
SCONUL Access

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As readers of *SCONUL Focus* will be aware, SCONUL's access schemes, in particular SCONUL Research Extra and UK Libraries Plus, are now being managed by a new Access Steering Group. The Access Steering Group, established in 2006, stems from the SCONUL Executive Board's strategic review of the organisation and the work of the Task and Finish Group on Access, one of the aims of which was to oversee the operation of SCONUL access schemes and to integrate existing co-operative schemes within an overarching management framework. The initiative from UK Libraries Plus to align itself more closely with SCONUL was undoubtedly a catalyst.

The groundwork for moving the agenda forward was undertaken by a small group representing both SCONUL Research Extra and UK Libraries Plus, chaired by the SCONUL Secretary. The idea was very much not to determine in advance what the schemes would look like, but rather to put in place the means of taking them into the future. The following had been put in place by August 2006 when SCONUL Research Extra and UK Libraries Plus began to be administered formally as SCONUL Access:

- 1 an agreed constitution for SCONUL Access
- 2 a management group, comprising three members appointed by the SCONUL Executive Board, and four members elected by member institutions
- 3 administrative support for the day-to-day running of access arrangements provided by Susan Baker (susanb@clayworthsj.demon.co.uk) and Maria Hiscoe (m.hiscoe@netcomuk.co.uk), who already had close involvement with the existing schemes.

The key task of the group is to manage SCONUL's access agenda for the future and, given the various barriers which stand in the way of library users, this is a challenging task.

The overriding objective has to be to make libraries welcoming and accessible places for everyone, with the least possible fuss. Our ambition is to make SCONUL Access fully inclusive, without exceptions. We need a simple scheme that is intuitive for users and library staff alike, takes the user's perspective and avoids confusion. The group is actively investigating how IT can be used much more than at present to facilitate access and deliver what is needed – a sophisticated access website should make access easier for everyone, letting us dispense in due course with paper forms, signatures and so on. Inevitably there will emerge a new brand, but this needs to be one that recognises the achievements of the past, especially the practitioner-led approach of UK Libraries Plus, and also one that moves things forward in a properly user-focused way.

In the coming months, SCONUL libraries and their access representatives can expect to hear much more of our plans for SCONUL Access. There has been much discussion of the structure of the access scheme, the statistics required for the management of the scheme and a supporting website. Information on the current SCONUL website relating to access is also developing (see <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/groups/access/> for details). There will be a good opportunity to learn about future directions at the annual meeting for library representatives that is being held at the University of Leeds on 11 June 2007. Meanwhile, our administrators will also be in touch to provide further information about SCONUL Access and to obtain feedback on proposals for the future. Let us have your input and views and help make SCONUL Access serve our library users even more effectively than before.