LIBLINK now links NSW university libraries

Elizabeth Curach, Secretary of UNISON, explains the significance of this development

LIBLINK is the result of an innovative project initiated by the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Conference (NSWV-CC) on behalf of the universities of NSW and the ACT. LIBLINK has been implemented and is being managed by UNILINC Ltd

Professor Brian Smith (Chair, NSW Vice-Chancellors' Conference, Vice-Chancellor, University of Western Sydney); Professor Michael Birt (Vice-Chancellor, University of New South Wales); Professor Di Yerbury (Chair of UNISON and Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University); Professor Tony Blake (Chair of UNILINC and Acting Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology); the Hon. Peter Baldwin (Minister for Higher Education) (Photo: Reece Scannell, Macquarie University)

on behalf of the Conference and its library advisory committee, UNISON. Development of the system has been made possible by a DEET grant to the NSWV-CC.

UNISON is a standing committee of the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Conference, chaired by a Vice-Chancellor, currently Professor Di Yerbury of Macquarie University. Membership consists of the University Librarians of NSW and the Australian National University of the ACT. The State Library of NSW and UNILINC Ltd have observer status on UNISON.

What LIBLINK provides

The purpose of LIBLINK is to link the on-line catalogues of the seven different library computer systems used by the nine universities of NSW, utilising the Australian Academic Research Network (AARNet) as the prime communications platform. In addition to linking these disparate bibliographic databases, LIBLINK 'translates' the differing screens into a common set of screens, requiring a single set of commands and providing help-text

shared amongst all participating libraries. The library user is thus able to interrogate, with a uniform command structure, the online catalogues of the nine universities in the State. LIBLINK, while not a library system in itself, is a user-friendly, sophisticated library catalogue linking system which connects member libraries, facilitating easy searching of a range of university library catalogues irrespective of location.

In addition to linking the university library catalogues, LIBLINK also has the potential to provide a management facility for requesting and supplying required materials on inter-library loan between participating institutions.

Development of LIBLINK

Following the establishment of a Working Group on Library Linking Systems to investigate and report on the most appropriate means of linking the library catalogues, a range of options were explored. The option finally recommended was a network model which incurred least cost and had no requirement to change local systems. The system initially recommended as meeting this network model was the Irving software, developed in the United States, and implemented as the South-East Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN). Negotiations leading to the acquisition of the Irving system software were well under way when a possible alternative presented itself.

UNILINC Ltd., in its management and development role, became aware of a local software company, CPS Systems Pty Ltd, which had developed a product called PINS. PINS is a sophisticated piece of 4GL software developed over a number of years here in Australia, at a cost of

millions of dollars. It provides a set of tools to enable interfacing and integration of disparate systems. Previous utilisations include integrated systems running successfully in commercial environments particularly the travel industry. Any products developed with PINS will run on any UNIX platform.

UNILINC could see the possible applicability of this approach to linking catalogues and put the suggestion to C.P.S. who agreed to carry out a feasibility study at no cost. UNILINC then approached the Working Group responsible for evaluating and recommending a linking system, strongly advising the C.P.S. be given the opportunity to submit a proposal. Following intensive evaluation of the product and the company the Working Group advised that it had identified a superior solution which was all Australian, and recommended its adoption to the Vice-Chancellors and UNISON. This unique and innovative approach to linking library catalogues commenced its development in late September, 1991.

Unlike the Irving implementation, the CPS system had to be built from scratch. In many software environments this would take months, if not years to accomplish. However, using the PINS 4GL tools, software work to develop the OPAC Common User Access (OCUA) was completed quickly and efficiently. In January, 1992, following extensive investigation and evaluation, a Sun 670 multiprocessor was selected and installed as the host hardware.

By March 1992 the first library catalogue linkages went 'live' via AARNet—becoming available immediately Australia wide, and world-wide to anyone with the appropriate AARNet address.

The implementation of LIBLINK represents a major step forward in the area of library cooperation, networking developments, managed use of AARNet, and the kind of adventurous approach to problem solving which characterises both the Australian library and computer software scenes.

Launch of LIBLINK

LIBLINK was launched on 13 May by the Minister of Higher Education and Employment, the Honourable Peter Baldwin (MP), at a UNISON function hosted by the Library of the University of New South Wales.