

“If research is about ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’...PQDT Global provides the ladders onto those shoulders...”
 – Andrew Barker, Director of Library Services & Learning Development

PHOTO CREDIT: Sheppard Robson

PROQUEST DISSERTATIONS & THESES INSTITUTION USE CASE

ProQuest’s Long-Term Partnership with Lancaster University

Meeting Lancaster University’s vision for globally significant research outcomes

Executive Summary

Following Lancaster University’s decision to partner with ProQuest to disseminate their graduate research via the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT) Global database, the Library saw a significant increase in the discoverability and use of their full-text theses; on both their Institutional Repository (IR) and in PQDT. There was no negative impact on Lancaster’s IR traffic in the 7 months following ProQuest’s harvesting of theses from the Lancaster IR. Furthermore, the Library’s decision to upgrade their subscription from the legacy PQDT A&I index to the full-text PQDT Global database created significant benefits for their researchers and students, and resulted in a marked increase in full-text usage, drastically reducing the Library’s cost per use. This study demonstrates through quantitative and qualitative means the positive impact of Lancaster University’s partnership with ProQuest, supporting the needs of their researchers and graduates, and perfectly aligning with the University’s vision of becoming a globally significant university.

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Lancaster University is ranked as one of the United Kingdom's top institutions with a campus in Lancaster, UK, Ghana, Beijing, and Leipzig, Germany. It was named **International University of the Year for 2020 by The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2020**. As a top global institution, Lancaster University continuously reflects on their vision and they wanted to do more to take their research global.

In 2020 Lancaster University made the decision to become a ProQuest content partner by including their theses in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (PQDT) as well as to begin subscribing to the full-text collection. By doing both they are able to further amplify not only the University's research profile, but also each individual author's profile as well and create more efficiency for their internal researchers. Today, Lancaster's graduate research is available to the entire ProQuest global community of over 4 million researchers across 3,100 institutions.

Expanding Global Visibility of Research

In a conversation with Annette Lawrence, Assistant Librarian (Metadata and Collections), she explained that ProQuest is the perfect strategic partner, as having theses available on the ProQuest platform makes their research discoverable to more people than ever before; giving them a truly global audience that they might not have had previously. "At the heart of Lancaster University's strategy is the vision 'to be a university that is globally significant – a sector leader and innovator' with a 'primary goal to consolidate Lancaster University's status as a leading global research-intensive university.'

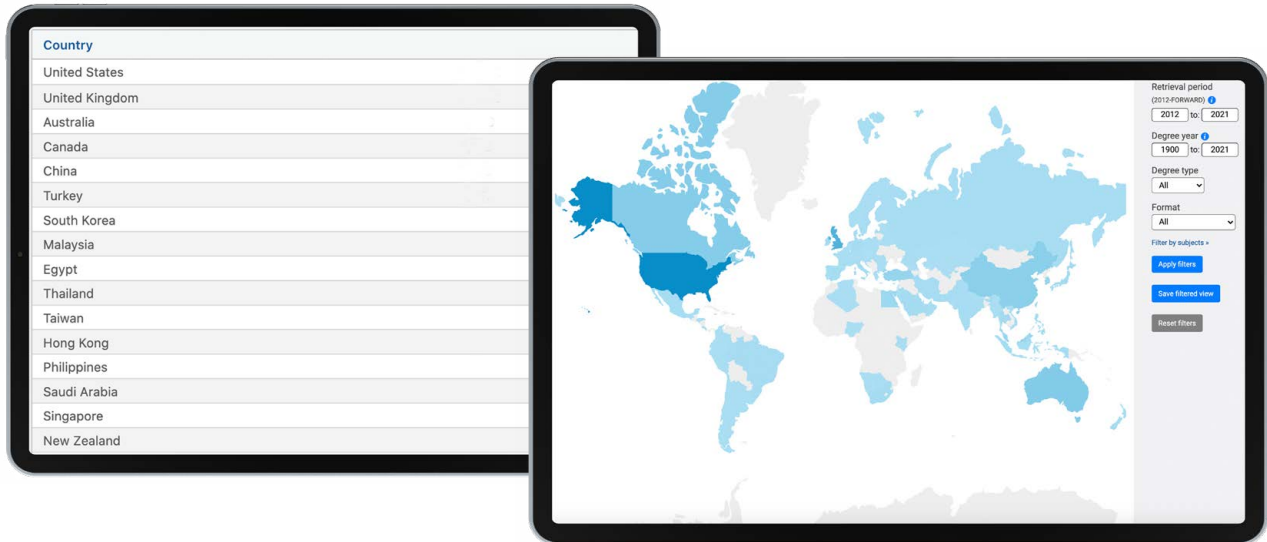
"Our vision is to become a globally significant university – a leader in higher education that provides the highest quality research and teaching and engages locally and internationally on the issues and debates of the day and future. Driven by research, and stimulating learning, the globally significant university informs and changes practice and thinking worldwide."

– Lancaster University's
Statements of Principles



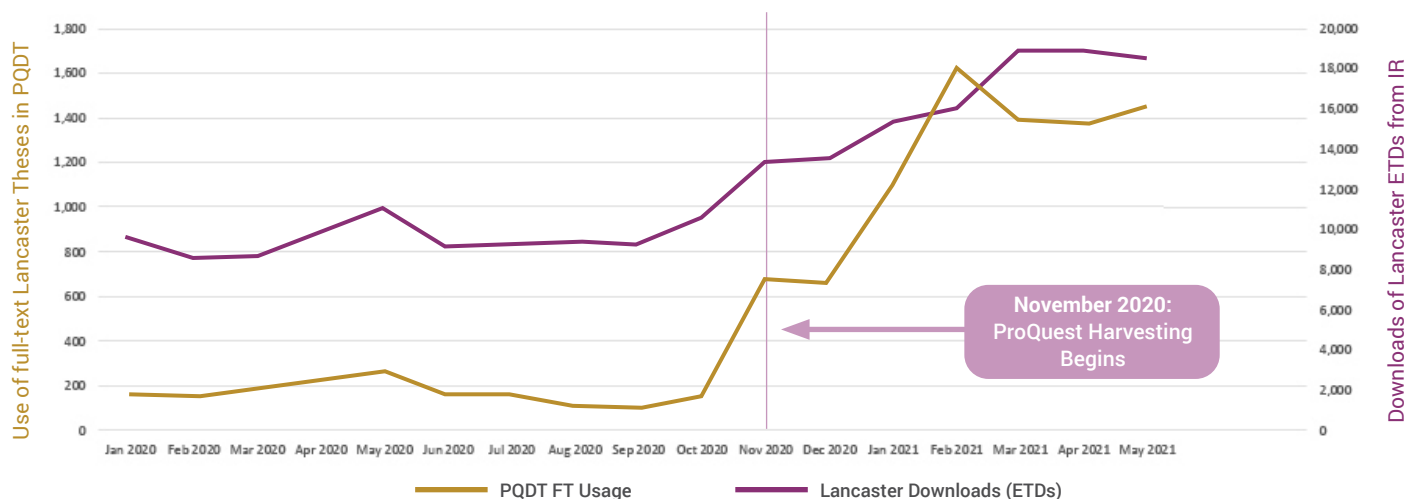
The top countries using the Lancaster Full-text theses on the ProQuest platform from 2018 to the present include the United States, the UK, Australia, China, South Korea, and many others. The partnership with ProQuest has complemented the Lancaster Institutional Repository (IR) additively. Every institution that includes theses or dissertations with ProQuest gains free access to the **ETD Dashboard**, which can be used to demonstrate the increased reach and impact of their research and the value of their partnership with ProQuest.

Lancaster's Top Retrievals by Country Report from ProQuest's ETD Dashboard



Research theses are consistently among the top 10 most downloaded formats from the Lancaster institutional repository, *EPrints. Since ProQuest began harvesting theses in November 2020, there has been no negative impact on thesis downloads from Lancaster's IR. Furthermore, IR downloads for theses and dissertations from October 2020 (prior to PQ harvesting) to the time of this case study's development (8 months) have increased by 75%, a phenomenon which is reflected in the number of downloads. Researchers want to see their research in the global arena to gain recognition for their contributions to the scholarly dialogue and create collaboration opportunities. Lancaster indicated that creating access to theses via the institutional repository plays only a partial role in this aim. "By promoting our research via PQDT Global, we are also promoting theses via Google Scholar and via specialist disciplinary databases."

Comparison of PQDT Full-text Use vs. EPrints Downloads for Lancaster ETDs



Usage of Lancaster theses in PQDT compared to Lancaster IR usage resulted in complementary increases in traffic on both platforms. (NOTE: Prior to the Harvesting date, ProQuest held a very limited set of Lancaster full text from a digitization project.)

As part of the ongoing partnership, ProQuest introduced a new feature in support of university repository goals such as Lancaster’s. For Lancaster’s graduate records, an IR linked button, “Go to Library Record”, is available to researchers within PQDT Global. By having this access point available, researchers are given more direct access options and submitting with ProQuest generates a complementary effect on university IR traffic. Lancaster’s IR sees consistent high usage among its audience, however they felt that it was just as important to gain visibility from outside their IR audience. The ProQuest traffic is driven by universities, corporations, and government organizations around the world, adding to the success seen on Lancaster’s IR and to the researchers they support.

“Go to Library Record” Button

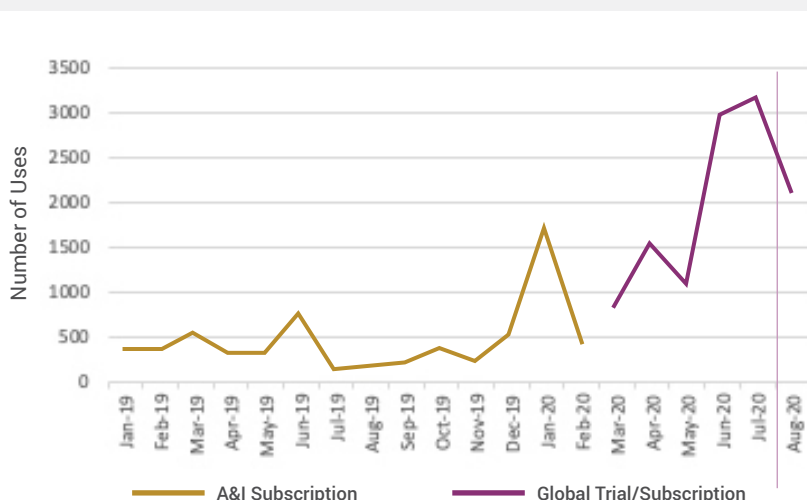


Many universities like Lancaster University, have chosen to work with ProQuest partly due to the ease with which the process is implemented, which makes access to research seamless and effortless. ProQuest offers two solutions for submitting: the use of the free workflow tool, ETD Administrator, or the no-effort IR harvesting process, ARC (Automated Retrieval of Content) Program. Lancaster was looking for an easy solution given their busy schedules which is why they chose to join the ARC Program. All harvesting processes are automated by ProQuest and configured to the institutional repository; it requires no maintenance or effort from the University.

Improving Research Outcomes and Research Efficiency with a Full Text Subscription

Lancaster University Library already had a longstanding subscription to ProQuest A&I so moving to an upgraded partnership with ProQuest wasn’t a far stretch. “While students and researchers have found the A&I database valuable in coverage, expectations for access to full-text theses had become an issue. Following feedback from users for access to the PQDT Global service, we ran a 3-month PQDT Global trial during April – June 2020 which was very successful in attracting well over 2,000 full-text downloads compared to less than 1,000 abstract uses over the same period. Student feedback was excellent with strong support for a permanent subscription.”

Total PQDT Subscription Usage Changes



Subscription usage increased dramatically after providing users with access to the full-text collection, drastically reducing cost per use for Lancaster’s subscription.

“The PQDT Global trial was one of the most successful we have ever run at Lancaster!”

– Annette Lawrence

Access to ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global has positively impacted Lancaster University's programs by allowing all users to access global graduate research in one location, including niche content they might not find anywhere else, detailed data sets, and ProQuest's research and discovery tools. A Faculty Librarian at Lancaster added that:

"I usually introduce ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global to postgraduate students (and often to third-year undergraduates preparing for their dissertation), and present it alongside other options for exploring theses such as ETHOS. Students are not necessarily aware that there are large collections that hold this material, so they are usually pleasantly surprised. Moreover, they may not even have thought about searching for this type of information at all!"

"One of the key benefits to having access to the PQDT database is being able to draw attention to the methodology chapters included in theses – being able to read about other researchers' approaches to constructing a research topic, what they did and the challenges involved and how they have been overcome helps new research students to think critically about their research approach and learn from the experiences of others," another member of the Library team added.

PQDT Global users gain access to over 5 million citations and nearly 3 million full-text dissertations and theses from around the world. Students and researchers will no longer need to make ILL requests and search in multiple locations to find what they need. With immediate access, they can save time, reduce frustrations, and apply global and diverse perspectives to their academic output from over 4,100 institutions in one easy to use resource.

Supporting Researcher Career Ambitions

In a competitive career environment, it has been a strategic goal of Lancaster's to support early career researchers. It is increasingly common for researchers to contact the library with questions regarding where their research thesis will be made available in the context of career applications.

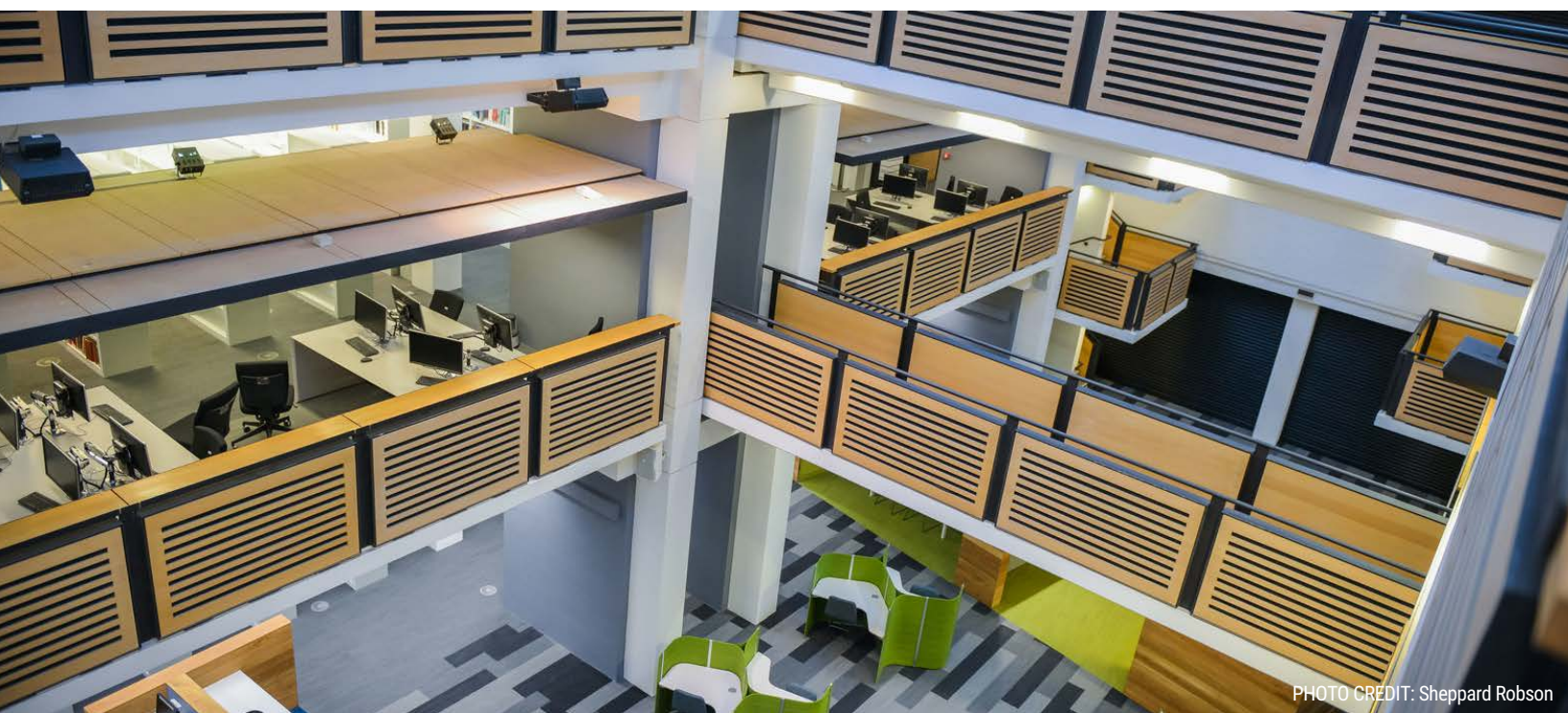
The following comment was made by a Lancaster alumnus talking about the importance of making their thesis available:

"The online available thesis is very helpful for academic career applications. The recruitment team for most academic positions I have experienced usually require official documents to judge the potential and research direction of the candidates as an essential step of the interview process." (Lancaster University alumnus, June 2021).

ProQuest's platform helps researchers achieve integration with a singular scholarly ecosystem and protects their intellectual property. The authors always retain their copyright since ProQuest is a non-exclusive dissemination partner and not a traditional publisher. All authors can request an embargo of their full-text at any time for any reason, and can sign up to receive royalty payments.

"I see PQDT as filling a critical gap – if a student wants to look for a dissertation or thesis then this is my 'go to' resource – seamless and easy to use. For me, it does an essential job, and does it well."

– A Lancaster University Librarian





Participating in a Global Scholarly Ecosystem

Contributing and subscribing to PQDT Global has reciprocal benefits. Lancaster researchers gain both access to unique research in their field, and the ability to maximise the impact of their own outputs, while the contribution of Lancaster research to the global knowledge bank is contributing to shared scholarship and co-operation made possible by the digital information environment.

“With PQDT we are ensuring that the great research that is being carried out at Lancaster will gain greater visibility and impact, and by doing that we will help to achieve our University’s ambition to be a university that is globally significant,” noted Andrew Barker, the Director of Library Services and Learning Development at Lancaster University. He added that “if research is about ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’ PQDT Global provides the ladders onto those shoulders ... it gives people a way to build on what’s gone before.”

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