

CURL Annual Report, 1997 / 98

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Chairman's Introduction

The past year has once again been one of significant progress for CURL, and I am pleased to introduce this annual report, which marks the highlights of the year. Following its earlier period of expansion, the consortium has this year consolidated its position, using the Strategic Plan for 1997-2000 as the means of focusing its activities

Three CURL Steering Groups were set up to implement the plan, and the work they have carried out has contributed to many of the achievements reported below.

The COPAC service, underpinned by the CURL database which now contains more than 1,600,000 records, goes from strength to strength. It was particularly gratifying to learn that COPAC is to be adopted as a national service, based at the University of Manchester, and that continuation funding for the service is secure for a further three years.

CURL's Strategic Plan envisaged an enlargement of the range of the organisation's activities. Of particular note this year has been CURL's success in winning external funding to support a number of new initiatives, ranging from grants for feasibility studies to a major award from the Electronic Libraries (eLib) programme for a digital preservation project, CEDARS.

The CEDARS project is carrying out ground-breaking work, and it fits well with CURL's mission to play a leading role in innovation for the scholarly library and research communities. The project is likely to raise CURL's profile both nationally and internationally over the next three years, and we will be watching its progress with interest, dealing, as it does, with a topic that will be of such critical importance for all the research libraries in the twenty first century.

CURL is a small organisation, and none of the achievements recorded here would have been possible without the energy and dedication of staff in the CURL libraries who have been willing to contribute their time and expertise to help further our work. CURL is grateful to all of them.

Our gratitude is also due to the two members of the Board of Directors who stood down at the AGM: Reg Carr, who, in effect, ran CURL for five years as Honorary Secretary until February 1997, and Fred Friend, who served as Honorary Treasurer from March 1996 to March 1998.

Peter Fox Chairman

The year's highlights

CURL's Strategic Plan for 1997-2000, formally adopted by the CURL members in September 1997, provided the consortium with the focus for its activities during the year. Three Steering Groups were set up to manage the implementation of the plan: Resource Description and Discovery; Access; and Resource Management. Membership of these groups was drawn from staff within the CURL libraries, with each one being chaired by a member of the CURL Board.

Resource Description and Discovery

The database

Development of the database continued to be a key area of activity within CURL. The new Resource Description and Discovery Steering Group chaired by Clive Field took over from the Database Management Committee, though with a somewhat extended remit, and has continued to play a major role in identifying priorities and providing a strong lead for CURL in this area.

The period under review saw the addition of catalogue data from the universities of Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, bringing the total number of contributing libraries up to twelve at the end of July 1998. As well as the ongoing schedule to load catalogue data from the newer members, there are periodic needs for data already on the database to be reloaded, to accommodate changes that arise when libraries migrate from one library system to another. This process is built into the regular loading and maintenance schedules at Manchester Computing, but can clearly have an impact on the schedule for loading new libraries, and the speed with which it can be accomplished. That the original aim to complete the loading of all new libraries by the end of 1998 has slipped a little, is due in part to the reloading requirements experienced over the past twelve months.

The routine updating of the database is now running smoothly and the revised schedule for loading the new data of the remaining CURL libraries has been agreed. Priority will be given by Manchester Computing in the coming academic year to completing the loading of new libraries, and it is expected that all full and co-operating member libraries' data will have been added by Summer 1999.

A Z39.50 interface to the record retrieval service is now fully functional and being used by a number of member and customer libraries.

COPAC

Exploitation of the COPAC service continued to grow over this period, with overall usage increasing at about 26% per annum.

Publicity continued to be a key activity; September 1997 saw a joint CURL/COPAC stand at LibTech at the University of Hertfordshire and in November 1997 CURL and COPAC jointly exhibited at the Earl conference at the Institute of Education in London.

Mid-term evaluation of COPAC service

A mid-term evaluation of COPAC, carried out by the Tavistock Institute in March 1998, gave a generally positive report of the service. Current users of COPAC were found to have high levels of satisfaction with both the content of the dataset and the form of the interface. However, it was recommended that the primary task was now to raise awareness of the service still further among the target user group - a finding that echoed recommendations made in the first-stage evaluation, carried out by the Department of Information and Library Management, University of Northumbria, in October 1996.

Continuation funding for the COPAC service

With the initial JISC three-year funding for the COPAC service due to end in October 1998, CURL and Manchester Computing worked closely together during the spring of 1998, to put together a bid to JISC for continuation funding for the service. It is pleasing to report that, following the submission of this bid, JISC's Committee on Electronic Information confirmed that COPAC should become a core MIDAS service and that funds should be made available for the future development of the CURL OPAC in relation to the service. Funding is now secure until September 2001, providing CURL and Manchester Computing with a sound base on which to continue their collaborative work.

CURL Feasibility Study on potential applications of Z39.50 technology for the COPAC service

The developing potential for resource discovery offered by Z39.50 technology had prompted CURL and Manchester Computing to consider whether the longer term strategy for the development of the COPAC service should move away from the present union catalogue model. Among the potential advantages perceived in such a strategy were a reduction in time spent on maintenance and data processing; and the availability, through COPAC, of dynamic location information relating to the holdings of CURL libraries. With funding from JISC, CURL commissioned Crossnet Systems to undertake a study during the summer of 1998, to compare several options for the architecture of COPAC. These were: continued Union Catalogue with all records loaded into COPAC; a fully distributed model using Z39.50 to access records and holdings information; and a hybrid model. The report's recommendations confirmed that, for the time being at least, the current physical union catalogue model should be retained, and that the potential for a distributed service should be

reassessed once the results of the UK Electronic Libraries Programme Clumps projects are known. A copy of the report of the feasibility study can be found on the CURL Web site (http://www.curl.ac.uk/z39-50_project.htm).

Future strategic developments

In the course of the year the Resource Description and Discovery Steering Group has investigated a number of the strategic issues that are likely to affect future developments of the database and the COPAC service. As a result it has identified several priorities for action in the coming twelve months. These will include the development of a UKMARC to USMARC conversion program; work towards the inclusion in COPAC of collection level records for archival material in CURL libraries; and the investigation of ILL functionality including options for accessing dynamic location information.

Access to CURL resources

Interlibrary Lending

The options for developing a monograph interlending service continued to be explored, under the aegis of the Access Steering Group. The stumbling block to providing a cost-effective service continues to be the identification of an appropriate technological solution that will permit one-stop-shop access to dynamic location information, preferably linked to an automated ILL ordering system. At the time of writing no appropriate solution had been identified.

Heritage Lottery Fund

CURL was pleased to learn, some twelve months after submitting an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, that its bid had met with partial success. The HLF agreed to provide some funding towards the cost of a feasibility study to see how access to CURL resources could be widened through a programme of retrospective conversion.

The contribution being offered by the HLF, however, fell considerably short of the amount CURL had requested, and additional funding from an alternative source was therefore needed if the study were to go ahead with HLF support. The CURL Board took the view that the study was potentially of such significance for CURL that it should allocate the balance required (some £10,000) from CURL's reserve funds. Partnership funding was confirmed with the HLF, and by the end of July 1998 negotiations with the HLF were well in hand for the signing of a contract so that work on the study could begin.

Resource management

Model retention policy

Work begun in the previous year through a joint CURL/BL Working Party on Retention moved forward, albeit slowly. It was proposed that the model retention policy, drawn up by the Working Party, should be piloted by a small number of CURL libraries. Volunteers were invited to take part in this pilot project, and Birmingham, Durham, Glasgow, Leeds, UCL and the Wellcome Trust expressed a willingness to

take part in the trial, although, by the end of the year under review work on the project was not underway.

Register of collection strengths

Over the same period CURL was also collaborating with the National Preservation Office in the setting up of a National Register of Collection Strengths, agreeing the data elements that would need to be included in an automated system, and drawing up a specification for such a system.

Consortium purchasing

There has been some discussion, within the consortium, about whether CURL should become more actively engaged in consortium purchasing on behalf of its members. For many CURL institutions, consortial purchasing through other, regional consortia is already well established at institutional level. In some instances, there may be a case for CURL to pursue a consortial deal for very specialist research products on behalf of the membership. However, it is felt that such instances are likely to be rare, and should be followed up as and when they present themselves. At present it is not thought to be appropriate for CURL to play a leading role in negotiating consortial deals.

Raising awareness

CURL's contribution to wider national and international debate

During the course of the year CURL took part in the consultation process on a number of issues relating to libraries and their role in providing research support. Responses were sent to the Library and Information Commission's Prospects: a strategy for action; to the DfEE on its consultation document, Connecting the Learning Society, on the subject of the National Grid for Learning; and to JISC over its Strategic Review.

International links

Research Libraries Group

Close collaboration with RLG continued on several fronts. In December 1997 a number of meetings arranged by RLG were held in the UK. A Shares workshop was attended by representatives of most of the CURL libraries and a meeting in Leeds for senior RLG staff and CURL directors was successful in pointing the way towards future collaboration and co-operation. In addition CURL staff were able to benefit from RLIN and Eureka workshops held in Oxford and Warwick, from the RLG forum also in Oxford, and from digital preservation workshops held in Leeds.

The RLG Annual Meeting took place at the British Library in May 1998 and was attended by many of the CURL directors as well as by US colleagues. With so many representatives of the RLG Board present in the UK, the CURL Board took the opportunity to arrange a joint CURL/RLG Board meeting, to explore some of the strategic issues of common concern, and to identify possible areas for closer collaboration.

An all-inclusive, fixed-fee deal between CURL and RLG enabled CURL to benefit once again from unlimited use of RLIN, Eureka and Shares. The benefits of the experience gained from the previous year's deal meant that fewer problems were encountered, both with the central administration of the arrangement and in rolling the arrangement out to the individual libraries. Increased usage of Eureka was seen throughout this period and several of the CURL libraries signed up to use Shares.

A further example of productive collaboration between CURL and RLG was to be seen in the work that was ongoing during the year to develop a Z39.50 gateway from RLIN to the CURL database for ILL purposes. By the end of July 1998 the technical work was all but complete, and negotiations over the formal agreements that needed to be put in place before the new service could go live were at an advanced stage.

Membership services

The period under review was one of consolidation for CURL, with no new institutions being received into membership. It was with regret that CURL received notice from SOAS that it would be unable to continue in membership beyond July 1998.

Site visits

A site visit to the National Library of Scotland was made by Clare Jenkins, Anne Mealia and Nancy Elkington in December 1997.

British Library

A fruitful meeting between CURL and the British Library led to an agreement over some changes to the licensing arrangements for the supply of bibliographic records to CURL. The arrangements are intended to offer CURL and the BL a more flexible working partnership and the possibility for greater co-operation in areas of mutual interest within the area of record supply.

OCLC

The lengthy discussions that had been ongoing with OCLC in the previous year over changes in the CURL/OCLC relationship were eventually brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and the new agreement between CURL and OCLC came into operation in January 1998. Under the new arrangement CURL ceased to act as a record reseller for OCLC but now acts as an intermediary between OCLC and CURL members for the supply of OCLC bibliographic records. CURL libraries may opt to be 'full members' or 'partial members' in the OCLC arrangement. Full membership confers additional benefits, but brings with it the commitment to make available for loading into the OCLC database, on a regular basis, copies of machine readable records added to a library's catalogue database. For the first year of the new arrangement, five CURL libraries, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Oxford opted to join the scheme as full members. Some problems were encountered in the early stages of the arrangement, especially with the loading of records, and

work was still underway in July to resolve these problems. OCLC workshops were held for CURL members in Autumn 1997 in Manchester and London.

Staff Development Conference

A second staff development conference was held at Nottingham in July 1998, taking as its theme 'Postgraduate students and information skills: the subject librarian's role'. Some fifty delegates attended, and the event once again proved popular among CURL library staff as a forum for discussing matters of common interest. Collaboration in the preparation of guiding materials was identified as an area where closer working between CURL libraries might be beneficial, and was set as a specific action to be pursued by a small task force in the coming year.

Wolfson Technology Resource Centres

The bids submitted to the Wolfson Foundation by the newer CURL members were all successful, and funding was made available to provide improved IT facilities in the libraries of Durham, Liverpool, Southampton, and Warwick. CURL is very grateful to the Wolfson Foundation for its generous contribution of £222,750 to support the development of these resource centres.

National Preservation Office

In addition to the collaboration already noted under Resource Management, CURL continued to support work at the NPO in a number of tangible ways, by providing an annual contribution to the costs of the NPO, and through formal CURL representation on the NPO Management Committee.

Projects

CEDARS project

During the autumn of 1997, CURL was successful in obtaining funding of £370,000 over three years from JISC, through the Electronic Libraries (eLib) Programme to support a consortium-led, three year project on digital preservation - CEDARS (CURL exemplars in digital archives). Kelly Russell was appointed to the post of Project Manager, and took up her post, based in Leeds, in April 1998, to coincide with the official start of the project. The Project Director is Clare Jenkins, the CURL Executive Secretary.

The project work is based at three CURL institutions - Leeds, Oxford and Cambridge. The main objective of the project is to address strategic, methodological and practical issues and provide guidance for libraries in best practice for digital preservation. The development of practical demonstrators will provide concrete practical experience in preserving digital resources, and the development of recommendations and guidelines in best practice will be of benefit to the wider community. The project also expects to deliver practical and scaleable models for establishing distributed digital archives.

The project is focusing on a well-defined group of digital content, but intends to identify techniques which can be generalised and extended to the full range of digi-

tal materials. Wherever possible, it will draw on work that has already been done and on expertise that resides elsewhere. The project's Advisory Board is drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, both in the UK and overseas, reflecting the recognition of the significance of its work to the wider information and research community. The project is scheduled for completion in March 2001.

People

Two long-standing members of the CURL Board, Reg Carr and Fred Friend stood down in March 1998, after serving CURL well for a many years. Reg Carr, in particular, during his time as Honorary Secretary, made an enormous contribution to CURL during a critical period in its development.

Fred Friend

At Nottingham Robert Oldroyd was appointed Director of Library Services, and at the BLPES Jean Sykes took up the post of Librarian and Director of IT Services. Paul Ayris became Director of Library Services at University College London, following Fred Friend's appointment to a new post as Director of Scholarly Communication at UCL.



Kelly Russell was appointed to the post of Cedars Project Manager.

Membership

The twenty institutions in full membership at 31 July 1998 were the universities of Birmingham, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, Warwick and Imperial College London, King's College London, London School of Economics, University College London and Trinity College Dublin.

The British Library, the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales and the Wellcome Trust were Associate Members and the School of Advanced Study and the School of Oriental and African Studies both of the University of London were Co-operating Members.

Board of Directors

Membership for the year was as follows

To 24 March 1998

Ms Lynne Brindley	University of Leeds
Mr Reg Carr	University of Oxford
Dr Clive Field	University of Birmingham
Mr Peter Fox Chairman	University of Cambridge
Mr Frederick Friend Honorary Treasurer	University College London
Mr Michael Hannon	University of Sheffield
Mr Bernard Naylor	University of Southampton
Ms Frances Thomson	University of Liverpool

Following AGM on 24 March 1998

Ms Lynne Brindley	University of Leeds
Dr Clive Field	University of Birmingham
Mr Peter Fox Chairman	University of Cambridge
Dr John Hall	University of Durham
Mr Michael Hannon Honorary Treasurer	University of Sheffield
Mr Ian Mowat	University of Edinburgh
Mr Bernard Naylor	University of Southampton
Ms Frances Thomson	University of Liverpool

CURL Steering groups

Resource Description and Discovery Steering Group

Clive Field Chair	University of Birmingham
John Hall	University of Durham
Clare Jenkins	CURL
Anne Mealia	CURL
Oliver Pickering	University of Leeds
Hugh Taylor	University of Cambridge
Paul Watry	University of Liverpool
Keith Webster	University of Newcastle
Janet Wharton	University of Nottingham
Present at each meeting by invitation:	
Julia Chruszcz	Manchester Computing
Ric Collins	Manchester Computing

Access Steering Group

Frances Thomson Chair	University of Liverpool
Chris Bailey	University of Glasgow
Anne Bell	King's College London
Clare Jenkins	CURL
Anne Mealia	CURL
Michele Shoebridge	University of Birmingham
Murray Simpson	University of Edinburgh
Julia Walworth	University of London- Senate House
Jan Wilkinson	University of Leeds

Present at each meeting by invitation:	
Ric Collins	Manchester Computing

Resource Management Steering Group

Bernard Naylor Chair	University of Southampton
Liz Davis	Imperial College
Tom Graham	University of Newcastle
Clare Jenkins	CURL
Stephanie Kenna	British Library
Martin Lewis	University of Sheffield
Mark Nicholls	University of Cambridge
Gregory Walker	University of Oxford
Christine Woodland	University of Warwick

Meetings of CURL

The Board of Directors met on the following occasions

16 September 1997 - UCL

26 November 1997 - UCL

21 January 1998 - Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London

4 March 1998 - UCL

20 May 1998 - UCL

Member representatives met on the following occasions

29 September 1997 - Wellcome Trust

24 March 1998 - Southampton

The Annual General Meeting

24 March 1998 - Southampton

Summary statement of financial activities:

Year ended 31 July 1998

	1998	1997
	£	£
Income and expenditure		
Incoming resources		
Subscriptions	178,705	171,906
User charges	97,902	100,865
CURL guide	39	5,784
RLIN search charge	199,506	122,453
CEDARS project	42,500*	-
Other income	2,720	-
Interest received	7,230	-
	528,602	401,008
Resources used		
Staff Costs	72,227	68,970
Administrative Costs	11,450	13,080
Membership activities	23,950	40,304
Database expenditure	214,137	267,294
CEDARS project	16,461*	-
	340,225	389,648
Net incoming (outgoing) resources for the year and net movement in funds	188,377	11,360
Balance brought forward at 1 August	82,045	71,045
Balance carried forward at 31 July	270,782	82,405
*restricted funds		

Glossary

BLPES British Library of Political and Economic Science

COPAC CURL Online Public Access Catalogue

HLF Heritage Lottery Fund

ILL Inter-library loans

JISC Joint Information Systems Committee

LSE London School of Economics

MARC MACHine Readable Cataloguing

OCLC Online Computer Library Center

RLG Research Libraries Group

RLIN Research Libraries Information Network

SOAS School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)

UCL University College London

Published by CURL, March 1999