EThOS: from a project to a national service

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Abstract

This paper traces the development of the UK's 'Electronic Theses Online Service' (EThOS) from its beginnings as a project funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to the establishment of a national service. Susan Copeland, the Senior Information Adviser (Research) at The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, and Anthony Troman, the Product Development Manager at The British Library, have been involved in work to encourage the creation and use of ETDs since initial investigations took place to identify a potential model for use across the UK. In this paper they discuss what led to the adoption of a hybrid model which encourages both the establishment of institutional repositories (containing e-theses and associated metadata in a recommended format) and the deposit of electronic theses in a national hub at The British Library.

The route to achieving a national e-theses service in the UK has been lengthy but one of steady progress. From 2002 to 2004 three projects, funded by the JISC, examined a wide range of issues associated with ETDs with a view to identifying a potential model for adoption by individual Higher Education Institutions and a central body. From 2004 to 2006 a consortium comprising ten UK organisations, and again supported financially by the JISC, used the model as the basis for developing a prototype e-theses service. Turning the theory into reality highlighted the areas where further development work was required – particularly in terms of technical details, legal issues associated with the retrospective conversion of paper theses, and advocacy work to persuade senior managers to support the concept.

Work is underway at present in the UK to create a 'live' e-theses service based on the work of the earlier projects. This paper describes the current situation: the achievements and the areas which still require further attention.