

CURRENT CIBER RESEARCH

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Open archiving in biomedicine British Library policy briefings

The British Library has created a new digital platform to provide free access to the results of UK biomedical research. The service is closely modeled on the US National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central service with which it shares its basic infrastructure. Scientists are increasingly being required to make the findings of their research openly available to anyone who wants to read it, typically by placing a copy of their manuscript in an 'open archive' or 'subject repository'. This represents a major shift in scholarly communication and CIBER is providing the British Library with a series of background policy papers, covering issues such as researchers' views and attitudes to depositing their work and their search behaviour and preferences as users of this new service. Our research shows that while researchers largely approve of open archiving, their publication and research behaviour remains very conservative.

Google Generation British Library / JISC forecasting study

Children born after 1993 are sometimes called the Google Generation: a cohort born and brought up entirely within the brief span of the world wide web. The library community, like many other service intermediaries, is naturally very concerned to understand how this generation ticks, the big question being how will they interact with library services in the future? Already, many researchers have practically abandoned the physical library, preferring to access services digitally. CIBER is undertaking a forecasting study for the British Library to prepare for 2017, when the first Google generation proper hits a major research library. Early indications are that the Google generation may be an urban myth: task, personality and work role are the really key variables driving research behaviour. The real threat to libraries comes not from the young but with an increasing tendency for all generations to behave as digital information consumers, valuing convenience over authority in their time-impooverished work and home lives.

Ethics and science publishing

Wiley-Blackwell editors survey

Scientific journals provide the key means by which researchers communicate their findings to the outside world. Possibly even more important than its dissemination function, the journals system plays an important regulatory role, assuring the quality of what is publishing and making sure that researchers can claim credit and priority for their best ideas. But the journals system operates in a competitive marketplace and many researchers are under very considerable pressure to write in top journals (publish or perish). With so much on the line, ethical corners are sometimes cut. Researchers fail to acknowledge conflicts of interest: perhaps their research was partly funded by a tobacco company, or even, in the most extreme cases, their results are made up or their papers plagiarised. CIBER is undertaking the first serious global survey of science editors to get a fix on how serious these issues are and what publishers can do to support their editors more effectively. The implications of bad or misleading science being published can impact on all of us.

SuperBook

CIBER / UCL Library Services action research

Most library users in higher education take online journals for granted but electronic books have not yet taken off in anything like the same way. Publishers are clearly worried that e-library books may eat into the profits they make from bread and butter sales of hard copy course texts. Librarians want the best deal that they can get from e-books and are concerned at what they see as restrictive licensing practices by the publishers: silly things like e-books being lent out, one copy at a time, so that the next visitor to the electronic shelf finds that the title is 'out'. And users are confused by a multitude of different hardware and software platforms. In an attempt to bring these various parties together in a spirit of creating some real evidence, not defending entrenched positions, CIBER is monitoring the roll out of 3,000 e-books, provided on a trial basis by Oxford University Press, Wiley and Taylor & Francis, across the UCL community. We have made some surprising findings. Median e-book sessions are less than three minutes and many visitors never return. Is this a sign of a lack of real interest or less than optimal site design? On a more positive note, cataloguing e-books adds spectacularly to their use. Google generation indeed!

Open access publishing

Oxford University Press experiments

In a radical overturn of a centuries old business model for journals, some publishers are charging researchers to have their papers published, rather than charging libraries to take out a subscription (this is sometimes called 'gold' open access publishing). The papers are fully peer-reviewed, copy edited and marketed as normal and are then made available free from digital libraries on the web to anyone who wants to read them. This can be an attractive model for some researchers who want to raise their digital visibility but it is largely unknown territory. CIBER is working with Oxford University Press to try to get a handle on some key questions. Do researchers really have the stomach for publication charges, and if so, at a sustainable level? Does open access really lead to greater use (yes, it should in theory, but where is the evidence?). Will open access finally remove the library from the value chain altogether?

Evaluating science funding

Science Foundation Ireland bibliometric evaluation

Science Foundation Ireland offers a small number of highly prestigious fellowships. These awards are very competitive and are designed to give leading scientists the space within which to develop their ideas. The scheme is also naturally very expensive and like all other public agencies, SFI needs to be sure that it is getting value for money. For this project, CIBER is working with London Economics, a leading consulting firm, the overall aim being to find out what benefits the SFI fellowship scheme brings to the taxpayer and the wider Irish economy. CIBER's specific brief is to benchmark the performance of SFI fellows in computing and the biosciences against their international peers using citation analysis and other bibliometric techniques.