

# Supporting research staff and postgraduates at the University of the West of England, Bristol: the growth of library research support



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## Introduction

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In common with many other universities, the University of the West of England Bristol (UWE Bristol) has developed its library support for research staff and students to respond to the strategic objectives of the institution and the changing research environment, and to push towards open research driven by funding council policies.

Blatchford *et al.* (2016) describe the various approaches that can be taken to support research, from reskilling academic liaison staff to creating dedicated teams. At UWE Bristol a small team has been created to support research staff and students.

## Development of library research support team

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The library research support team has been through various iterations on the way to its current form. For a number of years, support for research formed a minor part of a subject librarian's role. As the open access culture grew, UWE Bristol launched its own research repository in 2010, and at that point had one full-time repository manager who was responsible for promoting and managing the repository, plus one staff member who was involved in policy development and advocacy relating to the research repository. At around this time, the university revised its strategic plan, and 'Research with impact' became a prominent area of strategic activity. In response to this, and as part of a broader service restructure, Library Services introduced a new role – the Research and Knowledge Exchange (R&KE) Librarian (filled as a job share) – and recognised the need to increase support for the research repository through the addition of a part-time repository assistant post. Further library service changes saw research support move away from subject colleagues and merge with the collections team, the rationale being to bring about closer alignment of areas that were managing access to information. As a result, other research support activities and expertise (e.g. finance, copyright) could be shared across this broader team.

The retirement in 2013 of one half of the R&KE Librarian post provided an ideal opportunity to re-assess the research support team. The decision was made not to replace directly, but to introduce a new post, the research and open access librarian. This was partly a response to the growing open access requirements from funders and HEFCE's requirements for the post-2014 REF exercise, which led to an increase in the need for advocacy and engagement work. It also provided more depth to the team.

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## Where are we now?

Research Support at UWE Bristol now consists of a part-time Library Research Manager (formerly the R&KE Librarian), a Research and Open Access Librarian, a Research Support Librarian (Repositories) and a Library Information Administrator (Repositories). The team reports to a member of senior management with responsibility for research support.

## What services do we provide?

The work of the research support team is roughly divided between two core activities:

- managing the institutional research and data repositories and other scholarly communication activities
- liaison, teaching and advocacy

Managing the institutional research repository almost predates the existence of the research support team at UWE Bristol and continues to be one of our main activities. Although we do not offer a fully mediated service, checks are made for copyright adherence, and more recently for HEFCE compliance for appropriate publications. Deposit of research outputs with the research repository is now fairly well established. Prior to the change in funding council policies, two of the most effective drivers for engagement were: making academics aware that the research repository feeds the publications list on their staff profile pages; and offering training that covered both the research repository and the staff profiles. In order to encourage deposits, it has been vital to liaise with the research and business innovation office, as well as with associate deans for research, research centre directors and the lead staff for the REF in individual units of assessment.

Another significant responsibility for the research repository team is the management of doctoral theses. In cooperation with the Graduate School, we have developed a compulsory process whereby candidates upload a 'soft-bound' pre-viva thesis and, eventually, the final version, which is made open access. To facilitate this, we have provided copyright guidance for the use of third-party material, including regular training sessions delivered in collaboration with the Graduate School's research development manager. At UWE, as at many other universities, management of the block grant from Research Councils UK for open access payments (Research Councils UK, 2016) resides with the research support team. As UWE is a teaching-led institution, the administrative burden is relatively light for us; however, we are negotiating with library, faculty and management colleagues regarding how open access will be financially supported beyond the end of the block grant in 2018. Research data management (RDM) was identified as an emerging area of research activity before the establishment of the Research Support team. We were lucky enough to be awarded funding under the JISC Research Data Management Programme (JISC, 2013) to start RDM activities at UWE Bristol. Like many institutions, we are now grappling with the on-going challenges surrounding RDM, including providing appropriate data preservation infrastructure (we have a data repository linked to Arkivum), and encouraging researchers to engage with the processes involved.

The Research and Open Access librarians and the Library Research Manager have primary responsibility for liaison, teaching and advocacy work. Our aim is to deliver the most pertinent messages at the right time and to the right audience. The core work of the research librarian is still liaison, but this needs to be strategic (Parker, 2012): being involved in the right faculty and higher-level university meetings is vital for liaison and advocacy work to be effective. We have representation at key research committees, which allows us to deliver those important strategic messages, to report on progress in terms of policy compliance, and to establish what the research community regards as

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priority work areas. Close working with the university's Research and Business Innovation (RBI) office also offers opportunities for collaborative approaches to specific issues.

As we have a large team of subject librarians, the research support team provides generic rather than subject-focused teaching sessions, and covers themes such as literature searching, research data management, open access, using the research repository to upload theses, and e-theses and copyright. They are delivered two or three times a year, in conjunction with the Graduate School's skills development manager. We also run one-off seminars and workshops such as our recent Open Research Series. Sessions are frequently simultaneously webcast and recorded for future viewing. It is not unheard of for there to be more remote viewers than attendees, which of course brings its own challenges in terms of content development.

Finally, a significant part of the research and open access librarian role is advocacy around open access publishing and funder requirements. This includes keeping the library research pages updated with current information on publication strategies, funder requirements and research data management advice, as well as answering individual enquires. Managing and reporting on the spend from the block grant received from Research Councils UK (RCUK) is an important part of this role. So too are encouraging grant holders to access the block grant, and suggesting alternative publishing options to authors who lack any special funds to cover open access costs. Increasingly, the team are asked for advice about publication options, including how to avoid publishers that have unfriendly policies towards researchers.

## What next?

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As we enter our third year as an established team, we are considering the next steps for our development. Open research is a rapidly changing landscape that requires us to keep up to date and plan accordingly. We are working with Royal Bristol Infirmary on the purchase of a current research information system, which may well have implications for how we use the research repository in future. Coupled with this, we are interested in how we can get a broader range of academics to engage with open access, in particular in the arts and humanities. We continue to focus on liaising with professional services colleagues and academic staff to provide the guidance and development activities that are required to support them throughout the research lifecycle. The end of the RCUK block grant in 2018 and HEFCE's open access requirements for future REF exercises will be a continuing challenge for our researchers, whom we shall try to support in the best way we can. Alongside this, we need to ensure that any developments in research support reflect the overarching library environment at UWE Bristol, which is itself about to embark on a period of change in terms of access to information as the push towards fully digital and increasingly open access to information environment gains momentum. This, along with the continued redevelopment of the physical space to reflect the changing needs of the university population, requires the library service to look at how we support research both financially and practically.

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