INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORIES – A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PUBLISHING?

* At last week’s PALS conference, “Institutional Repositories and their Impact on Publishing”, much was said about the experiences of institutional repositories to date, but little emerged to create a clear picture of their eventual impact on the world of scholarly publishing.

by Kate Worlock, Director

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The one aspect on which almost every speaker agreed was that a definition of exactly what is meant by an ‘institutional repository’ is important – unfortunately this meant that there were almost as many definitions as speakers. The common factors were that institutional repositories could serve as a venue to record research output from organisations (generally in the form of e-prints or e-theses), and could also be used to store other material such as that used for management, background research data, or material for teaching and learning purposes. Clifford Lynch from the Coalition for Networked Information provided perhaps the most visionary outlook, suggesting that these repositories should be viewed not as systems but as services which exist for the dissemination, management and stewardship of information created by the various communities which make up an institution. He further assumed that the content which resides in an institutional repository may not be there permanently but could be deleted if it became obsolete; of course this activity would have to be governed by a systematic process. What became clear however was that institutions must define the purpose of their institutional repository - this is likely to differ from one institution to another in the same way as strategic goals and missions will differ.

Several reasons were put forward as to why an institution may want to create its own repository. Lynch suggested that the changing practise of scholarship meant that the journal article is no longer sufficient – we now have the ability to connect articles to a mass of other material including research databases. This has of course already been demonstrated by the Signaling Gateway service (Signaling Gateway: Nature pushes forward to next stage, EPS Insights, 19 April 2004), and indeed some US research funding agencies are now calling for data dissemination policies within grant applications. Institutions may want to use repositories to disseminate their research output as widely as possible, to raise the profile of this activity, to promote the reputation of the institution, to ensure long term digital preservation of this material, to act as a location in which to manage an institution’s intellectual assets, or to act as a complement to publishing activities. It appears as if increased visibility can certainly be achieved - Greg Tananbaum from Berkeley Electronic Press, which runs the eScholarship Repository on behalf of the University of California, reported that 98% of the usage of the service came from outside the University of California through search engines such as Google or Yahoo!.

There are of course factors which hold back the development of these services. These generally fall into three categories: cultural (placing material in a repository is an additional step in the process and goes against established
working practice for many academics), legal (what rights does the institution have over the material, particularly article content? – these are questions which Project RoMEO has been addressing), and technical (in-house skills are needed to create and maintain the service). This of course overlooks any financial hurdles – Chris Awre from the JISC made the assumption that institutional repositories would be the purview of the institution's library, but with Dspace's revelation that the facility costs $300,000 per annum to maintain (in addition to set-up costs), significant levels of funding would need to be ringfenced for this activity to take place.

In most cases speakers assumed that placing content in an institutional repository would be a complementary activity to publishing in traditional journals and monographs. A study undertaken for PALS by Mark Ware at the beginning of 2004 found that almost 60% of material held in institutional repositories was "grey literature" (such as technical reports), 20% was made up of theses and dissertations and only 22% was e-prints. The study also found that while the number of repositories was growing they were not being well used by faculty – most of the growth in the amount of content in these repositories comes from new services being set up rather than growth in the holdings of existing facilities. However, usage is on the increase – the number of records in the Caltech CODA archive increased by only 7% between January and June 2004, but usage figures rose by 107% over the same period.

It remains difficult to draw any real conclusions of the impact which institutional repositories may have on scholarly publishing. The facilities which have been set up to date are still at the experimental stage, and several key publishers are making efforts to work with these services – Elsevier’s decision to allow the use of an academic’s “final version” in institutional repositories (see Elsevier: the reply to the repository argument, EPS Insights, 3 June 2004) was widely discussed, and OUP is working with the JISC-funded SHERPA project to provide bulk-uploading of its content. The real benefits of institutional repositories will have to be understood by institutions before they will make any real investment in them, and without this investment these services cannot survive. This harks back to the early lessons of the web – it is now widely understood that once a web site is built it must be maintained and developed in order to deliver real benefits, and the same is true of institutional repositories. These benefits are likely to be stimulated by the actions of Google and Yahoo! which will drive external traffic, and publishers like Elsevier and OUP which are working with institutional repositories should be well-placed to not only keep abreast of developments, but perhaps also to help build repositories which act to the mutual benefit of both institution and publisher.

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RELATED LINKS

Coalition for Networked Information: http://www.cni.org/
JISC Focus on Access to Institutional Repositories (FAIR) Programme: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_fair
SHERPA: http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/
Project RoMEO: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ls/disresearch/romeo/
eScholarship Repository: http://repositories.cdlib.org/escholarship/
DSpace: http://www.dspace.org/
Caltech CODA: http://library.caltech.edu/digital/
PALS report, Pathfinder Research on Web-Based Repositories: http://www.palsgroup.org.uk/
Conference presentations:
http://www.alpsp.org/events/previous/PALS04prog.htm

FROM THE EPS ARCHIVE

Elsevier: the reply to the repository argument, EPS Insights, 3 June 2004
http://www.eps ltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1279

Google and OAI: new effort to search across university repositories, EPS Insights, 19 April 2004
http://www.eps ltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1237

OA-X: open archives, metadata and more, EPS Insights, 11 February 2004
http://www.eps ltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1173

Signaling Gateway: Nature pushes forward to next stage, EPS Insights, 7 January 2004
http://www.eps ltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1138

RoMEO: to self archive or not to self archive?, EPS Insights, 30 December 2002
http://www.eps ltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=135