

Acquiring E-Books for Academic Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines the recent work of the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee ([JISC](#)) in the area of e-books. The JISC Collections Team is responsible for negotiating deals with publishers and aggregators of e-content for all UK higher education libraries - some 180 in total. In other words it acts as a national consortium for the UK academic community, although it should be noted that all deals are negotiated on an 'opt-in' basis. The JISC Collections Team is advised by a series of format-based working groups - comprising senior academic librarians and library practitioners - including the E-Books Working Group, the Journals Working Group and the Moving Images Working Group. Recently the working groups have formulated vision statements to help inform both their own activities and the education community as a whole. The vision for e-books in UK education is as follows:

"The UK education community will have access to quality e-book content that is of high relevance to teaching, learning and research across the broadest range of subject areas. Flexible business and licensing models will support a diversity of needs, allowing users to do what they want when they want and how they want for education purposes. All e-books will be easily discoverable and consistent standards will allow all content to be fully integrated into library, learning and research environments."

THE JISC E-BOOK STUDY

In 2006 the [E-Books Working Group](#) (EBWG) commissioned a feasibility study on the acquisition of e-books by higher education (HE) libraries and the role of JISC ([CHEMS, 2006](#)). The study team produced their report in mid 2007 and outlined the following conclusions:

- There is an ignorance in the HE sector of what e-books are available.
- There is low awareness within HE institutions of the value and relevance of e-books.
- Librarians and publishers have a poor understanding of each others needs in the area of e-books.
- Access routes to aggregators' or publishers' platforms are too complex.
- Too few e-books are available.
- Available e-books are not up-to-date or relevant to UK users.
- Pricing models are not appropriate.
- Publishers are not making the right textbooks electronically available on the right terms.

When librarians were asked why they had not bought more e-books the main reasons were: e-books pricing models are not satisfactory (64%); there is too little choice of e-book titles (62%); e-book access models are not satisfactory (53%); we are waiting for the market to settle down (33%); and, we are waiting for JISC to offer better e-book deals (30%). The relatively poor take-up of e-books in academic libraries is further supported by the finding of the June 2007 Ebrary survey of 583 respondents from 67 countries ([Ebrary, 2007](#)). This showed that only 10% of libraries had over 50,000 e-books. However when asked whether there is any pressure on them to develop e-book collections 68% of librarians said 'yes'.

So what is it that librarians really want as far as e-books are concerned? The JISC report discovered the following:

- 'Reading list' materials, principally textbooks.
- Current titles.
- Wider choice relevant to the UK academic community.

- Flexibility in choosing between subscribing and outright purchase.
- Sensible charging bands or prices regime.
- Multiple and concurrent access for users.
- Easy access to the host server for Shibboleth/ATHENS users.
- A more systematic way of discovering what e-books are available.

From the perspective of the EBWG it was pleasing to note that the JISC sponsored report demonstrated that a high proportion of librarians felt that there were clear roles for JISC in the acquisition of e-books. 87% of librarians said that JISC performed a valuable national 'value-for-money' role seeking to get the best buys for the sector. 66% felt that JISC had an important role in investigating innovative formats or purchasing models, and 40% were of the opinion that JISC should facilitate the buying of resources that are essential in niche areas for teaching and research where libraries would not be able to afford the acquisition without financial help.

The findings of the report were carefully considered by the EBWG and following extensive discussions it was agreed that a top priority for the group should be firstly to devise a project to kick-start the e-book marketplace for libraries and secondly to focus activity upon core reading list materials - titles that individually librarians had had little success in acquiring. It was recognised that this was a difficult area as publishers are very wary about making textbooks or core readings available electronically – fearing the loss of student sales. With national funding it was hoped that the deadlock might be broken and both libraries and publishers could acquire real data that would inform future business models. And so the inspiration for the [National E-Book Observatory Project](#) was born.

THE NATIONAL E-BOOK OBSERVATORY PROJECT

The EBWG was fortunate to acquire a considerable capital sum of money from JISC to fund the project. The aims of the project were threefold: firstly to license a collection of online core reading list materials that were highly relevant to UK HE taught course students in four discipline areas. The core reading list materials would be free at the point of use to all 180 HE libraries for a period of two years. Secondly the project would evaluate the use of the materials through deep log analysis and measure the impact of the 'free at the point of use' materials upon publisher, aggregator and library processes. Thirdly, knowledge acquired from the project would be transferred to all stakeholders to help stimulate an e-book market that has appropriate business and licensing models.

An invitation to tender (ITT) was sent to the publisher and aggregator communities inviting them to submit core reading list materials for inclusion in the project. The books could be in any of four subject areas: business studies, engineering, medicine (not mental health or nursing) and media studies. The ITT stated that £600,000 was available for the purchase of such materials and that it would go to multiple vendors and stringent criteria were stated about the actual texts offered. Materials must be for HE taught course students; they must be UK focused where relevant; and they must be made available on the platforms used by HE institutions. It was made clear that materials offered by publishers and aggregators would be evaluated by the education community and a priority list would be created against relevance, value for money and print sales - to verify demand.

A significant number of publishers and aggregators responded to the ITT and in June 2006 the Project Steering Group selected the bids that best matched the criteria to go forward for community consultation. In medicine e-book titles from Wolter Kluwer and Wiley Blackwell were selected; in engineering titles from Thomas Telford, Cambridge University Press and Elsevier; in media studies titles from Palgrave Macmillan and Taylor & Francis; and in business titles from Thomson Learning, John Wiley, Cambridge University Press; Taylor & Francis, Palgrave Macmillan, Elsevier and Pearson. The cost of the e-book titles ranged enormously from around £5,000 to £184,000 for one title. However, it must be remembered that these titles will to be available (free of charge to individual libraries) to all 180 UK HE institutions for a period of two years and it was felt by JISC that publishers needed to be fairly compensated for the potential loss of income.

In addition to the cost of titles, a number of other issues were raised by the bids. The first related to e-book platforms. Prior to issuing the ITT, the EBWG had undertaken a survey of libraries about the most popular e-book platforms. It was hoped that in their bids to join the project, publishers would offer a range of platforms

that their books could be accessed on. However this was not to be and most bids lacked platform flexibility and few bidders offered multiple platforms. It may be that the project will end up with books on several different platforms - which would be far from optimal. On a more positive note, the ITT stated that all publishers - if selected to join the project - must provide MARC records for their books for libraries to incorporate into their OPACs. The vast majority of publishers agreed to this condition. The Steering Group felt that this was important for a number of reasons, not least because the timescale for the project was very tight and this would save libraries from having to individually catalogue the books. In addition various surveys have shown that having OPAC records definitely drives up the use of e-books. The Ebrary survey, previously referred to, showed that the library catalogue was the most favoured route for users to find e-books.

In parallel with the issuing of the ITT to the publisher and aggregator communities for e-book content, a more general ITT was issued for the deep web log analysis. This tender was for a 12 month study - using raw logs of user transactions to assess the impacts and usage of the core reading materials. The data derived from such a study then generates questions for follow up web-based questionnaires which will be sent to staff and students in a range of libraries. Jointly the two methodologies will provide an understanding of the e-book behaviours of staff and students and will inform business models for e-books and strategies for embedding e-books into libraries. The results of the usage study will be shared with all participating libraries and publishers.

As stated earlier, the project timescale is tight due to conditions placed by JISC on spending the capital money. In July 2007, when this paper was presented to the LIBER Conference in Warsaw, the project had reached the point where e-book titles had gone out to community consultation. The timetable for the next stages of the project is as follows:

- August 2007 - bids awarded to a range of publishers/aggregators for core reading materials.
- July/August - launch activities (including marketing and promotional materials) to HE libraries in time for the start of the academic year in October 2007.
- October 2007 - start of the deep web log analysis for a period of one year.
- October/November 2007 & January/February 2008 - project road shows.
- October 2007 to December 2008 - embedding and evaluation.
- December 2008 - close of project (although e-book titles will be available to libraries until October 2009).

In summary it is felt that there will be significant advantages and benefits to librarians, publishers and aggregators from the National E-Book Observatory Project. The project will:

- provide an in-depth understanding of how e-books that support UK HE taught course students are actually used in teaching and learning;
- enable publishers, libraries and aggregators to assess the demand for core reading list e-books;
- enable all parties to measure the effect of 'free at the point of use' e-books on the buying behaviour of students;
- enable libraries to measure the benefits and potential costs of providing core reading list e-books to students;
- inform the creation of appropriate business and licensing models;
- inform the promotion of e-books within an institution;
- raise awareness generally of e-books throughout the academic community;
- stimulate the e-books market in a managed environment.

Further updates on the project will be available on the [project wiki](#) for those who wish to follow progress.

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WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

JISC - Joint Information Systems Committee. <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

JISC Collections E-Books Working Group (EBWG).

<http://www.jiscollections.ac.uk/workinggroups/ebooks.aspx>

JISC National E-Book Observatory Project. <http://www.jiscebooksproject.org/>

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