

Key issue

Securing access to print: the UKRR

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It is a debate that every serials collection manager will recognize: *Are the rows of research journals the best use of library space when most are read online?* Yet the arguments for retaining print are convincing. Agreements for safeguarding access to digital material are still being defined and reliable digital equivalents of the print archive not yet in place. The true cost of digital archiving is still being assessed¹. Research libraries are committed to maintaining access to the information record. The UK Research Reserve (UKRR) pilot project, which ended in August this year, has shown how the higher education (HE) sector can effectively manage storage and access to print copy in the digital age.

Low use, no use?

With take-up of e-journal subscriptions at an all time high, the use of print copy of e-titles traditionally becomes lower, but is clearly a poor indicator of interest. For material not electronically available, figures suggest that, far from declining steadily with age, requests for older journals stabilize at a higher level than might be anticipated. A recent study of the usage of biomedical journals shows that the usage distribution exhibits a 'long tail': 50% of the 79,827 requests were for journal volumes published before 1986². In addition, the demand for low use articles increases when they are included in discovery systems and search engines such as 'Google Scholar'. Finding out about an article may be as influential on its future use as the publication format. Pressures on library space and the need to justify high estates costs for storage are persuasive in looking for a sustainable solution for storing low use print journals. The UKRR model shares the burden of storage, while guaranteeing access for researchers.

UKRR Phase I

UKRR has three goals: safeguarding the long-term future of printed research materials, maintaining quick and easy access for researchers, and ensuring efficient use of resources within HE libraries.

The Phase 1 project, funded by HEFCE, developed collaborative retention strategies, balancing the need to release low use material to repurpose library space with securing future access to that material. Sharing the storage burden through the HE sector and in partnership with the British Library (BL) has proved an effective use of resources and the resulting collection a useful resource for the research community.

Results from the pilot

Developing a shared collection involving the British Library and higher education and assuring research access through document supply allowed universities in the pilot project to free more than 11,000 metres of shelf space. As a benefit to the university sector as a whole this can be seen as equivalent to a saving in recurrent estates costs of £308,000 and a capital value approaching £3.8 million per year³.

Each partner library has either re-used space to house expanding collections or released space for other purposes. A major benefit has been new study areas and shared work spaces for students within the library. Feedback indicates high usage for these areas, developing the link between students and the library, promoting an increased awareness of library services and helping to place the library at the heart of the university.



UKRR has helped Imperial College library to increase study space



The UKRR project developed a process for the de-duplication of journals which allowed eight partner universities to combine in discarding their low use print journals whilst collaborating with the BL to begin the UK Research Reserve collection.

The foundation of the UKRR collection is housed at the British Library at Boston Spa as part of the Document Supply collection. The UKRR process fills gaps in this collection and improves and updates the catalogue records for individual titles that are presented publicly in the BL's online catalogue. Access to the material is provided by the document delivery service, with guaranteed electronic delivery of items within 24 hours. Building on the initial copy at the BL, up to two additional copies are then held in participating libraries, with the storage burden shared across the sector.

The UKRR process is complementary to the collection and disposal policies of the submitting universities, but is influential in allowing disposal of low use print journals available electronically. Not all the low use serials processed through UKRR were electronically available, with some older journal issues being offered.

Outcomes of the project were positive debate about collection policy in the partner universities, reviews of e-holdings and decision-making about the balance of electronic and print holdings, leading to improvement in journal supply.

The de-duplication process is more demanding than stock management and disposal would be normally. Standards for identifying titles are high, and care is taken to retain those serials where holdings appear to be scarce in HE. Whilst acknowledging the extra effort involved, all the partners

recorded benefits for their own library management. These included improvement in catalogue and holdings records and increased knowledge of cataloguing practices and interest in collections management. Feedback from partners also cited the project as making a useful contribution to staff training, drawing together different strands of library work, and increasing interest in collection development.

UKRR Phase 2

With a successful and thriving partnership between HE and the British Library and with UKRR poised to make a significant contribution to the national research collection, HEFCE have announced their support for a Phase 2 project to begin in January 2009, with a grant of £9.8 million.

Building on the momentum from the pilot project, Phase 2 is intended to develop the strength and size of the Research Reserve collection over the next five years, while securing and contributing to the modernisation of the document supply service at the BL.

During Phase 2 a subscription will allow universities to access a de-duplication fund to help with the costs of releasing and re-using shelf space occupied by low use print journals. The subscription contributes to the storage of these journals at the BL. The HEFCE funding will contribute to the building of an automated store at Boston Spa, housing the hub of the UKRR collection and supporting an efficient and economic document delivery service.

With an ambitious target of releasing 100 km of shelf space and building a sustainable national research collection over five years, the UKRR project is generating interest both within the UK and internationally.

Supported by the research and HE community, UKRR is making its mark in the knowledge landscape.

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UKRR Phase 1 project:

Partner universities: Birmingham, Cardiff, Exeter, Imperial College (lead partner), Liverpool, Newcastle, St. Andrews, Southampton

UKRR Phase 2 project (begins January 2009):

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