Open Access Pathfinder Case Study : Durham University

Optimising Resources to Develop a Strategic Approach to OA
This Jisc-funded project will develop shared tools and best practice policies and procedures to enable HEIs with limited external funding to effectively and creatively respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by recent Open Access policies. Outputs include a customisable Open Access cost modelling tool to help HEIs better plan different scenarios of research growth, best practice policies and workflows for University libraries and research services, case studies profiling lessons learned by four HEIs, and a quick reference decision tree for researchers and support staff.

Background

Durham University was formally established in 1832. The University has a strong track record of research, continuing a tradition of scholarship in the city dating back to the middle ages, when Durham was one of England's leading centres of theological scholarship. The University's research strength was demonstrated in REF 2014, with 83% of research rated as internationally excellent or higher. The University is based both in Durham and at its Queen's Campus in Stockton-on-Tees, with 17,500 students enrolled in its courses.

The University is ranked 5th overall in the Complete University Guide table for 2016, and 8th in the Guardian University League Tables 2015. As part of a £22M investment in the University's libraries, in 2012 a new wing was added to the main building, which was then renamed the Bill Bryson Library. The institutional repository, Durham Research Online (DRO) is based on EPrints software and is linked to an in-house staff profile system. The University is currently in the process of implementing Converis as its Current Research Information System and a Hydra/Fedora research repository.

Overview and objectives

Ellen Cole (Northumbria University, Scholarly Publications Librarian) and David Young (Northumbria University, Research Funding and Policy Manager) travelled to the Durham University on 1st April 2015 and met with four members of staff, all stakeholders in open access at the University, to discuss their responses to recent open access requirements.

Attending on behalf of Durham University were:

James Bisset – Liaison Librarian

Sally Hewett – Head of Research Operations

Heather Ewington – Repository Manager

Elena Kharlamova – Repository Assistant

Matthew Philips, Head of Digital and Bibliographic Services, also joined us to discuss systems for recording research activity.

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

Durham University's Open Access policy has a stated preference to make its research output open access via sustainable green open access, although where funds are available the choice remains with the author as to how they wish to approach open access.

Durham University does not currently provide any central institutional funding for open access, but for authors acknowledging funding from the RCUK, a block grant from the RCUK is available. In 2014/15, Durham's block grant was £325,386, intended to fund 196 articles.

The block grant is available on a first-come, first-served basis. It is held centrally, managed by the library, rather than being allocated to faculties, and there is no process of selection based on an author's status or the quality of the journal they are submitting to. The block grant has not yet been fully spent: in 2013/14, 102 APCs were met by the block grant (with a further 217 articles identified as being RCUK funded were compliant with RCUK policy through the green route). Spend on APCs accounted for 51% of the block grant received, 21% covering salary costs for supporting the additional administrative support required and a further 2.5% covering other costs (primarily advocacy, training and publicity materials). The remaining funding was rolled over to supplement the 2014/15 block grant. Durham awaits further guidance from RCUK on how funds may be used in future. Central management of the fund allows the library to track how the fund has been used and report to internal research committees at the University.

There is difficulty monitoring compliance with the RCUK policy, as reporting was done by authors directly to the research council through ResearchFish and the scale of research publication at Durham does not allow for manual checking of this data. Other issues were identified, such as not being able to report on a total number of RCUK publications (again, this is a figure known to the author/PI rather than something objectively available.) Similarly, a PI may have chosen compliance via the green route, in which case the repository team would not necessarily know the article was RCUK funded.

Attempts were made to identify the total number of RCUK funded publications from Durham affiliated authors. In line with other institutions, a report to identify publications with a Durham affiliated author, and an acknowledgement of RCUK funding, was generated from Web of Science. Whilst this did help identify a number of articles which were compliant via the green route which had not previously been identified, there were numerous problems with the data which meant that it was not seen as a reliable means of identifying publications:

- Many publications acknowledged RCUK funding, but this funding was not linked to a Durham author and so the Durham author would not have been obliged to meet RCUK requirements. A manual check of hundreds of articles would have been required to filter these out.
- The publication dates as listed in WoS do not necessarily reflect the actual dates of first online publication, or dates of submission/acceptance. The report therefore included many publications which had been published prior to RCUK policy coming into force – or even being announced. A manual check of hundreds of articles would have been required to filter out those submitted/accepted before RCUK policy came into force.
- With a number of publications, indexing on Web of Science (and thus appearance in any automated report) does not occur til several months after publication (in some cases, particularly some conference proceedings, this could be up to 10-12 months after publication). The report therefore missed a number of publications we had already identified.

Another difficulty is that in some cases an APC was paid, but the publisher failed to make the article OA in a compliant format, or at all. Elsevier and the American Chemical Society were notable as publishers where this was a continuing problem over an extended period of time.

Authors not acknowledging RCUK funding may have access to funding provision in research grants (for example, through the Wellcome Trust) or small pots of funding which may be accessible through faculty level provision. It is unclear, in the latter example, how widely this is available or used, but it is believed to be minimal.

Staff are encouraged by the research office's pre-award team to consider OA costs at the bidding stage of their research, if applicable and the funder allows this to be costed into an award application. Typically a cost of £2000 is used, based on estimates of the average APC from the Wellcome Trust and the average spend on APCs at Durham in the previous 12 months. Institutional publishing is not seen as a way of achieving OA at Durham. The resources are not available to maintain an OA publishing platform centrally, though there are instances of journals being published on the Open Journal Systems software around the University. It's up to individual or groups of academics to set these up, rather than being developed strategically as a route to OA by the University.

Good practice	All APC costs are recorded in a spreadsheet, where articles are allocated to a particular OA fund. The spreadsheet calculates remaining funding and instances where funds have been committed to an article but not yet spent.
Future Challenges/ Questions	Monitoring compliance with RCUK policy when only PI/research team know which publications the policy should relate to and the scale of research publication at the University does not allow for manual checks.

Open Access Structure and Workflows

Open Access advocacy and day-to-day management of the APC funding and workflows has been a big part of James' role as Liaison Librarian, though the focus of the job was intended to be research skills training. A repository team handle metadata deposit, full text checking and responding to enquiries from users. In May 2015 a full time Publications officer started, taking over the advocacy work and day-to-day management of funding from James.

The RCUK fund is accessed by the academic submitting basic details for a forthcoming or accepted publication in the staff profile system. This notifies the repository team that an APC payment is required and enables them to edit or approve the metadata for entry to the repository. This replaced a 2 stage process (web based form to check if compliant and confirm options, then submitting basic details to staff profile system) in early 2015, and since that point the number of requests for payments has increased – 54% of requests for 2014/15 were received between 1st August 2014 and the change in process (7 months), and 46% of requests since (4 months) (although there may be other factors – awareness of funding, impact of advocacy around REF policy). This procedure may change with the commencement of new Publications' officer post, and the implementation of Converis, as the staff profile system will be replaced with the publications module of the software.

A request submitted to the staff profile system automatically generates an email request to a central email address, with basic publication details (title, authors, publication, RCUK grant reference or indication of doctoral funding). Journal options (eg options compliant with RCUK policy) are checked by the repository team, and any submitted grant reference is checked against central finance records. James will then authorise funding, and record the request in an excel spreadsheet which automatically then calculates remaining funding from the paid and expected costs. Upon receipt of an invoice or request for payment, payments are made by credit card (or via pre-payment accounts for some publishers). This card has to have one of the highest (individual purchase) spending limits in the University, but it enables quick payment by bypassing purchase orders, though the processes some publishers have in place still involve a lot of time consuming paperwork.

The expectation is that the workload will increase with the introduction of the current research information system Converis, with a likely increase in the amount of research which is deposited, and more requests are made for APCs. Additionally, the new HEFCE policy is likely to mean staff are more aware of the need to deposit their work in DRO, the institutional repository.

Good practice	The author makes a request for APC funding when they deposit their article in the staff profile system. This joined up approach ensures OA publications are in the system for REF preparedness activities and shared in the repository as part of the portfolio of Durham research.
Future Challenges / Questions	The team have experience increased workload when new systems are introduced – how will workload change with the new CRIS?

Institutional Policy and Strategy

Academic staff must have deposited any work in DRO that they use as evidence to apply for promotion. Currently over 50% of items in the repository have full text attached. This requirement was proposed and ratified by the University Executive Committee, (not by the library – although the library and other representatives from the University Open Access Team supported the proposal) showing commitment at the highest levels in the University, and is seen as having had a more significant impact on deposit rates than the RCUK and HEFCE policies on OA.

Policies and workflows relating to OA APC funding have been through University Research Committee, which has an Open Access and Research Data Subcommittee.

A decision was made at senior levels of faculties not to apply any selection criteria to access to the RCUK fund. They felt this was too complex and would involve too much bureaucracy falling on academic staff. Instead the fund is 'first-come, first-served', with no restriction on how often an individual may access the fund.

The open access policy has been in place, and discussed at a high level, for some time, with the requirements linked to funders, HEFCE and academic promotion committee added to the policy post 2012. It should already be well established, but there is still some concern that discussion of OA will become too dominated by the REF and could jeopardise engagement with the broader agenda, due to an academic resentment of assessment. Indeed, the lack of clear guidance from the research councils, and the lack of certainty around REF2020, in particular auditing of publications submitted, is already having an impact upon academics who see open access as increasing the levels of bureaucracy and additional admin beyond any perceived benefits.

Good practice	The OA team includes representation from the Research Office, Library, Finance and IT. Additional representation is provided by legal services and academics. The group reports directly to academic committee structures. OA is well integrated into research systems and decision making.
Future Challenges / Questions	Will the HEFCE policy dominate discussion of OA, making it become too heavily linked to the REF / a compliance issue?

Advocacy/ Training/ Awareness

The moral argument for OA has never really worked at Durham as an advocacy tool. Though some academics do support OA for this reason, and there was an initial attempt to focus on this angle in advocacy, focus has since shifted to compliance with policy. This has worked better and in some instances, reduces the need to over-emphasise arguments for the benefits of, such as citations. James expressed some doubts about the strength of the argument that OA leads to increased access or citation based on much of the current research, which indicates a correlation, rather than any causal relationship. There perhaps needs to be a greater understanding of the selection processes involved – it could be that OA publications receive more citations because academics cannot make all publications available in an OA format, so must select which publications they would like to share more openly. If this is research identified as the most novel or impactful, then higher citation is as much a result of this as the method of publication or access. Given that, advocacy around citation advantage is usually presented with appropriate caveats.

Some researchers now simply see OA as part of the process of publishing their research and deposit in the repository or request an APC payment as habit. They are not necessarily advocates, but they talk positively about OA. There is reluctance among the academic community to “bang the drum” for OA, but some academics have been happy to give testimonials to use in presentations by the library, and the vast majority of comments received have been positive around their experience of the process and support available.

There are disciplinary differences in attitudes. HASS researchers tend to be more protective of their accepted manuscripts and less willing to deposit them in the repository, as in these areas papers can be subject to editing much later in the publication process after acceptance than in STEM fields. Although the repository team occasionally is asked to swap earlier versions of manuscripts with files showing amendments after acceptance, their practice is to *add* the later version. This is because an end-user could have referenced the original file in their own work and confusion could be caused by simply *swapping* files. To try and mitigate against such requests, the repository team assures staff that REF panels will not be using versions deposited in repositories in their assessment of research.

New researchers are recruited to a ‘Leading Research’ course every year, which now features an OA module delivered by James. This session, and similar sessions run for the PGCAP and other department specific sessions are usually delivered in the format of a short 10-20 minute presentation and a 40+ minute Q&A discussion. James considers this format to often be the most productive and rewarding in promoting the key requirements, the skills and knowledge of professional support staff available, and gaining an awareness of key academic concerns and prejudices.

Heather felt that newer researchers are often more receptive to messages about OA and more responsive to requests from the repository team, and said this may be because they have a greater awareness of the need to promote their research and a concern to “do the right thing” as a researcher. However, the group felt that the biggest influence on new researchers was their more established peers, citing the example of how PGR student attitudes to social media are influenced by their supervisors. Where established staff are positive about OA, it is likely their students and newer colleagues will be positive too.

All new staff are emailed by Elena, letting them know about the repository and the support available. This caused some discussion of how the HEFCE policy will impact on recruitment and how workflows will need to be introduced to capture information about a new staff member’s engagement with the repository at their last institution, as this could impact their eligibility for REF. This is still a grey area and will need further discussion at an institutional level.

Town hall-style meetings were held upon the introduction of the RCUK policy, which initially had high attendance from academic staff. Attendance has since fallen, with the main mechanism for liaison being department-level training. The Centre for Academic and Researcher Development (CARD) have been keen for the library to deliver OA sessions, but attendance is often lower than those offered to departments. The preference at these sessions is on practical tips: which systems to use and how to achieve compliance, rather than talking about why they should do it. Flyers have been created setting out procedures in simple steps.

Research Office staff come to library training on OA and contact the library for assistance with OA costings in grant applications. Due to collaboration with research office the library team now have direct access to the Oracle based funding system, as this enables them to find information about awards quickly without having to send enquiries to the post-award team. This makes the process more efficient, though occasionally using information available publicly through Gateway to Research is the quickest route.

Library staff have tried to use promotion of publications through social media as an advocacy tool, by talking about research deposited in DRO. The Marketing and Communications department prefer that all research be available OA or deposited in the repository before sending out a press release about it, and have contacted the repository team in instances where they want to link to freely accessible research published by Durham authors.

Good practice	All groups of staff involved in supporting OA share information about their systems and processes. OA is well integrated into existing programmes of research training for staff at all levels.
Future Challenges / Questions	Will there be a tipping point in future where there is less need to spend so much time on advocacy, because attitudes in the academic community change? Will senior staff continue to define how new researchers feel about OA?

Systems and Compliance

The University currently uses a patchwork of in-house systems that have been developed over time. For example, the staff profile system which interfaces with the repository, currently hosted in *eprints.* This has reduced the need for academics to retype information into multiple systems which can create resentment.

However, there remain limits to how effective this can be. The requirement of funders, placed upon authors, to report research outcomes, eg via ResearchFish, without any current options to provide interoperability with University CRIS or repository systems, alongside closed publisher systems which do not share metadata in a timeframe required by funder and HEFCE open access requirements, forces academics or delegated support staff to re-key the same information into multiple systems, at different stages of the research process. The University is currently looking at how ORCID and our forthcoming CRIS to improve this, as well as putting pressure on funders alongside other HEIs to rethink current reporting practice through the more effective use of technology.

Durham is adopting Converis as a CRIS and will switch their institutional repository from EPrints to Fedora. Hydra will link DRO, the thesis repository and the existing Fedora special collections showcase. This development of research information systems will increase interoperability and support the University's ability to record and report on all areas required by different OA policies, such as the need to document the date of acceptance for publication and exemptions from the HEFCE policy.

Efforts to reduce the administrative burden of academics further (eg, to reduce the amount of re-keying of publication and funding data) is unfortunately in part restricted by the lack of third party systems used by funders (eg ResearchFish) to offer effective interoperability solutions.

Good practice	Making processes easier for the academic, allowing them to input information once and be reused. Will also enable reporting on all known requirements of externals.
Future Challenges / Questions	Mechanism of reporting not yet known – how will systems adapt to audit needs?

Conclusions

Open Access plays a prominent role in academic progression and is well integrated into research support infrastructure and at the highest levels of University management, who recognise it as an important issue for the future of research publication and assessment. Support services involved in OA continue to work together to develop systems that are streamlined and intended to offer an as simple and intuitive experience for the academic user as possible.

Durham University has strong research communities, central to which is the idea of academic choice. As a result, open access funds are available on a first-come-first-served basis, open journal publication platforms are not hosted centrally (though there is demand) and there is little intervention in the process of publication. This could become problematic where compliance with HEFCE is concerned, particularly with the scale of Durham's research operation making checking after publication difficult. However, the research support infrastructure seems flexible and responsive to the environment, seen in the development of a new CRIS, repository and changes to processes relating to OA.