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Institutional Repositories: The New University Challenge

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Background

Since the case for institutional repositories was first made by SPARC in 2002, numerous initiatives have been launched in the UK to explore, research, and assist in the development of institutional repository solutions. But what exactly is an institutional repository? A frequently cited definition is that offered by Clifford Lynch in 2003:

"a university-based institutional repository is a set of services that a university offers to the members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institution and its community members. It is most essentially an organizational commitment to the stewardship of these digital materials, including long-term preservation where appropriate, as well as organization and access or distribution."

An institutional repository is thus defined not by the type of data it stores but by the purpose that it serves: in essence, this is the capture, collection, management and dissemination of the 'intellectual output of a single or multi-university community'.² The range of digital materials created by an institution and its community members is highly diverse. An IR, for example, may include pre-prints or post-prints of published articles or research reports, conference papers, teaching and e-learning materials, e-theses, primary research data and datasets, electronic records, multimedia, or image materials to name but a few. Repositories that contain a mix of these materials are commonly referred to as 'hybrid' repositories. The most widely implemented type of IR however is one with so-called 'eprint' deposits, i.e. electronic pre-print and post-print publications or research papers.

Implementation levels are rising, encouraged perhaps by the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008. There are now approximately 69 Research or Institutional repositories in the UK, although some institutions have multiple implementations to cater for different types of content.³ Despite this, broader and

¹ Lynch, Clifford. "Institutional Repositories: Essential Infrastructure for Scholarship in the Digital Age." *ARL Bimonthly Report*, No. 226, February 2003. <<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/226/ir.html>>.

² Crow, Raymond. 'The Case for Institutional Repositories: a SPARC position paper.' August 2002. <<http://www.arl.org/sparc/IR/ir.html>>

³ See <<http://www.openoer.org/>>. The University of Glasgow, for example, has two repository implementations: a DSpace repository for digital content including working papers, technical reports, theses and pre-prints by members of the University of Glasgow, and; an ePrints repository for published and peer-reviewed papers.

more consistent implementation is needed before a national institutional repository infrastructure can truly become effective. In recognition of the importance and value of institutional repositories within a UK institutional repository network, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) recently made substantial funds available to establish a support infrastructure to assist all higher education institutions (HEIs) in England and Wales to establish their own institutional digital repositories. This support infrastructure – the Repositories Support Project – is now up and running.

Your Starter for Ten: What is the Repositories Support Project?

The Repositories Support Project (RSP) is a 2-year initiative to assist Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in England and Wales in the development of a deployed network of inter-working repositories for academic papers, learning materials and research data.⁴ Although some institutions are in the advanced stages of establishing well-managed repositories, the deployment of repositories is still patchy and many institutions do not have the expertise, resources or confidence to address the repository agenda without external encouragement and support. The principal aim of the RSP will therefore be to increase the pace of institutional adoption by providing practical assistance and advice based on available solutions, with an emphasis on operational issues to do with the installation, implementation and deployment of institutional repositories. The overall objective of the RSP is to support repositories to be fit for purpose, standardised and sustainable.

The RSP will contribute to building repository capacity, knowledge and skills within institutions. Through providing guidance and advice it will benefit the whole of the UK sector resulting in the wider take-up and development of institutional repositories in HEIs. The RSP will provide support, activities and advice to achieve:

- More repositories
- More content in repositories
- More use and re-use of content by researchers and services

Guidance materials will take a number of forms, from planning materials such as briefing papers, toolkits and FAQs to events (including a subsidised 2007 residential short-stay summer school) and targeted site support. Support materials will concentrate on four broad themes:

- Technical: software selection and installation, technologies, metadata, interoperability
- Organisational: staffing, business requirements and incentives, copyright clearance and digital rights management
- Repository management: policies, workflows, archiving and preservation
- Advocacy: advocating to different stakeholders and advising on advocacy within institutions

Activities will address a range of stakeholder groups, from repository managers, administrators, academics and researchers, to publishers, service providers and

⁴ RSP is a consortium project led by SHERPA at the University of Nottingham with core partners the University of Wales Aberystwyth and UKOLN at the University of Bath. Other funded partners are the UK Digital Curation Centre and the University of Southampton. The project is scheduled to run from 1st October 2006 until 31st March 2009.

fundings. Targeted activities for each of these groups will ensure comprehensive coverage of the range of stakeholders with a role in making development and population of institutional repositories a success.

Bonus Questions

How does the RSP relate to existing repository-related research and development projects?

There are two main sources of funding for repository development and activities in the UK: JISC, and the European Union. Numerous initiatives have already been funded by these organisations, including the JISC Digital Repositories Programme, JISC's Repositories and Preservation Programme (the funding programme for RSP), and the EU-funded DRIVER - Digital Repository Infrastructure Vision for European Research – project. The RSP has close relationships to these initiatives and works with them when possible to ensure repository implementations remain at the cutting-edge of national and international developments. The RSP has particularly close relationships with SherpaPlus, a JISC-funded project that helped expand an existing pilot network of institutional repositories into a wider UK distribution and will, in effect, carry the mantle of the SherpaPlus project when that project completes in mid 2007.

My institution doesn't yet have a repository: how do I go about setting one up?

The first step is to register with the RSP! Visit <http://www.rsp.ac.uk/> and register as an institution seeking support in establishing a repository. This will be the start of a close working relationship with RSP and will ensure you are made aware of the preliminary issues that should be addressed before you install any software, and how you may resolve them. You may also, if required, receive some technical support in installing and configuring your software and making the contents accessible to a wider audience.

My institution has a repository but no contents: how can I get it populated with relevant deposits?

Once again, the first step is to register with the RSP. Visit <http://www.rsp.ac.uk/> and register as an institution seeking assistance in populating a repository. Advocacy to encourage deposit is a significant challenge that has been addressed in numerous documentary resources. The RSP site contains links to many of these resources and staff can discuss advocacy options, as well as what they require in practice. For example, mandated deposit can be a very successful way to populate a repository but maximum success and user buy-in requires more than just a written mandate to deposit: the mandate should preferably be part of a wider package that includes a link to repository policy, education and training. The absence of these can result in resentment and lack of willing amongst depositors, which in turn may produce infrequent deposits, badly filled-in metadata, and inappropriate formats. All of these may impact on the perceived success and efficiency of the repository and the longevity of its contents.

In summary, the RSP and the RSP web site is a one-stop-shop for advice on implementation, development, and management of successful institutional repositories in the UK.