

A snapshot of attitudes towards open access monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences – part of the OAPEN-UK project

Exploring the possibilities and feasibility of open access monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS), OAPEN-UK presents some initial findings from its benchmarking survey with the projects' authors, publishers and members of the steering group. The survey explores their awareness of and attitudes towards open access, their motivations for publishing and priorities in scholarly communication.

Introduction

The imminent demise of the research monograph has perhaps been overstated. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that this particular format for scholarly communications is facing some significant challenges. In the last ten years, library print book purchasing expenditure declined from 11.9% of overall budget in 1999 to 8.4% in 2009¹. The average number of sales of monographs to libraries has declined from around 2,000 in 1980 to around 200 in the early years of this century². This creates two problems for researchers. First, it decreases the number of readers with access to individual monographs, meaning that the flow of knowledge that underpins research is compromised. Second, it means that many scholarly monographs become economically unviable, leading to concerns that publishers may in future select titles based primarily upon the potential for sales rather than scholarly worth. Academics are fearful of a scenario where their research interests have to be directed by the market for outputs, rather than what they feel is relevant or important³.

At the heart of the problem is the tangled relationship between scholarly outputs and academic reward. Publishing a research monograph, especially a printed one, remains a prerequisite for most academic jobs in the humanities and (to a lesser extent) the social sciences⁴. Some commentators have suggested that the book is no longer a useful marker of ability, and that many unnecessary books are published for the sake of scholars seeking promotion, rather than because they have something important to say⁵. But, currently, no other publication format allows a sustained and lengthy argument, and this is still necessary to many humanities and social science (HSS) disciplines. The monograph, as the primary format for humanities and social science research arguments to be articulated, must survive: the question is – how?

Publishers and others have begun to experiment with new ways of making monographs available to support their long-term viability. Initiatives such as the UPCC Books Collection on Project Muse⁶ use alternative business models to maintain readership and profitability for their titles. Another option for maintaining the monograph's presence as a scholarly communications tool is open access. This is, comparatively speaking, uncharted territory for humanities and social science monographs. Open access is better established in STM subjects, especially in relation to journals. HSS disciplines do not, by and large, have wealthy and



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193 independent funders such as the Wellcome Trust who can drive open access policies. Indeed, much research in HSS disciplines is funded through core university funds, via researcher salaries, rather than through grant funding. For this reason, it can be difficult for HSS researchers to identify sources of funding for the publication fees that are an inherent part of 'gold' open access. Other issues, such as the longer citation half-life for HSS content and the big differences between publishing books and journals, mean that it is difficult to understand how existing open access models might apply to HSS monograph publication. Perhaps for this reason, the number of publishers experimenting with open access monographs has been relatively small⁷.

OAPEN-UK

OAPEN-UK (<http://oapen-uk.jisce-books.org/>) is a four-year project exploring the issues around open access monograph publication in the humanities and social sciences in order to provide an evidence base for people who might be interested in developing a business model. Based upon a European project (OAPEN⁸) which developed a platform for open access monograph publication, OAPEN-UK investigates a business model that enables print, electronic and open access versions to co-exist. A PDF of the monograph is made available online in open access under a Creative Commons licence through the OAPEN Library⁹, Google Books and the publishers' platforms. The print versions are available to purchase as are e-book device friendly versions in formats such as EPUB. The idea is to be able to separate out the costs associated with the PDF, the print book and the e-book version to establish the cost to the publisher of publishing in open access. The sales revenue generated from the print and e-book versions provide the publisher with an income stream to support the costs of the open access version (and make their required profit) whilst also recognizing that the print format is still required and that e-books are becoming more mainstream. OAPEN-UK is piloting this model to see if it is a feasible option for the five publishers involved: Palgrave Macmillan, Taylor & Francis, Berg Publishers, Liverpool University Press and University of Wales Press.

The pilot takes 29 'matched pairs' of monographs submitted by the publishers and randomly makes one title in each pair open access while making no changes to the other's publication model. The pilot will track citations, usage and sales of all versions of the monographs over three years (September 2011 – July 2014). Because the pairs have been matched as closely as possible on dimensions including their year of publication, formats, sales history (if previously available) and subject area before participation in the pilot, any differences between the two titles in a pair for sales, usage or citations can be ascribed to the business model under which they have been made available. There are considerable challenges involved in working with this kind of data. Publishers and aggregators collect sales and usage information in a range of formats which are not always compatible. It may also be hard to gain much insight from citation data, as three years may not be long enough to show a meaningful difference in the humanities and social sciences. One aim of the project is to understand and report on these challenges so that future initiatives can take them into account.

The second element of the project is a wider qualitative research programme which sets out to understand what might need to change for open access monograph publishing to become a viable business model in the UK. The original OAPEN research established that open access models will need to reflect local funding arrangements and scholarly norms, and that culture and attitudes are also an important factor in the adoption of such models¹⁰. The qualitative research will use a series of surveys, focus groups and interviews to try to understand the values and perceptions of a number of stakeholder groups towards open access monographs, as well as exploring some cross-cutting issues (for example, licence terms, metadata and preservation).

One key strand of the qualitative research is a survey which will track any changes in the attitudes of project participants over the three years. The aim is to understand whether

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194 participating in the project, and seeing the sales, usage and citation figures each year, changes the perceptions of participants towards open access. This will provide us with an important insight into the role of empirical evidence in changing attitudes towards open access. The survey is run with two groups: the project authors, and the project steering group. This latter group consists of researchers, the project funders, the participating publishers, and library and repository representatives.

Results

The baseline data collection for this survey was carried out in November 2011 and provides a useful snapshot of the participants. The majority of the 31 authors who responded are based in the UK (Table 1). Most of them have published content in electronic format, but fewer have published content in open access, and the volume of each author's content published in electronic formats is higher than that published in open access (Table 2). Nonetheless, most authors declared themselves to be 'aware of' or 'familiar with' open access, with only a minority never having heard of it (Table 3).

Domain	Count
UK	18
Rest of Europe	3
North America	6
Rest of world	4

Table 1. Domain of OAPEN-UK participant authors

		Electronic	Open access
Published in this format?	Yes	27	23
	No	2	4
	Don't know	2	4
Proportion of work as a percentage made available in each format	0%-25%	14	21
	25%-50%	3	4
	50%-75%	6	1
	75%-100%	6	0
	Don't know	2	5

Table 2. Content published in electronic and open access formats

Familiarity	Count
I had never heard of open access publishing	4
I was aware of open access publishing, but not familiar with it	21
I was familiar with open access publishing	6

Table 3. Familiarity with open access publishing

The survey went on to explore authors' attitudes to the publishing process, and in particular their motivations for publishing work. We asked them to rate the importance of five motivations, drawn from those identified in the original OAPEN project, and then to rank those motivations. Looking at the scores together gives us an overall sense of how important each goal is, but also comparative measures to see how the authors prioritize them. Table 4 shows the modal responses to these questions – the mode is chosen to represent the majority opinion. Authors view most of the proffered author motivations to publish as 'very important', with the exception of 'financial compensation', which is 'neither important nor unimportant'. This is reflected in the ranking, where 'financial compensation' was the least important, which is a key finding as the question of royalties was raised

in several focus groups as a potential problem for open access business models. For the motivation 'releasing information for social progress and knowledge in society', there is an interesting discrepancy between the mode (5) and the median (3). This suggests a divergent spread of opinions, with several authors considering it very important, but a large number also considering it unimportant. It will be interesting to explore this further with the wider researcher survey, which will allow us to identify whether there are links between discipline or age and attitude to this particular goal, for example.

Motivation	Rating	Rank (5= most important)
Communication with peers	Very important	4
Career advancement	Very important	4
Claiming research findings and new ideas	Very important	3
Financial compensation	Neither unimportant nor important	1
Releasing information for social progress and knowledge in society	Very important	5

Table 4. Importance and ranking of author motivations to publish (mode)

The survey went on to ask all participants about their opinions on five scholarly communications goals, again drawn from the original OAPEN survey. Table 5 shows the modal responses to these questions. There is considerable agreement between the authors and the steering group on most measures: broadly speaking, they rank 'availability and dissemination' and 'quality' as the most important areas, and consider 'efficiency and effectiveness', 'reputation and reward' and 'organization and preservation' to be less important. There is an interesting discrepancy between the authors' rating and ranking of 'organization and preservation': most rate it 'very important', but then consider it to be the least important of the measures – despite having rated other measures as just 'important'. Again, this is due to a wide spread in the responses on the rating question. Overall, however, this represents a positive finding for the project, albeit with a small and unrepresentative sample: the high level of agreement on what constitutes an important goal in scholarly communications means that it should be possible to build a model which satisfies the needs of all stakeholders.

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Goal	Rating		Rank (5 = most important)	
	Authors	Advisory group	Authors	Advisory group
Availability and dissemination (ensuring the maximum number of people see the findings of research)	Very important	Very important	5	4
Efficiency and effectiveness (using resources to ensure authors and readers are offered services that meet their needs)	Important	Important	2	1
Quality (selecting and signalling high-quality work using tools such as peer review)	Very important	Very important	4	5
Reputation and reward (for example, giving published scholars financial reward through royalties, or career reward through impact measures)	Important	Important	2	1
Organization and preservation (preserving and curating important content, and ensuring that relevant research can be found)	Very important	Important	1	2

Table 5. Importance and ranking of scholarly communications goals (mode)

196 Finally, we asked all participants what they thought the impact of open access publishing would be against the various quantitative measures to be used. Table 6 shows the modal responses to this question. Interestingly, the authors are less optimistic than the steering group about the probable impact of open access on print sales: and separating out the steering group publishers we find that most actually think that sales will increase as a result of open access publishing. This is very important, as publishers are a key group who need to be convinced about the practicality of open access publishing.

Measure	Authors	Steering group
Print sales	Lower	The same
Citations	Higher	Higher
Usage	Higher	Higher

Table 6. Predicted effect of open access publishing on various measures (mode)

Conclusion

This initial analysis of the project participants gives a useful snapshot of their views on publishing priorities and on open access publishing. Although this cannot be taken as a representative sample, it suggests that researchers are quite aware of open access publishing, but that not much of their work is available in open access formats. Researchers and other stakeholders in the scholarly communications process are fairly well-agreed on the priorities for scholarly communications, which suggests that they will be looking for similar qualities in an open access business model.

Next steps for the project include analysing the results of the researcher survey to explore whether these findings hold true with a wider group of researchers (over 800 responses have been received). A series of interviews with publishers of different sizes and commercial focus are planned – these will seek to include editorial, strategic, electronic, technical and sales staff and will allow further discussion of key topics and challenges which surfaced in the stakeholder focus groups completed earlier this year. It is important to understand how the views of different types of presses – commercial, academic, open access, large, small – might vary, and also the different attitudes that an editor might have compared to, for example, a member of the sales team, or somebody who deals with technical infrastructure in a publishing house. Institutional surveys and interviews are also being planned to enable the focus group findings to be explored in more detail.

In Summer 2012, the findings from the first year of the project will be presented to the steering group, where discussions will also take place on the focus for year two.

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To cite this article:

Collins, E and Milloy C, A snapshot of attitudes towards open access monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences – part of the OAPEN-UK project, *Insights*, 2012, 25(2), 192–197, doi: 10.1629/2048-7754.25.2.192

To link to this article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.25.2.192>