

Transition Complete?

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Who can hold an all-embracing collection in the modern world? If we define 'who' as one independent, physical entity – institutions, organisations, or even governments for example – the answer must be a big resounding 'no one.' In an era when almost everyone can publish their work and the estimated number of journal articles ever published (up to 2010) is likely to be more than 50 million¹, not many libraries still aspire to hold a comprehensive collection of the world. Resourceful librarians perhaps have recognised this for a long time and thus created various mechanisms to deal with it – inter-library loans, document supply services, etc. However, with the financial constraints and shortage of physical space many of us are facing today, more and more libraries are adjusting (and having to do so) their collection policies, including national libraries and those supporting world-leading researchers.

This is certainly not the first time libraries have to reflect and rethink their practices and services. For example, the role of libraries, and the value of their collections, had been questioned and dismissed when the first radio was invented or when TV was introduced into households. As technology develops, libraries, which represent the accumulation and advancement of human knowledge, need to find the right balance between the past, the present, and the future in order to meet the demand of the research community.

UK Research Reserve (UKRR) was set up to help libraries transition smoothly from the past into the future, and it enables member libraries to find the right balance within individual institution's contexts. On the surface, it aims to release 100km of shelf space during Phase Two (2009-2014), but deep down, it's about culture change, and the opportunities and potential that space and funding can generate for participating libraries. UKRR focuses on print journals and has so far processed nearly 66km of material.

In a sense, UKRR's approach to build up its 'collection' may raise a few eyebrows – it's more deleting than adding; more about access than possess, and more collaborative collections than individual/special ones. This is how we view collection at UKRR: 'the collective holdings of all UKRR members are considered the pool of UKRR holdings, with the duplicated offered holdings removed to leave a core collection distributed across the membership.'² So far, it works well - member libraries are thus able to repurpose newly-available space in a wide range of ways in order to provide better and more efficient services to their users. This is a model of collaboration, coordination, but above all, it is a

¹ 'How many journal articles have been published (ever)?', *O'Really?*, 15 July 2010, <http://duncan.hull.name/2010/07/15/fifty-million/> [accessed 02 October 2012]

² 'The UK Research Reserve Collection Principles and Policy', *UK Research Reserve*, August 2010, <http://www.ukrr.ac.uk/UKRRonly/default.aspx> [accessed 05 October 2012]

model of trust. We break down institutional boundaries and work together to achieve common goals. The funding from HEFCE acts as a great catalyst and helps smooth edges and overcome difficulties. Changes are happening.

But the environment has also changed significantly since HEFCE awarded UKRR Phase Two funding in 2008. It's unlikely that the sector will receive further funding from HEFCE to continue this collaborative and coordinated model which specifically deals with print journals, so what next? Should we give up the momentum that has been built up over the past 6 years? Have we already got rid of what we can and it's time to hang up the de-duplication hat?

According to surveys we have conducted, we believe there are still more journals that need to be processed and de-duplicated. In fact, weeding is a continuous process for many libraries and hence there are always materials that require UKRR's services. UKRR also held an event to look at monographs in 2011. Monographs are not in-scope material for UKRR to process, but there is no doubt the sector needs a similar approach to deal with them too.

Print collections, serials and monographs, are expensive to keep and can sometimes be difficult to justify the resources required to maintain them. On the other hand, there are high levels of risks if we simply bin them. UKRR was thus born and from the recent evaluation on the programme, we have learned that UKRR, a centrally managed and coordinated system, is well regarded by many. Its shared services model has contributed significantly to member libraries and helped them make informed decisions regarding print journals. It seems the sector regards a collaborative and coordinated approach, such as UKRR, the best and feasible way to deal with print collections.

UKRR was set up to deal with specific issues (i.e. de-duplicating print journals), but it has become a platform where collection management professionals share experience and best practices. For example, key issues regarding digital resources have been identified – the quality and completeness of digital backfiles, gaps in digital resources, permanent access to electronic journals, to name a few³. As we transition further from print to e-resource (and disposing of print materials along the way), it is important that we evaluate the quality of the digital world and ensure that it is good enough to meet the needs of current and future researchers.

Have we completed the transition from print to E? My answer is 'no' based on my time with UKRR. A collaborative platform like UKRR provides the sector an efficient and effective way to manage print collections; at the same time, it has the potential to play a powerful role to voice the sector's concerns regarding digital collections. The challenge is: when there is no more top-down funding, like so many challenges the sector has faced throughout the years, what shall we (and can we) do as a community this time?

³ Not all journals are being digitalised cover to cover and therefore what's available in print may not be available in electronic format.