

Open Access and the role of the national library

British Library Co-Supervisor: Dr Torsten Reimer (Head of Research Services):

Torsten.Reimer@bl.uk

Summary:

National libraries are tasked with preserving a nation's published output and to provide access to it. As far as contemporary research is concerned, this role is brought into question by the open access (OA) model. What was once a grassroots movement is now championed by governments and research institutions globally. Around a third of scholarly articles are now available openly, and [modelling from the Max Planck Digital Library](#) shows that it may be possible to flip global scholarly journal publishing to OA.

While many questions on the transition remain, national libraries need to consider its implications for their service model, as well as for their very nature. When scholarly content is fully discoverable and accessible outside of libraries, which role, if any, should national libraries play? What are the implications for legal deposit and national approaches to collections in a global OA world?

While there is a growing body of original research on open access, the focus is usually more on publisher business models and the HE sector. The proposed study will broaden the debate by approaching OA from the perspective of national libraries and their strategy and service development. This will enhance our understanding of the changing role of information provision across audiences, and provide national libraries with a framework for tackling the challenges in scholarly communication. The framework should include a typology of current national library involvement in OA and model a set of options of future development. It will derive from detailed analysis of the role of different stakeholders in OA developments, and take into account the needs of the different user communities serviced by national libraries.

The British Library and its users will benefit from this CDP both from using its final outputs as well as from the on-going critical scrutiny of its strategy and service development through the project.

Areas of Study:

Current research on OA focuses on issues such as workflows, policy, cost and publishing (business) models, and mostly takes a scholarly journal perspective, occasionally including monographs. In contrast, the role of national libraries has not been researched. Even basic information such as a comparison of policies or services is lacking.

A CDP investigating OA with a focus on national libraries will therefore broaden our understanding. We envisage working with the HEI partner and the student to develop a framework of policies, services and strategies across national libraries and their relation to government strategies. This would allow us to understand how the global OA is affecting national libraries in their different contexts, addressing policy-relevant research questions such as:

- Is national legal deposit still a suitable framework for access to scholarly content that is freely available online?
- Are there more suitable models to preserve the global scholarly output?
- Could (or should) open access publishing change the role of national libraries in the transmission of new scholarship within and in particular beyond academia?
- If national libraries can only remain relevant in scholarly communication by developing new digital services, what will be the impact on the nature and culture of national libraries, and on the way they and their staff need to work?

- As scholarly infrastructures are increasingly envisaged through international collaboration, how can we re-imagine national libraries in this context?

The study has the potential to further broaden the discussion by investigating the needs and expectations of different user communities (in particular those from outside the HE sector), and whether/how they are changing due to open access. This may widen the study to include heritage and other special collections held by national libraries, and how these relate to open access.

The research will carry out various data gathering and analysis activities, including:

- Textual analysis of policy documentation, using critical analysis methods
- Interviews with BL staff, other national library staff globally, and other stakeholders using thematic analysis methods
- A survey of national libraries and other stakeholders
- Policy mapping and modelling using scenario planning methods
- Interviews and/or surveys of users

This mixed-methods approach will be designed to create a holistic picture of the current international environment, and map out potential areas of development. We are keen to engage with relevant theory (including sociotechnical transition theory, innovation diffusion theory and organisational change theory) and literatures (in the scholarly communication, research policy and library science and other fields).

Benefits and training opportunities for the student:

As the proposed study needs to consider British Library services in the context of a changing global scholarly communications ecosystem, the BL contribution will not just be access to its own collections but to its staff, strategic planning and global network of contacts.

The PhD student will have access to BL strategy development as well as insight into the planning process for relevant corporate programmes and projects. The student will engage with colleagues across the organisation to understand the different user groups served by a national library as well as its diverse collections and legal frameworks. This is particularly important to give the study a broader horizon compared to current work in this field that often focuses on scholarly articles from a university/publisher point of view.

Through the BL's UK network the student would be introduced to some of the key organisations for the global development of open access (e.g. Wellcome Trust, Jisc and other sector bodies). The BL's International Office will facilitate engagement with contacts at national libraries, in particular to the Conference of European National Librarians ([CENL](#)), which is currently hosted by the BL. As the lead in CENL the BL is ideally placed to enable the student to access national libraries across Europe, and our network extends further across the globe. The BL also has strong links to other relevant sector bodies, government and the publishing industry. Library staff can also assist the student with user research.

These contacts will be invaluable for the study and also help the student to grow their professional network. Furthermore, as the BL is actively developing its open access services the student will have the opportunity to study service planning/delivery from the inside of the Library. This will open up job opportunities in a more service-focused role as well as in the HE sector.

In turn, the HEI will contribute an independent scholarly perspective and a theoretical grounding in critical research methods. This will assist the student in taking the study beyond the analysis of operational service planning and into important questions on the future of libraries. A prerequisite for the participating HEI is therefore a supervisor with a track record of critical analysis in scholarly communication and experience of relevant research methods.