues if urgent matters (such as news of an important call for proposals) come up. The other is networking: the support of colleagues, including help and advice for newcomers to the LIS research world.

This last point seems to me to be critical. LIRG encourages students to engage in research through awards and prizes. But what is then done to nurture these people and draw them in to the LIS research community? It would be interesting - and possibly salutary - for LIRG to check whether relatively recent entrants to the research world, whether based in a research environment or based in a practising library operation, have joined LIRG? Or would have found an informal "mentoring" network operated by LIRG of value when they started out in research? It seems to me that by offering support and advice to "new" researchers LIRG could fill a gap and "add value" in a way which makes membership of LIRG a worthwhile investment for both "new" and "experienced" research people.

By this means LIRG might also then reach "critical mass" in terms of the percentage of the people active in LIS research (as researchers or commissioners of research) who are LIRG members. Only when a high percentage is reached can LIRG hope to have influence with the bodies that matter: by which I mean BLRDD (will LIRG have a place on ACCORD's successor?), the new Library and Information Commission (not mentioned in your discussion paper but tasked with developing a strategic framework for LIS research), and - from my point of view - the <u>FOLACL Public Library Research Sub Committee</u>.

I haven't yet mentioned events and I believe you are right to suggest that these need to be set within a clear understanding of LIRG's role and added value. If LIRG is about supportive networking, bringing together experienced and novice research people, then has LIRG thought about joint events with the library schools to showcase student research and research in progress (rather like the event Bob Usherwood runs periodically to promote the public library research being undertaken in Sheffield)? If LIRG is about keeping members informed of research in progress - and about supportive networking - then has LIRG thought about joint events with funding bodies to bring together people working in similar or synergistic areas of research activity? If LIRG is about influencing key bodies, then has LIRG thought about a joint event with the Research Sub Committee of the Library and Information Commission (when that Sub Committee is properly established) to discuss the strategic framework for LIS research?

I hope these comments are helpful and I look forward to hearing the outcome of your weekend deliberations in due course. I have copied this letter to Deborah Goodall, as LIRG Secretary, so that she can check the LIRG membership list for relatively recent entrants to the LIS research world.

News

Commission staff were fortunate to be invited to the 1995 British Library Research Lecture, given by Michael Horner on the topic of <u>Information, Technology and the Information Society.</u> Having worked for some prestigious organizations, such as Digital Equipment Corporation and the business school IMD in Lausanne, Switzerland, Horner now has a portfolio career as a researcher, part-time manager and consultant, working on the nature and value of information. This lecture was no less philosophical, thought-provoking and erudite than its predecessors, identifying various key themes, now familiar, such as the information rich and poor....

As the framework of the lecture, we were talked through an impressive range of books on knowledge, information, wisdom and computing, some of which viewed information and information behaviour from a particular perspective or academic discipline such as physics or engineering. One could not help wondering how many people in the hall had read even a few of the works under discussion. Intriguingly, we were said to be in the last quarter of the Information Age, which expires in 2000. What happens then? Perhaps the author will supply a postscript in the printed version, which will be available from BLRDD in due course.

Another interesting event attended by Commission staff was the award of the 1994 LIRG Student Prizes, at City University. (As a reminder, LIRG established these prizes in 1993 to recognize the contribution of student projects to LIS research and to encourage wider dissemination of the findings of exceptional theses and dissertations). Presentations by the Postgraduate Prize Winner, Victoria Manglano (CD-ROM user interface evaluation: the appropriateness of GUIs) and by the Undergraduate Winner, Liz Mackie (Health and safety in the UK offshore oil industry) were preceded by Professors Stephen Robertson and Micheline Beaulieu speaking about the history of research at City and about current work.

Founded by Jason Farradane in 1961, the first funded project had been way back in 1965, the postgraduate only Department being awarded a 5A marking in the 1992 Research Assessment exercise. Its main areas are the management, retrieval and policy of information, but all these areas interact with each other. The presentations over, the <u>LIRN</u> editor having doubled as photographer, the small but select audience partook of wine and nibbles kindly supplied by the hosts.

LIRG Postgraduate Student Prize 1994/5

The Prize entry was entitled <u>CD-ROM user interface evaluation: the appropriateness of GUIs</u> by Victoria Manglano of the City University Department of Information Science.

This was an extremely thorough and painstaking analysis and evaluation of interfaces already developed and being used. This is related to some underlying theory and recommendations are made which should be of immediate and practical value to software designers in this field. The author's understanding and explanation of the context was excellent.

The work was well structured and the sheer weight of evidence and of argument was enormously impressive. Professionally this topic area is one of the most dynamic and relevant for research at the present time, and here we have an important contribution. Not only is the author's research and writing to be commended; the selection of topic and the overall research design were also quite excellent. The next issue of <u>LIRN</u> will contain an article on Victoria's work.

Highly commended was <u>Toward better information support for health workers: a study of the information needs of users of Teaching-aids at Low Cost (TALC) in four African countries,</u> by Patricia Harman of the University of North London.

The research here was excellently presented; it was a fastidious and careful example of standard questionnaire data collection and analysis. It could well serve as a textbook model.

The remaining four entries came from Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool John Moores, and Queens University Belfast. Topics covered were:

CD-ROM versus online information delivery in the academic library;
Knowledge extraction from chemical patents, and automatic abstracts;
Marketing in UK public libraries;
Marketing strategy for a health information unit.

In each there were some excellent features, but there were also weaknesses compared to the best entries of previous years.

To reach the level of distinction inherent in this LIRG competition the research has to show some evidence of original thinking. Picking a topic of current professional interest, following standard procedures and good presentation are not in themselves sufficient. This implies, among other things, an appropriate research design, explicit appreciation of the context for the research, and a good summary of what the research has accomplished.

In practice this means, for the supervisor, a careful review after the literature research and background work. Again, a careful review after the bulk of the work has been written up is needed to ensure a well rounded, balanced and comprehensive written report. Changes of course may be necessary: the research design may need modification in the light of the literature search; the scope of the final report will depend to some extent on the actual results obtained and may require several extra days' work at that stage. In several instances we had the impression that the author had run out of time: the report either looked incomplete, or required further editing.

A common failing is to avoid the more difficult aspects of the research by recommending they be "considered in further research projects". (This failing can be found in some professional consultancy work as well as in student projects!) These matters are frequently the most vital of the nub of the project. At the very least there needs to be some explanation why they could not have been pursued in the project and how such further work would relate to the questions that have been posed.

Over the three years of this prize's existence, it has been noticeable that the research project/dissertation element in a first professional postgraduate qualification varies widely between different universities both in scope and in the time allowed for carrying out the work. The judges' aim has always been to select the best piece of research, which is not necessarily the same as the most extensive project.

For further information on the LIRG Student Prizes please contact Sacha Shaw, Goldsmiths College Library, New Cross, London, SE14 6NW (telephone 0171 919 7158; fax 0181 692 9190; e-mail sacha@gold.ac.uk).

Loughborough University awarded grant for electronic document delivery research

A major project to study options, methods and the management of delivering documents and information to specialist users is to be undertaken by a Loughborough University team based in the Department of Information and Library Studies, and the Department of Computer Studies.

The team has been awarded a grant of £157,500 for Project FIDDO - Focused Investigation of Document Delivery Options - which will run for three years. The grant has been awarded from the Electronic Libraries Programme of the Follett FIGIT Initiative.

The team comprises:

Anne Morris (project coordinator), Eric Davies, Steve Guest and Cliff McKnight.

The principal aim of the project is to provide reliable data on which the library and information community can make informed decisions about the ability of electronic document delivery services to provide timely and economically viable information. The project will seek to examine a range of issues, focusing primarily on economic models of the process and end user human factors issues.

The project entails an analysis of document and article delivery models, including comparative assessment of existing and potential services together with 'traditional modes', evaluation of their impact on library policies and operations, and the response of end users. However, the project will go beyond desk research to testing 'live' situations of document need and supply and analyzing the results.

For its first phase the project will focus on the delivery of engineering documents with four academic libraries collaborating in the study to act as 'test-sites' for document delivery. It is envisaged that the range of subjects and sites will be extended in a second phase. In keeping with the character of the project, output from the study will be disseminated (and updated) electronically as well as by more traditional means.

For further information contact:
J E Davies (Publicity Officer)
Department of Information and Library Studies
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Telephone: 01509 223064
Fax: 01509 223053
e-mail: j.e.davies@lut.ac.uk

Providing environmental information to the public: a Loughborough University research report

The results of a one year study of national voluntary environmental organizations and their users has been released, revealing the importance of the information services being provided, and including details of user satisfaction.

The research was directed by Derek Stephens, a lecturer in the Department of Information and Library Studies, conducted by Paul Eden, Research Assistant and funded by the British Library Research and Development Department. It includes responses from major national environmental voluntary organizations such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and RSPB, plus umbrella organizations such as the Council for Environmental Education (CEE).

The organizations
- 111 organizations estimated that they deal with approximately 590,000 enquiries per year
- 78% reported an increase in the volume of environmental enquiries
- 31% plan to expand their services in 1995

The enquirers
- 94% of surveyed enquirers received information in time for it to be of use
- 82% received the information within 14 days
- 67% asked more than one organization for similar information
- 58% of enquiries in one month to 13 case study organizations came from the educational sector. Secondary school pupils made over 2,000 written enquiries.

For further information contact:

Derek Stephens
Department of Information and Library Studies
Loughborough University
Loughborough   Telephone: (01509) 223080
Leicestershire   Fax: (01509) 223053
LE11 3TU   e-mail: d.p.stephens@lut.ac.uk

Electronic public information seminar attracts a wide following

Over 100 people attended the very successful EPIP '95 seminar held at the Department of Information and Library Studies at Loughborough University on 18 September. The Seminar - the fifth in the annual series - is designed to highlight the newest and best in electronic public information provision and attracts a gathering of representatives from systems and hardware vendors, local and national government, health and community information providers, museums, travel and transport organizations and information and library services.

A variety of attractions were available at this year's event. In addition to several formal presentations there were four workshops on various aspects of the Internet, an exhibition of information systems and equipment and - a novel feature for this year - a Netcafé designed to provide an initiation into the wonders of the World Wide Web in an informal setting.

Goff Sargent, one of the organizers of the Seminar, remarked - "The EPIP series seems to go from strength to strength, as does the interest and activity in using electronic systems to deliver reliable and relevant information to the public."

For further information contact:
J Eric Davies
Department of Information and Library Studies
Loughborough University
Loughborough   Telephone: (01509) 223064
Leicestershire   .   Fax: (01509) 223053
LE11 3TU   e-mail: j.e.davies@lut.ac.uk

Navigating around the curriculum

Finding resources for teaching the school curricula in both Scotland and England will be easier as a result of work being undertaken in the School of Information and Media at The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Following earlier work on a feasibility study of developing a list of Key Terms for the 5-14 Development Programme in Scotland, Kay Wilson and Dorothy Williams have been awarded a further grant by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum to develop a National Curriculum Navigational Map. This will provide a quick reference guide to similarities and differences in major terms used in the curricula of both Scotland and England. This will help teachers and librarians to select relevant material to support teaching, regardless of where in the UK it was published.

For further information contact:

Dr Dorothy Williams
School of Information and Media
The Robert Gordon University
352 King Street
Aberdeen
AB9 2TQ

Telephone: 01224 262953
Fax: 01224 262969
e-mail: d.williams@rgu.ac.uk

European information in public libraries

Are the general public seriously interested in the European Union? Do they have all the information they would like to have?

A study now being undertaken by Rita Marcella and Graeme Baxter, of the School of Information and Media at the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, will investigate the implementation of the Public Information Relay (which provides European information to the general public in public libraries in the United Kingdom) whether it meets the needs of the libraries' users, and the extent to which it meets the needs of the man and woman in the street. The investigation is supported by a grant of £26,000 from the British Library Research and Development Department.

For further information, contact:

Rita Marcella
School of Information and Media
The Robert Gordon University
Hilton Place
Aberdeen
AB9 1FP

Telephone: 01224 283839
Fax: 01224 492608
e-mail: r.marcella@rgu.ac.uk

Reaching beyond the plateau

Promotion opportunities for librarians working in small special libraries usually depend on moving to other organizations, even though they have skills which might be useful to their present employers in other capacities. Jane Farmer, a lecturer in the School of Information and Media at The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, has been awarded a grant of £28,000 by the British Library Research and Development Department to identify librarians' transferable skills. This will be done by using the "learning pairs" technique to explore and analyze the skills of librarians and other professionals to identify skills which could be transferred from one job area to another.

For further information, contact:

Jane Farmer
School of Information and Media
The Robert Gordon University
Hilton Place
Aberdeen
AB9 1FP

Telephone: 01224-283834
Fax: 01224-492608
e-mail: j.farmer@rgu.ac.uk