The challenges of ebooks in academic institutions.
JISC Project Seminar
November 9th 2012
JISC Collections
Summary Notes

The meeting was focussed on reviewing the preliminary outputs for the curation strand of the project. These notes are from the stakeholder's review of the draft University of York and University of Hertfordshire case studies. The curation case studies are arranged under the following main headings

- Why ebooks
- How to curate/mange them
- Challenges
- Ways forward

There is significant overlap in the two case studies but each institution presented a distinctive voice. For example York is a research library and has used ebooks used to build new (research) collections quickly; Hertfordshire is primarily using ebooks to better align content to courses to support learning/teaching.

In reviewing the case studies the following issues emerged and were discussed:

1. Who curates the e-learning resources-such as OER? Does the library have a role?. And who curates the institution's university press output? Is there a library role there?

2. E-textbooks are in flux with no satisfactory (to the library) business model established and there are concerns about the role of libraries in provision of e-textbooks. It seems unlikely libraries will ever be able to meet the demand and some form of mixed economy will continue. Publishers will continue to go direct to academics and end users for textbook and related course content services.

3. In a sense the ebook's promise of access and availability highlights the *rationing* role of the library. Unlike the trade/retail sector where increasing demand is a positive opportunity, academic libraries cannot respond in full to demand—as evidenced by curation models like PDA. These are popular but typically resources run out before demand is sated.

4. Curation of 'non-scholarly' ebooks - in essence 'how do we curate the Kindle stuff' – some *'trade'* publications are relevant in an academic environment. However the academic ebook paradigm remains centred on the PDF format rather than ebooks produced on different platforms such as Kindle. User expectations will be increasingly driven by the general 'consumer' ebook experience (dominated by Kindle etc at present). What will happen if aggregators (as some now do) produce their own ebook readers in order to make their platforms more versatile and attractive to end users?

5. Access vs. ownership. Legally ebooks fall under a different category to print books.[1] Print books are 'distributed'; the rights holder cannot control subsequent lending or re-sale of the physical object. As a consequence, the library decides in accordance with its collection building policy what books to buy and use for lending. The library can keep these books indefinitely or sell/ give them away.

    'Ebooks are "communicated to the public" or "made available to the public". Communication to the public, or making available to the public, is regarded as a service. The library can only acquire the ebook by entering into a licence agreement with the rights holders. The rights holders are free to decide whether they want to give access to a specific work, and to decide on the terms for such access. The library cannot loan ebooks without permission. Ebooks cannot be sold or given away'.

    This different legal framework for ebooks means 'ownership' of an ebook is not the same as a printed book. Therefore issues such as perpetual access to content cannot be assumed. For example if platform providers go out of business access may be compromised. Institutional managers need to be more aware the implications and might look to some of the solutions employed in the world of journals such as Institutional repositories to secure content for future access.

6. Changing technologies and formats: Ebooks are beginning to contain dynamic content including learning and assessment elements. This raises issues for citation and curation of ebooks and e-content. Librarians need to be more familiar with the devices to read/use ebooks in order to better appreciate the issues and develop solutions.

    Furthermore with the current state of flux in terms of technology, and in particular standards, there is a concern access to content in 'old' formats will be impossible in the future. Perhaps the adoption of a minimum standard which can be read across all or a solution could help?

    In order to achieve the maximum curation/management efficiency librarian see advantages for one platform, and one ebook format that can be read on any reader. In part that is a benefit of the 'universal' (though in a sense a lowest common denominator) PDF format. This is compromised by new formats that enable new capabilities for the user– especially e-textbooks.

7. Universities produce a lot of local content that is used in a variety of ways. Much of this might be considered forms of 'ebooks'. There is little curation consistency with solutions and system growing up in an ad-hoc way. They may be managed by staff from different parts of the university. For example OER may be created and curated without the knowledge of the library

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[1] For a short helpful summary of the distinction and the consequences see; 'Ebook Acquisition and Lending Briefing Public, Academic and Research Libraries'. CILIP Policy Dept August 2011
http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/policy/Documents/E-book%20acquisition%20and%20lending%20by%20libraries%20%28August%202012%29.pdf

Ebook collections may not be easy to use. Curators need to look at how users need to navigate through the collection sites and also need to look at how the library/institutional networks add to the access complications especially for off campus users.

8. Unlike 'trade' publication, libraries are the main consumers for scholarly publications. This market power is not used to its full and could be better exploited in particular by working in partnership with publishers and others in the ecosystem for ebooks. For example:-

- If we are to break free of the current 'PDF paradigm' for ebooks in order to exploit the full potential of digital format, there is a lot to be said for a more proactive role in discussions with publishers to set common standards so that content is not restricted to particular devices (iPad, Kindle etc). It looks as if consumers will continue to use a variety of reading devices.

- Consortium agreements are growing in the US and could form a model for UK HE to increase market voice and power.

- Academic libraries are a good market for publishers. A recent CILIP policy paper noted: *'Piracy issues have not been a major concern so far. A lot of academic publishers publish journals and haven't experienced serious piracy issues with them, so are less afraid of putting their books online than trade publishers'.*[2]

- Institutions and in particular the library can work with publishers to engage more fully with end users in order to better understand more about what users want. For example in many cases, they seem to want chunks of content rather whole books. If they can get what they want they are more likely to go to illegal sources. So more can be done to make the legal route more 'convenient'.

- The institution has information on users which would be of immense value to publishers/content creators. This information could provide leverage to the institution for bargaining.

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[2] 'Ebook Acquisition and Lending Briefing Public, Academic and Research Libraries'. CILIP Policy Dept August 2011 http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/policy/Documents/E-book%20acquisition%20and%20lending%20by%20libraries%20%28August%202012%29.pdf