

HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES IN PARTNERSHIP (HELP) PROJECT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**WALES HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES FORUM
June 2004**

Executive Summary

The Higher Education Libraries in Partnership (HELP) Project was initiated by the Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELP) in February 2003. A detailed account of the organisation and conduct of the project is presented in the five separate reports noted below, all of which are available on the WHELP web site at <http://whelf.ac.uk>. This Executive Summary provides a brief overview of the project as a whole and its principal recommendations.

- Part 1: Summary Report
- Part 2: Collaboration Review
- Part 3: E-Learning Feasibility Study
- Part 4: Journals Case Study
- Part 5: Partnership Programme

A list of the members of the HELP Steering Group and Project Officers is also appended.

1. Background

The Higher Education Libraries in Partnership (HELP) project arose from a perception on the part of WHELF (the Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum) that the time was right for a major initiative to build on its already impressive record of achievement in promoting collaboration as a means of improving library and information services in Wales. The launch of the new strategy for higher education by the Welsh Assembly Government in March 2002, with its strong emphasis on reconfiguration and collaboration, closely followed in April 2002 by a consultation paper on the creation of a new policy division to foster collaboration between libraries, archives and museums in Wales, provided the initial political impetus and served to confirm that a wide-ranging project to take stock of existing collaborative ventures in Wales and create a blueprint for future joint action on the part of WHELF would be particularly appropriate and timely. The publication of the final report of the Research Support Libraries Group in April 2003 and the establishment of CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales in April 2004 has maintained the momentum behind the collaboration agenda and given added relevance to the project and its anticipated outcomes.

2. Project outline

The HELP project commenced in February 2003 under the direction of a steering group made up of WHELF representatives from the University of Wales Aberystwyth, acting as lead site, the University of Glamorgan, the University of Wales Swansea and the University of Wales Institute Cardiff. The project was of twelve months duration and was divided into three distinct phases, each of which contributed a practical outcome whilst at the same time informing subsequent phases of the project and contributing to its final outcome. The project began with a comprehensive review and evaluation of existing collaborative activity in the HE library and information sector in Wales, providing a detailed snapshot of current initiatives and identifying a number of areas where a more collaborative approach might offer opportunities for worthwhile gains. The findings of the review were subsequently used in the second phase of the project to select two specific areas for more detailed practical investigation, namely, inter-institutional support for the e-learning agenda and collaborative collection management in respect of journals holdings. During the third and final phase of the project the outcomes of both previous phases were used to define a strategy and action plan for use by WHELF as a blueprint to strengthen resource sharing and deepen collaboration between Higher Education institutions in Wales and with institutions in others sectors, notably the National Library of Wales.

3. Overview

The HELP project promotes a holistic vision of library and information provision in Wales, with persuasive evidence being presented not only in favour of closer working relations between academic libraries but also between information providers in all sectors, working together to provide the people of Wales with easy and seamless access to the nation's rich information resources. The report confirms the huge potential for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of national provision by strengthening collaborative working within and between library sectors and calls upon CyMAL to take the lead in creating a national information strategy for Wales. The HELP project provides the HE sector with an opportunity to make a significant contribution to this national agenda whilst at the same time addressing strategic objectives specific to Higher Education in Wales. In this regard the project urges WHELF to adopt a more proactive role by developing a Partnership Programme to promote and facilitate further collaboration between its members and invites HEFCW to consider to what extent it can facilitate the more ambitious reconfiguration in the HE library and information sector that some of the projects highlighted in the HELP project would entail.

4. Collaboration Review

The first phase of the project consisted of a comprehensive review of existing and potential collaborative initiatives in the HE library sector in Wales. Raw data was collected during the first two months of the project principally through a series of five focus group meetings held in different parts of Wales with senior staff from all WHELF member institutions, supplemented by meetings with key players from other library sectors. Information and raw data collected during the review process was used to create a comprehensive inventory of activity in nearly twenty discrete areas, with standardised entries highlighting principal features, including the benefits, challenges, drivers and resource implications of current and potential work in each area. The inventory, continuously updated during the course of the project and published as Part 2 of the HELP Report, provides impressive confirmation of how library and information service providers have long since followed their collaborative instincts to improve the services they deliver. It also provides persuasive evidence to suggest that inter-institutional and cross sectoral collaboration remains a valid option for further service enhancement.

5. E-Learning Feasibility Study

The Collaboration Review confirmed that library and information services are at the forefront of efforts to promote and develop the e-learning agenda in higher education and that all institutions have to confront very similar challenges in this rapidly moving area. It was consequently decided that one of the two pilot projects would test how feasible it would be for institutions to develop shared subject portals to digital resources by pooling expertise and experience and to assess how effective, sustainable and scalable they might be. Part 3 of the HELP Report consequently provides an account of the pilot project undertaken at the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales Institute Cardiff to develop a subject portal for Environmental Sciences. Although the six month timescale imposed obvious limitations on the breadth and depth of the study the project team was nevertheless able to construct and populate a subject portal and carry out an evaluation of the processes involved. The project team concluded that although local factors did play a significant part in determining the approach to e-learning there was sufficient common ground to justify a collaborative approach with definite benefits for users arising from integrated access to a much broader range of digital resources and to service providers through the more cost-effective use of pooled expertise and resources. To this end the project team recommended that WHELP should consider a collaborative approach to a number of practical issues, including the joint procurement of digital resources, the preparation of value added support material and the development of an all-Wales rights clearance scheme. It was also recommended that further work should be undertaken on what models might be used to develop an integrated approach to resource discovery on a subject by subject basis, with access for all being provided by a distributed network of subject portals maintained by individual institutions or clusters of institutions.

6. Journals Case Study

In response to numerous suggestions made during the Collaboration Review for strengthening coordination between academic libraries and with the NLW in respect of the management and development of library collections, it was decided to use the second pilot project as an opportunity to take a closer look at the prospects for progress in this area. It was agreed that journal literature would be used as the demonstrator material in view of its fundamental importance to the needs of researchers, the difficulties libraries experience in satisfying academic demand in periods of financial constraint and the major changes the electronic revolution is currently provoking in the journals landscape. During the first phase of the project

statistical and bibliographical data and more general information on institutional arrangements for the management and use of journal collections was gathered from published sources, a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews, library websites and OPACS. Although opportunities for detailed statistical analysis of the wealth of data collected during the three month project were limited by time pressures, the project report, published as Part 4 of the HELP Report, does highlight a number of interesting characteristics and trends, including the way in which journal costs have increasingly dominated library spends, the surprisingly limited degree of overlap between HE library journal collections, the rich but comparatively untapped academic journal resources of the National Library of Wales and the accelerating trend towards electronic journal subscriptions. Recommendations made by the project team included improved and integrated resource discovery tools; more effective joint marketing of the academic resources of the National Library of Wales; further work on collaborative acquisition of electronic journals and on the collaborative storage of print journals.

7. WHELF Partnership Programme

A principal purpose of the HELP project was to give WHELF an opportunity to define a strategy and action plan for strengthening resource sharing between member libraries and whose implementation would launch WHELF into a new phase of collaborative activity within the HE library sector and with institutions and libraries in other sectors in Wales and elsewhere. Drawing on the findings of each of the project's principal phases the project team prepared a document highlighting the principal factors that needed to be taken into account when preparing an action plan, identified the strategic objectives and broad policy areas on which attention might be concentrated and made specific recommendations about how WHELF should go about managing and implementing such an ambitious programme. The heart of the draft plan consisted of a series of seven strategic objectives around which many of the collaborative activities identified during the project could be grouped, namely, maximising library collections, improving resource discovery, widening access to collections, connecting with the National Library, creating a virtual academic library, promoting the e-learning agenda and delivering a more efficient service. The document also drew attention to a number of important organisational and resource issues that would need to be addressed if WHELF was to have the capacity to deliver the Partnership Programme. The full proposal for a WHELF Partnership Programme is produced separately as Part 5 of the HELP Report.

8. Summary Report

The Summary Report prepared at the end of the HELP project provides an account of the management, organisation and conduct of each of the three phases into which the project was divided. It also draws a number of conclusions from the project as a whole and makes a number of general recommendations for consideration by WHELF, CyMAL and HEFCW. These recommendations are listed below.

Recommendation 1: that WHELF should develop and implement a Partnership Programme based on the findings of the HELP project

Recommendation 2: that WHELF should review its organisational structure, funding and working methods in order to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver the Partnership Programme

Recommendation 3: that a key objective of the Partnership Programme should be to develop further collaborative projects and initiatives with the National Library of Wales for the purpose of ensuring that all those who could potentially benefit from the rich resources of the National Library have every opportunity to do so

Recommendation 4: that CyMAL should use the unique opportunity provided by its establishment as a division of the Welsh Assembly Government to develop a vision that transcends sectoral perspectives and provides libraries with a strategic framework within which to deliver effective and integrated services to the people of Wales

Recommendation 5: that WHELF should enter into dialogue with CyMAL at the earliest opportunity in order to explore areas of common interest and establish how WHELF might contribute to and benefit from CyMAL's emerging strategic agenda

Recommendation 6: that HEFCW should review its relationship with WHELF and consider how WHELF might be able to assist in the achievement of its policy aims and strategic objectives

Recommendation 7: that HEFCW should explicitly encourage HE institutions to give specific attention to library and information services when preparing their plans for collaboration

Recommendation 8: that HEFCW should consider how it might advance the reconfiguration agenda by facilitating innovative and collaborative ways of working within the HE library and information sector

HELP Project Staffing

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Collaboration Review

Project Officer:

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E-Learning Feasibility Study

Project Officers:

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Journals Case Study

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