

Open Access Publishing in the Arts and Humanities

A symposium in association with SAS-Space

July 15th, 2011

This event, held at the School of Advanced Study, was organised in association with SAS-Space, the institutional repository for the School of Advanced Study (<http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/>).

It brought together academics, journal editors, publishers, librarians, funding bodies and repository practitioners to consider issues of particular concern in the arts and humanities.

The morning session considered the economic and public policy aspects of humanities OA, while in the afternoon the conference considered examples of the different modes in which OA is currently delivered.

Session 1: The economic and policy context from different perspectives

Chair: Professor Roger Kain, (Dean and Chief Executive, SAS)

- *The university library* - Dr Paul Ayris (Director of Library Services, UCL, and President of LIBER - Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche)
- *The publisher's perspective I* - Dr Frances Pinter (Publisher, Bloomsbury Academic)
- *The funder's perspective I* - Dr Neil Jacobs (JISC, Programme Director - Digital Infrastructure)
- *The publisher's perspective II* - Tessa Harvey (Publisher for History, Wiley-Blackwell)
- *The funder's perspective II* - Professor Shearer West (Director of Research, AHRC)

Session 2: Different approaches to OA

Chair: Bill Hubbard (Centre for Research Communications, University of Nottingham)

- *The subject-specific repository: UALRO* - Stephanie Meece (University of the Arts London)
- *A repository for teaching: HumBOX* - Kate Borthwick (University of Southampton)
- *The overlay journal: SAS Open Journals* - Dr Peter Webster (SAS)
- *An OA publisher on campus: Ubiquity Press* - Brian Hole (UCL)

The following are three reflections on the conference proceedings, from very different perspectives.

Dominic Tate is Repository and Digital Assets Manager at Royal Holloway (University of London), having previously been Project Manager with SHERPA for the Repositories Support Project. He is also an officer of UKCORR, the United Kingdom Council of Research Repositories.

Mike Webb is Head of Production at Boydell & Brewer Ltd, publishers of scholarly works in the arts and humanities. Among the firm's many collaborations are those with learned societies such as the Victoria County History and the Royal Historical Society.

Dr Deborah Toner is Postdoctoral Fellow in Latin American History at the Institute for the Study of the Americas (SAS), working on the Liberalism and the Americas project.

Dominic Tate

Repository and Digital Assets Manager, Royal Holloway (University of London)

I have worked in the domain of Open Access for over six years now, initially for an open access scientific publisher, then as a project officer with the [SHERPA](#) team and currently as an institutional repository manager. Over those years, much of the focus of my work has been on ensuring the widest possible dissemination of 'scientific results' – and indeed we often hear about open access within the context of sciences, medicine and technology, rather than arts and humanities.

In my current role I am responsible for the implementation of an open access repository for an institution with a wide range of academic departments including sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. So, it was with great enthusiasm that I chose to attend this symposium.

After the welcome address, the day kicked off with Peter Webster looking at the current state of play. Personally, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of arts & humanities journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) – there were more than I honestly thought. Peter went into some of the reasons for the slow uptake of OA in these fields. A big part of the problem is “the centrality of the monograph to much of the scholarly endeavour.” Another important distinction in these fields is the notion of “the independent scholar - as distinct from the laboratory based scientist.”

Next up, Paul Ayris from UCL gave us the perspective of the university library - mentioning UCL's mature repository, [UCL Discovery](#). UCL were early adopters of a 'mandate' requiring staff members to make copies of their research available via the repository. Paul also showed us an interesting [video](#) about the repository.

Much of the challenge in this area centres on how to fund sustainable open access for books in the arts and humanities - the 'long form' publication. There is pressure on the academic community, and on libraries and their shrinking budgets. However, there is also pressure on publishers, especially when it comes to investing in new publishing technologies.

Frances Pinter presented the first of two sessions detailing the publisher's perspective. This proved an engaging session in which she presented the [ILCOAb](#) business model, which seeks to “rethink the role of funding academic book publishing”. Frances went on to explain that “we should avoid mirroring the print world in the digital world” – something that I think is particularly true in arts and humanities fields. Perhaps we will only really start to see change as the nature of the monograph changes?

Shearer West, Director of Research at the AHRC, gave a welcome presentation, detailing the views of the research funders. Open access should be part of the researcher's vocation to make sure that their research reaches audiences that are interested in it, and “the Coalition is strongly in favour of it” (OA). OA costs should be covered through FEC through institutions rather than as part of the direct costs covered by the grant. Neil Jacobs from the JISC presented their viewpoint, and described some of the work that the JISC is carrying out in this area (including the Kultur II project).

The morning session concluded with a very interesting discussion around the morning's presentations, especially focussed around Frances Pinter's proposed new business model for publishing. Paul Ayris pointed out that "the current business model is not sustainable so the question is what we do rather than whether we have to do something".

After a delicious lunch with plenty of opportunity for networking and further discussion of the morning's sessions, it was time to reconvene for the second part of the programme.

The afternoon was made up of a variety of excellent speakers. First off was Stephanie Meece, who is the repository manager at the University of the Arts, London. It was particularly interesting to see the challenges she faces as the manager of a repository in an arts-specific institution – and I was impressed by how customisations to their repository ([UALRO](#)) provide a user interface that is both aesthetically pleasing and fit for purpose.

Kate Borthwick followed this up with a very interesting presentation on [Humbox](#). In my opinion this was slightly off-topic in the context of the day perhaps, but fascinating nonetheless. Peter Webster continued the programme by detailing the School of Advanced Study's Open Journals System, which essentially provides overlay journals to increase campus-based open access publishing capacity. This is something I will be following with great interest, and I know of a number of other universities that are looking at similar possibilities.

In the final slot of the day, Brian Hole from the [Ubiquity Press](#) at UCL explained how their flexible publishing model makes humanities journals affordable, and enables researchers around the world to find and access the information they need, without barriers. This led pleasingly to further discussion about the economics of open access journal publishing, and the potential opportunities and pitfalls of different models. Mention was also made by more than one delegate about the role of the various learned societies in facilitating and even leading the process of change in the arts and humanities disciplines.

All in all this was a very successful day, although I feel it raised as many questions as it answered – but that was only to be expected. The arts and humanities disciplines have lagged behind science and medicine in the field of open access for too long, but I think that as the technology for the dissemination of monographs and non-textual outputs changes, this will lead the way for open access. That said, it remains to be seen whether sustainable funding and business models can be found and maintained.

Mike Webb

Head of Production, Boydell and Brewer Ltd

'Open Access –reflections from a traditional academic publisher'

The conference, organised in association with SAS-Space, was timely and of great interest to a long-established humanities publisher that is currently grappling not only with the immediate implications and impact of Open Access but how to formulate sound business strategy for the future. One keynote speaker in the afternoon session actually opened her presentation with the words, "Publisher Beware" which, apart from striking fear into the publisher heart, served to emphasise the contrast between publishing for profit and publishing for free. Commercially however, if there is no margin, there is no mission; and it was enlightening to hear two other speakers from major publishing companies exploring the middle ground, across which commercial and academic interests appear to be facing up to each other.

Open Access in the Humanities already has a long and distinguished history, and journals launched in the early- to mid-nineties gave free and open access to the work of major thinkers. Recent years have seen the emergence of a wide variety of Open Access journals, repositories and scholarly websites for the sharing of Humanities resources, most of which are run independently by faculty members or hosted by departments or libraries. So, journals have led the way in Open Access publishing but more recently there have been considerable developments in the area of monographs and textbooks.

Academic publishers are only too aware of the major changes in the publishing landscape that have already occurred and see those changes accelerating into the future. For the traditional publisher the main arguments against Open Access involve economics, editorial quality and advocacy of the existing system. We are not yet in an entirely online world but rather in a hybrid world of print and digital. Doubtless we will get to a largely electronic environment but are probably still a number of years away from it. Whilst we continue in this hybrid state, publishers find themselves bearing both the cost of printed and electronic delivery, with electronic revenue not yet compensating for the loss of printed product. However, the book continues to be the 'gold standard' for research in the humanities, and young researchers are expected to focus on getting their first book published. Usually, the first book is a volume based on their thesis and career progress thereafter is to a large extent measured in terms of books authored.

The problem for publishers using the traditional model is that a cycle of increasing prices, driving down sales, has resulted in a situation where academic titles are expected to sell very few copies (average print run probably now around 250/300 copies) priced at a high level in order to recoup costs. Consequently, many researchers are left struggling to find an outlet for their work. At the same time, the number of university and independent academic presses is declining. As a result, it seems that a number of non-traditional presses such as the scholar-led initiative Open Humanities Press (and Ubiquity Press, present at this symposium) are now starting to publish Open Access monographs and one would think that this poses yet another threat to the survival of the traditional publisher.

However, as is generally the case in business, innovation is the key. It was very encouraging to see that independent publishers such as Bloomsbury Academic are proving that Open Access offers publishers not

only new business models but also distribution to a global audience that would otherwise be out of reach. Internet technologies are enabling humanities scholars to experiment with new, open forms of authorship and editing. These trends cannot be ignored and it is in the publisher's interest not only to embrace these technologies but to become actively involved with the scholarly community to provide and enhance them. It is vital for any business to first identify exactly what its customers and clients want and then to set about providing it. In line with this it was interesting to hear Frances Pinter describing how part of the Bloomsbury Humanities publishing strategy is aimed at taking the library/publisher partnership to a new level. Considering that the university library is a key customer for the humanities publisher, it's clear just how important it is to develop this and similar 'partnerships'.

A further perceived barrier to making books Open Access online is the perception that it will harm sales of the print version; however, it seems that the opposite can be the case. One study (in the social sciences) reports that book sales turnover rose by 300% after monographs were made openly available online. This might well be an extreme example but even a modest 20% or so increase in turnover is clearly worthwhile and should therefore be an incentive to embrace rather than resist Open Access.

Arguments are increasing in favour of Open Access publishing models, not just for monographs but broader-interest academic titles. Open Access is a concept only applicable to electronic delivery, whether or not there is a print version too. Some scholars are writing books and making them available free on the Web, a trend that will doubtless continue regardless of what traditional and other publishers might offer. It is essential to keep ahead of the curve and some publishers are beginning to experiment with Open Access monographs. Breaking down price barriers can hugely increase usage and, particularly for university presses, align the publisher with core academic values. The future, whilst uncertain, is challenging and it is those publishers that step up to the plate and meet those challenges head-on with initiative and innovation that will survive long into the future.

Deborah Toner

Institute for the Study of the Americas, School of Advanced Study.

The symposium on Open Access Publishing in the Arts and Humanities was enormously informative for me as a rapidly learning novice in the world of digital humanities. The event was something of a crash course in what has been done to date, what particular issues are faced with respect to arts and humanities disciplines, and what problems and obstacles need to be addressed to progress further. The vibrant discussion sessions dealt with many pressing and challenging issues comprehensively.

Among the most eye-opening items under discussion, by Frances Pinter (Bloomsbury Academic) and Tessa Harvey (Wiley-Blackwell) in particular, was that traditional print publishing models are experiencing a rapidly escalating crisis of financial sustainability, which needs to be addressed urgently. Looking to the advantages offered by digital open access publishing formats beyond these economic exigencies, Neil Jacobs's discussion of how research can be disseminated more effectively to larger groups of people, expressed the need for publicly funded research to be made more available and accessible for public engagement. Moreover, the innovative formats offered by digital publishing, such as the "enhanced publications" combining text with multimedia, and combining primary sources with secondary research outputs, were particularly exciting to contemplate.

However, for me, the central issue that seemed to hover over the entire proceedings, and that left me wanting more information, was raised in Roger Kain's opening address: have arts and humanities scholars been 'slow' in engaging with open access issues, or would a more appropriate assessment of their reaction be as 'measured'? In other words, do arts and humanities scholars have legitimate reservations about engaging in open access publishing that have not yet been satisfactorily addressed? Are there institutional, financial and practical obstacles preventing arts and humanities scholars from getting involved as much as they would like? Or, are arts and humanities scholars dragging their heels, avoiding the issue, wilfully resisting necessary change?

Although not openly debated in these terms during the symposium, the discussion of several issues seemed to be informed by an acceptance that there was a general cultural resistance to changing publishing norms amongst arts and humanities scholars. While some more practical and institutional obstacles facing individual academics who wanted to pursue open access publishing options were considered – for instance, the fact that this is often done at the expense of the author – the possibility that academics might have serious, legitimate, and hitherto unanswered (or only partially answered) reservations about the practice was not really considered in depth.

Perhaps, as a symposium primarily comprised of scholars already deeply engaged in the digital humanities and open access publishing, this was not the forum for these reservations to be comprehensively discussed and addressed. However, in several presentations and discussion points, some concerns attributed to arts and humanities scholars, that partially explain why they have been less enthusiastic in responding to open access publishing initiatives than their counterparts in STEM disciplines, were presented as commonly-held misconceptions and myths. These were:

- that conventional publishers would object to authors depositing already published or in-press materials into open access institutional repositories, or would not be interested in publishing works based on such materials in the future
- that open access publishers are widely perceived as lacking a rigorous peer review process, and, therefore, publishing with them will “count” for less
- that it is not always desirable to have scholarly work permanently and freely available to anyone
- that e-publishing and open access publishing can facilitate potentially damaging bibliometric methods of measuring research quality and impact
- that making the tools for research digitally and openly available should be more of a priority than producing the outcomes of research in digital, open access formats

Perhaps the apparently misconceived nature of these concerns did not need to be fully explained to those who have probably had repeated and exhaustive conversations about these very issues. As a newcomer, however, it was not immediately obvious why these commonly-held concerns were “myths”. It seems to me that if the answers to these concerns are not widely understood outside the circle of scholars, publishers, and funders already involved in open access publishing – as I suspect they are not - change amongst the wider academic community will be slow indeed. But perhaps rightly so, as the scholarly community as a whole *should* ask for convincing answers to individually and institutionally important questions of how research will be published, accessed, assessed, and prioritised, before fundamental changes are accepted.

To take one example, Shearer West’s (AHRC) presentation suggested that many academics are unduly concerned that open access e-publishing methods would lead to potentially punitive bibliometric methods of assessing research quality and impact. The examples that various presenters offered of data collected from existing repositories and open access publishers showed how frequently particular articles, theses, books and other material had been viewed or downloaded. What purpose do such figures currently serve, and what will they be used for in the future? This information may very well reflect how relevant or cutting edge a particular topic is, but it may equally indicate little more than a work having a catchy title or a scholar having excellent PR skills. Such figures give no indication of how useful, informative, or profound the people who viewed or downloaded any particular piece of work found it to be. Moreover, some subjects and topic areas have a smaller circle of interested parties than others, but this doesn’t necessarily reflect their lack of importance or impact in research terms.

How this information is presented also affects the meaning of the figures. On one of the e-publishing websites displayed, the front page had a list of most downloaded or viewed works. Surely appearing on such a list would make the “popularity” of a work circular and self-fulfilling, as visitors to the site are guided towards consulting it?

It doesn’t seem like such a huge leap of imagination and cynicism to me to suggest that such imperfect metrics could filter into use by hiring committees, promotion boards, and research impact assessments. Or that, without giving careful thought to the nature of the information collected and the ways it is presented and used, this could potentially foster the pursuit of a headline-friendly research culture at the expense of important, but less obviously glamorous, research areas. If these are hysterical over-reactions, is it possible to provide detailed assurances to that effect? It strikes me as extremely important to set clear boundaries for the collection, presentation, and use of such bibliometric information before making substantial institutional moves towards the adoption of open access publishing.

It was clear from the symposium that the unstable financial sustainability of the print publishing model in the arts and humanities, the demands of public engagement, and the innovative potential of e-publishing formats are strong indicators that a much more widespread acceptance of open access publishing would offer many benefits to the sector. However, it seems to me that arts and humanities scholars have some legitimate questions about the implications of such a change at both an individual and institutional level that could usefully be addressed in a more detailed and transparent manner.

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