

Your thesis on the Web

The University Library can now make your thesis available on the Web, free of charge to readers, using a system called EThOS.

What is the advantage for you?

Theses are likely to be read more widely if they are easily accessible via the Web, leading to a higher profile and greater rates of citation, to your direct benefit both for further research and a future career.

Statistics from universities that make theses available on the Web indicate that there is a significant increase in the volume of use.

For example, figures from Virginia Polytechnic and State University ("Virginia Tech") and West Virginia University in the USA, two early adopters of the technology, reveal a very high level of use of their Web-based electronic theses and dissertations. An analysis of the accesses from US domains reveals that use of these theses is not limited to educational establishments: government, commercial and voluntary organisations are represented amongst the users. The statistics also show a high level of international accesses, indicating a degree of worldwide interest that was not so easily achieved when theses were available only in a few copies in printed form.

There are other advantages apart from higher visibility:

- Making a thesis available online (referred to below as an "e-thesis") could save you the cost of printing and binding additional paper copies.
- E-theses can be read at any time and from remote locations, regardless of the number of other people using the same material at the same time.
- Readers can undertake full content searches of e-theses on the Web, without having to judge from an abstract whether it is worth requesting a copy of the printed version on inter-library loan.
- The number of expensive inter-library loan requests for the theses of other authors will steadily decline.

It must also be recognised that greater visibility brings with it the need to be more careful about third-party copyright issues and sensitive areas of research. Plagiarism of your own work, however, is more easily detected if the thesis is in electronic form than if it is only in print. (The University has a licence for the Turnitin service, for example: <http://turnitin.com/static/plagiarism.html>.)

What is Ethos?

EThOS is the Electronic Theses Online Service managed by the British Library.

For many years, the British Library provided copies of UK theses on request in paper or microfilm format. It is now in the process of updating this service to make theses available in electronic format instead, at no cost to the reader.

EThOS allows a reader to select a thesis for supply even if the work is not held in electronic form by the system (as long as the author of the thesis agrees). It will organise the digitisation of the paper or microfilm thesis and subsequent delivery of the content to the reader in the chosen format.

All theses supplied to EThOS will be offered to readers for free downloading (and then local printing if required). In addition, several "added value" services are offered:

- Paper (loose leaf) - the thesis is printed on paper and supplied loose leaf to the reader.
- Paper (soft bound) - the thesis is printed on paper, bound with a soft binding and supplied to the reader.
- Paper (hard bound) - the thesis is printed on paper, bound with a stiff binding and supplied to the reader.
- CD/DVD - the thesis is burned to CD-R or DVD-R and supplied to the reader.

Charges are made for added value services because these functions are optional for the reader and they involve additional work for EThOS. All revenues are fed back into the system and used to support EThOS.

(Note: some formats may not be available, depending on the characteristics of the thesis. For example, a dance video cannot be supplied in a printed version.)

Copyright

British theses are protected under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988. The Act prohibits republication of any significant part of a thesis by a third party without the copyright owner's consent.

The copyright of a thesis generally belongs to the author but this ownership may be assigned by written agreement either specifically or as part of an undertaking between the researcher and the awarding institution when the course of research was entered upon. If the awarding institution actually employs the researcher to undertake the work, the copyright belongs automatically to the awarding institution unless a contract freely entered into by both parties specifies otherwise.

Third party copyright

When giving permission to make a copy of a thesis available online, its author must bear in mind the rights of other authors whom he or she has quoted. Print-only theses have traditionally had low readership rates and therefore low risk of serious infringement of third party copyright. Greater visibility through electronic distribution has changed the character of the thesis, resulting in a greater perceived risk of premature disclosure of results and copyright infringement.

In most cases good citation practice (always giving a full reference whenever quoting another's work or ideas, and keeping direct quotations to the necessary minimum) will eliminate any risk, but authors should consider seeking permission from third-party copyright owners for the inclusion of significant quantities of material. The University Library can offer guidance in reference methods, citation practice and the avoidance of plagiarism.

Deposit agreement

An agreement from the author is required to cover the special requirements necessary to store, organise and manage electronic copies of theses.

Access and distribution rights

The author must grant to the host repository a number of permissions and conditions with respect to online access to their work. The main requirement is to ensure that the depositor is the copyright owner or has the permission of the copyright owner to deposit. Equally important is to determine whether the author has permission to include any subsidiary material owned by third-party copyright holders.

Digital preservation

Digital repositories like EThOS must be able to maintain access to their electronic content into the future despite technology changes. They therefore need:

- permission to copy for the purposes of preservation;
- permission to migrate content to new formats for the purposes of preservation;
- permission to emulate access methods for the purposes of preservation.

Liability

The author must confirm that the repository is not responsible for any mistakes, omissions or infringements in the deposited work. Furthermore, in the event of a breach of intellectual property rights, or other laws including defamation, the repository is not under any obligation to take legal action on behalf of the original author, or other rights holders, or to accept liability for any legal action arising from any such breaches.