

Malcolm Read



Joint Information Systems Committee, UK

M.Read@jisc.ac.uk

Dr Malcolm Read graduated in 1973 with a degree in Environmental Science from the University of East Anglia and went on to do a PhD at the University of Manchester on the hydrometeorology of a glacial catchment. He then worked in the Overseas Development Administration before moving to the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) in 1979. He ran the computer department at the Institute of Hydrology before moving into administrative computing to head the Joint Administrative Computing Service of NERC and the, then, Science and Engineering Research Council in 1988.

Since July 1993 Dr Read has worked for the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils as the Executive Secretary to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). Apart from his overall responsibility for the Executive he has been particularly involved in ICT policy and strategy development in post 16 education and research. He is also heavily involved in international ICT infrastructure activities particularly in Europe and the United States.

GRL2020 Position Paper

A significant new opportunity for libraries and librarians in higher education is emerging from the growth of institutional, shared and subject repositories.

Initially these were seen as a place to store research outputs, primarily papers for academic journals, as part of the trend towards Open Access. However more ambitious visions are now being expressed in terms of repositories to hold and serve a far greater range of information resources. In particular the preservation and long term curation of research data is a growing priority, and repositories can also be a natural platform for educational resources.

Many research disciplines have long seen the necessity for managing and preserving research data, e.g. social science longitudinal data sets, such as census data, and scientific data that is expensive to collect and cannot be replicated such as climate data. Much research data is however discarded at the end of a project. In many cases, perhaps the majority, such data would have little or no value for future researchers, but in many cases a valuable resource is being lost. A new piece of research will always start with a literature review but a “data review” is seldom possible. The data and its analysis is seldom made available to other researchers in the field (although there is a growing recognition of the need to link publications with data).

Few universities have sufficient staff with appropriate information management expertise, or the right structures, to fully develop and exploit their repositories. They will need to identify and acquire staff with appropriate skill sets and will naturally look to their existing personnel first. Library services is the obvious resource; but will the libraries and librarians rise to this challenge? Of course many will. There are an impressive number of librarians, at all levels of seniority, who are at the leading edge of the digital library revolution (if it can still be called a revolution). But has

this corpus of enthusiastic experts reached a critical mass sufficient to comfortably manage institutional repositories?

An organisation must address many issues in creating and managing repositories:

- Policy: who owns the data? How do you select which data is worth preserving? For how long? Which resources should be open access? What quality standards are needed and how are they managed?
- Financial: how much will it cost, now and in the future? How can the capital and recurrent costs be met? What are the benefits of repositories and to whom?
- Managerial: should a repository be managed in-house, outsourced, or a shared service with other organisations? What meta-data standards should be used? How will rights clearance and digital rights management be tackled? What availability and quality of service is required? Are the necessary professional skills available to manage the repository?
- Motivation: What should organisations curate research data? How can researchers and teachers be encouraged to deposit resources within the repository? How do such deposits attract recognition and reward?
- Interoperability: how can individual repositories integrate? How can we build a national virtual repository from separate institutional and subject repositories? How can these national repositories link internationally to provide a seamless infrastructure layer of academic and scholarly content (the EC e-Infrastructure roadmap and DRIVER project are clearly helpful)? To what extent should research repositories link up to other educational and cultural repositories and related areas such as health.

It does not follow that a university or research institute would turn to their library service and librarians to tackle these issues: although many will. And it cannot be assumed that the library profession enjoys the same high status in a university that it used to. There are already many databanks of research data funded and managed by the research community quite separately from the library community. University managers might see repositories as essentially about computer provision and part of the IT infrastructure. There is also likely to be a strong requirement for subject specialists rather than general information skills. In practice all these skills are necessary, but not all universities enjoy integrated service provision, and the library profession faces the challenge of responding to these new skills requirements, and of convincing senior management that they are the right people for the job. Certainly in the UK we find research programmes (especially in the Grid or e-Science community), learning technologists, administration departments, and libraries all tackling the issues of data management and curation quite separate from each other. University libraries and librarians should play a pivotal role in the management of repositories. But it cannot be assumed this will happen. Attendees at GRL2020 will, I suspect, agree that repositories are a real opportunity for research librarians. But will all your professional colleagues and institutional management agree? And how can you ensure you take a crucial role in this growing area?