

Impact on Future Publication

In June 2010 UCL Library Services conducted a sector-wide survey into thesis deposit and open access in UK universities and HEIs. A rich body of data was provided by respondents describing how they approach the issues surrounding open access deposit of electronic theses. The data was analysed and evidence is presented here of consensus and best practice. A survey summary report and full text responses are available on the project website¹.

Of 144 survey respondents, 72 (50%) reported that they are aware of concerns within their institution that making a thesis available online may have an impact on students' opportunities to publish their work. Students are the most likely to express concerns about publication:

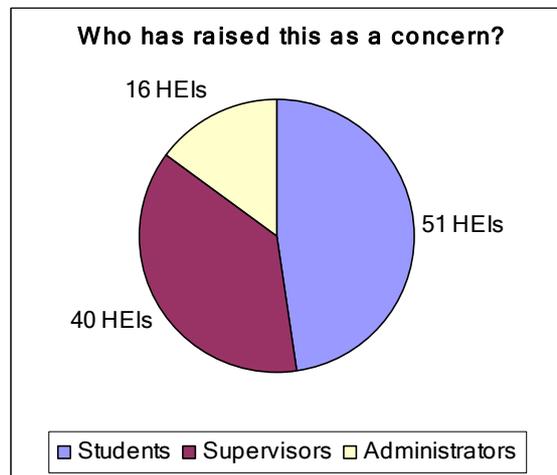


Figure 1: Impact on future publication: Number of HEIs where concern raised

Only a total of 10 HEIs (7% of respondents) report that this is a frequent or top concern:

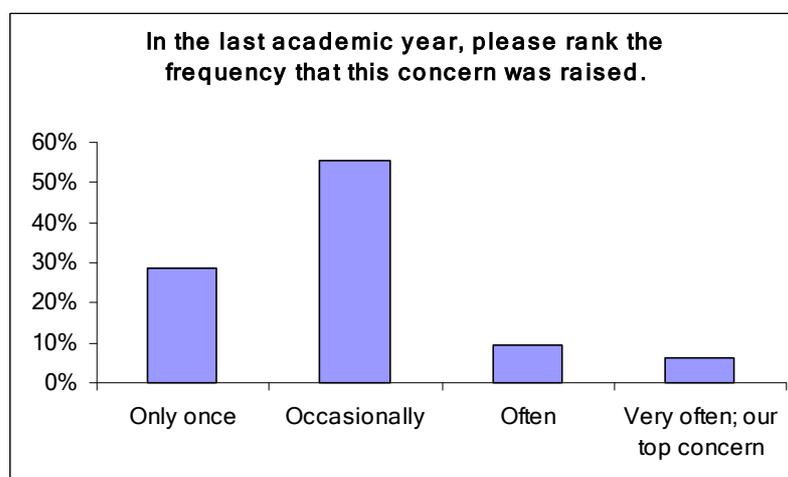


Figure 2: Impact on future publication: Frequency of concern

¹ Project website <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ls/etheses>

Examples of concerns raised

- “All indicated that ‘they had heard’ that publishers may not want to publish their work if their thesis was available online.”
- “We have been asked to remove a thesis which the student hopes to publish as a book.”
- A supervisor is quoted as saying “I want my students to be able to publish in journals and this is prior publication”
- “Certain publishers, particularly monograph publishers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, request exclusive distribution rights and/or no prior release of findings. The monograph is still viewed as an important step for a career researcher in certain disciplines.”
- “Concerns about prejudicing book publication tend to come from arts disciplines ... they're worried the thesis will no longer be of interest to a publisher.”
- “The publisher [Palgrave] on request made it clear that deposit in the IR was not acceptable according to their publishing agreement.”
- “University of Wales Press has been approached about open access publishing and expressed the concern in a hypothetical context.”
- “Our university lawyers have come up with no definite ruling on this.”

Mitigating actions

Respondents were invited to describe in their own words what actions they take to address these concerns. Only one takes no action. Notable responses are discussed below.

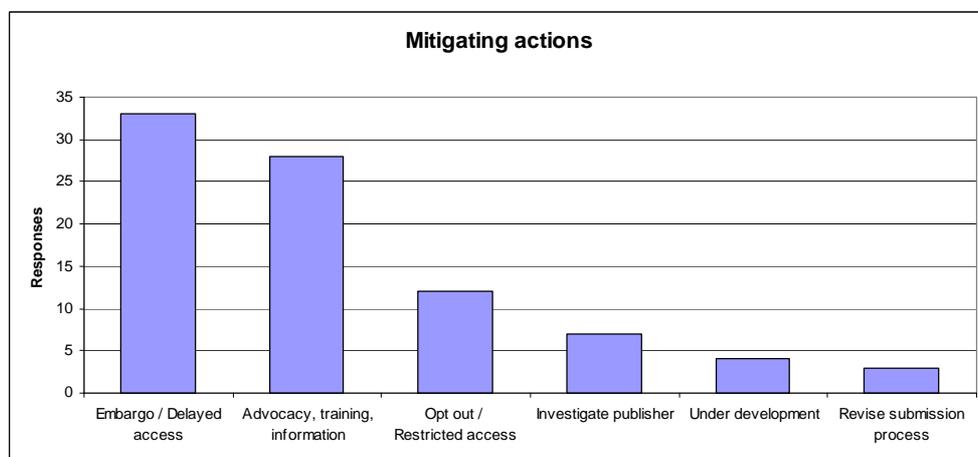


Figure 3: Impact on future publication: Mitigating actions

Embargo / delayed access:

Where publishers prefer the thesis not to be available, an embargo period is the most common means of addressing the concern, mentioned in 33 responses. A detailed breakdown of embargo solutions is available on the project website.

- “In the end if there is any question of a risk to future publication then we have to recommend embargo as the safest course of action. But Faculty committees do sometimes reduce the lengths of embargos, probably because of realism re. publication chances or knowledge of viable timescales in a particular discipline.”

Advocacy, training, information:

The second most popular measure (28 responses) is to allay concerns with education, training, information and advocacy. Some run training sessions or demonstrate that the thesis is unlikely to remain in its examined form as a published revision:

- “Training and awareness sessions targeted at PhD students”
- “Open access policy to thesis publication is a given; students may be reassured by the awareness that the data and text of a thesis may need to undergo considerable review prior to publication”
- “I...explain that it is extremely unlikely that any of the theses would be published exactly as written and submitted for examination - I speak from personal experience.”
- “Noting that publishers very strictly define publication as the peer review process,”

Others portray the Open Access availability of e-theses as a positive benefit:

- “Suggest that making a thesis available may actually bring it to the attention of publishers”
- “Information about open access (pointing out that the e-thesis is likely to reach a wider audience) to help authors weigh up their options.”
- “We spelt out the positive benefits of making the theses available and in fact some research suggests that publishers are more likely to publish theses if they are being well accessed online”

Some have evidence that publishers are not necessarily opposed to open access e-theses:

- “We also have students who published theses and were given permission by their publishers to deposit e-theses.”
- “Found that concern could be relieved by anecdotal reports of Publishers attracted to work through Open Access Archiving”

- “This [concern] doesn't seem to be being borne out - publishers who are genuinely interested will still consider PhDs to publish.”

Several respondents mentioned that they draw on experience and models of best practice from other HEIs:

- “Refer to EThOS guidance and consider what's happening in other universities”
- “Looked at the experience of others”
- “Show student the list of universities who are involved with EthOS”

Whilst many respondents mentioned the use of static web pages to give authoritative guidance on these issues, a range of strategies are employed to ensure that authors are given thorough and appropriate support:

- “Open meetings with the students, attendance at faculty graduate school board also the University-wide Graduate School Network, meetings with the deputy head of school research and various other academics to explain the embargo procedure.””
- “Answering queries via a dedicated mail box explaining our embargo procedures.”
- “Offer telephone/email support.”

The benefits of a comprehensive strategy of advocacy in allaying these concerns are clear:

- “Most students and supervisors don't understand these areas and are confused / worried. Normally when there has been an opportunity to explain the worries fade”

Opt out / restricted access:

Twelve responses indicate that HEIs may adopt measures to restrict access to the thesis, either beyond or instead of embargo measures:

- “At present they can opt out altogether.”
- “Depositing users can request to restrict access to their theses; this is a reason the University sees as a valid reason for restricting online access.”
- “We do sometimes offer retrospective take down of an unembargoed thesis to satisfy publisher requirements but this is not our preferred option and is stressful for the students!”

Investigate publisher:

Seven respondents suggest contacting the publisher to clarify their position, or gathering information about which publishers are disposed towards open access e-theses:

- “We emphasise that students should discuss these issues closely with supervisors who should have experience of publishers in their particular discipline. We also suggest that students seek further information from publishers on their policies, e.g. if something is very much rewritten, would a publisher accept the thesis already being available open access.”
- “Advise them to check with prospective publisher first”
- “Find a more OA friendly publisher”
- “Spoke with each student to try to find out which publisher was causing the concern to better inform other students.”

In situations where authors are in negotiations with publishers or have a clear idea of which specific publishers they will be approaching, this approach is clearly of benefit to both the institution and the author and must be regarded as best practice.

Under development:

A few respondents are in early stages of implementation and still developing their approach:

- “These are concerns and we are developing a system with policies to answer or accommodate such issues.”

Revise submission procedures:

In addition to practical measures taken, it may also be necessary to build those measures into submission documentation:

- “We also have redrafted the 'permission to deposit' form to include more fulsome guidance on embargos as many students and academics do not bother to look up the same information on the Institutional website.”
- “We have recently re-written our submission forms and guides”

Other measures:

Other responses include licensing approaches:

- “Discuss "Licence to Publish" agreements”

- “Discuss alternative model licence agreements that have been developed by JISC and SURF Foundation.”

Actual occurrences

When asked to quantify incidences of publication refusal, no concrete examples were offered. Five respondents pointed out that the embargo system prevents the issue from arising.

- A Russell Group university commented: “None (or for the previous 6 years we have been putting e-theses online)”

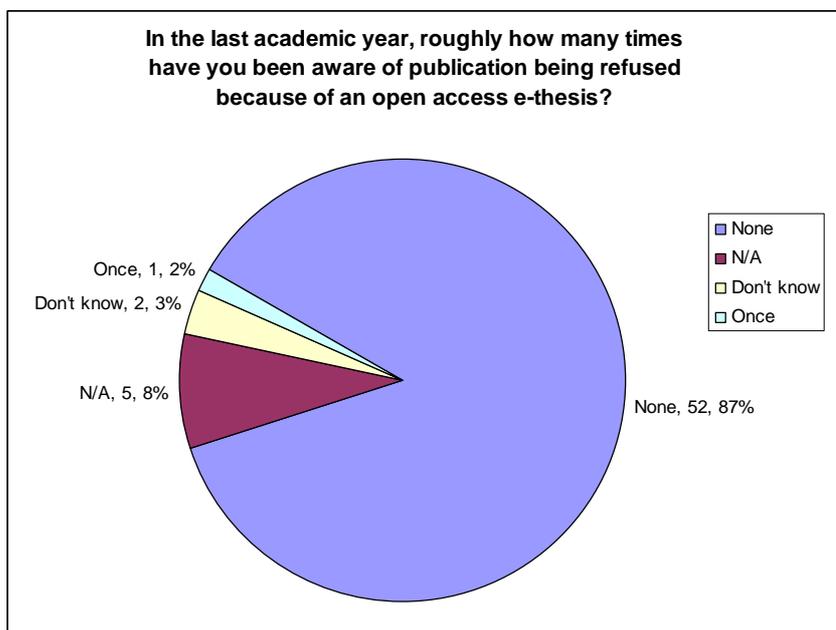


Figure 4: impact on future publication: Actual occurrences

The single instance reported could not be substantiated:

- “I heard of one case indirectly re. a monograph publication but not the precise details and don't really know the accuracy of the story”

Conclusion

Since the ownership of a thesis remains with the author unless they sign it over to a publisher, it may be difficult for HEIs to require open access deposit categorically; and therefore concerns, although likely to be overstated, should be addressed seriously. The impact on authors' publication prospects is a common concern amongst students and their supervisors.

Publishers take differing stances on whether they regard distribution of a thesis via an IR as prior publication, and it is therefore a legitimate issue for those hoping to publish.

However with advocacy to explain the benefits of open access, and the availability of short term embargo if a publisher is concerned, the issue need not be a barrier to electronic deposit. As one respondent remarked, such a combination of measures should ensure that management of this issue is seen as “an inclusive approach working 'on the inside and with them' rather than it seeming this is another 'imposed central' scheme.”

It is clear that this is an issue in which the role of the institution is vital. HEIs can effectively manage this concern with a combined approach, undertaking administrative tasks such as managing embargoes and contacting publishers alongside author education and advice.

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Further information can be found on the project website at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ls/etheses>