

NORDBIB – A SUCCESS STORY

Jon Duke, Andy Jordan¹

Nordbib is a four-year programme, designed to create a joint Nordic approach to Open Access and to the distribution of research results, particularly in the scientific domain, to which DKK 10 million is being contributed by NordForsk. It was established in 2006 and so, in order to prepare for the end of this first funding round and for its future after 2010, its Board commissioned us to carry out an evaluation which we completed in mid 2009. We were asked to assess the benefits of the programme, to establish how well its structure has worked and to identify the best way in which the partners in Nordbib can further their vision of the programme.

Our approach to the task was evidence based. There is a substantial amount of documentation about Nordbib available on the Web, but there is no better way of understanding a programme and its process than by talking to those involved. So we spoke to about 30 people who were stakeholders, sometimes engaged in the programme in more than one way. Some were involved in the management of the programme and its governance, others in undertaking projects and some had attended one or other of the workshops organised under the Nordbib banner. We took a semi-structured approach to the interviews, giving the stakeholders prior warning of the topics we wanted to discuss, but allowing the conversations to range beyond the boundaries of those topics when stakeholders wished.

Nordbib is of course centred on the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. We found that the Nordic dimension meant that, whether people or countries are being discussed, there is a basic shared understanding of cultural values. For example, although each country has its own language, several of these languages are spoken and sometimes officially recognised in more than one country. This pervasive cultural affinity means that it is easy for individuals, projects, or the programme's management groups to share and reinforce a common vision for the programme regarding issues such as good practice, conducting joint developments, sharing

the cost of projects and indeed sharing project outcomes. The cooperation between the countries and their concerted approach is now widely recognised on the international stage.

The benefit of the Nordic dimension is the ability to share problems common to the participating countries.

All the countries involved have small populations, which puts a limit on the resources available for development within a single country. Iceland – the smallest country involved – has in particular obtained real benefits from Nordbib.

Nordbib's initial design was largely drafted by Hanne Marie Kværndrup, who became the first programme manager. She brought to the programme a singularly clear vision of its purpose and a great breadth of knowledge of its participants. The dialogue accompanying the design of the programme was a lengthy one. Nordbib's predecessor, Nordinfo, had ceased in 2004 and it took until 2006 to ensure that funding was in place and to have the programme up and running. There is widespread agreement that those involved in its design had done a good job in setting up a programme that is both lean and well focussed.

Nordbib has two principal aims. The first is to develop recommendations to help Nordic countries in their development of Open Access policies. The second is the creation of a network of development environments in research libraries, universities and research institutions, which work together to strengthen Nordic research communication.

It is clear that Open Access and scientific publications provided a relevant and timely choice of focus for the programme. Nordbib has given Open Access a pan-Nordic dimension. The programme has set OA in both Nordic and European contexts and has successfully given prominence to the pan-Nordic aspects of OA.

The programme is thus based upon shared cultural heritage and a largely shared linguistic history. Its aims are about the sharing of research outcomes. It is therefore heavily based upon communication and, whilst this has been very successful overall, it is an area about which stakeholders have suggested scope for

¹ Dr Jon Duke and Dr Andy Jordan are the directors of Duke & Jordan Ltd. The company specialises in providing consultancy services to higher and further education. The work of the company relates in general to information services, both IT and library oriented. It has carried out substantial work for the JISC in the UK.

improvement. Nordbib has achieved its ends by operating in two principal ways: it has part funded projects and it has organised workshops, to which invitations were extended to individuals with specific expertise. The workshops have proved to be a very successful part of the programme and many of those we spoke to told us how good, informative and useful the workshops had been. They particularly cited the benefits of peer networking, and told us how beneficial it was to be able to share problems and solutions with people from other institutions and countries. The projects, which were quite deliberately only funded by Nordbib to 40%, adhered to the multi-nation vision by requiring the involvement of partners from at least 3 countries: other funds had to be found to make up the difference, though this has often been in kind, for example by providing staff time. This funding model was considered to have given good value for money because of the high local contribution. On the other hand, the need for at least three countries to be involved was found to make it difficult for some prospective bidders, who lacked the international contacts, to find the necessary partners.

The programme has three strands into which the projects fit. The first is concerned with policy and visibility and is designed to build upon and strengthen OA activities already taking place within the individual countries. The second strand is targeted at improving content and making content more accessible. Underlying these two strands, the purpose of the third is to promote interoperability between different systems in learning and scientific environments. At the time of our evaluation, eight projects had begun or had been completed and a further one was due to start. There was praise for the speed with which these had been established but also concerns from those who proposed projects that the aims of the programme and the process for the evaluation of proposals lacked clarity. The project calls, however, attracted few bidders, leading to little competition. The reasons appear to include a lack of flexibility in the calls and a lack of calls requiring innovation.

The group which established Nordbib is NORON, The Nordic Conference of State and National Library Directors. This has continued as Programme Board with the addition of a representative of Nordforsk. Responsible to the board are the Programme Manager and a Programme Group. The Programme Group works to support the Programme Manager, who chairs it, and consists of a member of senior staff of each of the five national libraries. It is the Programme Group with the Programme Manager which put together the original programme prior to its ratification by the Board and which has developed the further work within the programme.

The management of the programme has worked well in many ways. The bureaucracy has been lightweight and so the programme has been agile and able to move fast. Further, the programme has very successfully established social capital by creating a group of partners with much trust in each other. On the other hand, the small project office has led to a low visibility for the programme and little resource available to promote good contact between projects. There is also little interaction between the Programme Group and the wide range of stakeholders in Nordbib.

We found the communications from Nordbib to interested parties to be the weakest part of the programme. Open Access is a political issue and one of Nordbib's aims has been to influence the policy makers. Sadly, that has been an area in which progress has been less than hoped. That is not to say that no progress has been made: Nordbib has done a good job in initiating debate about Open Access, about what it is and about its benefits. But the workshops do not seem to have attracted enough senior decision makers. Furthermore, we were told by a number of people that the programme had failed adequately to engage researchers, the very people whose work Nordbib is seeking to make accessible through Open Access. In the world being promoted by Nordbib, tools such as the website are very important and at the time of our evaluation, that site was poor in conveying the breadth of work being undertaken in the name of the programme.

But despite these minor criticisms, we had no doubt in recommending to the Board that it should seek to deliver another round of the programme and that the principal focus should continue to be on giving Open Access issues a Nordic dimension. The justification for this is that Open Access remains an extremely important topic within learned publishing and that the first round has established a Nordic grouping that is leading and promoting change in a cost effective way. As one senior manager said to us, "The whole area of scholarly publishing and access rights are extremely important and must be worked upon. [We are moving] to an entirely new situation and need people to specialise in it and develop it". However, in good part because of the complexity and fundamentally international nature of the topic, changes are not occurring quickly.

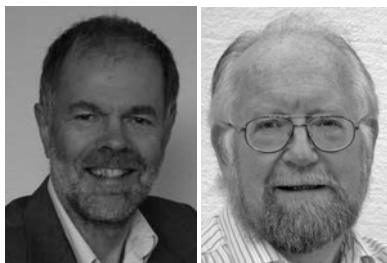
The next round of Nordbib should address both practical issues and communicating the policy issues to policy makers and researchers. It has a unique role to play in conveying the importance of open access policies to a Nordic audience: policy developments can be formulated, lobbied for and communicated between the member countries. Following from this, the member countries will be in a better position to

make concerted representations for change within the European Union arena. It also has a unique role in the development of open access practice: by working with universities and research institutes, it can develop standards of practice to suit all the Nordic countries.

We believe that the new programme should both continue to support and supplement the basic thrust to Open Access. In particular, it should give visible support to the Nordforsk eScience Action Plan, it should promote the development of understanding in handling complex documents such as those referencing other information and it should assist the growth of a better understanding of the management of the information life cycle. Without doubt, workshops should be a major element of the next round. They have been a very successful part of the first round and have proved a powerful communications tool, bringing together and advancing peer networks amongst a wide range of types of stakeholder who share an interest in open access. These stakeholders include librarians, researchers and, last but by no means least, those hard to reach policymakers.

We do consider the present funding model and the approach to seeking projects to be restrictive. For example, some prospective project applicants have found difficulty in finding interested institutions in two other countries: instead, Nordbib could issue a project call to ask for expressions of interest in a topic, with the objective of putting interested institutions into contact for formulating a bid. In the area of funding, project consortia have only been offered 40% of project costs. It was suggested to us that this makes bids from research institutions difficult, because of their funding model. We think that flexibility in the amount contributed to projects from Nordbib, perhaps by permitting the discretion to increase the level of funding to 50%, could be of benefit in obtaining more bids from calls.

It will be clear from this article so far that we are emphatic that the new round should include the development of a communications strategy, a framework for enhanced contact with all the types of external organisation and individuals of relevance to Nordbib as well as individuals and groups within the programme.



Dr **Jon Duke** and Dr **Andy Jordan** are the directors of Duke & Jordan Ltd. The company specialises in providing consultancy services to higher and further education. The work of the company relates in general to information services, both IT and library oriented. It has carried out substantial work for the JISC in the UK.

Successful external communications are crucial to Nordbib: this strategy might become a communications strand within the programme, and it could then use expert resources from other agencies and institutions.

The communication strategy should state the approaches Nordbib uses to obtain the involvement of policy and decision makers in the Open Access agenda. Providing up-to-date information about Nordbib is an important role for its website which can also usefully include pointers to other relevant web sites. News feeds could be implemented to enable individuals to keep track of Nordbib progress. And in these days of financial gloom, videoconferencing could be a useful tool both in convening and in enhancing meetings.

In summary, Nordbib is a well regarded programme, which was well designed and has been effectively and efficiently managed, with its administration delivering excellent value for money. It has done very well in introducing a Nordic dimension to the issue of Open Access and has developed, particularly through its highly successful workshops, a considerable degree of peer networking amongst those developing and supporting Open Access resources in the Nordic countries. It is also contributing significantly to raising the profile of Open Access in those countries.

From our personal standpoints, this evaluation proved a most pleasant experience. It was made thus by the kind and friendly way in which we were helped by all those we spoke to or communicated with. In particular, we would thank Mikkel Christoffersen, the present Programme Manager, whose enthusiasm and responsiveness enabled us to maintain the momentum of the exercise. For the pair of us, both native English speakers, the ease of communication with everyone was a salutary lesson, and the importance of retaining cultural heritage, even for this most modern of topics, was reinforced at every conversation.