

United Kingdom

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO THE AQUATIC SCIENCES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM – MAY 1998 TO APRIL 2000

By

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Abstract

This report attempts to summarise developments both in UK science policy and in the library sector, with particular reference to the aquatic sciences. Issues relating to the government sector, the private sector and the academic sector are addressed. Developments in the aquatic research associations and librarians groups are also covered, and some conclusions are drawn.

Introduction

This report covers the principal developments in this area over the last two years, and is intended to be a guide to the general course of events rather than a comprehensive review. I will start with the overall national picture for library and information services, and for science in general.

Reflecting the fact that Government and other web sites in the UK are now providing much more in the way of real information than the 'shop window' approach often taken in the past, I have included a list of URLs at the end of this paper. Much more information about items in this report is available online.

Since the last report ⁽¹⁾ the Labour government of the UK has largely continued as it began. After honouring their commitment to the budget of the previous administration, some increases in public spending were made in 1999, and there has (as yet) been no return to the continual round of reviews and efforts to privatise science laboratories, although it is certainly not off the agenda. In 1998, the Comprehensive Spending Review ⁽²⁾ provided substantial new money for science, with the aim of increasing the science budget by 15% over three years. Some stability in the funding of the Natural Environment Research Council has been achieved by setting the budget for three years in this way, rather than the year-by-year approach previously adopted, and also by linking the budget to the rate of inflation. Unfortunately, despite 1998 recommendations that the Office of Science and Technology be moved to the Cabinet office, to be "at the centre of Government", it has remained within the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). There is concern that the next Comprehensive Spending Review (due next year) will not be so beneficial to science, being driven by the DTI's priorities.

In July 1999, following the devolution of the Welsh and Scottish executives, the Chief Scientific Adviser's Committee (CSAC) became the principal committee at official level dealing with issues relating to science, engineering and technology.

The Government has declared its intention to modernise and improve all Government services. Given the Prime Minister's comment that "the knowledge-driven economy is the economy of the future" there is an expectation that information will be seen as a vital part of any modernisation. One example is the National Electronic Library for Health, a digital library aiming to provide easy access to best current knowledge and improve health and healthcare, clinical practice and patient choice. The National Grid for Learning has been

established both to provide a structure of educationally valuable content on the Internet and to develop the means to access that content in schools, libraries, universities, workplaces, homes and elsewhere.

In the library world, the British Library completed its move to new premises at St Pancras in June 1999. In April 1999, its research budget was transferred to the Library and Information Commission, which was itself superseded by the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries at the end of March 2000. The council is now responsible for providing financial support for and disseminating research (including development and innovation) in information, library and related fields. The Council is also responsible for the "People's Network", which will oversee the linking of all public libraries, described by the Secretary of State as "our street-corner universities", by 2002.^(3,4) The National Training Organisation for Information Services was set up in 1999, to oversee a range of vocational qualifications.

The two principal associations for library and information workers in the UK have agreed to merge. The Institute of Information Scientists and the Library Association have both received support at their 1999 AGMs for the merger to go ahead. An implementation working group has been established to decide on the exact nature and structure of the new organisation.

Government Sector

Research Councils

On 1st April 2000, the Institute of Freshwater Ecology (IFE) merged with three other Institutes to form the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. This leaves the Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory in Pitlochry as the only laboratory in the UK dedicated exclusively to freshwater research. The library services of the four Institutes, (the IFE, the Institute of Hydrology, the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and the Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology) have now merged into a single service, covering nine site libraries with seven professional staff. The marine research institutes continue to co-operate under the umbrella of the Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences. Linda Noble was appointed as Head of the National Marine Biological Library (NMBL) at Plymouth Marine Laboratory in 1999, after David Moulder's move to the World Maritime University.

Environment Agency

In April 1998, the Environment Agency established its National Library and Information Service, with eight regional libraries and a head office, and a team of 21 staff now in place. The library management system is Fretwell-Downing's OLIB.

Ministry Laboratories

In the last year, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) has relocated its library to new purpose-built accommodation, and developed a records management rôle on combining with the registry. Having recently completed an Information Services Review, a new one has now started.

Private Sector Organisations and Water Supply

The library and information staff of the water supply and regulatory bodies continues to meet annually. The last meeting was 13th July 1999, with sixteen attendees. The two most popular topics were relocations and take overs by multinational organisations.

The Water Research Centre (WRC), a private company since water privatization, continues to provide a research and development consultancy to the water industry, and now hosts the Environment Agency R and D Dissemination Centre, a useful tool for tracking down Environment Agency reports.

University and Academic Sector

Encouraged in part by the Anderson Report ⁽⁵⁾ many electronic library and hybrid library projects are currently underway in the academic sector. These are listed and described on the eLib web pages. Electronic journals are a cause of delight and dismay for librarians in all sectors, and the National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative (NESLI) has been a useful exercise for both librarians and publishers. The Distributed National Electronic Resource is an attempt to provide a managed environment for accessing quality assured information resources on the Internet which are available from many sources. These resources include scholarly journals, monographs, textbooks, abstracts, manuscripts, maps, music scores, still images, geospatial images and other kinds of vector and numeric data, as well as moving picture and sound collections.

Research Associations

The Freshwater Biological Association (FBA), the Marine Biological Association (MBA) and the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) continue to support research in the aquatic sciences. In January 1999 Dr Roger Sweeting became Chief Executive of the FBA and has instigated measures to increase both membership and the services offered to members, including the appointment of a Membership and Information Officer.

BIASLIC

The Britain and Ireland Association of Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres (BIASLIC) continues to meet annually, and the minutes of the meetings are now available on the BIASLIC web pages. Work is in progress to make a union list of serial holdings available via the web, and the holdings of four institutions are currently searchable, with a fifth in the process of being added. At the last meeting (November 1999) it was noted that most of the reports from individual institutions talked of cutbacks and precarious situations. As a result, a press statement was released, an abbreviated form appearing in *Fishing News*, 10th December 1999.

ASFIS

The NMBL at Plymouth Marine Laboratory continues as the UK National Input Centre for *Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts*, co-ordinating the input of the other two organisations providing data, the Centre for the Economics & Management of Aquatic Resources (CEMARE) and the Freshwater Biological Association.

Conclusions

The last two UK country reports have noted great changes, both in national science policy and in libraries. There has been a little more stability in the last two years, but information workers in this country, as in the rest of the world, must clearly accept that changes in structures and in practices are inevitable and to be welcomed. Sharing our experiences of these changes with our European colleagues not only benefits us, it enables us to enhance the services we offer to our users.

References

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2. Her Majesty's Treasury. 1998. *Comprehensive Spending Review: New Public Spending Plans 1999-2002*. Cm 4011. London: HMSO. Available online at <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pub/html/csr/4011.htm>
3. Library and Information Commission. 1997. *New Library – the people's network*. <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/lic/newlibrary/full.html>
4. Library and Information Commission. 1998. *Building the new library network*. <http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/policyreports/building/index.html>
5. Joint Funding Councils' Library Review: Report of the Group on a National/Regional Strategy for Library Provision for Researchers (The Anderson Report). <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib/papers/other/anderson/>

URLs

1. BIASLIC – <http://www.ife.ac.uk/biaslic>
2. British Library – <http://www.bl.uk>
3. Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences – <http://www.ccms.ac.uk>
4. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology – <http://www.ceh.ac.uk>
5. Centre for the Economics & Management of Aquatic Resources - <http://www.pbs.port.ac.uk/econ/cemare>
6. Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science – <http://www.cefas.co.uk>
7. eLib: The Electronic Libraries Programme – <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib>
8. Environment Agency – <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk>
9. Institute of Information Scientists – <http://www.iis.org.uk>
10. The Joint Information Systems Committee – <http://www.jisc.ac.uk>
11. Library and Information Commission – <http://www.lic.gov.uk>
12. Library Association – <http://www.la-hq.org.uk>
13. National Electronic Library for Health – <http://www.nelh.nhs.uk>
14. National Grid for Learning – <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/grid>
15. National Marine Biological Library – <http://www1.npm.ac.uk/library>
16. NESLI – <http://www.nesli.ac.uk>
17. People's Network – <http://www.lic.gov.uk/pno>
18. The UK Office for Library and Information Networking (UKOLN) – <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk>
19. WRc – <http://www.wrcplc.co.uk>