

A good year for the RIN



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The Research Information Network (RIN) had a good 2008, with a number of new projects getting off the ground and new reports published. We also hosted a number of our own events, and were invited to a variety of exciting research information conferences in the UK and overseas.

For those who haven't yet heard of us, the RIN was established in 2005 by the higher education funding councils, the research councils and the national libraries in the UK. We investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of the information services provided for the UK research community, how they are changing and how they might be improved for the future. We help ensure that researchers in the UK benefit from world-leading information services, so that they can sustain their position among the most successful and productive researchers in the world.

The RIN team has now grown from four staff members to eight, with the appointments of a new partnerships and liaison officer (Branwen Hide), a research officer (Aaron Griffiths) and myself as communications officer, as well as a team administrator, Catherine Gray. We also have a new PA to the Director, Charlotte Briggs. You can find out more about us at www.rin.ac.uk/taxonomy/term/35.

The focus for our projects over the next few years will be on collaboration and our three strategic priorities: developing the evidence base; providing authoritative advice and guidance; and promoting change. We will also be working hard to ensure the effective dissemination of our projects, targeted at relevant key organisations and groups, and to continue building our relationships with researchers, institutions, funders and others. We have produced a new booklet that outlines our key priorities and provides an introduction to the RIN. It's available on our website at www.rin.ac.uk.

[ac.uk/about](http://www.rin.ac.uk/about) or you can request hard copies by e-mailing me.

Our projects during 2008 have looked at researchers' behaviour in terms of how they use, search for and find information resources, analysing the economics of the scholarly communications system and how it is changing and its impact on researchers and institutions. We also looked at how the growth of digital information is affecting the research processes and how to ensure that high-quality digital information resources continue to be identifiable and easy to access for researchers. Some of our main projects during 2008 included those listed below.

research information network
Mind the skills gap
Information-handling training for researchers
July 2008
Research Information Network briefing www.rin.ac.uk

‘...research information skills and competencies have not kept pace with rapid change.’

The Research Information Network's (RIN) report, *Mind the Skills Gap: Information-handling training for researchers* (July 2008) finds that training for researchers on information seeking and management is uncoordinated and generally not based on any systematic assessment of needs.

The report focuses on the nature, extent and organisation of the information-related training for researchers that is provided by universities and other higher education institutions. It looks at the roles that librarians and other information specialists play and how the training they provide fits with the wider provision of generic training for researchers.

Developing the personal, professional and career management skills of researchers is currently high on the agenda in the UK's higher education sector. Over the last few years, researchers have enthusiastically embraced new technologies and services that allow them to discover, locate, gain access to and create information resources on their desktops.

In embracing the new opportunities presented by online resources, many researchers have acquired a range of new skills. But librarians and information professionals say that many researchers display alarming deficits in their skills and in their understanding of the new online information environment.

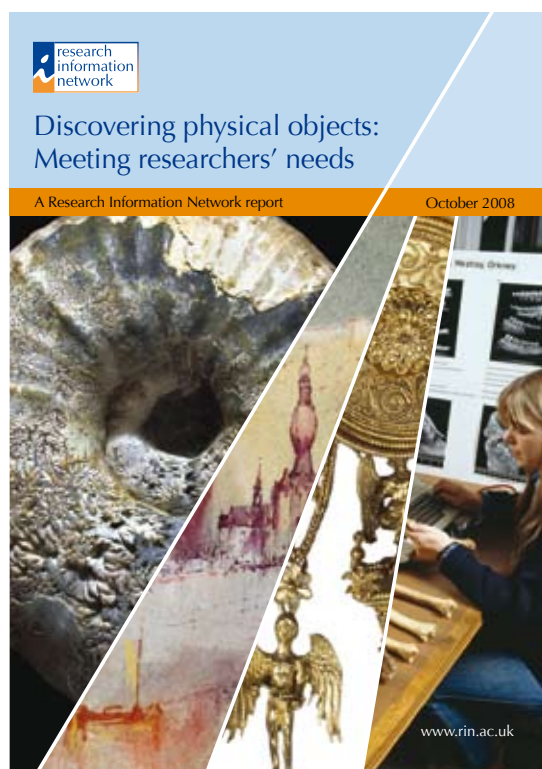
This raises important questions about how researchers acquire the appropriate skills in discovering and handling research information resources and services, the training opportunities provided for them, and the take-up of those opportunities.

You can download the executive summary and the full report at www.rin.ac.uk/training-research-info. The key findings and recommendations are listed overleaf.

Minding the skills gap: developing researchers' skills

The findings from our research into the quality and impact of training in research information methods and the tools provided for researchers by higher education institutions and other agencies found that training for researchers is uncoordinated and generally not based on any systematic assessment of need. Our report, *Mind the skills gap: information-handling training for researchers*, was published in July 2008 and we held an event in Leeds in September 2008 to discuss its recommendations. It was well attended by librarians, representatives from the Vitae hubs (formerly UK Grad), academic team managers and research development officers. Dr Iain Cameron (head, research careers and diversity unit at Research Councils UK) and Janet Metcalfe (director of Vitae) spoke about the current situation and possible solutions for moving forward. We shall

follow this up during 2009 by discussion with the key stakeholders on devising an action plan in response to the report's recommendations.



Researchers' access to objects and artefacts
Collections of objects and artefacts – whether ceramics or shoes, geological or botanic specimens – are important resources for researchers in many subject areas. However, access to these objects, and even to information about them, is often difficult because they may not be catalogued, and even when they are they are not always available to the public and in a lot of cases are not available online. Our report *Discovering physical objects: meeting researchers' needs* (October 2008) looks at how discovery services for objects and artefacts in museums and galleries might be improved to help researchers more readily find the collections that are relevant to their research (www.rin.ac.uk/objects).

The findings suggest that researchers want online finding aids to be available as soon as possible (even if records are incomplete, or considered to be less than 'perfect') and that a number of museums' perceived barriers to getting their collections online could be overcome through collaboration, by sharing expertise and with support from organisations like the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and Collections Trust. Following initial discussions with stakeholders in this sector that are planned for early in 2009, the RIN proposes to hold an event during the spring

to bring interested parties together and to discuss ways forward.

SHARING AND PUBLISHING DATA: IS IT A GOOD THING?

There are two essential reasons for making research data publicly available: to make them part of the scholarly record, which can be validated and tested, and to make them available for re-use by others in new research projects. Our report *To share or not to share: publication and quality assurance of research outputs* (June 2008), produced with support from JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) and the Natural Environment Research Council, focuses on why and how researchers make their research data available to others and the issues they encounter when doing so. The findings show that, in spite of policy developments by research funders, these are not always being followed up in practice, and that datasets of potential value (and especially those from small-scale projects) are not managed effectively or made accessible or re-usable. There is a need for greater clarity about the kinds of data that are of sufficient value to be preserved and shared – raw data or processed, derived or reduced datasets – and about the forms in which they should be curated and shared.

COMMUNICATING RESEARCH – WHAT DOES IT COST AND WHO PAYS?

There is a lack of reliable evidence about key features of the scholarly communications system and of what it actually costs the different groups involved in the process. Our report *Activities, costs and funding flows in the scholarly communications system* (May 2008) investigates the costs associated with producing, publishing, distributing and providing access to scholarly journal articles, the cash and non-cash costs involved and how these costs are met. To calculate these costs and look at how changes to the system might impact on the figures, we produced an economic model and focused on four key scenarios – electronic-only publishing, author-side payments for open access, cash payments for peer review and annual increases in research funding – and we came up with some interesting results. Read the full report and discover some surprising figures in terms of the costs incurred by libraries in terms of acquisition budgets in relation to the costs of the scholarly communications process as a whole.¹



In November 2008 we produced a guidance booklet, *Ensuring a bright future for research libraries: a guide for vice-chancellors and senior institutional managers*, which aims to ensure that library and information services keep pace with the evolving needs of researchers. Written by a working group set up to take forward the findings and conclusions from the RIN and RLUK's (Research Libraries UK) earlier report on *Researchers' use of academic libraries and their services* (April 2007), the guide is set in the context of the fundamental changes that digital technologies and online information resources are bringing both to the ways in which research is done and to what researchers expect from library and information services. It offers a framework of six key areas to focus on and encourages senior managers to share good practice (some examples are available on our website; see below) and to ensure that their research information services develop effectively.

RIN OUT AND ABOUT

We were delighted to be asked to speak at a number of high-profile events in 2008, including presentations given in October by the RIN's director, Michael Jubb, at the first RLUK conference, 'The power of knowledge'; at the annual conference of the International Association of STM Publishers in Frankfurt; and also at 'The best of times the worst of times' at the annual Charleston conference in the USA and the 'UK Evaluation Forum', both held in November.

We also organised a number of our own events to promote our research work and reports, to raise debates and encourage key stakeholders to take our recommendations forward. These included 'What does it cost and who pays? Scholarly communications globally and in the UK' in December; joint Digital Curation Centre/RIN workshops on data management in March and November; and an expert workshop, 'World class research needs world class information resources', focusing on the UK's five centres for language-based area studies in December.

We also held our first event specifically for researchers in September 2008, called 'Researchers' use of freedom of information', demonstrating how the Freedom of Information Act can be used as a research tool. We produced a podcast offering highlights of this event for those who couldn't attend.² We plan to hold more events in 2009 to take forward the findings and recommendations of our new projects.³

WHAT'S NEXT: PROJECTS FOR 2009

A number of new RIN completed projects will be published during 2009 and some new projects will be getting off the ground.

Projects to be published during 2009 include: a study on the production and dissemination on bibliographic data, to map and identify the current arrangements for creating records and to recommend how the current process might be simplified and improved through better coordination. A project on the use and relevance of Web 2.0 to researchers across different disciplines, which will explore the implications of this new technology for scholarly communications, will try to find out why researchers do or don't use these tools and what the implications might be for institutions, librarians, information professionals and funders.

Later in the year, we will publish a report on how researchers use, manage and create information of different kinds as part of their research methodologies. This project will look at getting an in-depth understanding of how researchers work in practice in different contexts and settings and with different types of information resources. Working in collaboration with JISC, we will be looking at the motivations, incentives and constraints that lead researchers in the UK in different subjects and disciplines to publish and disseminate the results of their work in different ways; at how and why they cite other researchers' work;

and at whether and how their decisions on publication and citation are influenced by considerations arising from research assessment. The RIN has also commissioned the centre for information behaviour and the value of research (CIBER) at UCL to do an analysis of the information-seeking behaviour of and the use of journals and journal articles by academic researchers in the UK, and the resulting findings will be published during 2009.⁴



KEEP IN TOUCH

If you want to keep up to date with our work, sign up to our monthly e-newsletter, which also features news from about general research information issues, events and new resources and publications of interest. To register, e-mail info@rin.ac.uk with the words 'e-news subscribe' in the subject heading.

Our blog continues to be a well-visited part of our website and we post regular updates on key issues and events taking place in the research information world; have a read at www.rin.ac.uk/team-blog. Our website was set up in 2005 when the RIN came into being, so we plan to re-launch the site in 2009, to make the content and design more accessible and contemporary. We'd welcome any comments or suggestions you have about our work, the website or any issues more generally; do get in touch.

REFERENCES

- 1 All of our reports are available on our website at www.rin.ac.uk/rin-activities-projects
- 2 See www.rin.ac.uk/foi-workshop
- 3 Sign up to our e-news to be kept informed (see below) or keep an eye on our website at www.rin.ac.uk/events-menu
- 4 More new projects will begin during 2009; you can find out information about our latest work at www.rin.ac.uk/rin-activities-projects