

The CURL-CoFoR Collaborative Collection Management Project

by GREGORY WALKER

ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

[CoFoR](#) originated from an initiative by [CURL](#), the Consortium of Research Libraries in the British Isles. CURL's Task Force on Resource Management proposed a project, which would develop and test several interrelated aspects of collaborative collection management (CCM), to help in determining the most effective kinds of collaboration between major research collections. The Task Force was concerned that local pressures on libraries were tending to make them take collection management decisions in isolation, and they were looking for a framework within which better informed decisions on libraries' collections could be taken with greater confidence and a clearer awareness of national provision.

CURL was seeking to establish which CCM approaches could be expected to:

- offer the most attractive benefits for costs incurred;
- be applicable to a wide range of subjects / areas;
- and be viable in the longer term.

In late 2002 CURL accepted a proposal from an existing project team to undertake this work.[1]

THE COCOREES INHERITANCE

The COCOREES project had run from 1999 to 2002 as part of the Research Support Libraries Programme ([RSLP](#)). The aim of COCOREES had been to lay the foundations for applying CCM to a specific field of research (Russian and East European Studies – REES), and it was therefore able to offer a significant body of data and experience from which CURL's wider-ranging initiative could be launched.

The COCOREES legacy included:

- Two major databases with a common search facility, one containing detailed descriptions of REES collections in 80 UK libraries, the other giving locations for about 35,000 REES serial titles in 52 libraries.
- Collection policy statements, accessions statistics and expenditure figures for REES acquisitions by 20 of the largest UK libraries.
- A National Desiderata List of major resources for the support of REES research not currently available in the UK.
- An active relationship with university researchers in REES through their academic association, the British Association for Russian and East European Studies ([BASEES](#))
- A Management Team and project staff in place.

PROJECT TASKS AND PRODUCTS

The CoFoR project was funded by CURL - with generous additional support from the British Library, University College London, Oxford University Library Services and Glasgow University Library - from December 2002 to August 2004, later extended to July 2005. The principal tasks it was given were these:

- to develop procedures for collaborative retention, transfer and acquisition in order to protect research resources, expand their range and make more effective use of them;

- to develop procedures for the deduplication of serials, with the aim of retaining coverage for researchers while freeing funding for other acquisitions;
- to develop methods for ascertaining the costs, savings and other benefits from CCM;
- to investigate ways of relating data on research activity to the provision of library support for that research.

While the project has retained REES as its academic focus throughout, it has aimed to provide outcomes that are applicable to research resources in a wider range of subjects.

To meet these requirements, CoFoR's main products have been:

- A ten year partnership - CURL-CoFoR-REES - negotiated with major research libraries (19 at present), based on an agreement over the retention, transfer and acquisition of research materials. This agreement is now fully functional.
- The mass identification of unique REES serial holdings in partner libraries to ensure their protection, as the first stage of serials deduplication.
- A detailed mapping of current REES research in the UK (the fullest ever undertaken), to underpin CCM planning and the allocation of partners' commitments.
- A Collaborative Collection Management Toolkit, consisting of guidance notes and model documents to support a wider application of CCM, founded on the project's experience.

THINKING AFRESH

Many of the bare necessities for a real, on-the-ground long-term CCM had never before been created in the UK for a specific subject or area. Much of the project's history consists of negotiations with individual libraries, putting together bodies of data, experimenting with new procedures, and negotiating with individual libraries.

Only through these multiple approaches has it been possible to establish:

- which bodies of data are essential (e.g. collection policy statements), which are useful (such as a National Desiderata List), which could be cut back (research mapping), and which probably demand reconsideration (serials listing)?
- which procedures work in practice, and which need modification or discarding?
- what kind of CCM agreement libraries are willing to sign up to - that is, what commitments are they prepared to make in return for benefits they can expect (such as inward transfers and safe disposals) and what safeguards must the scheme incorporate to sit alongside their local priorities (e.g. no extra spending outside existing collecting policies, flexibility to accommodate changes in support of local academic policy)?

A central element in the project has been the need to establish what kinds of CCM can be shown to be directly supportive of research, what resources they need in order to be effective, and what level of input - and of commitment by libraries - is justified by the benefits achieved. There has been a strong experimental component in the project, stemming from the of 'Do it, make the mistakes, adapt it, rethink it, so that people looking at other CCM applications can benefit'. As a result our work has produced several 'firsts' - at least in the context of British research libraries:

- The first long-term, evidence-based CCM agreement in a major research field.
- The first CCM scheme to focus on the targeted, research-led buildup of library resources, based in turn on:
- The first national research mapping to be linked to CCM.
- The first National Desiderata List.
- The first CCM Toolkit.

THE CURL-COFOR-REES TEN-YEAR AGREEMENT

These are the main features of the partnership agreement:

- It was deliberately set up as a long-term undertaking, to give libraries the confidence to make decisions over retention, transfer and disposal, and our policy was to recruit those libraries with the largest REES collections (for a list of present partners see Appendix).
- It is founded on a scheme of retention and transfer commitments with our partners, which takes account of each library's strengths and the academic research, which it has to support. This has enabled us to obtain planned protection for research resources, subject by subject and country by country, across most of the field of REES.
- It commits all partners to retain all holdings relevant to REES research for at least ten years, unless they dispose of them by agreement through the scheme.
- It gives all partners the opportunity (which nearly all of them have taken) to accept the transfer of material in specified subjects that are important to their own collections. It also gives them the opportunity (though no obligation) to commit to maintaining acquisition levels in a particular field and/or specific serial subscriptions for a stated number of years.
- We have had to show partner libraries that the agreement plays to their strengths and fosters the build-up of resources where they are needed. Partner libraries have to see that we in the project are well informed about their holdings and their collecting, and that we are in sympathy with their primary aim of supporting the researchers in their home institution.
- It has also been essential that researchers in UK universities are kept aware -through their association with the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies ([BASEES](#)) - of what we are doing, and that we have their support. We have had to demonstrate that we know what research is being carried
- on in which university, and that our scheme can be responsive locally by helping to
- protect holdings and strengthen collections through targeted transfers.
- Finally, we have taken seriously the use of multiple sources of hard data as a basis for allocating commitments to libraries and monitoring the scheme. These include:
 - library collection descriptions
 - library collecting policy statements
 - library data on accessions and expenditure
 - serials location data
 - research mapping

DOES IT WORK?

This blend of experimentation and practical experience has led us to some provisional verdicts about the CCM techniques that have come within the remit of the project, so that when we ask the question 'Does it work?' we can begin to give some answers.

Yes, it does work:

Retention: none of our partners has had a problem over committing to this, and it has meant that a planned protection scheme is in place for REES research materials.

Transfers: two transfer operations are at present (July 2005) in progress (from Leeds University Library to five other libraries, and from Portsmouth University Library to at least four), and others are expected shortly. We have found that, with the Agreement providing the formal basis, the procedures and monitoring arrangements can be written on half a side of A4 paper.

Academic and professional support: real benefits have come from inviting active involvement from the relevant academic association (BASEES) and from the area-specialist librarians' group - Council for

Slavonic and East European Library and Information Services ([COSEELIS](#)). These advisory and consultative bodies give us current awareness, feedback, and secure lines of communication to researchers and professional expertise.

It may work:

Collaborative acquisition: the partner libraries together form something like the entire British market for major primary source products in REES research. Our National Desiderata List has been compiled to establish priorities for consortial acquisition. However, in REES at least for the present, many important microform and electronic resources for research are simply priced beyond what UK libraries - even as a consortium - can afford.

Longer-term acquisition commitments: libraries' attitudes to this may vary by subject and sector (higher-education, national, independent), but it is unrealistic to expect long-term library commitments to support specific research when the research itself is liable to shift at short notice in location, status and emphasis.

Research mapping: our map of REES research in the UK is the most detailed ever carried out, and although it has been a vital input to the scheme of CCM commitments it was probably over-elaborate for that purpose. Nevertheless, research mapping also has obvious applications to academic planning and advocacy, and the academic association BASEES, which helped us to carry out the initial exercise, has invited us to collaborate again in its updating.

It may not work:

Specialist serials databases: the COCOREES and CoFoR project between them have created the largest location listing of REES serials ever put together in the UK, thanks largely to the British Library's generosity in providing the staffing resources needed. But our experience suggests that the construction and maintenance of a standalone single-subject or single-area serials database on this scale is not a realistic option for most CCM schemes unless they have a dedicated and assured source of funding for that purpose. We are now exploring a future for the database in conjunction with COPAC or SUNCAT.

COLLABORATIVE COLLECTION MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

With the backing of this experience and the kind of judgements we now feel able to make, the project has compiled a Toolkit of documentation and guidance, designed for dissemination as part of any wider initiative to promote CCM for the support of academic research in the UK. The text at present is still subject to further discussion with CURL's Resource Management Task Force, but even in its final form it is not intended to be prescriptive. It has been deliberately framed to allow for CCM applications to be adjusted to the needs of a specific subject or area. The intention is to give those who are considering a CCM scheme a grasp of the principles and policy issues underlying a CCM operation, as well as practical guidance and examples for setting up and running a scheme.

Table: The Collaborative Collection Management Toolkit contents [2]

ITEM	FUNCTION
1. Implementation Guide for CCM	Introduction to CCM for UK research libraries. Description of the Toolkit. Guidance on planning and managing a CCM scheme.
2. Framework Partnership Agreement	<i>Model document.</i> States the formal basis on which the CCM partnership is to function, and sets out the commitments common to all partners and those undertaken by individual libraries.
3. Framework Allocation Scheme	<i>Model document.</i> Sets out the specific commitments on retention, transfer and acquisition undertaken by each partner library under the Agreement. Serves as a basis for the review and revision of commitments.

4. Framework Collection Policy Statement	<i>Model document.</i> Provides a common format for the statement of partner libraries' collection management policies.
5. Transfer Procedures	Model document. States the procedures to be followed by partner libraries in offering, accepting and recording material eligible for transfer under the Agreement.
6. Terms of Reference and Job Descriptions	<i>Model documents.</i> Provides model content for the Terms of Reference of bodies concerned with regulating and administering CCM schemes, and for the job descriptions of administration and technical support staff.
7. Finance and Assessment Guidance Notes	Guidance on the financial essentials of a CCM scheme and on the components of costs and benefits for performance assessment.
8. Research Mapping Guidance Notes	Guidance on the design and conduct of research mapping exercises for application to CCM schemes.
9. Serials Listing and Deduplication Guidance Notes	Guidance on the production of specialised serials listings for CCM, and on the planning and execution of a deduplication exercise based on them.
10. Collection Description Guidance Notes	Guidance on the design of collection descriptions for CCM and other purposes, and on the collection and presentation of data.
11. Data Collection Guidance Notes	Guidance on data collection as an input to the operation of CCM and as a significant element in its costs.
12. Retention Policy Guidance Notes	Guidance for libraries wanting to draw up or revise statements on the retention of materials, with special reference to the needs of CCM
13. Desiderata Listing and Consortial Acquisition Guidance Notes	Guidance on using a CCM partnership in the compilation of a national desiderata list and in the consortial acquisition of, or access to, research resources.

AN EXPANDING FUTURE

Finally, what future do we see for the kind of approach to CCM which the CoFoR project has developed and (in some sense and at least in the UK) has pioneered? The Research Information Network's Strategic Plan for 2005 to 2008, published in July 2005, envisages a selective implementation of CoFoR's Toolkit, with particular reference to the feasibility of extension to other areas, the compilation of desiderata lists for other subjects, and the relationship between a national CCM scheme and the British Library's collection development strategy. Any further forecasting must be only tentative at this stage, while we await the outcome of discussions between the RIN and CURL over a concerted approach to CCM for British research libraries. However, it may be significant that in April 2005 CURL sponsored the first national conference (another first!) of specialist librarians' groups dealing with a wide range of foreign (i.e. non-English) language materials to consider the application of CCM techniques. CoFoR's work has a great deal to contribute here; and we think it is logical and realistic to see a future which includes (among other initiatives) an expanded CCM scheme that would protect, and enhance access to, the vital - though often

neglected - research resource which libraries' foreign-language holdings represent, in a country which - it can be argued – is becoming too exclusively monolingual for its own good.

NOTES

1. For further information, latest news and a document archive, see the project website <http://www.cocorees.ac.uk>
2. The full Toolkit draft text is available at http://www.cocorees.ac.uk/docs/COFOR_Toolkit.pdf

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

BASEES - British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies. <http://www.basees.org.uk/>

COSEELIS - Council for Slavonic and East European Library and Information Services. <http://www.lib.gla.ac.uk/COSEELIS/>

CURL, the Consortium of Research Libraries. <http://www.curl.ac.uk/>

CURL-CoFoR. <http://www.cocorees.ac.uk>

RSLP - Research Support Libraries Programme. <http://www.rslp.ac.uk/>

APPENDIX: CURL-COFOR-REES PARTNER LIBRARIES (JULY 2005)

The British Library

Birmingham University Library

Bodleian Library (University of Oxford)

Bradford University Library

Cambridge University Library

Chatham House Library (Royal Institute of International Affairs)

Essex University Library

Glasgow University Library

Leeds University Library

London School of Economics Library

John Rylands University Library of Manchester

National Library of Scotland

Nottingham University Library

Polish Library, London

Sackler Library (University of Oxford)

School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library (University College London)

Scott Polar Research Institute (University of Cambridge)

Taylor Institution Library (University of Oxford)