‘North Star’ – Executive Summary

The North Star project built on user experience research previously conducted by Cambridge University Library which had highlighted the potential value of a new research gateway that could help academics maintain their research profile and contribute their research outputs more efficiently. The gateway would be a single front-end which academics would find easier to navigate and update, that behind-the-scenes would be talking to all of the University’s existing research platforms including the institutional repository, Symplectic, the Cambridge Open Access website, and VIVO, thereby removing the need for academics to visit and contribute to all of these systems individually. As well as streamlining the academic process it was also proposed that the gateway could act as a shopfront for the University’s world-leading research. North Star was the name given to the project and the prototype version of the gateway.

Timeline and methodology

• Scoping (December 2015): Project briefing with key stakeholders inside and outside of libraries; sourcing academics from different disciplines from across Cambridge for interviews; collaboration with Research and Communications offices to help shape approach.

• Interviews (December 2015 to January 2016): 24 research academics interviewed with a focus on participants’ research interests and publication activity and other research outputs, profiles, collaborations and skills sharing. The interviews sought to uncover and understand the unique benefits or advantages that North Star could potentially provide. It was felt that if we arrived at a sufficiently compelling set of features for the gateway then academics would have an intrinsic motivation to use it rather than the extrinsic motivation of compliance.

• Prototyping (February 2016): North Star prototype shared with a subset of the academics who had been interviewed. Design workshops conducted to explore the look and feel of the gateway and key gateway features. Findings workshop to gather feedback to the prototype. Creation of an ‘Experience Blueprint’ to define how the platform might work for different user groups.

Key prospective functions of the gateway (gathered from academics)

• Increase the ease with which they were currently able to share research
• Ensure their publishing and dissemination activities are legally acceptable
• Provide statistics on article views, downloads, and citations their work has received
• Ensure that every interaction is quick and easy
• Decrease levels of stress by reducing administrative overheads.
• Help to make the research process more streamlined and less burdensome

Next steps

Although the research conducted showed that academics and researchers involved in the project were open to the concept, there are no current plans to pursue North Star further. There were concerns around the complexity of the project and the attendant technical requirements of such a significant undertaking. However, the project offered further valuable insight into academic routines and practices and highlighted the need for further investigation into providing streamlined workflows and easy to use platforms supporting the academic publishing process.

The full report can be read here: http://bit.ly/NorthStarProject

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