Publishing and Learning for Students (PuRLS): Project Executive summary

1)   Background and context

The academic library and scholarly communications

Providing support to our researchers to help them to disseminate their research has become as important a function of an academic Library as building and providing the collections that help them to do their research in the first place (for more on this, see Lorcan Dempsey on the 'Inside Out Library'[1]). The University of Manchester Library has built a very successful Open Access publishing service which provides the mechanics of enabling Open Access, training to raise awareness and understanding, and associated tools and services (e.g. ORCID support and online thesis submission). In this context, libraries globally are now considering their roles as publishers, with many establishing new models for university presses, with the primary mission to disseminate research, usually in open access form, rather than to deliver a profit (see, for example, UCL Press and White Rose Press, and a growing consortium of Library-run presses in the USA[2]).

The academic library as both research and learning partner

The Library remit is to respond to the University's strategic goals relating both to Research and Teaching & Learning, and so it is well-positioned to help deliver Manchester's Learning through Research initiative, and to use our research services to help taught students learn more about doing research. We address this through the PURLS objective to provide students with training in how to publish.

Manchester University Press

The University Press were partners in the Library's previous CHERIL project (SOAR), and the importance of developing their relationship with the Library was one of the recommendations of their strategic review in 2013. This was an opportunity for the Press to look at how they might add more value to the University, particularly its student community, though as we have found, this was not without serious challenges.

Student Open Access Research (SOAR)

The Library's 2015 CHERIL project project began on the basis that there was real potential in a student journal publishing service, but our research demonstrated that it wasn't

[1] Dempsey, Lorcan (2014) *The network reshapes the library*, Chicago: ALA Editions, p132. Available as an open access PDF at http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/books/dempsey-network-reshapes-library.pdf

[2] https://www.librarypublishing.org/

sufficiently clear that it was a sensible investment, and there were real questions about long-term sustainability. These findings steered the design of PURLS.

2) PuRLS objectives

Training materials

A major objective for PuRLS was the creation of training materials, on the basis that this was a sustainable way to contribute to student research, and might also help us to identify a market of students who wanted to take publishing further. The Library is already very active in skills provision, and we aimed to build on our successful taught student programme, and ensure we tested it to see how well it worked.

Platform to practice

We were keen also to learn from the SOAR project, which revealed that the most widely adopted open source journal creation software (Open Journal Systems) was too complicated to use without a lot of support. Unfortunately we were not able to source an affordable alternative, but as the project developed, it became apparent that understanding how to go about getting published was important to our students than the nuts and bolts of journal production.

Experience sharing forum

One way we hope we can contribute to University aspirations is by fostering networking and learning across disciplines, so one of our intended outputs was a space in which students who were learning about publishing could share their experiences and reflections. So the intention was to deliver not just training materials but a place to discuss them with others.

Wider dissemination – library/publishing community

Finally, we planned to bring staff from libraries and university presses across the UK together to share experiences, as a number of universities are delivering or exploring student publishing services. A recent conference at the University of Liverpool explored what this meant for established university presses. Our intention was to engage in similar conversations about libraries and the emerging new presses.

3) Deliverables

Training materials online

Our main objective was to create and deliver useful publishing training resources. We've released three online modules: How to get published, Peer Review, and Editing a Journal. We've used the Library's existing skills and brand and placed them into a larger training resource, called My Research Essentials, a companion to our well-established programme for taught students: My Learning Essentials.
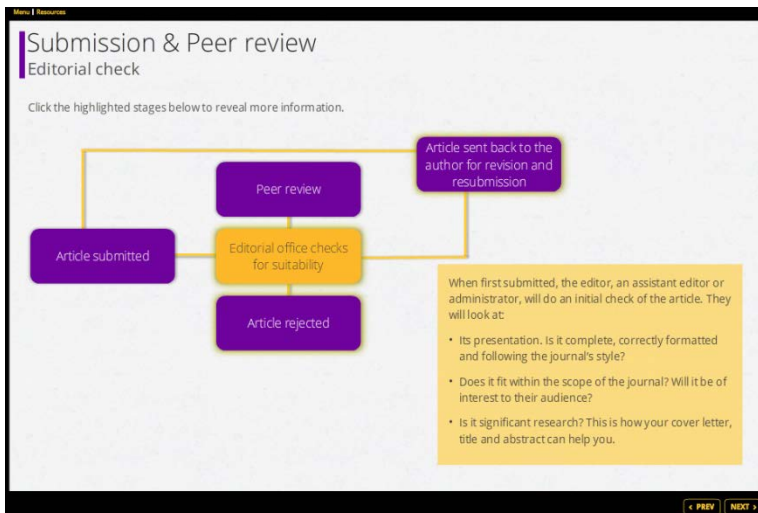
Menu | Resources

Submission & Peer review
Editorial check

Click the highlighted stages below to reveal more information.

Article sent back to the author for revision and resubmission

Peer review

Article submitted

Editorial office checks for suitability

Article rejected

When first submitted, the editor, an assistant editor or administrator, will do an initial check of the article. They will look at:

- Its presentation. Is it complete, correctly formatted and following the journal's style?

- Does it fit within the scope of the journal? Will it be of interest to their audience?

- Is it significant research? This is how your cover letter, title and abstract can help you.

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Image 1: an extract from one of the new training modules

User testing study and report

One of the learning points from our earlier CHERIL project was that usability was very important and difficult to get right, and students struggled with the publishing software we were using. We wanted to ensure our training materials were intuitive and met the need, so we conducted professional usability testing, which revealed improvements that will benefit all of our online training materials. Six research students participated in the testing, which used screen capture and audio and video recording.

Experience-sharing blog

One of our areas of interest since our first CHERIL project related to whether students would be interested in writing not just about their research, but about their experience and learning associated with doing research. It was by no means clear that this would justify the development of a scholarly journal, but instead we have developed a blog platform for students to share their experiences, and will promote and monitor its use.

Support for Manchester Medical Journal

A piece of work which began during our first CHERIL project, and has continued during our second, has been the support of the Library and the Press for the creation of the Manchester Medical Journal, run by medical school undergraduates. It has been a very useful learning experience for all concerned, and the journal launched at the end of 2016. One of our CHERIL deliverables during PuRLS was to add value to this title, and we have done so through software investment and technical and editorial support.

Student publishing conference

Our primary route to disseminating what we've been doing was by organising a small conference event involving other academic libraries and university presses. We organised a roundtable event two years ago involving Edinburgh, Liverpool and UCL, and this was an

opportunity to widen the conversation, with 17 institutions taking part. A blog post on the conference has been published at http://man.ac.uk/0muQPo.

Image 2: Student publishing conference montage

Engagement

We spoke to senior academic colleagues to seek views on student publishing, and responses were broadly positive in terms of training, but less so in terms of actually creating new student journals (PGR or taught). It was interesting to discover that Religions and Theology encourage their students to blog as part of their religious literacy agenda, and our conversation encouraged Dr John Zavos to propose a CHERIL project for 2017, which has now been funded.

4) Budget

KB00372 CHERIL Fund: PuRLS

£	
12,000	Staff Costs (Manchester University Press secondment)
138	Research Libraries UK Conference attendance (to speak about the project)
1,419	Manchester Medical Journal software costs
5,938	E-learning modules usability testing
505	Student publishing event catering
20,000	Total

Table 1: Use of CHERIL funding

5) Impact

The training modules were launched during 2016, with no marketing, but we have already recorded high use (see table 1, below). A second very positive outcome has been that Religions and Theology were persuaded through a project conversation to approach CHERIL to develop their own ideas, and this work will happen in 2017.

MRE module	Module launch date	Times accessed	Number of users
Editing a journal	21/06/16	89	54
Peer review	19/08/16	133	89
How to get published in academic journals	27/09/16	174	122

Table 2: My Research Essentials module usage

The student publishing conference was a useful forum for a national conversation about the issues, and feedback about the event was very positive.

6) Learning points

There are three key learning points which sum up all of our work on student publishing over two CHERIL-funded years:

a) There need to be clear business models and funding streams for student journals, as it is expensive to do it well, and journals must be sustainable beyond initial short-term funding, with clear transition planning to ensure any titles survive the departure after graduation of student editorial teams.

b) Strong academic support and an associated investment in time is vital, and students learning how to do it need a lot of support and guidance, academic and professional.

c) Skills provision is a better use of our resources than the development of student journal titles. Although there is clearly interest in some areas, we also heard quite firmly that the concept of new student journals, for either taught or research students, was not supported, and that it could be a distraction. This is debatable, and we see very different attitudes across different parts of the University, but there is presently insufficient demand and support to justify the development of a centralised journal publishing service.

7) Next steps

The Library is entering a strategic planning phase, and this work will inform how we prioritise support for skills provision for all students, and PGRs in particular in the future. We will engage with the 'Students in Public' project from Religions and Theology and see what results from that, and we will continue to develop the skills resources we have introduced with the University Press.

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