

The role of the library in scholarly publishing: The University of Manchester experience

The emergence of networked digital methods of scholarly dissemination has transformed the role of the academic library in the context of the research life cycle. It now plays an important role in the dissemination of research outputs (e.g. through repository management and gold open access publication processing) as well as more traditional acquisition and collection management. The University of Manchester Library and Manchester University Press have developed a strategic relationship to consider how they can work in partnership to support new approaches to scholarly publishing. They have delivered two projects to understand researcher and student needs and to develop tools and services to meet these needs. This work has found that the creation of new journal titles is costly and provides significant resourcing challenges and that support for student journals in particular is mixed amongst senior academic administrators. Research has suggested that there is more value to the University in the provision of training in scholarly publishing than in the creation of new in-house journal titles. Where such titles are created, careful consideration of sustainable business models is vital.

Introduction

Libraries and academic publishers have been part of the same scholarly information ecosystem for centuries. The generation of original research, or its distillation into material for lay interest or new students, has required expert professional attention to convert it into journal papers, monographs and textbooks. The expense involved in purchasing or subscribing to this content has made the academic library the only sensible way to ensure it reaches those who need it. The traditional life cycle of research stimulated by such collections being converted into new additions to those collections has continued for as long as there have been libraries and university presses.

Digital technology has both changed and reinforced that paradigm. On the one hand, this process certainly still exists, and has extended to encompass digital collections. These collections may be held in very different ways, and have nothing at all to do with the physical walls or location of the holding library, but the life cycle persists: the research is created, published and either purchased or subscribed to by the library. On the other hand, of course, there has been a global revolution in our approach to information production and consumption. Anyone can publish (if not necessarily professionally), the celebrities of the modern age are social media stars as much as they are movie stars,¹ and the challenge of working with the public release of information which lacks either filters or an association with trusted brands has heralded the era of 'fake news'.²

For academic libraries, the change has been well explained by the concept of the 'inside-out library'.³ As information has become ubiquitous, and routes to it multiply, the role of the library as gate-keeper has reduced and much focus has instead been devoted to ensuring unique collections are exposed online through effective discovery tools, digitization, and integration with globally visible platforms (e.g. Wikipedia, Flickr). At the same time, there has been a growing realization that 'publishing' in a digital world has the potential to transform scholarly communications. Libraries started to see ways to reduce the significant costs associated with acquiring scholarly content, and researchers saw value in early release of research outputs. These changes have been much more prevalent in relation to journals



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than research monographs, and tensions continue to exist between opposing models (with strong views on all sides of the argument). Nevertheless, it is now hard to deny the momentum behind alternative approaches in light of the emergence of new models for scholarly dissemination such as arXiv, PLOS, Knowledge Unlatched and the Open Library of Humanities.⁴ The ground-swell of support for the concepts of openness and sharing as credible, efficient and ethical alternatives in a digital world to paywalls and gate-keepers has won over governments and policymakers, and a new approach to scholarly dissemination is now here to stay.

As a consequence, the academic library has developed entire new service areas in support of open access (OA) publishing and research data sharing, and the scholarly outputs of the university have become, in this sense, another 'special collection' of unique content which requires stewardship and dissemination. In that context, surely the library is well positioned to act as the publisher, as well as the consumer, of scholarly research?

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There is abundant evidence that this is now a trend. The American Library Publishing Coalition⁵ documents many examples of it,⁶ and in the UK several libraries have recently reported on such work.^{7,8,9} Of course, this is not actually a new thing in one sense. As a recent Jisc report notes, university presses in the UK date back to the 16th century.¹⁰ Before the existence of a dominant commercial academic publishing sector, the emergence of which was recently described very vividly,¹¹ universities published the outputs of academe through their presses. Many continue to do so, and some, of course, are major commercial enterprises in themselves.

The significant differences in emerging scholarly publishing enterprises, when compared to established operations, relate to their mission and business model. These new initiatives take open access as their starting point and their objectives relate to the reach of the outputs that they publish rather than the financial returns that these outputs generate. Instead of generating subscriptions and sales to cover their costs, they must either apply charges at the supply side (article processing charges, or APCs) or rely on institutional or other funding sources. A number of models are emerging to address the fact that publishing is not free, even in an environment where it has become very much easier to do it.

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It is in this context that the University of Manchester Library (UML)¹² took the decision in 2014 to consider the potential value to the University of a Library-based publishing service.

The institutional context

Unlike a number of similar initiatives, UML is part of a university that has an established press. Manchester University Press (MUP)¹³ had recently been through a strategic review, and one of the outcomes of that review was recognition that the growth of open access was bringing the objectives of MUP and UML closer together. There were already long-standing strategic and operational connections; the University Librarian was, and continues to be, a member of the MUP Board, and MUP publishes the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*.¹⁴ However, the review recognized the changes taking place in the scholarly landscape and specifically asked that efforts be combined to respond to them.

This exposed one of the challenges, which subsequently emerged as a national theme at the University Press Redux conference in Liverpool in 2016.¹⁵ MUP and UML are financed in quite different ways. The Press is expected to be self-sustaining, and to generate profits for the University through its services, principally book sales. The Library, on the other hand, is a cost centre. The University accepts that it is a necessary overhead which requires investment in order to meet strategic objectives. In the same way as the other professional services

72 operated by a university (IT, estates, research administration, teaching administration and so on), library collections and services are essential components of the student experience and of university research and must be financed accordingly. These contrasting financial models presented immediate challenges for a Library/Press partnership. While UML could take a decision to prioritize such work over other things (noting that that is always easier said than done), the Press could only invest effort in such a project if there was a clear source of revenue.

The James Baldwin Review

An early opportunity to work in partnership came in 2013, when Dr Douglas Field, a lecturer in American Literature, approached us about the creation of a new OA journal title focusing on the work of the writer and social critic James Baldwin. Financial support was available through a partnership with Northwestern University in the USA and after discussion it was agreed that the Library content budget would be used to match Northwestern's contribution. While the Press took on the professional publishing work, the Library also agreed to fund and configure the necessary OA platform, in this case Open Journal Systems (OJS).¹⁶

Library and Press agreed to make this a very visible output of our partnership work, and the journal is now published under a shared imprint, 'Manchester Open Library', and both Library and Press are clearly identified as partners. The *James Baldwin Review*¹⁷ has published two annual issues, and we are pleased with the evidence of its use, both in terms of hard metrics (e.g. numbers of downloads) and qualitative evidence,¹⁸ including a reference in the *New York Review of Books*:

'Baldwin left behind more than enough keepers of his flame. Even so, his revival has been astonishing. He is the subject of conferences, studies, and an academic journal, the *James Baldwin Review*'.¹⁹

This project began to reveal the challenges. Working directly with MUP helped Library staff understand the publishing process more fully, and left us far less likely to underestimate the level of skill and amount of staff time necessary if we were going to undertake any similar work ourselves. It also made us think about the financial commitment. There is little point setting up a scholarly journal if funding is only guaranteed for that year's annual budget cycle. In this case we have had to commit several years ahead, which is acceptable for one title, but would start to be much more difficult at scale. Service sustainability has been a recurring theme in our deliberations.

Student publishing projects

The opportunity to develop a wider publishing service presented itself with the creation of a new research centre at Manchester. The Centre for Higher Education Research, Innovation and Learning (CHERIL)²⁰ is a strategic University initiative to encourage research into pedagogy and educational policy and practice. In 2015 it launched an annual funding round to encourage University staff to bid for grants to support projects which aligned with the Centre's mission. CHERIL forms part of a wider strategic commitment to ensure connectivity between teaching and research, which also includes a number of opportunities to encourage the development of research skills amongst taught students, co-ordinated by an initiative called Learning through Research.²¹

Encouraged by the possibility this project call presented to support further collaboration, a joint bid was submitted to CHERIL, and was successful. In 2016 we ran a project called Student Open Access Research (SOAR) to allow us to explore the appetite for publishing amongst our students. We had also, by this point, made contact with final-year medical students who were setting up a journal and had strong academic support for it. We were able to make use of the same OJS software for this title, and the Press was able to provide publishing support through the additional financial support we had received.

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73 SOAR worked on a number of aspects of the problem: it allowed us to engage with students to understand interest levels and knowledge of academic publishing; it helped us test the practicalities of the OJS platform for novice journal editors; it allowed us to think about the associated pedagogy, i.e. not simply the production of research papers, but the critical reflections on the process that would be evidence of the learning and development resulting from doing such work. As the project progressed, it became clear that one of the most potentially valuable outputs would be a toolkit that supported any students considering research publishing. Such a resource would provide direct benefits in terms of new skills and awareness about academic practice, irrespective of whether the students could invest the time in the daunting task of actually creating and running a journal.

The final report²² acknowledged that while there is much potential in a number of areas, the challenges are significant. It became clear that OJS was not fit for purpose, and more market research was necessary to understand levels of demand before making a commitment to develop a service. However, the creation of a draft toolkit seemed worthy of further work. By this time UML had developed a package of online and face-to-face learning resources called My Learning Essentials,²³ which had received many plaudits and won an award.²⁴ We were beginning to think about a companion My Research Essentials, and the publishing toolkit represented the groundwork for the creation of learning materials which would slot very neatly into this programme. On that basis, a subsequent year of funding was awarded by CHERIL.

Publishing and Research Learning for Students (PuRLS) concentrated on the development of these materials, and we used much of the project grant to provide a Library-based secondment to a member of staff from MUP to work alongside our e-learning and academic skills experts. Further support was provided to the development of the student journal in Manchester Medical School, which was not yet ready to launch. Learning from our experiences with OJS in our previous project, we also invested in usability testing to ensure that the online learning modules we created were intuitive and capable of meeting student needs.

Three online modules were released by the project: 'How to get published in academic journals', 'Editing a journal' and 'Peer review'. We have been pleased with levels of use (400 recorded uses in the first six months) and they sit comfortably alongside other research skills modules (currently 'Introduction to citation analysis' and 'Research Data Management', with further topics in the pipeline) in My Research Essentials.²⁵ This project also saw the *Manchester Medical Journal* come to fruition, with the first issue launched at the end of 2016. The student editors suggest that this will become a platform for the teaching of critical appraisal which 'could be considered as a model for others looking to promote skills in academia amongst students'.²⁶

The project engaged with senior academics at Manchester, and we were interested, and also a little disheartened, to discover a lack of strong support for the concept of student publishing. We heard that doctoral students should be focusing on getting published in the established journals in their field, and that the creation of student journals would represent a distraction, and could become a destination for their work that would not advance their careers. There was also little support for an initiative targeting taught students, beyond considering it as a vehicle for marketing purposes rather than scholarly communications.

Finally, we used this project to engage with our peers, as we were very conscious that other institutions were working in the same space, and we were interested to see how many journals were being launched, given our own caution in relation to demand, commitment required and sustainability, and the low levels of academic interest and support we had encountered. To this end, PuRLS hosted a one-day project in early 2017 which brought

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74 together a number of UK university libraries and presses to share work and lessons learned specifically relating to student publishing. Several interesting learning points emerged from this event.²⁷ In particular, it was clear that institutions were often running these services with limited staffing and budgets, and the relationship between new publishing services and university strategic objectives was not always clear. Where an institution has taken a strategic decision to move into OA publishing, the degree of commitment and investment seems significant, as is the case at University College London.²⁸ Even in this example, they report that time to support student publishing is very limited.²⁹ Our experience at Manchester has been that there is a significant need for publishing expertise and it has not been sufficient simply to provide a hosting platform and publishing tools. Although this type of service exists (at the University of Edinburgh, for example),³⁰ it would not have met the needs either of the *James Baldwin Review* or *Manchester Medical Journal*.

Next steps

UML and MUP chose not to respond to the third call for projects from CHERIL. We concluded that this was as far as we could take this work for now, and both organizations had other commitments from which it was hard to divert resource, even with additional investment. However, PuRLS inspired academic colleagues to develop their own thinking on ways to encourage and manage the dissemination of taught student work and their CHERIL-funded work this year may lead to further opportunities for us. In the meantime, it is gratifying to know that our work has encouraged academics to focus on the issues, and we hope to see senior academic decision makers influenced by this in due course.

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In the meantime, both Library and Press are pursuing their own ambitious plans. UML has concluded a three-year strategic cycle and is actively consulting on a 2018–21 strategic plan. We see opportunities to support our student community both in terms of increasing the skills provision we offer to doctoral students, and in terms of further connecting taught students with research skills. We expect the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to be a strategic driver for change, as the extent to which research informs teaching is addressed in the learning environment component of the TEF.³¹ How we support the University's objectives in relation to the student learning experience will be of high strategic importance, and we will assess the potential of student publishing services in that context.

Conclusions

It is important to set this work within our wider publishing activity, as our project work has made very clear the challenging nature of making a success of student journal publishing, particularly in relation to convincing academic colleagues of its value and ensuring that outputs will be sustained over a number of years. The focus of the Scholarly Communications team in UML is, necessarily, on academic research papers and OA compliance with funder policies, particularly RCUK and HEFCE. MUP continues to invest in infrastructure to support more effective production and publication of both monographs and journal titles. Where there is opportunity we continue to collaborate, with recent work focusing on stimulating the publication of OA monographs by University of Manchester authors, one of which has very recently been published.³² Our experience is, of course, informed by our context. Where no established press exists, the institutional challenges will be different.

'Any decision to invest in a student publishing service must be informed by strategic goals'

Any decision to invest in a student publishing service must be informed by strategic goals if it is to gain institutional support and become a core service rather than a distraction. Without this alignment and support, the risk to sustainability is high. It is a possible cause for concern that some new enterprises may not prove to have the longevity to sustain their titles over the long term. If that is the

75 case, this may damage our efforts to show that there are genuine cost-effective alternatives to the commercial publishing sector that we have come to depend upon.

Academic culture, as has been very recently argued, continues to allow the commercial model to dominate: '... efforts to use the Web to create alternative, non-profit-driven models of academic publishing have been stymied by the inertia of the academic prestige culture'.³³

An important reason for engaging students in research publishing is to encourage them to think about these issues, as some of our undergraduates will become the researchers of tomorrow. Our engagement with new publishing models at Manchester, with both students and researchers, can be placed within our wider remit to provide training and development in research skills and to advocate for open research methods. UML is actively involved in educating undergraduate students to think about the impact of digital on learning and work,³⁴ and we also provide teaching on openness to academic and professional staff through a postgraduate certificate module.³⁵

The overused proverb about it being better to teach someone to fish than to give them a fish reflects the conclusion we have reached over two years of thinking about and experimenting with student publishing. If we create student journals, we must invest very significant amounts of time in work which will impact on only a small number of student authors and editors. If we develop teaching materials we will expose many more students to the issues and raise awareness more widely about not just how to write and publish scholarly papers, but why the landscape is shifting and why it is important to form views about the ethics, economics and policies of scholarly communications. This, we have concluded, is both more in line with University strategy and a better use of scarce resources. We will continue to build publishing services in the Library, but we will not build a 'library press'. Instead we will ensure, as the scholarly information ecosystem continues to shift, that Library and Press work closely and effectively within it.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'Abbreviations and Acronyms' link at the top of the page it directs you to: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>

Competing interests

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