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Salford Open Journals project : the University as publisher

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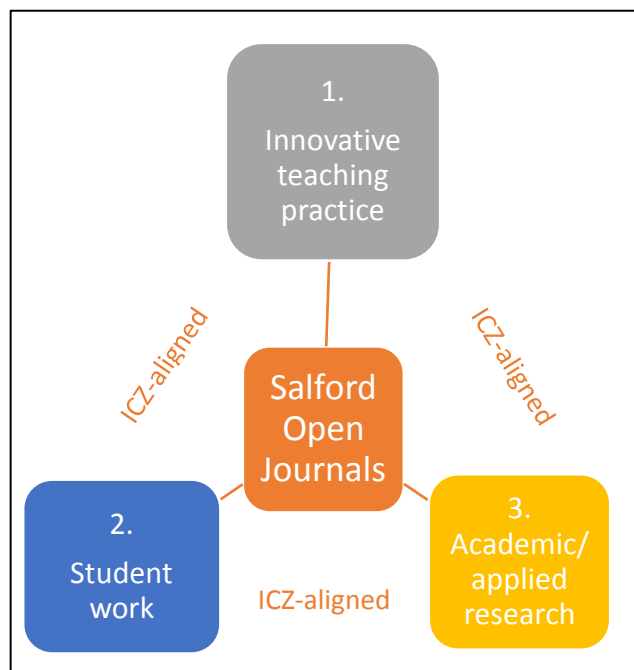
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Salford Open Journals project: the University as publisher

1. Introduction

At the heart of the University's identity are principles of excellence in teaching and learning, student experience and employability, and research, all delivered through our single strategic lens of industry collaboration zones. As an increasing number of competitor UK HEIs launch their own university presses, we have an opportunity to embark upon a unique publishing project which would showcase the fruits of our teaching, learning, research and industry collaboration via a new open journals platform. 'Salford Open Journals' would publicise the contribution our people make, broadening our academic reach, and offering a powerful new channel for our academics and students to communicate knowledge and innovation to industry partners and other interested groups.



The key strength of this development is its potential to strengthen our ICZs, through the journals' content, external audiences, and opportunities for student work-based learning in the publishing industry.

This position paper builds on recent discussions among senior leaders in teaching, learning and research regarding the benefits and challenges of launching an open journals initiative. The paper identifies the potential benefits of this development, while stressing the significant resources involved in such an endeavour and the strategic, financial and staff/student commitment required to succeed.

Following a brief outline of the background to new university presses, the paper sets out an approach that aims to be both valuable to the University's strategic development and achievable in resourcing terms. Informed by the ideas emerging from discussions with senior leaders, as well as benchmarking and research conducted by the Library, it proposes a phased plan over four years, starting with a single pilot journal before expanding to encompass other journal types.

2. Background: The evolving landscape of new university presses

A recent [JISC report](#) shows that disseminating research via in-house publishing is a growing area of interest within UK universities (Adema, J. & Stone, G. 2017). The open access movement and new digital technologies are key drivers and have reduced the cost of production and dissemination. Academic authors are also increasingly reluctant for their intellectual property to be sold back to them by publishing conglomerates (see the [UK-SCL](#) movement). Beyond

long-established presses (Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester et al), new university and academic-led presses are starting to disrupt the terrain using alternative publishing initiatives.

The Library open journals team did some benchmarking research into some existing UK university presses: Cardiff, Huddersfield, UCL, Westminster, UCLAN, Warwick, and White Rose Press (Leeds, Sheffield, York consortium). Those publishing models range from a simple collection of diverse specialist journals in a relatively low-cost EPrints repository (e.g. [Huddersfield](#)); to [Westminster's](#) polished university press managed and hosted via an intermediary, Ubiquity Partner Press; to a fully independent and ambitious independent publishing enterprise at [UCL](#). Many feature journals of pedagogical practice and/or research; most feature some form of open access academic research journal(s); and most include some student work, although undergraduate work is less common (see [Reinvention](#) at Warwick or [Fields](#) at Huddersfield for different models). Each press provides – to varying degrees – some governance and guidance regarding editorial practices.¹

HE libraries can and should influence new academic publishing models (Melling, M. & Weaver, M. 2017), and as new university presses develop they are often located within HE libraries (Adema, J. & Stone, G. 2017). Library colleagues have expertise including digital systems, publisher contract negotiations, discoverability of collections, metadata, reader behaviour, bibliometrics and scholarly communications, including research repositories. Salford's Library is well placed to play a key role in any publishing project, but would need adequately resourcing.

3. Salford Open Journals: mapping the way forward

Phase 1: In the preliminary consultation and preparation phase, establishing academic and leadership support for the enterprise would be essential. Three journal types would be scoped and, if feasible, developed and launched in three further phases beginning with the most straightforward and low-risk. The Library would lead on scoping publishing platforms and help advise on governance models. See summary plan in Appendix i.

Salford is committed to open access publishing, which allows anyone with an internet connection to discover, freely download and reuse our research outputs. Open access ensures the greatest reach and impact for our work; it democratises access to knowledge, opening up academic work to readers, organisations and communities without library subscriptions; it is also a requirement of many research funders including RCUK and HEFCE. For this reason, and in line with many other new university presses, any publishing initiative should be open access.

Phase 2 (pilot): Launch journal of innovative (ICZ-aligned) practice in learning & teaching

In the first year, this title will be the sole publication, allowing us to test the processes involved and develop academic 'buy-in' for driving the next phase – student journals.

Aims/benefits – pedagogical journal:

- A destination for the academic work produced for the PgCAP, and from teaching and learning forums. Submissions could also be invited from external contributors.
- It may be decided that the focus is specifically on 'Industry collaboration in L&T', to demonstrate the strength and impact of Salford's distinctive ICZ-ready curriculum.
- Contributions would explore and share how instructional design principles support research-informed teaching outcomes for their students, and cover intersections between theory and professional practice.
- The journal could be a hybrid, comprising academic research and CPD elements of interest to educational practitioners.

¹ Fuller details arising from this benchmarking activity are available on request and will help to inform phase 1.

- The experience of publishing in such journal will help teaching staff to develop their publication profiles and (in turn) encourage their own students into scholarly communications. This would build co-creative relationships between students, academics, and industrial partners (where teaching is linked with industry).
- There would be a work-based learning opportunity for students to be involved in aspects of the editorial/production process.

Logistical considerations – pedagogical journal:

- In order to set up a pilot quickly and at low cost (c. £500 set-up per title), we would recommend using the EPrints platform which already underpins our institutional repository, USIR. This existing system, hosted externally by EPrints, could be managed by the Library and require minimal support from Digital IT. However, additional staff resource within Library Systems may be necessary, at least temporarily.
- If successful, and especially if the University Press develops further, the journal could migrate to a superior open journals platform in future, e.g. Ubiquity Partner Press.
- The editorial board would be responsible for leadership and production. This would be led either by QEO or academic teaching staff or, ideally, as a partnership between the two. It is recommended that editors also include external L&T professionals.
- Peer review (preferably external) should also be a core part of the journal's processes, managed by the editorial board.
- Work-based learning: Students/interns could be involved in the various aspects of producing and/or editing the journal. Options for this need investigation (assessed project work? extra-curricular internship?). Note: to give students a meaningful 'in-house ICZ' publishing experience, the University would need experienced staff to train and support them, at least initially. This may call for a production editor/manager (e.g. *Reinvention* at Warwick), although this commitment would likely not be feasible in the pilot year.
- Financial: The journal would be openly available at no cost to readers. Article processing charges (APCs) would not be charged, at least for internal contributors. Any production costs would therefore need to be met by the University. IT system costs would be minimal, as noted, but resourcing would need to be found within the Library/QEO/academic schools to allow for the workload involved in managing the platform and the editorial and peer review process.
- It would serve a more effective strategic and reputational purpose if the University committed additional central resource to branding, promotion and quality oversight, and potentially also to certain governance and editorial aspects.

Phase 3: Student journals for ICZ-linked programmes

Student journals will be scoped and planned in phases 1 and 2, to launch in the third year.

Aims/benefits – student journals:

- There are a variety of options for publishing student work. Further consultation with academics and students is required here; in each case, the potential for transferable and research skills development and furthering the ICZ strategy is considerable:
 - Create a range of ICZ-aligned student journal titles potentially connected with specific programmes or schools, carrying articles formed from assessments
 - Develop one single highly selective externally facing journal
 - Facilitate independent student-led journal production
- Writing journal articles provides students with real-world research experience; links classroom theory with industry practices; and provides a stepping stone for future potential researchers.
- Writing in a format designed for their profession would foster research-informed learning and/or industry-led learning, potentially for academic and professional audiences, and enable students to connect their learning outcomes with their chosen profession.
- Being published could enhance students' attractiveness to industry partners/ employers.

- Evidence from student journals will demonstrate how the relationship between our institutional practices and student outcomes are meeting the needs of employers (Melling, M. & Weaver, M. 2017).
- Potential positive impact on NSS and DLHE returns because students would have a meaningful assessment experience to draw on, linked to their chosen profession.
- Future TEF submissions will be able to reflect on and capture how our student journals drive research-informed teaching and support learning. RIT, as noted in a recent HEA report, is experience students gain of research processes and methodologies, helping them learn as researchers (Burgum, S. & Stoakes, G. 2016).
- Students would get opportunities as contributors and in appropriate functional roles, including potential peer review opportunities for PGRs.
- Many HEIs already host student and student-led journals, so this adds to the attractiveness of Salford's offer in terms of student experience opportunities.

Logistical considerations – student journals:

- There are substantial implications for academic workload: editorial workload is likely to be considerable and assessment design changes will also be complex, time consuming and resource intensive.
- New assessments would be required for early-adopter programmes, factoring in journal submission criteria. This may involve substantial training/support for academic staff.
- Student work would be marked as if it were a journal submission at the point of assessment (some programmes already do something similar). Students may then decide to submit work to the journal proper. At this point peer review would apply, ensuring such journals represented Salford and our students at their best.
- Additional skills workshops will be required to help some students develop the writing style and quality required. Even with these measures, it is expected that only a limited proportion of student work would be suitable for publication, so support with handling feedback/resilience will be needed.
- Student journals usually attract a small, mostly internal audience, with little potential for financial return on investment for the set-up and management costs.

Phase 4: Research journals in specialist / inter-disciplinary / applied fields

Publishing research journals poses the greatest challenges. Careful scoping and consultation is required in the earlier phases before deciding to proceed. Given the factors below, the research journals phase should be rolled out last, building on the experiences of the first two phases.

Aims/benefits – research journals:

- Salford establishes its own University Press, hosting a series of academic and/or industry-facing journals.
- Reputational benefit as a publisher of journals in specialist (ideally interdisciplinary) fields where Salford is world-leading, in line with new Research Delivery Plan.
- Research journals with an applied research/ICZ focus would contribute to knowledge-based relationships with industries.
- Establishing ourselves as a publisher would advance our transition to open access and lower the cost of disseminating our research. Running our own open access journals would give us full rights over our intellectual property, and potentially remove the need to pay Article Processing Charges.
- In-house journal(s) could support and incubate early career researchers (e.g. titles such as 'New Directions in...' etc.).
- Further publishing opportunities will open up, notably open monographs and electronic textbooks. These are growth areas of interest to academic and Library colleagues.
- Further opportunities for students to get work experience in functional roles.

Logistical considerations – research journals:

- Academics submit research to a fast-growing multitude of high-profile academic journal titles, based on their professional judgement of relevance and impact. Establishing a journal's reputation from scratch is a lengthy process. Therefore, in the short–medium term, choosing a new Salford journal would sacrifice a high impact factor/citation rate and could have implications for our overall research performance.
- Reputation-building rests on journals being indexed by key databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Directory of Open Access Journals etc.), which takes 2+ years and in turn rests on meeting key criteria, including robust editorial and external peer review processes, compliance with good practice in publication ethics, citation profiles of contributors etc. (NB: Web of Science receives 3,500 applications a year and only approves 10%.)
- Substantial academic labour would be required both from editorial teams and researchers submitting their work. It is not clear if we have academics with time and knowledge to establish and lead such journals, or enough academic buy-in.
- To give strategic direction and consistency across externally facing research titles, it would be beneficial to establish a University Press. We lack the existing titles or infrastructure to launch a fully in-house independent press (e.g. [UCL](#)). It would therefore be worthwhile considering the full-service hosting model offered by [Ubiquity Partner Press](#), although the cost is substantial (£5,250 setup plus £10,000 annually for 3 journals each publishing 5 articles per year). As a less costly alternative (e.g. £3500 annually for 3 journals on an OJS hosted platform), the platform could solely host and distribute open journals, with management and editorial processes devolved to individual journal editorial teams. However, the University would still need to commit some central resource for marketing and quality assurance.²
- A consortium model could share the cost with regional partners (e.g. [White Rose](#)) and build relationships between institutions (e.g. building on the GM Medical School partnership). However this would dilute the reputational benefit and opportunity to communicate Salford's 'brand'. This approach also poses significant logistical and contractual challenges.
- Funding: Note that the majority of university presses surveyed by JISC are either funded by their institution or run on existing resources; only one of those surveyed was self-sustaining. We might consider whether, if there is an ICZ angle to the journals, any industry funding or more innovative alternative business models could be identified.

5. Next steps

Further initial consultation with academic leadership is required to assess the value and implementation of this proposal. Significant academic buy-in and commitment is critical to any publishing model; initial conversations between the Library and academic staff suggests this exists, but further engagement work is required. Depending on the scope of the project proposal, consultation with QEO, Finance, Digital IT, Marketing and External Relations, Equality & Diversity, and ICZ boards, among others, will be necessary. Again, depending on the scale of the proposal, the project could be led from within the Library or may require dedicated resource.

² The Library's Digital Systems team has undertaken initial research into the offer and costing of different hosting platforms which informs this paper and will help to inform phase 1 of the project.

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University of Huddersfield Press (accessed November 2017) <http://unipress.hud.ac.uk/>

White Rose University Press (accessed November 2017) <https://universitypress.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Appendix i - Phased plan for delivery of Salford Open Journals project

PHASE	DURATION	ACTIVITIES	PEOPLE
1 (prep)	6-12 months	<p>Scoping and consultation re feasibility of and model for university press, leading to production of full business case</p> <p>Prepare EPrints platform for pilot and scope other open journals systems</p> <p>Develop a model, editorial team and content for pilot journal: innovative practice in teaching and learning</p>	<p>PVC, Senior leaders, ICZ board, Library, E&D, QEO, Digital IT, Academics, Finance</p> <p>Library Systems, Digital IT</p> <p>QEO, PVC, Lib LRS Students/interns on editorial team</p>
2 (pilot)	1 year	<p>Launch pilot L&T journal; evaluate pilot</p> <p>Scope and design series of journals of student work emerging from ICZ-aligned programmes. Develop editorial boards and source content. Identify audiences and dissemination channels.</p> <p>Assess feasibility of research journals series in specialist areas – interdisciplinary and/or applied research/industry partnerships</p>	<p>Journal editorial team</p> <p>PVC, QEO, Schools (ADAs; programme leaders), Lib LRS, Student editors</p> <p>Dean of Research, Research Centres, ADRIs, RKE, Lib LRS</p>
3	1 year	<p>Launch first student journals</p> <p>If phase 3 demonstrated value: continue scoping research journals, identify first 1-3 titles</p>	<p>Journal editorial teams</p> <p>Dean of Research, Research Centres, ADRIs, RKE, Lib LRS, Research staff</p>
4	1 year +	<p>Launch first research journal(s) if phases 3 and 4 succeed</p>	<p>Editorial boards, RKE, MER, Lib LRS, Lib Collections</p>

Lib LRS = Library Learning & Research Support