The Why and How of JISC Support for Open Access

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What is JISC?

The acronym JISC stands for Joint Information Systems
Committee, and it is funded by and responsible to the UK Higher
Education and Further Education Funding Councils.[1] Although still
a Committee, it is in practice also an organisation, with an
Executive and a budget. The Committee agrees the overall strategy
and much of the implementation of that Strategy is carried out
within six sub-committees and working groups responsible to those
sub-committees. The commitment to support open access – for
example JISC's signature to the Berlin Declaration - is set at main
Committee level, but the implementation of the commitment to
open access falls under the Content Services Sub-Committee and
the Integrated Information Environment Sub-Committee, and in
turn much of the detailed work is carried out within the Journals
Working Group, the Repositories and Preservation Advisory Group,
and the Scholarly Communication Group. Each of these sub-
committees and groups has in membership a mix of academic and
library staff from universities and colleges, together with members
of the JISC Executive and when appropriate some international
members.

What does JISC do?

On the JISC web-site [2] the answer to this question is that "JISC
provides a centralised and co-ordinated direction for the
development of the infrastructure and activities" in respect of "new

environments for learning, teaching and research; access to resources; a world-class network (JANET); guidance on institutional change; advisory and consultancy services; regional support for FE colleges". It will be understood that JISC's role is complementary to and supportive of the role of institutions in determining their information strategies. The commitment to open access is intended to assist universities and colleges as they move into new information environments for learning, teaching and research, using the opportunities provided by the networks to improve access to academic resources. Support for open access has developed as JISC staff have listened to the needs of teachers, researchers and students, monitored national and international developments, and investigated the applicability of new models of information provision to the UK situation.

Why does JISC support open access?

The support for open access has developed out of JISC experience of a variety of models of information provision. The Journals Working Group, for example, has many years' experience of both the benefits and problems of national purchasing models, through the Pilot Site Licence Initiative (PSLI), the National Electronic Site Licence Initiative (NESLI), and currently NESLi2. These programmes have provided good value for money for UK universities and colleges in purchasing large sets of text and data, but much of the content needed by users could not be purchased under a national programme because of the time taken to negotiate a national deal. The open access model provides an opportunity to make available to lecturers, researchers and students all the content they need on open web-sites.

Of particular concern to the JISC Scholarly Communication Group has been the fact that much of the content produced by the UK's own academic community has been locked away behind subscription barriers, and its use by UK lecturers, researchers and students restricted under licensing terms favourable only to publishers and not to authors and users. The open access model respects authors' rights but cuts through the Gordian Knot of restrictions, making UK research outputs available world-wide, including to our own community. Statements such as the Berlin Declaration support open access as a principle, but JISC's support for the principle has developed from practical experience of supporting UK academic staff and students in their need to secure the information resources they need.

How does JISC support open access?

1. Support for open access journals
In its work to improve access for teachers, researchers and students to articles in academic journals the JISC Journals Working

Group is aware that high-quality content is now available in many open access journals, and that some publishers wish to trial an open access business model. In order to encourage these developments the Group proposed a three-year programme of funding for publishers moving from a subscription model to an open access model. [3] Only a small sum (£150K per annum) in relation to the huge size of the UK journals market could be made available for this programme, but JISC's commitment has been important as a sign to publishers that JISC wishes to work with them on open access developments. It is recognised that the biggest risk for publishers lies in the transition period, until authors and funding agencies support open access publication costs through research grants. It is clear from the reports received from publishers during the first two years of this programme that submissions by UK authors to open access journals have increased and that quality of publication has been maintained. These issues and the effect upon the publishers will be considered in an evaluation of the funding programme currently being commissioned.

2. Support for open access repositories

The support for institutional repositories began within JISC before the spotlight was turned upon open access as a principle. The JISC Executive was hearing from universities and colleges that electronic teaching packs were being developed, that some students wished to submit their theses and dissertations electronically, and that some authors were asking for a secure place to deposit electronic copies of their journal articles. Aware of international developments such as the OAI Protocol, the JISC Executive proposed a programme called Focus on Access to Institutional Resources (FAIR). [4] Fourteen projects were funded under the FAIR Programme 2002-05 to explore how staff and students could deposit academic content in a secure institutional repository. Although the initial motivation was to enable sharing of UK-developed resources across the UK, the FAIR projects adopted an open access approach in opening up those resources to users across the world.

The success of the FAIR Programme provided the stimulus for a broader programme of repository support, the new Digital Repositories Programme. [5] The aim of this Programme is "to bring together people and practices from across various domains.... to ensure the maximum degree of coordination in the development of digital repositories". The emphasis upon coordination (while still respecting institutional autonomy) is a strong feature of the new Programme, as is the inclusion of a subject as well as an institutional approach to repository development. Twenty-one new projects have been funded with the £4 million made available for this Programme, and a further substantial sum has been allocated for repository and preservation developments from funds just released. Support is also being given by the Scholarly

Communication Group to the development of a UK PubMed Central, a development led by the Wellcome Trust and other medical research organizations.

3. Support for fact-finding

Everybody working for JISC is conscious that we are exploring new territory in the changes taking place in scholarly communication, and at each stage developments are assessed on a factual basis. Evaluation plays a key role in each programme and project. The JISC Scholarly Communication Group has also commissioned a number of studies to help us learn about changes taking place within various stakeholder groups. The Group has supported Key Perspectives in two surveys of author attitudes to open access, the first survey in collaboration with the Open Society Institute. [6] A recent study by a distinguished publisher, Mary Waltham, has contributed to our understanding of learned society business models, while another report by RightsCom highlighted both the differences and the similarities between researchers from various disciplines in their use of resources. [7] The Scholarly Communication Group is about to commission further work on version identification in repositories, and on the use of research content in e-learning. Such work may be used to inform future policy decisions.

Collaboration the key to success

Throughout its open access work JISC has made collaboration with other stakeholders in the UK and internationally a high priority. Because funding for JISC is top-sliced from funds available for teaching and research, JISC has a particular wish to work with staff and students in UK universities and colleges. Publishers are also recognised as an important stakeholder group and many discussions have taken place with publishers on open access issues. Some of the developments within institutional repositories – such as the procedures for the electronic submission of theses – do not relate to publisher interests, but when they do JISC listens to the publishers' point of view. The close collaboration between related organizations in the UK is illustrated by the open access commitment contained in a statement from four organizations: Research Councils UK, CCRLC, the Research Information Network and JISC.[8]

Equally important to JISC is collaboration with organizations in other countries undertaking similar work. The partnership between JISC and SURF, the Netherlands information organization, has been particularly valuable, for example in studying the copyright aspects to open access. Close contact is also maintained with work on repository development in Australia, through an agreement for regular sharing of information. The Berlin Declaration meetings and the continuing work under the Open Archives Initiative provide fora

where JISC staff can discuss developments with colleagues from a wide circle of countries, and the JISC Executive is keen to contribute its experience and to learn from experience in any organization committed to open access. All of us within JISC who support open access developments as part of our commitment to foster the sharing of high-quality academic content know that collaboration with colleagues who share our vision is the key to success.

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[1] JISC´s annual budget is GB £65 million. In addition to that JISC receives some special grants, for example for repository development
[2] **http://www.jisc.ac.uk**
[3] The press release describing the third year of funding under this programme was issued on 18 October 2005 and is available at **http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=open_access3rd**
[4] **http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_fair**
[5] **http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_digital_repositories**
[6] The two surveys are available at **http://www.keyperspectives.co.uk/openaccessarchive/reports.html**
[7] A press release with links to both reports is available at **http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=schol_comms_reports**
[8] The statement and open access questions and answers are at **http://www.jisc.ac.uk/issue_qaopen.html**

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