# News

### Best practice benchmarking in the library and information sector

This research and development project is based at Loughborough University's Department of Information and Library Studies, and is funded by The British Library Research and Development Department.

### Focus

The concept of benchmarking has become significant as the value of quality management principles and practices has been recognized in library and information services, in common with other business and not-for-profit organizations.

The project focuses on the development of benchmarking techniques and adoption of the best of business practice in library and information services.

### Purposes

- to identify current activities and perceptions relating to benchmarking in the academic and industrial library sectors;

- to develop demonstrator projects in order to test techniques and assess the emerging issues for the LIS sector;

- to produce guidelines for library and information services in the implementation of benchmarking techniques;

- to disseminate the results of the project widely through the academic and professional press and also through conference and workshop presentations.

### Methods

Literature search, questionnaire survey and action research.

### Consultants to the project

John Brockman, Ministry of Defence, Headquarters Library Service, London, and Alan Gilchrist, Gavel Consultants.

## Coverage

The questionnaire will be targeted at all UK academic libraries in the HE sector and a sample will be taken from the industrial sector.

## Timescale

The project runs from November 1994 to December 1995.

## Contacts

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## Decision-making in European libraries

The Department of Library and Information Studies at the Manchester Metropolitan University is to coordinate a European consortium to develop a library management decision support module, with a grant of 225,000 Ecus from the Commission of the European Communities.  The DECIMAL [DECIsion-MAking in Libraries] Project will commence in February 1995 and last for two years.

The Project will provide a cross-cultural perspective on decision making in libraries and allow library managers in Europe to identify their requirements for the development of library management systems.  Three European library schools will undertake a programme of collaborative research to investigate the decision-making needs and practices of library managers in a range of organizations. Based on the research findings, Inheritance Systems Ltd will design, develop and implement an integrated decision support module.  The module will integrate with the Heritage management

system and should be adaptable for use with other library systems.

The consortium comprises Inheritance Systems Limited (Oxford, UK), developers of the Heritage library system; the Library at University College, Oxford; the Escola Universitaria de Biblioteconomia i Documentació at the University of Barcelona (Spain); and the Instituto di Biblioteconomia e Paleografia at the University of Parma (Italy). The Project Director is Tony Oulton, Department of Library and Information Studies at the Manchester Metropolitan University.

Further information is available from:

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## Management information needs of academic heads of departments

With funding from the British Library Research and Development Department the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield is currently investigating the management information needs of academic Heads of Department, using a critical success factors approach.

Changing patterns of university financing and current management strategies and styles within universities have increasingly obliged Heads of Department to assume greater managerial responsibilities for human and material resources as well as for traditional academic matters. New styles and patterns of teaching, distance learning, continuing education as well as the increasingly competitive environment for student recruitment and research funding and other resources have accentuated the need for more sophisticated "intelligence" services about potential markets, competitors, sources of support and about technological and other developments.

This one year study (from August 1994) hopes to build on these results of a pilot study carried out by the Department of Information Studies within the University of Sheffield, which identified a wide range of both critical success factors and types of information which the Heads of Department surveyed considered relevant and essential to both their academic and managerial responsibilities [1]. A representative sample of sixteen "old" and "new" universities have been chosen and semi-structured interviews with academic heads, librarians and other information providers within the institutions have been taking place since December 1994.

The Project Supervisors are:

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Francis Greene (F.J.Greene@Sheffield.ac.uk) is the Project Researcher.

## References

1.    Pellow, A and Wilson, T D.  The management information requirements of heads of university departments: a critical success factors approach.  Journal of Information Science 19 (6), 1993, p425-437.

## Help for computer users

More and more people are dependent on using computers, and on the support available from computer helpdesks in their organizations or operated by the producers of software or online database services.  However, little has been done to review expertise in this area, and to identify best practice.

To begin to make good this gap in IT Systems managers' knowledge Rita Marcella and a team from the School of Librarianship and Information Studies at the Robert Gordon University have been awarded a grant of £20,700 by the British Library Research and Development Department to investigate the key factors affecting the effectiveness of computer helpdesks.  Iain Middleton has been appointed as Research Assistant in the project.

For more information contact Rita Marcella at the University, Hilton Place, Aberdeen AB9 1FP (Tel: 01224 283800, Fax 01224 488545).