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Libraries and the Regions: A Discussion Paper

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Foreword by Alan Howarth, Minister for the Arts

The past two years have seen regional issues move up the political agenda, both within DCMS and across Government as a whole. The network of Regional Cultural Consortiums is now in place and cultural bodies have begun to work with the new Regional Development Agencies to realise their economic potential. At the same time, the creation of the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Council will increase the scope for co-operation and joint working at both a national and regional level.

There are undoubted opportunities here for libraries. They have the potential to lead the cultural sector in areas like new technology, lifelong learning and in the provision of information services. But, if libraries are to take full advantage of these developments, there must be a more strategic focus for libraries at a regional level. Building up a strong and effective regional presence will help libraries to take full advantage of the emerging opportunities.

Given this background, the main unanswered questions concern how libraries can best articulate their new regional role. To help focus the debate, my Department has reviewed the role of the Regional Library Systems and identified possible options for the future. This discussion paper sets out our initial recommendations on how the library sector can meet these new challenges at a regional level and asks for your views on what the Regional Library Systems of the future should look like.

Alan Howarth

Summary of Key Recommendations

This report identifies a number of issues relating to library and information services in England at a regional level. Its main recommendations are that:

- (i) Regional Library Systems (RLSs) and other regional library bodies need to represent a broad range of libraries in their area. They should seek to expand their membership and encourage all libraries in their area to join.
- (ii) Regional bodies for libraries should preferably be organised along Government Office geographical boundaries.
- (iii) There are likely to be funding implications associated with the drive to tackle strategic issues at a regional level. RLSs are encouraged to explore the options available to them in order to obtain any additional resources that may be required to support this. In the longer term, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) may wish to support projects that encourage cross-sectoral strategic work.
- (iv) It is for individual RLSs and their members to decide what services should be offered and how these should be funded but they should exploit the opportunities for providing services in partnership with other RLSs or other cultural agencies. As demand for traditional interlibrary lending services changes, RLSs should also consider alternative ways to encourage co-operation and access to resources through new technologies.
- (v) There is an increasing need for a strategic and developmental work for the library and information sector at a regional level. Libraries in each region need to consider whether the RLS, a separate library development agency, Library Association branch or other bodies are best placed to take on this strategic role.
- (vi) Libraries should be represented on RCCs by bodies based in their geographical area, who can speak for a broad spectrum of libraries in the region, and who can take a strategic view of priorities and opportunities for the sector.
- (vii) There should be greater strategic and co-operative working between libraries and museums and archives at a regional level. RLSs need to formulate clear policies on this and develop relationships with MLAC and with corresponding regional bodies in the museums and archives sector.
- (viii) Regional Library Systems should consider how to develop the work currently undertaken by CONARLS and LINC, and investigate the possibility of merging the two bodies, to create a strong single voice and a national focus of expertise for the regions.

Section 1: Introduction

Background

- 1.1 The first regional interlibrary lending systems came into existence in the 1930s. Some Regional Library Systems are still based on this core function of facilitating the interlending of books and other materials between different types of libraries. Others have moved into a more developmental role, acting as a focus for advice and expertise in the region and co-ordinating joint projects.
- 1.2 Recent changes in the political, economic and cultural environment have highlighted the need for a more strategic regional focus for libraries. In particular, the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) emphasised the importance of the regions and aimed to provide more coherent and effective action at a regional level for the Department's cultural and economic sectors. More specifically, the CSR encouraged the development of a stronger regional structure for libraries, announced the establishment of a new strategic cultural body in each region and committed the Department to create a new national body, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, which is likely to have a significant impact on the regional agenda. Details of these developments are set out at Appendix A.
- 1.3 The Department has therefore conducted a review of Regional Library Systems (RLSs) in England, encompassing an analysis of the work currently conducted within different RLSs and identification of possible options for their future development. This paper sets out the results of that review, including issues for further discussion and the Department's interim recommendations. We would welcome comments on these recommendations by 5 January 2000.
- 1.4 As background to the review, representatives of the Department have visited each of the seven RLSs in England. We are grateful to the RLSs for their help and hospitality, and for sharing with us the information and views on which this discussion paper is based

Future Opportunities

- 1.5 The review confirmed that recent changes to the environment within which libraries operate present many potential opportunities for improved inter and intra regional co-ordination. These include:
 - the establishment of Government Offices in the Regions and Regional Development Agencies and their responsibility for the Single Regeneration Budget;
 - the establishment of Regional Cultural Consortia and the development of Regional Cultural Strategies;
 - the creation of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the need to identify cross-sectoral agendas at national and regional level;

- the rapid development of information and telecommunication technologies, which opens up the opportunity for libraries to provide co-operative services and reduces the significance of traditional administrative boundaries;
- the need for co-ordination to maximise funding opportunities, particularly from European sources and the National Lottery;
- changes to the structure and role of local government which have increased the need for co-ordination between and within authorities;
- the development of the Modernising Government agenda and new ways of delivering public services;
- the need to maximise the benefit of the total library resource at a time of continuing pressure on resources and growing public expectations; and
- changes in the academic sector following the two Joint Funding Council Libraries Review Reports, including the Anderson Report, which recommended that national and regional strategies for library provision should involve the national copyright libraries, university research libraries, large public libraries and other specialist libraries.

1.6 The review also concluded that there is an urgent need for the library sector to consider how strategic functions can best be fulfilled at a regional level. The key strategic priorities over the next three years are likely to be:

- contributing towards a regional focus of expertise and advice to other regional and national bodies, including Regional Cultural Consortia, Government Offices for the Region, Regional Development Agencies, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and other Government Departments. This would include input to policy-making;
- developing a mechanism for contributing to national and regional cultural and information strategies;
- ensuring regional library and information planning, strategy and development, perhaps through the development of a library and information plan for the region. This could include cross-sectoral co-operation and co-ordination, marketing and promotion of services in the region, co-ordinated acquisition, IT exchange and development, and co-ordination of policies for preservation, conservation, dispersal and disposal; and
- providing advice and co-ordination of funding applications, including European and National Lottery funds.

1.7 In the past, many Regional Library Systems have focused primarily on operational issues and have not fully grasped the wider strategic agenda. This is increasingly changing but it has created a perception that strategic regional issues have not been a high priority for library authorities. However, if libraries are to participate fully in these new arrangements and benefit from future opportunities it will be essential that they can speak with a strong regional voice.

- 1.8 A model Regional Library System would be based on the boundaries of the Government Office for that area. It would provide a range of services that meet its members' needs, offer strategic advice and developmental work, co-ordinate collaborative activities and represent its region's libraries on regional and national fora. However, each Regional Library System has a different history and background and the library sector needs to consider how to meet these challenges in each region, what the RLS of the future should look like, and whether some of the challenges are better met by new organisational arrangements.

Section 2: Organisation

Structure

- 2.1 There are currently ten Regional Library Systems covering the United Kingdom, seven of which cover England. These are the East Midlands Regional Library System (EMRLS), Information North (IN), London and South Eastern Library Region (LASER), North Western Regional Library System (NWRLS), South Western Regional Library System (SWRLS), West Midlands Regional Library System (WMRLS) and Yorkshire Libraries and Information (YLI). Details of each RLS are at Appendix B.
- 2.2 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 provides for the constitution of 'regional councils' for interlibrary co-operation. However, this provision has never been brought into force because of the existing Regional Library Systems. The Act also allows the Secretary of State to require such 'regional councils' to enter into arrangements with other bodies, to establish joint boards to carry out library functions, and to make grants to bodies which make facilities available to library authorities. Under the Act, library authorities may also make joint arrangements with other authorities to provide library facilities, enter into co-operative arrangements and make financial contributions towards the provision of such facilities. The Department does not intend to use these powers at present. Regional Library Systems are well-established as membership organisations with different methods of governance and organisation and there does not seem to be any need or pressure to impose changes to the way in which they are currently established. Instead it is for individual RLSs, library authorities and other regional library and information services to determine for themselves the most appropriate form of development.
- 2.3 Regional Library Systems have a variety of methods of governance. Many are limited companies and registered charities. They are generally managed by committees with elected or honorary officers. Some committees are made up of professional librarians as representatives of local public libraries but others include elected members (ie local councillors).
- 2.4 Members of Regional Library Systems include nearly all public and university libraries and a large number of other public and private sector organisations. However, the library and information sector also includes further education colleges, commercial libraries, learned society libraries, health libraries, school libraries and other smaller specialist libraries. Some of these may have less use for interlending services and are not members of RLSs. If RLSs are to be truly representative of libraries in their region, and if they are to develop their strategic role, it is important that they have as broad a membership base as possible. The Department is happy to discuss with RLSs what part it can play in helping to bring this about.

Recommendation (i) – Regional Library Systems and other regional library bodies need to present a broad range of libraries in their area. They should seek to expand their membership and attract libraries in their area to join.

Geographical Boundaries

- 2.5 The Modernising Government White Paper sets out the aim of aligning the boundaries of public bodies to make administration easier, increase efficiency and aid joined-up government.¹ In an ideal world, RLSs would work to the same geographical boundaries as the Government Offices for the Regions, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the new Regional Cultural Consortiums. This would ensure that in each area there was a single point of contact and a clear representative body for libraries. However, not all RLSs' boundaries are co-terminous with those of other regional bodies. The current LASER region covers the Government Office regions for London, the South East and part of the East of England. Two Regional Library Systems, LASER and EMRLS, therefore each cover half of the East of England Government Office region. However, some areas covered by the Government Office for the South East (Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Southampton and Portsmouth) are members of SWRLS rather than LASER. In the North West, Cumbria is part of the North West Regional Development Agency but its libraries are members of Information North.
- 2.6 Where this is the case, Regional Library Systems have already made their own arrangements for co-operation and to ensure that the sector is properly represented on the appropriate Regional Cultural Consortiums. The East of England Library Development Agency was established in 1999 as a separate body, based on the principle that East of England representation for libraries can only be drawn from libraries within that area. In the London area, a feasibility study by the Vision Research Consortium recommended that a London Library Development Agency (LLDA) be established with a limited remit. The Association of London Government, in association with the London Boroughs, is taking this recommendation forward, and it is likely that the LLDA will emerge as the principal source of strategic advice and information matters to the Greater London Authority.
- 2.7 The Department believes that it is essential for there to be a single and representative voice for libraries for each Government Office area. Ideally this will be one body dealing with both operational and strategic issues. Where this is not possible, inter-library lending and other operational services could continue to be organised within the traditional geographical boundaries of the RLSs, while separate library development agencies based on Government Office boundaries could represent the sector in its relations with other regional and national bodies and develop a more strategic role. However, by adding an extra tier to the system, this may lead to confusion and duplication of effort, making co-ordination difficult. In such a situation, it would therefore be important for the different operational and strategic bodies to agree their respective roles and set out clearly defined areas of responsibility.

Recommendation (ii) – Regional bodies for libraries should ~~not~~ be organised along Government Office geographical boundaries

¹ "Modernising Government", Cabinet Office, March 1999, p33.

Resources and Staff

- 2.8 The size and resources of Regional Library Systems vary greatly. Their operations range from a Regional Librarian and a Regional Assistant, both working half-time, in EMRLS to 14 members of staff in Yorkshire Libraries and Information. These differences reflect both the variety of ways in which RLSs are run and the different range of services offered. Some operate services themselves while others co-ordinate or contract out service provision. The Department believes that it is possible to operate efficient services through a variety of different models and it is up to individual RLSs and their members to decide how they offer the best value for money.
- 2.9 Regional Library Systems are funded by a mixture of subscription and income generation. The budgets of RLSs vary dramatically. These range from EMRLS with a budget of a little over £30,000 per year to LASER with a total of over £2.2 million per year.
- 2.10 Some RLSs have a core basic subscription to cover residual functions. Many RLSs levy a subscription for public library members based on the population of the area. Some also have charges based on more or less complex formulae that include calculations for transport, interlibrary loans and other different services based on use. Some operate different subscriptions systems for public libraries and academic or special libraries, recognising the different extent to which they may use interlending services.
- 2.11 There is concern that the level of subscriptions that members pay should be kept as low as possible. Many are reluctant to pay for work beyond basic services such as interlending, making it difficult for RLSs to undertake strategic and developmental work. And many individual library members are concerned about the level of charges or subscriptions needed to support the range of more strategic activities undertaken by some of the more developed RLSs.
- 2.12 Although it is understandable that members often only want to pay subscriptions towards the operational services that they use directly, the Department believes that this substantially hinders the development of an authoritative and coherent regional library voice. Regional Library Systems who want to undertake strategic work and raise the importance of the regional agenda have therefore had to rely on raising outside funds for specific projects, often in partnership with individual members. Some RLSs, in particular Information North, LASER, and WMRLS, have succeeded in generating a substantial amount of extra revenue to carry out activities beyond the provision of core services. As well as raising income by offering additional self-financing services, they have attracted outside funding for research or development projects in their regions. For example, ten library authorities in the WMRLS region have been awarded nearly £325,000 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund for a MultiNet project to link libraries across the region and share services and resources. Information North has also received funding from the DCMS/Wolfson Fund towards their project which networks 284 libraries in the region as a managed Intranet, providing public access to services including community information, education providers, local history, business information and local authority services.
- 2.13 Libraries are well placed to take advantage of several potential new sources of funding. Many of these will help support the vision outlined in the Library and Information Commission

(LIC) 1998 report "Building the New Library Network".² The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) will provide three funding streams in support of a Public Library Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Network linking all UK public libraries to the National Grid for Learning. In addition to streams of £20 million to train library staff in ICT and £50 million to create digital content for the network, on which application guidance has already been published, £200 million will be available for a Community Access to Lifelong Learning programme. This will support the development of network infrastructure and also help develop Community Grids for Learning, particularly those which combat social exclusion and benefit those who face obstacles to learning. The Chancellor of the Exchequer also announced that the Government's Capital Modernisation Fund would provide £470 million toward the creation of 1000 IT based learning centres and that libraries should be among the organisations benefiting from this funding. Over the past three years, the DCMS/Wolfson Foundation Challenge Fund has supported a range of IT projects in public libraries. The Fund will be extended to 2002, although with a different focus. As other major funding sources which can help develop the library network are coming on stream, the Challenge Fund will be refocused from 2000-2001 to concentrate on projects that support reader development and that help to create and enhance history collections in libraries. The size and range of these funding opportunities provide huge scope for libraries and it is crucial that RLSs should be able to advise their members and co-ordinate activity in their areas.

Recommendation (iii) – There are likely to be funding implications associated with the drive to tackle strategic issues at regional level. RLSs are encouraged to explore the options available to them in order to obtain any additional resources that may be required. In the longer term, MLAC may wish to support projects that encourage cross-sectoral strategic work.

² "Building the New Library Network", Library and Information Commission, 1998. This followed the Commission's 1997 report "New Library: the People's Network".

Section 3: Interlibrary Lending and Other Services

- 3.1 From the 1930s to the present day, the core function of Regional Library Systems has been to facilitate the interlending of books and other materials between all types of libraries. However, it is possible that the development of national systems and networking will make the physical location of materials less important, diminishing the need for regional interlending as it currently exists.
- 3.2 Interlibrary lending is facilitated through various schemes including such services as:
- union and specialist catalogues;
 - van delivery services;
 - co-ordinated arrangements for joint purchasing; and
 - resources to support specialist collections and fiction reserves.
- 3.3 New technology is already an important part of interlibrary lending and future developments will increase the possibilities for sharing information electronically. The Unity Combined Regions Database is used by NWRLS, YLI, EMRLS, Information North and SWRLS. The VISCOUNT online system is used by WMRLS and LASER, which manages the network, and is available on-line and via CD. On a wider scale, UNiVerse is a European funded project with an overall aim of creating a Europe-wide network of connected catalogues using the Z39.50 protocol for distributed searching. The system is based around the Virtual Union Catalogue. It will be used to develop services such as interlibrary lending and document supply using standard protocol and there will be scope for collaborative cataloguing and record supply. The project has 19 partners in six European member states and 50 libraries are involved. The UK Special Interest Group for UNiVerse includes the British Library, LASER and the Universities of Sheffield, York, Leeds, Hull and Bradford.
- 3.4 The British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) plays an important role in supporting interlibrary lending across the country. For example, in LASER, 91.3% of serials and 30% of monographs supplied to members were received from the BLDSC. LASER members themselves supplied 5.6% of serials and 61% of monographs within the region. Other material was supplied by libraries outside the region and internationally. The overall success rate of items supplied to members was 92%.
- 3.5 The way in which interlibrary lending and transportation services are organised varies considerably between regions. Some regions contract out services or operate a collaborative system where members themselves run services. For example, EMRLS has only a small budget and staff and relies on in-kind contributions from its members. Interlibrary lending in the region is facilitated via a free interlending form and a set of agreed standards and its transport scheme is run by Leicestershire County Council. In comparison, some RLSs maintain, operate and staff a full interlibrary lending and transport scheme on behalf of their members. Yorkshire Libraries and Information focuses on facilitating interlibrary lending in the region and is staffed by a manager and a further thirteen staff, operating a transport

network with two vehicles. The British Library announced that from October 1999 the new contract for the delivery of material from the BLDSC in Boston Spa would be awarded by competitive tender. Some RLSs submitted bids for this but the BLDSC did not decide to award any contracts to RLSs.

- 3.6 Figures for interlibrary lending have shown steady decreases in recent years. This is thought to reflect the general fall in borrowing from libraries, the decline in the bookstock in many areas, the lack of resources in libraries to staff interlending services, the lack of promotion of interlending services and the effect of new technologies in providing access to a wider range of material.
- 3.7 Regional Library Services also operate reserve collections and co-operative acquisition schemes in areas such as fiction, music, regional material and other specialist collections. The Subject Specialisation Scheme was established in 1948 for non-fiction titles appearing in the British National Bibliography. Under the Scheme, libraries contribute by purchasing new books in specific subject areas. The Scheme was reviewed in 1998 to compare coverage and address gaps in purchase. The Provincial Joint Fiction Reserve Scheme was set up in 1962. Each region is allocated a section of the alphabet and individual libraries purchase and conserve fiction by their allocation of authors. Such arrangements both maximise resources for members and can provide a better and more complete service for users. RLSs can also play a valuable role in facilitating joint or consortium purchase arrangements. The EARL consortium for Public Library Networking has secured arrangements that allow partners discounts on a variety of products, including on-line information resources.
- 3.8 Regional Library Systems also contribute by offering a range of other operational services for their members that can be organised more efficiently and effectively at a regional level. Some of these are included in subscriptions and others are paid for directly by users. Some RLSs operate training courses on issues such as interlending and ICT and organise seminars and exhibitions. RLSs also provide newsletters and updates for their members, informing them of relevant information, projects and issues. Some produce publications on particular areas of interest or collections in their regions. They also collect information from their members about numbers of interlibrary loans, speed of supply and other data. Many RLSs have already begun to consult their members about what services they value and what support they think RLSs should offer in the future.
- 3.9 All RLSs participate to a greater or lesser extent in co-operative projects and partnerships, both within their region and with others. Each region is involved in NEWSPLAN, a co-operative scheme for newspaper preservation and access. NEWSPLAN has submitted a bid, co-ordinated by LINC and the British Library, to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the completion of work to preserve the nation's local newspapers on microfilm for use in local libraries and archives and in the British Library. Regional Library Systems also participate in schemes such as CILLA, the Indic languages co-operative purchase and cataloguing scheme organised by LASER. Various surveys and reports on a range of subjects have been produced and work to implement these has been undertaken, illustrating the important link between developmental work and its role in the implementation of operational services.

Recommendation (iv) – It is for individual RLSs and their members to decide what services should be offered and how these should be funded but they should exploit the opportunities for services in partnership with other RLSs or other cultural agencies. As demand for traditional interlibrary lending services changes, RLSs should also consider alternative ways to encourage cooperation and access to resources through new technologies

Section 4: Strategic Role

- 4.1 Some regional library systems have already begun to develop a strategic agenda by, for example, addressing research and development needs. This helps them to provide advice and guidance to their members and formulate agreed strategies for the region. As libraries are asked to contribute to regional and national strategies, it will be increasingly important for regional library bodies to work with their members to develop their own strategies on these issues. Such strategies can then be used as a basis to develop new initiatives in particular areas and inform future service provision.
- 4.2 It is not only the larger and more developed RLSs that can develop an effective strategic role. For example, EMRLS has agreed a series of policies, strategies and standards in areas such as information and communications technology (ICT), regionalism, stock retention and training. These are used to set out a framework and guide future service provision.
- 4.3 Some RLSs have taken their strategic role further to look in a more holistic way at library provision in their region. For example, LASER is in the process of developing strategic plans which look at: access, non-book materials and music, and networking between public libraries in London and the South East. LASER's access strategy aims to provide as many people as possible with a comprehensive range of resources, materials and services and to make them available in the most efficient and economic ways. It provides for increased co-operation and collaborative arrangements, networking and sharing of resources. The strategy for music and non-book materials includes the development of a networked database, interlending and electronic requesting services, a networking strategy and a collections policy for this area. Following the "Building the New Library Network" report, LASER has also begun discussions in the area of collaborative content creation and digitisation. LASER also runs EARL, the Consortium for Public Library Networking. EARL promotes the role of public libraries in providing information services across the network and offers support to member libraries. As well as its advocacy role for libraries, EARL raises awareness of current developments, demonstrates prototype networked services and provides advice and support through a programme of events, including workshops and discussions.
- 4.4 Many RLSs have developed websites, enabling members and the public more generally to obtain information about the organisation and the services it offers. Some have also been involved in broader Internet based projects. Information North has been working with the Northern Informatics partnership to develop a Regional Information Service, funded through the European Fourth Framework Programme. The Service's website, "www.thenortheast.com", is a directory of web based information on the area and provides a free enquiry service for local people. Once it has been fully established, Information North will take over the management of the Service from Northern Informatics. The Service will be based on the existing public library network of service points and will also include closed access networks for some areas, such as health.
- 4.5 In some regions, libraries have moved away from the traditional Regional Library System role towards a development agency model. LASER and Information North work as development

agencies whilst still running more traditional operations and services. In the West Midlands, WMRLS will from 1 April 2000 be reestablished as The Libraries Partnership with a new constitution and a range of strategic, developmental and operational aims. In the East of England and London, separate development agencies have been established in addition to the existing Regional Library Services. The recently created East of England Library Development Agency includes public libraries and higher education. It is intended to provide an effective voice for libraries in the region and to represent the sector on the Regional Cultural Consortium, play an effective role in implementing the East of England RDA Economic Strategy and inform the development of the Regional Chamber. In London, the London Library Development Agency has been established to undertake advocacy and promotional work.

- 4.6 There are also other options for creating a strategic focus for advice in each region. For example, the Library Association has a branch structure that is almost co-terminous with the RDA and Government Office boundaries. It is possible that these branches could be built up and developed to provide advice and information to the RCCs and others on library matters.

Recommendation (v) – There is an increasing need for strategic and developmental work for the library and information sector at regional level. Libraries in each region need to consider whether the RLS, a library development agency, Library Association branch or other bodies are best placed to take on this strategic role

Section 5: Links to Other Bodies

Government

- 5.1 Regional Library Services are increasingly called upon to act as representatives of, or spokespersons for, libraries in their area. This is particularly so with the establishment of Regional Cultural Consortiums (see below). RLSs are also asked to provide advice to other parts of Government, including Government Offices for the Regions, Regional Development Agencies, the Department for Culture Media and Sport and other central Government departments. The Regional Development Agencies are drawing up their Regional Economic Strategies and it is important that RLSs are able to work with other regional cultural bodies to ensure that the potential contribution of the cultural sector is properly represented.
- 5.2 As stated elsewhere in this paper, it is therefore crucial that RLSs have a broad membership base and can take a strategic overview of issues affecting libraries in their region.

Regional Cultural Consortiums

- 5.4 Many local authorities have moved towards more integrated structures for the delivery of cultural, leisure, tourism and education services. They are encouraged to produce local cultural strategies in which library services will be included. This enables them to pursue shared objectives such as promoting access and education and maximise the contribution they can make to broader objectives such as tackling social inclusion, cutting crime and improving health.
- 5.5 Such cross-sectoral working is still at a relatively early stage of development at a regional level and links with other cultural bodies are weak in some areas. The existing regional cultural fora have helped bring together the different sectors, often for the first time. The new Regional Cultural Consortiums will improve these links by producing joint strategies and encouraging the sharing of information and development of collaborative projects.
- 5.6 However, the establishment of the Regional Cultural Consortiums has brought to a head existing concerns over issues such as geographical boundaries and the ability of RLSs to act as regional representatives. This highlights the need for libraries to be absolutely clear about how their interests should be taken forward at a regional level. The key question is what kind of body is best placed to represent the views of the library sector and develop partnerships and joint working. In some cases, this will be the existing RLSs but in others it may be the newly established separate library development agencies, improved RLSs or some other form of representative body.

Recommendation (vi) – Libraries should be represented on RCCs by bodies based in their geographical area, who can speak for a broad spectrum of libraries in the region, and who can take a strategic view of priorities and opportunities for the sector

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

- 5.7 In particular, RLSs will need to consider how to develop their relationships with analogous bodies in the museums and archives field and with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) once it is established. Many RLSs are already in discussion with colleagues in

Area Museum Councils and regional archive groundbreakers to consider possible future options. There are many possible opportunities, from exchanging information and experience, to providing joint services in areas such as IT and training, to the development of joint projects and sharing staff and accommodation.

- 5.8 The Museums and Galleries Commission currently has a role in providing funding for and agreeing objectives with Area Museums Councils, while the Library and Information Commission does not have a direct relationship with RLSs. MLAC will therefore need to consider what its role should be in relation to the sector at the regional level. This will depend on the views of the Chairman, Board and Chief Executive. However, it seems likely that MLAC will want to encourage increased regional co-operation between museums, archives and libraries. This will help to ensure that there are mechanisms in place which enable MLAC to translate much of its national level work to a regional level.

Recommendation (vii) – There should be greater strategic and co-operative working between libraries and museums and archives at a regional level. RLSs need to formulate clear policies on this and develop relationships with MLAC and with corresponding regional bodies in the museums and archives sector

Other Library Bodies

- 5.9 There is scope for greater co-operation between Regional Library Systems, both bi-laterally and as a whole. The Circle of Officers of National and Regional Library Services (CONARLS) has members who are the Directors or Managers of the seven English Regional Library Systems, the National Library of Scotland Inter-Library Services, Cydfecthyca Cymru (Interlending Wales), A Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) of the Republic of Ireland, the Library and Information Co-operation Council and the British Library. CONARLS aims to support, encourage and assist the development of the interlibrary lending network and all forms of interlibrary co-operation.
- 5.10 LINC (the Library and Information Co-operation Council) was established in 1989 as a successor organisation to the former National Committee for Regional Library Co-operation. Its foundation members are the seven English Regional Library Systems, the National Library of Scotland, Cydfecthyca Cymru, A Chomhairle Leabharlanna, LISC (NI), the British Library and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (as observer). A range of library organisations and specialist groups are also subscribing members or affiliates. LINC's aims are to manage co-operative activities between library and information services, offer advice to Government on library co-operation issues and influence policy in this area.
- 5.11 There are a variety of areas that can benefit from the development of cross-regional expertise. For example there are further opportunities to develop and co-ordinate guidance, training programmes, cataloguing systems and joint purchasing arrangements. LINC and CONARLS have played a valuable role in facilitating library co-operation. They have undertaken research and published guidance on issues such as standards for interlibrary lending.
- 5.12 However, the existence of LINC and CONARLS as two separate bodies may create confusion and duplication of effort. The lack of a single strong national focus for libraries at a regional level could hinder their ability to work with national bodies and the establishment of MLAC will make this increasingly important. The current national groupings of Regional Library

Systems also lack a high status, and do not have dedicated members of staff or the ability to undertake substantial pieces of independent work. In contrast, the Committee of Area Museum Councils has provided a clear point of contact for AMCs at a national level and the National Council on Archives will be able to represent the new regional archive structures

Recommendation (viii) – Regional Library Systems should consider how to develop the ~~work~~ cur undertaken by CONARLS and LINC, and ~~investig~~ the possibility ~~of~~ merging the two bodies, to create a strong single voice and a national focus ~~and~~ ~~expertise~~ for the ~~regions~~

Section 6: The Consultation Process

6.1 We would welcome comments on the ideas set out in this paper. Our long term aim is that services for libraries at a regional level should develop in such a way that they meet the challenges of the new regional agenda and ensure that libraries can best benefit from future opportunities.

6.2 Comments should be sent by 5 January 2000 to:

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