Developing Open Access support for business PhD researchers at Imperial College London

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The following short text describes how and why the Library business team at Imperial College London developed additional open access (OA) support for business PhD students. It also places the work in a broader UK OA context.

What was the impetus for this work?
Following several enquiries relating to thesis writing and open access (OA) from Business PhD students, discussion with the Doctoral Programme Manager revealed that as well as requiring practical guidance on publishing their theses, most PhD students knew little or nothing about OA and key initiatives such as ORCID. The timing of a workshop offered by the Library OA team and the Graduate School was unsuitable, so after looking at business research student requirements it was decided that the best solution was to develop a tailored session for business doctoral students. This also fits with the general preference for customised solutions for business postgraduates.

Previously on the doctoral programme...
Existing engagement with the doctoral programme included participation in regular student staff committee meetings. In addition end of year review meetings with the programme managers are particularly useful for longer term planning including addressing any broader resourcing requirements.

In terms of teaching, the only existing session was a one hour library induction which included a very short introduction to open access and the Imperial repository. Similar topics are also covered in a library slot within the induction programme for new academic staff which is organised annually by the Business School. Since many in both groups will be from outside the UK, explaining UK-specific open access requirements is an important element, as well as local Imperial services (e.g. the Imperial OA Fund for article processing charges (APCs)).

Finding out more about business research
Periodic meetings with the Business School Research Manager have been invaluable in providing background information about business and related research and how it differs from other subject areas. For example given the nature of business research, there is little tradition of Research Council (RC) funding; as a result there may be less requirement for engagement with multiple funder OA policies. On the other hand the Research Excellence Framework (REF) clearly applies to a large number of business researchers at Imperial; it is also possible that more RC funding may be sought in future.

It is also useful to keep up to date with the developing research environment at Imperial as new research staff influence directions. Many doctoral students will of course work closely with their supervisor and other faculty researchers.

Useful information about student publishing habits was also gathered from the PhD manager. While academics may focus on journal articles (although not excluding reports, books and many other
PhD students favour conference papers which are often co-authored, with fewer journal articles. In the case of journal articles, supervisors tend to advise on which journals to approach. However given the very high number of international students as indicated, many are unfamiliar with the complex UK funding context and resulting compliance requirements.

Business students have been targeted by predatory publishers but have asked the Library business team for advice and fortunately avoided entering into disadvantageous contracts.

Developing the session

Fortuitously a similar session had already been developed earlier by a member of the Library business team. This was used as a basis for the session, with further material added from existing Imperial guidelines e.g. on copyright. However rather than incorporate too much detail in the session, users were signposted to comprehensive Imperial web resources.

The teaching session aimed to place issues surrounding OA in PhD students’ business research context and explain how research students can benefit from OA both as producers and consumers of research information. It included common questions business students have asked about OA including thesis publishing, the Imperial repository, co-authorship and plagiarism. It also covered information about the REF, tools for checking research funder requirements and the Imperial OA Fund.

Much of the session was in a lecture style format with opportunities for class discussion. Experiential learning classroom activities were also used with tutor-led online demonstrations which invited the students to take part and explore OA online resources themselves. These activities included demonstrations of:

- Imperial’s repository Spiral with a focus on altmetrics showing links from papers to tweets, blogs and policy document citations; students could observe that depositing in Spiral leads to wider visibility of their work, including benefits for career progression
- Imperial’s professional webpages and links to Spiral
- ORCID and how the researcher ID works with databases, Spiral and professional webpages
- SHERPA/RoMEO showing how journal titles can be searched to discover publisher OA policies and self-archiving permissions.

Focus on the benefits of OA in business context

To conclude the learning and reflect on some of the issues raised, the students were asked what they considered to be the most important benefit of OA for researchers: the response was increased citations. One of the key resulting observations from the Library business team has been that business PhD students are highly career focused and interested in influencing and contributing to policy documents, as these might in turn be recognised by SMEs and the wider business world. Therefore any opportunities for career enhancement both inside and outside academia are important for students and emphasising research visibility is a good way to engage students in the benefits of OA.

The wider business OA landscape

A quick review of the literature revealed that with several exceptions, there has been little published relating to open access activity in the field of business; in particular there is little activity in the UK business library community. A search of the JiscMail list for the Business Librarians Association (BLA, the main professional group in the UK, which is very active) also revealed no discussion of OA issues.
The work discussed in this article was however presented at a recent BLA workshop, which opened up some dialogue. With other presentations focusing on ‘doing more with less’ the most common reason for lack of involvement is simply lack of staff resource in a period of library budget constraints. Many business librarians cover a growing range of subjects and information literacy responsibilities so if their academic library already has a dedicated Scholarly Communications Management/OA team there may not be such a requirement for involvement.

However a recent study on strategies for OA outreach highlights the importance of liaison or subject librarians in connecting with academic departments and researchers, as well as communicating OA developments (Dawson, 2018). It also acknowledges the inevitable different levels of OA knowledge between scholarly communications and liaison librarians. Some liaison team members will feel less confident dealing with OA issues. However by combining staff strengths and expertise it seems there is considerable scope for cross team working.

In a US survey of business faculty Hahn and Wyatt (2014) found that many researchers were unaware of OA journals and ‘believe their prestige would fall if they published in an open access journal’ (p.93). This view may be shared by researchers in the UK where business schools are primarily concerned with publishing in one of the 50 journals used in the Financial Times research rank (Ormans, 2016). With the OA requirement for the next REF in place, it is unclear how exceptions to this rule will be treated.

**Going forward... sharing experience**

A key result of this work is that instead of just being covered briefly as part of the library PhD induction, a full session on OA and thesis publication is being embedded into the Imperial Business School induction programme.

Discussion has also taken place on the best way of reaching academic researchers in the Business School, to update them on OA, especially given the large number of international faculty as discussed. A joint session with the Scholarly Communications Management Team may be possible.

In addition to presenting the OA development work at the Business Librarians Association workshop, a short session was also delivered at a Library TeachMeet on research support. It has therefore been useful in raising awareness both in the business and in the wider library and information community. Resulting from Teach Meet discussions a librarian at another university plans to deliver a similar session, also recognising the importance of tailored sessions to appeal to business students. It could also be easily adapted for other subject areas.

**References**


