

SPARC IN EUROPE

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The formation of a European "Chapter" of SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) was agreed at two meetings in February. Three UK organisations, JISC, SCONUL and CURL, jointly hosted a visit by David Kohl, Dean and University Librarian of the University of Cincinnati, and Rick Johnson, Enterprise Director of SPARC. The meetings were organised by CURL's Executive Secretary, Chris Bailey, and attended by around 60 academics and librarians from the UK and three Continental European countries. The first meeting, chaired by Paul Ayris of UCL, brought together members of the scholarly communication committees of JISC, SCONUL and CURL, and the second meeting, chaired by Tom Graham of Newcastle University, had a broader attendance, setting the organisational discussions in a wider context. LIBER, the organisation that represents European research libraries, is also very supportive of the SPARC, and the organisations represented at the meetings set up a working group to discuss the constitution and funding of the European "Chapter".

SPARC has been operational since 1998 and already has some European members and publishing partnerships. The intention is to build on that base and enable a European focus to SPARC to be developed to complement the North American focus already established. Authors, readers, libraries and publishers from across the world share many interests and yet each country has its own special concerns. One European aspect, already agreed is that there will be versions of the SPARC literature, such as the "Create Change" brochure, which will be worded to suit local circumstances. The hope is that European learned societies and academic

organisations will get involved in a variety of SPARC activities. The "Advocacy", or awareness-raising, programme is a key element in North America and will certainly be important in Europe, but SPARC provides an umbrella for a wide range of initiatives. For more information about SPARC please see the web-site, www.arl.org/sparc/.

One myth to explode is that SPARC is "anti-publisher" or "anti-profit". Certainly SPARC is against some of the exorbitant prices charged for some journals – prices, which have prevented libraries from buying more journal titles or more textbooks – but SPARC has also helped those publishers who commit to reasonable prices by offering support in starting new journals. There is evidence that when competition enters the journal market, prices are reduced and a greater range of journals can be afforded. The emphasis in Europe will probably continue to be support for learned society publishers and university presses but there is no reason, in principle, why commercial publishers should not co-operate with SPARC. This initiative is about change, and SPARC working with the academic, publishing and library communities to effect change in a way which benefits authors, readers, and the intermediaries between them. The feeling behind the support from JISC, SCONUL, CURL and LIBER for a European "Chapter" of SPARC is that change in scholarly publishing is long overdue, and that those most closely involved in scholarly communication should be driving change forward.

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