

Case Report

Library-Mediated Deposit: A Gift to Researchers or a Curse on Open Access? Reflections from the Case of Surrey

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Received: 20 February 2018; Accepted: 7 April 2018; Published: 23 April 2018



Abstract: The University of Surrey was one of the first universities to set up an open access repository. The Library was the natural stakeholder to lead this project. Over the years, the service has been influenced by external and internal factors, and consequently the Library's role in developing the OA agenda has changed. Here, we present the development and implementation of a fully mediated open access service at Surrey. The mediated workflow was introduced following an operational review, to ensure higher compliance and engagement from researchers. The size and responsibilities of the open access team in the Library increased to comply with internal and external policies and to implement the fully mediated workflow. As a result, there has been a growth in deposit rates and overall compliance. We discuss the benefits and shortcomings of Library mediation; its effects on the relationship between the Library, senior management and researchers, and the increasing necessity for the Library to lead towards a culture of openness beyond policy compliance.

Keywords: open access; repositories; library-mediated deposit; researcher engagement

1. Introduction

Attitudes and responses towards open access have changed dramatically in the last decade, both among scholarly communications professionals and within the research community. While several initiatives as we know them today stretch back to the early nineties (e.g., the launch of ArXiv in 1991 [1], the CERN preprint server in 1993 [2], and CogPrints in 1997 [3]; the setup of the first open access journals; and Harnad's seminal subversive proposal [4], which influenced significantly the early discourse on open practices), it is only from the mid-2000s onwards, with the emergence of institutional and funder policies, that we start seeing a shift of focus from open access as 'a nice to have' or 'best practice' to a 'must-have' practice, framed by specific guidelines and requirements. This shift is accompanied by changes in the—both perceived and actual—role of the Library in promoting and supporting open access specifically and open research at large.

In this paper, we present a case study showing how recent mandates and reporting requirements have led to the setting up of services designed to take the burden off academics, with the aim of increasing compliance and ensuring efficient monitoring and reporting. We discuss the implications of running a fully mediated service: what are the short- and long-term benefits and drawbacks? Can a fully mediated model co-exist with the evolving role of the Library as the centre of expertise and a major agent of change in scholarly communication? And how does the shifting of responsibility from the academic to the Library affect engagement with open access; does it facilitate or impede culture change?

2. Background in the UK: The Shift from Good Practice to Compliance

In the UK, several developments have driven open access into the mainstream, formally embedding it in research practice. The 2004 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report on scientific publications [5] was instrumental in making institutions take notice. Central to the report's recommendations was the formal endorsement of institutional repositories as a means to provide free access to scholarly publications. Within a few years, UK institutions responded to both the report and the growing awareness of the open access movement by setting up and populating repositories, raising awareness among academics and drafting local policies or mandates [6]. Surrey was among the first to respond, with a growing repository and open access policy in place by 2005. The responsibility for this sat largely with the Library, resulting in whole new roles or new responsibilities added to existing roles.

These changes opened new opportunities for Library practitioners: roles moving from the mere provision of resources to not only building new, public-facing resources, but—importantly—working with the creators of knowledge to curate, showcase, and publicly share this knowledge. The challenges for the librarian were—and still are—cultural, as well as operational; education and advocacy of open access call for communication, negotiation and influencing skills on one hand, and setting up systems and services requiring technical knowledge and management experience on the other. The goal was to ensure researchers embrace and adopt open practices as part of their research activities; and in this goal, the messages from the Library were key.

Indeed, what is widely called 'open access advocacy' was the main tool for informing researchers about open access, encouraging open practices and populating the newly established repositories. Institutional policies/mandates were also helpful to varying degrees, depending on how strongly they were implemented or enforced [7].

In 2005, the Wellcome Trust introduced the first major funder mandate [8], followed by the publication of the RCUK policy on open access in 2006 [9]. Institutions began to build their policies around these mandates; the open access messages were tightened. However, it was only following the Finch report and the subsequently updated RCUK and HEFCE policies [9–11], effective from 2013 and 2016, respectively, that open access became a widespread requirement; deadlines, rules and exceptions, and proposed processes require that institutions and their researchers comply in specified ways and expect to see evidence of compliance.

From that point onwards, it became necessary for research institutions, particularly their libraries and research offices, to review their policies, platforms and workflows on open access. In the next section we discuss how Surrey responded to the newly introduced mandates.

3. The Case Study: University of Surrey and Open Access

As mentioned earlier, Surrey was one of the first Universities to respond to the House of Commons report [5], by initially carrying out a pilot study in the first half of 2005. This resulted in setting up the institutional repository by the end of 2005, implementing the University's open access policy, and creating a full-time position for a repository manager/open access advocate within the Library. The policy required academics to deposit their published journal articles upon publication and encouraged them to deposit any other research outputs as well; local Faculty policies were also set up to reflect disciplinary priorities. If the policy was not enforced in the first few years, at least it increased awareness and led to a moderate growth of the repository and the service. The policy itself was reviewed and more strongly enforced from 2011, and its messages aligned further with those of HEFCE's in 2016.

3.1. HEFCE's OA Policy: A New Workflow for Surrey

Up to 2016, the Library offered a partly mediated service. Academics logged into the University's publications database (Symplectic Elements) to approve or—more rarely—manually add their

publication records and to upload full text for open access. The Library would then check/update the metadata, check the version uploaded, check copyright/seek publishers' permissions, apply any necessary embargoes and make the paper public in the SRI Open Access repository (Eprints).

A significant part of the Library's role in open access was advocacy. At that point in time, this was led by the repository managers, through presenting at Faculty meetings, reporting/highlighting key recommendations to senior management, disseminating newsletters, information packs and online materials, organising/participating in relevant events (OA week, scheduled help desks, festivals of research) and running workshops. It is worth noting that a large part of the advocacy typically reverted to systems and other operational issues, rather than promoting open practices. What staff and senior management were most interested in, for example, was to be shown how to add a record, resolve a technical issue or comply with a policy. This led to the Library being perceived almost solely as a systems/problem-solving service rather than as the focus of expertise in scholarly communications.

In 2016, an operational review on the University's open access implementation took place. The review was led jointly by the Library, the Research & Innovation office and a working group including academics and research support staff from all Faculties. Associate Deans Research and individual academics took part in the consultations. In addition, the Library carried out a functionality review of the systems available. The aim was to assess whether the existing processes would ensure that the HEFCE requirements would be met, and to identify factors that might increase the risk of non-compliance.

The review, which considered a range of possible scenarios, from a fully unmediated workflow to a fully mediated one, concluded the following:

- The setup of Symplectic, which harvested published papers after they had been indexed in databases, did not ensure timely compliance with the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It was deemed essential that outputs would be deposited at the point of acceptance, and it was desirable, for the institution's reporting purposes, that the acceptance date would also be captured.
- Both the consultation with the academics and the review of the systems concluded that the academics engaging with the systems to upload their papers directly involved a high risk of non-compliance.
- Comments from the Faculties strongly suggested that the Library taking over as much of the workload as possible was very desirable.
- A scoping exercise was conducted to develop a business case. Library staff taking over the uploading of the publications was deemed feasible in the short term: at least for the duration of the REF reporting period.

As a result of this joint review, the following steps were taken:

1. From 1 April 2016, academics are required to forward the acceptance notification email, attaching their accepted manuscript, to the Library.
2. The Library is fully responsible for every step of the process, from manually creating records to applying embargoes to updating metadata on publication. This applies to both outputs in scope and out of scope of the REF.
3. The Library, along with the Research & Innovation office, is responsible for raising awareness of the policy and its implications for the next REF.
4. In May 2017, the Symplectic Elements publications database was decommissioned because the institution could not rely on auto-harvesting to comply with HEFCE's open access requirement.
5. As a result, the University's repository changed from a full-text repository to a hybrid publications database/open access repository, i.e., it holds both full-text records and metadata-only records. This led to a steep increase in the size of the repository and an overall increase in the visibility of Surrey outputs; publication records are now public, regardless of whether they hold full text or not. Research dataset records are also public; they are assigned a DOI, but the actual datasets are currently held in other locations that vary by discipline.

6. To meet the resource demands of the new workflow, the Open Access team grew from 1.35 full-time equivalent (FTE) repository manager and 1.5 FTE assistants, to 1.35 FTE repository manager, 1 FTE supervisor, and 3 FTE assistants.

3.2. Effects of the Fully Mediated Workflow

Full mediation was one of several changes introduced in April 2016; the new workflow was part of an implementation package that also included raising awareness of the policy and its implications for the next REF, and strengthening the messages to the Faculties. While, for this reason, the effects of the workflow in terms of deposit activity cannot be assessed in isolation, looking at deposits over a wider range of years allows us to draw certain conclusions.

Table 1 shows the timeline of changes to the service since the set-up of the repository up to now.

Table 1. Changes to the service from 2005 to date.

Year	New Developments (Internal and External)	Repository Staffing	Workflow
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repository setup Institutional OA policy Wellcome Trust OA policy 	1 FTE repository manager	Pilot phase. No established workflow, but papers solicited from early adopters.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal launch of repository service. Local Faculty mandates. 	1 FTE	Academic uploads paper in the repository. Library checks copyright and makes the record OA.
2010	Service is divided into advocacy and copyright checking	1 FTE repository manager (shared role) 1 FTE assistant	Same as above.
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New CRIS and new deposit workflow introduced at the beginning of the year. University-wide OA mandate (replacing local faculty mandates) University deposit mandate strengthened in November 2011. 	1 FTE repository manager (shared role) 1 FTE assistant	Academic approves and uploads full text in Symplectic. Library checks copyright and makes the record OA.
2012	The Finch report [10] is published.	1 FTE repository manager (shared role) 2 FTE assistant ¹ plus additional staffing when needed.	
2013	University receives RCUK OA block fund.	1 FTE repository manager (shared role) 0.5 FTE supervisor role 2 FTE assistants	APC workflow introduced.
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University mandates e-theses deposit. The HEFCE policy on OA [11] is published. 	1.35 FTE repository manager ² (shared role) 0.5 FTE supervisor role 2 FTE assistants	E-theses workflow introduced.
2016	HEFCE policy on OA comes into effect.		
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symplectic is withdrawn; the repository doubles as the University's publications database. New, fully mediated workflow is introduced. 	1.35 FTE repository manager (shared role) 1 FTE supervisor role 3 FTE assistants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic e-mails publications to the Library. Library checks copyright, creates and posts the record. Library monitors compliance.

In response to these changes, both the deposit rate of new publications and the size of the Open Access team increased in parallel. This increase is shown in Figure 1.

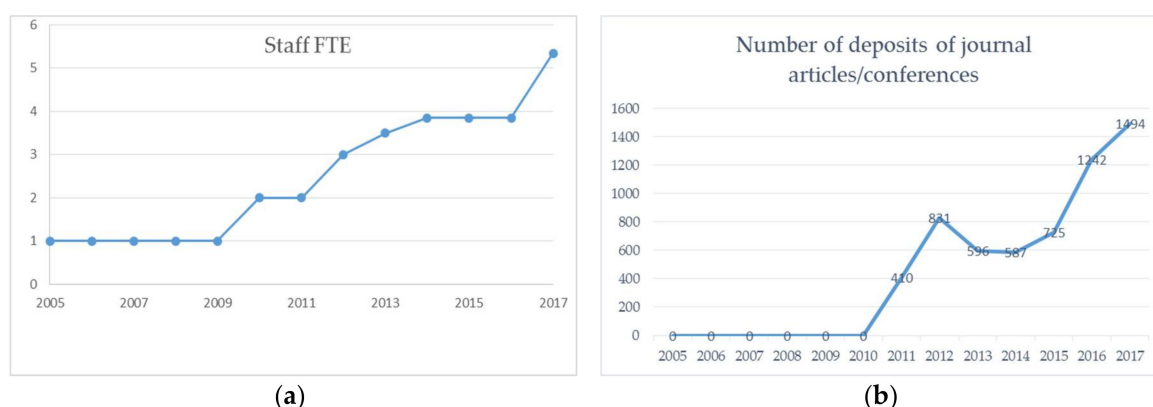


Figure 1. (a) Increase in the number of staff from 2005 to 2017; (b) increase in the number of deposits of journal and conference papers with full text.

There were two parallel increases over the years: an increase in staffing (Figure 1a) to meet the increasing demand for Library resources as the open access messages tightened and expectations from academics to deposit their papers became more pressing; and an increase in the deposit of full texts (Figure 1b).

In particular, there were two steep increases in the deposit rate of new publications (Figure 1b). The first one was in 2012, which immediately followed a strong message from senior management to deposit publications. The other was in 2016, which followed both communications from senior management and the provision of the fully mediated service. It can be argued that it is the policy, rather than the workflow, that triggers stronger engagement from researchers.

A compliance exercise, based on publication information from Scopus, estimated that about 45% of Surrey journal articles and conference papers were available on open access in 2014. The same exercise carried out in 2017 suggests a much higher estimate of 73%.

In short, implementation of the HEFCE policy, which included a fully mediated service, has resulted, on one hand, in increased deposit rates and higher compliance and, on the other, in increased staffing within the Library. In the next section, we further discuss the implications of these changes for both researcher engagement with open practices and the role of the Library in promoting and supporting those practices.

3.3. Discussion of the Fully Mediated Workflow: Benefits and Shortcomings

The increased deposit rates are not surprising. There is evidence that the strength of an open access mandate does have an effect both on deposit rates and the latency of depositing [12]. The HEFCE policy is strong both in its timing of deposit requirement and in its use/opt-out conditions, measures that correlate highly with compliance [13]. It can be argued, therefore, that it is the strength of the requirements, rather than the workflow itself, that increases deposits.

However, this does not imply that full mediation itself has no benefits. The mediated workflow has removed a number of barriers (actual or perceived) that affect deposit rates: namely workload, difficulties in engaging with the platforms, lack of confidence regarding publishers' policies,

¹ The increase in the number of assistants was a direct result of the push from senior management to deposit full text in the University CRIS.

² The increase in staffing was as a result of managing the RCUK OA fund, but also to cope with the volume of deposits and copyright checking.

and an overall perception of any workflow as ‘too time-consuming or complicated’. These are the very barriers documented as affecting researchers’ engagement [14,15]. Further, the mediated service has helped establish a relationship of trust with the Library which, in turn, facilitates outreach and increases engagement further, in line with previous findings [16]. Consistent feedback from all Faculties also supports this: academics respond very positively to the Library taking over the administrative burden and providing fast levels of service.

At the same time, a fully mediated model increases resource demand within the Library, as reflected in the increase of staffing, especially at assistant level (see Figure 1a above). While this is, at present, supported by senior management, as it ensures compliance, its long-term sustainability needs to be addressed. The number of members of staff is not the only issue here: the roles undertaken at every level of the team are also changing. While, at assistant level, new areas of expertise emerge—in understanding and reconciling various policies, interpreting publishers’ conditions, and communicating with authors, to name but a few—additional administrative tasks are also required at manager level, often at the expense of advocacy. Monitoring and reporting compliance, leading technical improvements and liaising with IT and suppliers, as well as managing additional staff, are the most important among them.

Thus, a service led and mediated by the Library, endorsed by senior managers and welcomed by researchers, should be successful at many levels. First, paired with a strong mandate, it does increase compliance and engagement, at least insofar as researchers send the correct versions of their papers on acceptance. Second, by moving administrative tasks from the hands of the researchers to the Library, it helps forge a relationship that could, at least in theory, lead to a more fruitful and interesting discussion on scholarly communication. Third, it places the Library in a position to lead this discussion to foster an open research culture, beyond compliance.

At the same time, this model is proving to be too resource-intensive to allow these opportunities to develop. Institutional priorities seem, at least at the moment, too concerned with compliance issues to place importance on developing and supporting open researchers in the longer term. It is increasingly challenging to plan and run advocacy activities, especially if these are mainly the responsibility of the repository managers whose time is still taken up by managerial and operational activities. With more management responsibility, increasing reporting requirements and technical/operational issues to resolve, the role of the repository manager risks being side-tracked from education and advocacy. The general discussion below addresses how these issues can affect the progress of open research itself, and how they can be overcome.

4. Discussion

In this case report, we presented the implementation of a workflow that ensures open access compliance for the REF and also increases overall deposit rates independently from the REF. We discussed how this workflow, which relies almost solely on Library resources, minimises effort on the part of the researcher while being very resource-intensive for the Library, and how this shift of responsibility leads to the perception of the Library as the main facilitator of open access.

4.1. Sustainability Concerns

As already discussed, a fully mediated service calls for an increase in staffing. While, in the shorter term, this is necessary for ensuring timely deposits for compliance, in the longer term, this is problematic; the larger and more research-intensive the institution, the less sustainable this model is expected to be. One solution to this can be to offer a mixed service, where researchers can opt for direct or mediated deposit; at the University of Edinburgh, some Schools/Departments also have local support [17,18]. Some US institutions also employ students to solicit and deposit content [19]. While these approaches may free up resources in the Library, overall, the model remains resource-intensive and potentially financially unviable.

Sustainability concerns are not limited to financial and operational issues. It can be argued that such an approach runs the risk of narrowing the skill sets of both Library staff and academic/research staff. Moreover, this concern extends beyond mere skills; the whole concept of open research risks being reduced to (mediated) data entry, deposit and copyright checking, leaving little room for developing an open culture and engaging with scholarly communication in a meaningful way.

It is therefore advisable, even at universities where mediated services are embedded and well received, to keep reviewing existing processes with a view to a longer-term transition to a more researcher-led model. For this to happen, it is necessary to continue engaging researchers with open practices.

4.2. Advocates or Compliance Checkers? Evolving Perceptions of the Library, Open Research and Scholarly Communication

With regard to institutional priorities, mediated services can be seen as successful, as they support the box-ticking, compliance aspect of open access. Indeed, it can be argued that developing a fully or heavily mediated service is the inevitable outcome of the requirements of HEFCE and other funders. However, there is a concern around what the policies—and workflows that support them—mean for the way open research is perceived and addressed.

Since the launch of the open access policy for REF 2021, open access as a concept started being associated more closely with issues of monitoring and assessment. As a result, the relevant educational messages were also simplified, moving from a discourse aiming at cultural change to more pragmatic ‘how-to’ guidance³. Institutions stand to risk too much by not complying; while, in the long term, researchers actively engaging with open practices is still the desirable outcome, in the shorter term, certain requirements must be met, regardless of how much researchers really understand, or care about, open access. And so it is that the day-to-day responsibility for compliance sits with the Library and the Research office, with the Library becoming, at least for the purposes of the REF, less of an advocate and more of a guardian.

Fortunately, this does not have to be the case. HEFCE itself offers us the opportunity to engage researchers at a deeper level. In its circular letter dated September 2017 [20] in response to the Stern report [21], HEFCE states that “The revised template will also include a section on ‘open research’, detailing the submitting unit’s open access strategy, including where this goes above and beyond the REF open access policy requirements, and wider activity to encourage the effective sharing and management of research data. The panels will set out further guidance on this in the panel criteria”. Considering that HEFCE’s policy on open access has already contributed to engaging academics with the Library, this new requirement may well further opportunities to change the culture.

For this to be achievable, we need to rethink the way in which advocacy is done. As mentioned earlier, at Surrey this role has so far resided with the repository managers. However, given the already increased responsibilities of repository managers and the heavy workloads of researchers, it is reasonable to question how many advocacy activities can be carried out and, indeed, whether they can be successful in engaging researchers. It is increasingly the case that opportunities to meet face to face are limited and events are not well attended; communicating via email or the website is limited to information sharing rather than dialogue and engagement.

There are at least two ways round this challenge. One involves moving away from ‘advocacy’ to dialogue, and even debate. Having gained the researchers’ trust in offering efficient services, it is time for libraries to offer engagement opportunities, not simply by advocating, but also by giving researchers a voice in matters that affect their own day to day research practices: not only opportunities to champion, endorse, and adopt open practices, but also question and debate them if necessary.

³ An interesting study, beyond the scope of the current one, would be to examine how the online advocacy/information on open access has changed over the years, and how the language used to describe and advocate open access has evolved in response to mandate pressures.

While the sector has been leading the debate for years, e.g., through negotiations with publishers, setting up open presses, open data and, more recently, through the launch of the UK Scholarly Communications Licence, these initiatives, and their relevance to researchers' lives, need to become more visible and accessible to researchers.

The second suggestion, which draws on the principles of embedded librarianship [22,23], involves engaging different parties, within and across institutions, for a more collaborative approach. Although this is already done to varying degrees at different institutions, including Surrey, here we suggest a more integrated, strategic approach that brings together cultures and skills from different areas: open access managers, copyright consultants and subject/liaison librarians in the Library; academics, researchers and support staff from different Faculties; researcher development experts; and key parties in the research office and press office. This not only distributes responsibilities across different parties, but also allows the messages to be shaped more flexibly and innovatively for different audiences and disciplines within the University; multiple voices rather than a single one enrich and facilitate the discussion. Library staff, including subject/liaison librarians and repository managers, continue being the source of expertise, especially to dispel common myths or highlight new developments in open initiatives, but the issues are open for discussion across the University.

Finally, a collaborative approach across the sector ensures consistency of messages while allowing a fruitful exchange of ideas and approaches. An example of this is the JISC open access pathfinder project [24], which has produced workflows, advocacy packs and best practice guidelines that can be used and built on by other institutions.

5. Conclusions

The case report presented here highlights challenges that most institutions and their Libraries are facing at this point in time. Regardless of the deposit model adopted, the tensions around scholarly communication and open access are universal: the mixed perceptions of librarians as gatekeepers, service providers, advocates and experts; the perception of open access as a compliance exercise or as one aspect of a wider culture of openness and transparency with political implications; and the way libraries perceive and reinvent themselves. These are all issues to consider, both collectively and within the context of a particular institutional culture. We would like to conclude with a few general remarks that should hopefully be helpful to other institutions facing similar issues.

First, the feasibility and sustainability of a particular workflow or policy need to be evaluated, not only in financial and operational terms, but also in a wider context. A mediated service will almost certainly become increasingly resource-intensive; however, the additional question we need to ask is whether it will facilitate or impede the advancement of the open research agenda within an institution. At Surrey, mediation has helped embed the Library and plant the seeds for further dialogue. This, in turn, may facilitate a transition to a model that relies on researcher engagement in the future.

Second, while ensuring open access compliance will remain a central priority, it is now up to the Library to build on existing relationships with senior management and researchers and work together towards an open culture: to adopt practices that ensure transparency at every step of the research lifecycle, to recognise and respond to publishing trends and even to engage with the political agenda of open research. Again, the best way to do this depends on local cultures and practices, but sharing and building on these practices is essential.

To achieve this, libraries and their staff must take a central advisory and facilitating role that enables researchers to contribute to the conversation and hopefully shape the scholarly communications agenda. A culture of dialogue rather than one-way advocacy should ensure that engagement addresses numerous aspects of open research and extends beyond deposit activities and compliance.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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