Repository of Postgraduate and Undergraduate thesis in Forensic Science – making University student research available to the community

Vision

To create a searchable repository of forensic science thesis completed at postgraduate and undergraduate level in UK Universities.

Context

Following a Home Office review into Research and Development (R&D) in Forensic science (2012) it is clear that there is a lot of R&D taking place but it is uncoordinated and not necessarily focused on the needs of the criminal justice system. The funding mechanisms with the various research councils are equally uncoordinated and do not necessarily support R&D financially to the extent that the industry would think it needs to. To this end there are various activities now taking this subject forward and the academic community sees an opportunity to contribute to this through some form of searchable database. A Special Interest Group funded by the Higher Education Academy met in April 2012 to consider how best to develop such a database to have maximum benefit to the forensic community. The initial brief for the HEA was for a database that will provide links to undergraduate (UG) research thesis containing information such as author, title and keywords.
This has now extended to include postgraduate (PG) as well (excluding PhDs).

Such a repository would:

- promote institutional collaborations / networks for multi-centre studies;
- reduce / prevent inappropriate repetition of studies across higher education institutions (HEI);
- be accessible to caseworkers and forensic science providers (police and commercial) and other interest parties such as Government agencies therefore providing immediate application of the research;
- provide an opportunity to facilitate the use of standard approaches to such projects and in doing so make the data generated more robust for its use in UK Courts;
- Support the R&D UK strategy going forward.

It is accepted that the PG and UG thesis are independently marked by two academics but will not have been subjected to 'peer review' type publication and may contain grammatical errors.

Implementation

To encourage buy-in from HEI's, aspects to be considered and appropriately addressed are intellectual property rights, copyright, patents pending and possible data protection issues. Ethics of the studies and of the dissemination of the results through this repository-database need also to be considered.

Initially, links to each thesis will be provided. The facility to store, manipulate and disseminate such large volumes of data needs to be considered (servers, host institutions etc.). Core information would be Title, abstract, key words, full document, student name, supervisor(s) name and email(s) and University contact details.

Meta-tagging would be an essential part of the process in order to make it functionally searchable and this needs to be carefully considered in terms of the appropriate glossary of key words suggested to those submitting material.

Repository of Postgraduate and Undergraduate thesis in Forensic Science – making University student research available to the community

Data storage and back-up facilities need to be considered as the repository-database would expand rapidly. With approximately 30 Universities offering forensic based courses and average of 30-50 students per cohort, there could be between 900-1500 abstracts per year submitted.

A mechanism for judging the quality and criteria for submission has been developed.