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Recent Developments in Scholarly Communication: A Review

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This review article on recent developments in scholarly communication focuses on the content of three 2013 publications:

The future of scholarly communication, edited by Deborah Shorley and Michael Jubb, London, Facet Publishing, 2013, 188 pp., £49.95 (soft cover), ISBN 978-1-85604-817-0 (available from *Inbooks*)

Debating open access, edited by Nigel Vincent and Chris Wickham, London, The British Academy, 2013, 126 pp., gratis (pdf), ISBN 978-0-85672-609-5
□(available at <http://www.britac.ac.uk/openaccess/debatingopenaccess.cfm>)

The big deal and the damage done, by Walt Crawford, Livermore, CA, Cites and Insights, 2013, 131 pp., US\$9.99 (pdf) (available at http://www.lulu.com/shop/walt-crawford/the-big-deal-and-the-damage-done/ebook/product-20998658.html?mid=social_facebook_pubsharefb#productDetails)

Scholarly communication is defined by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) as 'the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use' (ACRL 2003).

The 14 essays in Deborah Shorley and Michael Jubb's *The future of scholarly communication* cover the major issues affecting the complex ecology of research and scholarly communication. Several of Shorley and Jubb's contributors remind us that the issues relate not only to text but also to other content fields, such as research data, evidenced in Henry Rzepa's 'Changing Ways of Sharing Research in Chemistry', Vincent Smith's 'Cybertaxonomy' and John Wood's 'Coping with the Data Deluge'.

Jubb's judicious introductory overview pulls together the different roles, perspectives and interests of the key stakeholders: researchers, universities, funders, libraries, publishers and learned societies. Jubb (2013) emphasises that

...effective scholarly communication is essential if we are to reap the full benefits - in the form of tangible contributions to social welfare and economic growth, also to the intellectual and cultural life of nations - that can and should arise from the substantial investments that government, charities and others make and research.

He is necessarily cautious, unlike some of his contributors, in his assessment of the pace of change, which is likely to be incremental because of the vested interests involved in scholarly communication change.

Governments globally agree that a productive research community underpins a successful knowledge economy. How to achieve the goal of increased access to, and distribution of, publicly funded knowledge is the \$64,000 question. In Britain a committee chaired by Dame Janet Finch reported in June 2012 to the British Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willetts, on *Accessibility, sustainability, excellence: How to expand access to research publications*. Finch noted in a subsequent article that 'we were not asked to debate whether open access was a good thing or not - it was taken for granted' (Finch 2012a).

The Executive Summary of the Finch Report noted that

The future development of an effective research communications system is too important to leave to chance. Shifts to enable more people to have ready access to more of the results of research will bring many benefits. But realising those benefits in a sustainable way will require co-ordinated action by funders (Finch 2012b).

The Finch Report, and subsequent reactions by funders such as Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), stimulated much debate. With a strong commercial publisher representation, the Finch Committee controversially favoured the Gold approach to open access (OA), via article processing charges (APCs), with these costs to be covered by government grants to universities, internal university grants and research council funding. Finch did not favour the Green OA pathway, which refers to research being deposited in either institutional or subject-based repositories. A number of other countries, however, have preferred, in ornithological terms, to be greenfinches rather than goldfinches.

Irrespective of the methodology recommended to achieve OA, the Finch Committee also aroused comment by focusing largely on science, technology and medicine (STM) articles, overlooking the humanities and social sciences (HSS) disciplines, for which learned societies and the academic monograph play an important role. The British Academy, therefore, subsequently assumed a role for the HSS disciplines in *Debating Open Access*.

The collection of eight stimulating essays in *Debating Open Access*, edited by Professors Nigel Vincent and Chris Wickham, both vice-presidents of The British Academy, encompasses very divergent views, leading the editors to conclude, 'our authors often do not agree on much at all, which makes any synthesising attempt pointless' (Vincent and Wickham 2013). They did, however, conclude that 'it seems to us that green is going to be by far the main route for HSS open access publishing now' (Vincent and Wickham 2013).

It was once said that trying to organise academics is like herding cats. Thus Robin Osborne, Emeritus Professor of Ancient History at King's College, Cambridge, takes the most extreme view in his essay, 'Why Open Access Makes No Sense', arguing that it would lead to lower quality research

publications; yet his King's College colleague, Dr Raymond Gatti, is a pioneer in OA monograph publishing. Vincent warns that OA cannot be allowed to harm the continuing importance of the monograph in HSS research, clearly unaware of the success of various new OA university presses, not least those in Australia, such as the Australian National University and Adelaide E Presses, and the hybrid presses at Sydney and Monash.

Given that much of the work in implementing the RCUK and government policy will fall on libraries and research offices in universities, it is regrettable, as Vincent and Wickham acknowledge, that 'the important perspective of university librarians' is missing, especially given that 'the library issue is one which will not go away' (Vincent and Wickham 2013). The editors agree, however, that OA has a current force 'which is not only moral but is now political' (Vincent and Wickham 2013).

Traditional 'political' considerations, however, are likely to hold more sway in the short term. The chapter in *The Future of Scholarly Communication* by Katie Anders and Liz Elvidge ('Creative Communication in a "Publish or Perish" Culture: Can Postdocs Lead the Way?') reflects the Jekyll and Hyde publishing position of academics. On the one hand academic authors 'give away' their articles to 'prestige' journals, usually published behind high subscription firewalls, whereas, as readers, these same authors wish immediate access to content free of charge.

Anders and Elvidge emphasise that the gap for creative research communication is narrow, which is enhanced by the restricted range of publication metrics used by governments and universities for research evaluation purposes. Rachel Bruce from the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and David Prosser from Research Libraries UK (RLUK) have correctly commented on a tension between policy directions and research practice:

Publishing practices seem to be more strongly influenced by the 'impact factor' and a researcher's immediate research interests and peers, than by the opportunities of wide availability and models that support open dissemination (Bruce and Prosser 2013a).

Professor Stephen Curry, in his *Debating Open Access* chapter ('Political, Cultural and Technological Dimensions of Open Access: An Exploration'), emphasises the need for scholars to play their part in making sure OA works effectively. This will not, however, be a rapid process given the current conservatism in academic publishing. The 2013 JISC and RLUK survey of 3500 UK academics, conducted by Ithaka S+R, uncovered similar tensions and attitudes, although Bruce and Prosser (2013b) note in their preface to the Ithaka survey that, 'while the importance of "formal" communication through journal articles and monographs is undimmed, there is an increasing use of "informal" channels with even greater traffic through blogs and wikis'. Ellen Collins reaffirms this fact in 'Social Media and Scholarly Communications', her chapter in *The Future of Scholarly Communication*, stressing the undoubted

benefits of academic 'information extension' from social media. There is a strong need for universities and research councils to adopt wider metrics for research evaluation. Downloads from OA could be a viable alt-metric, in addition to OA and the impact factor within the 2014 UK Research Evaluation Framework (REF).

Several contributors to *The Future of Scholarly Communication* ponder the future of peer review. Peer review has often been seen as an academic collegiate exercise, but with the number of articles to be reviewed increasing annually, and with no formal recognition for peer reviewing, there will be an increasing disinclination for many to continue peer reviewing, particularly when inferior articles require a great deal of editorial work. Martin Eve, Director of the Open Library of the Humanities, argues, in *Debating Open Access*, that OA could make peer review a more collaborative, less elitist process.

Where are libraries in this debate? Librarians often have limited authority within the power structures of their universities to make major changes in scholarly communication practice. Nonetheless, the digitally connected world is increasingly leading to new campus relationships for the library in such areas as e-scholarship support, data management, copyright advice, scholarly publishing initiatives, institutional repositories and research metrics analysis.

In 'The Role of the Research Library' in *The Future of Scholarly Communication* Mark Brown (Southampton University Librarian) highlights the need for research libraries to react to an increasingly complex research environment. He highlights the impact of the acceleration of digital publishing, escalating publication costs and the long-term preservation needs of research outputs. The reference to 'escalating costs' of serial subscriptions leads on to the increasingly debated issue of whether multinational publisher Big Deals are still in the best interests of universities.

Purchasing most or all of a major publisher's serial output was initially seen in the 1990s as a way for libraries to maintain and even decrease subscription costs while increasing access to scholarship. The subsequent consolidation of the Big Deal from a small number of multinational publishers has, however, led to library budgetary problems, including conformity in purchasing patterns, with a diminution of acquisitions from smaller publishers and a dramatic decline in the purchase of print monographs.

A recent study of a decade of Big Deal library purchasing in American research libraries affirms that 'content and pricing seem to be trending toward a growing disconnect' (Strieb and Blixrud 2013). Professor Stuart Shieber, Director of Harvard University's Office for Scholarly Communication, has succinctly outlined the difficulties that even Harvard confronted in reducing the cost of their Elsevier Big Deal: 'From the library's point of view, you can't win by cancelling journals, because the product is not the journal, it's the bundle' (Shieber 2013a).

Shieber notes that this 'market dysfunction' arises from the fact that journals

are 'complements', not substitutes, for each other; the inefficiencies in the subscription market; the lack of market competition and the bundled journal. Apart from branding and publisher profits there is no obvious reason for the journal in a digital form to replicate the print copy format and costs.

Walt Crawford provides another, more detailed American analysis in *The big deal and the damage done*. Crawford's conclusion provide some sobering comments, including, 'if things continue along the same line as they have from 2000 to 2010, the damage done may become irreparable, as a growing number of academic libraries become little more than subsidised article transfer mechanisms'. (Crawford 2013). Crawford's figures and statistical graphs will resonate elsewhere in the world where similar figures for costs of serials within libraries can be found. In Australia, however, the generally high Australian dollar has, to some extent, muted high-level policy debate on serial subscriptions in the last five years, but the recent decline in the Australian dollar, irrespective of the OA debate, will reignite discussion in universities.

Even the most strident OA advocates recognise that there are costs to publishing, but the crucial issue is to establish what are reasonable publisher profit levels and who should own the intellectual output of universities and research organisations. Professor John Houghton's numerous research studies have provided cost figures for the various processes of scholarly communication, including repositories (Houghton 2009, 2012). While Houghton's figures have been criticised by some of the major international publishers, the same publishers have never produced transparent costs for their publications to back up their criticisms.

The British messages have been mixed in terms of drilling down into the practical realities of changing publisher practice. On the one hand UK minister David Willetts has said that

a reason for greater transparency is to ensure a better deal for taxpayers. Every year, the government spends almost £5bn on science and research. Yet the results of that research are generally behind pay walls that individuals and small companies cannot afford, even though they have paid for the research through their taxes (Willetts 2013).

In the same speech, however, Willetts reflects one of the parameters of the Finch Committee, namely not to 'disturb' the multinational commercial publishing industry. It is curious that publisher profits – some over 35% per annum - should be so ring-fenced, when many other components of the ICT industries are being significantly disrupted and transformed by evolutionary change. Schieber, in his chapter 'Ecumenical Open Access and the Finch Report Principles' in *Debating Open Access*, argues that the principles of the Finch Report have been lost in the government's implementation of the recommendations (Schieber 2013b).

The Finch intention that 'hybrid' journals, subscription journals which include Gold OA articles, would see historical serial subscription costs diminish is admirable but far from realised. In the meantime a second revenue stream, a double-dip for the same article, already covered by library subscriptions, has emerged, via Finch, through the APCs. Some major publishers, such as Emerald and Springer, have also interpreted the post-Finch deliberations of the Research Councils UK to increase their original Green embargo periods and thus 'muzzle' institutional or subject repository deposits.

Mike McGrath's chapter in *The Future of Scholarly Communication* ('The Changing Role of the Journal Editor') considers the key drivers for change in the journal marketplace. He predicts changes in the peer review system, from pre-publication to post-, and the likely demise of the Big Deal, at least in its present form. His comment that publishers, while contributing greatly to increasing access to the academic literature, are now acting as a brake through their exploitation of copyright law and digital rights management, will certainly stimulate further comment. At the very least universities should adopt a campus-wide policy to ensure that academics license their intellectual output rather than simply giving it away to publishers.

Universities need to become much more involved in scholarly communication issues at the highest levels. The Finch Report certainly increased debate within British universities. Ian Carter, Chair of the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (UK), argues the need for 'Changing Institutional Research Strategies' in *The Future of Scholarly Communication* and confirms that university research strategies have, to date, rarely addressed scholarly communication issues at the highest levels. He concludes, 'Successful institutions will ensure that strategy and scholarly communications activities are mutually supportive to the benefit of both their researchers and the organization' (Carter 2013).

In this context university repositories should become the flagship of university research. It was unfortunate that the Australian government repository grant funds in the first decade of the 21st century did more for the development of the 'dark' closed archives, established for the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) exercise, than for making university scholarship in Australia more globally accessible.

In 2013 Australia now has OA policies from the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council and a general support within government towards OA to government information and publicly funded research (Kingsley 2013). The Australian Open Access Support Group (AOASG) emerged in 2013. Supported by seven universities through their libraries, one of AOASG's aims is to increase awareness of the importance of OA and target advocacy to Australian research institutions, funders and the wider community (AOASG 2013).

In Australia there are relatively few high-level cross-sectoral bodies that debate scholarly communication issues. The widest Australian policy forum is probably the National Scholarly Communications Forum, which, in May 2013,

under the aegis of the two relevant Australian academies, addressed the topic, 'Open Access in the Humanities and the Social Sciences' (NSCF 2013). This, however, is essentially a policy forum rather than an implementer of outcomes.

Scholarly communication and scholarly publishing are, more than ever, contested fields, where the potential of new developments produced by changes in ICTs are available for the wider dissemination of knowledge. This potential continues to be qualified by existing historical and commercial practices in publishing, research evaluation and academic behaviour. Scholarly communication change will, however, continue apace, even if it is more likely to be through incremental rather than revolutionary change (HEFCE 2014).

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