UK Research Reserve – A Sustainable Model from Print to E-collection?

The UK Research Reserve (UKRR) is a strategic project targeted at the higher education sector. Through joining this programme, UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), partner with the British Library (BL) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and work together to achieve two key objectives: to de-duplicate low-use printed journals in a collaborative way and to preserve material for the research community. This scheme’s pilot phase started in 2007 and by the end of August 2008, UKRR members had released over 11km of shelf space. The success of Phase One also encouraged HEFCE to further fund the programme for five more years until 2014 to allow more HEIs to join in and to enjoy the benefits of being part of UKRR. The scheme is now in its second phase and is developing according to plan; however, its sustainability without funding council’s support has been a concern since Phase One. In this paper, the author aims to share UKRR’s journey so far and their experience in identifying a business model beyond 2014.

UKRR is the first of its kind here in the UK as well as internationally, and has thus far released more than 50 km of shelf space. However, since the beginning of its second phase, the environment UKRR operates in has changed dramatically. The HE sector as a whole has experienced the impact of a credit crunch that we haven’t witnessed in decades. Its aftermath lingers on and pushes the entire sector to rethink and reorganise how HE institutions are run in the UK. We also see new (private) players joining the HE market and competing with existing institutions at both ends of the market. Libraries, at the very front line shaping up customer experience, are adjusting their activities in order to meet researchers’ needs and support their work beyond their expectations in order to keep institutions’ competitiveness in an ever changing environment.

To maximise their potential, UKRR member libraries understand the need to utilise modern technologies and to deal with legacy problems associated with the Just-in-case strategy most libraries adopted in the past. They are also well aware that unless they deal with those issues from the past properly, resources and space will be further wasted. In a thrifty era like ours, it is simply not sustainable. Issues as such may also distract attention from core activities and hold back strategic development.

UKRR set out to help HE libraries transform and change, and has provided members with resources to do so and the platform to share and learn from each others’ experience. 29 UK HEIs have joined and enjoyed the benefits UKRR has to offer; however, the majority of libraries here in the UK as well as internationally are facing and dealing with these legacy issues on their own. In the process of identifying a sustainable model, UKRR reflects on its development so far and asks itself difficult questions. For example, has UKRR so far moved along the right track and on the way to achieve its mission? Has UKRR succeeded in creating
the expected impact and culture change within the HE sector? Have UKRR members’ demands been fully met?

In this paper, the author aims to cover the following:

1. The environment libraries are operating in and changes they are facing
2. Why UKRR was created and where is UKRR positioned today?
3. UKRR’s current model and processes
4. The self-reflection process and potential model(s) for post-2014 UKRR

Through the paper, the author also aims to share experience and thoughts with the conference attendees and the wider library community in order to exchange ideas, learn from each others’ practices, and to explore the potential of global collaboration.

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About the author:

Daryl Yang is the UK Research Reserve Manager based at Imperial College London, UK. UK Research Reserve is a national collaborative scheme that aims to tackle issues surrounding low-use print journals and Daryl works closely with a range of stakeholders in order to ensure the project’s success. Before joining UKRR, Daryl was a consultant, a university lecturer, and a business development manager. She also helped operate family business during a time of change and has had extensive experience in business management and operations.