

Response to EC Green paper
August 2007

Response to the specific question:

Is there a need for EU-level policies and practices to improve and ensure open access to and dissemination of raw data and peer-reviewed publications from publicly funded research results?

The European Research Area is integral to the development of the European Knowledge Society, because of the globalisation of research and the emergence of new scientific and technological powers outside of Europe. It follows therefore that the European Knowledge Society should prominently show its high quality research, education, training and innovation, both in order to contribute to the global research community and to show its important position in these fields. In order to achieve this with efficiency and consistency, policies and practices should be agreed on an EU-wide level which take into account developments in research dissemination on a national as well as an international level, focusing on two major issues: the establishment of open access repositories, and in supporting academics in using them.

Knowledge sharing generates innovation and is fundamental within academia and e-learning. The Knowledge Economy is based on creating, distributing and adding value to knowledge. As Norris et al ¹note:

'In a pervasively networked world, individuals are part of intersecting networks of interest and communities of practice. Knowledge becomes tangible as digitized content, as context that can be digitally shared, and through direct and indirect interactions.'

To support the sharing of knowledge there first needs to be ready access to it. The more opportunity there is for knowledge exchange, the more new knowledge will be generated: the more public this knowledge exchange becomes, the better integrated the knowledge economy will be and the higher and richer the profile of the EU becomes. Furthermore, there is the basic moral case that the public should have free access wherever possible to the research that they have funded.

Open access repositories address this need and allow free public access to the results of publicly funded research. In many European countries, including the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, the infrastructure is already in place with the potential to support the deposit of the majority research output.

To allow these benefits to be shared across the European Research Area, there needs to be high level European policy initiatives to recommend the construction of a repository infrastructure across Europe. If repositories are based in individual institutions, then the costs of infrastructure construction can be spread over a wide base. For each individual institution the costs are not high² and the institution gains institutional benefit from their use to help offset these costs.

In the UK, SHERPA³ is a good example to show the benefits of an integrated and policy-driven approach to research dissemination. As a successful partnership of over 30 research-led Higher Education institutions with open access repositories, SHERPA repositories alone give potential global access to over 70% of centrally funded UK

¹ Norris, Donald, M. et al, "A Revolution in Knowledge Sharing", EDUCAUSE, 2003 (www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0350.pdf)

² Swan, Alma (2007), Business Models for Digital Repositories, DRIVER project

³ www.sherpa.ac.uk

research. SHERPA also administers a number of resources that are useful for researchers worldwide, for example RoMEO⁴, JULIET⁵ and OpenDOAR⁶, and is also a partner in the European project, DRIVER⁷.

The UK is now concentrating on policy support through various national initiatives, to develop centralised policies and practices to take advantage of the existing open access repository infrastructure and encourage the population of these repositories with research-content.

At a European level, in order to promote the European Research Area through repositories, it will take EU-level policies and practices to promote and support the establishment of a comprehensive repository network.

The DRIVER project, funded by the EC, is an example of an initiative that is promoting the establishment of such a network. The DRIVER project seeks to create a virtual network of institutional repositories across Europe, using a search service that offers features designed according to researchers' needs. This will allow for easy access to global exposure of research material that is European branded.

Apart from policy support for the establishment of repositories, an EU-wide policy support can also help academics in using the repositories.

In a recent international multi-disciplinary study, it was reported that:
'over 80% of academic researchers around the world would willingly comply with a mandate to deposit copies of their articles in an institutional repository'⁸.

The main inhibitor of the wider public dissemination of research comes from some academic publishers' requirement for the acquisition of the copyright of research outputs. It is often the case that in order to publish material, publishers will insist that academic authors freely surrender their copyright in the work that they have produced. Publishers' contracts can then prohibit authors from making their research publicly available through the Internet.

While some publishers will allow academics to archive their work, embargoes and other prohibitions are often imposed to restrict access to the archived work.

Therefore we have the situation:

- where there is an infrastructure to allow free public access to publicly funded research outputs;
- where the rapid and open access dissemination of research is beneficial for the research process and the scientific discipline involved;
- where open access of research is good for the promotion of European research;
- where academics would willingly archive their work for public dissemination;
- but where little progress can be made because some publishers insist on being given complete control over access to publicly funded research outputs.

While they would be willing to use open access repositories, individual academic authors can do little to change the traditional publishing model. Individual authors need high-level policy support from research funders and from government initiatives in order to insist on a right to disseminate their work publicly.

⁴ www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo

⁵ www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet

⁶ www.opendoar.org

⁷ www.driver-support.eu

⁸ Swan, A. and S. Brown (2005), Open access self-archiving: an author study, Technical Report, External Collaborators, JISC, HEFCE

Such policy initiatives are being driven forward in the United States of America, from the National Institutes for Health. Internationally, the Wellcome Trust, which funds biomedical research, has now introduced a mandate for authors to archive their work as a condition of their funding grants. As a pre-existing condition associated with the research output, publishers cannot then insist on restricting access to that research output for their own particular commercial advantage.

Policies such as this on a European level associated with public funding would support individual authors in the dissemination of their work and would be of significant benefit in both dissemination of research and promotion of the European Research Area.

Although some countries already have existing repository infrastructures in place, the European network is not comprehensive. Therefore, EU level policies would be beneficial in helping to establish a network of repositories to promote research across the European Research Area.

In addition, EU level policies to promote the use of repositories as a normal consequence of public funding of research would be both a welcome move for research dissemination and in support of academics' opinion.

SHERPA Document

Response to EC Green paper
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