

The UK Electronic Libraries Programme

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THE UK ELECTRONIC LIBRARIES PROGRAMME

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Introduction

The UK Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib) was established in 1995, following the publication of the Libraries' Review Report (Follett Report) at the end of 1994. The Review had been set up to address some of the problems faced by libraries through:

- the rapid growth in student numbers,
- the increase in the volume and cost of scholarly literature,
- the move towards self-directed learning,
- the conflict between the demands of teaching versus research,

all taking place within an environment where budgets were shrinking. However, there were a number of opportunities presented by developments in information technology, including stable or even falling prices of technology, advances in networking, and the provision of networked datasets to higher education staff and students, that could be taken advantage of by the Programme.

eLib Phases 1 & 2

One of the main conclusions of the Follett Report was that a substantial sum should be devoted to creating the electronic library, but it also resulted in a number of other initiatives, including:

- the Library Buildings Programme, which provided central matched funding for the building of new libraries or the expansion of existing buildings to provide additional reader places;
- funding for cataloguing of special collections and archives to make them more available to researchers;
- the Journal Site Licence Initiative, which explored the issues around providing libraries with site licence access to the electronic journals of four major publishers at no additional cost;

- the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Data Service, which is exploring how best to provide scholars with access to digital research material created by institutions or research groups;
- a national strategy for supporting research by creating 'national collections' of print resources;
- and the eLib Programme.

The aim of the £15m three year eLib Programme was to establish collaborative partnerships between libraries, academic staff, publishers and others, to promote large-scale pilot and demonstrator projects focusing on the components of a future electronic library service, and to provide stimulus to its creation. The UK already had a well developed national technical and organisational infrastructure, with a strong national network (JANET), together with a network of committees and agencies already in place. In addition, most institutions had invested in powerful campus networks and in clusters of workstations for students, so that they were ready to deliver any new services to their staff and students. The eLib Programme was able to take advantage of this technological and organisational infrastructure to rapidly establish its projects.

The 60 eLib projects were selected from over 400 submissions and Phases 1 & 2 covered six Action Lines, including:

- exploring new methods of document delivery,
- electronic publishing,
- digitisation,
- electronic course readers,
- access to network resources,
- training and awareness.

The Programme was underpinned with a range of supporting studies.

One example of the Access to Network Resources projects is the Edinburgh Engineering Virtual Library (EEVL). EEVL is based at Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh, and has created a gateway to engineering resources on the Internet. Resources are selected, described and facilities provided for searching and browsing the database of over 3000 resources. EEVL, which now attracts over 3000 hits per day, was established in 1995 and is to be funded until 1999. One of the Training and Awareness projects, Netskills, is based at the University of Newcastle and has developed a variety of training tools for staff and students to introduce them to the Internet and to the range of services and facilities now available to them. This has been done by seminars, workshops and online courses and has reached a very wide coverage.

eLib Phase 3

Most of the Phase 1 & 2 projects will finish in 1998, though a number have made the transition from project to service, and a further £3m has been awarded to carry forward the successful projects and to fund Phase 3 of eLib. Phase 3 is intended to use some of the outcomes of the first set of projects and to take advantage of newer

technologies in order to build new models of library services. Phase 3 projects fall into three main areas:

- 'Hybrid Libraries', which aim to provide seamless and integrated access to resources in both electronic and print formats;
- Z39.50 projects, which will explore the issues around using this protocol to link together both regional and subject library catalogues and provide integrated access to resources;
- a major digitisation project, which will explore the technical and managerial issues around creating and preserving large collections of digitised material.

Lessons Learnt

The UK higher education library community has learnt much from eLib and this has been helped by a programme of both formative and summative evaluation, which has encouraged projects to draw out the major issues that can be transferred from the Programme. eLib has also ensured that the lessons learnt from the Programme have been widely disseminated and each project has been required to actively publicise its activities. Many of the lessons learnt from eLib have centred around people - librarians and users - and how to change effectively the perceptions of both library staff, academic staff and students, so that they are more receptive to using electronic information resources.

eLib has not been a research programme, but a development programme and it has been essentially about 'learning by doing', as well as about 'learning from mistakes'. The projects have been short-term pilot projects which can deliver results within the time frame of the three year Programme. eLib has been about creating a more informed library workforce, about helping both librarians and institutions to understand the changing environment and to help them plan for the future of electronic information.