

The great information liberation

– because everyone wants information to be free

My enduring memory of cell biology lectures in my final year at university are of the lecturer bemoaning the fact that although he had found lots of *really* good articles that would help us understand the last incomprehensible lecture, the university could not afford them. Research capability and the student experience are being damaged by journal subscription cuts as libraries struggle to manage overstretched budgets in the face of the relentless rise of journal prices. Those who distribute published research findings and debates now dictate policy to those who actually do the research and debating. The long tail is indeed wagging the university dog. The situation is clearly unsustainable. Librarians need to find new ways to help their institutions solve this problem.

Based on the idea that just because you cannot afford something does not mean that you should not have it, supporters of the open access movement have long hoped that research institutions would begin seriously to archive copies of articles they publish in searchable repositories. If everything that is published were archived using easily preserved formats and a common metadata standard, these archives would allow anyone to search for and access peer-reviewed article content in the open archives, whether or not they could afford the subscription to the journal in which the article appeared.

After years of fierce debate and tireless advocacy by academics and librarians on both sides of the 'Pond', the battle for stakeholders' hearts and minds has finally been won in America. At MIT, the library have taken over the University publishing business, both MIT and Oregon State University (OSU) have made their researchers give copies of their research publications to their libraries to archive and Boston University has also made self-archiving of all its research publications compulsory. The future of scholarly publishing would seem to be ours for the taking.

As the University of Portsmouth Library prepares to migrate to the latest version of the *ePrints* software that powers our open access institutional repository, through which we make both research and many of our student dissertations freely accessible on the Web, I am pleased by the thought that almost everything recently published will soon be available for free. The days of people bemoaning the cost and difficulty of obtaining recent research will soon, happily, be a thing of the past.

408 words

Soundbite: *"Just because you cannot afford something does not mean that you should not have it"*