



Co-operation between EDCs on the national level - examples from the United Kingdom¹

Margaret Watson, UK EDC Co-ordinator

I am going to look at the reasons for co-operation between EDCs in the UK and, the history of that co-operation; I shall look at what we are doing now, and give some recent examples, and I shall briefly consider what we could do in the future

Why do we co-operate?

For many reasons, the key ones being:

- EDC Librarians are often specialists in larger libraries, their colleagues do not necessarily know much about EU reference materials, and they can end up feeling isolated;
- Academic libraries often have funding problems, and so there may well be gaps between the departure of one EDC Librarian and the arrival of another, and this lack of “handover” time can cause problems, which support from other EDC Librarians can alleviate;
- It is more efficient if the UK Representation of the Commission can speak to us all as a group, rather than trying to deal with us each individually, and I should like to think that we carry more influence as a group than we do as individuals;
- Finally, co-operation with colleagues is interesting, rewarding and enjoyable.

How do we co-operate?

First, a little history: the story of UK co-operation goes back to the 1970s, when it began on a regional basis. 10 years ago, in 1997, Anne Ramsey, who had been the EDC Librarian at the University of Northumbria, published an article describing the development of the EDC network in the UK from 1977-1999².

Anne remarks that in the early years of UK membership, there was very little contact between EDC Librarians or with Commission officials either in the UK or in Brussels. Then in July 1977, two librarians at the John Rylands Library in Manchester published an article entitled *Subject approach to European documentation: the possibilities for computer application*³. Anne Ramsay, then a “struggling European Documentation Centre Librarian” (her own words!) read the article, and arranged to meet one of the authors. It was from this that the UK Northern group of EDC Librarians originated.

¹ Text of a presentation given by Margaret Watson, UK EDC Co-ordinator, at the Co-ordination meeting for the Representations’ EDC correspondents and national EDC Co-ordinators, Brussels, 23 May 2007

² Ramsay, Anne. From little acorns ... the origins of the European Information Association. *EIA Review*, No. 9, January 1997, 7-10

³ Lovecy, Ian and Hulme, Charlie. Subject approach to European documentation: the possibilities for computer application. *Journal of Librarianship*, Vol. 9 (3) 1977, 186-198

Progress was swift. Fifteen EDC Librarians attended the first meeting in Newcastle in 1978, and the *Northern EDC Newsletter* was launched in October 1978, and in 1979, they even invited Eric Gaskell, the Librarian at the Commission in Brussels, to come and speak to them. Meanwhile, in 1978 and 1979 two other EDC Librarians, Mike Hopkins (subsequently Chair of the EDC Association) and John Jeffries, were setting up groups in the Midlands and in the South East.

Anne's account of the early days of the northern group is interesting, because it already includes most of the key characteristics of EDC co-operation in the UK: the personal contact and initiative of individual EDC Librarians, the meetings to which Commission officials were also invited, and the publication of a newsletter.

There was one key ingredient still to be thrown into the pot, and that was Giancarlo Pau, who arrived at the Commission's London office in 1979. His energetic and enthusiastic support helped to stimulate EDC activities, including the first EDC conference at Wye College. From these beginnings the Association of EDC Librarians emerged, which in 1990 metamorphosed into the European Information Association (EIA), under the chairmanship of Ian Thomson, and went on to follow a separate line of development.

Since the 1970s there have been more and more users of EU information in the UK, resulting in two separate but interwoven strands of co-operation: the formal EDC networking, sponsored by the Commission through the UK Representation, and the wider unofficial networking, between individuals or under the auspices of other organisations such as the European Information Association (EIA) and the European Union Databases User Group (EUDUG). As many of the people involved are the same, the distinctions sometimes become blurred, and I shall cite examples of good practice from both formal and informal networking activities.

There have been changes over the years: we no longer have an EDC Association with a 'chair': my role as UK EDC Co-ordinator is less specifically defined. Technology has transformed our networking techniques since the 1970s. There are still meetings, conferences and publications, but we have mailing lists and websites and more as well. I shall take them in that order.

Meetings

Meetings continue to be a feature of UK EDC life: the UK EDC Annual General Meeting (AGM), hosted by the UK Representation is invaluable: the most recent meeting, in January, was particularly useful because it explained the new EDC evaluation procedure for 2007.

Conferences

Conferences offer exceptional networking opportunities, from which co-operation can develop. In the early days, the EDC Association organised conferences, and that function passed to the EIA. When I joined the Oxford EDC in 2001, the main conference for UK EDC Librarians was the annual (international) EIA conference, but in November 2006 the UK Representation organised a Networks Conference in London for all the UK European Information Networks and I understand that another one is planned in Edinburgh in 2007.

Publications

Publications have a vital role: it was the publication of an article that resulted in the creation of the Northern group of EDC Librarians. Over the years, EDC Librarians have helped to write, edit or publish titles that include *EDC Newsletter*, *European Access*, *EIA Review* and *European Information*. Publications, whether paper or electronic, disseminate information and remind us that there are other EDC Librarians out there, whom we can contact. Current examples are the EIA newsletter *Focus*⁴ and also the electronic *INFO-EUROPA* (see below).

Training

⁴ *Focus: news and views from the European Information Association*. Published monthly by the EIA

Training is another essential activity for UK EDC Librarians. Many of us attend courses from time to time, but a number of us also offer education and training ourselves, as teachers and speakers at events attended by other EDC Librarians. Whatever our role, attending these events enables us to meet each other and work together.

Email

Turning to maillists, the first to mention is *Eurodoc*. I am indebted to Patrick Overy, EDC Librarian at Exeter for this summary. He writes: "*Eurodoc*, a list for EDC Librarians, was started in 1993 in Durham at the initiative of Richard Caddel, who was then chairman of the UK EDCs. It now covers all UK EDCs, and many others from the EU and beyond, and is still growing. "Most of the messages are in English, although some appear in other languages. The list is closed and restricted to managers of EDCs or other official relays, so in some ways it almost acts as an official list. However, the archive is publicly accessible and searchable at www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/EURODOC.html"⁵

Julie Brett, EDC Librarian at Leeds Metropolitan, states that from her perspective *Eurodoc* is the most successful example of EDC co-operation. She describes it as "a very clear demonstration of what a supportive and helpful network the EDCs are". So far this month (May 2007), posts on *Eurodoc* include requests for information about childcare statistics for Germany and Sweden, requests for issues of the publication *European Economy* in English and a request for information on the ratification process of European treaties in each Member State, all of which were satisfied.

In contrast, the EIA email discussion group, *Eurotalk*, is clearly not "official". This is the description on the EIA website: "*Eurotalk* is used by EIA Members seeking help with specific queries and to pass on news and views about EU information." The membership of the *Eurotalk* list is broader than that of *Eurodoc*⁶, but it is often used for similar purposes.

Websites

Then there are websites, official and unofficial: *Europe in the UK*⁷ is the official website maintained by the European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom "to enhance public access to information about its initiatives and European Union policies in general".

Europe in the UK includes *INFO-EUROPA*, a weekly newsletter, edited by Patrick Overy at the Exeter EDC, using a format based on the Spanish newsletter produced weekly by Alfonso Moreira of the EDC at the University of Valencia. All UK EDCs have a logon and password for this site, which we use to update information about our own EDCs, and enables us to post information about events on the website.

Recent examples of how UK EDCs have benefited from co-operation:

- Meetings and conferences offer us forums in which we can make contacts and sow the seeds for future co-operation. I have already mentioned the UK EDC AGMs, and UK EIN conference hosted by the UK Representation. Other recent meetings hosted by other organisations, include the EIA AGM and award ceremony in April and the EUDUG meeting in November, both of which were hosted at the London office of the European Parliament.⁸ In all these cases, the support of the EU institutions has been crucial, whether in providing a venue or speakers or both.
- There are also many small examples of person-to-person networking that have made a real difference to individuals and the services they offer. Here are two of them:

⁵ From: Overy, Patrick. *European information: a guide to official sources*. Manchester, EIA, 2006

⁶ The EIA is "an international body of information specialists whose aim is to develop, co-ordinate and improve access to EU information", so it represents a broader group.

⁷ www.europe.org.uk

⁸ Both the EIA and the EUDUG have more than one EDC librarian on their respective committees

- Ian Mayfield (Portsmouth EDC Librarian) writes that from time to time he is contacted by new EDC Librarians in his area looking for an introduction to how the whole thing works and seeking advice on particular issues: for instance he is going to Bath this summer, to talk to the new EDC Librarian there. Mentoring is a form of networking that perhaps we should be seeking to foster more systematically in the future.

- In Leeds, EDC Librarians have held reciprocal visits to learn from each other.

- There are plenty of examples of co-operation through training:

- The UK Representation currently offers a training programme for the European Information Network (including EDCs), which aims to introduce public information providers to the range of information sources available across the UK, and to give hands-on help on how to access and use EU databases⁹.

- Other organisations offering training of courses include the EIA, which also includes EDC Librarians among its own members and trainers in the UK and abroad. Examples of overseas training work undertaken by UK EDC Librarians include courses in Sweden for Swedish EDCs at the request of the Swedish Representation, in Australia¹⁰ following an approach from the EC Delegation there, and in Iceland¹¹ following a request from the University of Reykjavik EDC.

- One of the best recent examples of the benefit of co-operation in the UK is the contribution that the EDC network made to the transfer of the Westminster Reference library EDC collection to the British Library.

- In November 2005, Westminster Public Libraries were looking for a suitable re-location for their EDC collection, which comprised an almost complete archive of all EU official publications received from the European Commission and the various Directorates-General of the European Communities, since 1973. Eveleen Rooney, the EDC Librarian at Westminster Reference Library, posted a message on *Eurotalk*, and Grace Hudson, EDC Librarian at Bradford suggested the British Library to her. That is where the collection has gone. Subsequently Grace Hudson and Ian Mayfield (both EDC Librarians, of course) provided in-house training for the British Library¹². Thanks to this co-operation, the collection has been saved for the nation, and the EDC at the British Library St Pancras will be launched on 4 July 2007.

What next?

I am sure that we could do more. For example, I don't think that we all make full use of the *Europe in the UK* site. There is the small barrier of having to log in with a username and password, and much of the current awareness material from the site, such as *INFO EUROPA* can be delivered direct to your inbox by email. However relying on the email alerts instead of visiting the site can mean missing the blogs and opportunities to engage in online discussions. The next generation of EDC Librarians will certainly provide the critical mass of activity that will make this take off, but we should not wait: we should engage with the technological possibilities

We need to offer more support to new EDC Librarians. It is surprisingly difficult to keep the list of UK EDC contacts up-to-date. Responsibility for the EDC is often only one part of a librarian's job, and when there is a change in library staff, the EDC may not seem a priority. I think that we need to develop a robust procedure for welcoming new EDC colleagues.

⁹ This training is currently administered through a contract with the European Information Association

¹⁰ Organised through the EIA

¹¹ Organised through the EIA

¹² Organised through the EIA

Conclusions

This is a good time to be an EDC Librarian in the UK. There is renewed interest in the EDC network from the Commission. After a period of hesitation about our role when electronic publications are superseding paper ones, and many of our users start their research with Google, we are finding our place as centres of expertise rather than repositories of publications (although of course we are that too). The ability to organise and manage collections is as essential as ever, but the focus on research skills and knowledge casts EDC Librarians in a more public role: an EDC can only be as good as its librarian, and in this climate mutual support, sharing and co-operation between colleagues is essential.

Acknowledgements

I should like to say thank you to all the EDC Librarians who very kindly emailed me with examples of co-operation, information and suggestions. Their help was invaluable.

© Margaret Watson, 23 May 2007

www.eia.org.uk