Programme information

A brief case-study of Royal Holloway's experiences of trailing two different patron-driven acquisitions models with EBL and Elsevier, outlining our goals in using PDA, the practicalities of setting up the pilot studies, lessons learned, and future plans.

Patron-driven e-books

- Why PDA?
- Exploring PDA with EBL short-term loans
- Exploring PDA with Elsevier evidence-based selection
- Learning from success?

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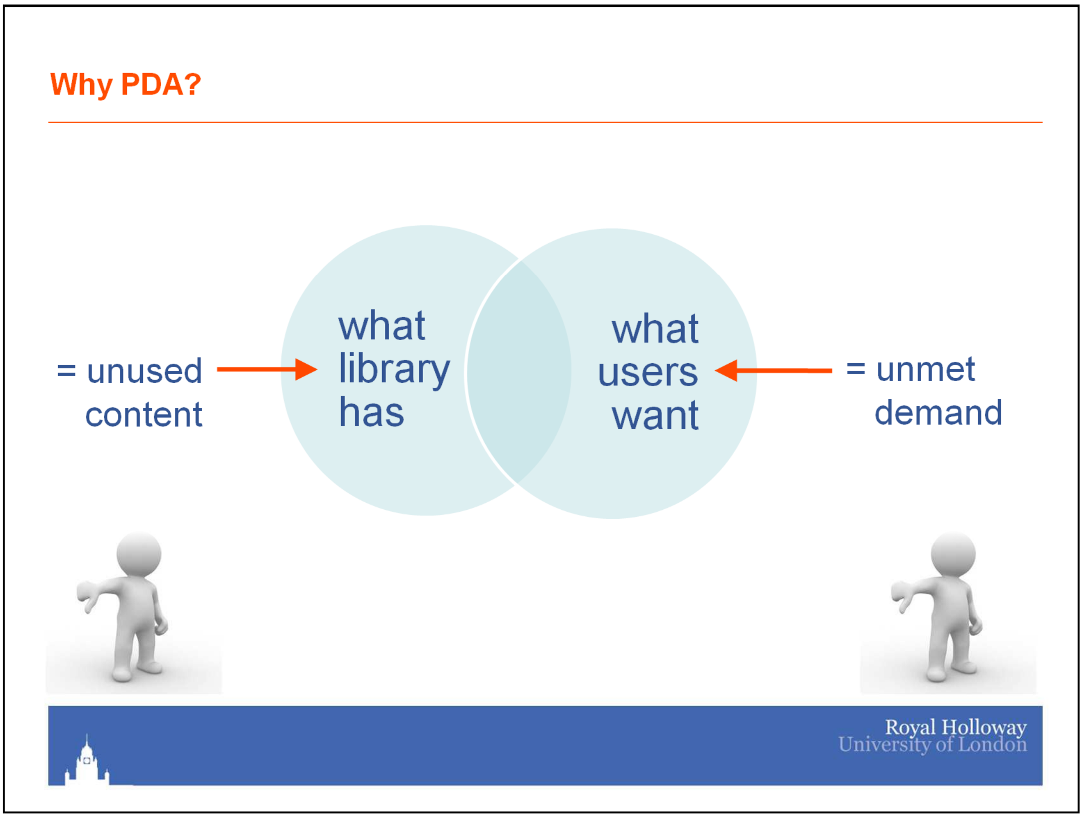
Looking at why we wanted to explore PDA at Royal Holloway, the models that we have explored, and what we learned.



Limited funds vs unlimited demand

We buy e-books that we **think** our users will use, using a range of business models:

•Individual books

•Packages

•Books in databases

But some of the individual books show low or no usage

But it doesn't necessarily match what they actually **want** to use

•We can't buy all the books on very long 'further reading' lists. Sometimes our users want the ones we haven't bought, and give us negative feedback if we don't have them

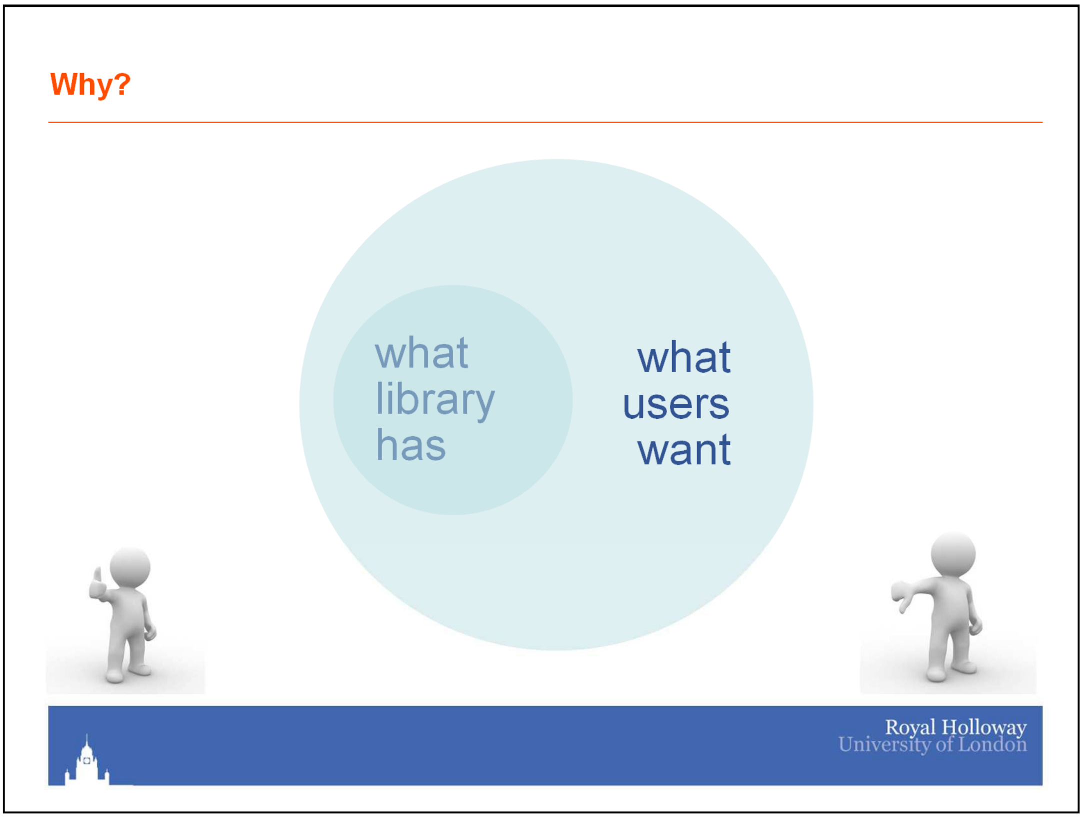
•We can' buy all the books that users find in our discovery system. We're making it easier for users to discover more and more stuff that's 'out there', but we can't deliver it to them.

So we end up with

- Unmet demand = unhappy users
- Unused content = unhappy librarians

So we wanted to trial PDA to see how it could help us get past the problem of buying content based on what we THOUGHT patrons would use,
and instead buy on the basis of what they ACTUALLY use

To help us get to this …



… or at least to get to this, where we could ensure that even if we couldn’t meet all our users need, then at least all the content we **did** have was getting used

So our main aim was to get a better match of content to user needs. But we were also interested to see if this could save staff time spent on selection of books, and therefore give more efficiency savings.

Exploring PDA with EBL short-term loans

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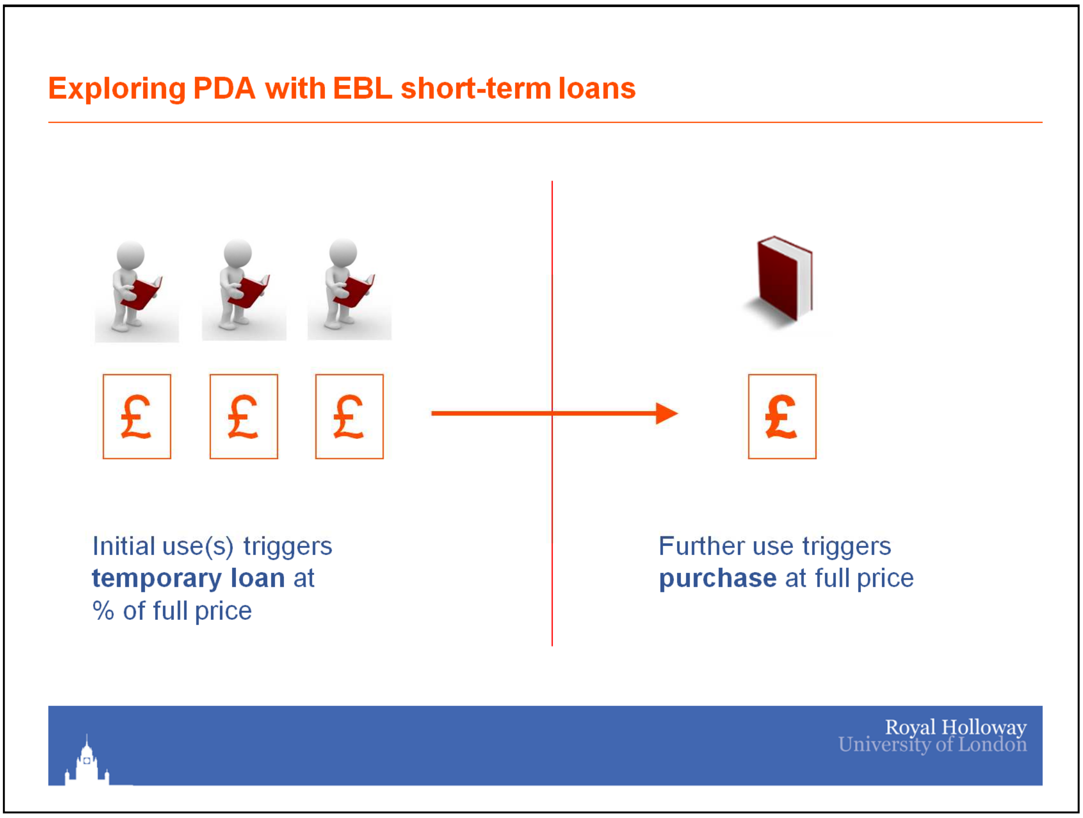
We decided to run a pilot study of PDA

We set aside £10K funding

We hoped to run the pilot for one or two terms

We chose EBL because

- They were available under the national book agreement
- We liked the flexibility of their short-term loan model
- We had not used them as an e-book supplier and wanted to trial their interface



How it works

•There is a free five minute preview

•The first use triggers a loan at (typically) 10-15% of the full price of the book.

•Further use triggers a purchase at full price, and the book becomes part of the library's collection and is available to all its users.

We liked this EBL's model because it allowed us to **choose** where to put the threshold line between loan and purchase, and decide how many loans to have before purchase so we could make sure we were only purchasing titles with significant usage

Exploring PDA with EBL short-term loans

Step 1: Carefully select the books

- Finding criteria to exclude ‘unsuitable’ books was difficult
- De-duplicating against existing e-books was difficult

Step 2: Carefully set the ideal threshold for purchase

- Set threshold based on ‘best guess’

Step 3: Load the records

- Attempted to load 120,00 records ... very, very slowly
- Delay in transfer from library catalogue to discovery system
- Not activated in link resolver

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We faced a number of practical challenges in setting up the pilot study ...

As this was our first experience of PDA, it was a steep learning curve to manage the logistics of the model, and decide the various loan criteria (whether to mediate, how many loans to allow, what price limits to set etc). We made a ‘best guess’ on most criteria.

Exploring PDA with EBL short-term loans

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So having set up the pilot study, we handed over the keys of patron-drive access to our users, and prepared to sit back and watch them run acquisitions for us ...

Exploring PDA with EBL short-term loans

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Things moved a lot faster than we anticipated!

•First short term loan within 30 minutes of adding records to catalogue

•First purchase within few days

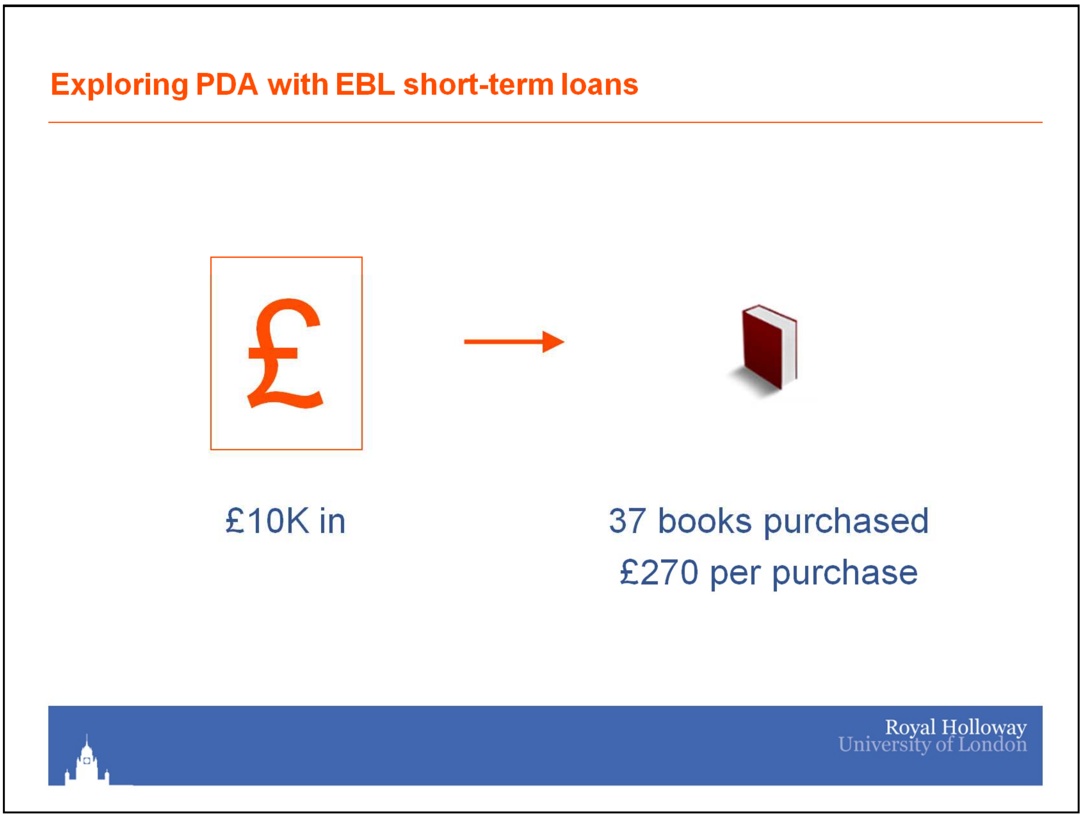
•All funds used within six weeks

•PDA rapidly pulled in to the pits and stopped

So we clearly had some lessons to learn about the scale of the pilot: number of books we offered to our users, the price limits we applied, and possibly our loan thresholds.

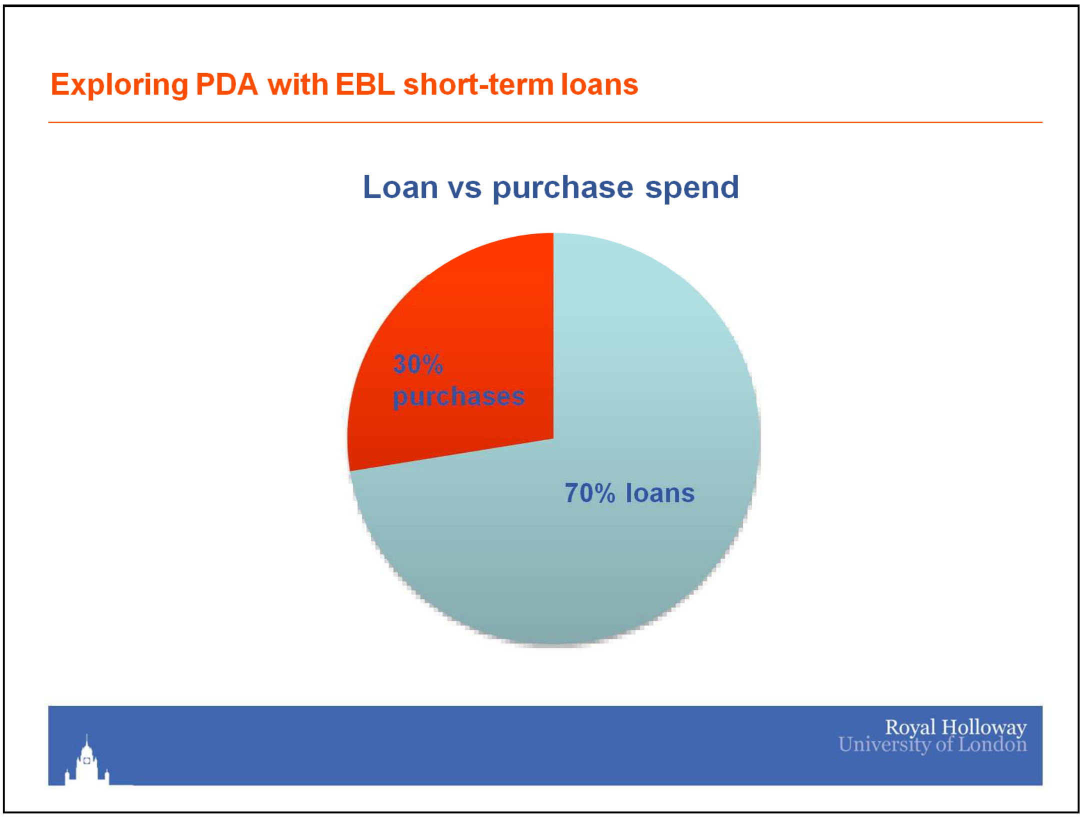
[NB. We should have asked our vendor for most advice! If you’re new to PDA, vendors can offer you valuable advice on an appropriate number of titles, price limit and loan thresholds to help you estimate the rate of spending that will result.]

But what else did we learn about the value for money offered by this model?



Was it a failure?

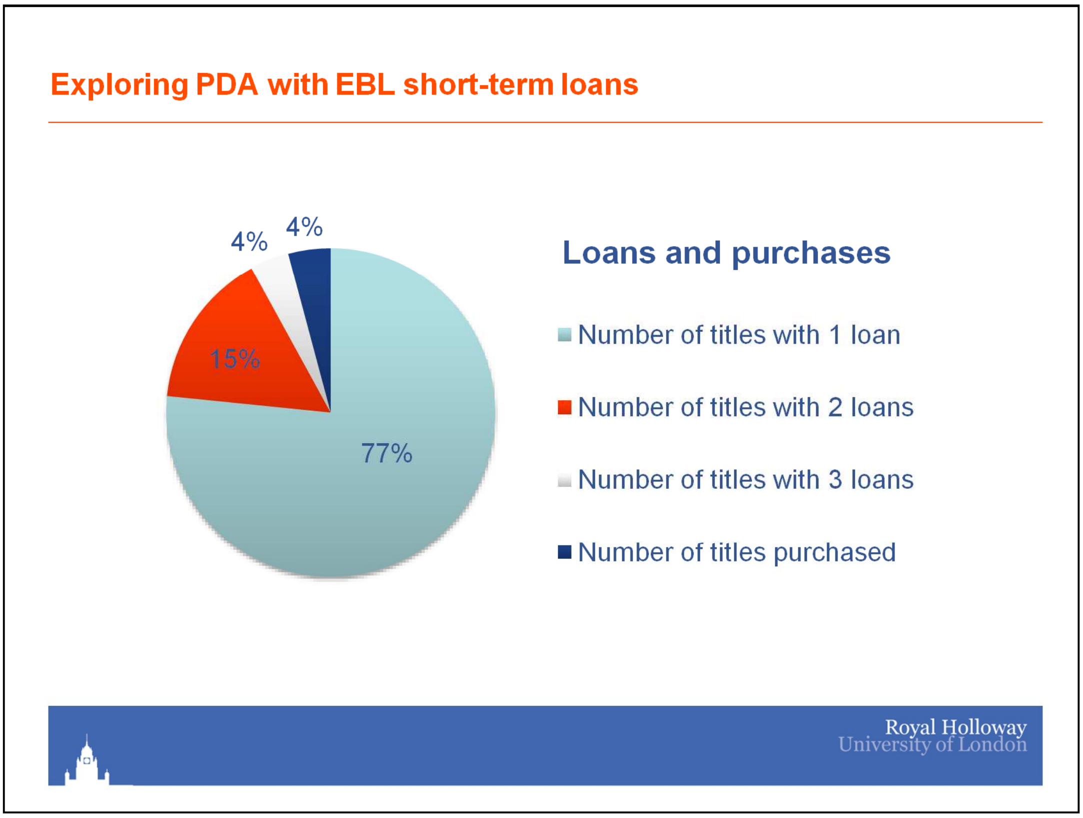
For our £10K investment we purchased just 37 books, which works out at a spend of about £270 per purchase -- obviously not great value.



Looking at our total spend, we spent 70% of funds on loans, and only 30% on purchases.

We could view this as failure, and see money spent on loans as wasted because we've not ended up with content that we own. Clearly if thinking of PDA only as a way to buy books, then the loan model for PDA isn't ideal, because it will always involve spending a percentage of your funds on content that you don't own.

We may take the view that if we were to rollout PDA as ongoing part of service, we should end up with more purchases, either by dropping our purchase threshold to purchase on the 2nd or 3rd loan rather than the 4th loan, or by moving to an alternative model (eg from ebrary or MyiLibrary) which does not charge for loans but purchases on the 2nd use. Both options would give more purchases, and lower (or no) charges for loans.

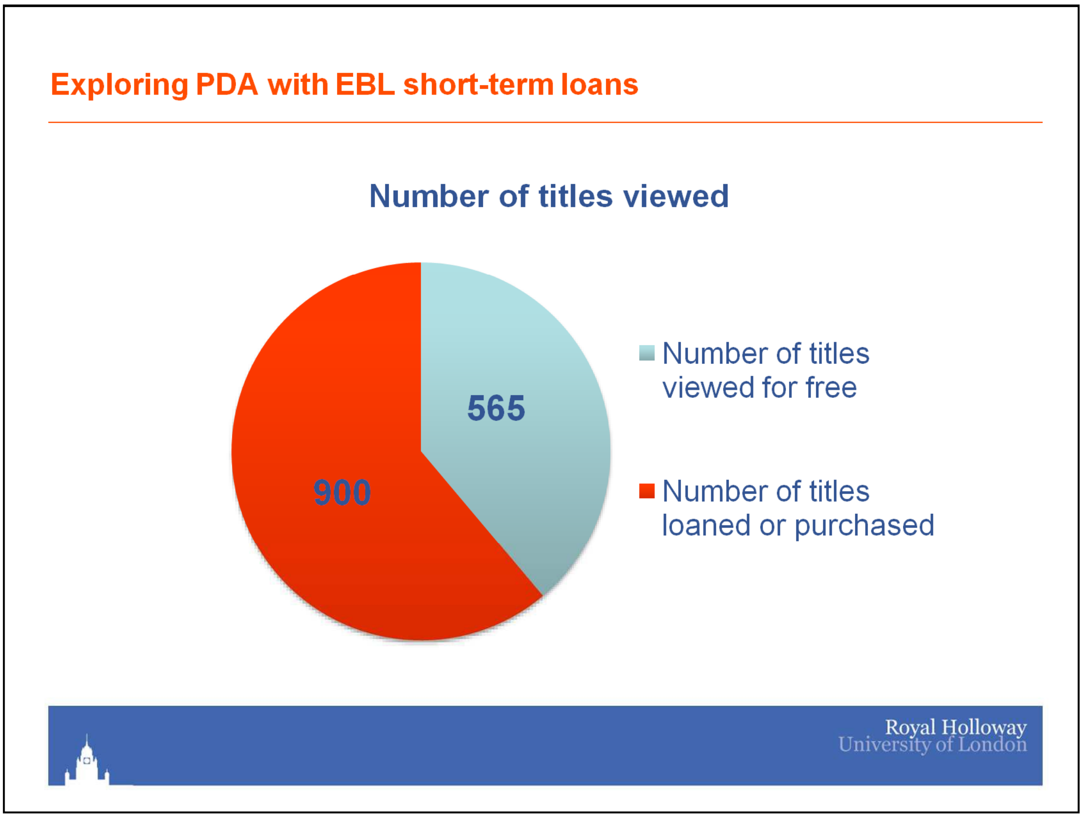


BUT looking in more detail at what got loaned suggests another way to evaluate the success of this PDA model.

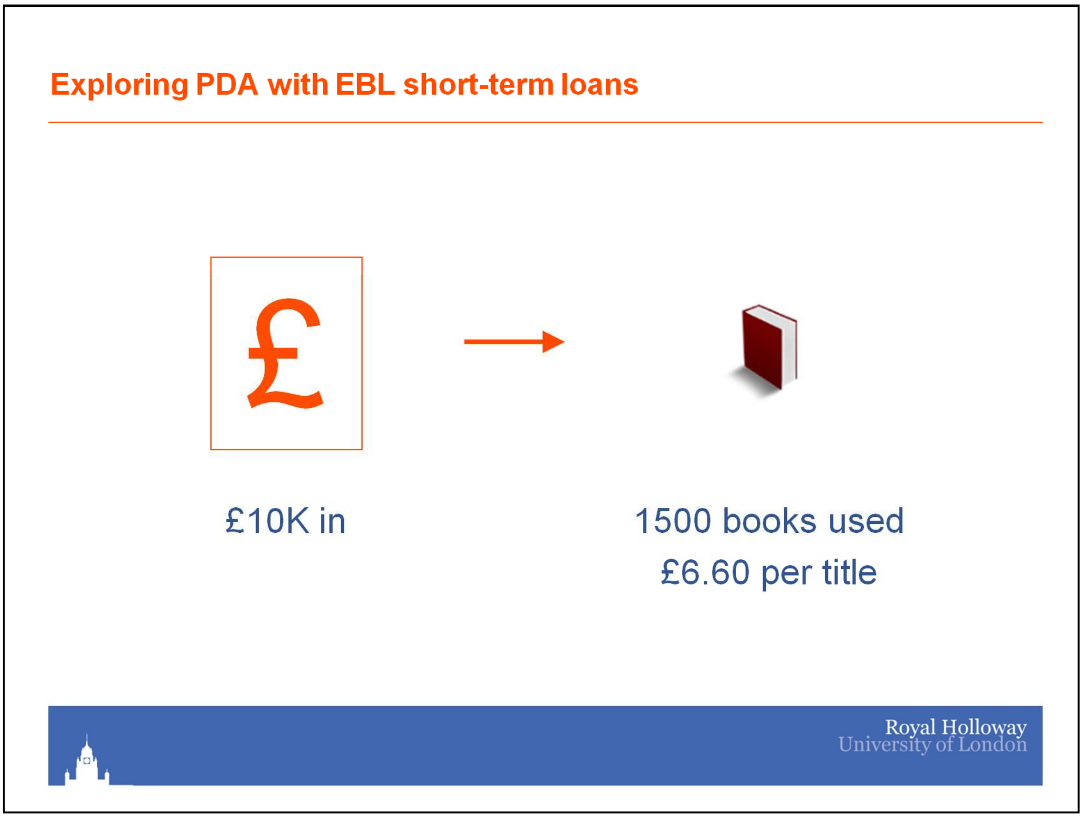
77% of books were only used once, and a further 19% only saw two uses. This was partly due to the short length of our pilot (only six week) – we would expect many of these books to get further use if we had kept them for longer.

But nevertheless, two uses is still not very high, so do we really **want** to purchase books if there's quite a high chance that they won't be used again? If we were making this decision about print books, would we purchase these titles, or would we look to the print equivalent of PDA – inter-library loan – to fulfill user needs for this material?

So instead of viewing money spent on loans as wasted money, shouldn't we simply view PDA as the e-book equivalent of our ILL service, ie spending some of our funds to provide our users with access to a vast range of titles that will only be used once or twice and that it's not worth purchasing for our collection?



By spreading our funds out over both loans and purchases, we were able to pay for access to over 900 different titles. And if we include the number of books which our users got to look at for no charge using the free five minute preview, then that total goes up further to almost 1500 different titles.



That’s clearly far more titles than we could have provided for £10K if we had only purchased books. In fact, if we calculate the cost per title **viewed**, rather than the cost per title purchased, then it works out at £6.60 per title, which looks much better value -- and is much cheaper than paying for a print inter-library loan request.

So to quote Rick Anderson (University of Utah), should we think of PDA as providing us with the means to deliver ‘patron-driven **access**’ not ‘patron-driven acquisition’? If we view this model as an e-book equivalent of ILL rather than a purchasing model, then we would expect the majority of titles to be just short-term loans, with the auto-purchase threshold as the ‘safety net’ which catches the few titles which get repeat usage.

So instead of seeing a low number of purchases as a failure, is this perhaps a better way to use our limited funds to meet more of the demand for access to a vast range of titles? After all, our users don’t necessarily care whether we own a e-book or not – all they want is to be able to access it when they need it.

NB. For more on Rick Anderson’s thought-provoking writings on collections and access, see his contribution to “Digital Information: order or anarchy?” edited by Hazel Woodward and Lorraine Estelle (Facet, 2009) , and his posts on PDA on the Scholarly Kitchen blog.

Exploring PDA with Elsevier Evidence-based selection

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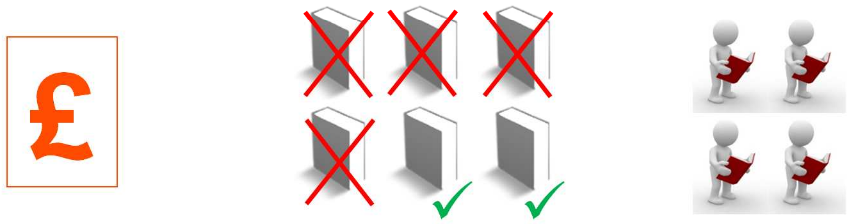
But we were also keen to explore other models of PDA, so we also trialled Elsevier's Evidence-based Selection model for a year.

Exploring PDA with Elsevier Evidence-based selection



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Under this model, the library pays a fee in advance and the supplier makes a collection of books available. The size of the fee is based on the number of books in the collection, and is typically higher than the cost of an annual subscription but lower than the cost of purchasing the collection. Users then have **unlimited** access to all the books in the collection for a year, without any additional ‘loan’ fees.

At the end of the year, librarians can look at the usage statistics for ‘evidence’ of which titles have been used, and ‘select’ which titles they would like to keep as permanently. We can pick as many titles as we can afford up to the value of the fee that we initially paid, based on the full list price of each title. So we don’t get the cheaper price per title that we’d get if we purchased the whole collection, but we’re only paying for titles that we know are of value to our users.

Furthermore, there is no automatic selection of titles for purchase under this model, and we don’t have to select the titles that were most highly used. So as librarians, we have a little more control, and can exercise our judgement to pick exactly the titles we want.

Exploring PDA with Elsevier Evidence-based selection

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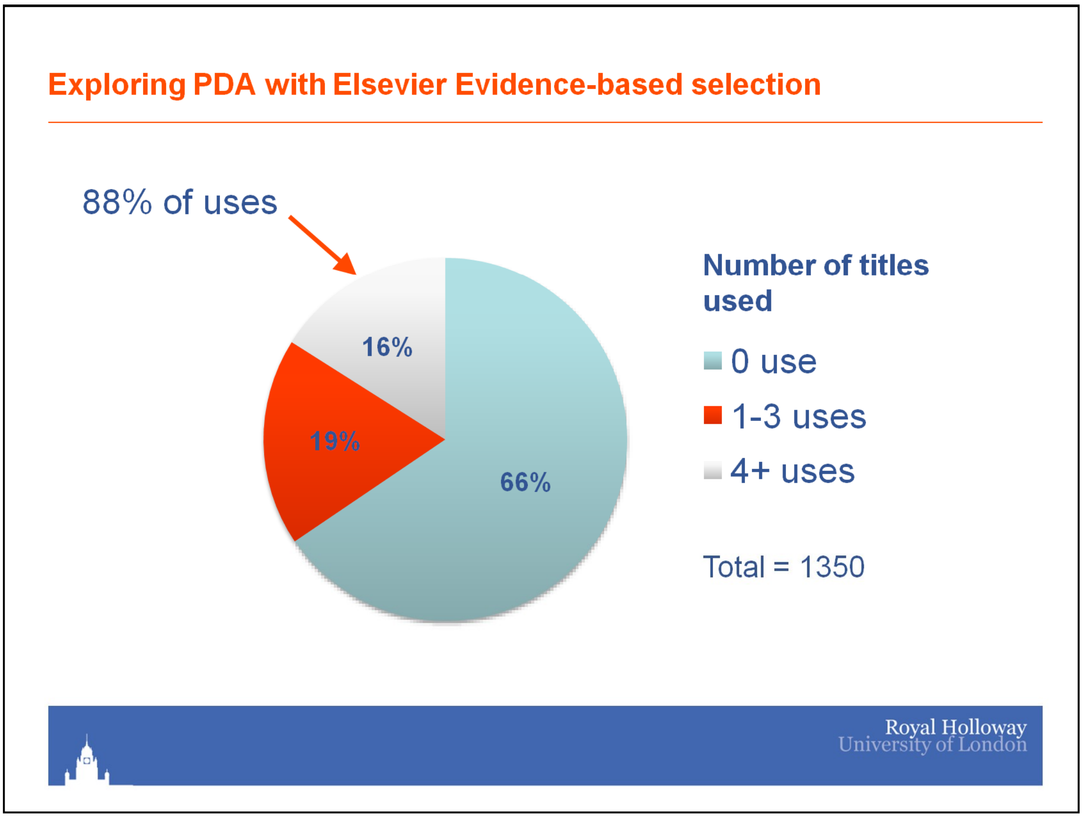
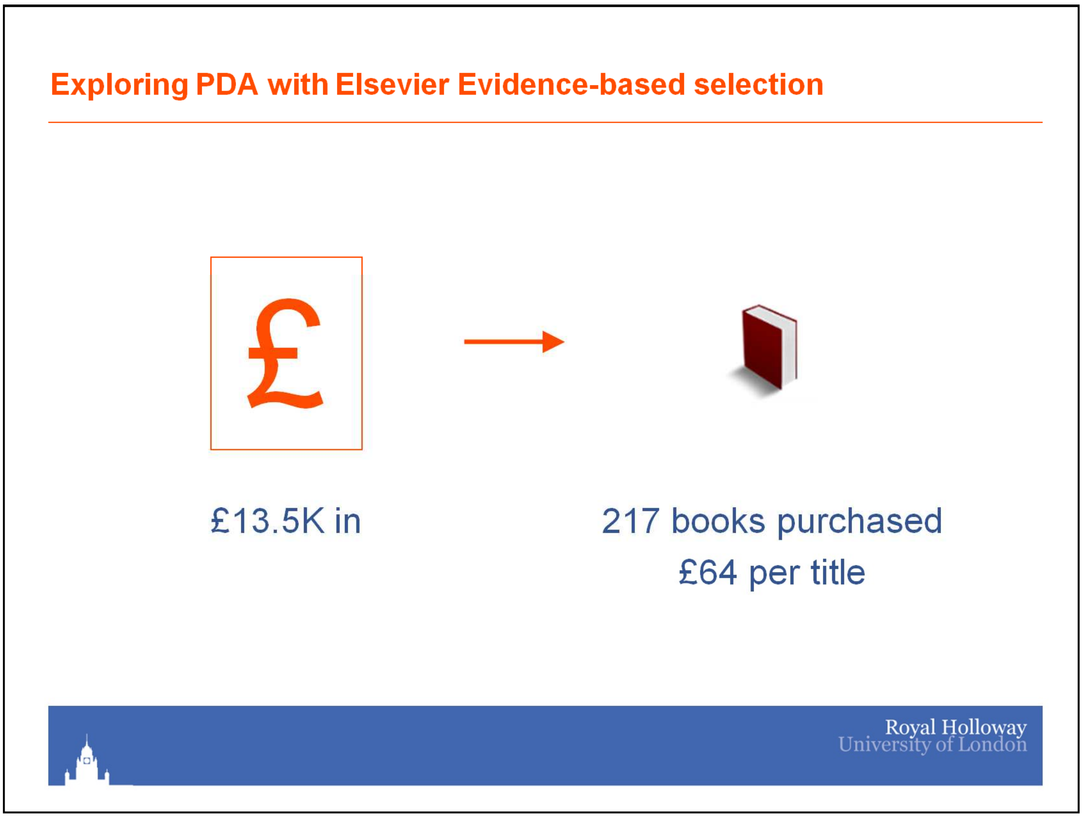
So EBS is not pure patron-driven acquisition, but is more like letting our users loose with bumper cars – we've got more control, and there's no risk of them running away with our collection budget.



When we look at the usage of titles in this collection, it is very different to our EBL pilot.

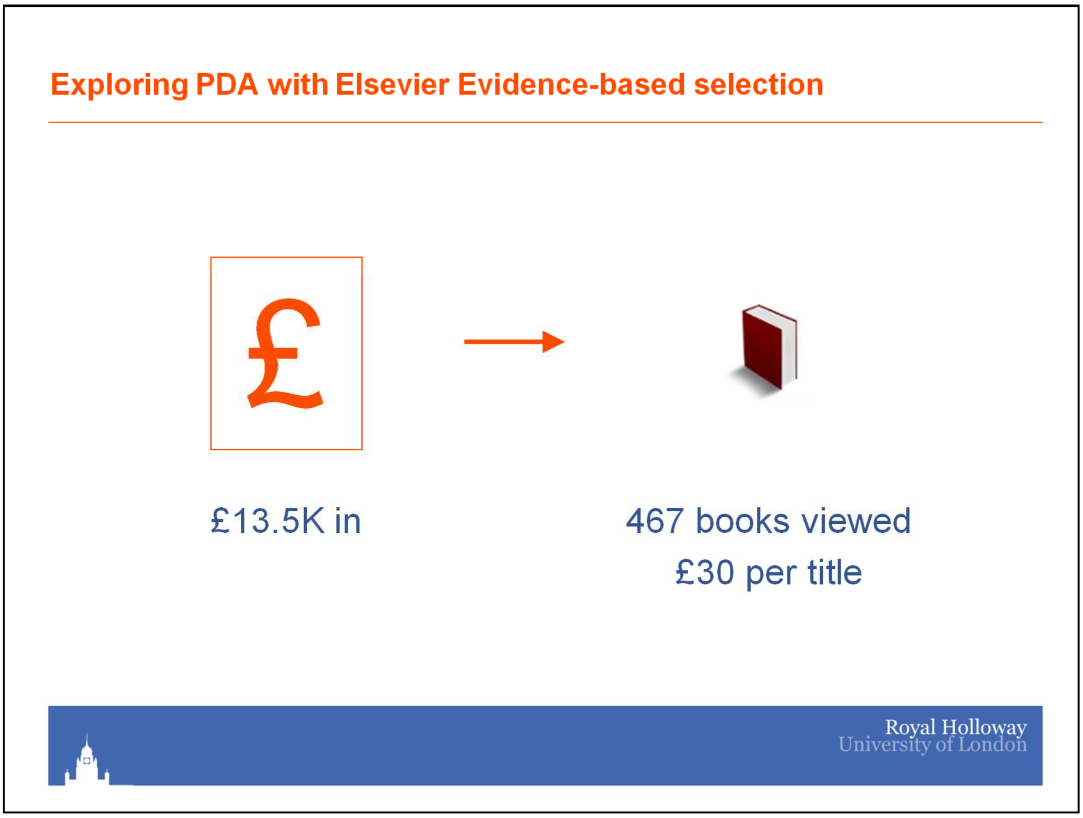
We had a much smaller collection of books available – only 1350 instead of over 120,000 with EBL. And although the majority of titles didn't get used at all, we saw a much bigger percentage of titles with four or more uses (ie the equivalent of books that we would have purchased from under our EBL pilot).

So whereas the majority of total usage for our EBL books was spread across a **large** number of books which were only used once, the majority of the total usage of our Elsevier books (88%) was concentrated into a **small** number of titles that were used at least four times.



As it happened, for the £13.5K that we paid for upfront gave us enough money to purchase all of the titles with 4+ uses, plus a few more that we thought might get more use in the future.

That works out at £64 per title – still expensive, but this simply reflects a high average list price. And as the calculation of what we can purchase at the end of the year is based on the list price of the book, we're not paying more to purchase each book than if we'd purchased them directly without using the Evidence-Based Selection model.



But we also got some value from the 250 books that were used 1-3 times during the year, but were not purchased. So if we recalculate the 'cost per title' to include these books, it brings it down to just £30 per title – more than an ILL but still reasonable value given the cost of the titles they had access to. Alternatively, you can view it that you are paying list price for the books you purchase, and effectively getting a year's use of the rest of the collection for free.

Compared to the EBL model, evidence-based selection has both advantages and disadvantages.

- The **advantages** are that we know upfront exactly how much it is going to cost, so it's much easier to budget for, and easier to manage as there is no need to continually monitor spending. We also know that we will end up with a reasonable number of purchased books, so it's more reassuring for those who want to see the library building collections.
- But the **disadvantages** are that we can only get content from a single publisher, we have to pay a large amount of money upfront, and (unlike more conventional PDA models) there's no guarantee that we will get any usage.

Given that the original aim of PDA was to avoid the risk of buying e-books that nobody uses, that's a significant risk of this approach. After all, if we were any good at predicting which books our users would use, then we wouldn't need PDA in the first place!

What we found is that the value of EBS was not that it gave us not the option to investigate **if** the collections got used, but to explore **which** subject collections got most use. We have not previously invested heavily in collections of e-books, due to uncertainty about whether they would generate enough usage to provide us with better value than selecting individual titles. Under EBS we paid for access to four different subject collections, and were able to look at the usage statistics to see which subjects saw the most usage. So as well as guiding our selection of which titles to purchase, the usage stats from EBS gave us some valuable guidance on subject areas where we saw high and/or broad use across a collection, and we can use this to consider purchasing further e-book collections in these subjects – either purchasing the full collection from Elsevier, or looking collections from other vendors.

Learning from success?

How to drive safely
with patron-driven acquisition

Learning from success?

Start slowly

- Small number of titles

Cover the brakes

- Use catalogue to control demand
- Use mediation to control spending

Change gear if you need to

- Change loan to purchase thresholds if you have the option

Learning from success?

Know where you want to go

- Define “success”
- Access or acquisition?

Pick your model to match your goals

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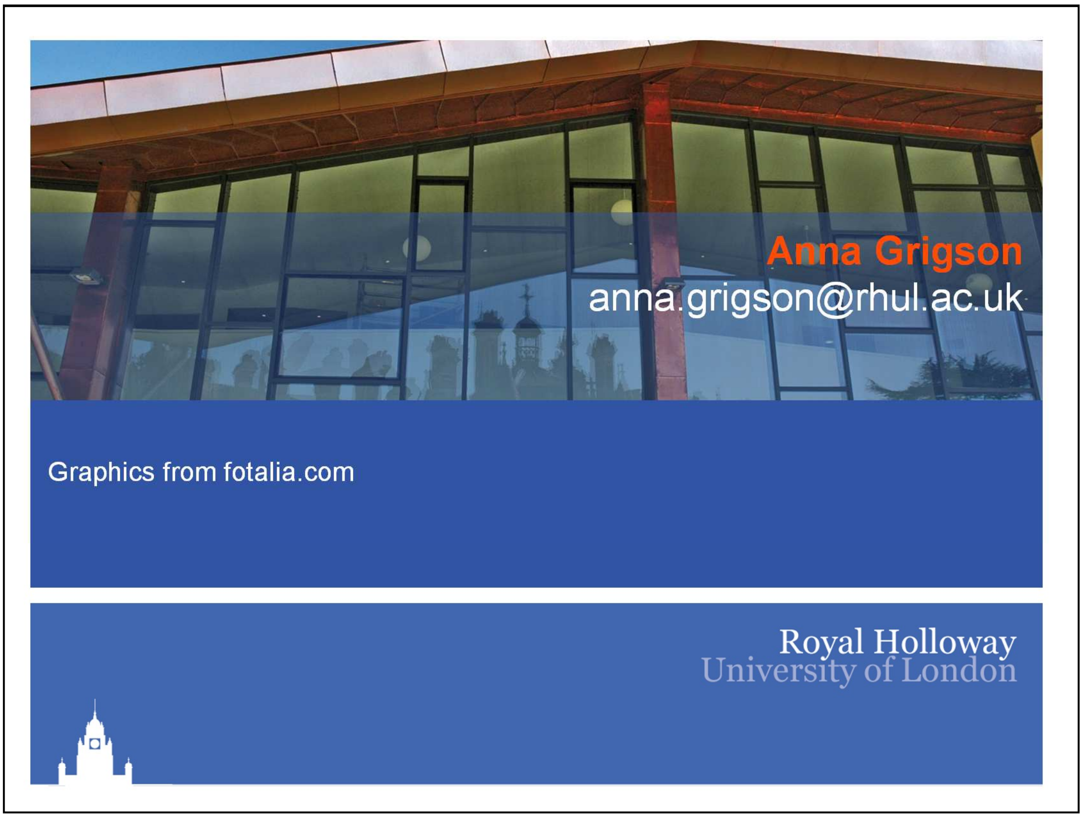
So one possible view is that an EBL-style loan-based model suits a **large collection**, where we have **no idea** which titles users will want, and the **majority of use is scattered** across a large range of titles. Paying for short-term loan access under this model provides better value than purchasing titles that may never be used again.

By contrast, a model like Elsevier’s EBS suits a **smaller collection**, where we have a reasonable degree of **confidence** that the books will be used, and the **majority of use is concentrated** into a small number of titles.

But it doesn’t need to be an ‘either/or’ choice:

•We can have more than one model of PDA running at the same time, using different models from different suppliers, perhaps using different models for different subject areas where we see different patterns of use. For example, we see lots of business titles getting high use (which suits an EBS-style model), but use of our history titles tends to be more scattered (which suits a loan model).

•We can have different varieties of the loan model to suit different needs. For example, we might want to control access in some subject areas more closely by mediating access, but allow auto-purchase in other subjects.



For more on PDA, see:

Patron-driven acquisitions: history and best practices, edited by David A. Swords (De Gruyter, 2011)

Patron-driven e-books: the promise and the (potential) pitfalls, by Anna Grigson, a presentation at the UKSG Annual Conference, March 2012. Available via Slideshare through the UKSG website at www.uksg.org.