

What should we do with all these books? A feasibility study on collaborative monograph solutions

Academic libraries in the UK are under increasing pressure to reduce their estate footprint or increase learning space in the library. Following the success of the UKRR, the National Monographs Steering Committee commissioned Information Power Ltd (IPL) to explore potential solutions for the collaborative management of monographs in the UK. Desk research and interviews with existing collaborations worldwide showed that there were three potential models in use: distributed storage and shared collection, physical consolidation of print materials into a shared repository and shared or co-operative storage facility. Interviews with key stakeholders in the UK HE sector and an online survey established that there was an appetite for collaborative management. The key issues include funding, sustainability and business models; shared bibliographic data; collection analysis; governance, leadership and administration; duplicate materials policy; and storage and retrieval from storage. IPL recommended that a national membership organization be formed (UKRR-M) which would offer a national solution with physical consolidation of print materials into a shared repository collection with central administration.

Keywords

Monographs; collaborative management; academic libraries; UKRR; monograph storage

Following the success of the UK Research Reserve (UKRR) for journals, the National Monographs Steering Committee (NMSG) – comprising representatives from the UK Research Reserve (UKRR), Research Libraries UK (RLUK), Jisc, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the British Library and SCONUL – was set up to investigate solutions for monographs.

In early 2017 the NMSG commissioned Information Power Ltd (IPL) to explore potential solutions for the collaborative management of monographs in the UK. As all academic librarians are aware, there is constant pressure on libraries to either reduce their estate footprint or to use their existing space more creatively for learning spaces. University managers increasingly require the space available to provide maximum return on investment (ROI). Libraries face pressure to accommodate and retain only those collections that are currently of value to their institutions and to ensure those collections are discoverable and rapidly accessible.

It was agreed that the study should focus on printed academic monographs rather than textbooks and reference books. IPL undertook extensive desk research and conducted interviews with a variety of international stakeholders to explore a range of possible solutions suitable for the collaborative management of monographs. The research focused on models, governance, workflows, structure and funding used in other European, North American and Australian initiatives. Interviews with UK librarians focused on the requirements and appetite for a national solution to printed monograph retention and storage.

Literature searching and interviews

IPL carried out desk research and discovered over 200 relevant references and abstracts which described collaborative initiatives around the world. These were compiled into



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2 a searchable database and made available to all UK academic libraries via SCONUL. Subsequently, these items were used to identify key players and stakeholders in the international community and interviews were requested. In total, 19 key personnel from overseas collaborations were interviewed. The structured interviews included such questions as: How are successful collaborations funded? Are there membership fees? How are costs divided between large and small institutions? In what ways do participating libraries collaborate? (For example, bibliographic data, shared storage, leadership, administration.) The final key question was: What can cause collaborations to fail?

After analysis of the data from the international collaborators, interviews were set up with ten key stakeholders within UK higher education institutions (HEIs). These were identified in conjunction with the NMSG in an attempt to cover many different types of libraries. A set of detailed questions was prepared and used to gather detailed information about the current conditions and requirements in the UK. The questions were wide-ranging and covered (among other topics):

- bibliographic data and collection analysis
- shared distributed collections, shared consolidated collections and shared storage
- special collections
- leadership, governance and administrative support
- reliable data and shared metadata
- measuring ROI and magnitude of space saving.

'The majority anticipated imminent space problems and 46% already had a critical problem'

Finally, once again in consultation with the NMSG, an online questionnaire was set up to gather further information about the appetite for collaboration within UK HEIs. This was distributed using the UKRR, SCONUL and RLUK lists. It was pleasing that 49 institutions completed the online survey. The majority anticipated imminent space problems and 46% already had a critical problem, whilst 85% were interested in collaborating with bibliographic data and 60% were interested in shared storage.

Models for the collaborative management of monographs

The literature review and interviews found a variety of approaches to collaborative monograph management. In some European countries collaboration is centrally managed and funded. For example, in Finland, the Ministry of Education has, for 20 years, provided a shared storage space with loan requests processed in 24 hours.¹ Ongoing government funding for such an initiative is unlikely to be the case in the UK, and thus the models outlined below are found in the USA, Canada and Australia. Shared collections may be established in a centralized or distributed pattern and may involve specialized storage facilities or traditional library locations. Ownership may be retained by the original holding library or ceded to another party. Three key models emerged and are detailed below with examples.

Model 1: Distributed storage and shared collection

Characteristics are:

- no shared or collaborative storage
- the holding library retains ownership
- evidence-based decision making for retention and deduplication
- access should be enabled by inter-library loan (ILL) between participating libraries.

Examples include:

- Michigan Shared Print Initiative (MI-SPI)²
- Eastern Academic Scholars' Trust (EAST).³

3 **Model 2: Physical consolidation of print materials into a shared repository (e.g. UKRR)**

Characteristics are:

- collaborative storage, access and, in some cases, digitization on demand
- the number of copies in a shared repository is usually limited
- ceded ownership
- evidenced-based decision making for retention and deduplication
- some have 'last copy' policies; if a monograph is the last copy of that work held within the group of participating libraries, a process is in place for retaining it on behalf of the group
- access is from the shared collection in the repository rather than by ILL amongst participating libraries.

Examples include:

- UKRR
- Florida Academic Repository (FLARE).⁴

Model 3: Shared or co-operative storage facility

Characteristics are:

- each library retains ownership of its collections, with separate location of collections for each participating library within the storage facility
- flexibility for participating libraries providing a short-term ROI
- this model does not encourage deduplication, and a shared store could be holding several copies of the same item for different owners. As a result, it may be unlikely to achieve any significant cost savings in overall space.

Examples include:

- CARM (CAVAL Archival & Research Materials) Centre (Australia)⁵
- PASCAL (Preservation and Access Service Center for Colorado Academic Libraries).⁶

IPL's recommendation for a UK Monograph Collaboration and the way forward

Having analysed in detail the evidence and interview/questionnaire responses from the study, IPL recommended that the way forward for the UK would be Model 2. The proposed monograph solution would be based on the highly successful UKRR model for journals and have the working title UKRR-M.

UKRR allows UK HE libraries to deduplicate their journal holdings of a title if two copies are held by other UKRR members, ensuring continued access to low-use journals, whilst allowing libraries to release space to meet the changing needs of their users. Phase 1 of UKRR showed the effectiveness of creating a shared collection of low-use journals, with eight HE libraries releasing over 11,000 metres of shelving through co-ordinated deduplication. With HEFCE funding, UKRR continued its work of building a sustainable national research collection in Phase 2. In Phase 2, UKRR has processed nearly 95 kilometres of shelf space while retaining approximately 18,800 scarce holdings. UKRR is now in Phase 3 and aims to work with all libraries who wish to make informed decisions about their low-use print collections.

'The proposed monograph solution would be based on the highly successful UKRR model for journals'

However, what the research clearly demonstrated is that there are a range of key issues that need to be addressed by the NMSG and, in some cases, individual libraries, before any UK initiative can get off the ground. These include:

4 Funding, sustainability and business models

Some European initiatives have benefited from government funding for both development and ongoing sustainability, e.g. in Finland. In other parts of the world, start-up funding has come from a state system or a foundation, e.g. Andrew W Mellon Foundation and the Davis Educational Foundation. Such funding has enabled project planning, support for shared collections, analysis of bibliographic records and off-site storage infrastructure. In the UK, approximately £10 million in funding from HEFCE for UKRR achieved more than 11 kilometres of shelving space released in the first phase. This resulted in recurrent estate saving of approximately £318,000 p.a. and capital saving of about £3.3 million. In Phase 2 a further 76 kilometres of shelving space was released, resulting in a recurrent saving of approximately £2.2 million p.a. and capital saving of £23 million.

As with the UKRR, most collaborations in the world depend upon membership/subscription fees from participating libraries for ongoing costs such as: overhead costs (project management and administration); fixed costs (storage and systems); activity (validation, delivery, retrieval, reshelving and metadata updates). There are some notable examples of collaborations that failed due to the lack of a sustainable business model. CASS – a collaborative academic store for Scotland – was a pilot service for seven SCURL member libraries. The National Library of Scotland provided initial storage space but the project folded when this could not be continued. At the end of the project, a costly exercise was required to take back or dispose of the stored collection!

'a generally acknowledged need to establish what is rare and unique'

Bibliographic data

The IPL research indicates that shared bibliographic data is central to the success of all types of collaborative initiatives. In the USA, OCLC holdings metadata is generally considered definitive but in other countries a centralized metadata system is considered out of the bounds of possibility. However, there is a generally acknowledged need to establish what is rare and unique. In the UK the National Bibliographic Knowledgebase (NBK) currently being developed by Jisc in conjunction with OCLC will eventually include catalogue data from more than 225 academic and specialist libraries.

'Libraries adopt a variety of methodologies for the deselection of titles'

Collection analysis

Collection analysis is a key issue for both individual libraries and existing shared monograph collections. Interviews with UK librarians demonstrated that many libraries are already undertaking collection analysis, both to understand their collection strengths and weaknesses and to provide an evidence base for deduplication and deselection. Libraries adopt a variety of methodologies for the deselection of titles ranging from the relatively simple 'one in, one out' or discarding multiple copies of old editions to the use of sophisticated collections analysis tools such as OCLC's Greenglass or the Copac Collection Management tools.

Governance, leadership and administration

All successful monograph collaborations need clearly thought out and agreed governance procedures. IPL's research revealed a diverse range of documentation regarding the governance of monograph collaborations, ranging from succinct Memoranda of Understanding to highly detailed policy manuals. The interviews conducted with UK librarians specifically asked about leadership in the UK context, and without exception all respondents said that they thought the British Library was a natural leader for monograph collaboration as it has the knowledge and expertise built up over many years. Most respondents agreed that it would also be important to establish a national membership organization as a separate legal entity and to ensure that the membership had a voice and was listened to. As far as administration was concerned, the vast

- 5 majority of stakeholders were of the opinion that administrative support was key to any collaboration. Successful collaboration requires dedicated administration to support governance, create documentation and liaise with members.

Duplicate materials

The optimum number of duplicate monographs contributed to UKRR-M must be agreed. It is proposed that bibliographic data is submitted to UKRR-M. The agreed optimum number of copies will then be called in from submitting libraries and checked. If they are a match and in good condition, they will be secured in UKRR-M. Without this physical check, it would be difficult to be certain that the duplicate copies submitted were identical.

Storage and retrieval from storage

As described above in the models section, shared storage is not a requirement for all collaborations. However, evidence gathered in this study indicates that storage is a key driver for UK libraries. Some face an acute space shortage and many others struggle to balance the need for study space with the need to offer a breadth of titles across a given subject area. Only 4% of respondents to the survey did not report a problem with space. Moreover, they showed little appetite for shared distributed collections and articulated a distinct preference for shared collections in a shared store. Of respondents, 78% would be interested in using an off-site shared storage solution and 73% would be interested in collection sharing at a national level. The research showed that reliable and efficient retrieval from store is a high priority for libraries and would be essential for success. There was a preference for 24-hour delivery, although some might accept a slower delivery for a lower-tiered price.

‘reliable and efficient retrieval from store ... would be essential for success’

Recommended strategy for UKRR-M

IPL proposes the adoption of the following strategy for collaborative management of low-use monographs in the UK.

A national membership organization would be formed to manage collaborative management of low-use monographs. The goals of UKRR-M would be:

- quick and easy access to materials
- co-ordinated retention
- collaborative storage, helping UK HE libraries to release space
- preservation of materials for the community.

UKRR-M will achieve the above goals by:

- offering a national solution ensuring that all libraries are working to common guidelines
- providing physical consolidation of print materials into a Shared Repository Collection, creating a Shared Collection of Monographs in the British Library at Boston Spa
- providing central administration
- deduplication of materials transferred to the Shared Repository Collection. (After the start-up phase and assuming the development of the NBK and confidence in its metadata, subsequent phases could have deduplication before transfer)
- timely access to a shared collection for the benefit of UK research.

The ball is now back in the court of the NMSG, who have the huge task of securing initial funding and setting up infrastructure. We all need to keep our fingers firmly crossed.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the ‘Abbreviations and Acronyms’ link at the top of the page it directs you to: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

Competing interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

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