

## EDITORIAL

### Going for gold: *Research in Learning Technology* makes the switch to a fully Open Access publishing model

The publication of issue 20(1) of *Research in Learning Technology* (RLT) is a landmark for the Association for Learning Technology (ALT). It is the first issue since the journal made the switch, on 1 January 2012, to Open Access, and the first with our new publisher Co-Action Publishing. Traditionally, research journals have been published under a subscription model, whereby subscribers (individuals or institutional libraries) receive access in return for payment, sometimes as part of their membership of a scholarly society, as has been the case for ALT.

From his investigation using Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, Mabe (2003) found that the growth rate of active peer reviewed scientific and scholarly journals has remained almost constant at 3.46% per annum from 1665 to 2003, resulting in the doubling of the number of active journals every 20 years. This growth in the number of journals, and hence articles, makes it difficult for institutions to subscribe to them all and for researchers to read all relevant articles. Furthermore, the cost to libraries of subscriptions (known in the trade as 'serials') cannot be explained only by the increase in the number of serials. A FRPAA (2011) study showed that whilst between 1986 and 2006, Massachusetts Institute of Technology increased the number of serials to which it subscribed by 25%, expenditure on serials subscriptions increased by 350%, way out of line with increases in prices generally. This is also reflected in other studies (Schlimgen and Kronenfeld 2004). Harnad et al. (2008) have shown that although it was the *journal-affordability problem* that brought to light the *research article-access/impact problem*, these two problems are distinct. Harnad et al. define an article's research impact as 'the degree to which its findings are read, used, applied, built-upon and cited by researchers in their own further research and applications'. Even if subscription journals were made more affordable and hence accessed by more people, this would not fully address the problem of impact.

In addition to subscription publishing, two alternative models of scholarly publishing have been identified: Open Access publishing and Open Access self-archiving (Houghton and Oppenheim 2010). In Open Access publishing, access is free to readers with the costs being borne by authors and their employing/funding organizations, or by another sponsor – such as a scholarly society. This is also known as the 'gold road' (Harnad et al. 2008). Open Access self-archiving is not formally 'publication' but refers to the situation where authors deposit copies of their articles in institutional or subject repositories that can then make the article freely available to anyone with an Internet connection. This is also called the 'green road' (Harnad et al. 2008).

Open Access (publication and self-archiving) is seen as a solution to the *research article-access/impact problem*. There is a growing body of evidence that articles with Open Access have improved citation rates. In a 12 year study, 1999–2003, Harnad et al. (2008) compared the matched citation counts of Open Access versus non-Open Access articles. Across disciplines, they found variable (but all positive)

percentage increases in articles made Open Access compared with articles from the same journal and period. A recent review of studies of the relationship between Open Access and citations showed that 26 studies found evidence of citation advantage whilst 10 found no advantage or were inconclusive (Swan 2010).

Figure 1 shows the increase in the number of repositories and in the records they hold. The significant jump in records in the last two years can probably be explained by the increase in institutional mandates during that period, shown in Figure 2.

Research in Learning Technology began the journey to becoming an Open Access publication in 2007. At that time ALT began work, with the support of Taylor and Francis (the then publisher of the journal), on the ALT Open Access Repository <http://repository.alt.ac.uk/>. The work – completed in 2009 – was a small part of a Cranfield University project under the Repositories Start-up and Enhancement Strand of the JISC Repositories and Preservation Programme (JISC 2006). In the period since the repository went live, and with the agreement of Taylor and Francis, ALT's policy has been to upload back-issues of the journal to the repository 18 months after publication. This half-way house might have sufficed, but with appetite whetted, ALT decided in 2010 to include an explicit reference to Open Access when we undertook market testing on the overall publishing arrangements for the journal. We issued a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) in Autumn 2010 (Schmoller and Ryan 2010). The RFP was open to the possibility of a change to the publishing model for the journal, but realistic about the challenges this would pose to a small scholarly society:

For the last few years ALT has been a supporter of the Open Access movement; and by hosting past issues of the journal in our Open Access Repository has gone some way towards making that support concrete. Alongside this:

- ALT's membership model provides a subscription to the journal as a membership entitlement for organisational, sponsoring and individual members;
- those submitting articles for publication are not normally accustomed to 'author pays' publication models, nor are they typically funded for this either.

For these reasons, a switch to an Open Access publication model for the journal may require a simultaneous change to the membership model, and for this reason, any such switch would be challenging. We are nevertheless very keen to receive proposals and will seriously consider proposals that would enable ALT to make the journal fully Open Access. (Schmoller and Ryan 2010)

ALT received four responses to the RFP. One offered an Open Access model only; one offered both Open Access and conventional publishing as discrete alternatives; two offered approaches that included an Open Access component. Three of the proposals were from big publishers. After detailed evaluation of the proposals, in December 2010 ALT's Trustees decided to make Research in Learning Technology Open Access with effect from 1 January 2012 (Schmoller 2011a, 2011b).

Whilst it is clear that the Internet is disrupting scholarly publishing, the detailed nature of the changes is revealed only gradually, as they take place over an extended period. We can try to anticipate possible changes, yet understanding often comes rather late in the day and achieved through observation of and reflection on innovations in use (Hall 2010, Naughton 2011), this being consistent with an interactive model of innovation in a social learning context (Williams, Stewart, and Slack 2005).

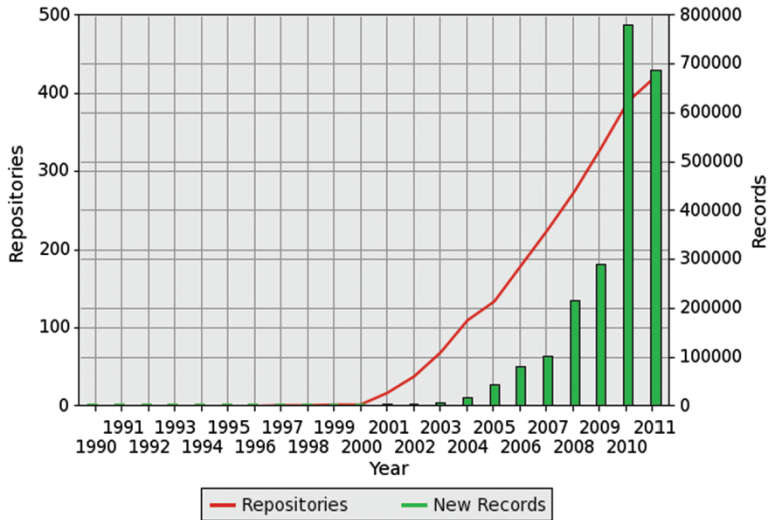


Figure 1. Open Access repositories and records over time, generated at <http://roar.eprints.org>.

By attending to, and even influencing, the emergent practices of our members (as well as authors and other researchers) as ALT introduces innovations, we can continue to exploit the opportunities presented by the openness and web presence of articles in Research in Learning Technology. The read/write web, as represented by blogs and social networking services such as Twitter and Google+, offers the potential to develop conversation and interest around our articles, and thereby promoting their use. For example, ALT has an account (@A\_L\_T) on Twitter that is used to deliver a low-volume news feed to its 2400 followers. The link to the latest issue of Research in Learning Technology is a regular news item. It can be argued that when the journal was closed to subscribers there was a disincentive to ‘tweet’ links to a resource inaccessible to most members of one’s network, a disincentive that will be removed by the availability of an open web link for each article. Time will tell how @A\_L\_T’s followers will ‘retweet’ – or otherwise propagate – links to future issues and articles, thus propagating them across their own networks. There will also be services, as yet unknown, that can affect the impact of the journal on the ALT membership and others

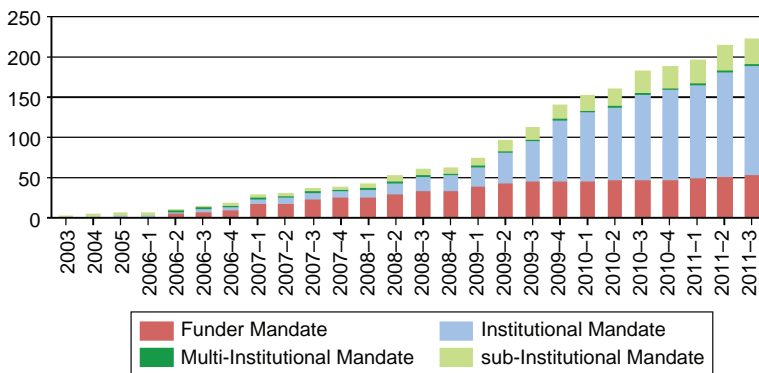


Figure 2. ROARMAP: registry of open access repositories mandatory archiving policies.

interested in learning technology research. As a scholarly society in the area of learning technology, ALT is committed to documented and evaluated processes of innovation, as we learn how best to manage our scholarly publishing in a dynamic environment.

The first Open Access issue features a variety of articles of general and specific interest to those applying and researching in learning technology. Rolfe's (2012) systematic study of staff attitudes to and awareness of Open Educational Resources (OERs) is useful in its findings, and as a model for others to conduct specific local studies. Issues of local culture and (lack of) awareness are important for OERs in particular and Open Access publishing more generally. Waycott et al. (2012) are also concerned with attitudes to openness and with academics' actual experiences in a study that explores the use of and future support for using Web 2.0 in assessment.

Kearney et al.'s (2012) framework on the pedagogy of mobile learning identifies three major constructs: authenticity, collaboration and personalization. It is offered to inform further research, and is also of practical use for those incorporating mobile learning in their pedagogy. The account of the development of the framework includes a variety of examples likely to inspire practitioners in their learning designs.

Cann et al.'s (2012) study of science students' social engagement in a public network gives a fascinating insight into how social networking services can be used to promote and assess learning, with evidence of the student experience complementing the staff view provided by Waycott et al. The examples of use of network visualization tools (enabled by the open nature of the interactions) is valuable not only for academics wishing to understand student networking behaviours but also for ALT as we consider the networking of our members, readers and authors in our newly open environment.

In their study of the creation and use of easy-to-create online resources Crampton et al. (2012) offer a refreshing and pragmatic perspective on student agency and what staff can do to promote this (linking back to theme of awareness raised by Rolfe and Waycott et al.). This includes student training and making them aware of evidence of the relationship between resource use and student grades.

The last two articles in this issue look at subject-specific contexts: Music and the Visual Arts, and the Built Environment. Tam's (2012) survey evaluation of the effectiveness of podcasting with students of the Music and Visual Arts revealed that they were effective, particularly when integrated with other learning activities. The project reported by Tucker and Morris (2012) was concerned with bridging the gap between what flexibility of learning Built Environment students expect and what staff can and will offer. The dimensions of flexibility explored are time, content, entry requirements, instructional approaches and delivery and the findings capture the complexities evident when learning technology is used to support face to face delivery.

The seven articles in this first issue are the first to be published immediately as Open Access, joining our extensive and now open 'back catalogue' of the 19 Volumes published since the inception of the journal in 1993. We hope that all of these articles can contribute to improved research and practice in learning technology by attracting more readers, and by encouraging authors to submit to our journals. This is indeed a happy – and hopefully exciting – new year for Research

in Learning Technology and its community of members, readers, authors, reviewers, editors, members of the Editorial Board, ALT staff and publishers.

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