

Developing Repositories at Worcester

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Abstract

The paper is a short report on the JISC-funded DRaW project written by the Project Director Andrew Rothery on behalf of the project team. The project has run for two years and finishes 31 March 2009. During that time considerable progress has been made establishing online repositories for staff publications and for learning and teaching materials, and a co-ordinated support structure has been put into place to underpin the growing culture of repository use at the university. Dealing with educational material has proved to be the most difficult aspect to deal with but the project team has identified what needs to be done in future to create a more satisfactory approach to managing learning and teaching resources.

The project

The DRaW project¹ runs from April 2007 to March 2009 and is part-funded by the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) as part of a wider programme of funding for repository development called the Repository Start-up and Enhancements Strand² of the Repositories and Preservation Programme. Its formal title is Extending and Embedding the University Repository Service. The DRaW project team consists of: Sarah Hayes (Project Manager), Janet Davidson, Debbie Offen, Ann Craig, Mark Adams, and Clive Kennard.

What we have done and why

The DRaW project has helped the university to establish repository use within its working practices and create an environment where there are options for staff to choose the appropriate repository suited to particular purposes, and a coherent service for support and management. The most successful area of development has been the creation of a repository for research and related publications; and the most difficult area to cope with has been that of learning and teaching materials. Indeed the project team feels there is still need for new initiatives in respect of e-learning resources.

When the project started in the Summer of 2007, the university had already installed software for two separate repositories, one based on EPrints³ software and the other based on CoRE⁴. Following experience of an earlier project called WM Share which investigated the sharing of resources regionally, the project team realised that engaging staff with repository use would require considerable work, and so one key objective of the DRaW project was to customise and promote the use of these repositories.

In addition, the project team felt that the repositories should not be left as separate entities and the development of a repository culture would be assisted by some kind of integrated approach. Other kinds of repository might be added too: there was in 2007 much talk of

¹ Developing Repositories at Worcester (DRaW) <http://worc.ac.uk/drawproject>

² <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/reppres/sue.aspx>

³ For research and publications <http://www.eprints.org>

⁴ For learning materials <http://learning.covcollege.ac.uk/demo/>

using the national system JORUM⁵ and of developing an in-house system for media files. So a typical university environment would include access to several repositories! Clearly these cannot be integrated seamlessly as software but the DRaW project set out to at least develop an integrated approach to their support and management so that users had a coherent route into their use of repositories. Moreover, we were anxious to maintain sustainability: we wanted the support to remain in place after the end of the project so made one of the project objectives building the support structure.

The membership of the project team was drawn principally from members of the Information and Learning Services (ILS) who would be directly involved with continuing support for repository use. We adopted a “long thin” approach i.e. relatively modest time over two years rather than a short intensive “burst” of activity. On reflection this ideally suited our goals, as changing attitudes and practices takes time.

Research and publications

After the software interface had been customised to university style and requirements, the Worcester Research and Publications (WRaP) repository was launched at an event in October 2007. Added support was given by the Vice Chancellor who declared that all newly published publications should be uploaded. However, this in itself is not enough to get people using the system: much of the hard work of advocacy was done on a day to day basis by members of the ILS and the project team. This involved speaking to individuals and groups and arranging substantial amounts of help in starting to use WRaP. There were debates on copyright and how to avoid problems; a whole range of general issues had to be argued with individuals. The initial number of deposits was small but now after just over a year, we are approaching our 500th item which for a small university, we feel, is good.

On reflection it now seems that academic staff do readily accept that using WRaP will improve the “visibility” of their work, and improve the reputation of the university by making its outputs public. WRaP provides a useful archive as well as a way of publicising the papers. There is still however a need to constantly remind staff about WRaP and for those supporting the repository, a need to connect with any university initiatives, such as the Research Assessment Exercise, and in the case of Worcester, the university’s bid for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP).

Learning and teaching materials

Our repository for learning and teaching materials (CoRE) has not had the same positive response despite similar, indeed, rather more energetic campaigns to promote use. The project team has set up events, training and meetings but the take-up from tutors is extremely low. Yet the same tutors are happy to upload papers to WRaP, and to upload teaching materials to the VLE, and indeed to public services such as Flickr or YouTube. But not to CoRE. As a result of this experience we are convinced that it is not the tutors who are to blame, but the repository itself is not meeting their needs. The project team organised a JISC Programme level event in June 2008 to host a meeting of representatives from the other projects in the Programme involved with repositories for learning and teaching. Everyone shared similar problems and there was a common agreement over what was happening, leading to the publication of an event report called *Repositories for Learning and Teaching: our recipe for success*⁶.

⁵ JISC national repository <http://www.jorum.ac.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.worc.ac.uk/drawproject/documents/DRaWeventreport.doc>

For a range of reasons⁷, the conventional repository structure and metadata system does not seem suitable for the management and interactive use of the day to day learning and teaching resources used by tutors. However, that is not to say that a conventional repository is no good. For centrally managed resources which are publicly available, the metadata system and the unrestricted openness is fine. At Worcester we have tested out the use for undergraduate dissertations and also some audio/video files; other projects have developed more extensive collections of materials. However, for material belonging to tutors we believe that a more personal approach is needed, something more akin to a Web 2.0 service, replacing metadata by tags perhaps, stressing personal management and very controlled sharing, perhaps more like social networking software. By way of example, the Faroes⁸ project has developed something along these lines; a completely new, fresh approach is needed.

Though not exactly a repository the university ILS has recently developed a system called "Release" which is used to manage and deliver video and other material. This is rather like YouTube in that tutors upload media files which can then be played via a url or embedded code in the VLE or web site being used to present material to the students. It is not like a conventional repository in that it is a delivery mechanism rather than an archive, and it performs the added service of converting media files into a consistent format for viewing. This was launched early in 2009 and is already being put to good use. We mention this to indicate that tutors are not against uploading material to online systems but the repository they need has to be a new type!

Integrated repository environment

The project team has in mind the idea of an "integrated repository environment". Recognising that different types of material being deposited will need different types of repository, how can staff nevertheless avoid being confused and how can they be guided to the right place? The project team has designed a web page which aims to provide, in one place, all the information needed to describe what is available at the university; and in future will include any relevant external repositories. This will become a vehicle for presentation of training and awareness materials and videos, together with contact details for obtaining help. However, more than this, we have developed a coherent approach to support using a team within ILS.

At Worcester the ILS underwent a major restructuring at the end of 2008, and the DRaW team took advantage of this to be able to negotiate new roles and responsibilities of ILS staff for the management and support of the repositories. This was not as easy as it might seem, because introducing new systems raises concerns about the changing nature of staff jobs, who does what, and who does extra? We finally arrived at a solution in which the ILS Research Team manages, promotes and provides expert level of support for WRaP, and the ILS Learning and Teaching Technology Support Unit for systems which manage learning resources. They work in collaboration with the ILS Academic Liaison Team whose staff work with subject departments and are able to advise, promote and answer queries on any repository, referring more complex matters to the abovementioned teams. In addition Worcester has set up a Repository Development Steering group so that as time goes on, there is a group responsible for additions to the repository service, both new software and new services.

⁷ Some are set out in the conference paper *Is there a role for repositories in online learning?*
<http://www.worc.ac.uk/drawproject/documents/eunis2008erepsfinal.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/reppres/sue/faroes.aspx>

The support approach seems to be very suitable for us here at Worcester; clearly other universities might have different structures to work in. The DRaW project team would suggest to anyone embarking on setting up a repository that they give serious attention to changing the roles of the support staff at different levels. It is not easy, takes time and lots of negotiation, but is very important to the sustainability of the work once the project initiative is over. We would also recommend that ample attention is given to the substantial effort needed to promote and give help to initial users to get things off the ground. And we would warn that for learning and teaching materials, the situation is quite complex; the different types of resources, owners and audiences require a very flexible approach. We think it inevitable that several different repository systems might be involved, so it is vital to look at, and deal with, the entire repository environment as a whole.

The future at Worcester

The project team will hand over responsibility for overseeing future progress to the ILS Repository Development Steering Group. There is work to be done during Summer 2009 in updating and extending the material on the web page for repository information and guidance, and the production of training/awareness videos for WRaP. Within the area of learning and teaching new systems are becoming available: the ILS "Release" media streaming system is now available for use and the JISC national repository JORUM is to be re-designed and relaunched as OpenJORUM. And the ILS has been successful in attracting further project funding from JISC to enable it to develop a new Web 2.0 style system for learning and teaching material, now generally seen as the best way forward to manage tutors' educational resources.