

Biannual report

Title of project: Theses Alive!

Project Manager: John MacColl

Lead Institution: Edinburgh University

Project Partners: Cambridge University, Cranfield University, Leeds University and Manchester Metropolitan University

Duration of Award: 11/02-10/04

Total award: £84,277 JISC

Period of Report: 02/03-08/03

Total co-funding: £88,267 JISC/UoE

Confirmation Statement

I confirm that the project development is being conducted under the terms agreed in the initial contract with JISC.

Aims, Objectives and Methodology

The aims/objectives and methodology of the Project remain as stated in the Project Plan. The *Theses Alive!* project aims to develop on a pilot basis a distributed system for the management of electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) in the UK, in order to take advantage of the availability of the networked digital environment. This system will provide both a metadata submission system, and a full-text repository for those universities wishing to use it.

The Project has six main objectives to achieve these aims:

- 1) To develop an OAI-compliant thesis submission system for use in all participating universities,
- 2) To develop an infrastructure which enables e-theses to be published on the web to the extent that a minimum of 500 e-theses exist within the UK segment of the NDLTD after two years,
- 3) To develop and support a generic metadata format capable of delivering metadata to a number of relevant metadata repositories for UK thesis information,
- 4) To test the value of a national support service for e-theses creation and management in the UK,
- 5) To work with other e-theses developments internationally, and in particular to assist the research aims of other e-theses projects funded within the JISC FAIR Programme, and
- 6) To produce a 'checklist approach' for universities to use as they develop e-theses capability.

Originally the Project expected to tackle objective one by providing an electronic submission/examination system that mirrored the traditional hardbound copy system, although through discussions with outcome users, particularly university administration, it has become apparent that this objective is initially too optimistic. Instead a two-tiered approach is more preferable. Initially, to promote uptake and use of the *Theses Alive!* system we will adopt a post-examination system, whereby the final version of the thesis is deposited. Once this is up and running we will develop and test a pre-examination submission system. Coeval with this a user service will be set up based upon the selection of a group of test sites, and the establishment of a help and support service.

Highlights, Outcomes and Important Findings from project

Since the last reporting date, the project has achieved a number of significant goals. We have thoroughly evaluated the major open source digital repository systems and we feel that the DSpace software developed by MIT and HP provides the best functionality specifically with ETD management in mind. The other available software package (Eprints and ETD-DB) were tested but were found lacking, especially in terms of future technical support. The findings from this evaluation are to be written up as a report available to other institutions interested in ETD management.

In order to achieve the aims of our project it has been necessary to develop our own tools to add extra functionality to DSpace. The current Add-On pack provides the ability within DSpace to operate a supervised authoring facility, allowing Thesis and Dissertation Supervisors to observe the ongoing work by their student on their project, to comment and to even make changes. This comes with an addition to the DSpace administration area to manage the supervising groups and their access policies to the student's work. The EUL DSpace Add-On version 0.1 (alpha) is open source and available from the Theses alive website.

In addition to technological advancements with the project, we have successfully identified, approached and included other partner institutions to be involved in our pilot study. We have included a broad cross section of HE institutions in order to reflect a range of ETD submission scenarios, from well-established universities (Cambridge, Leeds) to newer institutions (Cranfield). We will also investigate the management of MSc dissertations with the inclusion of Manchester Metropolitan University in the Theses Alive! project.

Changes to original award

As stated in the last biannual report, the Project began in November 2002 due to delays caused by staff reallocation and the summer vacation. With the departure at the end of January of the original Project Officer due to ill health, the Project Plan was reviewed and Workpackage 3: *Advocacy* and Workpackage 4: *User Support* were rescheduled with the intention of a new Project Officer being in place by the beginning of April 2003 (month 6). The new Project Officer started at the beginning of May 2003 (month 7), therefore the Project Plan has been rescheduled accordingly.

Project staff

Project Director (part time) Nov 02 - present	John MacColl	Project planning and co-ordination. Reporting to JISC
Project Officer (part time) May 03 - present	Theo Andrew	Project advocacy, pilot administration, user support
System Developer (part time) Jan 03 - present	Richard Jones	Building the system

Involvement with Programme

Theses Alive! has actively been involved with the JISC programme. The Theses Alive team attended the JISC FAIR Programme meeting in Warwick on 23/24th June, which also incorporated the eFAIR cluster meeting. In addition, Theo Andrew attended the JISC IPR workshop held on 29th May 2003. Other informal meetings between the E-Theses sub-cluster have occurred at recent conferences and events.

Publications and Publicity

The *Theses Alive!* Project staff are currently working on a number of articles for publication in Ariadne and VINE.

Engagement with Potential Outcomes Users

The *Theses Alive!* website [<http://www.thesesalive.ac.uk/>] has been extensively redesigned for new content and functionality. The new design incorporates an improved document archive and a new download/installation section for the EUL DSpace add-ons, as well as an FAQ section on Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD's).

We have been working closely with the University of Edinburgh administration (including representatives from the College Postgraduate Studies Committee and the Academic Affairs, Planning and Secretariat) to gain their views on future directions for the Project.

In May 2003, the *Theses Alive!* team attended the international ETD-2003 conference in Berlin, where John MacColl presented a paper describing the aims, objectives and methodology of the Project.

Detailed Progress and Future Plans

Progress

The main activities undertaken during the reporting period are listed below broken down into workpackages, as defined in the Project Plan:

Workpackage 1: Pilot Administration

1.1 *Pilot Set-up*. The Project had identified, invited and incorporated four pilot sites to be included in the pilot study. These pilot partner institutions are Cambridge University, Cranfield University, Leeds University and Manchester Metropolitan University. A fifth institution, Warwick University, has been approach, but we are as yet awaiting a firm response.

1.2 *Initial Interviews*. Prior to the pilot launch we have held meetings with University of Edinburgh stakeholders (Administration/ selected Graduate Schools). Additionally, we have arranged some pilot site visits to liase with site representatives and help with pilot advocacy.

Workpackage 2: Building the System

2.1 *Platform Choice*. Our Systems Developer has tested and evaluated the three main OAI-compliant open source platforms and the Project is proceeding with DSpace as the software package of choice.

2.2 *System Programming*. The Project Team are continuing with the coding of a bespoke system for use in a UK HE-context. We have recently released the EUL DSpace add-on version 0.1 (alpha) to the wider community and are awaiting feedback.

Workpackage 3: *Advocacy*

3.1 *Site Visits* Visits to pilot sites to meet with contributors and help with advocacy have been planned for October.

3.3 *Advocacy Material* Production of advocacy/promotional material for the Project has begun with the creation of flyers to be distributed at College Faculty Offices and the University Binding Services.

Workpackage 4: *User Support*

4.1 *FAQ creation* An FAQ service has been created on the Theses Alive website prior to the launch of the service. It is envisaged that this will be a continuous process with feedback playing a valuable role.

Future plans

The main priority for the next reporting period is the completion of the system build. Initial roll out of the service is on target with the Project Plan (month 12; October). In parallel with this we need to actively gather content, through increased collaboration with graduate schools within the University of Edinburgh. Once we have the system developed and working at Edinburgh we will then proceed with the pilot sites.

Addressing accessibility

As the Theses Alive! Project will provide a service that is essentially representing the University of Edinburgh we will abide by the regulations recommended by the University. In addition, we will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that our website complies with the University's minimum accessibility requirements. To comply with these web accessibility standards under the principles of SENDA, we will use the Web Accessibility Service hosted by TechDis and UsableNet [<http://www.techdis.ac.uk/usablenet/>].

Financial summary

To be attached.