The view from Europe

Creating international change

by David Prosser

Scholarly communication has long been an international endeavour, and the problems facing it are international in scope. No country is immune from the information gap between what researchers need to access and what libraries can purchase (or, increasingly, license). Similarly, any solutions to the problems (in particular the "serials crisis") will need to be international. However, within this international environment there exist many regional variations. This is especially true of Europe.

Europe as a whole rivals the United States in terms of research spending and number of papers published. It is home to many of the largest commercial publishers (Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, etc.) and the two largest university presses (Oxford and Cambridge). One area in which Europe does not rival the United States is in the size of its learned societies (and associated publishing programs). Traditionally, most European societies were national in reach and had few pan-European societies, with the result that the societies and their publishing programmes lack the scale of those in the United States. However, despite generally being smaller (both in terms of number of journals and papers published), there is a strong society publishing scene in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom (with Blackwell as one of the largest publishers of society journals).

As might be imagined, there are wide differences across Europe in the way both research universities and libraries are funded and organized. As a simple example, most libraries in U.K. research universities are centrally funded, while on continental Europe much more library funding comes from individual departments (and many universities continue to have strong departmental libraries).

While the European Union is the major pan-European political entity, it does not have significant spending power in either primary research or library provision. Decisions on these are made at the national level, which makes it difficult to get consensus on scholarly communication issues at a European level. Fortunately, consensus is not always needed to move forward. The following examples may illustrate this.

The U.K. inquiry

The first example is the U.K. House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Inquiry into Scientific Publications.[1]

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The committee is responsible for examining the expenditure and policy of a number of bodies, including the U.K. research funding bodies, and can make recommendations to government regarding these bodies.

The inquiry was set up to look at ". . . access to journals within the scientific community, with particular reference to price and availability" and to ask ". . . what measures are being taken in government, the publishing industry and academic institutions to ensure that researchers, teachers and students have access to the publications they need in order to carry out their work effectively."

The committee has accepted written evidence from a wide range of interested groups and is in the process of accepting oral evidence with a view to reporting at some point over the summer.

SPARC Europe has suggested that the committee make three recommendations to the funding bodies. First, it should be a condition of grant that authors retain copyright in their papers. The transfer of copyright (or granting of exclusive and limiting licences) in research papers from the authors to the publishers gives control of access to the papers to the publishers and limits subsequent use of the papers.

Second, authors should be required to deposit copies of their final, peer-reviewed papers in suitable, fully searchable, freely accessible Internet repositories or archives. Finally, funds should be provided as part of research grants to allow payment of charges for publication in open access journals. There is great international interest in the committee's inquiry and we could well see the report catalysing similar action in other countries (or at least other countries picking-up the recommendations).

The Berlin Declaration

The second example relates to the interest of funding bodies in the issues surrounding scholarly communication. In October of last year the research funding bodies in Germany issued the Berlin Declaration.[2] Realizing that their "mission of disseminating knowledge is only half complete if the information is not made widely and readily available to society," the funding bodies have committed to supporting open access (both through self-archiving and open access journals). The practical lead for this has come from Germany's Max Planck Gesellschaft (the Max Planck Society), which has set up a repository and launched a number of open access journals. The declaration has now been signed by organizations outside of Germany, including funding bodies in France, Austria, Finland, and Greece.

Both the declaration and the commons inquiry have initiated wide debate outside of Germany and the United Kingdom, amplifying their effects and moving us forward more quickly than probably would have been the case if we had had to wait for pan-European agreement.

Contributions of the Wellcome Trust

When discussing the leadership of funding bodies, it is important to note the significant contribution of the Wellcome Trust to the open access debate. The trust spent more than £500 million last year on research (mainly in the biomedical field and mainly in the United Kingdom) to ". . . foster and promote research with the aim of improving human and animal health." Last year the trust issued a position statement strongly in support of open access, stating that it ". . . has a fundamental interest in ensuring that neither the terms struck with researchers, nor the marketing and distribution strategies used by publishers (whether commercial, not-for-profit or academic) adversely affect the availability and accessibility . . ." of papers reporting research funded by the trust. Specifically, the trust agreed to allow those funded by the trust to use grant monies to pay for publication charges in open access journals.[3]

Growing support for open access strategies

These high-level initiatives are providing strong support for the two parallel and complementary strategies for achieving open access outlined in the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) of February 2002.[4] BOAI succinctly formalized the twin approaches of author self-archiving in repositories and open-access journals that would place no subscription barriers between readers and the papers they were interested in. By pursuing these two strategies we can move

towards a fairer, more equitable, and more efficient communications system. Action has been taken in Europe to follow both of these routes.

One of the first software packages that enabled an institution to set up a repository to accept authors' papers (among other scholarly material) was eprints.org (now renamed GNU EPrints) from Southampton in the United Kingdom. This open source software has now been used to set up more than 120 archives worldwide. Other software packages developed include CDSware at CERN and ARNO in the Netherlands.[5]

A number of large-scale projects exist within some European countries to encourage the development and use of institutional repositories. For example, the DARE project in The Netherlands aims to provide infrastructure and support for institutional repositories and has, impressively, ensured that all Dutch universities have working repositories. This is an example of where a relatively small size makes it easier for a country to implement national solutions. The SHERPA project is offering similar support to 20 of the most research-intensive universities in the United Kingdom.[6]

The Directory of Open Access Journals

Turning to open access journals, May 2003 saw the launch of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) from Lund University in Sweden.[7] This directory, which lists fully peer-reviewed open access journals, has performed an extremely valuable service in showing that it is possible to have high-quality research published as open access. When first launched, DOAJ covered 375 titles, a figure that has quickly risen to more than 775 journals in a wide range of subject areas (in both the science and humanities and social sciences). One feature of DOAJ is that records for each journal listed can be easily downloaded by librarians and entered into their catalogs, thereby allowing readers to learn about the journals.

We are continuing to see both the launch of new journals that are "born" open access and existing subscription-based journals investigating how they may move to open access. In the first category, BioMedCentral continues to lead the way in terms of size, with more than 5,000 open access papers published in more than 100 journals.[8] The second category sees a growing number of publishers (especially society publishers) attempting to make the transition.

One model, promoted by SPARC Europe, is to offer authors a choice as to whether they are willing and able to pay a publication charge.[9] If they are (and, of course, the paper is judged acceptable for publication following peer-review), the paper is made open access on publication. If they are unwilling or unable to pay, the paper is only made available to subscribers. Over time, the proportion of authors willing to pay should increase, and the publisher can begin to reduce the subscription price. Eventually, the entire journal will become open access.

While not eliminating financial risk for the journal owner, this model should reduce the risk by providing a smooth transition period as the decline in subscription revenue is matched to the increase in publication revenue. In the United Kingdom, we have already seen Oxford University Press, the Company of Biologists, and the Society of Experimental Biology begin to experiment with this model.[10]

Any attempt to fundamentally change a well-embedded system with such large degrees of inertia as those of scholarly communication will be difficult. These difficulties are compounded by the worldwide, international nature of the problem, which makes consensus and coordination difficult. However we are seeing growing acceptance of open access by researchers as they deposit their work in repositories, publish in open access journals, and read their colleagues' work in these journals.

Librarians are seeing the benefits of open access, and they are increasingly taking on the role of host for their institutions' repositories. Funding bodies and politicians are waking up to the inefficiencies of the old subscription-based system and are looking critically at new models. This combination of high-level and grassroots desire for change will enable us to overcome the inertia in the system and the difficulties of working in a diverse and multicultured environment.

SPARC Europe is proud to be able to play its part in encouraging and supporting change within Europe and to follow the successful example of SPARC in North America. Al-

though less than two years old, SPARC Europe already has more than 80 members in 14 European countries.[11] By coming together, members can amplify their voices and help to create change.[12]

Notes

1. www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/science_and_technology_committee/scitech111203a.cfm. Transcripts of the oral evidence can be found at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmsctech.htm.

2. www.zim.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/berlindeclaration.html.

3. www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/1/awtvispolpub.html.

4. www.soros.org/openaccess.

5. Details of the various Institutional Repository software can be found at GNU Eprints: software.eprints.org/, CDSWare: cdsware.cern.ch/, Arno: www.uba.uva.nl/arno.

6. DARE: www.surf.nl/en/themas/index2.php?oid=7, SHERPA: www.sherpa.ac.uk/.

7. www.doaj.org.

8. www.biomedcentral.com.

9. David C. Prosser, "From Here to There: A Proposed Mechanism for Transforming Journals from Closed to Open Access," *Learned Publishing,* vol. 16 (2003), pp. 163–66. (An earlier version is available at www.arl.org/sparc/core/index.asp?page=g29).

10. Oxford University Press: www3.oup.co.uk/nar/special/14/default.html, Company of Biologists: www.biologists.com/openaccess.html, Society of Experimental Biology *(Journal of Experimental Botany)*: www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=news_openaccess_0304.

11. www.sparceurope.org/, www.arl.org/sparc.

12. www.arl.org/create/. ■

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Course Options areas of the Control Panel, but not to the Assessment section of the Control Panel or to the Manage Groups functions in the User Management section. Therefore, a user with the Course Builder role would not have access to the Online Gradebook. If a course is Unavailable to students, the Course Builder may still access the course Web site.

5. Renee Vaillancourt McGrath, "Meet New People and Make Friends," *Public Libraries* 42, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 210. See also, John Agada,"Profiling Librarians with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator," *Education for Information* 16, no. 1 (March 1998): 57–58. ■