Case history: University of Southampton, e-Prints Soton

Wendy White, OR2008 Open Repositories Conference 1-4 April 2008

Organisational context

The University of Southampton is one of the top 10 research institutions in the UK and gave early support to widening access to research and scholarship. The University has over 20,000 students and over 5000 staff. The repository supports the full range of disciplines at the university covering the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Science, the Faculty of Engineering, Science and Mathematics and the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences. The repository is overseen by a steering group with representatives from the Library, Information Systems and Services and the School of Electronics and Computer Science.

Repository's mission

The aim of the University of Southampton Research Repository (e-Prints Soton) is to provide a permanent record of the research output of the University and maximise the visibility, usage and impact of this research through global access. Where possible the repository will include an author deposited copy of the research paper/work or a deposit made by an authorised second party.

Building a business case

The repository started in 2003 as a JISC funded project to provide proof of concept, refine user requirements, develop advocacy with the research community and build a critical mass of content. This was used to make a business case to the University for an additional 2 years of funding to fully embed the repository as a University wide service. Funded was provided for this period to promote open access deposit and provide a research management tool for the Research Assessment Exercise.

Overview of current contents

The repository has over 3000 items available on open access and over 1000 items currently embargoed or on restricted access. 42% of the open items are reports and working papers, 21% are journal articles, 21% are conference items, 7% are book chapters, 7% are higher theses and 2% are exhibitions or artefacts.

Overview of current deposit activity

The University has over 20 academic schools, the majority of which support self-deposit by researchers. Some schools make use of administrators to assist deposit and some that had long standing databases export to the repository. A number of Schools have phased out their databases and moved to e-Prints over the last couple of years. There are full deposits across all areas of research activity, but there are particularly strong collections in Oceanography and Engineering. Deposit is backed by an institutional mandate for journal and conference items and strong encouragement for all other research outputs.
Developmental phases

This route map shows the stages of development from 2003-2008.

http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/12662/

Institutional embedding

The approach has been to embed the repository into the technical, policy and budgetary infrastructure of the institution. Engagement with researchers is incentive based as we promote and develop benefits.

Faculty engagement

We are trying to move from an advocacy to partnership model and are developing different policy initiatives through engagement with the academic community at university committees and individual research groups. Desk-side support is available for new and existing staff as required.

Policy formulation

The development of policy is an iterative process based on user feedback and other policy developments internationally. Repository policy is agreed at the e-Prints Steering group and the group drafts University policy as required. The steering group has strong links with Research and Innovation Services in terms to co-ordinating policy and strategy e.g. user/deposit licence agreements, links with the Research Councils' requirements and the University’s relationship with commercial sponsors of research.

Hosting and support

The server is hosted by Information Systems and Services and there is 1FTE software developer support. There is a core editorial team, based in the Library, to ensure quality assurance of metadata and to help provide copyright checks, 1.6 FTE. Other roles are absorbed into portfolio posts e.g. the institutional repository manager and additional editorial support. The academic liaison librarians also provide support through their roles. The Librarian chairs the e-Prints Steering Group.

Service sustainability

A key strand of sustainability is the development of added value services e.g. a service which lists publications and provides full text/output items to researchers’ home pages. It has also been important to embed staffing into regular budgets and spread the risk with a balance between a core team developing specialist skills and roles absorbed into portfolio posts.
Measuring and demonstrating success

It is hard to measure the impact of opening access to research. Citations are part of the picture particularly with the new Research Excellence Framework. Download figures only tell you how many people have downloaded, we have little evidence of its use. This is an area where we need more qualitative work.

Key challenges faced

- As researchers have so much pressure on their time maintaining the deposit momentum is always a challenge.
- Delivering the RAE has been the biggest challenge of the last 18 months.

Major achievements

- Integrating the repository to LDAP, the Content Management System and the Institutional Research Management System for human resources and financial data
- Storing and managing all the metadata, links and texts required for the Research Assessment Exercise to timescale. Staff supporting the repository received the Vice-Chancellor's annual award

Unresolved issues

- Effective preservation tools and policies
- Interoperability, how can the user can draw information together effectively from different repositories and how can repositories can exchange information effectively
- Further development of copyright and IPR legislation in the electronic environment