



## Diary of a library collaboration, aged 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

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The White Rose Libraries, the libraries of the universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York, have been working in collaboration for well over a decade. Though originally narrow in focus, over time the scope of this collaboration has grown. In 2015 an Executive Manager was appointed to oversee the range of collaborative projects, and a distinct strategic plan for White Rose Libraries (running 2015 to 2017) was created for the first time. In 2017, with a new iteration of the strategy in development and with a new Executive Manager in post, it seems a good time to reflect on the story so far.

### **Once upon a time . . .**

The White Rose Libraries (WRL) first came together to collaborate on the creation of a shared institutional research repository. Part of the SHERPA project, funded by Jisc and CURL, the shared research repository was born in July 2004. It was in the vanguard of UK institutional repositories and the move to increase access to research outputs. The original repository, [White Rose Research Online](#) (WRRO), has since been joined by [White Rose Etheses Online](#) (WREO). We believe these remain the only consortial university repositories operating in the UK. Working together allowed the individual libraries to take advantage of the SHERPA funding and to develop repository services much more quickly than if they had approached this individually. It has also allowed the institutions to share resources, and removed the need to replicate similar processes at the individual institutions. The learning gained from a shared approach has also been seen as valuable. This has enabled WRL to contribute to discussions and developments at a national level, in a way perhaps we would have been unable to as individual institutions. In some ways, this initial project set the tone for the WRL collaboration. The focus is on opportunities to work together that add value, increase efficiency or impact, and take advantage of increased scale, to advance the agendas of the individual institutions.

### **Working together . . .**

The WRL collaboration is broad in scope, with activities in a range of different areas. One area of ongoing focus is a collaborative discussion of collections. Much work has recently been done using the [GreenGlass tool](#). This tool allows libraries to analyse collections, informing collection management policies. WRL used GreenGlass to establish how much overlap there is between the collections of the three institutions. While the overlap identified was not, perhaps, as significant as expected (in fact, 83% of the titles in the combined collections were identified as uniquely held by only one White Rose library), the libraries learned a great deal about the processes involved. There was significant investigation into how the matching of records worked, with specific subject areas chosen for detailed analysis. It was particularly interesting to note the impact of the vagaries of data

on the matching process. WRL have recently submitted a report on this groundbreaking work to Jisc, and we have been approached by other library collaborations who are keen to learn from the work we've done. In the past, work done by WRL has made a contribution beyond the collaboration – the Copac Collection Management tool grew out of a tool developed by WRL, for example – and it is hoped that WRL can contribute the experiences and findings from comparing their collections to further discussions with RLUK about a shared monograph strategy, for example.

Work on the repositories continues. While WRRO and WREO were early examples of their type, the landscape in this area is changing and there are now many other systems for WRL to explore integrating with. Work has been done to ensure the repository content is as visible as possible, with the data available to next generation resource discovery tools such as Primo and Summon, and through CORE. At the time of writing, WRRO holds 48,361 items. 91% of these are full text, and 70% are open access. There have been more than 7 million downloads since the creation of the repository, with over 1 million downloads in 2017 so far. WREO holds 11,818 full text items and has seen almost 6 million downloads in total, over 800,000 in 2017. WRL are now having discussions around digital preservation for the repository content. Work is also ongoing on functionality and user experience, and on ensuring things are in place to meet the needs of the REF.

Much is done to make sure that the collaboration derives maximum benefit from the knowledge and experience of the staff across the three institutions. Staff in particular areas meet to take forward shared WRL strategic objectives, and there is significant perceived benefit from having a pool of expert staff across three institutions who can bring a different perspective to any discussion. There have been very successful joint training initiatives, and there have been two WRL staff events in recent years – a conference on the benefits of collaboration, and a digital scholarship event, bringing library colleagues together with academics to explore this topic in depth.

Most recently, the WRL consortium has come together to create [White Rose University Press](#). As an open access press, and the first jointly run university press in the UK, this again puts WRL at the forefront of the changing landscape, this time around academic publishing and access to research. As the recently published Jisc report '[Changing publishing ecologies: A landscape study of new university presses and academic-led publishing](#)' shows, the growth of the new university presses and the continued rise of open access is central to this. It is hoped that White Rose University Press will develop into a leading example of this type of press. It is still early days, but we published our first content this summer, with two journals ([JACHS](#) and [JESLA](#)) publishing articles, and we expect monographs to follow soon. While moving into publishing has been a significant learning experience for WRL, it is one of the most rewarding aspects of the collaboration at the moment.

### **And for our next trick . . .**

The WRL collaboration is working to build on achievements to date, while looking to identify new ways in which working together can enhance the progress of the three institutions. The press will remain an area of continued focus, with attention turning to the next set of commissioned projects and – more broadly – to marketing and promotion.

Work will continue to identify opportunities a shared overview of the library collections across the three sites might bring. The work done so far has helped the institutions better understand the collections, and the associated data, both at an individual level and as a collaboration. This should mean that WRL are well placed to contribute to discussions about the National Bibliographic Knowledgebase, for example, as well as taking forward work with local institutional benefit. With a slightly different approach to collections, Digital Scholarship seems to offer another area where more value could be gained through collaboration, perhaps, than by working as separate institutions.

The driver for collaboration has to be the additional value this brings. There are some instances where collaboration at national rather than regional level might be more appropriate. All White

Rose libraries are members of the Northern Collaboration, for example, and of RLUK. White Rose Libraries, individually and collectively, also work in partnership with the British Library and Jisc on current and emerging projects. Sometimes it will be more appropriate to collaborate at these levels than just across the three White Rose institutions. That said, in some scenarios, being able to undertake practical collaborative work in a (relatively!) short time period is a real strength, and this can be much more difficult at a larger scale. This is the reason why, in the past, the WRL collaboration has often been able to drive new developments and adopt new practices quickly. I fully expect this to continue as we move forward.



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