Open Access Pathfinder Case Study: Hull University

Background

The University of Hull, founded in 1927, has approximately 20,000 students and has a strong track record of research, particularly in electronic engineering (where it is known for the creation of liquid crystal technology) as well as healthcare, chemistry and environmental/marine science. In REF 2014 the University performed well, with 62% of its research rated as internationally excellent or above.

The University is ranked 63 overall in the Complete University Guide table for 2016, and 54 in the Guardian University League Tables 2016. The University has recently invested £28M to upgrade the Brynmor Jones Library. Hull's institutional repository, Hydra, is based on Fedora and is primarily designed to hold items where full-text is available.

Philip Larkin at Hull railway station by Barry Hall CC BY

Overview and objectives

Barry Hall (University of Sunderland, Repository Manager) and David Young (Northumbria University, Research Funding and Policy Manager) travelled to the University of Hull on Monday 9th March and met with four members of staff, all stakeholders in open access to varying degrees, to discuss their responses to recent open access requirements.

Attending on behalf of the University of Hull were:

Chris Awre - Head of Information Management

David Lunt - Senior Lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences

Michael Latham - Academic Liaison Librarian for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Andrew Taylor - Planning Officer with responsibility for REF

The case study discusses both the challenges faced by our respective institutions, but also, and more importantly, it explores examples of good practice in areas of open access advocacy, and successful workflows and systems that have been used to meet open access requirements. The case study is loosely structured around five broad headings which describe the central issues related to Open Access: costs, OA structure and workflows, institutional policy and strategy, advocacy and training, and systems.

Costs

David Lunt provided an academic perspective on the question of open access costs, making the point that an average APC cost of £1500 is trivial in comparison with staff time invested in writing and reviewing publications. The implication is that the University shouldn't hesitate to invest in (paid-for, gold) open access because it builds on the investment they've already made in the staff publishing the research, and because of its clear advantages in terms of access and citations.

Hull is in receipt of limited funding for gold open access from RCUK (£26,333 for 2015/16), and like many other institutions, there is a perception among many academic staff in particular that open access equates with paid gold exclusively. The result is that difficult decisions need to be made regarding who receives funding, and who doesn't. According to Chris Awre: 'It's not realistic to have a single institutional way of making these funds available,' and decision-making in this instance needs to be devolved to faculties.

Although nobody in the sector has yet 'cracked the question' of how to decide where limited funds are to be made available, the strategy at Hull is to go beyond compliance with the HEFCE open access policy, but this will be necessarily selective. This raised the issue of whether only three and four star research should be funded (at the expense of one and two star research). The consensus though, was that nobody should expect the publication of three/ four star research only, and that one/ two star can not only inform more significant work, but, as Andrew Taylor noted, these outputs might employ a really novel method for instance, one that might turn out to be important for later studies.

Although claims against the RCUK block grant have demonstrated an average APC similar to that highlighted by Finch (although there have been 'figures either side – quite far either side in one or two cases'), there is no effective tool for capturing this data yet.

Good practice	Devolving APC funding decisions to Faculties ensures academic selection is the basis
Future Challenges/ Questions	Are all RCUK funds being spent? Is there consistency in how Faculties are giving access to these funds?

Open Access Structure and Workflows

Chris Awre is the central point of contact for open access and is based in the library. The open access and research data management agendas for the library sit within the information management function, which Chris heads up. Processing of APCs is carried out by acquisitions and cataloguing staff, and there is a central email account for all open access requests. There has been a noticeable increase in requests to deposit in the

institutional repository since publication of the university policy on open access (1st April 2015). Awareness of OA and the need to comply has also increased overall in recent months.

To meet this increased demand, the library is putting together a research services team, consisting of four existing members of staff currently working across various library functions including cataloguing, collections development, and acquisitions.

It is felt that good collaboration between departments is necessary for successful workflows, and that this exists across services at Hull, particularly between enterprise, ICT, research policy, and the library.

Good practice	Putting in place a team with specific responsibility for OA, even if they have other responsibilities. A single point of contact will ensure a coherent message and practice across the University.
Future Challenges/ Questions	How did the creation of the Library Research Team impact the workflows and anticipated rise in demand for OA?

Institutional Policy and Strategy

A new open access policy has come into effect 1st April 2015, one year in advance of the HEFCE REF policy. It's expected that the HEFCE open access policy will instigate further engagement in the run-up to its implementation in April 2016. The library is anticipating a spike in queries between now and next year, and as Chris notes, they are implementing the university policy now so that there's a full year to 'bed in'.

The recent appointment of the new PVC for research has given greater impetus to activities around open access, and has helped to raise the OA profile.

Good practice	Putting policy in good time before compliance is expected is essential in order to give time for awareness raising.
Future Challenges/ Questions	How have attitudes and practices of academic staff changed (if at all) in response to the policy?

Advocacy/ Training/ Awareness

Among academic staff in biological sciences, different attitudes to open access correlate with age difference, and career stage: early- and mid-career researchers tend to be more enthusiastic towards, and can see the benefits of, open access, whereas more established and/ or senior researchers are generally less convinced.

Representative views from the latter group include: 'My work is specialist – I know who will read it. No one else will be interested'. Others believe open access to be, 'a solution to a problem which does not exist – you can just email the author if you need a copy'. This is not seen to be a particularly effective approach however, and as David Lunt explains, 'when you're engaged in research you want to access a paper right now, rather than waiting for the author to get back to you'.

Early career researchers are not always 'the answer' to promoting open access however. Postgraduate union reps have been involved in a 'fight against open access', on the grounds

that it's viewed as a threat to the careers of postgraduate researchers – if there are not enough funds to cover open access publication (via the APC-led gold route), then there's a feeling that PGRs might be forgotten.

Cost is not the only factor however; Michael Latham notes that there has been very little take-up of a waiver for PeerJ, for instance, and there is a suggestion that prestige of the publication, especially with regard to impact factor, is a major factor in deciding where to publish. David Lunt explained the prevailing attitude among early career researchers, 'When I go to look for a job, the Head of Department will ask, "Is it in Nature, PNAS?"'. Younger researchers still retain the mindset that they need to publish in non-open access prestige journals and yet, there are plenty of articles in Nature that aren't cited!

One department has funded eight APCs over the past five years, and yet the department policy has been to never turn people away – very few have asked. A major barrier is unfamiliarity with systems and processes, and research staff are often reluctant to do something for the first time. Once over this hurdle, however, they are likely to engage more often.

From the perspective of the library, open access has been seen as one way to counter rising journal costs, but it's difficult to communicate this to academic staff who are often unaware of the amounts of money spent on journal subscriptions. It was suggested that it might be interesting to undertake a modelling exercise: what would happen if we stopped subscribing to Elsevier?

David Lunt pointed out that the 'sticks' regarding open access advocacy are obvious (HEFCE says you have to...), but asks whether the university 'gets the carrots right'? There should perhaps be a different approach to advocacy, one where compliance is tempered with benefits: 'The University wants to make your work more accessible and more visible to people', and less about 'The Serials Crisis'. His view is that the stick will never work with more established Professors, but that carrots might.

He went on to say that institutions could do '... a much better job of publicising our outputs', whether that be on external web pages, or part of email and newsletter announcements, and that the University should have a mission statement of: 'Our intention is that everyone should have access to all the work we do.'

Good practice	Don't lose sight of the positive benefits of OA when raising awareness - don't focus entirely on the sticks, otherwise you risk creating disengagement. Use OA to celebrate the work published by University staff.
Future Challenges/ Questions	Have awareness-raising efforts led to changes in staff attitudes and behaviour?

Systems and Compliance

There will be a transition over the next couple of years from a system where input is done largely by Library staff to a system where the author must take responsibility for uploading their outputs. This is necessary because nobody knows the date of acceptance except the author (and publisher). Realistically, this is seen to be the only way it can be done, short of significant developments in national services such as Publications Router.

Current system developments include the development of Hydra, the institutional repository - RIOXX is to be implemented in September 2015 to enable self-upload.

Despite this, and despite the ongoing promotion and dissemination efforts, there is limited optimism about achieving full compliance with the HEFCE policy. Although the shift in behaviour required is small, it can't be applied retrospectively and ensuring that everyone is aware and remembers to do this is a huge challenge.

Good practice	Self-deposit ensures authors take responsibility for engaging with the HEFCE policy
Future Challenges/ Questions	How did the self-deposit process work in terms of increasing engagement with OA/HEFCE policy?

Conclusions

The focus at Hull in 2015 is on compliance with HEFCE's OA policy. There are clear challenges in terms of both staff engagement and understanding around OA. This area is complex and there is unlikely to be a single solution which will work across the University - something which was recognised by all participants. The University is seeking to address these challenges by adopting a new policy and re-structuring to form a team of Library staff whose roles will include OA management. Working together across services is a strength which will need to be developed if the various challenges are to be addressed effectively.