

## HERON: AN UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

*Marianne Jacques*

Over the past few years there has been much speculation and debate concerning *electronic* or *virtual* libraries. How would 'libraries without books' come about? What form would they take? Who would run them? How can libraries best support and advance their universities into the 21st century? To address these questions The Libraries Review was commissioned by the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, chaired by Sir Brian Follett, in 1993.

As a direct response to the Follett report The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) established The Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib), awarding a budget of about £15million over three years. Its objectives include the use of IT to improve delivery of information through increased use of electronic library services, which would allow academic libraries to cope better with growth, to explore different models of intellectual property management and to encourage new methods of scholarly publishing. The overall aim of the eLib programme is to engage the Higher Education community in developing and shaping the implementation of the electronic library.

HERON (Higher Education Resources ON-Demand) is made up of a consortium of the Universities of Stirling, Napier, South Bank, Blackwell's Bookshops and Blackwell's Information Services which aims to develop a UK national database and resource bank of electronic texts which will widen access to course materials. The project received confirmation of £462,000 funding in April 1998 from JISC. The development phase started in August 98 and the objective is to make the service self-financing by August 2001. It thus continues the work of other eLib projects such as SCOPE and PHOENIX, with the overall aim of creating a successful, new learning/teaching information service to benefit all UK Higher Education stakeholders. HERON is inviting UK Higher Education Institutions to become subscribing members, who will be able to request material for clearance and digitisation since development of the HERON service is now well underway, with a prototype due to be available at 'test' HEI sites around the UK from the summer of this year.

As part of eLib HERON will be able to draw on the growing mutual respect of the HE and rightsholder communities, evidenced by the JISC/Publishers Association (PA) agreements, which

*Marianne Jacques is Marketing Manager for the HERON project at Blackwell's.  
marianne.jacques@blackwell.co.uk  
www.stir.ac.uk/infoserv/heron*

provide a framework for fair use in HE. Through this patient work, there is a growing confidence that rightsholders can trust the university community with valuable electronic materials. HERON will be implementing controlled access methods to ensure that this trust is not violated.

### How HERON will work

HERON has four principal aims:

- to create a successful, new learning/teaching information service to benefit all UK Higher Education stakeholders;
- to create a sustainable business model in exchanging rights and access to electronic educational material for payment by licence or transactional fee to rightsholders;
- to build a viable bridge between the research and development focused projects and the commercial market that operates in the UK;
- to create a national electronic resource bank of world-class standard and interest.

But how will these objectives be achieved?

The project will develop a national database of digitized material and electronic texts, which will be held at Napier University. The database will contain records for digitised material within the following groups:

- newly retro-digitised material;
- the archive of material from eLib projects;
- HEI-owned material.

The HERON resource bank will hold electronic text in trust and will be non-exclusive. Other organisations will be able to access the materials, subject of course to clearance permissions. The database will also provide pointers to other resource banks of digital texts (e.g. at publishers' own Web sites).

In order to create this database HERON will collaborate with rightsholders and representative bodies to remove blockages in copyright clearance to determine appropriate fee levels and conditions for the digital age. The eLib and TLTP programmes, as well as the Dearing report have greatly increased pressure on rightsholders to reach decisions on policy for electronic permissions and fees.

Copyright terms and conditions will be negotiated through Blackwell's licensing department and via the CLA, which has recently

announced its intention to deal in electronic permissions. Agreements will be made with individual publishers as well as with HEIs and individual academic authors. HERON and CLA have a mutual interest in agreeing electronic permissions with rightsholders, and will be working together. There are clearly a number of issues to overcome, but the popularity of technology with students and academics means that ways must be found to distribute material electronically and assure rightsholders of fair income. HERON provides one of the best options we have currently for handling these issues.

HERON aims to increase the availability of copyright cleared material by providing a single point of access to enable lecturers to request any material, irrespective of who holds the copyright. Following a request from a lecturer via the HERON interface, the HERON copyright team will seek to clear the material either through Reprographic Rights Organisations such as the CLA or by approaching rightsholders directly.

HERON's collaboration with these agencies will help avoid duplication of effort, thus speeding up the clearance process. In addition HERON is expected to be a 'trusted repository' for copies of all digital files requested through the CLA's forthcoming electronic licence. This will mean that any file which has previously been requested will be held on an electronic 'bookshelf', ready for re-use, removing the need for repeated digitisation.

HERON aims to follow the guidelines formulated by the JISC/PA working parties on charging for texts and pricing modules. Lecturers can keep informed of how clearance is progressing for their selected materials through the HERON interface. This information will be maintained and updated regularly by the HERON copyright team.

HERON will also be holding metadata for the digitised files. The Copyright Team is in consultation with publishers and end users to ensure the correct standards are adopted.

### Advantage of HERON

*Academic staff* will be able to tailor recommended reading to specific courses, thus offering the diversifying student population convenient access to reading material via paper course packs or

electronic documents. They will then have a 'one stop shop' in HERON to arrange supply of material, clearance rights, payment details and, for course packs, distribution through campus bookshops. This will be a new way of providing course materials, which will supplement printed standard texts and journal articles, all of which lecturers will continue to recommend.

*Librarians* will be able to reallocate scarce resources which are currently being spent on inflexible, traditional methods of text provision, in order to develop new services appropriate to the needs of today's students.

*Rightsholders* will be assured of an important source of income and will no longer need to be concerned about losses through unsupervised copying because the students will have the material they need through official channels. They will welcome the fact that production of course packs and access to electronic documents will be covered by regulatory frameworks. In addition, rightsholders will be provided with invaluable market research and usage figures.

*All campus bookshops* will benefit because more students will visit their shops to buy printed course packs. Each visit is likely to lead to other purchases, such as the optional materials they miss under current arrangements.

*Students* will be able to call up entire texts on a reading list on their computer, rather than having to rely on the often over-stretched resources of library short-term loan collections. Coupled with the availability of tailored course packs in campus bookshops, the worry about how they will obtain copies of recommended reading will be removed.

### **The technology behind HERON**

The HERON service will be implemented using World-wide Web technology. Tutors and

librarians will need only a common Web browser to use the facilities. All the processing power and data storage will be provided by HERON on central servers. These will enable tutors at participating institutions to browse the ever-expanding catalogue of digitised material in the HERON electronic resource bank, to request additions to that bank, and to assemble lists of material for delivery in the form of electronic reserves or paper course packs. Librarians and bookshops who have access to the Web will be able to order course material online. Institutions will even be able to learn about the HERON service and apply for membership via the Web.

Making the service available via the Web will be particularly convenient for tutors, who will be able to browse other online resources, seeking suitable material, while using HERON. At the same time, HERON will protect the publishers' interests by keeping the resource bank out of reach of the public Internet on 'back room' servers. The content will only be accessible through HERON order fulfilment on payment of the appropriate fees.

Development of the HERON technology is progressing well. A prototype version has been evaluated by HEI representatives in the partnership, and work is under way on a second version which will allow the partners to fully exercise the service. A prototype service is due to be launched at selected test sites in the Summer of this year.

Blackwell's will have a stand at both Libtech (29-31 March 1999) at Olympia and the UKSG exhibition (12-14 April 1999) in Manchester, at which they will be demonstrating the latest HERON prototype.