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People Profile: Peter Burnhill

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Tracking E-journal Preservation
from page 32

A workflow is being devised for e-journals that come to notice as not having been assigned an ISSN, and to cater for use of the print ISSN using the new linking identifier, the ISSN-L. Our initial intention was to follow ISSN rules and only include as e-journals those serials that were issued in digital format (i.e. "born" digital), and not "digitised journals" which were originally issued in print format, although this is now being actively reviewed for the purpose of this project.

Title-level metadata on serials is essential but it is the article that is the information object of desire. Libraries will want to know the extent of preserved content for a given title, in order therefore to know which articles are preserved. This is more complex and, as such, has been deferred to the second phase of the PEPRS project. Provisional thinking is to create four date fields for each e-journal: earliest and latest known date of issue in digital format; earliest and latest known date of issue archived.

(2) Metadata on preservation agencies and archiving action on each e-journal

Another key question is which archiving agencies to include in PEPRS project activity and over the longer term in the registry. The term “archiving” signals a potential widening of scope beyond that of digital preservation alone, to include “access continuity”: continuity of access to back content. This is triggered by a more recent UK report commissioned by JISC in which Morrow et al (2008) reviewed the policies and practices of six digital preservation agencies. Not surprisingly, the JISC-funded Scoping Report for this registry service touched on the matter of sustainability: “The archives themselves have to be sustainable over the long-term and to be of any use whatever, the registry must be equally long-lived.” Discussion of this recommendation may seem premature, but the PEPRS project will be reviewed in 2009/2010 to assess whether the results of the project activity thus far and its business plan would justify the transition into service.

That might seem an appropriate open issue on which to end but perhaps this conclusion from the Scoping Report is more upbeat: “It seems to us that in order to gain the co-operation of the archiving organisations based around the world, which would be vital to its utility, the registry would have to be conceived as something which would serve the whole international scholarly community.” The Report continues that the registry should be managed and governed “in such a way as to secure and maintain trust of both the library community and publishers.”

Request for Comment

PEPRS is a UK-funded project being carried out by a national academic data centre in partnership with an international standards body. In light of its potential to be international in scope and operation, and that any resultant registry service needs to exist over the long run and to be of benefit across many sectors of the scholarly community, comments on issues raised, including governance and sustainability, are gratefully requested. 

people profile

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BORN & LIVED: United Kingdom.
EARLY LIFE: Economics/statistician, research into schooling, university lecturer.
PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Edinburgh University Data Library (1984), EDINA (1995/96); Director & Methodologist.
HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I think we will all look back in five years time and accept that what seemed alternative and informal as means of scholarly communication has become recognised as mainstream record. That’s the way with science fiction.

Peter Burnhill

ENDNOTES

1 One way to assess the extent of preservation is to create four date fields for each e-journal: earliest and latest known date of issue in digital format; earliest and latest known date of issue archived.

2 The term “archiving” signals a potential widening of scope beyond that of digital preservation alone, to include “access continuity”: continuity of access to back content. This is triggered by a more recent UK report commissioned by JISC in which Morrow et al (2008) reviewed the policies and practices of six digital preservation agencies.

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