Collecting Loughborough’s research: the story of our Institutional Repository

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Collecting Loughborough’s research: the story of our Institutional Repository

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In June 2005, I was appointed as a Support Services Librarian at Loughborough University with specific responsibility for the development and management of a new Institutional Repository service. Overseen by a Steering Committee, the first year was recognised as a pilot phase in which we would concentrate on developing policies; building content and promoting the service. By the end of this twelve months, the repository was officially launched by our Vice-Chancellor, demonstrating that the repository was now a permanent service which the Library would be providing for its research community. We had by this time won valuable support from a number of key sources; been given encouragement by the positive response of senior managers and established key channels of communication with important players. Two years on, in common with many other institutions, there is still much work to be done: there has been no official mandate from our University management and our advocacy work continues. This article, however, is our story so far: it explores some of the issues and challenges which we have experienced.

In 2003, the development of an institutional repository was identified as a key element of the Library’s strategic aim “to increase access to local and external sources of information for all users, moving towards a predominately electronic Library”. The Library had been monitoring developments in scholarly communications and the open access movement with interest and it was recognised that these were areas in which we could provide important support to our research community. This was further emphasised by a report produced by a Working Group, investigating the feasibility of developing an Institutional Repository at Loughborough. This group concluded that the development of a repository service was essential to ensure the long-term preservation of the University’s digital outputs and it was recommended that a 12 month pilot project with a limited number of volunteer departments should be launched. At this very early stage, the Library started its advocacy campaign, speaking to a range of University committees to raise awareness and to identify departments willing to participate in the pilot.

From these discussions, 6 volunteer departments were identified and working initially during the pilot phase, with only these select departments was a valuable way
to ‘test the waters’ and we learnt some important lessons very quickly. As Hubbard (2003) states, a repository has to have a clear collections policy that defines what is acceptable in the repository: decisions include the type of material that is acceptable. However, it became clear that we could not be too prescriptive and that we had to work closely with groups, and sometimes individuals, to understand what they wanted to get out of the service. At Loughborough, we already had an established publications database which is a full record of the research publications of all staff at the University and therefore, the focus of the repository was always going to be its full-text potential. Although we had initially expected the repository to be used for traditional research outputs such as post-prints and pre-prints, we have remained flexible and have always been keen to discuss other types of material with departments, including conference posters; datasets and multi-media. Most recently, for example, we have started a collection of moving image art pieces, created by an academic in our School of Art and Design:

(See: http://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace/handle/2134/107)

One of the major challenges we have faced is persuading academics of the value of open access and the potential of the Institutional Repository. In many ways, this was made more difficult by the existence of our publications database. However, having collected material from our pilot partners, we could give live demonstrations at departmental meetings and were prepared for many of the questions which would come our way. Over a period of some months, we had given presentations to all the academic departments in the University and the service had been met with varying levels of enthusiasm, disinterest and scepticism. At times, it was hard to remain positive about what we were doing because of such negativity but through continued marketing work with our Academic Librarians, we began to amass significant levels of content. Targeting research groups and research centres proved particularly successful as they were often much more amenable to the idea of the Library managing their research centrally on their behalf. The more content we had: the stronger our arguments appeared.

‘How long will it take me?’ has been a common question. Administrative demands on academics are already high and we were keen that this would not be an obstacle to the growth of the service. For this reason, we started out offering a mediated service as opposed to the self-archive model, including undertaking any

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Copyright checking. To date, we have continued with this model: it has worked well as academics appreciate our time and it also means that we can ensure the quality of the metadata records. In addition, it became clear very quickly that copyright issues would cause problems.

Copyright has always been a thorny issue. Using the SHERPA / RoMEO database\(^2\), we are able to quickly check publishers policies: the most time-consuming activity has been explaining copyright regulations to academics. There exists a general misunderstanding about what rights an author has to their work after they have signed a copyright transfer agreement and it has been frustrating to have to refuse material due to the restrictions in these documents. A large part of our advocacy work has centred on discussing these issues and encouraging academics to think twice about signing away their rights. In 2006, our Vice-Chancellor endorsed a policy encouraging our staff to retain their copyright whenever possible: this has provoked a lot of useful discussion but does not go far enough: it is sometimes difficult for an individual to fight these battles with the publishers.

We have come so far in a short period of time. We have proved that the institutional repository infrastructure works and have the internal commitment to its longevity but the next step has to be an institutional mandate on open access. In 2005, Pinfield stated that the mandating of deposition by institutions or funders of research papers in open access repositories (institutional or otherwise) remains a real possibility.\(^3\) In 2006, the Research Councils made an important step towards the principle that all publicly funded research should be publicly available, with a position statement on access to research outputs.\(^4\) However, in 2007, content within repositories remains dishearteningly low. Here at Loughborough, there are some encouraging steps being made: after much discussion with our Research Office, the deposit of electronic theses will be trialled this year with the view to making it mandatory in 2008. This is a huge cultural change. Mandatory deposit of research articles in the repository may remain elusive but we will continue with our advocacy campaigns.

\(^2\) SHERPA/RomEO database was based on research done by staff at Loughborough University and is hosted by University of Nottingham (\[http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo.php\]

\(^3\) Pinfield, S. (2005) A mandate to self archive? The role of open access institutional repositories. Serials, 18(1), pp 30-34

\(^4\) RCUK Position statement: [http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/access/default.htm](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/access/default.htm)