

Institution as publisher Session: Putting the Academy at the heart of scholarly publishing

Friday, 19 June 2015 09:00 (30 minutes)

In the 17th century, scholarly communication was typified by small groups of scholars who could openly discuss their findings and criticise others. In the 20th century, as science became more specialised and the number of researchers and research outputs increased dramatically, scholarly communication became commodified and industrialised. And as the system continues to grow in the 21st century so do concerns that publishing as traditionally practiced is not working effectively. Studies can't be reproduced, there are increasing accounts of fraud and incompetence, and those who should have access to information can't obtain it.

Institutions have the opportunity to help change the system and provide a way to re-engage the human part of the process, to make it more social. To do this requires a transformation in the scholarly communication industry to one that is focused on services rather than commodities, and on communities rather than individuals. Central to this system will be transparency - 'intelligent openness' - and the ability to track, identify and make connections between researchers, the research objects they communicate and the wider community. Transparency will enable the system of experts to evaluate the effectiveness of the whole ecosystem of services including pricing, expert review, different types of collaboration, and new methods of evaluation and assessment.

Between the values of the 17th century and the technical capacities of the 21st we have an opportunity to build systems of networked knowledge that don't just scale to include all the interested parties but truly involve them in the process, conduct and communication of research, bringing their expertise to the places where it can best be applied and creating a system that is accountable and itself open to independent scholarly scrutiny. The scientists of the 17th century talked about the centrality of openness and discussion to the conduct of research. Institutions have the opportunity to help deliver it.

Presenter: Mrs MACCALLUM, Catriona (PLoS)

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