
Latest research findings from the RIN



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The Research Information Network (RIN) is entering a busy phase of publishing new research findings in the field of research information.

The first of these to be published is a report on 'E-journals: their use, value and impact' (www.rin.ac.uk/use-ejournals). The study underpinning it was conducted by the Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) at University College London, using deep log analysis of publishers' usage logs as well as data from SCONUL, the Higher Education Statistics Agency and other sources. The report analyses the behaviour of researchers in a sample of UK higher education institutions and disciplines, and explores the relationships between usage, institutional expenditure on electronic journals and research outcomes. There are several sets of findings worth highlighting here. First, e-journals are heavily used and nearly everything that is made available is used.

Second, researchers seek and use information in very different ways. For example, users in research-intensive institutions visit e-journals more but spend much less time per visit, and they are much more likely to enter via gateway sites. Users in government laboratories and in different universities exhibit very different behaviour, even within the same subject. Users are also bypassing carefully crafted discovery systems. Just four months after ScienceDirect's content was opened to Google, a third of traffic to ScienceDirect physics journals came from that route. Few readers use the advanced search functions on publishers' websites.

Third, e-journals represent good value for money. Readers use e-journals well into the night and over the weekend, with nearly a quarter of ScienceDirect use occurring outside the traditional 9-to-5 working day. Researchers and students in

higher education downloaded an estimated 102 million full-text articles in 2006/07, at an average cost of 80p. Journal expenditure correlates with use, with a strong positive correlation between universities' expenditure on e-journals and the volume of downloads of articles per capita.

Finally, per capita journal use and expenditure correlate strongly and positively with research outcomes, such as papers published, numbers of PhD awards and income from research grants and contracts. These results can be modelled to show that increases in downloads are statistically associated with dramatic – but not necessarily causal – increases in research productivity.

The RIN and CIBER are now embarking on a second, qualitative phase of the study to explore these findings further and find out what researchers are doing once they have downloaded their articles. Questions include:

- Does a large amount of use equate with satisfaction?
- Why do users spend so little time online?
- What are the reasons for going to a gateway site?
- Why do very few researchers use advanced searching?
- Why is the use of internal search engines not much more favoured?

Results are expected in early 2010.

Further RIN reports follow in Spring 2009. A new report titled 'Creating catalogues' (www.rin.ac.uk/creating-catalogues) will look at how bibliographic records for all content held by UK academic and research libraries are created and distributed and at how they are utilised by all involved in the supply chain, from the publisher to the final end user.

A short report will follow investigating the UK's share of all research articles published globally (http://www.rin.ac.uk/uk_presence_research). It asks why different sources of bibliometric analysis come up with such different figures for the UK's share, and explains the differences that result from different methodological choices. The conclusions make important recommendations about producing and using bibliometric studies properly and transparently.

In May, the RIN will publish a series of reports on 'barriers to access to research information resources of importance to researchers' (www.rin.ac.uk/barriers-access).

The series will provide quantitative and qualitative analysis on the nature and scale of the barriers and recommendations on the ways in which they might be reduced or overcome. Areas of investigation include the differences in availability of content to different users from the point of view of the institutions and libraries; how institutions manage access to information sources for non-members; how researchers secure access to licensed content not immediately available to them; and how their access to a range of data and information is subject to restrictions apart from licensing costs, including patents, corporate confidentiality, barriers to disclosure of market data, security restrictions and privacy laws.

Two further reports will be published in June/July 2009. One will be aimed at 'understanding researchers' information needs and uses in life sciences' (www.rin.ac.uk/case-studies). Another will be an in-depth study on 'the publication and dissemination behaviour of researchers' (www.rin.ac.uk/research-assessment-behaviour), which the RIN hopes will inform the autumn consultation on the Research Excellence Framework.

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