

# The challenge of ebooks in academic institutions. (JISC) project

## Curation of ebooks: Case study

University of Chester.  
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Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

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## **Background to ebooks in the University of Chester**

The University of Chester has around 16,800 students, studying on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees across two main campuses at Chester and Warrington, a number of NHS trust sites, and some course delivery at partner colleges of further education. The University was an early adopter of ebooks having begun with NetLibrary (now owned by EBSCO) through a NoWAL consortia deal, in 2003. They are now the third largest purchasers of ebooks from Dawson in the North West. The library forms part of a converged service, Library and Information Services headed by the former Director of Computing and Information Services, who is very supportive of e-resources.

## **Why ebooks-what problems do they solve?**

Ebooks are addressing the main issue of accessibility. Purchasing ebooks is not about adding value through content - the decision to purchase ebooks was to improve access to the library collections for all students. Collections are accessible to all students who can access the Internet and available at all hours and every day. Students and staff are actually disappointed that some books are not available as ebooks.

## **How successful have ebooks been in addressing those issues?**

Ebook usage is carefully monitored to review the success of their purchasing policy including loan figures and view figures which are going up incrementally each year

The impact on learning and teaching is purely anecdotal as there is no identified way of gaining evidence. The library reports that it is asked to provide more information and resources online, and some academic departments would prefer an e-purchase rather than a physical purchase.

With a history of purchasing ebooks stretching over 10 years it is hard to say how ebooks might impact on the NSS rating.

## **Scope of ebooks**

The library defines ebooks primarily as the online or e-version of paper books i.e. OED Online was the dictionary and also the equivalent which might now only exist in e-format. They also include database type information available online such as Oxford Music Online.

## **Scale**

The library has around 15,000 individual ebook titles on their catalogue mainly purchased through EBSCO, Coutts (MyiLibrary) and Dawson (DawsonEra), selected as Coutts and Dawson are where they buy print books. In addition they have a number of ebook collections including: Emerald ebooks, University Scholarship Online, Palgrave Connect, Cambridge Companions Online, Oxford Reference Online, PsycBOOKS, Digital Karl Barth Collections, JISC Historic Books, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, OED online, Oxford Language Dictionaries, Medieval Sources Online, Oxford Music Online, Women Writers Online and a number of collections from various publishers.

### **Allocating resources for ebooks**

Ebook collection purchasing is generally planned with a fixed outright purchase made when specific pots of money are available. A small number of subscription purchases are also made. The library has a separate online budget used for the purchase of database/journals/large ebook collections online, accounting for the majority of e-purchases. In addition to these purchases 18% of books funds specifically allocated to departments in 2011-12 were used for ebook purchase.

PDA purchasing began in April 2012, initially through a pilot project aiming to examine the collections development strategies to review if library was purchasing what users wanted. 10,000 titles were made available to users leading to the purchase of 228 titles from Coutts. The library chose not to publicise the project for fear of running out of money quickly. They downloaded titles to 5 times the value of their total project allowance into the catalogue. The titles were all new books across a variety of subject areas, the only limits placed were the exclusion of non-UK law, education and nursing/medical books. By allowing their users to access ebook titles across a wide range of subject areas they were able to identify any gaps in the library collections where users wanted content added. PDA purchases were made after 2 uses. The pilot project ended in October 2012. The books bought via PDA covered a much broader range of subjects than would have been chosen by library staff, but analysis of their usage shows that they are being used to a similar extent as “core” subject titles. See Appendix 1: Usage stats for e-books bought via Patron Driven Acquisition in 2012 vs. non-PDA titles.

### Purchasing issues

Some suppliers work on an access credit system where titles are allocated a specified number of credits very few titles use their full credit allocation. Others work on a multi-user or limited consecutive user licences. The library has noted that suppliers are providing fewer credits per title, some publishers are withdrawing their titles from ebook collections and some publishers are setting up their own platforms and collections. VAT is significant issue for e-book purchasing, the market is in an interesting place at the moment.

Ebook availability is limited in some subject areas, particularly art books.

### Usage monitoring

There has been more focus on gathering usage statistics in this year to ensure value for money from purchases. Cost per download, cost per search, cost per use are all factors taken into account. Other cost savings need to be considered in this equation including the reduced processing costs, and no need for storage space or shelving. Their ebook usage statistics show an incremental increase in use each year.

## **The management – ‘curation’ of ebooks.**

### Workflows

Individual title purchases of ebooks are treated in the same way as physical book purchases with an additional process which alerts when the ebook is available, it is then added to the catalogue in the standard way. There are no real changes for staff reported except that the acquisitions process is simpler than for individual physical book purchasing. Where large collections are purchased specific funding monies are used. Access is enabled almost immediately then the library loads the titles onto their catalogue, this involves another member of staff who can set up a bulk upload of the records into the catalogue. Every two weeks records are loaded from catalogue on to Summon, this is an automated process.

### Divergent platforms

Currently the library focuses on a small number of suppliers (aggregators). Some publishers are starting to provide their own ebooks using their own platforms. The library's top level users are totally comfortable with the technology and will adapt to different ways of accessing ebooks. It is harder for other students and staff who are less comfortable with technology and will struggle to access books across a range of different platforms. The library considers that the divergence is a problem for library to work out not the user. "Our users do not care who provides the book they want the information and it is for the library to manage that." However there are a number of worrying trends as one publisher has recently tripled their prices for access via an aggregator site.

### Metadata

The library does not opt to purchase catalogue records from suppliers choosing instead to adapt records from print records, or use British Library records or Copac records. If the catalogue records are provided free they are used and are particularly useful when purchasing specific or large collections of ebooks. To facilitate PDA records are loaded and unloaded at specific time in the year where staff are available, these records are made identifiable as a group so they can be bulk processed when they need to be removed from catalogue.

### Specific issues

The University of Chester operates a partnership service with a local hospital library that provides services for both HE and NHS users. The hospital library shares the university's library catalogue, and this has caused some issues with access to e-books. Collections bought by the partners are restricted to use by just their staff or students or users, and there have been some issues with clearly identifying user access rights. It is hoped that this issue will be addressed shortly.

## **How ebooks are discovered and accessed**

All information searches are steered through Summon as a first point of access.

## **Issues and lessons learnt**

- Ebooks should become part of the library service and be fully integrated into all policies.
- Ebooks are heavily used and this library feels the move to ebooks was worthwhile.
- Students expect books and resources to be available online and be fully accessible from their chosen place of study across the entire academic year including the vacations.
- Some ebooks are very expensive and the library can only purchase single use copies.
- The limitations on copying books occasionally cause problems.
- If using PDA don't be too restrictive in limiting access by subjects, students will select the books they need.
- Ebooks provide a very useful addition to traditional collections.
- A pilot Kindle project found textbooks availability on Kindle is weak and coverage is not ideal.
- Users can use ebooks on any standard internet device from observations they are currently using iPads or laptops or library computers.

## **Thoughts for the future**

Value for money is critical as budgets are under pressure, publishers should be aware that academic library budgets are low. Increases in prices may result in reduced sales as libraries are now keeping prices are under constant scrutiny.

The library is taking part in a new project 'Coursesmart' which is investigating renting ebook collections.

The ability to buy just chapters rather than whole books would be useful in the current economic climate this is an area libraries should explore further.

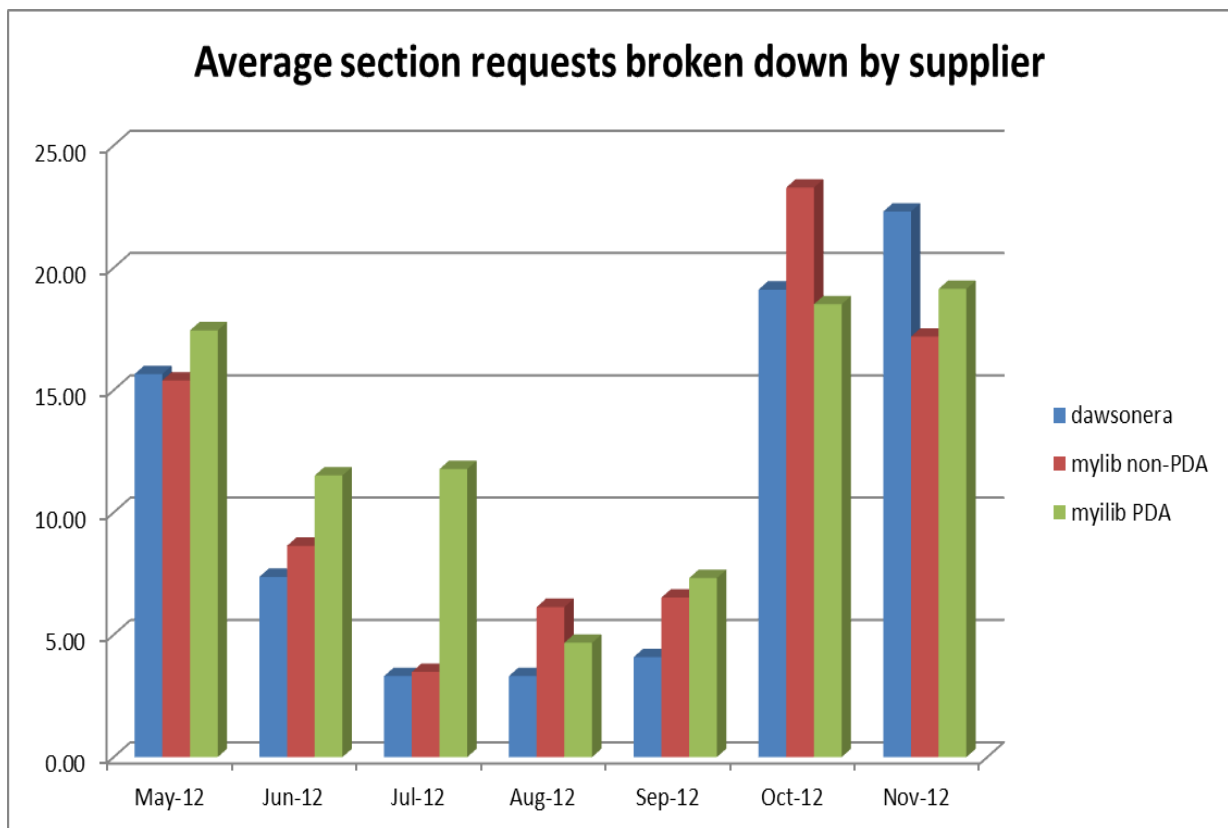
## Appendix : Usage statistics

The report below is reproduced with permission from the University of Chester.

### *Usage stats for e-books bought via Patron Driven Acquisition in 2012 vs. non-PDA titles*

Charts below are based on the average number of section requests from each e-book from May to November 2012. We got usage data from MyLibrary and Dawson, and then totalled and divided that by the number of titles we have from each supplier.

The first chart shows that PDA titles outperformed non-PDA titles between May and July and then again in September, but also that usage is broadly equal between PDA and non-PDA titles. I would propose that this can be seen as affirming that our current e-book purchasing strategy is successful, and that PDA titles are proving an equally well-used addition to the titles that subject teams are already choosing.



The second chart shows the same usage figures but split between PDA and non-PDA (with some adjustment so that MyiLibrary stats – a smaller collection – are in proportion to Dawsonera’s).

