

**HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES IN PARTNERSHIP  
(HELP) PROJECT**



**PART 1:  
SUMMARY REPORT**

**WALES HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES FORUM  
June 2004**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite being a small country with difficult communications Wales has a rich diversity of Higher Education institutions (HEIs) that have developed a strong tradition of collaborative activity and mutual support in respect of the management and provision of library and information services (LIS). The fact that most institutions are constituent parts of the federal University of Wales has helped but the main impetus for collaboration in recent years has come from the Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELP), the organisation within which the Chief Librarians, Directors and Heads of Library and Information Services of all HEIs in Wales come together with the Librarian of the National Library of Wales (NLW) to exchange information, share expertise and develop collaborative activities<sup>1</sup>.

WHELP has long promoted a holistic vision of HE library and information provision in Wales and believes that strengthened collaboration between institutions and with other sectors in Wales can offer real benefits for all users of library and information services and more effective use of public funds. To this end exploratory discussions were held with the Director of Higher Education at the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) in June 2001 on how WHELP might develop a more strategic leadership role in this area, followed later in the year by an initial proposal for a funded project. After further dialogue with HEFCW, taking account of important higher education policy initiatives from the Welsh Assembly Government, a revised proposal for a twelve month Higher Education Libraries in Partnership (HELP) project was approved in late October 2002 for commencement in February 2003.

The purpose of this Summary Report is to provide a descriptive account of the conduct of the HELP project describing its origins, objectives, methodology, organisation and management as well as providing an overview of its principal deliverables and outcomes. It should be noted, however, that whilst this Summary Report describes the principal features of each of the distinct phases into which the project was divided and makes a number of general recommendations, it does not replicate the detailed findings, conclusions and recommendations of each of the project's separate reports.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information on reciprocal access schemes, consortial projects and other collaborative activities is available from the WHELP website at <http://whelf.ac.uk/>

## 2. THE CONTEXT

### 2.1 Higher education

The HELP project took place against a background of significant strategic and structural change in the HE sector in Wales. During the period when proposals were being discussed with HEFCW the Welsh Assembly Government launched its strategic plan *Reaching Higher: Higher Education and the Learning Country – a strategy for the higher education sector in Wales*<sup>2</sup>. The opportunity was consequently taken to ensure that the project brief took account of how library and information services might be affected by and contribute to the achievement of this new vision for higher education in Wales, particularly in respect of the following themes:

- *Reconfiguration and collaboration.* The Welsh Assembly Government called for a ‘radical new approach to the development of collaboration and co-operation across Wales’ and indicated that ‘reconfiguration and collaboration must be at the heart of the strategy for HE in Wales’. The envisaged creation of networks of administrative, functional and subject-based clusters raised important questions about the future management of LIS resources and the delivery of high quality information services.
- *Strengthening research through joint action.* Considerable attention was given in *Reaching Higher* to the need for Welsh HEIs to join forces in establishing a globally competitive presence in research and scholarship, raising questions about how access to distributed resources and facilities could be optimised and wasteful duplication of expensive research resources avoided through a holistic and collaborative approach to the development of research collections.
- *Excellence in teaching and learning.* *Reaching Higher* confirmed that teaching remained a core function and that ‘the objective of all teaching missions must be to maximise the experience and attainment of all students’. The challenge for library and information services was to devise practical, shared ways in which they could help parent institutions ‘to develop innovative teaching methods, drawing on the latest developments in technology wherever relevant, to supplement more traditional techniques and personal contacts between tutors and students’.
- *Widening access.* Confirmation of the continuing emphasis on widening access to higher education placed an onus on library and information services to improve both physical and virtual access to learning materials within and between institutions and to develop

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<sup>2</sup> *Reaching Higher: Higher Education and the Learning Country – a Strategy for the higher education sector in Wales.* Welsh Assembly Government, March 2002.

means of making such resources ever more accessible to as large and varied an audience as possible.

- *Efficiency gains.* *Reaching Higher* noted that the HE sector carried above average administrative costs as compared with other HE sectors in the UK and offered clear encouragement for investigation of what efficiency savings, if any, might derive from strengthened collaboration, particularly through shared access, integrated functions and elimination of wasteful duplication.

## 2.2 LIS collaboration

The HELP project was timely not only because of the prospective changes in the shape and structure of the HE landscape in Wales but also because, quite independently, high level attention was at the same time being paid at all-Wales and United Kingdom levels to issues concerned with collaboration and resource sharing within and across sectors as a means of improving access and ensuring optimal use of scarce financial resources. These important initiatives and programmes included:

- The *Research Support Libraries Group (RSLG)*, established by the four higher education funding councils, the British Library and the national libraries of Wales and Scotland under the chairmanship of Sir Brian Follett, submitted its final report during the early stages of the HELP project. Established in order to investigate the ways in which UK researchers could continue to have ready access to high quality research resources the report recommended the creation of a new national body, the Research Libraries Network (RLN), and offered opportunities for WHELP to play a full part in addressing its ambitious agenda for collaborative actions whilst at the same time addressing issues of particular concern in Wales<sup>3</sup>.
- The *Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP)* provided a major impetus to collaborative activity across all parts of the United Kingdom by funding a national access scheme and over fifty consortial projects designed to provide researchers with improved access to research collections and resources<sup>4</sup>. The momentum created by the opportunity to develop and manage several successful consortial RSLP projects in Wales gave WHELP the experience, confidence and appetite to consider how it might pursue a more active strategic role in future in respect of the collaboration agenda.
- *Collaborative initiatives in Wales.* Two developments, in particular, provided an essential backdrop and incentive for the HELP project. First, the report commissioned by the

<sup>3</sup> *Final report.* Research Support Libraries Group. HEFCE, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rslp.ac.uk>

Library and Information Services Council (Wales) on resource discovery in Wales was published in June 2002, demonstrating the need for a comprehensive online record of library resources in Wales covering all library sectors and recommending an all-Wales strategy and funded programme to achieve it<sup>5</sup>. Second, after lengthy consideration and public consultation, confirmation that the Welsh Assembly Government would create a new division called CyMAL (Museums Archives and Libraries Wales) from April 2004 to provide an integrated and holistic approach to the development and implementation of policy for the three domains, created a widespread sense of anticipation and excitement about future prospects for maximising the contribution of libraries, archives and museums to the economic, educational, cultural and social life of Wales<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. PROJECT OUTLINE

For reasons outlined above WHELP considered that the political and professional climate was right for a major initiative to build on its record of achievement in respect of LIS collaboration and embed inter-institutional working firmly into routine service provision. In this context the twelve month HELP project was intended as a means by which WHELP could kick start a longer term programme of activities designed to address the strategic agenda established by the Welsh Assembly Government and help it to play its full part in the numerous collaborative initiatives then emerging at a UK and all-Wales level.

#### 3.1 Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the HELP project as set out in the original project brief were to:

- *review existing collaborative and co-operative schemes and investigate the implications of proposals to reconfigure the HE sector for the future management and delivery of library and information services in Wales*
- *identify and implement practical measures and projects that enable institutions to share resources and work together at an appropriate level to deliver improved and cost-effective library and information services to the HE community in Wales*
- *define a strategy and a complementary action plan to strengthen resource sharing and deepen LIS collaboration between HE institutions at a local, regional and national level in Wales and with institutions in other sectors, particularly the National Library of Wales*

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<sup>5</sup> *Towards a complete picture of library resources in Wales: a report of a study of resource discovery in Wales for the Library and Information Services Council (Wales)*, by D.Hywel E. Roberts. LISC (Wales), June 2002.

<sup>6</sup> *A strategic and advisory structure for museums, libraries and archives in Wales – consultation paper*. Welsh Assembly Government, April 2002.

### 3.2 Methodology

The HELP project was divided into three distinct phases, each of which was intended to produce practical outcomes that would enable WHELP to assess the need and potential for inter-institutional collaboration and to prepare a plan for developing a programme of practical measures to address the collaboration agenda over coming years.

- **Collaboration Review** An initial objective was to build up a comprehensive picture of existing and potential collaborative activity within the LIS sector and between the sector and other sectors and domains in Wales. Particular attention was to be paid to the nature of co-operative links between libraries, differentiating between the different levels of collaboration as defined in the RSLP report on *Barriers to resource sharing among higher education libraries*<sup>7</sup> and evaluating to what degree the obstacles to greater resource sharing and collaboration noted in that report applied in Wales.
- **Feasibility studies** The main practical thrust of the HELP project was to identify and investigate a small number of areas where collaboration seemed likely to offer real prospects of improved services and/or efficiency gains in the light of the National Assembly's vision for the HE sector, and to test how feasible it might be to apply such methods to all or to clusters of HE institutions in Wales. The emphasis throughout was to be on finding practical solutions to real issues rather than on theoretical or academic studies.
- **Blueprint and action plan** The final phase was to use the findings of the project to devise a practical action plan that would provide WHELP with a programme and agreed agenda for future collaboration. It was expected that the action plan would not only highlight options, models and mechanisms for strengthening collaboration within the HE sector but also identify strategic objectives and the principal areas where practical actions and projects of varying types and levels of engagement would strengthen cross sectoral working and encourage a more holistic approach to the planning and delivery of library and information services.

### 3.3 Project management

Staffing arrangements for the conduct of the HELP project reflected its principal components. Elizabeth Kensler was appointed as HELP Project Officer for a 12 month period with particular responsibility for the organisation, conduct and analysis of both the Collaboration Review and the Journals Case Study. The E-Learning Feasibility Study was undertaken jointly by the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC)

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<sup>7</sup> *A report to the RSLP on: Barriers to Resource Sharing among Higher Education Libraries*. The Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting, January 2002.

using staff seconded from their respective library services, notably Wendy Smith from UWIC and Wayne Morris from Glamorgan. For budgetary and administrative purposes the lead institution was the University of Wales Aberystwyth, with Mike Hopkins, Director of Information Services, acting as Project Director and Chair of a small Project Steering Group appointed by WHELP, whose other members were Jeremy Atkinson, Head of Learning Resources Centre, University of Glamorgan, Paul Riley, Head of Library Division, UWIC and Chris West, Director of Library and Information Services, University of Wales Swansea. The Steering Group met on 11 occasions between December 2002 and June 2004 in order to provide strategic direction, monitor progress and consider reports from the Project Officer and the sub groups established to oversee the two studies. Regular reports on progress were given to the full WHELP Board at its six monthly meetings and feedback incorporated into the project and its final report.

### **3.4 Funding**

WHELP has traditionally operated without a formal budget, depending largely on the generous support of its members, who give freely of their time and institutional resources, and on the good offices of the National Library of Wales for its modest administrative requirements. Although WHELP has recently established a Development Fund the HELP project would not have been possible without the generous support of HEFCW, whose grant of £40,000 enabled WHELP to appoint dedicated staff to supplement the time generously offered by Directors and Chief Librarians.

## **4. THE COLLABORATION REVIEW**

### **4.1 Aim**

The purpose of the first phase of the HELP project was to compile a comprehensive inventory of existing collaborative activities for use as an initial reference point and context for the project, provide a steer for its two feasibility studies and help shape the action plan whose subsequent implementation would constitute the project's lasting legacy. The scope, nature and principal characteristics of existing collaborative activities were to be mapped and both the drivers and the barriers to cooperation highlighted. It was anticipated that the exercise would not only inform the remainder of the project but clearly identify areas of rich potential for future priority attention by WHELP and others.

### **4.2 Conduct**

The principal means used to gather data and information was through focus group meetings held with Heads of Library and Information Services in all HEIs in Wales and with the Librarian of the National Library of Wales. Five focus group meetings were arranged in Cardiff, Pontypridd, Swansea, Aberystwyth and Wrexham during late February and early March 2003, at which the Project Officer and Steering Group members were able to learn

about the extent to which collaboration and cooperation was pursued in each institution and region. Particularly valuable were the insights participants were able to provide into the motivation behind initiatives, their actual experiences in terms of operational benefits and practical difficulties as well as their views and ideas on which areas of service provision could benefit most from strengthened collaborative activity in the future. Further details of each of the five focus group sessions along with a copy of the questionnaire used as a loose framework for the conduct of each group discussion appear as an appendix to the separately published report on the Review. Feedback from these sessions was supplemented later by desk research and interviews with representatives from other library sectors in Wales, details of which also appear in the appendix. Informed input from the users of HE libraries was also obtained from project reports made to user committees in institutions represented on the Project Steering Group.

### **4.3 Deliverables**

Although designed primarily as a means to an end the Collaboration Review constitutes a valuable tool in its own right, providing a comprehensive picture and analytical assessment of collaborative structures within the HE LIS sector and between the sector and other sectors and domains in Wales. The Review begins with an overview of the current situation in Wales, with analyses of the main drivers for collaboration and a summary of the major issues and challenges associated with collaboration that emerged from the focus group discussions. The principal organisations, structures and projects associated with collaboration are identified as are the key documents and policy initiatives that provide the essential political and professional background. The main body of the report takes the form of an inventory of collaborative activity in Wales, with principal sections covering collection management, service provision, staff training and development and technical issues. The four main sections are themselves divided into some twenty sub-themes consisting of annotated entries following a standard format covering existing and potential activities, the main drivers, benefits, challenges and resource implications. A complete version of the Collaboration Review is separately published as Part 2 of the HELP Report.

## **5. THE E-LEARNING FEASIBILITY STUDY**

### **5.1 Aim**

In view of the key role increasingly played by new technologies in the HE teaching and learning environment and the fact that issues associated with the e-learning agenda permeate the Collaboration Review it was decided at an early stage that one of the two HELP pilot projects would be devoted to this broad topic. It was consequently decided to test how feasible it might be for two institutions to share expertise and experience in jointly developing a shared portal to digital resources that would enhance services, widen access and achieve cost-effective delivery in an agreed subject area. It was expected that the process of

developing the portal would illustrate how effective a collaborative and content driven approach might be in meeting the common and different information needs of staff and students in the two institutions. It was expected that the study would also provide an opportunity to assess issues such as technical infrastructure, rights clearance, the relationship of the portal to other resource discovery tools and how sustainable and scalable a shared portal could be.

## **5.2 Conduct**

In reflection of their already active involvement with e-learning initiatives it was agreed that the feasibility study would be based at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) and the University of Glamorgan under the direction of Jeremy Atkinson, Head of the Learning Resources Centre, University of Glamorgan, assisted by a Steering Group consisting of Paul Riley, Head of Library Division, UWIC, Wayne Morris, University of Glamorgan and Wendy Smith, UWIC. Environmental Sciences was chosen as the pilot subject area and discussions were undertaken with academic staff in both institutions to identify user requirements. Interviews were also held with key members of Library and Information Services staff and those involved in e-learning projects at both institutions, existing and potential resources were identified and suppliers were contacted to assess the feasibility of jointly negotiated licenses for electronic resources. The information gathered during this initial phase was fed into the design and construction of the portal using open source software residing on a server based at the University of Glamorgan and into its content and functionality. During the final evaluative phase of the project assessments were made of the feedback received from user groups and other key stakeholders focussing not just on the actual portal itself, but also on how the portal could be integrated into other resource discovery tools and the benefits of providing such a portal on a collaborative basis across two institutions.

## **5.3 Deliverables**

The feasibility study generated a series of findings and recommendations on e-learning for incorporation into the Partnership Programme, a portal for environmental sciences as well as a significant insight into how collaboration can enhance the resources available to staff and to students. The study showed that even when institutions have different approaches to delivering e-learning there is still potential for collaboration. The choice of subject is crucial and close involvement of academic staff is necessary for the project to be user focussed. Significant time was spent in discussions with academic staff and with library staff. The study demonstrated the possibilities for clusters of institutions to develop subject based portals and other integrated approaches to resource discovery within an agreed subject framework. In this context it was recommended that the findings of the feasibility study could be used to develop a toolkit for use by other institutions wishing to pursue a collaborative approach. More detailed information on the conduct, conclusions and recommendations arising from the e-learning feasibility study appears in Part 3 of the HELP report.

## 6. THE JOURNALS CASE STUDY

### 6.1 Aim

In response to numerous observations made during the Collaboration Review phase about the potential for strengthening collaborative acquisition, use and storage of different categories of material, particularly in relation to the National Library of Wales, it was decided to undertake a study that would highlight some of the generic issues associated with collaborative collection management, including the conditions that would have to exist, the barriers that would have to be overcome and the potential benefits that might potentially accrue. In view of its fundamental importance to 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, it was agreed that journal literature would be used as the demonstrator material.

### 6.2 Conduct

The 3 month project was undertaken by Elizabeth Kensler, the HELP Project Officer, under the guidance of a small Steering Group consisting of Mike Hopkins, Director of Information Services, UWA, Chris West, Director of Library and Information Services, UWS, and Non Jenkins, Head of Acquisitions, National Library of Wales. During the first phase of the project essential statistical and bibliographical data and more general information on institutional arrangements for the management and use of journal collections was gathered by a variety of means. Data was extracted from published sources, notably *SCONUL Annual Library Statistics*, a questionnaire seeking additional information was circulated to all WHELP librarians and lists of journals requested from member institutions. Further information was obtained from library websites and OPACS and from discussions with relevant staff in individual libraries. The data so gathered was subsequently used to construct a database and web-based profile of the principal characteristics that define academic and national library journal collections and their use. During the final phase of the study the relationship between, and characteristics of, academic and national library holdings of journal literature and the extent to which practical measures to co-ordinate and integrate provision for the benefit of both researchers and partner institutions might be possible was considered.

### 6.3 Deliverables

Despite its short-term nature the Case Study generated a series of recommendations on collaborative collection management for incorporation into the Partnership Programme, a database of bibliographic data on journal subscriptions and holdings across Wales, detailed statistical profiles of journal collections in WHELP libraries as well as invaluable management information on their organisation and use. The tabulated results of the questionnaire survey, published as an appendix to the Journals report, provide a unique snapshot of the

management systems, policies and practices currently in use in HEIs in Wales and in the National Library and illustrate how comparative data of this kind can act as a powerful management tool to highlight differential levels of provision and pinpoint areas where a more concerted collective approach to collection management might be beneficial. A considerable amount of time and effort was also expended during the project on collecting, assimilating and analysing lists of both print and electronic journal titles available in HEI libraries and in comparing the results against the holdings of the National Library of Wales. Although the study very clearly demonstrated the difficulties of processing and interpreting bibliographical records and data drawn from a multitude of institutions it also amply demonstrated the potential value of inter-institutional databases as an analytical tool for comparing provision across the sector and of union lists as an invaluable aid to resource discovery, particularly in respect of encouraging increased academic use of the National Library of Wales. More detailed information on the conduct, conclusions and recommendations arising from the Journals Case Study appears in Part 4 of the HELP Report.

## **7. WHELP PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME**

### **7.1 Aim**

A fundamental aim of the HELP project, as defined in the original project brief, was to enable WHELP to 'define a strategy and a complementary action plan to strengthen resource sharing and deepen LIS collaboration between HE institutions at a local, regional and national level in Wales and with institutions in other sectors, particularly the National Library of Wales'. It was expected that the HELP project would provide a unique opportunity to undertake a more systematic and thorough review than would otherwise have been possible with the limited resources available to WHELP and that the data, information and views gathered during the course of the project would provide a sound basis for building a plan of action whose implementation would launch WHELP into a new phase of collaborative activity.

In the event, the project utilised a wide variety of methodological approaches and data-gathering techniques to inform the preparation of the WHELP action plan. During the initial phase of the project, for instance, data was principally gathered by means of focus group sessions supplemented by an iterative dialogue with WHELP members, set piece interviews with other key players outside the HE sector and general desk research. The e-learning feasibility study, on the other hand, tested the concept and viability of designing and developing a shared, inter-institutional e-learning portal, using observation, experience, analysis and discussion with information providers and academic staff. The journals case study, in marked contrast, generated large amounts of statistical, factual and descriptive data derived from both published sources and from institutional responses to a questionnaire survey which provided a unique and detailed snapshot of policy and practice in one important area of library activity.

## **7.2 Deliverables**

During the final phase of the HELP project a separate document was prepared recommending the creation of a WHELP Partnership Programme and outlining its proposed main elements. Drawing on the findings of each of the project's principal phases the document highlighted 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 WHELP 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 WHELP was to have the capacity to deliver the Partnership Programme. The full proposal for a WHELP Partnership Programme is produced separately as Part 5 of the HELP Report.

## **8. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is not the purpose of this Summary Report to repeat the numerous conclusions and detailed recommendations made in the extensive documentation associated with the HELP project. Rather, the aim is to summarise the high level recommendations made to WHELP, with numerous detailed proposals and recommendations made in the two feasibility studies being covered indirectly by the recommendation concerning the creation of a WHELP Partnership Programme. The opportunity is also taken here to draw some conclusions and make some recommendations for consideration by CyMAL, the new lead body for library collaboration in Wales and HEFCW, as the facilitator and principal funder of the project.

### **8.1 The vision**

The HELP project paints a picture of library and information services in Wales composed of a proliferation of small service providers offering a range of similar or virtually identical services to discrete but overlapping constituencies, using public money from separate funding streams whose contrasting levels of provision cause wide variations in the quality and standard of services provided. Wales is a small country yet it maintains library and information services in 13 higher education institutions, 22 public authorities, 24 further education colleges, not to mention the National Library of Wales, specialist networks like the National Health Service and numerous other public and private agencies. The way in which segmentation can often have unhelpful consequences was clearly illustrated in the LISC report on Resource

Discovery in Wales<sup>8</sup>, which disclosed wide variations in standards of provision between library domains in Wales in something as fundamental as catalogue provision and highlighted how effective exploitation of the resources of Wales as a whole was being severely impeded as a result.

The HELP project promotes the concept of Wales as a single entity rather than a series of rigidly compartmentalised, parallel library and information domains with duplicated services and associated inefficiencies. Although the vision of an integrated national library service for Wales offering a comprehensive range of both general and specialist services to all user communities and constituencies is likely to remain a distant prospect, the HELP project does confirm the huge potential for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of national provision by strengthening collaborative working within and between library domains. The advent of CyMAL has created an organisational focus at a Welsh Assembly Government level which will hopefully provide momentum for the creation of a national information strategy for Wales, although it will inevitably take time for the new organisation to establish itself and make a perceptible impact on service provision. In the meantime, 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 calls upon WHELP to adopt a more proactive role in promoting and facilitating collaboration between its members and 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.

## **8.2 WHELP**

The HELP project clearly identified the role WHELP could and should play in realizing a more holistic vision of library and information provision in Wales. It concluded that the conditions within the HE sector are favourable for a major initiative on LIS collaboration and that WHELP is well positioned to provide the essential leadership and coordination role. It also concluded that if it is successfully to perform this function WHELP will have to develop a strategic framework and change its organisational structures to create increased capacity. In addition to identifying numerous areas where increased collaboration between HEIs could be expected to generate improved public services and/or increased administrative efficiency the project also concluded that closer working relationships with the National Library of Wales represent another rich but largely untapped vein of collaborative activity that offer exciting prospects for researchers, scholars and life-long learners. More generally, the project also recognised that all library domains in Wales have a distinctive contribution to make to national provision and that WHELP should strike up a dialogue with CyMAL and play its full part in creating the strategic alliances necessary to provide library users in Wales with seamless

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<sup>8</sup> Towards a complete picture of library resources in Wales: report of a study of Resource Discovery in Wales for the Library and Information Services Council (Wales), by Hywel E. Roberts. LISC, June 2002.

access to an integrated and comprehensive library service. The detailed recommendations made to WHELP may be summarised as follows:

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

The HELP project confirmed the need for WHELP to take a leadership role in driving forward the collaboration agenda. Although it was readily recognised that some types of collaboration are more suited to small clusters of institutions based on geographical location, institutional mission, etc., it was nevertheless agreed that such initiatives need to be conducted within the overall framework provided by a national strategy. Consequently, it was recommended that WHELP should develop a Partnership Programme in which it would define its strategic objectives, identify a number of priority action lines and map out its intentions for their practical achievement. It was also suggested that in defining an implementation strategy WHELP should take account of the different levels of collaboration possible and their respective funding implications. In this regard it was suggested that collaborative projects might form a pyramidal funding model, with the base of the pyramid consisting of relatively numerous collaborative activities that require little in the way of additional resourcing. Projects of a more resource-intensive nature, perhaps needing specific support from the WHELP Development Fund or from institutional sources, would form the next layer of activity, with the upper sections consisting of a relatively small number of increasingly ambitious and expensive flagship projects whose implementation would depend largely on the availability of substantial external funding.

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

WHELP is currently a self-help organisation that has no regular source of income and achieves its aims entirely through the goodwill and resources of member institutions. Whilst the informal but highly committed nature of WHELP gives it a special strength its members have long since recognised that its structures must change if it is to reach organisational maturity and fulfil its considerable potential. Members have noted with some envy how the appointment of an Executive Officer has allowed SCURL (its sister organisation in Scotland) to carry out a series of valuable projects<sup>9</sup> and have ambitions to make a similar appointment. The degree to which the Partnership Programme can be successfully delivered is indelibly linked, therefore, with the search for the additional resources that would allow WHELP to transform its working methods and devote much more effort to collaborative activities than has hitherto been possible.

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<sup>9</sup> See the SCURL website at <http://scurl.ac.uk/>

*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*

The extent to which the academic community in Wales is aware of and makes effective use of the resources of the National Library of Wales, the largest research library in Wales, was a recurring theme throughout the HELP project. The general consensus was that researchers, scholars and students do not fully appreciate the breadth of the National Library's coverage and the extent to which its collections could satisfy their educational and research needs. The project also identified a number of roles or functions not currently performed by the National Library that would be worthy of further investigation. The potential role of the National Library as a national repository for printed collections, as a library of last resort for inter-lending, as a digitisation centre and national centre for electronic document delivery were all raised during the course of the project. It was suggested that a small task force drawn from the National Library and HE institutions should be established not only to consider how best to raise the profile of the National Library amongst the academic community but also to explore the additional roles that the National Library might perform in collaboration with HEIs for the benefit of all library users.

### **8.3 CyMAL**

The HELP project coincided with the creation of CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, a new division of the Welsh Assembly Government created to provide policy advice to the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport and practical guidance and support to museums, archives and libraries in Wales. Although CyMAL's role and work programme began to emerge only towards the end of the HELP project through publication of its initial prospectus<sup>10</sup>, previous announcements concerning its creation, the appointment of senior staff and members of the Advisory Council, all served to raise awareness and to confirm the view, expressed repeatedly during the project, that CyMAL provides a real chance to develop a more integrated approach to library development and provision in Wales.

*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*

Reference was made during the course of the HELP project to the lack of a national information strategy for Wales and the need for some of the collaborative activities identified during the project to be considered on an all-Wales basis with full participation from other library domains. It was consequently hoped that the advent of CyMAL as a new policy division

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<sup>10</sup> CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales: initial prospectus. Welsh Assembly Government, 2004.

within government would provide impetus for the creation of a national information strategy linked to Welsh Assembly Government priorities and that it would be able to alleviate some of the constraints on collaboration currently imposed by sectoral funding streams.

*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*

It was suggested that the near simultaneous development of collaboration agendas by both CyMAL and WHELF provided an opportunity to explore what scope there might be for concerted action, particularly in those areas of the proposed Partnership Programme that chime with CyMAL's emerging strategic priorities. It was also recognised that by comparison with many other library domains in Wales HE libraries are relatively generously funded and would consequently need to play a lead role in building on the strong culture of collaboration that already exists in Wales.

#### **8.4 HEFCW**

The HELP project and its associated reports largely reflect the current structure of higher education in Wales and deal primarily with professional issues over which the members of WHELF have some influence and control. It goes without saying that neither WHELF collectively through the proposed Partnership Programme nor its individual members separately can radically change the higher educational landscape of Wales and that whilst library and information services contribute to the implementation of institutional policy they rarely make it. Any ambitious programme to rationalise library holdings by moving subject collections between institutions, for instance, could only follow structural change and similar rationalisation of teaching and research coverage at an institutional level. It is clear from a statement made by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning during the Welsh Assembly Government debate on higher education on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004 that reconfiguration continues to be the key government priority for the higher education sector and that the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will be expected to pursue financial strategies that deliver on the reconfiguration and collaboration agenda. Against this background the HELP project has highlighted a number of ways in which HEFCW itself could encourage a more holistic and collaborative approach to the provision of HE library and information services and how, in the context of its own reconfiguration agenda, HEFCW might derive benefit from facilitating consideration of some of the more ambitious and innovative service models that emerged from the HELP project.

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

WHELP is grateful for the opportunity provided by HEFCW to undertake the HELP project and wishes to build on this one-off opportunity by establishing a regular dialogue and closer working relationship with HEFCW. In this regard it is suggested that an annual meeting between HEFCW and WHELP representatives, together with nominated contacts for routine correspondence, would be mutually advantageous. In addition to topics directly relevant to the reconfiguration and collaboration agenda other issues of a more general nature raised during the course of the HELP project might form the basis for such a dialogue. These include, for instance, the Welsh contribution to and return from UK-wide initiatives, such as the JISC and the Research Libraries Network (RNL) and future relations with CyMAL. It is also suggested that HEFCW should consider whether it is able to facilitate the future development of WHELP through financial support of a kind provided by SHEFC to SCURL (the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries) in Scotland.

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

Although the scope for collaboration and joint working attracts significant attention when institutional mergers and strategic alliances are being actively pursued it is important that the holistic vision of library and information provision also becomes integral to the routine development of library services. Without the 'imprimatur' of stated HEFCW policy and consequent ownership by the sector as a whole it seems likely that some of the ambitions identified in the HELP project will be stymied by the enduring territorial tendencies of individual institutions and a reluctance to give priority and resources to anything other than local service delivery. In practical terms it is suggested that HEFCW could give a lead, for instance, by requiring institutions to make specific reference to their intentions for collaboration in respect of library and information services in their annual Strategic Plans or even to submit separate plans similar to those already requested on such topics as Estates, learning and teaching and widening access. It could also endorse the WHELP Partnership Programme and request that all institutions provide active support for its implementation.

*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*

As previously mentioned, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning has recently stated that she expects HEFCW to take a more proactive approach to the reconfiguration agenda and to determine a number of additional fields where a collaborative approach and innovative ways of working will enable the sector to meet the requirements of the *Reaching Higher* strategy. In many ways, reconfiguration of administrative functions and central services like

libraries and IT services may offer a more cost-effective and immediate way of encouraging collaboration than full-scale mergers, which are inevitably expensive and fraught with political problems. During the course of the HELP project a number of ambitious collaborative initiatives repeatedly emerged as examples of actions that would radically transform the landscape and offer serious opportunities for significant administrative efficiencies. Such initiatives included, for instance, the creation of new electronic resource discovery tools to provide single point of access to the holdings of all HE libraries in Wales; the joint procurement and management of centralised servers; the shared use of common library management systems, virtual learning environments and other software platforms; the establishment of a shared store for the joint use of all HE libraries and the development of an e-prints archive or electronic repository on an all-Wales basis. Although the viability of such projects would clearly need thorough investigation it is already clear that they are currently beyond both the organisational and financial capacity of WHELP and would need both sectoral and institutional commitment of a kind that could only be provided at a high policy level. In this context it is suggested that HEFCW should consider what scope it has for creating the climate and the conditions in which structural initiatives of this dimension could flourish. In practical terms this might include providing earmarked capital grants or allocations specifically for re-shaping library and information services or making explicit provision within existing arrangements, including the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund, for major initiatives of this kind. It might also mean using its good offices to ease some of the practical difficulties caused by sectoral funding streams when projects that might involve, for instance, the National Library of Wales and public libraries, are being considered.