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OAPEN-UK: An open access business model for scholarly monographs in the humanities and social sciences [1]

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Abstract. This paper presents the initial findings of OAPEN-UK, a UK research project gathering evidence on the social and technological impacts of an open access business model for scholarly monographs in the humanities and social sciences.

Keywords: Open access, scholarly monograph, humanities and social sciences, culture, technology, business models, research study

1. Introduction

OAPEN-UK is a 4-year research project, which will gather evidence to help stakeholders make informed decisions on the future of Open Access (OA) scholarly monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). Managed by JISC Collections and funded by JISC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the project takes a collaborative and real time approach to addressing the challenges, risks and opportunities of unfettered online access to scholarly monographs.

This paper provides an overview of the project, exploring some of the trends in scholarly communications which have led the project sponsors to their interest in this area, detailing the barriers and opportunities encountered during the project set-up, and giving some indicative early findings from the research element of the project.

2. The monograph market

The scholarly monograph remains an important tool for researchers in HSS. There is a strong perception – and some evidence – that selection and promotion committees still believe a print book is more prestigious than one published in electronic format, and so a cycle is created where researchers are dependent upon publishers for their career progression [20]. Some commentators even suggest universities

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have effectively outsourced their tenure and promotion decisions to the publishers who commission and select content [2].

However questions are beginning to rise about the long-term sustainability of print publication of scholarly monographs. Library book purchasing budgets have decreased significantly in the past ten years, both in real terms and as a percentage of overall library budgets [16]. Consequently, print sales of monographs have been in decline: a trend that can be observed over the last two decades. In the US, between 1980 and 2000, "a monograph's average library sales plummeted from around 2000 copies in 1980, to 1000 in the late 1980s, to 500 in the 1990s, to a little more than 200 in the early years of this century" [24]. This means that publishing of scholarly monographs is no longer self-sustaining: most monographs by academics are no longer profitable [20].

These financial pressures are having repercussions for scholarship in HSS disciplines. Willinsky argues that economic considerations are beginning to determine what can be considered 'scholarship' in various disciplines, while Steele identifies a trend among some academic publishers to publish more 'popular' books, in an attempt to remain financially viable. Bazerman et al. suggest that these pressures could even be affecting scholars' decisions about which areas of research to pursue, focusing on areas that they believe will produce publishable content [3].

Publishers have begun to recognize the need to find new models for scholarly monograph publishing to maintain profits and readership, such as the UPCC Book Collections on Project Muse [22]. But there is another model that could be financially viable, potentially increase readership and avoid the repercussions mentioned above – Open Access.

3. Open access monographs

OA business models are relatively common, although not dominant, in journal publication. In 2011 Laakso reported that, since 2000, "the average annual growth rate has been 18% for the number of [OA] journals and 30% for the number of [OA] articles" and that by 2009 the share of articles in OA journals had reached 7.7% of all peer-reviewed journal articles [9]. Open access publishing is more common in science, technology and medicine (STM) subjects than in HSS, although some publishers in these areas are beginning to offer open access options, such as Sage Open, launched in 2011, or Bloomsbury Academic [4]. In addition, new models are being proposed, including a global library consortium which underwrites the cost of producing scholarly monographs, and a campus-based programme owned by the university library [14,23]. These models are all relatively new and are designed to test concepts for open access publishing, rather than provide a guaranteed solution.

A number of questions arise when considering business models for HSS OA monographs. Many relate to funding and sustainability. Cockerill argues that sustainability is not the same as profitability, and declining publisher profits do not equal unsustainable business models. He also stresses that all scholarly communications models depend upon public funding, whether that is to pay Gold OA charges, or to pay for library subscriptions. In many ways, a move to OA might simply be a re-alignment of how public funding is distributed [6]. But as Friend points out, this move requires 'fluidity' as universities, and indeed, the public purse overall, cannot afford to pay OA publication fees and library subscriptions at the same time [7].

It is particularly difficult to answer questions about the financial implications of moving to an OA model because relatively little is known about its impact on sales. Most OA business models rely upon income from sales of an alternative or enhanced version of the publication – in print, or PDF, or ePub formats – to support the funding via publication charges [1]. But the few studies which do look at the

effect of open access availability on print or other for-sale content, are inconclusive. Snijder's 2010 study, the most recent in this field, finds no relationship between accessibility and sales, and earlier research is mostly anecdotal [8,10,19].

The OAPEN project attempted to answer some of these questions by exploring the challenges and issues surrounding the publication of OA HSS monographs at an international level [13]. As with the other models being tested, this project found several important challenges to OA publishing of monographs, and concluded that, while national boundaries are irrelevant to OA publishing in terms of access, there are critical components such as the funding model which must be investigated at a local level to reflect the differences between the education and research systems of European countries. The experiment also concluded that the "main obstacles for the development of Open Access eMonographs in the HSS are cultural and institutional" [2].

4. Culture and technology

A number of factors affect the ways that researchers engage with information, and as findings from OAPEN suggest, it is important to understand these before attempting to promote a business model that appears, to some researchers at least, to challenge some of them. The first section of this paper highlighted the financial issues facing monographs and the traditional importance of print monographs for promotion and career opportunities in HSS disciplines. But there are other drivers to consider when thinking about how and why researchers behave around information, and what might affect their enthusiasm to engage with new ways of working.

Several studies have emphasized the influence of disciplinary traditions upon information practices and behaviours [17,18]. These can play an important role in acceptance of OA publication. A recent survey of STM researchers found that those in bio-sciences are more likely than those in other disciplines to pay article processing fees for OA publication of their own work. The study's author suggests that this is because bio-scientists have a number of OA journals and therefore trust the process as a secure mechanism for publishing their work [11]. The same study found that awareness of OA publishing varies by sub-discipline; an OA business model will need to take account of such variations.

One area which most researcher surveys suggest OA publishers need to address is that of quality assurance and peer review. While many, if not most, OA publications operate similar quality assurance processes to traditional publishers, many researchers do not necessarily understand or believe this. Studies in 2000 and in 2010 both found that researchers need to be reassured that publications in online-only outlets are peer reviewed in the same way as print publications. This perception is not disappearing as OA becomes a more widely-recognised model of publication [2,21]. There are several possible reasons for this ongoing suspicion about the quality of OA publication. The 2010 study by Adema and Rutten suggests that some researchers may negatively associate electronic-only publications with non-peer-reviewed online content such as Wikipedia or other websites. There is also a lingering perception that paying to publish your work is, essentially, vanity publishing, and as such of a lesser quality than traditional publication routes [5]. OA publishers are aware of these concerns, and have taken steps to address them, such as engaging distinguished researchers on editorial boards [24]. Others stress that Gold OA publishers need to produce high quality content if they are to continue to gain the high citation rates that attract authors [6]. Nonetheless, traditional perceptions of what quality does – and does not – look like persist, and OA publishers must be vigorous in addressing these perceptions in the monograph model.

Researcher behaviour also offers some opportunities for new publication models. Chief among these is a growing interest in using electronic resources. Although print remains the dominant model, e-book

purchases by libraries have grown significantly over the last ten years [16]. A 2004 circulation study of one university library by Littman and Conway found a decline in circulation of print books after electronic versions of the same titles were introduced, suggesting that researchers are keen to engage with electronic content [10]. The authors suggest that in fact both print and electronic versions are probably used, but for different purposes. Later research confirms this suggestion, finding that researchers in the humanities value the convenience of electronic resources for finding specific information within, for example, a book, but that they still prefer to read in print format [17]. Researchers are also beginning to explore the possibilities of digital native publications, and the ways in which they can be enhanced by linking to data and to other relevant publications. This work is still in its infancy in relation to monographs, but some OA presses are establishing systems which make it relatively easy for researchers to link their scholarly work to underlying or related content [1,24].

Change in all these areas is rapid, although uneven, and (as the OAPEN project suggested) it is important to fully understand how they operate at a national level in order to propose an OA model that will meet the needs of researchers, and provide a sustainable avenue for communicating scholarly findings.

5. Introducing OAPEN-UK

In order to understand how an OA business model might be implemented in the UK, and whether it is feasible, JISC and the AHRC are funding the OAPEN-UK project. This project collaborates with publishers, authors, research funders, learned societies, academics and institutions to gather evidence to help stakeholders make informed decisions about options for an OA business model in HSS disciplines.

OAPEN-UK is piloting the OAPEN model, which offers publishers a grant to make an OA PDF version of a monograph available using Creative Commons licensing. The publishers are then free to sell print and e-book versions of the content to help recoup any additional costs not covered by the grant. This hybrid model recognizes that a move to OA will take time, and that business models need to be flexible and to incorporate familiar elements. It also acknowledges that print remains an important format for many academics who still read print versions of books for certain purposes, and associate a published book with reward and recognition.

An invitation to tender resulted in OAPEN-UK working with five publishers: Palgrave Macmillan, Taylor & Francis, Berg Publishers, Liverpool University Press and University of Wales Press. Each publisher nominated matched pairs of HSS scholarly monographs for inclusion in the pilot, which commenced in September 2011 and will run for three years. The pairs were matched on publication date, subject area, age to print sales ratio, price and format history. A total of 58 HSS scholarly monographs were selected by the OAPEN-UK Steering Group (prior to publishers being included), making 29 pairs [12].

A title from each pair has been randomly placed in either the experimental group or the control group. The experimental group titles are made available under a Creative Commons licence on the OAPEN Library, in addition to the publisher's own website, institutional repositories, the author's own website and offer a 100% view in Google Book Search. The control group titles are available as e-books for sale under the publisher's normal licensing and route to market models.

6. Research plan

As well as the pilot with 60 books, OAPEN-UK is undertaking a broad programme of research to understand the environment for OA monographs in HSS. The research plan for OAPEN-UK sets out

to answer three main questions, each of which is divided into several sub-questions. The first question considers how policies, processes and mechanisms might need to change to enable OA publication of monographs. This looks at business models, organizational policies and technical changes among key stakeholders. The second question considers the measurable effects of a move to OA monographs upon usage, sales and citations. The final question examines how perceptions of OA monograph publication change among participants during the project, looking specifically at perceptions of risk and quality for open access publishing.

To answer these questions, the project has been broken down into a number of work packages. Table 1 shows how the work packages and research questions interact with each other.

The literature review was undertaken at the beginning of the project, and underpins all the work packages, which comprise a series of qualitative research activities, which seek to answer questions about changes in behaviours, policies and processes, and quantitative analysis of what happens to the titles involved in the experiment.

The first activity in the qualitative work package was a series of six focus groups with key stakeholders – academics; institutional staff (librarians, repository managers, and research managers); publishers; learned societies; e-book aggregators; and research funders. A series of exercises were used to identify the risks, opportunities and questions that each group might experience in moving towards a more OA system for publication: the findings from focus groups are discussed in greater detail in Section 7.

The focus groups identified key themes and areas that require further clarification and exploration. In particular, there were a number of areas where participants from one group had perceptions about participants from another group, and expectations about how they would behave in an OA world. These perceptions, themes and areas will be tested more widely through a series of interviews and surveys, as they may, in many cases, affect the viability of business models and, if untrue, will need to be countered. At the time of writing, a survey for HSS researchers is being undertaken.

The final element of the qualitative research focuses upon project participants – the authors of the 58 titles in the experiment and members of the Steering Group. An annual benchmarking survey will track changes in their attitudes to OA publication of monographs and the business model being tested. Annual focus groups will also be run with project participants, to present them with the findings of each year's research, and to help determine the direction of future activities. The annual focus groups might concentrate upon specific issues that need to be considered by participants from several different stakeholder groups – for example, licensing arrangements or payment structures – but this will be determined upon evaluation of year one findings. This agile approach enables OAPEN-UK to take account of changes in the scholarly environment, to focus on key areas and to decide, in real time, what the focus of the activity should be in the third year rather than pre-determining it from the outset.

The quantitative work package focuses upon the 58 titles in the pilot. Sales, citation and usage data will be collected on an annual basis and assessed to identify differences between the two groups. Data about sales will be collected from the publishers in the project, and also from some e-book aggregators. The matching of the pairs will enable us to establish if any differences are due to their availability in OA. Similarly, we will gather citations of the project titles on an annual basis, although we expect that, due to the long publication cycle in most HSS disciplines, we may not see the impact of OA content until the end of the project at the earliest.

It is harder to get a clear picture about usage due to the multiple locations and platforms the pilot titles are available on. It will not be possible to track usage on every platform, however, by working with the publishers, aggregators and the OAPEN library the project will capture the majority of usage. However, the comparability of the usage data collected will be a challenge, particularly as what is being measured

Table 1
Interaction of OAPEN-UK work packages and research questions

		Literature review	Annual benchmarking survey	Initial focus groups	Initial scoping interviews/survey	Quantitative data analysis	Annual participant focus groups	Planning for year 3	Additional year 3 activities	Final evaluation and report
How might policies, processes and mechanisms need to change to enable OA publication of monographs?	What is the core business model?	X		X	x					x
	What is the impact on organisational policies and processes?	X		X	x					x
	What technical issues might affect a move to OA?	X		X	x					x
What are the measurable effects of a move to OA monographs?	On readership/use?	X				X				x
	On sales?	X				X				x
	On citation?	X				X				x
What are the perceptions of OA monographs, before and after the project?	What are the perceived risks/benefits of publishing in OA?	X	x	X	x		X			x
	What is the perceived quality of OA publications?	X	x	X	x		x			x

will differ by platform. For example, the COUNTER reports provided will differ depending on whether the publisher or e-book aggregator counts BR1: number of successful title requests or BR2: number of successful section requests and whilst the OAPEN platform counts PDF downloads of the full book, repositories may capture both PDF downloads of chapters in edited works or the full book. One solution may be to investigate one of the recommendations of the PIRUS2 final report [15] – the development of IRUS (Institutional Repository Usage Statistics). IRUS-UK could be used to supply COUNTER metrics for repositories and publishers at the book and chapter level to ensure that accurate comparisons could be made.

7. Initial findings

The six initial focus groups with stakeholders uncovered some important areas for further investigation, and highlighted many of the technical, financial, organizational and attitudinal issues that an open access model will need to engage with if it is to be viable in the current academic publishing environment.

One extremely important issue which stimulated considerable debate at most of the sessions was a question about what researchers actually want, as both authors and readers of scholarly content. While surveys and other studies suggest that support for open access publishing is high among researchers, this support has not yet translated into a wholesale move to open access channels for disseminating research findings. This is, at least in part, because such channels are not currently widespread, but participants in the focus groups identified some other factors that might be preventing such a move. In most (although not all) OA models, author royalties are not paid: this was perceived as a bigger problem by publishers and institutional representatives than by academics themselves, most of whom rated royalty payments as fairly low in their publishing priorities. But reward of another kind ranked much higher: academics are concerned about their reputation as their publication record is tied very closely to promotion, grant awards and other professional successes. This was recognized in most groups, and there was a widespread feeling that open access presses were not yet able to compete with more established channels in providing prestige. In particular, participants in several groups talked about the importance of a print book, and the continuing disparity between print and electronic in terms of prestige.

Print versus electronic was also important in considering the behavior of researchers as readers, rather than authors, of books. The researcher focus group was divided starkly between those who have almost completely eradicated print from their working practices and those who will print out whole books – if necessary – rather than read an electronic document. The importance – or not – of print copies is a question that affects scholarly communications business models beyond open access. But it is particularly important for OA, especially in a model like OAPEN-UK where publishers provide an electronic version of the book for free but are able to charge for print copies. This will require further investigation.

Another issue that was raised across all focus groups was the role of the institution in driving OA agendas. They might do this in two main ways: by changing policies and by providing infrastructure. Policy changes might relate to stricter and enforced open access mandates for publications by university employees; publishers felt that some universities were already beginning to assert their rights over employees' publications and that negotiation about copyright may become tougher in coming years. Institutional policy might also drive change by creating funds to pay OA publication fees. This is particularly important HSS, where funding for the research that underlies publications generally comes from institutional coffers rather than external funders. In science, technology and medicine disciplines,

independent research funders such as the Wellcome Trust have been able to encourage uptake of OA publication by including costs for OA publication fees within their grant funding. In the humanities, this role will necessarily fall more to institutions, as the primary funders of research projects.

In terms of infrastructure, several focus groups discussed the role of university presses, libraries and repositories in creating new ways for researchers to disseminate their work. Models already exist, primarily in US, Canadian and Australian institutions, where the university library works with other university departments to offer an OA dissemination route. Benefits of such models include the fact that the institution retains rights to the intellectual property of any outputs, and that production of content might help to raise the profile of the university – one group participant suggested that this might be important in attracting new students. But most participants also recognized that new university channels would be unlikely to offer the kind of reputation and reward that scholars are chasing. Indeed, some suggested that scholars identify more closely with their disciplinary communities than with their institution, and that OA models might have more success if they worked with disciplinary repositories and learned societies rather than institutions.

As well as considering the changing roles of institutions, most groups also focused upon the changing roles of publishers in an OA system. There were concerns that, if publishers were paid upfront for producing a book rather than recouping their costs from sales, they would lose the will to market and distribute a title effectively. Since usage and citations are very important to researchers, and since the whole point of OA is to increase visibility of published content, this represents a significant risk. But some groups – including the publishers themselves – also saw commercial opportunities in an OA world. Depending upon the type of content that is made available, publishers may be able to sell print copies, enhanced e-publications, overlay services, or customizable products in order to retain a financial stake in the post-publication success of a book.

Finally, questions about standards, metadata and preservation underlay the discussions in all focus groups. In order to enable the effective discovery of OA monographs, institutional representatives, publishers and the e-book aggregators were particularly concerned with what metadata needs to be provided and to what standard. In addition, the research funders were keen to see that metadata contains fields pertaining to the origin of the research funding to support auditing and data collection. Metadata for OA monographs will need to include a number of fields including licensing information and version and, through application of correct identifiers, ensure that the OA version is connected to the enhanced versions available in the supply chain. The question of who would be responsible for the creation and maintenance of metadata was central to many of the discussions. Traditionally the publisher is responsible but depending on the OA model applied, this could fall into the hands of the author or librarian or perhaps the e-book aggregators if they are to integrate OA monographs into their institutional offerings and gain from this.

A strong thread of the focus groups was that standards need to be developed and implemented if there is to be any consistency. The version of record was one important area of discussion, particularly for the researchers. Depending on the business model and the Creative Commons licence applied, it may be possible for the monograph to be deposited in institutional repositories pre-publication or for a reader to re-purpose the monograph to support their research. Establishing, most likely within the metadata, what the official published version is was important to the researchers.

Linked closely to versioning were discussions around preservation and archiving. All focus groups discussed the need for some method by which OA monographs (in all formats) are preserved, and there was some debate as to who might undertake this role. In the print model there are the legal deposit libraries, but in an OA model, should this be a centralized shared service or should it be devolved to

individual institutions or subject repositories, if it is even required? If there is no centralized system, there was a concern that OA monographs could disappear into the ether and that if a publisher or e-book aggregator no longer existed, archival access would not be supported. These discussions clearly showed the need for standards to be developed and applied consistently by whoever take on that role and becomes responsible – which remains a major question that is being explored in more detail in the interviews and surveys.

8. Next steps

The literature review and focus groups have raised some interesting and important issues that must be considered in more detail. The survey of HSS researchers is at the time of writing exploring many of the issues surfaced around prestige, value, roles and what researchers require from an OA model. Interviews with publishers (editorial, financial, sales, technical and strategic staff) and an institutional survey are the next work packages to be undertaken. At the end of year one, the sales and usage data of the titles in the pilot will be analysed and presented to the Steering Group alongside the qualitative research findings. These activities, taken together should mean that by the end of year one, OAPEN-UK will have a good understanding of the issues around open access publication of HSS monographs in the UK, and are able to progress plans for the next year's research activity. By the end of the project, recommendations and next steps, based on the evidenced gathered, will assist stakeholders in making informed decisions about moving to an OA publication model for HSS monographs.

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