



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Lessons in Open Access Compliance in Higher Education (LOCH)



University
of
St Andrews

University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University & University of St Andrews - Scotland

Introduction

For some years now, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom have been committed to Open Access (OA) and all research-led and most teaching-led institutions now provide some Open Access services to their researchers (such as institutional repositories).

In the last two years, we have seen major research funders such as RCUK begin to require that the research they fund is made Open Access. Furthermore, HEFCE have recently announced new requirements meaning that many journal articles and conference proceedings may not be eligible for submission to the next REF if they are not made Open Access from the point of acceptance by publishers.

These changes in particular mean that many UK HEIs will need to introduce new services to support Open Access and to consolidate and raise the profile of existing services.

The LOCH project will fulfil a need to provide guidance and evidence of best practice in the provision and management of Open Access services. It will share experiences of three HEIs which have extensive experience of running repositories, CRIS systems, OA journal hosting and publication funds. It will provide case studies of evidence of best practice in relation to OA workflows and financial management. In addition, the project will provide a range of tools to help practitioners improve their services and make it easier for academics to comply with new requirements.

The University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University and St Andrews University have long been committed to Open Access and already have a culture of sharing good practice between institutions. The three universities use the same CRIS system (PURE) and were joint submission partners in REF2014. The Universities vary in size and speciality but are all research led, and are already gearing up for reporting on Open Access activities for RCUK, as well as preparing for the new requirements for the post-2014 REF.

The LOCH Project enables the three partners to formalise existing collaborations and a culture of sharing information in a way which will benefit the wider Higher Education community in the UK.

The benefits of the LOCH Project are straightforward. The aim is to provide guidance and tools which make life easier for Open Access Practitioners and therefore the research community. All of the deliverables and outputs are geared towards making the transition to Open Access as seamless as possible. Compliance with research funder and research assessment requirements will be made easier and this will reduce the risks of non-compliance for institutions.

How Has REF Changed Open Access?

The association of OA with research assessment has changed the landscape in the UK in a number of ways:

1. Open Access now affects everybody

Until now, there was only really a mandate for those authors in receipt of grant funder for a research project. Large, research-led universities such as Edinburgh aspire to be able to return any member of a staff on a research contract in a REF exercise. In turn, it is important that any member of staff is in a position to be able to select any of his or her publications for such an exercise. In an institution such as the University of Edinburgh, this effectively means that every journal article and conference paper needs to be made OA.

2. OA is no longer optional, even for un-funded research

Some researchers who are not in receipt of grant funding for research have argued that they do not need to make papers deriving from their research OA as there is no funder mandate. Linking OA to research assessment has started to break down this argument, with some universities responding that any research conducted during working time or using university facilities is in some way "funded" research, even in absence of a project grant. The argument for tax-payer access to tax-payer funded research still applies.

3. OA is being discussed

The OA agenda now has the full attention of research directors, administrative support staff and university senior management nationwide. It is on the agenda at many departmental meetings and the issues are being discussed amongst researchers in a way we have not previously seen in the UK.

4. OA can no longer be put off, or ignored

Authors must take action immediately on having an article accepted for publication. The OA requirements for REF have been designed in such a way as to prompt the researcher to deposit the author's final peer-reviewed manuscript (postprint, AAM) at the point at which they are most likely to still have that version available. Because it is a requirement to deposit this (even closed-access) immediately on acceptance, authors cannot postpone this task until a later date, or they may risk the paper being ineligible for inclusion in the next REF. Because there is no scope for retro-compliance with the requirements, appropriate administrative support must be in place to guide authors who are unsure of what actions they must take.

5. We are starting to see real growth in UK repositories

The relative ease and low cost of making large numbers of research articles available on repositories is highlighting the relative high cost of gold OA, especially with hybrid journals.

Conclusions

- The UK has been engaged with the OA agenda for over a decade, but progress has undoubtedly been slow.
- The revision of the RCUK policy undoubtedly helped to create an increase in awareness of OA, as well as increased deposits in institutional repositories and demand for gold OA funding.
- Linking OA with research assessment has done more than anything else to get authors interested in and talking about OA.
- It is imperative that we continue to convey a really positive message about the benefits of OA to authors during this time of transition. There is real a danger that authors lose sight of the good things that OA can do for them, and a risk that it becomes perceived as an extra administrative task with a sanction for non-compliance.
- Universities in the UK are working hard to prepare for the REF requirements to 'go live' on April 1st 2016. There is much work to do, and many conversations to be had – but success with this new policy could prove to be a real milestone in the transition towards open access.

Bibliography

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LOCH Project Outputs

- The LOCH Project has already produced a number of useful outputs, including:
- Exemplar website text which can be used on institutional websites to inform researchers of the requirements for Open Access in the post-2014 REF.
- Example project plans which can be used by any university to assist with the implementation of the new requirements.
- 'Minimum Deposit Checklist' to use when submitting items to the repository.
- 'Responsibility Matrix' detailing who has responsibilities for different stages of the deposit and checking processes.
- Training materials for universities using PURE as their CRIS system and/or repository.
- Exemplar communications to send to researchers regarding the REF OA policy, including templates to use in different scenarios.