

Protecting the UK's research collection: the UK Research Reserve project



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The UK Research Reserve (UKRR) is a collaborative, co-ordinated and sustainable approach to securing the long-term retention, storage and access to low-use printed research journals.

Whilst the need to preserve and provide access to printed research collections is understood, there is also a recognition that lesser-used printed journals are at risk of ad hoc disposal as higher education libraries face space and cost pressures. The UKRR is designed to protect, and make accessible, low-use but still important research material, in the most cost-effective way.

The UKRR is being developed in two phases. Phase 1 of the project to establish the UKRR is funded by the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, following a successful bid by the Consortium of Research Libraries in the British Isles (CURL) and the British Library (BL) and will run for eighteen months, from January 2007 to June 2008.

In Phase 1 the universities of Cardiff, Birmingham, Imperial College London (the lead institution), Liverpool, Southampton and St Andrews are partnering with the British Library to establish the UKRR. The library and research communities are fully represented on an advisory board which is overseeing the development of Phase 1 of the UKRR project and developing a full governance model for Phase 2 and beyond. The advisory board has responsibility for advocacy for the UKRR in Phase 1 to ensure understanding of the objectives and benefits of the UKRR within the research communities. SCONUL is represented on the advisory board and has a key role in commu-

nication with higher education libraries and in the arrangements for co-ordinating the retention of research material.

The UKRR will be based on the holdings of UK higher education libraries, and will have the British Library at its core. The BL will store and maintain printed copies of journals and provide a range of services to ensure quick and easy access to the material for researchers and others who wish to consult them. To help to ensure the preservation of and continuing access to the material within the UKRR, at least two copies of each journal will be retained within the higher education library network, in addition to the BL copy.

The UKRR has three goals:

- **safeguarding the long-term future of printed research journals:** the UKRR will protect vulnerable printed research material by establishing a system to manage the co-ordinated retention of an appropriate number of copies of low-use printed research journals, ensuring that 'last copies' of titles are not inadvertently discarded. Journals within the UKRR will be permanently retained both centrally at the British Library and within a distributed holding across the research library sector
- **enabling quick and easy access to research material:** journals within the UKRR will be accessible to all researchers, regardless of location or institutional affiliation. The UKRR will provide fast and convenient access to journals, by developing the existing strengths of the British Library's document supply service. Researchers will have a choice of accessing journals in printed or electronic format, with electronic desk-top delivery being the norm
- **ensuring efficient use of resources:** by co-ordinating the storage and retention of printed journal titles, the higher education library sector will make significant space gains by reducing the amount of duplicate storage of the same low-use journal titles, without endangering the long-term retention of and access to this material. The space reclaimed from journal storage can be re-purposed for new opportunities and higher-priority 'people-focused' uses.

Phase 1 of the project will include developing a prototype UKRR and testing an operational serv-

ice for researchers. To establish the prototype the Phase 1 project is focusing on several key areas of work:

- **selection of printed journals for de-duplication by each higher education library partner:** the higher education libraries will set their own criteria for selecting low-use printed journals that they wish to prioritise for withdrawal. Having made their selection according to these criteria, the libraries will check the journals at the shelf to confirm the holdings, the measurement of each title and the physical condition of the items. The libraries will then carry out their own consultation on the proposed withdrawal with their institution's research community.

Convincing academics of the case for the UKRR and gaining their support through local advocacy programmes is a key challenge for the higher education library partners.

- **establishing the process, and support systems, for journal holdings information discovery and management:** before withdrawal can take place, the holdings of other higher education libraries must be checked to ensure that at least two copies of each journal title, in addition to the BL copy, are held within the higher education library network. This is an essential part of ensuring the UK's collection of printed research material is protected under the UKRR and that 'last copies' are not discarded.

The UKRR project faces a strategic challenge in finding an accurate, timely and easy-to-use method of establishing the journal holdings of higher education libraries. Holdings information in library catalogues is quietly recognised as 'patchy'; catalogues do not currently record a library's intention towards a journal – it may be due for withdrawal the week after it has been checked by another library and assumed to be for permanent retention; union serials catalogues are rarely universal in their coverage and vary in the regularity of their updating timetables; there are often multiple records for the same title, which can make navigation and interpretation of the information complex and time-consuming.

The project will investigate the requirements and options for developing a 'journal hold-

ings information management system' to support the UKRR.

- **developing the models and mechanisms to enable the co-ordinated retention of the agreed number of copies of printed journals within the UKRR:** where the number of copies of a particular journal title are found to reach the agreed minimum, the UKRR must provide a mechanism to co-ordinate the retention of these 'last copies'. SCONUL has agreed to act as the co-ordinating body that will investigate the most appropriate library to retain a print copy, and will secure that library's agreement to act as the holder of the title. SCONUL will liaise with institutions to reach agreement on the most appropriate home for 'last copies' and to ensure that the responsibility for retaining reserve copies is shared across the sector. Several factors may be considered: individual collection strengths and the 'fit' of the title; regional distribution; the practicalities and cost of transferring the title; the remit of the library.

The UKRR project will work with SCONUL to design and test a retention agreement and management process.

- **building on the British Library's existing research infrastructure to develop the storage and access services for the UKRR:** as part of the co-ordinated retention principle, the BL will take in, process and store 'last copies' of journals under the UKRR scheme. Coupled with this, the BL will provide access to material within the UKRR with a fast, easy-to-use delivery service for researchers, to an agreed service level developed in consultation with library and research stakeholders.

The British Library will develop and test a new pricing model for document supply with the higher education library project partners. Payment for the document supply service will move from a per transaction basis to a banded subscription fee based on the level of use of the document supply service and including a fixed element to reflect the central storage and retention role of the BL within the UKRR. This business model will enable the BL to cover the costs of storing the material required to support the UKRR and to continue the document supply service in a sustainable way.

An external consultant will be appointed to carry out a formal evaluation of Phase 1 of the UKRR. The evaluation will include an assessment of the models, processes and costs of Phase 1; the optimum number of copies of items to be retained across the nation and within disciplines; the potential for widening the scope of the UKRR to include monographs and an investigation of the different challenges that monographs would bring; the impact on users and the level of use; the spatial and monetary savings to the Higher Education sector; the potential scalability to a full UKRR in Phase 2; and benchmarking with other schemes.

Phase 2 of the UKRR project will build on Phase 1 and open the UKRR to all higher education libraries wishing to participate, and will possibly extend the scheme to include monographs. The development of Phase 2 will be informed by the experience and knowledge gained in Phase 1 and will be dependent on receiving additional funding.