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Perspective

The role of the institution in scholarly publishing

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In providing a supportive and sustainable research environment, the institution has a key role to play in scholarly publishing. Whether that be as a guide, assisting researchers through the maze of publishing options and access to specialist audiences, or as an auditor for funders, or as a financer, agreeing article processing charges and subsidising website maintenance. Equally, the institution is the specialist systems developer and protector of the 'unpublished' research. This ensures repositories meet the needs of their researchers. In a wider context, the institution is the rewarder of scholarly publishing though promotions and the horizon scanner, preparing researchers for what is coming next. This piece looks at how the multiple roles of the institution in scholarly publishing impact researchers.

Introduction

The role of the institution in scholarly publishing is a varied one that must always adapt to the changes in researcher needs and publishing innovation. University Presses and Institutional repositories are two areas that are frequently associated with the role of institutions in scholarly publishing, but institutions also play a significant role in other areas. There is, as yet, no unified approach to supporting scholarly publishing, it involves departments across the institution, and varies according to location, size, research area, and researcher needs. The present study identifies some key areas of commonality.

The institution as a guide

When it comes to publication of your research, there are many options, which, increasingly, do not involve a 'publisher' in the traditional sense of the word. These choices are compounded in collaborative projects, from development questions over which members of the team lead on which outputs, through to practical questions, such as making the most of institutional offsetting deals for article processing charges (APCs).

The institution also has people with close contacts with key research users — from innovation and enterprise teams, impact officers, public engagement with research, school liaison teams, international offices, and corporate communications teams — each brings unique relationships with the world beyond academia that can be harnessed for effective communication of research. This variety provides an opportunity for researchers, in specialist, institutional contacts but a real challenge in knowing whom to contact within an organization to access this knowledge.

Institutional support for dissemination plans and data management plans is crucial, through access to tools such as DMPonline [1], a tool which assists researchers to create, review, and share data management plans, and the supporting staff with knowledge of best practice from organizations such as the Digital Curation Centre, Digital Preservation Coalition as well as bodies such as the British Library and national consortia. Examples of good practice and individual support and feedback on draft plans can ensure that researchers have considered the full range of publication options, to reach the appropriate audience, be that within or outside of academia.

For researchers who are keen to make their work openly available, the technicality of language in open access, from type of open access ('Green' and 'Gold' may be commonly understood, but Bronze? Platinum?) versions (Author Accepted Manuscript? Version of Record?) and licencing options

(CC-BY? CC-BY-NC? CC-BY-SA?) set alongside the range of options provided by publishers and the multiple levels of policy, compliance, and regulation can seem a insurmountable barrier. Here, the institution, and in particular the library, plays a key role — through advice, systems, services, and training in creating the environment that enables researchers to make their work as available as possible.

The institution as an auditor

With the move to open research, funders, the Research Excellence Framework (REF)[1] in the U.K., and increasingly publishers, are requiring more forms of research output to be openly available, within certain terms.

The complexity of compliance [2] with these interwoven policies adds to the administrative side of research, with institutions being required to report on compliance. This creates a new role for institutions, following up and enforcing conditions on published research. Where previously researchers were free to use the repository as they desired, the need to demonstrate compliance with open access mandates has created processes on the deposition of works that the institution manages to ensure maximum compliance with the lowest burden on researchers.

The institution as a financer

Institutions pay, in many ways, for open research — whether APCs, book processing charges, conference hosting, conference attendance, website hosting, or archiving. It also provides a constraint, in as much as we encourage research to be made immediately openly available, there is not sufficient budget to allow for 100% gold open access (we are yet to see how this will be impacted by PlanS [3] created by a coalition of research funders which mandates that 'access to research publications that are generated through research grants that they allocate, must be fully and immediately open and cannot be monetised in any way' [4]). Institutions are required to make a distinction between funding that allows for APCs and research that does not have this capacity, and the conditions then placed onto those researchers.[2]

Institutions are also increasingly publishing research [5,6], from hosting open access journals, on platforms such as the Open Journal Systems [7] (OJS), which are free to publish in and free to read, the cost of hosting is paid for by the institution to new University Presses [8]. Institutions are increasingly collaborating to meet the needs of researchers in this way, such as with The Northern Collaboration [9] and White Rose Press [10] in the U.K.. For researchers, this provides a platform for innovation, especially for fields that cross disciplinary boundaries or are emerging fields of research.

The institution as a systems developer

There is an inherent challenge on scholarly publishing systems as research outputs push the boundaries of what systems are able to do. This can also present a challenge to researchers — where their research output does not fit into the 'usual' formats, where does it go? How is it discoverable? How will it be preserved? Is it interoperable? How does it fit in the wider research context? It may be straightforward to pay for external hosting on a website for a year, but as the size of files, the quantity of material and length of research develops, this material can easily be lost — institutional repositories provide a way of preserving this research long term. There is an increasing body of literature available on the role of repositories globally [11–13], including the benefits and uses of them.

Institutions have a unique capacity to provide the expertise, support, and adaptability for the new styles of outputs — recently at Kent, we undertook a project, inspired by arts and humanities researchers, to improve the research support offer for practice research. While this work will inherently benefit those researchers, the capacity is not limited to those that asked for it — meaning that researchers in sciences conducting demonstrations, contributing to events or engaging in wider scholarly communication also have a mechanism to record this as part of their contribution to research. The focus on co-produced research, public engagement with research, and the rise of citizen science makes capturing these activities as part of the scholarly record vital.[3]

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[1] The REF is a process of expert review undertaken by the U.K. higher education funding bodies, which assesses the quality of research outputs, their impact beyond academia, and the environment that supports research at each institution. The previous cycle was REF2014; the next will be REF2021.

[2] For example, at Kent we cannot fund Hybrid APCs from our institutional budget, but are required to from our UKRI allocation — this is reflected in many institutions, e.g. https://www.imperial.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/support-for-staff/scholarly-communication/open-access/faq/applying-for-oa-fees-article-processing-charges/.

[3] More details on this project are here: https://dpconline.org/blog/beyond-a-b-c.

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The institution as a protector

Institutions are in a unique position in regard to research outputs. Where a publisher is interested in one output, or one output and the supporting data, or as an emerging trend, one output, the data and the laboratory book/methodology, institutions are interested in the corpus of work. This includes the 'unpublished' research — the work on blogs, media outlets, and in 'grey' literature.

The institution provides the underlying infrastructure to support and protect researchers — from advice on possibly predatory publishing — to unique researcher identifiers such as ORCiD [14], to prevent confusion over research areas and online identity, to IP policies, copyright advice, and repositories of scholarly work.

One key use of the academic repository is to provide the full range of research outputs of an institution to the world in an easily discoverable way. In producing a research report, or policy brief as part of the project, the institutional repository provides a long-term, discoverable option to store this work — work that, outside of the institution, would be disseminated at the end of a project and then up to individuals who received copies to use and store as they see fit.[4] The repositories, both the academic repository with specific item types (articles, books, book chapters, and so on) and the data repository, which provide the flexible metadata to incorporate the diverse range of practice research, data, and other forms of scholarly output, provide a way to disseminate research beyond the lifetime of a project. They also store research beyond the lifetime of a researcher and provide the wider context for an individual research output.

The institution as the rewarder

Scholarly publishing is an inherent part of researcher progression, promotion, and reward although different contexts and cultures outlined this in a wide variety of ways. Thus, the framework for progression and promotion is key to adoption of newer forms of scholarly publishing — are all forms of peer review rewarded? Are preprints considered as publications? There is emerging work in this area [15], but as yet there is little in the way of 'best practice', although progress is being made [16]. This is a challenge to innovative researchers — how to be both innovative in publishing, and to be rewarded. At Kent, we have adopted a responsible metrics policy [17] to ensure that research is valued on its merit and contribution rather than format or place of publication.

The institution as the horizon scanner

One of the most exciting elements of scholarly publishing today is that there are continual innovations, and they are coming from everywhere. As mentioned above, the researchers need systems that support the research they are generating, but also publishers are finding new ways of working, there are new systems to support dissemination and new tools to measure the reach of research. It is impossible for a researcher to stay abreast of the innovations in both their field, and in the implications, reach, and importance of different models of scholarly publishing.

Here, the institution plays a key role — not only on the scale of the individual in acting as a guide, but also feeding into development discussions. In connecting the appropriate researchers with the best platforms for their research, and also ensuring interoperability between systems which enhances discoverability and avoids repetition of effort, appropriate use of limited researcher time, and wider engagement with research users. Even in engaging with researchers on these topics, nuance is required — some prefer large training events, some a panel at a conference, some blogs or social media and some one to one to one time, either prebooked or at a stand in a larger event. Institutions offer the expertise, contacts, and facilities to enable this.

Conclusion

We do not get it right all of the time. This is an area that is moving quickly, with researchers pushing at different boundaries, such as citizen science, participatory-based research, and new forms of research methodology and outputs, and institutions, necessarily, have to choose where to prioritise efforts. We do, however, provide a crucial link between researchers, funders, and publishers and in the wider, long-term preservation of research.

Abbreviations

APCs, article processing charges; OJS, open journal systems; REF, research excellence framework.

[4]For an example of research that would otherwise be unavailable, see https://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2846811.

Competing Interests

The Author declares that there are no competing interests associated with this manuscript.

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