

# Convergence of libraries with other academic services

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# Convergence

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Library and academic computing services, with or without other services, are brought together for managerial purposes under a single executive director recruited from a professional information background

# Historical sketch

- UK Learning resource centres: Brighton and Plymouth mid 1970's
- CIO – Chief information officer concept in USA c. 1980: Columbia, Carnegie Mellon etc.
- UK convergence with computing centres: Plymouth, Salford, Stirling, De Montfort 1987-1989
- British Journal of Academic Librarianship special issue: 1988

# Convergence in Europe

For the book *Managing academic support services in universities: the convergence experience*, ed T. Hanson, Facet Publishing 2005, includes:

- UK case studies
- Reviews of state of affairs in USA, Australia, Europe
- Cases of non-convergence or de-convergence

# UK experience

- UK 2001: about 66 converged services
- Notable radical new structures: Birmingham, Hertfordshire
- Some examples of non- or de-convergence
- Opportunities:
  - Integrated strategic planning
  - Facilitates cross-cutting development, e.g. e-learning
  - Standardized approaches, good practice
  - Economies of scale, resource sharing

# US experience

- Despite early adoption, convergence not as widespread as in UK, no dominant model
- Advantages:
  - Integrated user services
  - Synergies, flexibility, reduction of competition
  - Staff development
- Disadvantages:
  - Different cultures
  - Organisation too complex
  - No savings
  - Goals can be achieved without convergence

# Australian experience

- Proportionately quite widespread, but
- Some examples of de-convergence
- Notable radical models: Melbourne, Newcastle, Australian National University
- Advantages:
  - Broader knowledge base of staff
  - Improved collaboration, innovation
  - Strategic thinking, institutional goals
  - Flexible use of resources

# Models of convergence

Many and varied but broadly:

- Common reporting lines to executive board member, with or without good co-operation
- Strategic co-ordination under a common director
- Service-level convergence, possibly with re-defined roles, jobs and titles



# Europe – approach of the study

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- Hypothesis that convergence is rare in Europe outside UK
- Email survey to find examples of convergence
- Analysis of responses
- Confirm or negate the hypothesis and suggest reasons or conditions

# Results

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- About 15 known examples of convergence in some form, existing or in development
- Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland
- Definite nil return from certain countries: Belgium, Italy, France, Hungary. There are probably others.

# Advantages

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- Customer focus, common approach to quality control
- Service flexibility and multi-skilling
- Integrated planning
- Better technical approach and investment
- Operational cost savings

# Difficulties

- Implementation requires much time and effort; most staff positive, some not
- Fear of change, loss of identity
- Culture differences between professional groups
- Seen as a centralising tendency, reducing service quality or power of faculty
- Much staff development needed

# Instigation

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- Nearly always a top-down initiative from University President or Executive Board
- Occasionally a co-operative initiative from the service heads themselves – e.g. Kuopio

Reflects experience in UK

# Evaluation and feedback

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- One institution has systematic evaluation processes
- Others have planned programmes
- Some were still in process of convergence and it was too early

# Analysis

- Convergence in Europe outside UK is still extremely rare
- Two significant concentrations of activity: Finland and Germany
- Finland is a cohesive professional environment with well established levels of co-operation at national level (e.g. FinElib)
- German Research Foundation initiative

In these respects both show similarities with the UK environment

# Why is it not happening?

- Devolved power (and financial control) of faculties
- Humboldt ideals of the unity of research, teaching and academic freedom
- Conservative attitudes or rigid regulatory structures
- Lack of strong professional cadres
- Drives for efficiency seen in UK not (yet) dominant in Europe



# Conclusions

- Convergence in Europe is so rare as to be a negligible feature in information services development in higher education
- Conditions appear not to be conducive:
  - powerful de-centralized administrations
  - rigid statutory frameworks
  - level of professionalization?
- Will it happen later?
- Does it matter?