E-LIB : an evaluation
- a report on a talk by John Kelleher of the Tavistock Institute Evaluation Development and Review Unit

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Background and context for the e-lib programme

The Follett report and the role of JISC. The funding crisis resulting from the increase in student numbers with no increase in funding. The continual challenge to innovate.

- Less money for research and innovation at a time when the pressure for that research and innovation is greater than ever. New possibilities using new technology as well as pressures on funding traditional resources.

- The emerging role for JISC in meeting the challenge of its perceived role for IT innovation in HE.

- Limited funds for the programme - £15m over 60 projects - to set up new initiatives, services, programmes, which must then either find other funding or close down.

- Emphasis on value for money.

- Programme is about creating the future and the development of practical knowledge. Expected to have catalytic and mobilisation effects. Training people in the management and practicalities of running new systems and software. Developing the human resources to deal with the new technologies.

- Also concerned with changing behaviour, learning through action, and openness and transparency in experimentation. Favoured a dispersed model to maximise contact and influence with the wider community. Deliberate decision to have 60 projects with low funding, rather than a few well funded projects (cf D-lib in the USA). (Technical and managerial problems would have been less with a few well funded strategic projects.)

The role of evaluation

- Formative evaluation to study the development of individual projects through continuous feedback on organisation and technical systems.

- To capture and disseminate learning.

- For legitimacy and accountability.

- For feedback to programme management to influence successive phases and projects and future JISC programmes.

Formative evaluation

- Evaluation has been decentralised and based around project self evaluation. The emphasis is on the value of learning feeding back into project decision making. Annual reports talk about learning and the resulting modification of the work of the project. Each project has its own website. A synthesis of the second year reports is now underway. The e-lib website has the syntheses of project evaluation reports. Evaluation has not been part of HE culture (other than in curriculum development and teaching). Therefore there has been a need for workshops to teach and advise projects about designing their evaluation strategy, and to give ongoing technical support.

- Policy mapping and final evaluation of the programme will be done by another external evaluator.

Effects of evaluation to date

- It has helped transparency.

- It has introduced a learning perspective into project innovation.

- Technically the evaluation work is still patchy but people are learning by doing. This will need to be revisited and re-examined.

Problems which have been identified

- Evidence of poor project management which needs to be addressed.

- The absence of systems development standards and procedures in HE generally.

- Inadequacies in user centred design where much needs to be learned and improved upon.

- The need for resources for training researchers.

  Other observations

- e-lib can be seen as a mass vocational education exercise. The new skills and attitudes gained will spread.

- How will the relationship develop between the projects and innovation and the individual institutions?

- This research raises more questions than it answers, for example in the profound implications that electronic journals will have for scholarly communication. The discourse of scholarly communication will be changed by electronic communication and this will differ between disciplines, but we donít know how.

General conclusions

- **Relationships for HE:** to FE (Dearing); the role of the HE library at regional level; public libraries/British Library/HE libraries; with

lifelong learning, adult continuing education, postgraduate education and training, the "University for Industry" proposals.

HE library strategies in the future

- Larger experiments. Hybrid libraries on a regional basis. What does the electronic library look like in reality? Need to map out possibilities.

- Revolution in teaching and learning. Use of electronic resources in teaching is tiny at present. Curriculum and curriculum development in HE. Pressure to change and reform eg through TQA.

- Radical changes for scholarly research resulting from the dynamic capacity of electronic communication.

• Practical possibilities for the future

- Need for minimum standards for the management of innovation

- More need for classic external evaluation of services

- Shift of innovation to individual HEIs.

- What are the implications of more targeting of innovations?

- Developing institutional capacity for learning through innovation and change.