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Original Citation

Kaye, Jane (2006) Books, e-books, journals, e-journals, databases, DVDs... Getting the balance right. *Taking Stock*, 15 (1). pp. 4-5. ISSN 0966-6745

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Books, e-books, journals, e-journals, databases, DVDs... Getting the balance right

Jane Kaye – University of Huddersfield

Looking back it is possible to see some major patterns of change in the purchase of resources for an academic library. One significant change is in the move from predominantly one-off purchase in many areas (journals, books, reference books, music and film) to ongoing or multi-year commitments for many types of resource. Many libraries might, for example, have bought some reference books every other year quite happily, but now they might need to decide each year whether to subscribe or not.

What DID we buy ten, or even twenty, years ago?

1985	2006
Books	Books
Journals	E-books
Abstracts and indexes	Journals
Short loan photocopies	E-journals
Videos	Bibliographic databases
On-line searching	Scanned articles, book chapters
	Datasets
	Videos, DVDs
	Web film and sound

Like many institutions Huddersfield tries to achieve “balance” in its resources by using a formula for distribution of funds. Also like many institutions it is considering how best to incorporate the purchase of electronic resources into this, but the formula currently uses:

- Division by School
- Average student numbers averaged over 3 years
- Book and journal prices
- An amount for research in proportion to the School’s research income

Formulae have the advantage of being relatively transparent, but they can bring with them their own range of problems. Those which are based on an allocation for a School or Faculty can appear imbalanced if there is a wide range of subjects covered within that area – and possibly also subsequent disagreement about how to use the budget within the School! There is also the knotty problem of how to cope with new courses being set up – additional start-up funding? For how long? On the opposite side of the coin, what happens with a course which is closing down? Resources needing to be maintained for remaining students may cost disproportionately more than their formula allocation might allow them. Curiously this problem can result

in subject librarians choosing to cancel online subscriptions in favour of carrying out one-off online searching (if still available!). This also requires the maintenance of increasingly little-used skills.

How do we achieve balance at selection?

Is it best (or possible) to try to keep to a fixed percentage of spend in certain categories? (print,electronic,journals,books,databases etc)
Most library surveys show a continuing student demand for books, so it is advisable to prevent other spend from impinging too much on this, but will ebooks satisfy this demand as happily? Students also “need” immediate access: despite the increased speed of document delivery and interlibrary loan this is often completely discounted by many users (staff and researchers as well). This is a pity since document delivery, rather than purchase, should logically be the most effective use of resources. Trying to retain a balance of spend can also be made impossible when new, and key, resources become temptingly available with very little warning!

Selection by academics is still largely from publishers leaflets and approval copies, although Amazon and Co do feature here too. The availability of statistics via library systems gives more idea of what people are really using, and statistics for e-book usage can actually also be helpful in print selection.

What else is on the horizon?

As well as buying these “traditional” resources librarians need to be ever aware of yet more and newer sources of information, not always paid for but with the potential to impact on budgets in future (in a positive way!)

Open Access Journals and **Institutional Repositories** may change our access to information quite dramatically in the future, and JISC-funded ventures such as **Jorum** enable the sharing of learning and teaching materials amongst institutions, some of which might be the successor to commercially produced resources. The new **HE Digital scanning licence** is in its infancy but who knows how much use of this may take off to pay for content in yet another way? Publishers producing books with web-site links often market direct to lecturers rather than libraries (e.g. Pearson) but the additional, free, content should not be disregarded.

We may be reaching out to widen participation beyond the traditional 18 yr old, but many of our users still fit that description! . In “tune” with providing content in an appropriate way some US Universities have taken advantage of a Campus version of **iTunes** to download audio and video content direct to their iPod (see reference link below)

Images too cannot be ignored as a resource – is it true that young people are more image-based? The **Education image gallery** and the **Moving image Gateway** are just two familiar examples of resources in this area.

Lastly, still not standard with all publishers/resources are links back to library catalogues, seamless access if already authenticated, and inclusion in cross-searching tools such as Metalib – but all of these are gradually making it easier to use such resources together in a more effective way.

Collection development policies – the real solution?

Working to build these is the ideal solution, difficult though it may be. Because of all of the factors above collection development policies need regular updating. They should be there as a tool to help with de-selection, as well as selection, and to make clear which “gifts” are acceptable and which not. (Free material, as most librarians know, also needs processing or access routes creating and adding to catalogues). Subject areas have differing needs, which makes it difficult to set a generic number of copies per title (or books per student?) but these are essential as a guideline and can then be adapted for use with ebook purchases.

JISC has a role to play in developing collections. One of the stated remits of the Joint Information Systems Committee is:
'To negotiate for, and, where appropriate, to license, quality assured electronic materials that will provide the JISC community with a range of resources to support education and research'

There is a JISC E-books Working Party, and much of its work to date has involved listening to publishers and libraries. Some deals have been brokered, a JISC model licence for ebooks established, and studies carried out to be made available to the Community. The most current of these is a feasibility study on the “acquisition of E-books by Higher Education libraries and the role of the JISC”. This is to look at the feasibility of JISC adding value at a national level, by engaging in negotiations with publishers of e-books. If the report concludes that it can, recommendations for business models, modes of delivery and licensing will be proposed.

Despite the “slow burn” in getting electronic resources adopted they are with us to stay and, difficult though it may be in the short term, administrative difficulties in working out how to purchase and pay for

them may well seem very unimportant when we are looking back in another ten or twenty years time.

Useful links:

Google book search <http://books.google.com/>

Google Scholar <http://scholar.google.com/>

Windows Live Academic Search <http://academic.live.com/>

Campus iTunes http://www.apple.com/education/solutions/itunes_u/

Education image gallery <http://edina.ac.uk/eig/index.shtml>

JISC model licences

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=coll_guide_jiscmodel

JISC feasibility study

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=funding_ebooks