
Group news

PROJECT TEAM AT HUDDERSFIELD UNIVERSITY WINS DAPHNE CLARK PRIZE

A project team based at Huddersfield University has won the 1998 Daphne Clark Prize. The Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) awards the Prize annually for excellence in practitioner based research. The project team, led by Margaret Weaver, examined the effects of using supplied classification numbers and subject headings on throughput, cost, and subject retrievability of acquisitions. The project used some interesting and novel methodologies for benchmarking processes, analysing scatter, and evaluating subject strings. The Prize was presented to Margaret Weaver on behalf of the team at the AGM of the Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) in Wednesday 17th. March 1999. Other members of the team were Eileen Hiller, Ian Jennings, Jennifer Brook, Heather Moreton, and Elizabeth Jolly. This is the second award of the Prize — the previous winner was Neil Jacobs of Sussex University Library for a study of the use of Internet resources by researchers at the University.

The Prize is worth £250 and is for research by practitioners which has made a useful and timely contribution. Entries are judged each year by a panel made up of members of the Library and Information Research Group. The judging panel looks for evidence of successful innovation based upon sound and transferable research methods. The Prize is intended to encourage the use of sound methodologies in practitioner based library and information research and to encourage wider dissemination of such small studies.

Entries are acceptable from any individuals or staff teams who have conducted practitioner based research. Their employer can also nominate candidates. Entries should consist of a short summary (2000-5000 words) of the research activity, method, and outcomes. This could be the report of the study supplemented by a brief description of how the research was used. Any

sort of research project can be nominated but externally funded projects are not eligible. The research must have been completed within the last two years. Candidates may be required to provide further evidence of the work undertaken (eg working papers, reports, committee papers etc) if required.

Prize winners will be asked to submit a short report describing their research within three months of receiving the Prize - to be published in the Group's journal, *Library & Information Research News* or publicised as considered appropriate by the judging panel. If the research findings have been previously published, then the report submitted for *Library and Information Research News* must demonstrate originality.

The closing date for applications is early January each year. Applications should be sent to Philip Payne, Chair, Library & Information Research Group, Leeds Metropolitan University, Learning Support Services, Calverley Street, Leeds LS1 3HE (telephone 0113 283 5966, fax 0113 283 3123, email P.Payne@LMU.AC.UK)

GROUP'S RESPONSE - L.I.S.U. CONSULTATION

(Readers may wish to look at the reviews of LISU publications in conjunction with this response: they are printed at page 55 - 56. Ed.)

To: British Library Research and Innovation Centre, London

Consultation on the future of the Library and Information Statistics Unit

Thank you for your letter of 9th. October 1998 in which you invite LIRG to comment upon the future of the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) at Loughborough University. The LIRG Committee discussed your letter and the attached position statement at its meeting on 16th. December 1998. Committee members expressed a high regard for the quality of the LISU's work and there was overwhelming support for the continuation of the Unit. LISU's publications and activities are widely valued amongst the library

and information community. The Committee felt that LISU had a remarkably high profile given that the team of staff working for the Unit is so small. It was felt that one of LISU's great strengths was that it drew together statistical data from across all library and information sectors.

The Committee noted that LISU had a high profile both within the UK and abroad. It was felt that it would be possible to build upon its international profile to enable it to develop a more positive leadership role on the international scene. This is particularly relevant in the context of the increasing globalisation of the information industry, but there was some concern as to whether a more international focus might dissipate energies away from the Unit's core business in the UK.

The LIRG Committee felt that LISU's statistical information should be timely, accessible, and easy to use and manipulate. The approach developed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency could be a model for LISU in which statistics are available via their WWW site and be can downloaded for reanalysis. We are concerned that the need to generate income from sales of publications could restrict LISU's ability to make available statistical information electronically even though on-line databases would make available the statistical information to a much larger number of people in the library and information community. The Committee did feel that users of the databases may be willing to pay for access to more extensive data sets if the information was more timely, accessible, easy-to-use, and possible to manipulate. However, the benefits of LISU's work would be more fully realised if there was free access to the databases by policy makers, researchers, practitioners, and students. Students, in particular, should have free access to these databases in order to raise awareness of LISU, to appreciate the value of statistical data sets produced by the Unit, and to benefit from reworking and interpreting some really solid statistical data.

Data collection and analysis need to reflect hybrid library development. Current LISU data sets tend to focus upon more traditional publishing

industries and upon more traditional library use. It was felt that greater emphasis should be placed on electronic publishing and upon the measurement of the use of electronic information services. The MIEL - Management Information for the Electronic Library - study undertaken by CERLIM illustrates the kinds of statistical data which could be collected across the library and information community. We feel that such data is essential for informing strategic policy decisions on electronic services and for guiding policy makers and the information industry on the speed at which information use is moving from print to electronic sources.

The LIRG Committee feels that LISU should concentrate on its core mission of collecting and making available quantitative statistical information and should have clear strategic objectives for its work. However, there is a role for LISU to become more involved in promoting the wide and intelligent use of statistics. This might well lead to a subtitle for LISU as "Statistical Research Information Centre" but we would not be in favour of changing LISU's name which has taken a long time to establish amongst the library and information community.

LIRG would be very interested in working with LISU on joint activities and we propose to initiate contacts with LISU about a possible joint seminar on benchmarking. However, we have concerns about possible duplication of effort if LISU were to develop its programme its workshops and seminars into areas which compete with activities organised by LIRG.

Yours sincerely

Philip Payne,

News & Views

*contributed by Ros Cotton,
February 1999*

Still reeling from the news of their announced absorption into the Library and Information Commission, colleagues at the BL Research and Innovation Centre then had to digest the news that they will form part of a mega museums, galleries and archives quango, to be up and running by April 2000 - a tall order. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is intended to bring about "a more holistic approach on key strategic issues". Despite fears that libraries will be "buried" within the more prominent interests of the other bodies, optimists remain convinced that such a move will raise the profile in the right way. However, there must be some rationalisations as big fish in the currently smaller ponds step aside or are pushed aside to form the more streamlined body.

Information overload no longer a problem?

Following years of living under the threat of information overload, as detailed in Reuters' series of research reports, the latest - *Out of the abyss: surviving the information age* - paints a healthier picture. The 1996 *Dying for Information* described the information overload syndrome, which the Western world is now better able to cope with. Three stages are identified in the new report: Europe, the US and Japan largely coping and increasing in confidence; South-East Asian economies at a "mid-stage"; and Eastern Europe still struggling to access information - with low awareness of how to obtain it. This "pre-information age", not surprisingly, is characterised by low Internet and intranet usage and much higher reliance on printed sources.

In the West the Internet is seen as a solution rather than a problem - 40% of managers saw online information as a burden-easing resource. The bad news is that almost half of the organisations surveyed had no intention of implementing an

information management policy, even though companies that acknowledge the importance of information in this way have reported higher productivity and improved decision making. Further information can be found from the Reuters web site - www.reuters.com.

Boost to professional self-esteem

Following hot on the heels of news that the Government's new social classification scheme (the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification - NS-SEC), that comes into force with the year 2001 Census and places bods such as librarians in the top bracket, is a report in the *Guardian* noting librarianship and information graduates as being the second most immediately employable group - after engineering and technology graduates. So we must be doing something right!

A sense of *deja vu*?

Yes, we were here before - in 1989 when the LA, IIS and Aslib were considering working more closely together. However, the case is more pressing this time because of more recent challenges presented by the Information Society. To maximise professional impact it is hoped that we can take advantage of the proposed new body, set to rise like a phoenix (?) from the ashes of the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists.

Many have felt for some time that we can no longer, if we ever could, afford the luxury of such a specious professional divide between librarians and information scientists. The danger is that we have already lost ground to the IT specialists and such like who have scooped up the new Knowledge Management posts being created at the rate of knots: it may now be too late to recoup this lost territory - especially with a built-in delay necessitated by the consultative process. Responses were due by 15 March so it will be interesting to see, shortly after that, how the members really feel. (*LIRG's response expected in the next number*)

Another consultation

Some interesting responses have emerged to the BLRIC consultative exercise on the future of the Loughborough University based Library and Information Statistics Unit. LIRG's response is printed above. The Library and Information Cooperation Council (LINC), a body much given to responding publicly to things, says "LISU enhances the value of LIS data because, with its knowledge of the sector, it can interpret raw input and output data effectively. LISU's invaluable contribution is to create transparency and clarity, essential features in the increasingly dominant world of benchmarking".

Within current resources any expansion of activities would clearly be difficult. While LISU has already tackled special libraries in two projects, there is a feeling that LISU would be even more highly thought of if it could collect more regular data. Admittedly this is a notoriously difficult area to tackle because of the sector's diversity .

LINC's good ideas for additional activities include statistical analysis of Web activity (e.g. comparisons and end-user surveys), work on Public Library Plans, support for or partnership in Lottery projects, and "international profiling" such as data on work undertaken for the European Union. Just think, within time, we could have LISU's rankings of public library plans, and league tables of winners in the European funding stakes: the public availability of such data could concentrate minds wonderfully.

European matters

After months of wrangling over budgets between the European Union's Parliament and Council, which threatened a break in EU research funding, agreement was reached on 22 December. Those who seriously feared permanent disagreement between these august bodies can breathe again. The overall budget of 14,960 million euros (this machine can't reproduce the symbol!) is a 4.6% rise on the 4th Framework budget, and what's more, much-criticised Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Edith Cresson, has forecast " a

different spirit" this time round, though quite was meant by this is unclear.

(Speaking of the euro, BBC2's Money Programme carried out a survey on the public's awareness, which was at a low level, and found that no one recognised the euro symbol.)

The Commission has also produced its first *Status Report - Towards a Sustainable Information Society*, which aims to present the achievements and information emanating from RTD projects and assess their political impact and economic and social implications. This vital reading can be found at

<http://www.uk.infowin.org/ACTS/ANALYSIS/GENERAL/ACTS98/>

More on metadata

Just as we must all be sick of hearing about metadata OCLC announces a new research project to automate cataloguing of Internet resources. It will be a sizeable project: OCLC is looking for cooperation from libraries throughout the world, also from bodies up against the same issues, like museums, archives and publishers. A major problem the project is hoping to tackle is the need for organisations to create multiple links from their own pages, with rapid growth of pages and links making this task increasingly unmanageable. CORC - the Co-operative Online Resource Catalog - will create, over the 12-18 months of its duration, a shared system to facilitate link selection and maintenance, and hopes to provide added value from its global coverage, since at present many metadata projects are European.

Meanwhile, information consultant Chris Armstrong, writing in *Information World Review*, laments the ignored potential of metadata. He reckons that it is not used more because Web publishers are not convinced of its usefulness, whereas it should be possible to search the Web by use of descriptors. He suggests that the quality of information retrieval from the Web would be greatly improved if search engines ignored any site without a small core of metadata.