

RAGnet

Annual Report 2002-2003

Chair's Report

You might feel that over the past year the memories of the Research Assessment Exercise 2001 have faded, but there's no doubt that the consequences of the outcome are only just beginning to be fully realised. The government White Paper and the Roberts review promise to radically change the research landscape with which we are familiar. Further changes are resulting from the increasing importance of knowledge transfer, and the growing tendency of research funders to encourage or even require the transfer of the knowledge and technology produced to the wider community. The working environments of many of us are changing as research offices are reorganised to incorporate or interact with enterprise teams.

In these changing times, **RAGnet** will continue to provide essential stability for all research managers and administrators. Whether the need is for specialist training, a representative voice or a supportive and constructive network of colleagues to share best practice and lend an ear, **RAGnet** will work to fill those needs.

The past year has also seen evolution in **RAGnet** itself, as we have been exploring how **RAGnet** can support the needs of research administrators outside the University sector to the advantage of us all. Research administrators and managers in universities and colleges have always worked closely with counterparts on the "other side of the fence" in the funding bodies. We have an increasing amount in common with research managers in NHS Trusts given the changes that they are currently having to implement. **RAGnet** has offered a number of events jointly organised with research funders this year, and we have seen an increase in the number of members from non-HEI organisations - a pattern that I hope will continue.

In addition to broadening membership we

have also increased our collaboration. Last year's AGM endorsed **RAGnet**'s participation in the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS), and Peter Townsend (Loughborough) represented **RAGnet** at the inaugural meeting in Orlando in October 2002.

The objective of the network is to develop communication and collaboration between the members in order to take forward the professional development of research administrators in an international context, and seek to share knowledge and best practice. The other founder members are the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS), European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA), Society of Research Administrators International (SRA) and the Swiss Association of Research Managers and Administrators (SARMA).

RAGnet has undeniably grown substantially in the last few years, both in terms of size and complexity. It is now

clear that **RAGnet** has reached the limits of what can be achieved by an organisation wholly dependent on voluntary contributions of committee members. A more established infrastructure is required to maintain and enhance our activities. Financing this will require further growth. The committee agreed that any developments should be evidence-based, and firmly rooted in the wishes and aspirations of the membership. Bluebell Research Ltd was therefore commissioned to undertake a study to canvass the views of existing and potential members and collaborators, and analyse the potential for growth of **RAGnet**. The results of that study are reviewed in more detail below, and will provide a firm foundation for the next steps in the increased professionalisation of the management of **RAGnet**.

Another step towards this professional approach to governance is reflected in the new electoral procedures for the committee. All of you should have received ballot papers, and hopefully participated in a more transparent and democratic process for the election of committee members. At a time when we are planning to invest in the future of **RAGnet**, the members' ability to participate in the selection of those who run **RAGnet** on their behalf is more important than ever. We hope that these changes will lead to more members participating in elections (rather than only those who attend the AGM), and also to a wider pool of members willing to serve on the committee.

There have been several changes to the committee this year, and I would like to thank all retiring members for their valued contributions. Particular mention must be made of Kate Nimmo, long-serving Treasurer of **RAGnet**. Kate was involved in the establishment of **RAGnet** well over ten years ago, and this is the end of her second term as

Treasurer. Kate has served **RAGnet** with skill and dedication well beyond the call of duty, and I am extremely grateful to her. Jen Shearer has also made a huge contribution over the last few years.

At the time of writing, almost a month before the Spring Workshop, over a hundred delegates have registered, and it will therefore be the largest conference ever. If you couldn't attend this year, we hope that you'll make it a date for 2004. **RAGnet** continues to go from strength to strength and we look forward to another year in which our organisation supports us all in the demands of and changes in our professional lives.

JACQUI FORSYTH
APRIL 2003

Options for Future Development

Following the brief discussion at last year's AGM, the Executive Committee commissioned a report from Bluebell Research Ltd analysing our current position and producing some recommendations for the future. The draft report arrived just over a week before the Spring Workshop, so a more detailed presentation is not yet available, but here are a few of the most important issues and recommendations that have been highlighted.

- **RAGnet** membership is heavily concentrated in universities, and **RAGnet** members tend to have research administration as the only or main focus of their role.
- The most useful things **RAGnet** provides for its members are training, the mailing list, and a sense of community.
- **RAGnet** is a very specialised organisation compared to others with related activities.
- There are research administrators in other sectors (such as research councils and charities) who could (and do) benefit from

membership of **RAGnet**, and **RAGnet** members could also benefit from increased representation.

- Any expansion must also entail great efforts to preserve the valuable sense of community that characterises **RAGnet**, and should consider a careful restructuring to ensure this is achieved.
- Expansion cannot be achieved solely by increased voluntary effort from the committee, and some permanent executive should be considered.

This is necessarily not an exhaustive and detailed review, but merely a list of some of the highlights for further discussion. It is hoped that informal discussion at the Spring Workshop and debate at the AGM will provide a further valuable input into the work that the Committee must do on the detail over the next year.

Membership report

There are now over 450 individual members of **RAGnet** representing almost 150 different organisations. Although universities and colleges in the UK and Ireland are the great majority of these, we now have members in four research councils and a small number of funding charities, NHS bodies other organisations within the HE sector. Fifty-seven per cent of university sector members are in pre-1992 universities and 43% in post-1992 universities and colleges, although the number of institutions represented in each sector is equal. Sixty per cent of these members are in central offices. Of those 'local' administrators based in faculties, departments and research centres, and those in specialist institutes, 47% are in social sciences, 36% in sciences (including 16% in medical and health sciences), and 17% in arts and humanities areas, a growing sector of the membership.

Training Review

Joint seminar with the British Academy: Funding Opportunities in the Humanities and Social Sciences

24 April 2002, British Academy, London

A new collaborative venture, this seminar brought together a range of speakers from major funding bodies in the humanities and social sciences, including AHBR, ESRC, Joseph Rowntree Foundation the Leverhulme Trust, Nuffield Foundation as well as the British Academy and proved very popular, with over 100 delegates, many of them new to **RAGnet**.

Spring Workshop: Information Everywhere: Making the most of it

5-6 May 2002, Ramada Jarvis, Leicester

Over 90 delegates attended the eleventh annual Spring Workshop, featuring speakers from universities, a funding council, a research council and the Wellcome Trust, amongst others. The workshop explored different aspects of information requirements in a climate of increasing demands for accountability and performance measurement, looking at what information is required and by whom, why it is needed and how it is used by the recipient, and how research administrators can best provide it. Reports from the Workshop are available in the events section of the **RAGnet** website.

Fifth Induction Workshop: An Introduction to Research Administration

23-24 September 2002, Burleigh Court, Loughborough

This annual workshop is aimed at people with less than one year's experience in research administration, either from a research centre or from a central position. The programme looks at varying roles and responsibilities of a research administrator, gives information on funding for research and how to apply for funds, looks at negotiation skills and gives an insight into project management and into the financing and administration of research projects. Above all it offers delegates the opportunity to network with other new research administrators. In 2002, 41 people attended the induction course.

Disseminating Research Findings (Joint seminar with the Association of Medical Research Charities)

27 March 2003, Park Crescent Conference Centre, London

Another new collaboration with AMRC, this seminar brought together **RAGnet** members with staff from AMRC member charities with responsibility for disseminating the findings of research which they fund. Messages by speakers from the AMRC, a medical charity, health journalism and a University Press Office were applicable across a range of disciplinary areas. Thirty people attended this seminar, and it is intended to organise another joint seminar with AMRC later in 2003 on the subject of research ethics.

Training Day for the Association of Commonwealth Universities: Obtaining and Managing External Research Income

25 February 2003, Universities UK Offices, London

In a new initiative this year, a **RAGnet** team provided a one-day seminar for 28 ACU-sponsored postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers from 13 different Commonwealth countries. The event covered both pre- and post-award administration activities, beginning in the morning with identifying appropriate sources of funding, drafting successful proposals and forging and managing partnerships. The afternoon session considered issues of governance and good practice; project management and financial monitoring; and dissemination/ exploitation of research outcomes. Two lively case study sessions were well received, and delegates and presenters alike were reluctant to bring the proceedings to a close. We hope that this seminar will become an annual event.

EPSRC Study Visits

24-25 July 2002, 2-3 October 2002, 3-4 April 2003

EPSRC study tours have now become an established and very popular part of the training events. The study tours allow for plenty of interaction between EPSRC staff and University research managers and administrators in a two day programme that features presentations, discussions and a mock panel.

Financial Report

Current account

Start balance 1.4.2002	£6,592
<i>Income</i>	
(1) Membership fees	£13,418
Corporate membership fees (4 @ £200)	£800
Transfer from deposit account	£9,500
<i>Expenditure</i>	
Committee costs and expenses	-£3,246
Committee Awayday	-£1,934
Cost of attending SRA 2002	-£1,404
Advisory Group costs and expenses	-£1,518
(2) RAGnet Executive Assistance	-£7,642
General consumables, including display stand	-£2,684
RAGTimes	-£2,449
Professional fees (accounting, data protection, website)	-£827
Bank charges	-£614
(3) Research project (including focus group expenses)	-£6,194
(4) Fees for ACU training event	-£300
<i>Surplus/deficit on events</i>	
(5) Spring workshop 2002	-£1,841
(6) Induction 2002	£1,626
(7) Spring workshop 2003	£4,676
(8) Expert seminars:	£285
End balance 31.3.2003	£6,245

Deposit account

Start balance 1.4.2002	£35,422
Interest earned	£699
Transfer to current account	-£9,500
End balance 31.3.2003	£26,620

TOTAL ASSETS AT 31.3.2003 **£32,865**

Notes

- (1) Mostly from 2002/2003 renewals. Some from 2003/2004 renewals and new memberships.
 (2) General assistance on recruitment, website, committee business etc. £5,980 costs for the year are still outstanding. Assistance with specific events is charged against the events.
 (3) Final payment outstanding. Final total cost is £11,767
 (4) To be repaid by ACU
 (5) Net surplus was £398
 (6) Final outcome was a deficit of £961 after deduction of charges for casual assistance
 (7) Most transactions will take place during 2003/2004
 (8) Some transactions from events in 2001-2002, plus some income from dissemination and US funding Expert Seminars, though most transactions will come through in 2003-2004
 Costs for elections to the **RAGnet** committee are around £478.

For further information please contact:

Ann Hill
RAGnet
 The Registry
 University of Kent at Canterbury
 Canterbury
 Kent
 CT2 7NZ

Email: enquiries@ragnet.ac.uk
www.ragnet.ac.uk