Implementing a coordinated and strategic approach to Library and Information Science research: the work of the UK Library and Information Science Research Coalition

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Abstract

In recent years there has been growing recognition amongst the UK library and information profession of a need for a co-ordinated and strategic approach to Library and Information Science (LIS) research. Therefore in March 2009 the British Library (BL), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Research Information Network (RIN) signed a memorandum of understanding to invest in a new Coalition: the Library and Information Science Research Coalition. The implementation of the Coalition's plans began in earnest in August 2009 with the appointment of an Executive Secretary to work two days a week on its behalf.

In this paper we reflect on the early achievements of the LIS Research Coalition with reference to its efforts to provide a formal structure to improve access to LIS research in the UK, and to maximise its relevance and impact. We will also discuss progress on specific aims related to:

1. bringing together information about LIS research opportunities;
2. encouraging dialogue between research funders;
3. promoting LIS practitioner research and the translation of research outcomes into practice;
4. articulating a strategic approach to LIS research;
5. promoting the development of research capacity in LIS.

We also explore the Coalition's strategies for fostering an interest in LIS research amongst the practitioner community. The objective is to help practising librarians apply the outcomes of earlier studies routinely in the workplace, and also to encourage a greater proportion of practitioners to undertake research themselves. Means of building an evidence base dedicated to demonstrating the value and impact of library and information services are also considered in the paper.

1. Introduction

This paper presents an overview of the work of the Library and Information Science (LIS) Research Coalition. It details the background work from 2006 that eventually led to the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the five founding members in March

2009, and the appointment of Dr Hazel Hall to lead the implementation in August of the same year. Taking into account the broad mission of the Coalition and each of its specific aims, the paper then evaluates the Coalition's achievements to date. Attention is then focused on the priorities of the LIS Research Coalition for 2010/11 with particular reference to the strengthening of the infrastructure to support UK LIS researchers, the growth of an evidence base on the value and impact of library and information services, and the need for further investment in the Library and Information Science Research Coalition to assure its sustainability.

2. Establishing the LIS Research Coalition: 2006-2009

The history of the LIS Research Coalition dates back to late 2006. Some 60 delegates attended an invitation-only workshop held at the British Library on 27 November 2006 in memory of Brian Perry, Director of the British Library's Research and Development Department, 1984-1995. The workshop looked back at the research landscape funded and sponsored by the former British Library Research and Development Department and by the Library and Information Commission, and also considered the future for library and information science (LIS) research in the UK. The papers stimulated a lively debate and delegates identified a number of research themes and pointers for the future. The proceedings were published as a special edition of *Library and Information Research*[1] . The outcomes of the workshop suggested there was a need for a real or a virtual structure which would enable the organisation, co-ordination and implementation of strategic LIS research in the UK. Such a structure would also enable access to the information by the LIS profession. This in turn would engender more confidence that any research activity associated with the profession would be available in an understandable and useable way. The organising committee reviewed the outputs from the day and proposed a way forward for discussion.

Outlines of three models for a coalition were drawn up[2] and the committee consulted with a range of key stakeholders over the summer and autumn of 2007. Discussion focused on (1) how best to engage with the agenda, and (2) the desirability and practicality of establishing a coalition to provide support for research in library, archive and information science.

A second workshop for stakeholders was held at Universities UK in London on 30th November 2007 to review the work of the committee. Delegates supported the establishment of formal organisation, and agreed that an Implementation Group should be convened with the objective of establishing a coalition. Following further work in 2008, including the publication of a paper[3] that summarised the progress to date, the Library and Information Science Research Coalition was formally established on 2nd March 2009. The five founding organisations were:

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[1] 2007, volume 31, issue 97.

[2] These are accessible from http://lisresearchcoalition.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/threemodels.pdf

[3] Kenna, S. (2008). Towards a coalition for research in library, archive and information science, *Library and Information Research, 32*(100), 3-9

1. the British Library (BL) - the national library of the UK
2. the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – the main UK professional body for librarians and information scientists
3. the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) – the public body responsible for promoting best practice and innovation in museums, libraries and archives in the UK.
4. the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) – a public-funded body that provides leadership in innovative use of ICT to support education and research in further and higher education across the UK.
5. the Research Information Network (RIN) – a UK policy unit that focuses on understanding and promoting the information needs of researchers.

Work on implementing the plans of the LIS Research Coalition began in earnest in August 2009 when Dr Hazel Hall became the Coalition's first appointment. Dr Hall was seconded part-time two days a week to the Coalition from her main role as Director of the Centre for Social Informatics at Edinburgh Napier University, initially for one year, to the end of July 2010.

3. Facilitating a co-ordinated and strategic approach to LIS research across the UK

The Coalition's broad mission is to provide a formal structure to improve access to LIS research in the UK, and to maximise its relevance and impact. More specifically, it aims to:

1. bring together information about LIS research opportunities;
2. encourage dialogue between research funders;
3. promote LIS practitioner research and the translation of research outcomes into practice;
4. articulate a strategic approach to LIS research;
5. promote the development of research capacity in LIS.

These aims relate to a number of issues that currently face LIS research in the UK. For example, in recent years there have been concerns about a range of issues including:

- the quality and standing of LIS research;
- the limited range of research methodologies and techniques deployed in LIS research;
- distance between LIS researchers, and between LIS researchers and researchers in other domains;
- the failure of LIS research endeavours to feed into practice and policy development to inform future research strategy and investment;
- the lack of an evidence base on which the value and impact of library and information services can be assessed.

The Coalition has identified various ways to achieve its mission and since August 2009 considerable progress has been made in achieving the ambition of the newly-formed organisation.

3.1 The Coalition's online presence

Much of the Coalition's work to date has been facilitated by the its online presence. An early priority was to develop a web site as a source of information about the Coalition, and about LIS research. The Coalition web site[4] was formally launched in the first week of September 2009. At the same time that the web site was developed a Twitter newsfeed was set up from the account @LISResearch.

The web site has grown steadily over the months and now serves as a popular resource on the work of the Coalition, as well as a reference tool for those interested in LIS research. Alongside details of the Coalition's history, members, contact details and conference, it provides, for example, links to LIS research events and events listings, funding sources, UK networks associated with LIS research, and UK-based LIS research centres. The web site also hosts the LIS Research Coalition's blog, where news stories related to the Coalition and LIS research are posted by both the Coalition and occasional guest bloggers. The web site currently attracts over 1000 hits per month. A significant proportion of visitors to the site are from beyond the UK.

The Twitter feed at @LISResearch provides regular short news alerts of interest to LIS researchers. These alerts cover details of research projects from the earliest stages - such as calls for proposals - to final publication of results, as well as research opportunities ranging from advertised PhD places to vacancies on high level research-related bodies and committees. Output that shows references to funding calls, studentships, research-related LIS job vacancies, news of new publications, training events, calls for papers, prizes, forthcoming conferences etc. can be seen at http://www.twitter.com/LISResearch. Members of the international LIS research community follow @LISResearch from their own Twitter accounts, or subscribe to the service using RSS. The value of the Twitter newsfeed is evident in the degree of retweeting of content, the number of lists to which @LISResearch has been added by the community of LIS Twitter users, and requests from LIS research community members for @LISResearch to tweet their news or requests for help with research projects .

As well as the core online services of the web site and the Twitter, the Coalition also maintains a Slideshare account at http://www.slideshare.net/LISResearch from which all external presentations may be accessed. The Coalition also subscribes to a number of other services to provide infrastructure for its online presence, such as bit.ly and hashtag.com.

3.2 Face-to-face engagement

The Coalition has recognised that some messages are best delivered in a face-to-face environment, particularly those related to advocacy. Thus the third of the aims noted in section 3 above - to promote LIS practitioner research and the translation of research outcomes into practice – has largely been addressed to date by a number of formal

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[4] http://lisresearch.org

presentations to LIS professionals[5]. Here audience members are urged to engage in practitioner research, both as consumers and producers. Those who are active researchers are encouraged to ensure that they publish their output so that the rest of the LIS community can access the findings and use them as a basis for improved practice. Such audiences have included academic librarians at the autumn conference of the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) on 17th November 2009, and health librarians at a meeting of the HEALER (Health Information and Libraries for Evaluation and Research) network on March 18th 2010. Mixed audiences have also attended presentations at events where the Coalition has played an active role. These include major conferences such as the Online conference[6] held annually at London Olympia and branch meetings of CILIP.

3.3. Media coverage and publications

The efforts to develop the Coalition's online presence as an information hub for LIS researchers, in combination with the advocacy work undertaken in face-to-face environments, have attracted considerable media interest. As well as coverage in LIS publications - from full feature interviews with Hazel Hall in print, online and podcast format to news reports of the Coalition's activities - the Coalition has been mentioned in a national UK press, including citations in *Times Higher Education*, the leading UK publication on higher education. Details are given on the Media Coverage page[7] on the Coalition web site. The Coalition also contributes to the academic research literature with submissions to international peer-reviewed publications. For example, Hazel Hall wrote an invited guest editorial[8] for the June 2010 issue of the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. It is anticipated that media attention and publications in the academic literature will help the Coalition succeed in its goal of pushing LIS research further up the agenda of the UK LIS community, particularly amongst practitioner colleagues. Longer term it is hoped that this work will result in an improvement in the volume and quality of practitioner research, and the translation of this future research output into practice. Ultimately the research completed should also inform the development of future UK LIS research strategy.

3.4 Conference, meetings and seminar programme, and associated web resources

To further support practitioner researcher ambitions the Coalition has planned a number of initiatives that it hopes will bear fruit in the second year of its implementation. These respond primarily to the fifth aim (listed in section 3 above) of promoting the development of research capacity in LIS. The most significant of the activities planned relates to the establishment of a programme of meetings that will bring LIS researchers from a range of backgrounds together in a new sustainable network with researchers from other disciplines.

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[5] All presentations are accessible from http://www.slideshare.net/LISResearch.
[6] http://www.online-information.co.uk
[7] http://lisresearch.org/news/press-coverage/
[8] Hall, H. (2010). Promoting the priorities of practitioner research engagement. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *42*(2).

Should the Coalition be successful is winning funding for this[9], a 20 month programme in 2011/12 will provide opportunities for sharing and exploring good practice and experience of appropriate methodologies and techniques for undertaking LIS research, as well as address current challenges that face LIS research in the UK. These relate to:

- building capacity and capability in the development of innovative methodologies and techniques in undertaking LIS research;
- raising the quality and standards of research training and practice in LIS;
- establishing a foundation for long-term collaborations across LIS and related sectors;
- enhancing the value and impact of LIS research with particular reference to policy development, improved services provision;
- informing the future LIS research agenda for investment.

Other smaller-scale activities planned for the Coalition's second year include: (1) a one-day seminar with journal editors and editorial board members focused on encouraging the dissemination of research results in the LIS literature: (2) the creation of a "practitioner researcher starter" kit as a set of links from a new page on the Coalition web site; and (3) the development of a facility for user generated content on the Coalition web site in the form of a wiki where individuals may contribute brief details of current research projects. The one-day seminar on dissemination intends to address the problem of under-exploitation of LIS research in cases where output becomes trapped within an institution or sector, and the habit of individual institutions to tend to focus solely on local research output in their planning activities. If practitioner researchers can be encouraged to disseminate their research findings more widely others will have the opportunity to take advantage of them in their own work, and there will thus be a greater likelihood of key messages reach the level of strategy development. It is anticipated that the seeds for the wiki will have been sown at the LIS Research Coalition's conference[10] "Evidence, value and impact: the LIS landscape in 2010" at the British Library on Monday June 28th 2010. Here the argument that much LIS research largely goes unnoticed beyond institutional and/or sectoral boundaries will become manifest as delegates discuss their research priorities, and the creation of a simple user-generated web page as a location for recording high level details on on-going projects post-conference (for delegates and non-delegates alike) will become an attractive proposition.

3.5 Engagement in higher level dialogues

The second aim listed in section 3 above relates to furnishing opportunities for funders of LIS research to engage in dialogue. The founding members of the LIS Research Coalition represent five of the main funders of LIS research in the UK, and the regular contact of their representatives at Coalition Board of Director meetings prompts discussion of issues related to LIS research. Further opportunities present themselves for funders to come together alongside other stakeholders, such as Coalition-organised conferences and events. As well as their representatives communicating with one another, the Coalition member

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[9] At the time of writing a bid for funding is under consideration with the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).
[10] http://lisresearch.org/conference-2010/

organisations are able to contribute to higher level discussions of the LIS research landscape through consultations with other external parties. The most significant work of this nature in 2009/10 was the Coalition's response[11] to the Higher Education Funding Council for England's consultation on the proposals for future assessment of research output in the form of the Research Excellence Framework. Such activity also contributes to the Coalition's aim to devise a strategic approach to LIS research in the UK.

4. LIS Research Coalition priorities into 2010/11: the infrastructure, the evidence base and sustainability

It has been demonstrated above that much of the work of the Coalition relates to scaffolding the UK LIS research environment to strengthen the quality and impact of LIS research that is currently undertaken. Equally important is the need to promote and foster sustained interest in LIS research amongst LIS professionals who do not currently conduct (or in some cases even *use*) research in their daily work. Awareness of the resources provided by the LIS Research Coalition may address some of the complaints of aspiring LIS researchers such as:

- confusion over how to navigate funding infrastructures (for example, due to the number of funding bodies and differing requirements as far as proposal writing and submission are concerned);
- difficulties in negotiating working practices with mentors and partners;
- lack of research skills (sometimes more a case of lack of *recognition* of research skills);
- struggling to fit research work into demanding job roles that involve competing – and often more obviously pressing – service priorities;
- lack of time to develop the output of small-scale projects into a format for publication;
- few obvious channels of communication through which to influence the future research agenda.

If the Coalition is successful in encouraging a larger body of research-aware professionals to capitalise on the infrastructure that it has built, then there is great potential for the knowledge base of the LIS profession to be enhanced. It will be both enlarged and more intensively exploited, not least due to the engagement of a fresh cohort of practitioner researchers receptive to the idea of research as a core component of the role of librarian.

In the longer term the Coalition will need to turn its attention to assessing the impact of these efforts at the level of the profession. For example, it is anticipated that the proportion of practitioner researcher submissions to peer-reviewed journals will grow as a consequence of the activities related to encouraging the wider dissemination of in-house or sectoral research output. The direct impact of the Coalition's work on end-user services

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[11] http://lisresearchcoalition.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/lis_research_coalition_ref_response.pdf

delivery will be more difficult to measure. However, this should still feature in future work plans.

In tandem with this, the Coalition has identified a number of research themes of relevance to all LIS sectors that clearly merit investigation. Broad research questions may relate to a wide range of topics where there are perceived gaps in knowledge, for example: the long-term effects of digitisation on library and information services provision; means of generating and sustaining community engagement; services development in an environment where mobile devices become the preferred platform for information delivery; challenges of serving increasingly diverse user groups; future roles of LIS staff; perceptions of Google as a cost-free replacement for libraries etc. Above all these, however, the need to develop a strong evidence base that can be used to demonstrate the value and impact of library and information services has been identified as the priority area. The LIS Research Coalition therefore intends to put resources into addressing this particular topic ahead all of other possible research themes. A starting point for this focus will be the commissioning of a literature review on value and impact of LIS. From this it will be possible to assess what is already known about the value and impact of library and information services, and how this message can be translated for a range of audiences from the general public to policy makers. This theme has been prioritised on the basis that without easy access to such an evidence base, library and information services are rendered vulnerable to cost-cutting exercises. Funders will protect units where contributions to organisational objectives and the bottom line are more clearly articulated, not least as demonstration of accountability for their own decisions.

Alongside the provision of a research infrastructure for LIS researchers, and building the evidence base on the value and impact of library and information services, the Coalition's own sustainability is a third priority area as it enters the second year of its implementation. It has been demonstrated above that much has been achieved in the early months of the Coalition, especially when it is considered that its sole employee is contracted part-time just two days a week. As the profile of the Coalition grows, however, demands on its resources increase. If the Coalition is to meet raised expectations of an enlarged UK LIS research community, then it needs to encourage further stakeholder organisations to invest in its work. In March 2010 the Coalition was delighted to welcome the National Health Services' Strategic Health Authority Library Leads (SHALL) group as an associate member, and at the time of writing other bodies are considering membership. In its second year the Coalition needs to convert organisational interest in its work into an enlarged membership base, and then ensure that the resources available to the Coalition are channelled into activities that deliver real value to the LIS research community in the UK.

5. Conclusion

This paper has outlined how a collaborative venture, in which the UK's "library association" (in the form of CILIP) has played a role, has become a leading advocate for opening up access to LIS research in the UK. In its early months the implementation focused on establishing the LIS Research Coalition as a player in the UK LIS landscape with much effort directed towards establishing its online presence and associated resources. Media attention

and opportunities for members of the UK LIS profession to share the Coalition's vision in person at conferences and other organised events also helped the Coalition position itself as a focus for LIS research in the UK. It is anticipated that the interest in the Coalition's broad agenda will continue to recruit a range of stakeholders to consider the priorities of LIS research, and – in particular - to participate actively in the building of an evidence base of robust research that can be deployed for library advocacy. In the future this, in turn, could contribute to a national strategy that demonstrates the value and impact of library and information services across a range of contexts.

Slides

Library and Information Science Research Coalition

Facilitating a co-ordinated and strategic approach to LIS research across the UK

Implementing a co-ordinated and strategic approach to Library and Information Science Research

The work of the UK Library and Information Science Research Coalition

Hazel Hall and Caroline Brazier

World Library and Information Congress 76th IFLA General Conference and Assembly
August 10-15 2010

Establishing the LIS Research Coalition

❖ *2006-2008:* consultations

❖ *March 2009:* 5 founding members formally established the LIS Research Coalition

❖ *August 2009*: Hazel Hall appointed as Executive Secretary to lead the implementation

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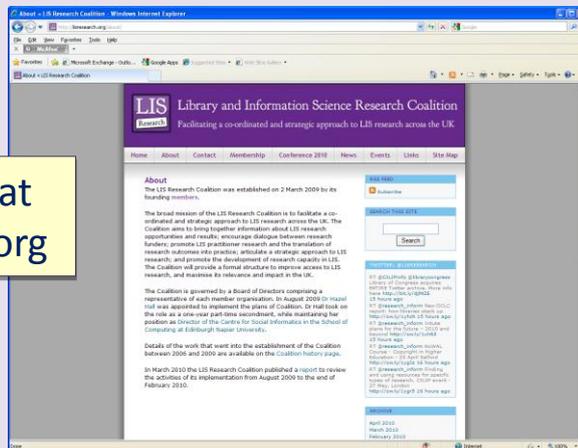
LIS Research **Our goals are to:**

1. bring together information about LIS research opportunities and results
2. encourage dialogue between research funders
3. promote LIS practitioner research and the translation of research outcomes into practice
4. articulate a strategic approach to LIS research
5. promote the development of research capacity in LIS

World Library and Information Congress 76th IFLA General Conference and Assembly
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LIS Research **A strong online presence is essential to bring together information about LIS research opportunities & results**

Coalition web site at
http://lisresearch.org

World Library and Information Congress 76th IFLA General Conference and Assembly
August 10-15 2010

LIS Research

A strong online presence is essential to bring together information about LIS research opportunities & results

Coalition on Twitter
@LISResearch

Research funding opportunities

Invitations to join consultation

Studentships offered

Research reports published

Topical debates

Reports of on-going research

Training events announced

Conference registrations open

New journal issues published

Conferences offering funded places

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LIS Research

Strong advocacy through face-to-face engagement

❖ Formal presentations to LIS professionals

❖ Encourage practitioner research

❖ Encourage *dissemination* of practitioner research

❖ Promotion of application of research findings in the workplace

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Media engagement is an important tool

❖Print, online and podcast news reports of Coalition activities

❖Contributions to national and international peer-reviewed publications

❖Seminar with editorial boards and editors

❖High visibility in the media important to raise the profile of LIS research with the wider community

Conference and seminar programmes to help build capacity

❖Provide opportunities to share good practice, research methodologies and techniques

❖Raise the quality and standards of research

❖Improve collaboration

❖Influence and shape the future research agenda

Coalition priorities for 2010/11

❖ Infrastructure
❖ Evidence base
❖ Sustainability
❖ Major themes for investigation

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What are the long-term impacts of digitisation on services provision?

How should services be developed for mobile devices as the preferred platform for information delivery?

How can we best engage our user communities?

To what extent is Google perceived as a cost-free replacement for libraries?

World Library and Information Congress 76th IFLA General Conference and Assembly
August 10-15 2010

LIS Research

How should services be
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**WHAT IS THE IMPACT AND
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LIS Research

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Library and Information
Professionals

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MLA Museums
Libraries &
Archives

research
information
network

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