



**Strategy November 2020 to November 2023**  
Ratified by the Annual General Meeting of CERL  
members in their Online Meeting, October 2020

**THE CONSORTIUM OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES** is the international focal point for the engagement with the historic printed books and manuscripts, the written heritage of Europe, represented by the collections of our members and beyond. We focus on manuscripts and printed books produced before the middle of the nineteenth century.

CERL is where library and information professionals work together so that people can gain the full, connected meaning from our distributed collections and where leaders of our member institutions have access to a pool of shared expertise for the development of strategy, policy and tools for their implementation in an increasingly international field.

We are a flexible membership organisation which works to benefit our members - in Europe and world-wide - and their users. Jointly the distributed resources of our members document a shared experience of national and regional specificities within a wider whole, which is inextricably interconnected, intellectually, commercially, and politically.

**CERL is an international professional network of experts in the many disciplines which are relevant for historic printed books and manuscripts.** Funding is increasingly based on collaboration, and major issues transcend national borders. Interconnectedness is of ever greater importance. The CERL network brings together skills, experience and expertise of staff and senior leaders from member institutions. Our network enables specialist staff to develop experience with strategic planning, and to maintain and advance awareness of current developments, opportunities, and issues, often relating to digital expertise. And it enables senior leaders to draw on their peers internationally in the formation of strategy and policy. Providing access to its networks of experts in specialist fields, CERL can assist in training of specialist staff. This helps ensuring awareness of current developments, opportunities, and issues, relating to digital as well as to material expertise, and can assist members with succession management and capability building in disciplines where small staff numbers in individual member institutions can make this a challenge.

**CERL creates digital resources** of its own and offers a structured framework within which member institutions can deliver digital services, jointly or separately, which they may not be able to deliver or sustain themselves. Among its core resources are The Heritage of the Printed Book Database, the CERL Thesaurus, the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (with the British Library), Material Evidence in Incunabula, CERL Provenance Digital Archive, and much more.

**CERL engages in digital research.** CERL takes part in project-based collaborative development of new services, methods and tools, to ensure that they are optimised for institutions and researchers working with the material and digitised written heritage of Europe and its metadata. CERL members benefit from research projects where CERL collaboratively on their behalf engages with higher education institutions and their researchers on developing new methods, international standards and protocols for engaging with data and metadata.

**CERL provides services to its members and their users.** CERL has a portfolio of services strategically chosen to meet the needs of our members. Through their collaborative development as well as through their delivery they provide opportunities for member institutions to participate in formal and informal skills and knowledge exchange.

## **Strategic challenges for CERL in the 2020-23 planning period**

The way CERL works to fulfil its mission in the coming planning period is determined by factors external to CERL itself. Below we address some of the key factors that guide our work in the coming period.

**The importance of on-line community building.** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, financial and medical, the impact of the climate crisis, and our geographically ever wider membership join to make it urgent to reshape how our professional network is articulated and developed. We need to give new emphasis to a continuous on-line presence, benefiting physically dispersed groups of researchers, leaders and staff at our member institutions. Simultaneously we must maintain and develop networks through physical encounters, important not least for new entrants to CERL's activities. We need to ensure that our networks and services are understood to be relevant by institutions, researchers and funders beyond our traditional environment and addresses the requirements of an increasingly diverse group of researchers.

**A changing financial and funding environment.** We must envisage a period of significant financial challenge for many of our member institutions and for our researchers and their institutions. This may enhance an existing trend away from the funding of the work of libraries on historic collections as "business as usual" towards external funding of projects and programmes. This is a competitive environment and CERL must become an attractive partner of choice in large externally funded projects for member institutions and for others whose activity is of relevance. We need to ensure that our offerings are relevant for funders and that we have policies and processes in place which meet their requirements. We need to ensure that our members at all institutional levels know that CERL spends its resources transparently and responsively on things which are of use to them.

### **Changing expectations, methodologies and working patterns among researchers.**

The research environment is rapidly and constantly evolving as digital tools and methodologies emerge, are tested, adapted and, sometimes, widely adopted. CERL must participate and, on occasion, steer developments in these areas jointly with its member institutions or on their behalf. With a track record of high-quality implementation of international standards, CERL must enhance its role in the formation of emerging international standards and norms in handling metadata. CERL must work with researchers on the use and interpretation of the data it hosts and it must simultaneously work towards making its data available to researchers with minimal intervention from CERL. While cementing its importance in this field CERL must maintain its important role for research focused on physical objects, which equally relies on digital tools.

### **A changing international environment for acquiring and managing cultural property.**

Recent years have seen a radical change in attitudes to the cultural property constituted by the collections of our members. These changes are reflected in rapidly evolving national and international legislation around trade, import, export, acquisition and ownership of cultural property. They are paralleled in the growing awareness of the need for policies and processes that ensure equality, diversity and inclusion. Building on its success in creating a key international network around collection security, there is a need for CERL to create an offering around key themes in the field of cultural property management within and across national borders, both at a strategy and policy level for institutional leaders and at an implementation level for staff.

## **CERL will seek to meet these strategic challenges through its work plan for 2020-2023**

### **CERL is a professional network**

- CERL will expand its portfolio of online meetings (e.g. for Working Groups), information and instruction videos, (recorded) webinars and seminars, and the exchange of knowledge through electronic publications. Additionally, CERL will seek to continue a programme of physical meetings, a crucial way of keeping the

network relevant, strong and engaged, in a manner that is difficult to replicate in a remote setting.

- CERL will review its use of social media platforms (including the CERL website). The aim is to reach a greater part of our potential user base, to build relationships with end users for us to gain first-hand knowledge of user workflows and data needs, and to expand the community that is keen to work with CERL on developing our tools and data offerings.
- CERL will enhance the visibility of the CERL grants scheme and use it for the creation of a cohort of younger professionals who are engaged with the possibilities offered by CERL. We will give recipients a larger role at events, in our programme of blog posts and in the promotion of CERL and its services and we will seek to create a community of former CERL grant holders.
- CERL will review its policies and procedures to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is at the core of our work

### **CERL creates digital resources**

- CERL will **prioritise work** with the Data Conversion Group to structure, map and link data within its digital resources and with other relevant external digital sources.
- We will **seek funding to implement** an open-source triple store and SPARQL endpoint, where we would publish the CERL Thesaurus and the HPB, enhancing the usefulness and relevance to wider groups of researchers of CERL's portfolio of databases, presenting them to the user as a coherent package.
- We will **establish models** for fuller integration of CERL data resources.
- CERL will work with the community to **expand** the content of HPB, MEI, HPB-item, CT and PDA.
- CERL **will expand** its pool of databases with bibliographical records where they are of sufficient trans-institutional interest. CERL will explore whether it can act as the host for the Atlas of Early Printing and the LIGATUS Glossary.
- CERL will continue to **work with** the Data Conversion Group to harmonise bibliographic terminology where current divergence hampers automated data analysis
- We will **develop** a bulk upload facility for the Provenance Digital Archive.

### **CERL engages in digital research**

- On behalf of its members CERL will participate in funded international collaboration to develop standards and norms for metadata and metadata handling, and their implementation.
- CERL will actively seek to shape and participate in international funded research projects. We will engage in projects aimed at developing norms, standards and capabilities in the area of digital research and service provision as well more specific research where this enables CERL to develop tools and services of relevance for its wider membership and for a broader group researchers.
- CERL will develop a code of good research practice, and an Open Access policy for research outputs.
- CERL will develop a service for manuscript studies to replace its experimental pilot CERL Portal. As a prerequisite for cross searching databases with descriptions of manuscripts in a manner that would be useful to end users, we will work with the community to develop and /or host tools, such as glossaries, and thesauri to support mapping, harmonisation and linking.
- CERL will build on its experience with PATRIMONiT and MAT\_MED, to create an integrated sustainable approach to the data model that allows users to annotate selected HPB records, with information of importance to their specific research questions.

- CERL will explore a format to display and share Digital Humanities research based on our databases. This could take the form of a “GLAM workbench” where researchers can share scripts, SPARQL queries, etc. that deal with data from our databases. These, combined with a regular literature review, would enable CERL to demonstrate the potential and the use of CERL resources, and would allow the Digital Humanities community to potentially reuse scripts and queries developed by the Data Conversion Group and others.

#### **CERL provides services to its members and their users**

- We will build on the success of the annual Collection Security Summer School. The Security Working Group will support the development of national/regional collection security networks. We hope to continue a form of physical Summer School, but will also develop an on-line offering. During the Summer School more emphasis will be placed on workshop activities, during which, participants have the opportunity to review their own Collection Security Arrangements. Expanding the Quick Audit Tool (QAT), developed by the Security Working Group, we plan to add supporting documentation (policies, guidelines, reports) for reuse by CERL members. The WG will expand CERL’s collaboration with related organisations (e.g. Blue Shield and ICON in the archives community).
- CERL will create a Working Group for Digital Humanities. It is intended to support library management and curators of rare books and manuscripts to develop an informed mid- to long-term vision for the interconnection between Digital Humanities research and their organisation’s special collections, its associated data and metadata. The working group will work with university-based, library-based, national and international entities seeking to ensure that we have the opportunity to enhance their work through an understanding of the available data, the format in which data is made available and via which channels, as well as its research potential. The WG will provide information and organise training for management and curators of special collections in DH technologies. Through the WG CERL will create a regular and structured programme for engaging with researchers to promote and to enhance the research potential of the data that is available through CERL.

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