

Briefing Paper on National Digital Library Policies for UK Universities

By Malcolm Read

As the Executive Secretary of the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)¹ my expertise is from the government funding perspective. As such we see digital libraries as an important component of the wider ICT infrastructure needs of education and research:

- National research and education networks
- National online content resources
- Resource discovery tools
- Access management systems (authentication, authorisation etc)
- Research infrastructure (including e-science/ Grid)
- Learning management systems (or virtual learning environments)

To support and centrally (nationally) manage such an infrastructure for universities, colleges and research institutes requires clear policies at the institutional, national and international level. Policies of relevance to digital libraries include:

- Agreed technical standards e.g. for access and metadata
- IPR and digital rights management (DRM)
- Open access and open standards
- Content acquisition and use
- Subscription and charging- for economic sustainability (long term business models)
- Institutional repositories
- Curation and preservation

Digital libraries are typically national in scale and can, therefore, provide expertise and leadership to research, education and cultural heritage communities through identifying and specifying national policy guidance. It is this policy leadership role the JISC, through its expert committees, provides in the UK. By providing such advice it is possible to increase the integration of online resources across the country (e.g. between libraries, museums, universities), across the different education sectors, and across different media (e.g. text, sound, still and moving images).

What follows is a brief summary of the policy issues we have attempted to address in the UK; but many of these issues are international in scope and context, and indeed can only be sensibly tackled in collaboration with other countries. References are given to relevant UK work to supplement the contributions from other participants.

Common Technical Standards

Although JISC's work is focussed on the higher education sector this is shared, and often done collaboratively, with the other public sector organisations such as the British

¹ For more information see www.jisc.ac.uk

Library, Museums Libraries and Archive Council, National Archives, National Health Service, schools etc. These bodies meet regularly to define a Common Information Environment² to enable member organisations to describe and manage their publicly available on-line resources to common standards to facilitate the sharing of resources. This work is being progressed on a broader scale to define a national framework for digital libraries. An ambitious international collaboration is underway to define an e-framework that identifies all the activities within a university that need to be linked together to exploit the potential for on-line information across digital libraries, research outputs and data, e-learning and management information systems.³

IPR and Digital Rights Management

These issues are important as universities are both users and producers of online resources and wish to protect their rights but maximise availability to researchers, lecturers and students. These issues have become particularly important in the context of “libraries” of learning objects⁴. Advice to universities on ownership of IPR has been provided by the funding councils⁵ and a useful report was commissioned from a consultancy called Intrallect on digital rights management⁶.

Open Access and Open Standards

All digital library, increasingly referred to as digital repositories, programmes in the UK must conform to open standards. Our work in this area is obviously done internationally and is led by two organisations: UKOLN⁷ and CETIS⁸. The former concentrates primarily on library standards and the latter on e-learning standards, but these activities are increasingly being integrated.

The open access debate on sharing scholarly communications is wide ranging and passionate. Other participants are well qualified to provide briefing in this area. There was a useful international colloquium hosted in London last year that produced a commonly agreed position statement⁹.

Open access is less controversial (so far), in respect of sharing learning objects where MIT took the lead some years ago with their Open Courseware Initiative. Similar initiatives are being taken by some UK universities. These resources need to be linked with more conventional digital libraries.

² See www.common-info.org.uk. Other agreed standards and guidance related to the web can be found at www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=topic_standards

³ www.e-framework.org with further information at www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=e_framework_news_120705

⁴ One such learning object repository is JORUM. See www.jorum.ac.uk

⁵ www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2003/03_08.htm

⁶ www.intrallect.com/drm-study/DRMFinalReport2.pdf

⁷ www.ukoln.ac.uk

⁸ www.cetis.ac.uk

⁹ www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=event_international_0605

Content Acquisition, Use and Business Models

Many on-line resources (e.g. journals, research databases) are procured nationally¹⁰ for use by all UK universities and colleges either for free or, via subscription, on a cost recovery basis¹¹. Wherever possible this is done through a model license with the content owner against an agreed usage policy¹².

In order to ensure these procurements are handled cost effectively and against a long term sustainable business model we are creating a not for profit company¹³.

Institutional Repositories

Many universities and learned societies are creating their own digital repositories of scholarly resources and many universities are building their own institutional repositories. It is important that these repositories are integrated with national repositories and with similar activity in other countries. In this way an international “content layer” of scholarly and academic resources can be built up. There is a new development programme in the UK aimed at universities and colleges¹⁴ and a recent international conference in Amsterdam jointly funded by JISC, SURF (a similar funding agency in the Netherlands) and CNI¹⁵.

Digital Curation and Preservation

Paradoxically as more information is born digital less information is managed and preserved for future generations. To help address this problem many organisations interested in digital library resources founded the Digital Preservation Coalition¹⁶ to share expertise and foster informed debate and strategy.

A Digital Curation Centre¹⁷ has been funded to support UK universities and colleges to manage and preserve their research outputs in digital form.

¹⁰ www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=coll

¹¹ www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=collections_faqs

¹² www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=coll_guide_jiscmodel

¹³ www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/board/2005/100

¹⁴ www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_digital_repositories

¹⁵ www.surf.nl/en/bijeenkomsten/index1.php with a useful update of activity in different countries at www.surf.nl/en/publicaties/index_lijst.php?pfo=23. For more information on SURF see www.surf.nl/home/ and for CNI see www.cni.org

¹⁶ www.dpconline.org

¹⁷ www.dcc.ac.uk