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THE WHITE ROSE CONSORTIUM EPRINTS REPOSITORY: CREATING A SHARED INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORY FOR THE UNIVERSITIES OF LEEDS, SHEFFIELD AND YORK

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Introduction

The White Rose Consortium ePrints Repository was created as part of the JISC funded SHERPA project[1]. The Consortium is a partnership between the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York. The three universities share a single installation of the open source EPrints software [2] (developed by Southampton University). The repository houses published research output from across the consortium – primarily peer-reviewed journal papers – and can be viewed at http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/. Currently, all the repository content is openly accessible and our access statistics suggest a good level of usage, with many users coming into the system through Google and other search engines.

The Consortium Model

Rationale

The White Rose University Consortium – a broad strategic partnership between Leeds, Sheffield and York Universities – is a framework that researchers within the White Rose institutions, particularly in science and technology fields, are becoming increasingly familiar with. For example, there are shared White Rose postgraduate scholarships and there is a joint, high performance computing service, the White Rose Grid. Prior to the creation of the White Rose repository, there was already a history of cooperation between the three University Libraries and it was felt that a shared, open-access repository could offer a number of advantages to all three partners. For example:

- it was hoped there would be economies of scale in having a single repository installation and in sharing management of the system

- as well as acting as an "institutional repository" for the three partners, the repository might develop into a tool to aid regional research collaboration

- as the three institutions are all research led, they produce a considerable body of research output and, as the White Rose Consortium web site states, "the combined research power of the three institutions ranks alongside that of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and accounts for 86% of the region's research spend" [3]; it was felt that a collaborative system might capitalise on this

- by pooling resources, the University Libraries were able to create a dedicated Project Officer post to facilitate the development of the repository.

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[1] http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/

[2] http://www.eprints.org/software/

[3] http://www.whiterose.ac.uk/

This co-operative, shared repository between three competitor institutions is an unusual model and one that has offered a number of advantages - and challenges.

Scale

To give some idea of the scale of the consortium, it may be helpful to consider some statistics. York is the smallest of the three universities, with 10,000 students and over 1,400 academic and research staff spread across 30 academic departments and research centres. Sheffield has 25,000 students, around 2,200 academic and research staff across 70 academic departments organised into 7 faculties. Largest of all, Leeds has over 32,000 students, 9 Faculties, 120 departments and research centres and over 2,300 researchers.

Management

The EPrints software is installed on a server at the University of Leeds and technical support for the repository is provided by staff from the Library systems team. The Project Officer is primarily based at Leeds but spends time at both York and Sheffield. The repository steering group consists of a member of senior staff from each of the partner libraries – Tracey Stanley (Head of e-Strategy, University of Leeds), Peter Stubley (Assistant Director, Academic Services, University of Sheffield), Elizabeth Harbord (Head of Collection Management, University of York) - plus the Project Officer (Rachel Proudfoot). The group meets regularly to monitor repository development and make key repository management decisions. Progress is also monitored by the three White Rose Library Directors who receive monthly progress reports and who have been closely involved with securing support for the repository at institutional level. Monthly reports are also sent to Nottingham University, lead partner in the SHERPA project. The arrangement has worked well – there have been no major differences of opinion so far about the overall strategy for repository development – though the implementation of, for example, local advocacy strategies has differed to some degree between the three partners.

Local customisation

The repository has been customised to reflect the Faculty and Departmental structures of the three Universities so that, if desired, the searcher can limit by specific University or may browse through the tree structure to particular academic units. Of course most University departmental structures are fluid to some extent, with new departmental and research centres being created and others disappearing. To keep up with these changes would be an issue for any repository administrator but it is particularly tricky in this case, with three separate hierarchies and local coding structures. At the moment, there is a single, White Rose branded entry point to the repository. It may be that we will need to consider further customisation so that academics feel more local ownership of the system. Most academics seem to be quite happy with the shared model; it is rarely raised as a major factor influencing whether or not academics self-archive. However, there is some indication that academics would like to see the distinctive branding of their local institution reflected in the repository. It remains to be seen whether we will pursue this direction.

Cross-institutional working

The Project Officer post was created in mid 2004. Initially, the Project Officer worked at Leeds, Sheffield and York on a regular basis; this was felt to be appropriate to become familiar, as far as possible, with the structure and culture of the three organisations and to meet with library staff and academics. Rigid attendance at all three institutions, however, is not necessarily the most effective use of a cross-institutional post. For example, extensive cross-site travelling is expensive and can result in lost working time, negotiating three different local IT systems has occasionally been problematic and, over time, information resources tend to become concentrated at one site. Now that communication channels and local contacts are well established, the Project Officer tends to visit Sheffield and York as and when the need dictates – for specific meetings with library staff and academics, presentations to committees and so on – with most of the repository development work, for all partners, taking place in Leeds.

Politics

There are some broadly "political" considerations when working in a consortium. For example, since the repository was created we have changed from a Leeds URL to the more neutral White Rose URL; there was some concern academics from Sheffield and York might have qualms uploading work to a Leeds URL. Also, we have detailed access statistics – including breakdown by institution – but we have not made these available in great detail; direct comparisons between the partners might be helpful – or might be politically sensitive. For now, a summary page of access statistics is offered. [4] We also offer local contact email addresses for the repository – again to emphasise local ownership.

One of the most challenging aspects of the consortium model has been the need to develop the repository at roughly the same pace and growth rate across the three institutions. It was felt that it would be undesirable, at this stage, if one institution was seen to dominate or fell significantly behind. As the repository becomes more established, this requirement may relax to some degree. In practice, academics have tended to be interested only in what work is included from their own institution – rather than the overall size and make up of the "White Rose" repository.

Advocacy

This short article is primarily concerned with the consortium model and there is not space to consider, in detail, the wide range of advocacy activities that have taken place across the consortium. In summary, all three institutions have taken a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. It has not proved straightforward to persuade academics to become involved with the repository. Our two main population methods have been:

    (i)   identification of "green"[5] papers published by White Rose academics (i.e. those published in journals where it is known that the publisher allows self-

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[4] http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/sherpa/access_stats.html

[5] See the information on RoMEO for further information on publisher policies and an explanation of the colour coding system http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo

archiving); academics are then alerted to specific works that can be added, without difficultly, to the repository. Inevitably, this is a piecemeal approach - but a pragmatic one that was felt to be appropriate at this early stage in order to "kick-start" the repository.

(ii) working closely with individuals or departments who have expressed interest in adding work to the repository. Almost all work has been added through a central, mediated service offering copyright checking, data inputting and, where necessary, obtaining electronic copy of the work.

Although the repository is becoming more widely known, there is still a lot of advocacy work to be done. In the longer-term, it is hoped academics will self-register and upload their own work (though some centralised validation and quality control is always likely to be required). For now, though, in order to keep populating the repository, the central, mediated service is likely to remain.

Conclusions

We are now starting to address the transition for a small-scale pilot repository to a fully-fledged service across the consortium. There is still much ground work to do – including continuing to raise awareness about open access and the availability of the repository. Hopefully, national developments such as support for repositories from UUK [6] and the position statement from RCUK (still being finalised at the time of writing)[7], will help. There may be particular challenges to come for the White Rose repository - the local needs of one or more of the White Rose partners may change significantly, for example. However, the White Rose experience has demonstrated that it is possible to set up and manage a collaborative institutional repository and, whilst there are many questions still to be answered about how the repository may develop in the future, it is envisaged that the consortium arrangement will continue.

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[6]

http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/mediareleases/downloads/Open%20Access_UUK%20policy%20principles_FINAL.pdf

[7] http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/access/