

## **Meeting Report: eResources in higher education: Challenges, changes, and choice**

**5 July 2006; John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester**

This meeting provided an excellent overview of e-resources. Combining theoretical and practical presentations, the course left participants much better informed on the areas of provision and delivery of electronic content.

Tracy Kent, who organised the event, opened the meeting with a paper on open access. She compared open-access repositories, open-access journals and other areas of open access. Her suggestions for promoting open access produced a lively response from the audience. She pointed out that open access is free to users at point of use, while not necessarily being free to publish or to provide. The current situation in the UK, following a recent report from JISC<sup>2</sup> seems to be that around a third of UK universities have some kind of institutional repository, but that there is not currently much content in many of these repositories. Southampton University has probably the largest catalogue of institutional archives.

She made the startling revelation that there is still no central repository of theses. There is a UK database, but no single worldwide source that includes the text. Open access journals, by contrast, have directories, including DOAJ and OpenJGate.

Alan Bradwell, of Anglia Ruskin University, spoke from the unique position of having been both a librarian and now a lecturer in education. His research includes competing literacies in teacher education, of which information literacy is simply one of several. His talk gave an informed overview of information resources for education, identifying major gaps such as the lack of Z39.50 searching using the JISC education package, and presented the fascinating idea that education resources lend themselves to use by only one of the three current paradigms of educational research – they are all essentially positivist. This raised the intriguing question of how information resources could be structured in other ways. In the questions and answers following his talk he revealed that Google is often a quicker way of accessing content such as policy documents than going through the “official” sources.

Caroline Moss-Gibbons of the Royal College of Physicians gave an outline of e-resources for the professional library. Since such libraries cannot take advantage of JISC deals, they have to fend for themselves and make their own agreements. A library such as the RCP has a user base that is almost entirely offsite, and she described the challenges of providing for such a group. Her talk was interesting not just for institutions outside of

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<sup>2</sup> Linking UK Repositories, June 2006

JISC: her distinction between categories of users, and what constitutes a “walk-in user”, is relevant for any institution.

Stuart Macdonald and Luis Martinez talked about data resources – in their case, collections of social science data for use within higher education. Problems they face are, predictably, users not being aware of available data, and lack of local skilled user support. Like several presenters at this course, they were looking forward to Shibboleth, the new access management system that is starting to replace Athens, because of its better profiling capability, enabling institutions to provide selective access to particular subsets of users. Among their recommendations was “metadata for all to make data easier to find”, an admirable goal, although they did not discuss how this would be implemented, who would take responsibility for adding the metadata, and so on.

Lorraine Estelle of JISC Collections gave an overview of JISC’s provision of e-resources within higher education. Their in-house team of four people is responsible for over 60 licensed e-resources in higher education. In addition, they are responsible for the nesli2 agreement with 17 e-journal publishers. Among new developments at JISC are the capability to license a resource for a small faculty within a large organisation, not currently possible, and how to manage such intricacies as students on industrial placements, and their access to licensed resources. The lively question-and-answer session after her talk made it clear there was considerable interest in the details of the JISC licence and how it should be interpreted.

Finally, Peter Walker, head of Eduserv CHEST, talked about future issues and challenges for education resources. He introduced CHEST, which, like JISC, provides resources to higher education at prices lower than the institution would be able to achieve by negotiating directly, but which differs from JISC in some respects, such as not always insisting on a full site licence.

His wide-ranging talk looked at the implications of Web 2.0 for institutions. For him, the key is: How can we share all our information? His suggested answer was “co-opetition”, a combination of co-operation and competition although not elaborated. He then described the Google Print Library project, and Wikipedia. Wikipedia, “created by the masses for the masses”, is undeniably an astonishing example of the power of collective authorial power; any commercial encyclopedia publisher can only look with envy at the resources available to the Wikipedia team. He did not dwell on the increasingly apparent drawbacks of Wikipedia, which have resulted in the editorial team imposing greater restrictions on making changes to key articles on core topics.

Fascinatingly, only 3% of the books in the project are held by all five libraries participating in the Google Print Library scheme. His talk was an appropriate moment to end the day, with Google’s future strategy from the Print initiative still not clear

The course was stimulating and interesting. I would like to have had more on the differences between e-books and e-journals, perhaps: while in principle, as Peter Walker pointed out, the difference between books and journals becomes meaningless once the content is in digital form, in practice, there remain substantial differences in the ways e-books and e-journals are provided.

A further question that emerges from these topics could be the role the institution plays in harnessing the metadata across all this e-content. The increasing importance of e-resources in higher education means that the design and implementation of federated searching across institutional and department repositories, as well as the library print and electronic collection, and the larger external information resources, will become increasingly important.

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