

Meeting Report: Intranets Forum: Working with Sub-Editors

London, Thursday 7 December 2006

On the day a tornado hit London, the third UkeiG intranets Forum convened in the Society of Radiographers headquarters to tear through the subject of working with sub-editors. Convenor Helen Davies, of the Trades Union Congress, kicked off by defining sub-editors as those dispersed editors, outside the central intranet team, who publish to a specific section as one part of their job. Alternative terms for them are devolved editors or publishers, content editors or custodians.

Susan Henry from the Society of Radiographers (SoR) gave the first talk. We were given a presentation of the SoR intranet, which is very new, around nine months old, and uses Mambo open source. SoR is a small organisation with around 40 staff and another 20 on the council, with staff based all over the UK. Nearly all staff have one of three roles:

- Registered users: can look at content
- Authors: can create content (most staff)
- Administrators: can create, edit and publish.

All staff publish using templates, with layout, font and colours being fixed. Content is not reviewed before publishing, and there are guidelines covering how to create and present content. Departments, not individuals, are responsible for their section on the intranet, and all departments have administrative access.

The intranet is part of an attempt to break down 'silos' within SoR and to make all staff feel involved in the management of information. Staff members visit the intranet every day, and say they like the idea of publishing on it but find the current system 'clunky'. Training is provided, in general and individual sessions, and one-to-one support is offered as needed. The Society intends to invest in an improved system in 2007 and will keep the present system of general authorship but with probably a more formalised sub-editor role.

Ruth Hilbourne from Peter Brett Associates then gave a presentation from the point of view of the sub-editor who is likely to say: why should I take on this work when I'm already so busy? We need to demonstrate to staff the value of being a sub-editor, by:

- making the intranet an essential tool
- providing clear benefits of having information published on the intranet
- appealing on a personal level
- using champions.

The software must be easy to use and to learn, and quick; there must always be support available, including help notes and documentation – such as content style guidelines – on the intranet. Webex or videos can be very useful training tools. In addition, make it clear what is expected of sub-editors by providing a clear framework.

We then discussed several issues:

- time: do the sub-editors allot regular periods of time to check and update?
- Intranet usage statistics: can either motivate or discourage sub-editors.

- Automatic reminders for updating can remove the need to chase out-of-date content.

The wide-ranging discussion that followed mimicked the windy weather by jumping from: balancing the need to get content with having to vet it, which may stop the free flow of information; moderation of discussion forums and 'acceptable use' agreements; whether a password to a forum is a barrier; and training – we have different formats, ranging from one hour to one day, but we all felt one-to-one training works best. We ended by talking about the format and frequency of these UKeIG meetings, which we agreed are very useful for sharing good practice, and suggested a number of future topics. Then, fortified by this very useful session, we then went out into the wild and stormy weather...

Fiona Graph, Intranet Manager, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

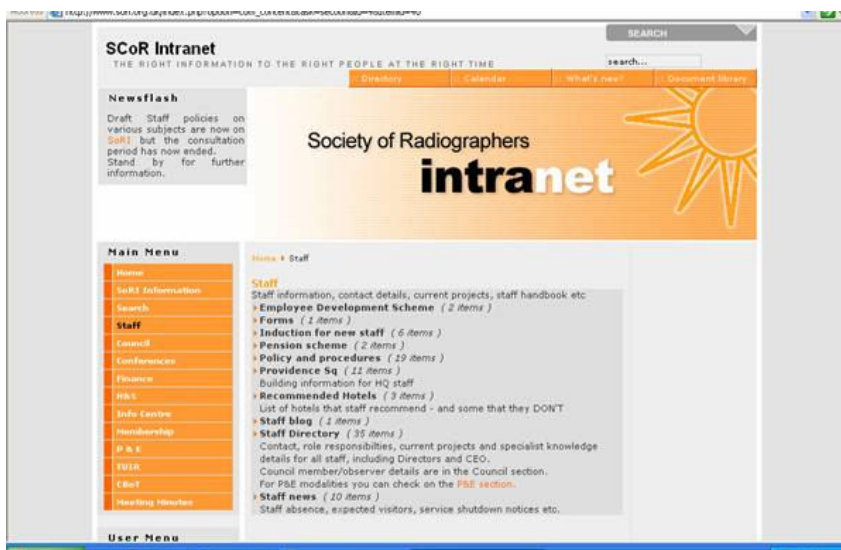


Figure 6 SoR Staff Page

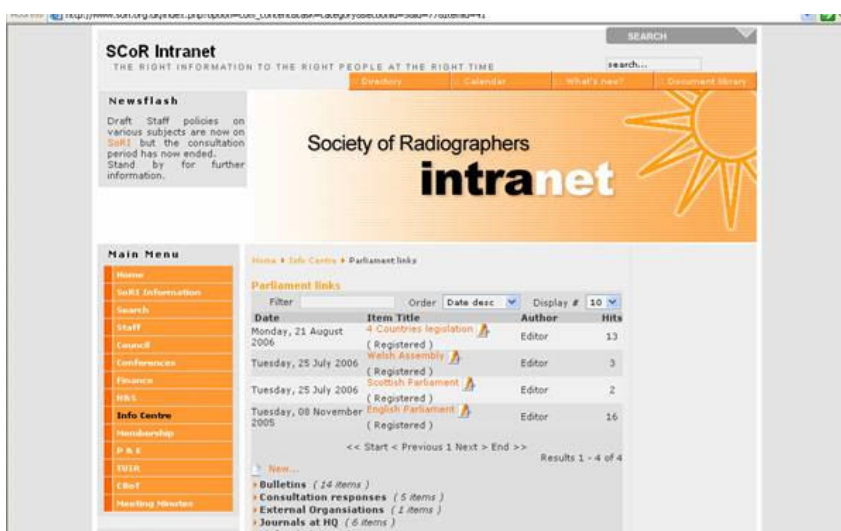


Figure 7 Info Centre Page

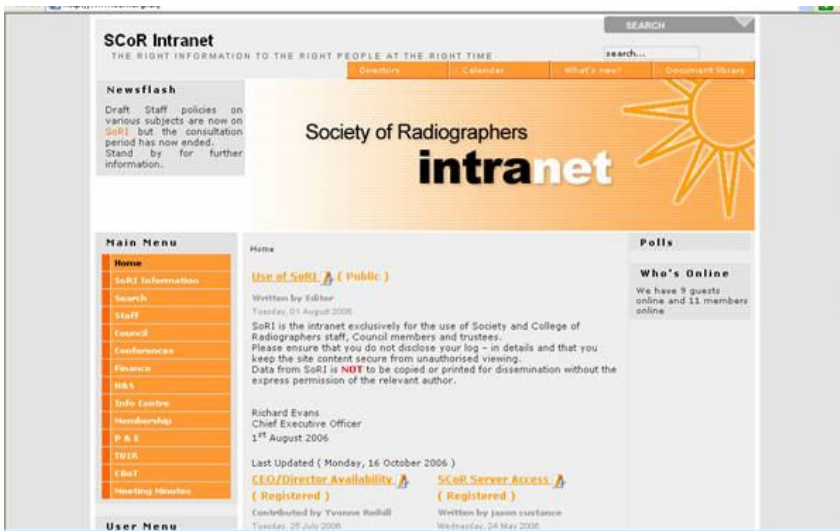


Figure 8 Intranet Home Page

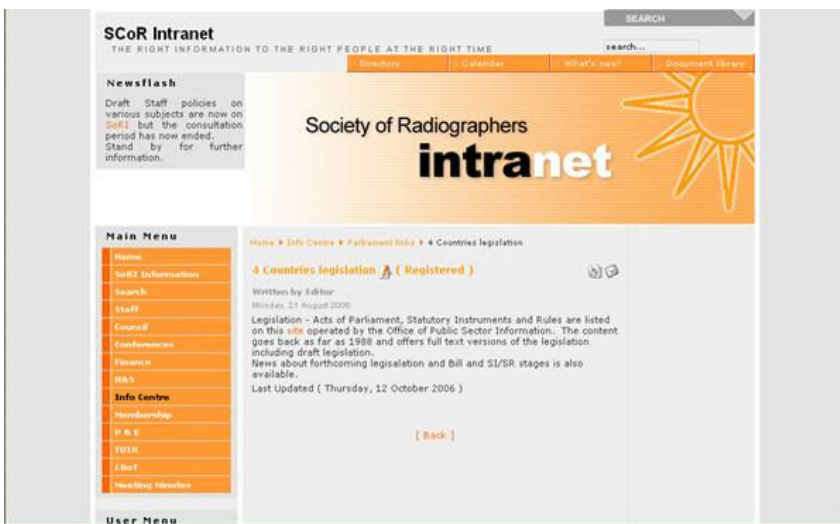


Figure 9 Info Centre Page