



NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

## **The Status of Local Records Centres in the UK, 2002**

[www.nfbr.org.uk](http://www.nfbr.org.uk)

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### **1. Introduction**

The National Federation for Biological Recording (NFBR) was set up in 1986 to promote all aspects of biological recording in the UK. It represents the biological recording community nationally and is a founder member of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Trust.

A Local Records Centre is a not-for-profit service run in partnership for the public benefit, which collects, collates, manages and disseminates information of known quality relating to the wildlife, wildlife sites and habitats for a defined geographical area.

Local Records Centre (LRC) development across the UK has been variable in time, space and characteristics. There had not been a national survey of LRCs since the mid 1990s (the Co-ordinating Commission for Biological Recording, Department of the Environment, 1995). NFBR identified a need to bring together some essential facts about the suite of LRCs in order to inform NBN strategy, existing and potential LRC stakeholders and LRC managers themselves.

NFBR would like to thank BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland) and all LRC staff who contributed to the survey.

### **2. The Survey**

NFBR conducted a questionnaire survey of all known Local Records Centres in the UK in the autumn of 2002. The questionnaire related to activity in 2001 or the 2001/2002 financial year. The questionnaire was in two parts: the first relating to the status of the LRC and the second to the uses to which LRC data were being applied.

The results have been analysed using spreadsheets and GIS, the latter to obtain area statistics. The results are presented in terms of totals of all LRCs responding, averages of all LRCs responding and, sometimes, the largest six LRCs in terms of expenditure. For some results statistics are extrapolated to either all known active LRCs or the whole of the UK if it were to have a complete network of LRCs operating at certain levels.

The map of LRCs status shows the results of the questionnaire with the addition of information known to NFBR Council members, the latter applicable to the end of 2002.

### **3. Response**

24 LRCs responded to the questionnaire.

20 of these were in England, 2 in Scotland, 1 in Wales and 1 in Northern Ireland.

The geographical coverage of these LRCs represents 38% of the UK (46% of the area of England, 11% of Scotland and 25% of Wales. The one LRC in Northern Ireland covers the whole of that country.)

There are known to be another 15 LRCs that are active in the UK. 9 of these are in England and 6 in Scotland. Therefore, of the 39 active LRCs in the UK, 62% responded to the questionnaire.

NFBR is aware of a further 13 areas that have active LRC partnerships and plans to develop new LRCs, complete or in progress. 9 of these are in England, 1 in Scotland and 3 in Wales. If all of these come to fruition then the total number of LRCs in the UK will be 52.

This leaves around 8 geographical areas, 3 in England and 5 in Scotland, with no current LRC activity or known plans. If the UK coverage is completed in due course then the total number of LRCs is likely to be around 60 (England 41, Scotland 14, Wales 4, Northern Ireland 1).

### **4. Legal status**

Of the 24 LRCs 12 operate under local authorities, 6 operate under Wildlife Trusts or their trading companies and 6 are independent charitable trusts or companies.

### **5. Data holdings**

The 24 LRCs hold 10.1 million species records on computer, details of 169,000 sites and have 288,000 parcels of habitat data mapped on GIS. The average LRC has 424,000 species records on computer, details of 7,050 sites and 12,000 habitat parcels mapped on GIS.

The largest 6 LRCs hold 37% of the total species records on computer, 45% of the site details and 88% of the mapped habitat parcels. If the whole of the UK had LRCs operating at this capacity LRCs would hold around 38 million species records on computer, 750,000 site details and 2.5 million mapped habitat parcels.

### **6. Computer Systems**

8 of the LRCs (33%) are using Recorder 2000/2002 as the main database, 11 are using Recorder 3.3/3.4 and 5 are using other databases.

19 of the LRCs (80%) are using GIS. 7 use ArcView, 14 MapInfo (a few use more than one system). All of the largest 6 LRCs use GIS.

14 of the LRCs (60%) have their own web site. All of the largest 6 LRCs have their own web site.

### **7. Human Resources**

The 24 LRCs employ 79 professional staff, 38 voluntary staff and received records from 4785 voluntary recorders in 2001. The average LRC employs 3.3 professional staff, 1.7 voluntary staff and received records from 200 voluntary recorders in 2001.

The largest 6 LRCs employ 50% of the professional staff, 41% of the voluntary staff and received records from 67% of the voluntary recorders. If the whole of the UK had LRCs operating at this capacity LRCs would employ 400 professional staff, 150 voluntary staff and receive records from 30,000 voluntary recorders.

16 of the LRCs employed 2 or more professional staff, the level considered by NFBR to be the minimum necessary to deliver essential LRC functions. 8 were operating at below this level.

## **8. Expenditure**

The 24 LRCs had a total expenditure of £1.81 million in 2001.

Using extrapolation to those LRCs that did not return questionnaires NFBR estimates that the total expenditure in LRCs in 2001 was around £2.5 million.

The average LRC had expenditure of £93,800 in 2001. If the whole of the UK had LRCs operating at the average current expenditure level the total LRC expenditure would be £5.6 million per annum. This represents an increase of around £3.1 million p.a. on 2001 levels.

The largest 6 LRCs' expenditure represented 57% of the total expenditure. Their average expenditure was £176,000. If the whole of the UK had LRCs operating at this capacity LRCs' total expenditure would be £10.5 million per annum. This represents an increase of £8 million p.a. on 2001 levels.

## **9. Income**

77% of LRC funding comes from "decision makers for the public benefit" (including statutory agencies and local authorities); 13% from commercial sources and 10% from conservation bodies. Less than 1% of LRC funding derives from "landowners", "individual members of the public", "community groups" or "educational users".

The 24 LRCs derive a total of £1.44 million from "decision makers for the public benefit", £243,000 from commercial sources and £188,000 from conservation bodies.

The largest 6 LRCs derive 86% of their funding from "decision makers for the public benefit", 5% from commercial sources and 9% from conservation bodies.

The 24 LRCs have a total of 119 Service Level Agreements with organisations, a mean of 5 per LRC. The largest 6 LRCs have 50% of the SLAs, a mean of 10 per LRC.

## 10. Use of LRC Data

Figure 1 shows the use of LRC data in the 24 LRCs and the 6 largest LRCs. The statistics are compiled from both accurate counts and estimates. The totals are in many cases underestimates as some LRCs felt unable to provide statistics against some of the uses.

**Figure 1 Use of LRC Data**

Use	All - Total	All - Mean	Largest 6 - mean	Largest 6 - %
Planning applications screened against LRC data	75187	3580	5433	43
Planning applications where LRC data reported to inform the decision	5273	251	220	25
Strategic policy documents e.g. Development Plans prepared/revised using LRC data	92	4	11	73
Environmental Impact Assessments (including non-statutory) using LRC data	463	22	34	44
Statutory environmental process decisions e.g. SSSI compliance/ abstraction licence decisions informed by LRC data	188	9	28	88
Local Wildlife Site evaluations made using LRC data	6968	332	527	45
Site surveys targeted/ informed using LRC	2787	133	188	41
Monitoring programmes supported by LRC data	67	3	4	37
Grant or agri-environment decisions targeted using LRC data	443	21	49	66
Forestry/ hedgerow decisions informed by LRC data	260	12	9	21
Site management plans prepared using LRC data	260	12	22	50
Heritage/ nature reserve site acquisitions informed using LRC data	99	5	12	74
Local distribution atlases informed by LRC data	92	4	12	76
UK or Local BAP implementation decisions informed by LRC data	297	14	22	44
Biodiversity/ quality of life/ sustainability indicators used LRC data	49	2	1	12
Land management advisory visits/ cases used LRC data	572	27	81	85
Site management decisions e.g. contractors verge maintenance made using LRC data	267	13	30	67
Enquiries from the public responded to by LRC/ accessed LRC data	3337	159	410	74
Education enquiries answered using LRC data	365	17	49	81
Press appearances/ articles produced by the LRC	154	7	18	71
Identification workshops/ training led or supported by the LRC	61	3	6	54
Local community groups advised using LRC data	107	5	13	71

## 11. Status of LRCs in the UK, 2002

Figure 2 shows the geographical distribution of LRCs at various stages of development across the UK. The information is derived from a combination of the results of the survey and information known to NFBR Council members from regional reports, as at the end of 2002.

**Figure 2 LRC Status in the UK, 2002**



### Key

- Black – Active LRC with 2 or more professional staff
- Dark Grey – Active LRC with less than 2 professional staff
- Light Grey - Areas with no LRC but a partnership plan in existence or in development
- White - Areas with no known current LRC activity\*

\* It should be noted that many of these areas have valuable biological records collections, often in local authorities or museums. These organisations hold some computerised data but have sufficient resources only to input data reactively and to provide limited support for recorders and some reactive information products. Examples in Scotland include Perth Museum BRC, North Lanarkshire BRC, South Lanarkshire BRC, Inverness Museum BRC, Falkirk Museum and Naturebase (Dundee). There are a few equivalents in England.

A full list of Local Records Centres and their contacts can be found on the NFBR web site ([www.nfbr.org.uk](http://www.nfbr.org.uk)).

Figures 3 and 4 show the statistics by country for the four categories of LRC development in terms of numbers of LRCs and geographical area covered respectively.

**Figure 3 Number of LRCs at different stages of development across the UK**

	England	Scotland	Wales	NI	UK
LRCs with at least 2 professional staff	17	2	1	1	21
LRCs with less than 2 professional staff	12	6	0	0	18
Areas with no LRC but a partnership plan in existence or in development	9	1	3	0	13
Areas with no known current LRC activity*	3	5	0	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>

**Figure 4 Geographical area covered by LRCs at different stages of development across the UK**

<b>(Figures are % of country area)</b>	England	Scotland	Wales	NI	UK
LRCs with at least 2 professional staff	48	11	25	100	36
LRCs with less than 2 professional staff	19	10	0	0	14
Areas with no LRC but a partnership plan in existence or in development	27	7	75	0	22
Areas with no known current LRC activity	6	71	0	0	28

\* \* END \* \*