

# The Challenge of ebooks (JISC) project

## Curation of ebooks: Case study

### University of York.

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*'Ebooks aren't always as convenient as you might think'*

### CONTENTS

<b>Background to ebooks at the University .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Drivers for the adoption of ebooks.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>What key issues are ebooks addressing? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>What do you mean by ebooks?—what is the scope? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Monographs.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Textbooks.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>OER.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>University created ebooks.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Summary of how ebooks are managed (curated) at the university.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Title by title.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>(Publisher) Subject Collections.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Aggregator collections.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Library built Collections.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>PDA.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>What are the main issues in 'curating' ebook that the library needed to address.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Enabling discovery.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Curation convenience vs. user experience.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Business models.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Disintermediation.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Accessibility.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Not everything is e.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>How successful have ebooks been in addressing those issues?.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Lessons learnt and advice to give.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Thoughts on the future.....</b>	<b>5</b>

## **Background to ebooks at the University**

### Drivers for the adoption of ebooks

Student numbers have been growing –from around 10 to 15 thousand in last five years. In addition the university has created new departments: Law and Theatre, Film & Television and also now has a Medical School (shared with University of Hull). In addition core offerings such as archaeology have expanded their scope to be more international. There is no capacity to economically expand the physical library so provision of ebooks is an obvious way forward. Students want (expressed especially via surveys like LibQual and the NSS) 'more books.'

To support the research function the university has enhanced its humanities research collection + archives (Borthwick) funded through a benefactor and other funding. Ebooks, notably through research collections like EEBO and ECCO, State Papers Online and Past Masters, are an efficient way to supplement the existing print collection to provide the depth required for a serious research library. These packages have enabled critical mass for research collections to be achieved quickly.

### **What key issues are ebooks addressing?**

- The key benefit of ebooks is an improvement in terms of *access*, which includes discovery of the resources (MARC records for all titles are in the library catalogue) searchability *within* the resource content and availability 24/7 and to off-campus users
- Even where some content is already available -e.g. in microfilm-the old formats cannot compete with the searchability of an online resource
- New research collections can also be offered and existing ones expanded quickly through commercially available ebook aggregations (see section above).
- High quality research collections improve the university's reputation and so attract academics and researchers
- Saving in shelf space ---which is at a premium

### **What is meant by ebooks—the scope**

#### Monographs

Ebooks curated/managed by the library are predominantly monographs-this includes the 300,000 or so titles in ebook collections/databases like EEBO and ECCO

#### Textbooks

Textbooks definitions vary — a workable definition might be a book for where a new edition is published annually. An academic may designate a monograph a textbook for a course where another would designate it is supplementary reading for their course. The library does not attempt to meet the full demand for textbooks—e or print. It is a mixed economy involving library, student and department purchase. A limiting factor in terms of e provision of textbooks is the cost and limits in licensing (e.g. restrictions of simultaneous access)

#### OER

The library does not curate OER -and indeed is not formally made aware of OER resources that the university might create and need curating

## University created ebooks

York does not have a university press.

### **Summary of how ebooks are managed (curated) at the university**

#### Title by title

Specific titles are acquired because they appear on reading lists, or are selected by academic staff. In essence the acquisition processes are the same as print. The library uses the same suppliers -Dawson (Era) and MyiLibrary and orders are processed through the library management system in the same way as print. This means the same (streamlined) workflows including EDI (E-orders and invoices etc) as print.

Publishers are trying to encourage the library to deal directly with them. One of the advantages would be the titles were not subject to the DRM restrictions of the ebook aggregator platforms. As a consequence end users could have improved features in terms of downloading and printing. However in *curation* terms this would be expensive as publishers haven't built in the same library workflow friendly process: the library would have to expend more staff resources to manage the process. It's about trade-offs. *Convenience* often cited as one of the key aspects of the 'consumption' experience is also key part of the **curation** equation.

#### (Publisher) Subject Collections

The library subscribes to specific subject collections -e.g. Computer science from Springer, Royal Society of Chemistry etc

- MARC records get loaded into catalogue-there is library staff input to ensure they are of good quality
- The KB (Knowledge Base) (SFX) is updated and checked for accuracy – (collections will already have been identified by the KB so they just need activating).
- Licenses are filed as print or PDF on shared drive—the library does not use an ERM system at present.
- An (LMS) acquisitions order record is created for the collection (i.e. not the individual titles). The invoice (generally a PDF invoice) is sent from collection publisher and is processed through the LMS

Members of library staff also have to flag in Primo Central (the discovery service) that the library has full text access to a collection (there is not an immediate update from the SFX KB). This is important as Primo delivers the initial result set for a search based on those records for which the library has full text licenses. The user can expand the search to the full (centrally hosted global index) but in that case some results will not have a full text link.

#### Aggregator collections

The library also manages aggregator packages/collections -e.g. from Ebrary—some subscription subject collections e.g. education, social science. They are one of the ways, adopted especially in the early days of ebooks, of building up content to meet the needs of (remote) off campus students in particular. Such students can't easily access the campus based print collections. However such subscription collections are dynamic and aggregators may add titles (generally a good thing) but also delete them. Deletions involve a significant curatorial overhead. Titles may be required (e.g. be on a reading list) so have to be acquired another way. Deletions need to be 'unpicked' in the KB and catalogue. Such collections are just leased for a year. In this sense the library outsources its curatorial role to achieve a trade off in terms of the benefits of a low cost per use compared to other approaches.

## Library built Collections

Some publishers offer a 'build your own collection' approach (e.g. Palgrave which is strong in social sciences). They require that the library commits a minimum spend (from c £3K). The librarians can then access the publisher portal and pick the (e.g. politics) titles required. It is analogous to the way librarians and academics selected from a printed publisher catalogue. The selected titles go through the acquisition process as a collection order record and MARC records are loaded into the catalogue. However there is no integration with the library catalogue at the *selection* stage to show what titles may already be in stock. So workflows are not yet optimal.

## PDA

The library has trialled PDA but has not yet found a sustainable model whereby funding for PDA does not quickly run out.

## **The main issues in 'curating' ebook that the library needed to address**

### Enabling discovery

The library catalogue includes everything –it's all about discovery. The Catalogue is our 'shop window'.

For end users the 'catalogue is now essentially represented by the Discovery Service (Primo). This means the Knowledge base is becoming more important. There are problems in how KBs manage ebooks-- in large part because of the inconsistency/multiplicity of ebook identifiers.

### Curation convenience vs. user experience

There are tensions between the way we buy ebooks in order to get the most streamlined workflow compared to doing the utmost for the end users (e.g. having DRM free ebooks—so you can download and print freely). (See above).

### Business models

Publishers and aggregators change the business models they offer via the ebook platforms. This is a consequence, in part, of the early/still developing state of the market but it can be frustrating in terms of curation/management.

### Disintermediation

It looks like publishers are keen to do more direct business with libraries but this must be set against the scale and efficiencies in the aggregator based models. Furthermore aggregator platforms are currently better than publishers at enabling features such as annotations. (Aggregator) platforms also mean there is a more consistent user's experience. Indeed ideally we like to have one consistent platform for consumption of ebooks.

### Accessibility

There are accessibility issues of platforms; for example, PDFs can't be read by screen reader software when they are within the 'online wrapper' of an aggregator platform.

Most content is still PDF so lacks some flexibility -especially regarding mobile/tablets device

There is not a satisfactory way of the library curating Amazon Kindle titles. At the moment this is not a huge issue as most kindle titles are not mainstream academic fare. However users tend to expect that ebook titles should be available on their preferred device.

## Not everything is e

One of the issues is that sometimes you can't get the title as an ebook

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

Ebooks are well used—increasing demand from academics as well, especially in order to help them cater for modules with large student numbers. Statistics compiled for the annual Sconul return show:

- 2,093,398 section requests for ebooks in 2011/12, up from 1,439,252 in 2010/11, an increase of 645,145.
- The number of ebooks provided by the library increased by 22,878 from 2010/11 to 2011/12, to a total of 576,689.

### **Lessons learnt and advice to give**

The dust has not yet settled on ebooks—things are still very dynamic. Features and business models are still evolving quite quickly. This means libraries have to be flexible and adaptable in their approaches.

### **Thoughts on the future.**

For library licensed e-books it's still essentially a PDF world where content is only downloadable to a USB stick (or similar) or an Adobe enabled device. It looks like we'll need to make ebooks (and other content) content available on a wider range of devices—the PDF/PC paradigm doesn't look like it is sustainable.

From a curatorial point of view the library is hoping that the move to Alma (ExLibris's new library services platform) will make things much easier—notably in terms of workflows for econtent including ebooks. This may need some staff restructuring to take best advantage of new system approaches

As publishers develop e-textbooks and content closely aligned to courses we are beginning to see potential for the library's curatorial function to be sidelined. Content providers are going direct to academics to deliver highly co