Developing a Screencast of the Research Deposit Process

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Case Study written by Amy Robinson, VADS, based on an interview with Sarah Hall, UAL, on 4 May 2011.
Background

The University of the Arts London offers a diverse range of art, design, fashion, and media courses to 20,000 students at all levels from foundation and undergraduate to postgraduate and research. The University’s 1,228 members of teaching staff include active professional artists, designers, practitioners, critics, and theorists, from across six distinctive Colleges including: Camberwell College of Arts; Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design; Chelsea College of Art and Design; London College of Communication; London College of Fashion; and Wimbledon College of Art.

Between 2007 and 2009, the University was a partner in the JISC-funded Kultur consortium which set out to create an institutional repository model for research outputs in the visual and creative arts. Whilst institutional repositories were already proficient in managing text-based research such as articles, books, and theses, they were not yet attuned to the requirements of visual arts researchers depositing complex multimedia works.

The main outcome of the Kultur project for the University was the development of a new institutional repository, UAL Research Online, which was soft launched at the end of the project in June 2009, and was officially launched at the University in February 2010. The repository is staffed by a Repository Manager and part-time Repository Administrator, who have been working to promote its use across the six Colleges of the University and to integrate the repository into the working practices of UAL researchers as a means of showcasing, documenting, and preserving their work, as well as for research management activities such as the University’s submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014.

Expectations

The University’s Research Strategy (2010-15) sets out a vision in which the, ‘University of the Arts London will be internationally recognised for world leading research in identified areas of excellence’ and ‘will develop a world-class, sustainable research culture that reflects our leadership in the arts, design and communication sector, particularly in practice-based research, and builds on the outstanding achievements of the University’s researchers since 2005.’

In support of this strategy, the University’s repository team has undertaken an advocacy campaign with the intention of increasing the number of deposits and the level of usage of the institutional repository. A number of targets were set in this regard in a biannual report by the Repository Manager in October 2010, including: doubling the number of visits and downloads by July 2011; increasing the number of items in the repository by 15%; increasing the number of creators and authors on the database by 10%; keeping up with software developments and opportunities to extend the repository’s functionality; and raising awareness of the service within the University.

In order to achieve these aims, the repository staff have undertaken various advocacy activities including attending as many relevant meetings and events as possible such as the Research Office re-launch event; producing brochures and online user guides; profiling the repository as highly as possible on the University research web pages; installing the IRStats statistics package for EPrints, which displays information about the number of downloads from the repository and the most frequently downloaded items; as well as rolling out ‘floor walking’ days in which the repository staff have undertaken one-to-one training sessions with researchers at their desks showing them how to upload an item of their own research.
In undertaking these ‘floor walking’ days, the repository staff have found that they have needed to spend time explaining the role, purpose, and remit of the repository and to answer the researcher’s particular questions and issues. The actual process of uploading the item of research often felt rushed at the end of the training session. The Repository Administrator therefore proposed the creation of a screencast which would guide researchers through the deposit procedures. A screencast is a digital recording of computer screen output, also known as a video screen capture, and often contains audio narration. It was expected that the screencast could be used as an aide memoire after the one-to-one training sessions had taken place, or to encourage researchers who were already IT literate to deposit their work in the repository without the need for one-to-one training. It was also hoped that the final screencast would be completed in time for a demonstration by the Repository Manager at a Professoriate meeting which would include representatives from across each of the Colleges of the University.

**Approach**

1. **Floor Walking Days**

The ‘floor walking’ days were initially rolled out across the London College of Fashion by working with an Administrative Assistant at the College who was keen to get involved. The Administrative Assistant was able to provide repository staff with a list of hourly appointments with members of the College’s research staff, their room numbers, contact details, and some background information about their research interests. Repository staff would then make contact with individual researchers and ask them to bring an item of their research to upload during the training session.

This approach enabled the repository staff to not only provide training but to simultaneously secure another item for deposit in UAL Research Online. The ‘floor walking’ days also provided a useful critique of the repository and specific issues that needed to be addressed. For example, contact was made at an early stage with a researcher who works with large datasets, but at the time there wasn’t a good system in the repository to manage this content. The ‘floor walking’ days also acted as a trouble shooting exercise for aspects such as platform and browser compatibility. The highly personalised approach has also helped researchers to get to know repository staff and understand their job role and responsibilities and that they are supportive, helpful, and so researchers feel that they can approach them.

2. **Software Selection**

The first step in developing the screencast was to review a number of existing screencasts produced by other libraries. A large number of software options were also considered such as: AviScreen, Camtasia, CamStudio, GoView, JingProject, Screencast-O-Matic, ScreenFlow, Screenjelly, Screen Toaster, Screenrr, and Wink.

The Repository Administrator initially selected Screen Toaster, a free browser-based service for capturing screen activity, since it was an easy-to-use freeware option already utilised by a number of other libraries, and there was no need to install software which can be an issue on managed networks. Screen Toaster’s functionality seemed to be on par with that of many other commercial screen capture tools, unlike other free tools which had relatively limited capability. For example, it had the option to add speech bubble-style captions and had much greater editing functionality once the recording was completed.

Luckily, the project had only just started to develop the screencast when the demise of Screen Toaster was announced in July 2010 and all online content was no longer available. It was instead decided to download a free trial from Camtasia to develop the final
screencast, since this software was also used by a number of libraries and the University’s Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (CLTAD) holds a software licence.

3. Producing the Screencast

The screencast was based on an existing tried and tested PDF user guide, which had already been developed and used by the repository team to guide researchers through the deposit process. In developing this user guide, the repository team felt it was important to keep the instructions as simple, clear, and concise as possible to demonstrate how quick and easy the deposit process is, and to dispel concerns that it is an onerous task that researchers are being asked to complete on top of already busy schedules.

One of the logistical aspects which had to be surmounted was the suitability of the office environment for recording the screencast and the problem of background noise. The repository team is based in a shared office with other Library staff, and the University’s managed network meant that software couldn’t easily be installed on alternative computers, and it was decided to record the screencast after normal working hours. If further screencasts are produced in the future, the team hopes to install the software in another location such as the Library Head Office.

Use of the software and production of the screencast was self-taught by the Repository Administrator, although the Repository Administrator did subsequently attend a workshop on building effective screencasts organised by JISC Digital Media. This proved useful now that they were starting to be asked to train other members of Library staff that were seeking to produce their own screencasts. The JISC Digital Media course provided reassurance that they were following best practice and not passing on any ‘bad habits.’ It also introduced them to the variety of ways in which screencasts are being used, and how they might evolve in the future as they become more ubiquitous, and sparked new ideas such as producing screencasts on an individual basis to answer individual researcher’s enquiries.

4. User Testing and Dissemination

UAL Research Online is jointly funded by the Library department and the Research Office and both departments were asked to give feedback on the screencast. This testing proved useful in identifying ‘EPrints terminology’ which may be common parlance in the repository community but could be confusing to researchers, such as the word ‘Editor’ which implies there is only a single person responsible for checking the quality of the research rather than a research committee.

When developing the PDF user guide, the repository team have also found that there is a difference between the feedback from staff who are appraising the training materials, and the responses of researchers who are actually using the repository to deposit their work. Whilst ‘appraisers’ often raised questions and suggestions for additional details to be included, most ‘real-life’ users of the repository were able to deposit successfully with only the support of the concise user guide, and the repository team has sometimes had to be firm in asserting to colleagues that a simple set of steps is most effective. This anecdotal evidence is also supported by the experiences of other repositories, such as the University of Huddersfield’s repository manager, who has also found that researchers prefer a simple set of steps and has developed their user guide accordingly.

The finished screencast was disseminated on the UAL Research Online web pages; during the ‘floor walking’ days; within the email signatures of the repository team; and telephone enquirers have also been directed to the web link by repository staff. As well as making the screencast available on the institutional repository web pages, the screencast was also uploaded to the video-sharing website YouTube.
5. Research Audit and the REF

The launch of UAL Research Online in 2010 came at an unsettling time coinciding with a staff restructure in the Research Office. Once this was completed and as the 2014 REF approaches, there has been increasing focus from the Research Office on utilising the repository for reporting and for the University’s submission to the REF. The repository team was therefore tasked with undertaking a four-week Research Outputs Review in Spring 2011 as a ‘dry run’ for the REF, which resulted in 1,000 additional items being uploaded through self-deposit and an additional 290 registered users. Whilst some members of research staff...
have engaged with the repository, the review highlighted that there is still an aversion by some staff to using the online submission process, and one of the Colleges has opted to use paper-based forms which are now being data inputted by a member of administrative staff, which will add a further 700 items.

Several changes to the online deposit workflow have also been requested as a result of the mock REF exercise, and the repository team are currently holding back on actively disseminating the screencast until the workflow is altered and the screencast can be amended accordingly.

Figs. 3 & 4: example screenshots from the screencast.
Kultivate Project Case Study: Developing a Screencast of the Research Deposit Process

Conclusions and Recommendations

The screencast has provided the repository team with a valuable advocacy tool and the background research, training, and skills learnt in its development will be utilised again in developing future iterations, and this knowledge will also be cascaded to members of Library staff who are now seeking to develop screencasts for other Library services. Challenges in undertaking this project have included the evolving focus, nature, and functionality of the repository, and balancing the needs and priorities of its funders, including the Library’s Open Access agenda and the REF reporting requirements and greater fundraising focus of the Research Office.

Recommendations from this project include the importance of seeking feedback on training materials from ‘real-life’ users, particularly those with no prior knowledge of the repository, and the advantage of creating written training materials as an initial ‘stepping stone,’ rather than developing the screencast from scratch.

The repository team is now looking to roll out the ‘floor walking days’ to other Colleges, which, although time consuming and sometimes difficult to timetable (since research staff are often working abroad), is proving effective in engaging researchers and receiving a positive response. One idea for a potential future iteration of the screencast is the inclusion of a formal introduction from the Rector of the University to encourage staff to deposit. Another idea is to develop the screencast into an arts project in its own right, since this type of activity is often promoted at the University, such as the ‘No Smoking’ signs at the London College of Communication, which were developed as a design project by College students.

Key Points

- The use of an institutional repository is still a relatively new concept in the visual and creative arts education sector and repository practices, policies, and procedures may still be subject to change.

- The Research Outputs Review has highlighted that there is still an aversion by some staff to using the online submission process instead of a paper-based REF submission form.

- One-to-one training sessions can help to develop rapport as well as to overcome this initial impasse and aversion to depositing work online, and to understand the personal benefits of the repository rather than it being seen as ‘yet another thing to do’ of purely institutional and administrative benefit.

- It is important to gather feedback on training materials from ‘real life’ users and not just from repository ‘experts’ or ‘appraisers’.

- In addition to repository staff, there may be other repository ‘champions’ or ‘enthusiasts’ who can assist with advocacy, such as the Administrative Assistant at London College of Fashion who provided details for the ‘floor walking’ days.

- Be prepared to share expertise on a number of related issues, not only on developing screencasts, but in particular on copyright issues which can be highly complex in the visual and creative arts. In the absence of a dedicated university copyright officer, enquiries on a range of copyright issues may be received which may not always relate to the repository.
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