A square peg in a round hole? representing practice-based items in a research repository

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Kingston University is a multidisciplinary University based in Kingston upon Thames in London. Amongst the variety of subjects on offer are degrees from the Kingston School of Art, at the forefront of art, design, and architecture education and research internationally,[1] and the School of Performance and Screen Studies, where the emphasis is on subjects relevant to the world today taught by world-leading researchers and talented and experienced creative practitioners.[2]

History

Kingston University's institutional repository (http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk) was developed during 2005-2006 to support the University's RAE2008 submission. The initial project was led by Jane Savidge, at that time Head of Learning and Research Support at Kingston University. Her considerable previous experience as the Faculty Librarian for Art, Design and Music at Kingston University, as well as at Central St Martin's and as Chief Cataloguer at the National Art Library, strongly influenced the shape of the repository.

Hence, practice-based outputs were central to the initial configuration of our EPrints repository. A list of item types was constructed to best support these types of research outputs:

- Artefact/device
- Composition
- Design
- Exhibition
- Still/graphic work
- Moving image/broadcast
- Performance/live event
- Sound recording

New metadata fields, some with controlled selection lists, were added to capture elements of the physical aspects of the output as well as its place within a larger exhibition or performance. These evolved further in response to feedback from academics that tested early versions of the repository. Citations were configured based on Harvard referencing. The structure of the content in each field was based on AACR2, the cataloguing convention at the time (influencing how we used punctuation and capitalisation). The Research Repository was launched in the autumn of 2006, using EPrints 2, with the first record being made live at the end of October 2006.

Kultur and Kultivate

The early work undertaken meant that we were very interested to follow the progress and outcomes of the Kultur project 2007-2009,[3] particularly the final reports on Metadata and Technical Developments, and we were able to participate in various Kultur II (2009-2010) meetings.[4]

[1.] Kingston University (2017) *Kingston School of Art.* Available at http://fada.kingston.ac.uk/ (Accessed: 8 June 2017).
[2.] Kingston University (2107) *School of Performance and Screen Studies – overview*. Available at http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/faculty/school-of-performance-and-screen-studies/ (Accessed: 8 June 2017).
[3.] *Welcome to the Kultur project* (no date). Available at: http://kultur.eprints.org/index.htm (Accessed: 8 June 2017).
[4.] VADS (no date) *Kultur II Group*. Available at: https://vads.ac.uk/kultur2group/index.html (Accessed: 8 June 2017).

The Kultivate project (2010-2011), which arose from Kultur II, was tasked with finding strategies (digital and otherwise) to increase the deposit of practice-based arts research outputs into repositories. A larger number of institutions participated in this project and a range of common themes and challenges in the area of supporting practice-based arts research outputs emerged. A recent article gives a timely and interesting discussion of the ten-year anniversary of Kultur and its ongoing impact.[5]

A major upgrade and refresh of the underlying EPrints software of our Research Repository was undertaken during the summer of 2011 and we took the opportunity to enhance our existing support with some of the outcomes from the Kultur project. This was before EPrints software became 'Kulturised' as a matter of course.

We implemented the following items which were adapted from the Kultur project final report:

- Promoting the visual presentation of images and sound files over metadata values in the public view of the record
- Splitting the initial record creation screen into two pathways. The first screen asks the question "Which option best describes this item?" with two choices
  ◊ Text-based or non-text or practice-based
  ◊ The phrasing was taken from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) language
  ◊ Upon selecting 'Practice-based', our original list of practice-based output item types is then available
- Introducing some new metadata fields
- Adding a new workflow stage for Events to capture both multiple locations and events for objects and performances or exhibitions. This expanded our original configuration which captured a single event only.
- Adding Scorch files (music score software) as an uploadable file type

Technical issues remain a considerable challenge in ensuring that already deposited sound and video files remain usable over time. During EPrints software upgrades, we have experienced problems with ensuring that existing video and sound files play and present properly. These issues are often connected with changes in underlying server technology or software and their interaction with web-based media players. We therefore include testing the media files in our test scripts for each upgrade.

Putting it all into practice

Regardless of the level of planning, the proof of the metadata pudding is in the ~~eating~~ recording – so how did we put this into practice?

Much of how we approach the recording of items is in collaboration with the academics concerned. Often we've met with them to discuss the sort of work they do, to demonstrate the Research Repository and to highlight what it can offer in terms of promoting their work.

One of the first challenges is that the way in which two people view their work will differ. Some view the creation (composition/play/artwork) as being the main output, with the different places it was performed/exhibited being simply the way it is shared. Others, however, view the location as integral to the piece, and that each performance/exhibition exists as separate and distinct outputs. Often the academics are quite surprised that we can be flexible (up to a point) in how we record the items, but they appreciate that we understand the difference for them.

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[5] Meece, S., Robinson, A. and Gramstadt, M-T. (2017) 'Engaging researchers with the world's first scholarly arts repositories: ten years after the UK's Kultur project'. *New Review of Academic Librarianship.* [Preprint]. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2017.1320767 (Accessed: 8 June 2017).

Once you have assessed whether you require one record or more, then the next challenge is to determine what to actually put in the record. When we implemented the Kultivate project improvements, we spoke to the Music Subject Librarian and investigated what other repositories were doing in order to make decisions on how to interpret the fields on offer. The aim is to be as consistent as possible, but the unique nature of practice-based items can make it difficult.

The title is often the most straightforward, although the usual convention of only capitalising the first word and any proper noun after that often has to be overlooked as even the use of capitals can be considered important. The first main difficulty is in recording the creator's contribution. Within the repository software we can record multiple creators and assign a 'role' to each. These roles are based on the Dublin Core Relator Terms.[6] However, we cannot record multiple roles for the same creator. It is not unusual for a practitioner to identify three (or more) distinct roles that they had in the creation and expression of the piece – for example, director, performer, producer, researcher. In these instances, we have had to come to the compromise of either not specifying any role in the creator field or recording what they feel to be most significant in the creator field. We can then include information on the other roles in a general note field.

With practice-based items the traditional notion of publisher and place of publication goes out of the window. Even date can be a tricky one to capture. Whilst we can now record multiple dates in the system, only one date will appear in citation. We can display multiple events associated with the record, but these may be different from when the academic feels the work to be 'created'. Verifying this 'creation' date can be almost impossible as it's only the performances that are recorded, not the date it was finished. The date matters greatly in terms of inclusion in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), so getting the date consistent between items is important.

When it comes to recording events, we had to modify the practice developed for conference papers. With conferences, we recorded the place as town and country only, as the host institution of the conference is often not significant, just the location the organisers happened to choose. However, the gallery, concert hall or theatre that the practice-based piece event took place in can carry more importance, not only from the prestige point of view, but also from the differing layout or acoustics. Therefore, we record festival/event name (if appropriate), gallery/hall, town and country.

Verifying dates and places can be problematic, especially for the smaller galleries – webpages get updated, posters get binned or programmes lost. We've now put together guidelines[7] for the academics which details what forms of evidence we accept. This means they can retain what we require at the time of the event, saving time and effort in having to ask for them later. Additionally, the Wayback machine[8] has often been invaluable in delving back through the mists of internet history.

[6.]Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (2017) *MARC Relator terms and Dublin Core*. Available at: http://dublincore.org/usage/documents/relators/ (Accessed: 8 June 2017).
[7.] Contact us if you would like a copy.
[8.] *Internet Archive Wayback Machine* (2017). Available at: https://archive.org/web/ (Accessed: 8 June 2017).

With the HEFCE REF Policy[9] the place of full text in Repositories has been given greater importance. We had always welcomed full text for all items, but had never actively sought it, valuing the recording of metadata for all outputs over trying to explain the complex minefield that is full text permissions and restrictions. Over the last year, in addition to dealing with the text-based items covered by the policy, we have had more queries from those academics with practice-based outputs concerned about how the policy will affect them. Their reluctance regarding full text is frequently because they feel a photograph or video cannot fully express the work as it has to be experienced in context. Having said that, some researchers are keen to enrich their records with pictures, video or audio. This has meant we have to find out about and explain the elements of copyright and re-use (including Creative Commons licences), which may be unfamiliar to them.

Engagement and workload

Despite our best efforts, not every meeting results in increased engagement, and we've had to accept that it's not personal! Many of the academics involved are on very fractional contracts and some don't feel the same engagement with the University as full-time staff may do.

Of course, if you do get engagement, then you have to be prepared for extra work. It is quite time-intensive to have meetings, deal with the records and follow things up, however worthwhile it is. With the HEFCE REF policy and its requisite time pressures (alongside the consequential uptake in general Research Repository engagement), it's easy sometimes to overlook these records in favour of 'easier' or more 'important' work. You have to take each item separately and allow yourself the time to fully understand the complexity of the output, and how to record it. As with all Repository work, if you need to contact the academic it's important to stress that it's not about us doubting the existence of an item, it's about us ensuring it's represented in the fullest, most comprehensive way.

Early on in the Research Repository history we tried to get academics submitting records for their own items and for the text-based outputs. This has been fairly successful, especially as their outputs in the Repository are listed on their profile pages. Providing clear instructions for books or articles is fairly straightforward; however, due to many of the factors already listed, practice-based instructions are much more difficult. We have drawn up guidance on the main fields, but are always keen to emphasise to the academics that we will work with them in recording their work.

Conclusion

Writing this article has reminded us of all the work that has been put in over the last 10 years. We've constantly refined and updated our understanding of the recording of practice-based items and changing the architecture of the Research Repository to accommodate this knowledge means we can more easily record outputs in more common formats, whilst also giving us flexibility to capture more complex outputs. REF2021 is on the horizon so it's more important than ever to continue to maintain the dialogue with all involved. We also follow with interest what other institutions are doing to support practice-based researchers.

[9.]Higher Education Funding Council for England (2017) *Open access research: policy*. Available at: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa/Policy/ (Accessed: 8 June 2017).