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Open Library of Humanities

The Future of the Open Library of Humanities: Milestones, Governance, and Sustainability

Martin Paul Eve, Birkbeck, University of London, UK, martin.eve@bbk.ac.uk

Rose Harris-Birtill, Birkbeck, University of London, UK, r.harris-birtill@bbk.ac.uk

As the Open Library of Humanities reaches its fifth birthday, this editorial reflects on the future strategic direction for the platform.

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The Open Library of Humanities (OLH) has reached its fifth anniversary of operations and is now into its eighth year since its inception. During this time, it has grown from a small operation with six journals and some 100 supporters to a multi-award winning academic publisher, with 28 academic journals, four full-time members of staff – soon to be six – and its own in-house open access publishing software. We have reached a huge milestone in ensuring its ongoing stability, with 300 supporting libraries and institutions that now contribute to our ongoing financial sustainability year-on-year.

While we have reflected elsewhere on the lessons that we have learned from our first half-decade, we are now at a turning point for our platform.¹ This brief editorial sets out the essential structural changes underway at OLH as we look towards the future, forming our guiding strategy for the next five years.

The first crucial structural change is that OLH is now part of Birkbeck, one of the constituent university colleges of the University of London. OLH has long been affiliated with Birkbeck, which has a mission of extending the benefits of higher education to those traditionally excluded. In formalising this partnership, staff at OLH will now be able to focus on our mission of publishing high-quality, open-access content without the burdensome overheads of operating an external charity, and with the benefit of the university's valuable support infrastructures. As a UK institution of higher education, Birkbeck is itself a charity and, thus, the not-for-profit and charitable status of OLH has not changed. Our mission also remains the same: to support and extend open access to scholarship in the humanities for free, for everyone, for ever.

The second structural change pertains to the organization's governance structure. OLH has, since its inception, been managed on the ground by Dr Caroline Edwards and Professor Martin Paul Eve at first, and in later years, solely by the latter as the OLH has become more established. Since its founding, the charity's trustees have determined the organization's formal direction, which management has then implemented on the ground. This structure will be changing shortly, in keeping with the needs of the organisation. When OLH merges with Birkbeck this year, a steering committee will replace the trustee body. The steering committee will consist of academics and librarians, with some internal to Birkbeck, and some external to the organisation, with the aim of a 50/50 split to ensure a balance of expertise.

In further developments, Professor Martin Eve will take academic research leave in the Autumn and Spring terms of 2021 and 2022. Dr Rose Harris-Birtill will therefore be stepping into the role of Acting Director for the platform. Dr Harris-Birtill will work

¹ Martin Eve, Paula Clemente Vega, and Caroline Edwards, 'Lessons From the Open Library of Humanities', *LIBER Quarterly*, 30.1 (2020), 1–18 <<https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10327>>.

with the steering committee to ensure the platform's ongoing community orientation, and the long-term sustainability of OLH.

OLH also seeks, in the coming year, to reopen for journal applications. We are particularly interested in helping journals currently hosted at subscription-based, for-profit publishers to move to our open-access, not-for-profit, mission-driven system. The vital importance of open access to knowledge has been conclusively demonstrated by the global pandemic. We have tested and proven a model for open access that enables equitable publishing opportunities for everyone within a not-for-profit environment, and we look forward to helping more journals, editors, authors, and readers in the years to come.

Finally, we continue to develop our dedicated in-house publishing platform, Janeway, and to make this software available for anyone to re-use, free of charge. Our hosted services are a vital part of the ongoing sustainability of OLH, helping to generate extra revenue to support our staffing and publication costs. These services also give us the welcome opportunity to collaborate with library-publishing partners.

It gives us great pleasure to be able to say that the OLH has now reached maturity. We have developed an internationally-recognised scholarly publishing platform that provides excellent value for money and equitable open access, run collectively and collaboratively for the benefit of all. We now aim to continue and extend our work, demonstrating a global appetite for digital access to humanities scholarship.

We would like to thank our board of trustees for all their assistance and expertise; our funders the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, OpenAIRE, and Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, for their generous support; our vital supporting libraries and institutions; our dedicated editors and their editorial teams; our authors; our partners at Jisc and LYRASIS; the entire staff of OLH past and present (particularly Andy Byers, Mauro Sanchez, Paula Clemente Vega, Dr James Smith, and Dr Helen Saunders) and all those who have helped us reach our goal in establishing the OLH. We look forward to the next half-decade.

Competing Interests

Professor Martin Paul Eve is Director of the Open Library of Humanities. Dr Rose Harris-Birtill is the Managing Editor of the Open Library of Humanities and will shortly be stepping into the role of Acting Director. This editorial was not peer-reviewed.

