

Press Release - January 7th 2004

Large Scale Open Access to UK Research.

The SHERPA project is pleased to announce the adoption of six new associate partners in its work in disseminating and promoting UK Higher Education research. It brings the number of institutions involved to 20, who represent a major proportion of UK research-led universities.

Currently there is a high degree of interest in improving the visibility and accessibility of UK research, not only to directly facilitate economic development, but also to increase the fundamental efficiency of the way that research works.

One response has been the development of Open Access journals to replace the current subscription based commercial journals. There are now around 600 such journals, compared to around 20,000 subscription journals, but more are planned for launch.

The other solution, adopted by the SHERPA project, takes a different approach and promises to have a more direct effect. This is to make UK research directly available online in Open Access collections. Such open-access archives, or repositories, have already made available over 500,000 research papers.

Now members of the UK HE community are setting up their own network of archives, based in individual universities and institutions, through the development project SHERPA.

"There is no real technical barrier to overcome" say Bill Hubbard, the SHERPA Project Manager, leading the project from the University of Nottingham. "People have been using these archives based around individual subjects like physics for the last ten years, so installing and using the software is no problem. What is different now is that universities themselves are building their own repositories to hold the research output of all of their own staff. This gives a unique way of seeing the intellectual productivity of each institution - and allowing a worldwide audience to see it and access it."

The key to the success of such archives is the way that they are searched. Built to comply with a set of standards called the OAI-PMH, all archives can be searched as though they are one. This means that a researcher just has to go to one site to search all repositories in the UK - and worldwide. And the big benefit? - there is no clutter. These search services just look at academic archives of research papers, so that usable search results are not lost in the thousands of junk results you typically get using conventional search engines.

In a major expansion, the SHERPA project is announcing today the adoption of six new Associate Partners. This brings the partners in the project to 13, representing 20 institutions, and a significant proportion of the research-led universities of the UK. This shows a level of effort and commitment that will make a substantial contribution to the development of the archive network.

Stephen Pinfield, the Project Director, says: "These archives will be a major benefit to academics. They will allow authors to disseminate their material worldwide overnight - and allow researchers elsewhere free access to that material from their desktop, from a single source. This level of accessibility

raises the profile of the author and the institution and will be of direct benefit in spreading UK HE research around the world."

It is not just academic researchers that benefit. Universities are realising that such archives can be used to manage their intellectual property and demonstrate their productivity. Figures from the University of Edinburgh, a SHERPA partner, show the university to produce over 10 peer-reviewed research papers every single working day. While these will still be published in journals, the university is now working with SHERPA to put them also into its own archive - to be called ERA, the Edinburgh Research Archive. Bill Hubbard: "This is a very productive aspect of UK HE that is often difficult to see. When papers are dispersed and published in highly specialised journals it is difficult to get any overall picture of all of the activity that is going on. Institutional archives allow that overall picture to be seen."

SHERPA is being funded by JISC, who guide IT strategy in HE, and CURL, a consortium of research-led university libraries. With the support of funding councils and research bodies for Open Access to research findings, this network of institutional archives looks set to become firmly embedded into the future of UK universities.

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Further Information:

SHERPA stands for: Securing a Hybrid Environment for Research Preservation and Access

SHERPA has funding from JISC (www.jisc.ac.uk) and CURL (www.curl.ac.uk)

OAI-PMH stands for: Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting

The six new partners: The Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Newcastle and the London LEAP Consortium - UCL, Imperial, Birkbeck, Kings College, Royal Holloway and the School of Oriental and African Studies.

The institutions involved in SHERPA: The Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, York and the London University Colleges: University College, Imperial College, Birkbeck College, Kings College, Royal Holloway and the School of Oriental and African Studies; together with the British Library and the Arts and Humanities Data Service.

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