Editorial

Ellen Collins and Caren Milloy were invited by the editors of *Insights*, Lorraine Estelle and Steve Sharp, to guest-edit this special *Insights* supplement on open access monographs

When work on the OAPEN-UK project first started in 2010, open access (OA) monographs were something of a niche concern. These were the days before Knowledge Unlatched and the Open Library of the Humanities, the days before most commercial publishers offered an open access option for books – the days before RCUK's open access policy became a strong, funded mandate rather than a set of well-intentioned but unevenly enforced guidelines. Generally speaking, awareness of open access was much stronger in scientific, technical and medical (STM) than in humanities and social sciences (HSS) subjects, and the best-established publication routes were through pure or hybrid open access journals, plus (in some disciplines and territories) long-standing subject or institutional repositories. Books were hardly thought of at all.

Fast-forward four years and the environment looks very different. Initial policy shifts by funders have tended not to include monographs, except as a question to be answered at a later date, but rapid changes in the journals world have meant that eyes – of publishers, funders and researchers themselves – are turning towards other types of output. A host of projects within and across each of these stakeholders is looking at the future of monographs, with a strong presumption that this future should aspire to be open.

In the four years that we have been working on the OAPEN-UK project, we have noticed – and welcomed – a promising diversity in routes to open access for monographs. The lack of a clear business model for OA books, noted in the Finch Review, is – to our minds and at this stage – a positive asset. We do not need to rehearse the stale gold-green debates, or limit our discussion to arguing about how much an article processing charge (APC) ought to be. While 'book publication charge'-based models, similar to journal APCs, are springing up for books and providing welcome and straightforward routes to open access for those who have the money, other models are exploring more innovative ways of underwriting the costs that undoubtedly go into the production of a high-quality book.

In this *Insights* supplement we have tried to explore some of the key issues we have noticed around open access for monographs. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our

contributors, who have provided thoughtful and insightful commentary on the subjects that we proposed to them.

The role of institutions in supporting OA monographs is fascinating. Universities interact with books in complex ways. As employers of academics, they set terms and conditions for engagement and promotion which often relate to research outputs such as books. They have to meet the expectations of their funders, including HEFCE and the UK research councils. Some are developing policies and services to support those among their academics who want to 'go it alone' and begin new journals and book imprints, breaking away from traditional publishers. There are important questions about funding for open access publishing and the role that universities are expected to play in this, which have not yet been answered. And of course there are the university libraries, which represent a crucial mechanism for researchers to discover and use OA books.

Open access for monographs also demands a certain amount of 'rethinking' among many stakeholder groups. The relationship between researchers and the books they read and write is too complex to investigate in a short editorial, but any long-term future for OA monographs must engage with it. A book, especially in the humanities, is much more than a simple container for ideas, knowledge and argument: indeed, the very concept of the book is constantly evolving at different paces in different parts of the academy (and beyond). Any moves towards open access need to engage with the network of assumptions and habits that surround book production and consumption, and to ensure researchers are engaged with the changes made to a valued cultural object. Publishers, too, need to think about their systems, processes and services to authors and readers, and understand how these might operate in an open access world. And as new models for producing open access books arise, there are new opportunities for collaboration across and beyond traditional publishing partners.

Another very important question – one which is usually the first to be asked whenever we talk about open access books – is funding. Where will the money come from? How will the business models work? How can we build something sustainable but still financially realistic? Happily, a number of experiments are currently operating in this area, and some of them are covered in this issue. But we also asked all our authors to provide a short piece on their thoughts about the future funding and sustainability of OA monographs. We have presented these together at the end of the supplement and think that they make interesting reading.

So what does the future hold for OA monographs? As we gaze into our crystal ball, we are going to be honest and say that at this point, we don't know. But we are prepared to hazard a guess on some things that it might involve:

- *Diversity* We continue to believe that we are unlikely to see a single business model or provider emerge for OA monographs in the near future. Books are too different; book publishers are a very diverse group, and publishing cultures in book-heavy subjects are heterogeneous. We are glad that funders recognize this and are not pushing for too-rapid change.

- *Collaboration* This seems to be a key feature of many of the start-ups working in this area: traditional publishers working with new projects to underwrite the costs of open access publishing; new technologies being developed by international networks to support OA monograph production. We believe that this is likely to be an important feature of many OA monograph models.

- *Leadership* Open access for monographs needs to reach some kind of a tipping-point in order to justify the investment various parties must make in order to integrate them into existing monograph workflows. Leadership will also be needed to help academics feel confident about publishing using this new business model. The diversity which we welcome above need not be in tension with some clear leadership that provides justification and possibly also funding for efforts towards OA monographs.

- *Surprises* The book is more than a business model, and is constantly evolving in both form and content. E-books are developing on their own track. New ways of sharing long-

form content are emerging. Open access for books will need to engage with all of these developments.

So those are our predictions – but they are not exactly stone tablets brought down from the mountain. In the words of one futurologist we have worked with: the only thing you can guarantee about forecasting the future is that you will, in at least one respect, be completely and utterly wrong. And that, after all, is what keeps open access for monographs so exciting.

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