

# **Research and practice: findings from the Interactions project**

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## Abstract

This article reports on findings from a consultancy project commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of a broader study on library, archive and information management research and academics, and their interactions with practitioners. This article does not necessarily represent the views of the AHRC. The project was carried out between February and June 2006, and involved a number of focus groups with academics and practitioners from both domains, and across sectors, supplemented by a series of interviews with key library and archive professionals and researchers. These explored issues of good practice as well as barriers to the successful uptake of research by practitioners and communication between academics and practitioners. Findings indicate that there are – still – key perceptual and practical issues which work against practitioner access to and uptake of research that comes from the academic community. However, examples of good practice and suggestions for closer contact and co-operation suggest that there are ways to overcome some of these barriers.

## Introduction

Funding of library research:

Research funding in the library sector has historically emphasised the link between research and practice (as an ideal, even if not always an actual reality); this was reflected in the work supported by the British Library's Research and Development Department (this became the Research and Innovation Centre) funding a wide range of projects, which brought together practitioners and academics. This research function was transferred to the Library and Information Commission (LIC) when it was established in 1995; the LIC continued, not only to fund a range of similar projects, but to develop a national research strategy for the sector. The LIC continued to stress the links between research and practice, defining research as 'not rigid', but systematic data gathering, which 'carries forward findings and innovation into development and practice' (LIC, 1997, para 2.7). They identified practitioners who

‘make decisions about policy and management of library and information services’ as the prime users of research, and transferring research into practice was identified as a key theme:

*Collaborative and innovative methods of transferring skills and sharing experience will be encouraged. For example, we shall consider ways of supporting events involving higher education institutions, and collaboration between business schools and information management schools, along with participants from a wide community of information practitioners besides library and information professionals (such as Business Links, competitive intelligence professionals, knowledge managers, and research students). (LIC, 1997, para 5.48).*

Typical of the projects funded by the LIC was the VITAL project (Value and Access of ICTs in Public Libraries), which brought together researchers based in a research centre at an academic institution, with practitioners in public library authorities (see Eve & Brophy, 2000). Whilst the LIC issued themed calls for research, it was also still possible to submit speculative proposals and be funded for what might be termed more ‘blue skies’ research, thus allowing a broad range of research to be supported, and to foster new researchers and critical thinking.

The merger of the LIC with the Museums and Galleries Commission in 2000 into Resource marked a shift in the way library and information research was funded; both academics and practitioners found themselves falling between the gap created as Resource (now MLA, The Museums Libraries and Archives Council) focused its research attention on tightly policy-driven initiatives, often linked to government agendas, and funding councils concentrated on research which was not practitioner-focused. Thus in 2004, McNicol and Dalton could assert that:

*There would seem to be a danger that the needs of practitioners are being neglected at the expense of those sections of the research community which are viewed as more influential, such as funders and politicians. Too often, LIS research is regarded as an activity which is important to academics and policymakers, but of little or no immediate relevance to library practitioners. However, in practically focused discipline such as LIS, surely it is the needs of practitioners which should be to the fore. (McNicol & Dalton, 2004: 175).*

Archive research:

Research in the archives domain did not benefit from an LIC equivalent, and has been seen by archivists as something of a poor relation to libraries in terms of resource allocation and visibility. Most research has been conducted by students following Masters courses, which has exacerbated the problem of dissemination of research findings. Funding for archival projects has largely come from the Higher Education sector (e.g. the JISC supported Archives Hub), and the focus has been on practical projects, such as digitisation and preservation and widening access to archives. Research in the archives domain is now also part of the remit of MLA; as with trends in library policy, emphasis is being put on impact and outcomes measurements. MLA-supported research is likely to link to strategic government policies, such as Taking Part (National Council on Archives, 2001) which considers the role of archives in

promoting social inclusion. Attempts are being made by regional MLAs to address the research agenda, but the focus is still on more practical projects, and in demonstrating the contribution of archives to the regions.

Practitioner engagement with research:

Goodall's (1998) work on the place of research in public libraries suggested that although a high value was placed on research, practitioners did not see themselves as having a strong involvement with it. This was partly due to terminology – research ‘sounds a bit academic and highbrow for what we actually do ... we gather management information and interpret it’ (Goodall, 1998: 49) – and partly because of the applied nature of the research carried out; it was embedded in specific, everyday practice. The research also highlighted a number of barriers to the execution and use of research, including: lack of expertise in dissemination; lack of time and expertise; and political factors such as competing agendas (Goodall, 1998: 50-55).

McNicol & Dalton's 2003 cross-sectoral comparison of library practitioner research surveyed over 300 practitioners from five sectors, and found that whilst over half reported involvement in research, this varied across sectors (school librarians having lowest involvement and public and academic librarians the highest). Research was commonly used for service development, as Goodall (1998) had also observed, but demonstrating the value of libraries to government and funders was also listed, something, which, for the public library sector had been missing from the earlier study (Goodall, 1998:55). Barriers to research identified in this study were time, financial resources, staff skills and a lack of practically focused projects (McNicol & Dalton, 2004: 170).

McNicol & Dalton observed that, with the exception of schools librarians,

*It was noticeable that very few librarians made use of research other than that which they had been directly involved in (McNicol & Dalton, 2004: 174)*

One of the tensions here may be the differing priorities of practitioners and academics as regards dissemination. As the LIS research landscape project carried out by CIRT (Centre for Information Research) (McNicol & Nankivell, 2003) underscored, academics prioritise publishing in top-ranking journals for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) purposes, whilst potentially neglecting more practitioner focused publications which would disseminate findings more widely. However, others reported difficulties on getting research published in professional journals, as editors were not always convinced of the relevance to their readers (p.73). Practitioners reported accessing journals as a barrier, as pressure on budgets limited what was available to them (p.74). As Goulding and Matthews (2002:65) note,

*academics [...] need to ensure that the results of their research are disseminated effectively throughout the LIS sector to foster their application.*

Genoni, Haddow & Ritchie (2004) explore a number of reasons behind their title question, ‘Why don't librarians use research?’. Drawing on a range of previous work, they also conclude that time constraints, perceived irrelevance of research literature, and a ‘culture gap’ between researchers and practitioners as possible answers. They suggest that developing collaboration in research projects, finding avenues and the

language to communicate effectively with practitioners, and the role of education may all play a part in improving the situation, as would greater practitioner contribution to the research literature. Haddow and Klobas (2004) develop this work further, and, via a critical analysis of the literature, identify eleven types of 'gap' in the communication of research to practice, ranging from time, to cultural issues, such as motivation and terminology, and skills gaps. According to them:

*available research suggests that only one of the proposed methods for improving the communication of research to practice is likely to be effective: inclusion of research reports in newsletters and other publications frequently read by practitioners (Haddow & Klobas, 2004: 39).*

The research agenda: recent developments

McNicol & Nankivell's report (2003) concluded that the LIS research agenda lacks direction, and is driven by political priorities, which can lead to the neglect of valuable areas of study (p.78). The lack of funding, in particular, has led to a gap in 'strategic, long-term research and work which is not directly related to policy concerns' (p.79). However, the report also concluded that partnership working (including collaboration between practitioners and academics) was becoming 'increasingly prevalent' (p.79), although again, there were some tensions here when academics were felt to be unaware of the more immediate demands of the job for practitioners (p.79). Similar tensions are at play in the increasing trend towards partnership working across the domains of museums, libraries and archives. Politically, these are the types of research projects that MLA at both national and regional level is likely to support (for example the Workforce Planning Project sponsored by SEMLAC; see Moore, Wallis & Marshall forthcoming – up to date ref?).

Other calls for a clear research agenda have come from the Health Executive Advisory Group (HEAG, 2004), which, although written from the perspective of the health sector, voiced concerns relevant to the whole library and archive field. For example, evidence-based practice has been a key research area in the health sector for some time, and is now spreading into the wider LIS community (see, for example, Booth & Brice, 2004):

*Interest in research and in establishing the evidence-base for practice in library and information work has grown over the last few years and more practitioners are becoming aware of the need to acquire research skills (HEAG, 2004: 25).*

Streatfield (2000) noted that an emphasis on grounding practice in the best available research evidence is a relatively recent development for both library and archive (and, indeed, museum) professionals, which would seem to bear out the gradual move towards evidence-based information practice (as Booth (2004: 8) terms it) which has been gaining ground since the mid-1990s.

HEAG concluded that CILIP's role should be to

*take a lead in the development of a clear research strategy for LIS by developing a framework and identifying where research and development is needed. Beyond this it is important to identify where research is being done currently and by whom and finally to disseminate research outcomes to practitioners and thus facilitate access to good practice (HEAG, 2004:25).*

This sentiment has been echoed by the Library and Information Research Group, which has as its mission, the promotion of research, and the linking of research with practice. Their strategy document recommends CILIP ‘continue and expand ... appropriate dissemination activities’ (p.5), and, addressing some of the issues raised in the research discussed above, suggests CILIP should:

*Assess needs for, and review the opportunities that exist for the development of appropriate skills to undertake R&D, and to promote the mechanisms for their acquisition (LIRG, 2005:5).*

This project, then, is located within the above context and sought to further explore the ways in which knowledge is – or can – be exchanged between researchers and practitioners, and to uncover instances of good practice that can be built on throughout our profession. This article focuses on contributions from the library sectors, although the project looked at both library and archive practitioners and researchers.

### Aims and objectives

The broad aim of the project was to investigate the role of research in the working practices of library and information professionals and archivists. Specifically, the research focused on:

- Identifying what, where, how and why practitioners access research outputs (or do not).
- Understanding how practitioners implement research findings in their everyday practice, or what they need to expedite their ability to do so.
- Identifying the extent to which practitioners see themselves as active researchers, and as contributing to both the research agenda more widely as well as specific research projects.
- Understanding what access practitioners have to research methods and tools, how empowered they feel to use them, and what can be done to improve this.
- Evaluating the range of networks practitioners and academic researchers engage in, and how they contribute to successful dialogue and collaboration between the two groups.

### Methods

A qualitative approach was taken to data gathering and analysis, using focus groups and interviews to gather a rich picture of the field, drawing on detailed accounts from participants of their experiences of, and attitudes towards, the role of research in the

lives of library and archive practitioners. Participants for interview were identified using a ‘snowballing’ technique, whereby key stakeholders were approached and asked to recommend others from within their networks. Interview participants were – largely – senior practitioners and researchers or representatives of key national organisations, who would be able to provide a wider perspective on the issues. A similar ‘snowball’ approach was used to recruit focus groups members, although here the emphasis was to include as broad a range of views as possible, from people working at all levels across both domains and within a range of sectors. Extensive use was made of personal networks as a way to reach people; in addition, calls for participation were circulated to a range of library and archive email lists, including those of some of the Special Interest Groups within CILIP.

In total, five focus groups were carried out, involving over 35 library and archive practitioners and lecturers. Twenty-nine interviews were conducted, mostly over the telephone, using a flexible interview schedule as a guide. This enabled the two researchers to be sure they were covering the same questions, but ensured necessary flexibility according to position and sector of the interviewee. The interviews were professionally transcribed, and analysed using a broad thematic approach, derived from the questions developed in the aims and objectives. All focus groups followed a similar format, which consisted of a first session identifying ‘What works well’ currently, and ‘What doesn’t work well’, followed by a second part focusing on specific questions relating to the need for research, the accessing and implementation of research, and the translation of research into practice. These second group of questions were modified for the last two focus groups, to accommodate the researchers’ perceptions that more useful data could be gathered from re-focusing the discussion around the following three questions:

- 1) How can we better support carrying out research?
- 2) How can we improve access to research findings?
- 3) How can research be better translated into practice? (i.e knowledge transfer).

Focus group discussions were recorded via a process of extensive note-taking as well as noting key issues on flipcharts; this material was then brought together and synthesised into one document. Themes from the focus groups were identified and brought together with the interview analysis to provide a complete picture; the results below draw on all the data collected.

Whilst every attempt was made to gain as wide a cross-section of opinions as possible, it was often easier to gain access to academic researchers than to practitioners, and some sectors (e.g. school librarians, lone archivists, commercial sector librarians) were less represented than others. However, views have come from individuals working within large national organisations and professional bodies as well as from academic departments, individual archives, and from the health, academic, public, government and commercial library sector.

## Results

The results here highlight some of the key themes that emerged from the project; the authors have chosen to focus on those areas likely to be of most interest to a library practitioner audience. Accessing research, issues relating to the gap between the

recognition of the need for research and the interest – and increasing necessity – of being engaged in research (for example to prove impact, or demonstrate value to the organisation) on the part of practitioners, and the limitations on their ability to do so are discussed. The sites of engagement between academics and practitioners (including what is problematic about these) are also discussed, along with examples of good practice from both domains. Considerable space is given to the recommendations from the research, and the authors would be most interested to hear views on these, and ways they could be taken forward.

#### Support for and access to research

Participants were clear and positive about the overall value of research, in its many forms, and identified a very wide range of reasons for needing research in our professions. These encompass research to inform practical service development to the more personal and professional issues relating to individual intellectual development and the development of the library and archive professions as a whole. A typical view from the focus groups was that:

*As organisations and individuals we can't divorce ourselves from research outputs in our day-to-day work; need to have broader vision especially in these times of great change, need to keep up-to-date with what's going on. Might not be research active but need to be aware of research, and be responsive to the wider context [reflexive practitioner].*

As might be expected, a wide range of print and electronic resources were cited as the means of accessing research outputs; of interest here is the role of the academic and professional press.

It is acknowledged by academics and practitioners alike that the latter are extremely unlikely to read academic, peer reviewed journals. Reasons for this include time, lack of access for some, the style of academic writing and perceived relevance. Many practitioners felt academic writing to be inaccessible:

*this [professional reading] tends to be done [...] when you're on the train going home [...] At which point, you know, sort of, reading the Journal of Documentation doesn't exactly grab you. [...] I do think that it's not too unreasonable that it should be written in the English language and relatively interesting terms.*

Some academics interviewed also acknowledged that, despite a certain 'anti-intellectualism' on the part of practitioners, this is not merely a perceptual issue. The need to write appropriately for different audiences was summed up by one former academic thus:

*I think for those of us working who believe in making this relationship between theory and practice, you've almost got to write things 3 times. You've got to give it the kind of popular viewpoint, you've got to do the academic thing, and I think that's part of the issue, which is about the translation.*

When academics do write for a range of audiences – and publications – this is perceived as an effective way of reaching the practitioner communities who may well have been involved in the research anyway:

*I think because of that [practitioner involvement], one of the important dissemination mechanisms has been the, shall we say less formal methods of publication? In other words, not so much the peer-reviewed journal paper, but actually the article in Inform, the paper at a conference that is... I mean, because a lot of our conferences are attended quite widely by practitioners. Those kinds of mechanisms, to me, have been more important than the formal literature. You know, if we're talking about getting things into practice.*

Practitioners, then, are more likely to read the professional press indicating that publications such as *Update*, and the number of special interest group journals are a good means of disseminating findings, and that researchers wishing to target particular audiences (e.g. the health sector) might do well to ensure at least brief descriptions of both ongoing and completed projects are submitted to these. The online journal, *Ariadne*, was suggested as a good – and well used – example of an effective online publication, as was *LIR*.

How do practitioners view research?

It is necessary to see the how and why of accessing research by practitioners in the light of wider issues which affect everyday working practices. Practitioners are working under the constraints of pressures of time, and need to deliver front line services, a situation which does not encourage time for reflection and in-depth literature searching, when looking for the evidence-base for particular issues. Thus there is a tendency to use what is (easily) available, such as email alerting services, and to draw on existing networks (either personal or electronic).

*It all hinges on what I know is going on. You know, the brain is put to the test every day in terms of, who do I know that's doing what? And because I know a lot of people, I know a lot of what's going on. It's not good enough is it? [...] we're very poor I think at having formal information sharing structures and it's really difficult because if such a structure existed, nobody would use it.*

It is, therefore, often what comes to the attention of a practitioner that will get used – and for some, if that is easy to access electronically, it is also more likely to be adopted. Common practice (ahead of reading a range of journals) when wishing to develop an area of service, for example, is for practitioners to use email lists to ask if anyone else has had similar experiences:

*I've put up a message a couple of weeks ago asking people what their practice was and what their evidence base was for dealing with misuse and abuse of IT in terms of pornography and all of that. And, that is, in effect, a mini-research project, if only I had the time to do it. [...]*

The type of research and research outcomes required by practitioners are thus very much context based. It is often not necessary to find out everything on a topic, or undertake a rigorous search on the topic, but just enough to make an informed

decision. They often require quick results so they can start implementing them and therefore build a case from ground up. Other times, a more rigorous evidence-based research will be required.

*What you need depends on area of research – might need more rigorous evidence-based research to validate something but not always.*

It was suggested by one participant that a useful point of intervention here might be for academic researchers to specifically monitor the kinds of questions that come up on these list, as a way of keeping abreast with current issues of concern, and potentially developing ideas for more systematic research engagement.

#### Practitioner engagement in research

As indicated above, where practitioners are key participants in research projects, results are more likely to be disseminated in ways other practitioners will access, and also more likely to be implemented. The extent to which practitioners are able to participate in research is dependent on a number of internal and external factors. Wider government agendas – such as impact measures, social inclusion and lifelong learning – put competing pressures on library and archive services, particularly those in the education and public sectors. Proving the value of your services, whether it be to your parent organisation or other funders is increasingly an issue for most library and archive services, and this, combined with the increasing trend towards an evidence-based approach to delivering services, puts an emphasis on carrying out a range of research to provide this evidence. At the same time, it could be argued, the increase in the external pressures (notable on public libraries and archives) to deliver on a range of government agendas, drives research into a particular (and narrow) direction, and adds to the already over-riding constraint for practitioners: the lack of time, both to engage with research form elsewhere, and to participate in projects. Internal factors, such as lack of motivation, and lack of a research culture were also identified by some participants, who felt that a certain ‘silo mentality’ still exists in some parts of our professions.

#### The question of relevance

There was a perception – across all library sectors as well as from archivists – that much academic research (including that funded by Research Councils) was not relevant to the everyday needs of practitioners:

*I personally believe as a practitioner to come into the academic arena that there really is a big problem with lack of relevance with a lot of the stuff the AHRC, in particular, fund ...*

This may be particularly true for the commercial sector, who may have links with universities, but with business schools, rather than LIS departments:

*most of the research that I come across doesn't seem to bear any relation to what we do. I think that's, for me, and I have to say, I don't put a lot of effort into finding academic research that will help me.*

Research can thus appear ‘dislocated’ from the practical nature of delivering library and archive services, and is perceived by practitioners as failing to lead to products or services:

*I really do think that mainstream library action is a practical operation and that research results have to be pointed towards actual real every day practical applications that impact on daily [life] ...*

There may also be a wider questions about where research is directed; practitioners are not always in a position to *commission* research; *so in a lot of cases it's not practitioners that need actually to consider the research, it's actually the planners and funders of services, policy makers, that's really the big issue.*

The above issues can lead to a perception of lack of ability to influence the research agenda at the levels of funders and policy-makers; however, attending conferences and seminars and other spaces for discussing research were seen as key for sharing ideas amongst fellow practitioners and researchers.

#### Communication spaces

Despite all the barriers outlined above, examples of practitioner-researcher collaboration, and working in partnership, demonstrated that spaces can – and do - exist where the two groups can usefully work together towards a shared research agenda. Such spaces include:

- Practitioner involvement on academic courses

There were many examples of practitioners contributing to library and archive courses, as guest lecturers, external examiners, and as hosts for students completing dissertations. Significant regional differences exist here; some areas of the UK are geographically advantaged in that local library schools are able to develop strong links with local libraries. In Wales for example, strong links between library and archives courses at Aberystwyth, CyMAL and other Welsh bodies ensure a very ‘joined up’ approach to developing research, both in the support of students, and in the sharing of research results at joint conferences etc. Where these links do not exist, practitioners felt strongly that academics needed to initiate this kind of outreach.

- Academic-practitioner collaborations

Participants discussed examples of joint working they had been involved with; amongst a number of academics there is a strong commitment to involving practitioners at all stages of a research project, seeking advice on projects from the outset, and involving them during the research, rather than just disseminating the results to them at the end. Feedback from focus groups suggests that this is particularly successful, as it builds in ownership of the project from the beginning, and increases the chances of results being taken up, and this feeling was also echoed by interviewees:

*from the point of view of practitioners, is that if there is an involvement in a project, a research project, by your staff then the results are more likely to be used or taken note of.*

Experiences of actually working on joint projects revealed that these can be beneficial to all sides, despite the competing agendas of academics (who need RAE-able papers) and practitioners (who want practical outcomes) (it isn't impossible to 'square that circle'). However, it must be acknowledged that this does present challenges:

*although we did work really well as a team of practitioners and academics, we were being driven by slightly separate agendas, [...] the practitioners wanted it to be immensely practical, and I wanted it to be something that began to develop the library agenda if you like [...] But [name of academic] particularly, was driven by the need [...] for it to be a certain kind of research that had certain kinds of academic credibility.*

An example from focus group discussions revealed that successful collaboration can take hard work, and may hinge on the characteristics of the individuals involved; a successful academic library project was cited which employed a researcher with particularly good communication skills who was able to be a bridge between the library and the academic department involved, their success being rated by the fact that they came to be seen as a member of the library service. This suggests then that research training should take account of these kinds of issues.

Interestingly, there is a lack of data involving actual examples of where research has been implemented successfully in practice, suggesting that either practitioners did not readily have examples, or that academic research does not get taken up in such a straightforward way.

- Networking

Unsurprisingly, and despite enthusiasm for electronic ways of sharing resources and engaging with colleagues, face-to-face personal networking was the most popular way of engaging with research, and participants from all backgrounds emphasised the importance of events which bring together practitioners and researchers. Some of our academic interviewees stressed the importance of attending conferences aimed at practitioners:

*it's bridging that gap in a way, building bridges between the two, that research... you know, it's the old thing, there's nothing as practical as a good theory, and I think it's convincing practitioners that that is the case.*

whilst others felt that conferences specifically designed to bring together researchers and practitioners where a successful strategy:

*the best events, I think, are conferences which draw together researchers and practitioners, and they need to be either invitation or refereed [...] it seems to me that that kind of event actually produces a lot of value. It gets researchers and practitioners together. They both have things to say; they both get benefit from it.*

The importance of networking was emphasised, both between academic and practitioner communities, and also between practitioners, in determining areas of significance for research:

*Unless you have a free flow of information between practitioners and academics, you're not going to get academics engaging in the sorts of research questions that practitioners want solving. If you don't get practitioners talking to each other, you don't get the body, well, the weight of feeling that anything is worth researching.*

## Conclusions

The research explored a range of issues which impact on the knowledge exchange between practitioners and academic researchers; many findings support previous work done in this area, suggesting that solutions to some of the more endemic problems such as lack of research culture, lack of time for research, and communication barriers between the two groups may not be simply nor quickly found. However, building on existing good practice – and, importantly – to a large extent the goodwill to work together, as well as implementing some of the very specific suggestions from our participants may well help to move both the research agenda and the actual practice and implementation of research in the library and archive worlds forward.

## Recommendations

There are a number of factors, which need to be addressed by individuals and organisations, if a 'culture change' is to be effected so that research is embedded into our professional life. This is a long-term project, and involves active engagement on the part of practitioners, researchers, employers, library and archive schools and national bodies alike.

However, in the shorter term, there are a range of significant contributions which could be made to build on the good practice which already exists, and to address some of the issues discussed above.

### *The national context:*

A number of areas need to be considered, by a range of national bodies, as well as individual organisations, and these may well be best achieved by collaborative working to maximise impact:

- Support for research at all levels and across all parts of the professions, to raise awareness of its role;
- Support for partnership working, and the matching of complementary roles and skills sets of academics and practitioners;
- National bodies to take lead on facilitating debates about role and value of research, as well as debates about research agendas;
- Need for research 'champions' – this may come down to individual practice, but there is also a role here for organisations to support staff in this capacity;
- Greater publicity for research support and initiatives (such as the LIRG/Elsevier Prize).

### *Funding issues/role of research councils:*

- Increased support for first-time researchers;
- Practitioners on panels which commission research;
- Impact on practice as specific criterion for funding; also evaluation of a project's impact;
- Continued support for dissemination via funding specifically for this aspect of research;
- Greater inclusion of practitioners in research design, and as a criterion for the funding and evaluation of projects;
- Funding for small-scale 'exploratory' projects to support and encourage work by sole practitioners.

### *Dissemination*

- Support for wide ranging dissemination, in a variety of formats and via range of channels;
- Importance of short reports on research – in progress as much as finished work – in professional journals, and to email lists, alerting services etc;
- More conferences, seminars and workshops which bring together practitioners and academics – importance of physical spaces and networks to discuss research results;
- Support for academics in writing up research results for a variety of audiences (could be via courses on writing for the professional press);
- Use of outside 'translators' such as journalists to publicise research findings and demonstrate benefit;
- Establishment of central repository – for research and information about research; a 'good practice portal';
- Build on existing regional structures (e.g. of national bodies/professional associations) to facilitate dissemination.

### *Networks*

- Continued activities to bring academics and practitioners together in the support of library and archives students – where this is not already practice, Higher education institutions can:
  - Invite practitioners as guest speakers and external examiners;
  - Recognise role of local organisations in hosting students and providing ideas and support for students dissertations;
  - Establish 'employers forum' where practitioners and academics can exchange ideas for research as well as feeding into curriculum design;
  - Get out into the local community and find out what areas of research are of importance to practitioners;
  - Facilitate 'job swaps' or shadowing.
- Electronic networks, such as email lists, can be used to monitor areas of concern to practitioners and pick up ideas which can be researched more rigorously;
- A kind of 'marriage brokering' or 'dating service' for practitioner and researchers, where those looking for research to be done.

### *Training and support*

- Library and archive schools to emphasise value of research to students – and encourage research as a valid career option;
- Training to support practitioners in research methods – including how to evaluate, translate and utilise research findings and outputs;
- Projects to support the ‘translation’ of research results could include specific design of tools – these would need to be developed by a partnership of academics and practitioners;
- Support for research as part of CPD;
- Research mentor scheme; this could involve academics or practitioner-researchers providing guidance and support for new researchers, and for those undertaking research in the workplace.

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