

Research4Life Infrastructure Review 2010

Executive summary

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

This review was commissioned by the Research4Life partners as part of a set of three reviews (the other two reviews considered the user experience and bibliometric evidence of impact). The review was intended to provide information to the partners on which decisions regarding the longer term future of the programmes could be made. Its stated objectives were:

- to establish the costs incurred by the partners
- to establish whether the partners' goals and expectations for the programmes were met
- to make any recommendations for the future organisation and management of the programmes.

The review methodology consisted of: a series of in-depth face-to-face (or in a few cases structured telephone-based) interviews with the relevant people at WHO, FAO, UNEP, Yale, Cornell, Microsoft, DFID and STM; structured face-to-face and telephone interviews (typical duration ~1 hour) with 10 publishers; and a survey of the remaining publishers (approximately 140) via an online questionnaire. This was supported by a number of valuable discussions with Maurice Long. The bulk of the fieldwork was conducted during late April and May 2010.

In addition, the review considers three other sources:

- the 2006 infrastructure review, which provides some kind of baseline against which progress can be assessed
- the 2007 strategy document *Path to 2015* developed by the partners in the light of the 2006 infrastructure and user experience reviews. This set out a number of relevant objectives and targets
- the 2009 strategic retreat and its report, which identified and prioritised areas and issues of strategic concern for the programmes.

1.2. Key findings

1. Since the last review in 2006, the Research4Life (R4L) partners have (amongst other things) brought in new programme partners, launched OARE and AGORA Band 2, expanded all three programmes in terms of content, registrations and usage, brought in a new technology partner and established a programme of technology development.
2. R4L partners saw the programmes as successful and remain very committed to continued participation and active development of the programmes. Partners' primary motivations remained largely unchanged from the previous review, being broadly a matter of their core mission, having a strong and obvious connection to a corporate social responsibility programme or being simply seen as the right thing to do (helped by the fact that it is cheap and simple for publishers to add journals to the programmes). Although these primary motivations were largely unchanged, we did detect some greater willingness among publishers to ascribe a market development or other commercial benefit to participation, albeit over the long term.
3. R4L has established a greater degree of organisational structure (including a strengthened Executive Council and more project/team leaders), developed the *Path to 2015* ("PT15") strategy document in 2007 in response to the last review, and more recently held a strategic retreat ("NY09"). This review does not therefore take place against a vacuum and in reviewing our findings we take account of this previous work and the targets that were set.
4. Strategy development for R4L is neither a one-off event nor a fixed outcome: it evolves in response to events and continuous discussions. Nonetheless many of those consulted felt it

would be useful to have some “shared language” describing the goals, objectives and strategy of the programmes, together with a simple development plan (or “roadmap”).

5. An important strategic issue to be resolved relates to the restructuring of Band 2 and the related issues of country exclusions, and to the handling of migrations and graduations (this issue is of course being addressed by the working group tasked with reviewing just these issues (the “Band 2.5” group)). Views on how to approach this were, however, somewhat divergent: for instance, some see country exclusions as a pragmatic way to allow publishers to participate without damaging their interests, while others see growing exclusions as a threat to the programmes.
6. Previous discussions have postponed decisions on the question of adding additional programmes. This review shows that publishers would be willing to support such programmes with their content provided there was a credible lead body and if demand could be established. Discussion with other partners, however, indicates that there are stresses and shortcomings in the current systems, and given the additional workload that adding programmes creates for existing staff, there is a case for deferring expansion until the key technology and systems developments are complete (or conversely accelerating systems development to meet deadlines for any new programmes).
7. Registrations and usage have grown substantially. Most of the available indicators show continuing growth, although the increase in usage (as measured by logins) of AGORA and OARE appears to have slowed or even stopped over the last 12 months.
8. There is a need, however, for a much broader range of performance and impact measures. This was recognised in PT15, which set a number of objectives in this area that have, however, mostly not been achieved. The unmet needs expressed in the consultations reflect this. In addition there are continuing shortcomings in the statistics that are collected.
9. The total cost of the partners’ participation was estimated at about \$2.7 million per year. This is in line with the 2006 estimate (\$1.9m) after allowing for the addition of a third programme. If the OARE and Microsoft costs are removed, the total figure is roughly unchanged from 2006.
10. There has been substantial enhancement to the technology capabilities of R4L with the addition of a world-class technology partner in the form of Microsoft. There have been important implementations (replacement of Safeweb, creation of the multi-programme journal backend system, the portal). Perhaps more importantly, R4L has been able to become more proactive and establish a strong technology development programme, with project teams and leaders in place for each of the major components: next-generation authentication; search; CRM; and website redevelopment.
11. The pace of technology innovation and implementation has, however, been unduly slow (e.g. some high-priority targets set in 2007 are yet to be met). The current technology roadmap looks to be the right one and appears well supported from the interviews. R4L needs, however, to find ways to improve its ability to execute in a timely fashion.
12. Alongside the technology infrastructure, marketing and communications was seen as the area with the biggest opportunity for improvement. Little here was new, with the opportunities such as regular contacts with institutions, follow up for new registrations and for lapsers, and better conversion of registrants into users having been discussed in 2007. Compared to 2006, we found a greater sense of urgency about two issues in this area: the lack of resources was increasingly seen as a serious obstacle, alongside the difficulty of managing communications and marketing through an informal volunteer organisation.
13. The key questions for training and outreach (apart from resourcing) were mainly about defining the limits of the R4L programmes’ direct responsibility or involvement and their role in partnering and supporting other efforts.

14. In general the systems behind the R4L service deliver their intended results. Some systems, however, seem less efficient than they could be. We pass on some suggestions for improvements but there is a case for a more systematic review of systems and procedures.
15. In terms of the way R4L is organised and managed, we found almost no support for a single shared secretariat. There was, however, a degree of cautious support for some additional formality provided it were limited to clarifying arrangements, responsibilities and mission (not creating new burdens but developing shared language, information and plans.) More effective management of the programmes would be facilitated by better metrics and information systems.
16. The case for greater integration of the programmes in terms of systems and data is well supported. This is of course not new but is worth confirming.
17. The review showed support for mobilising additional resources behind the R4L programmes. There are shortcomings in the present operation that could be fixed with relatively small additional resources; the scale of the external opportunity and the potential returns on investments from building effective use of research information in developing countries are so large that not to do so seems a wasted opportunity; and not being seen to address the larger opportunity in this way may also risk reducing support from existing and potential partners and from individuals.

1.3. Summary of recommendations

In the main report we have divided our recommendations into major and minor. In this Executive Summary we list just the major recommendations (which is not to say the minor recommendations are unimportant, of course, just at a lower priority or impact level).

Strategy and development

- there should be a simple shared statement of objectives and strategy. This can use PT15 and NY09 as its starting points but also needs a shorter version (i.e. less than one page) that can be easily grasped and shared with other interested parties
- the so-called “Band 2.5” issues (i.e. country exclusions and migrations/graduations) are matters of live concern and need to be addressed and resolved promptly
- any programme expansion should avoid diverting resources from the existing programmes: there is a feeling that securing and building on more effective use of the existing programmes may deliver greater real benefit than simply adding notional (but perhaps unsupported) access to yet more content. (Or conversely, programme expansion should be supported by commensurate expansion in resources.)
- related to this, there is a case for new programmes being added only once the technology infrastructure and systems are robust and functioning effectively

Performance and metrics

- reconfirm PT15/C1, to develop a range of performance and impact measures. Not all measures need to be produced to the same frequency
- fill the gaps in the existing measures as a matter of some priority
- reconfirm PT15/C2, to seek feedback from users on the nature and scope of the programme’ services that amongst other issues would identify reasons for non-use
- reconfirm PT15/C3, to collect an evidence-base of narratives about use/impact of programmes, mobilising the experiential knowledge of users

Technology

- to confirm support for the current technology roadmap

- to find ways, whether through increased resources or improved organisation and management, to accelerate the technology innovation and implementation cycle
- to confirm the priority given by NY09 to improve search capabilities and implement cross-programme search
- to recognise the need for greater resources in this area (see separate section on Resources and funding below)
- to be alert to the potential for creating efficiencies

Systems and procedures

- review systems and procedures with a view to simplification and greater efficiency
- prioritise the system fixes and developments that address inefficiencies and service gaps. This could help reduce staff frustration, help avoid potential burnout and improve service to users
- confirm the earlier recommendations for a single cross-programme registration process
- agree targets for elimination of current backlogs in registrations, publisher queries and new journals additions

Marketing and communications

- additional resources need to be found for this area
- implement systems for regular contact with institutions, follow-up for new registrations and for lapsed, etc.
- encourage and support the development of end-user online networks
- expand the availability of online training resources
- provide tools for librarians to promote and support use, including access to institution-level usage statistics
- reconfirm targets set out in PT15, especially re. Goal D (Marketing, publicity, promotion)

Training and outreach (taken from NY09)

- consider whether other organisations were better placed to broker/manage such arrangements in particular areas (e.g. authorship) (e.g. INASP/PERii, eIFL) and work alongside or partner with them rather than recreating their capabilities
- consider creating a tiered structure of training, to include for instance face-to-face, delivery via web conferencing systems (e.g. WebEx or similar), online training resources, computer-based (offline) training, and other self-help systems (e.g. user forums?)¹
- Supporting publishing by end users (completing the circle). This was another area where there was a number of obvious existing players, notably AuthorAid and AuthorAid@INASP) and publishers themselves

Organisation and management

- reconfirm the desirability of cross-programme integration in terms of systems and data

Resources and funding

- R4L should accelerate efforts to mobilise additional resources, whether internally (i.e. from the partners' own resources) or externally.

¹ Note: This would build on work by ITOCA, Lenny Rhine and Steve Glover, who have developed and implemented some of what is suggested here