
Creating an institutional repository at the University of Liverpool: our approach



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The literature relating to the creation of institutional repositories (IR) in higher education both in the UK and elsewhere has all acknowledged that it is a challenging process. Those involved in IR development recognise that it involves changing the scholarly communication culture of researchers. Closely intertwined – and perhaps more central to the challenge – is our role in advocating and, indeed, convincing researchers that the new service might have tangible benefits to them which they cannot afford to ignore. Time is a precious commodity and researchers already feel that they spend a disproportionate amount of it completing administrative tasks, which impacts negatively on the availability of time for their primary concern: research. Given this scenario, it is hardly surprising that at the core of any strategy to create an IR must be developing sustainable channels for advocating the IR to academics, in order to secure the deposit of their work whilst tailoring the service to satisfy their different scholarly communication practices.

When the University of Liverpool began its IR project the university research committee and the information services committee had given approval and funding for the establishment of the IR. The University Librarian, Phil Sykes, had been successful in securing this funding by clarifying the benefits of an institutional repository to the executive management of the university. As part of the process of securing the support of academics the University Librarian, in conjunction with some senior library management colleagues, had

sought feedback from a select group of senior academics; however, the majority of the university research community still needed to be made aware of the benefits of an IR. My role was to share the vision and create an institutional repository for the University of Liverpool.

THE LIVERPOOL APPROACH

The approach that Liverpool adopted was guided by our desire to learn from the challenges other universities had encountered in building their repositories. We were particularly concerned about the difficulty universities had experienced when they sought to encourage researchers to deposit their work. Many universities had established advocacy campaigns which sought to raise awareness about the emerging role of IRs and to allay fears about depositing in an IR, in particular as it relates to copyright and the peer review process. However, despite their efforts many IRs have only been able to attract a fraction of the research output of their institution. Another issue that concerned us was the ambivalence in the repository community about how to address other questions relating to the scope of the repository. Some repository administrators were of the view that the repository should accept anything that academics wanted to submit, whilst others felt that there should be limitations. Questions such as 'Do we accept any type of material, e.g. including research articles, e-theses, conference papers?', 'Do we only accept peer-reviewed content and exclude pre-prints?' or 'Do we include full-text and metadata-only records or only full-text records?' had no clear answers.

Liverpool decided to tackle these challenges by adopting an approach which recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach to IR development would not satisfy the needs of the diverse academic units. We felt that the process for arriving at these kinds of decisions needed to be flexible so that different disciplines could make different decisions that would be appropriate to their research needs and scholarly communication practices. The IR needed to satisfy the research requirements of different disciplines, therefore central to the approach taken by Liverpool is a respect for the different scholarly communication practices in different academic units and a desire to work closely with academic units so that the infrastructure for the creation of the IR is well integrated with their research management processes and their research needs. Our objective from the outset has been to develop partnerships with academic units and to seek to embed depositing

in the IR in to the research management processes of the school, department, division, research group or research centre to which the researcher belongs. This approach to IR creation we anticipate will result in the sustained deposit of content in the IR over the long term.

DEFINING THE PROJECT

The project was clearly outlined in a project definition document (PDD). The process of creating the PDD was challenging but instructive, since it provided a useful document that could be reviewed as the project progressed to ensure we had stayed within the project's scope. As part of the PDD the decision was taken to decide on the type of services that the IR would provide and then to create a requirements-analysis document. A core feature we included to support our approach was that the IR will define content to include all the research outputs that a specific discipline would accept as representative of its field. It was also decided that a pilot project would be run in order to test the implementation of the institutional repository, to learn lessons and to guide the roll-out of the service to the university in 2008.

DEVELOPING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Our first step was to develop a marketing approach. We defined the service, identified our target market and considered external factors which impacted on the service, both negatively and positively. From this analysis we recognised that academic administrators – including executive management and heads of departments – were an important segment of the target market that we needed to reach. Although the executive management was important as a target group, much work had already been done to engage their attention, whereas at this stage it was crucial that we raise the awareness of heads of school/department. Garnering the support of heads of academic units was important since our approach to creating the IR was based on developing partnerships with academic units so that a sustainable dialogue could be maintained in order to develop a service based on the needs of the research community. Support from the heads of academic units suggested to other researchers in the department that the IR had legitimacy and was a valuable service for the university.

We also realized that we needed to prioritise as a key target group academic administrators who already had a relationship with the library; in most cases this meant making the library repre-

sentatives aware of the benefits of establishing an IR. Members of this group were already accustomed to sharing news about the library with the research community in their departments and therefore they were an obvious first port of call to share information about the IR. The subject librarians were also identified as an important target group. This group had an established relationship with academic units and had established links with the university committee structure, where they shared information about developments in the library. Their role as the primary library contact for academic units and the fact that many schools and departments had a designated library contact person, the library representative, made them an ideal choice to initially disseminate information about the IR. To facilitate their role this group was amongst the first to be trained about open access and the benefits of the IR to academic administrators and researchers and, of course, to themselves.

Finally, the most important target group to emerge from our analysis was the researchers in each faculty or research centre. Obviously we recognised that without their support we would not be able to develop the IR.

The advocacy approach that emerged involved in the first instance trying to obtain the attention of the heads of schools and departments. Using an internal communication channel to academic heads, we sent out a carefully crafted document indicating that the university was creating an IR, outlining the benefits to the university and researchers of establishing an IR and inviting the academic heads to indicate their interest in participating in the IR pilot. Simultaneously, the subject librarians arranged for me to attend various faculty, school and departmental information services committee meetings to promote and answer questions about the IR pilot project. The subject librarians were also instrumental in ensuring that the call for participation in the pilot was promoted in the departments, since they sent e-mails to the library reps to notify them of the initiative. A buzz was created within the university about the IR pilot project and after many follow-up meetings this resulted in nine departments agreeing to participate in it. We had originally hoped for three departments but this greatly exceeded our expectations.

THE IR PILOT PROJECT

Since the start of the IR pilot project, we have been working to establish partnerships with nine

schools and departments. This has involved the pilot school or department identifying an academic representative who serves as our primary point of contact. We have discussed with the academic representatives many issues related to the development of the IR. Three key issues that have been discussed are the type of content which the academic unit wants to be included, whether the content should be peer-reviewed or not and how the school intends for their staff to deposit their content. In order to document these kinds of decisions we have created a partnership policy for each department. This document provides a clear official document for the academic unit which academic representatives can distribute to their colleagues to advise them on the policies that have been agreed. We anticipate that these documents will be dynamic – changing to satisfy the emerging research needs and scholarly communication practice of the academic unit.

The academic representatives have been important allies in the IR-building process. They have been instrumental in guiding the advocacy process with researchers in their academic units. They have sent out correspondence to colleagues to advise them of the academic unit's role in the IR pilot and to advise researchers how to participate. In addition, they have helped us to organise presentations to research committees in their academic units and to the entire research staff. Perhaps their most significant role has been to give the creation of the IR legitimacy, a stamp of approval from the academic unit.

CONCLUSION

Our approach of active engagement with academic units has built a good partnership with many of them and has laid the foundation for sustainable advocacy in the academic units. The IR pilot project will end in January 2008 and the IR as a service will be launched in the second quarter of the year. At the end of the pilot we will be evaluating our approach, based on the lessons learned. The infrastructure we have established for the creation of the IR seems to have worked well but embedding an IR into the research management processes of academic units takes time and therefore we know that the success of this approach will only be shown as the IR matures.