OASIS: a report to stakeholders, July 2010

As the number of grey literature reports in the ADS' Grey Literature Library heads toward the 5,500 mark, the members of the OASIS management board* wanted to update all users of both the OASIS system and the ADS Grey Literature Library about the project to provide some information about how the system is bedding in; the levels of usage; and the outputs that our users are enjoying.

Grey Literature Library

To start with the outputs; we began keeping statistics about the number of grey literature reports we uploaded by month in early 2008. Since then we have seen a steady increase month-on-month in the number of grey literature reports being attached to OASIS forms and made available to be hosted by the ADS in the Grey Literature Library. At the same time the usage of the Grey Literature Library has gone from strength to strength with 40,896 individual reports being downloaded from the system in the last recorded quarter.
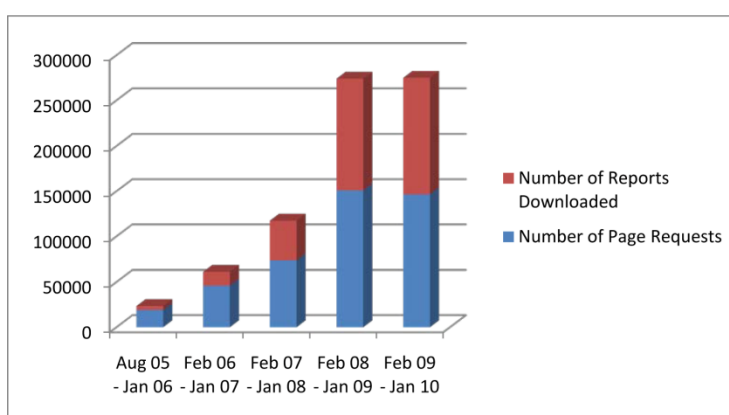

Figure showing the number of reports requested by year.

Uptake of the form by HERs

The Grey literature library continues to expand, as does the number of users of the OASIS system, not only in terms of fieldworkers including their records and reports, but also in terms of the HER community. So which HERs are engaged with the project? OASIS has been adopted by the HER community across Scotland, and in England we have seen the coverage grow too. The following diagram shows the spread of the use of the system within counties from April 2005, April 2007 and April 2010 (from left to right). Across England and Scotland, from Shetland to the Isles of Scilly, 90 HERs (at county level and some UADs) have started actively validating records from their area.
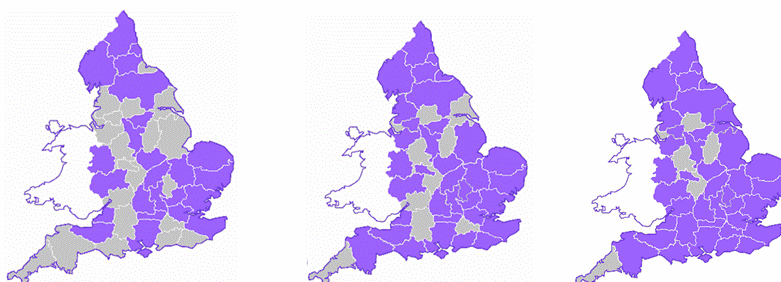

Figure showing the spread of the uptake of the form in England by county, from 2005, 2007 and 2010.

Uptake of the form by OASIS record creators

Where OASIS has really caught the imagination seems to be with those undertaking fieldwork. Some units have really embraced the use of the form, perhaps as they recognise the benefits of using the form to submit grey literature associated with their current fieldwork projects to local records, the NMRs and the ADS. A total of 291 individuals or organisations have registered to use the OASIS system and create records. Obviously this constitutes a wide range of fieldworkers; some a-vocational users, university researchers and community groups will only register and use the form infrequently. This can be seen in the numbers of completed records: 5 users have more than 500 completed records in the system, 28 users have more than 100 to 500 completed records in the system, 18 users have between 50 and 100, and 38 users have between 10 and 50 records, and 98 users have less than 10 completed records. Unsurprisingly it is the larger contracting units that use the form most frequently and most consistently.

While our original focus for the OASIS system was on the recording of commercial contracting archaeological work, we have been trying to tease out the proportion of records in the OASIS system that were not associated with the development control process (i.e. volunteer project, university based projects). As of the end of April this year there were 23,909 records in OASIS; of these 21,433 were planning related records (PPG 16/15 NPPG 5 and 18 etc). The remainder consisted of 1112 records associated with buildings care, 274 Church recording related records, 971 research-related, 98 SMR/HER enhancement records and 231 associated with human remains recording. That equates to 2476 non-planning related records, or about 10% of the total records across England and Scotland.

Future plans

The OASIS system is, in digital terms, becoming a bit of an antique. And as more requests have been made over the last five years for additions and modifications to the form (for example the modification of the form to record marine fieldwork or fully document geophysical survey work) so too has the need for a significant refreshment of the form become a priority. We hope that within the next 2 to 3 years we may get the opportunity to redevelop the form, incorporating more user requirements, creating additional modules to record other elements within the historic environment, and to engage different sectors of the heritage profession, meet industry standards in recording marine archaeology, and work more closely with community archaeologists.

With the unfortunate demise of some units in the recent past and stringent cuts in the public sector being reflected in the private sphere, we all need to consider ways on which we can cut down on duplication of effort and ensure that the outcomes of the work of the sector is disseminated widely; we thereby have the opportunity to receive proper recognition for our efforts. By continuing to use the OASIS system and the associated Grey Literature Library the profession can continue to join up our working practices and to benefit from the outcomes.

*The OASIS Management Board consists of representatives from the ADS, English Heritage, AiP, RCAHMS, Historic Scotland, ALGAO and ALGAO Scotland. It sits once every six months to review progress and consider developments.

Further information about the progress of the OASIS system can be found at
http://oasis.ac.uk/downloads.cfm?country=england and http://oasis.ac.uk/downloads.cfm?country=scotland