

Facilitating Access

Tracing and Locating Electronic Books for the Academic Sector

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Abstract. This paper reports on research undertaken over the past two years into the provision of e-books in the UK focussing upon the issue of bibliographical access. The problems experienced by library and information staff tracing and locating e-books are elucidated. The current position concerning the extension of legal deposit for this electronic format is considered, and a map of the providers of bibliographical information is set out. The establishment of a national strategy for access to e-books is explored through a discussion of the role of a significant new UK body, the JISC e-Books Working Group. The group has a specific remit covering bibliographic access and the potential impact of this group upon the present model of bibliographic access is also discussed. The paper poses a range of questions designed to encourage further international debate on this aspect of e-book accessibility.

1 Introduction

This paper reports on recent work undertaken by the authors concerning the accessibility of e-books to academic libraries, and updates earlier work that formed the basis of a previous paper delivered three years ago in this forum [1]. In 1997, the authors were funded by the Joint Information Services Committee (JISC) of the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales to undertake an 18-month study of the incidence and nature of publishing of electronic scholarly monographs and textbooks in the UK. This was the first study of its kind and possibly a little ahead of its time as e-books were still only at an emergent stage in the UK [2].

The project researched the overall state of e-monograph publishing including incidence of provision, management structures, costing mechanisms, and authoring and editorial responsibilities. The study also looked in some depth at content, surveying added-value and rights issues. The implications of e-monograph publishing for those involved in collection management were also explored, especially issues of access, the central topic of this paper.

Since their first report [2], the authors have maintained a regular watching brief in the area of e-books, and have continued their research in this area. The basis of this paper lies in two discrete but inter-related research projects.

The principle study (IMPACT) comprised an e-mail survey within the higher education (HE) sector undertaken during 2002, updating an earlier study in 2000/1 [3]. The 2000/1 work was itself conceived to continue the work of the investigation into e-book provision discussed above. The purpose of IMPACT was to discover the degree to which e-books had been accepted by library and information services (LIS). In particular, IMPACT investigated librarians' views and use of netLibrary, ebrary and Questia, and explored issues of bibliographical access and the problems surround the adoption of e-books.

Both the 2000/1 and 2002 surveys used an electronic mailing list to distribute a questionnaire to all HE libraries in the UK. However, in repeating the survey, it was decided to use an additional two mailing lists so that the population could be extended to include the further education (FE) sector. The questionnaire was first sent out in February 2002 and resent as a reminder with an extended return date a month later. The qualitative data presented in this paper is based on responses from 48 institutions.

The second project with particular relevance to e-books is a longitudinal study and has been under way since 1998. Ongoing research being conducted, in part by the authors, at the Department of Information and Library Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth on behalf of the JISC is examining the provision and uptake of *all* – that is, not just e-books – electronic information resources and services in both sectors. The JISC User Surveys: Trends in Electronic Information Services (JUSTEIS) project comprises two strands:

- a survey of students, academic staff and LIS staff to discover what electronic information services they use; and
- a survey of LIS Websites to determine the electronic resources that are offered to those user groups.

The insights used in this article come from the second strand of Cycle 3 (2001-2002) which comprised an investigation of 50 HE and FE Websites to analyse content. A detailed account of the methodology and results can be found in the project reports of the third cycle [4].

In addition to these two major research projects, work is currently being undertaken by the authors to map the prospective take up of e-books in a number

of discrete subject disciplines. This work, the Subject Mapping Project, on behalf of the JISC e-Books Working Group discussed below, seeks to explore still further the issues surrounding the provision of e-books to the HE and FE communities. An initial, pilot focus group session with LIS staff was conducted during the joint Colleges of Further and Higher Education Group (CoFHE) / University College and Research Group (UC&R) Conference in April 2002 and further focus groups are taking place during 2002 and 2003.

2 Aims of the Paper

The IMPACT study recognised the importance of the different elements of access to e-books – user access and acquisition as well as bibliographical access, which is the theme of this paper. Despite the significance of bibliographical sources and services in the collection development of electronic materials, paradoxically, scant consideration has been shown of this field in the literature. With respect to e-books, research for the initial 1998 study revealed that there was even less published literature and/or concern about bibliographical access, although it is central to any institutional e-book acquisition and use. The literature search for the IMPACT study confirmed that there had been little additional publishing in the intervening years.

We may conjecture that the paucity of literature stems from the relative newness of the format, the piecemeal or serendipitous discovery of electronic texts, and the comparatively low take-up of e-books within HE and FE collections. The JUSTEIS project revealed that only 42.0% of LIS Websites examined contained links to e-books (57.1% of HE sites and 22.7% of FE sites). More fundamentally, this lack of writing about bibliographical issues reflects a disregard for this aspect of collection development. This paper aims to raise questions as to the importance of bibliographical access, and to consider the modes of access with which librarians and academic staff may need to be conversant.

3 The Issue of Bibliographical Access

The IMPACT study sought to ascertain the problems experienced by institutions when trying to identify and select e-book titles. Respondents from the HE or FE institutions identified the following concerns:

- There is no single [bibliographic] source
- There is no one source for all subjects. Each provider has different strengths in different subjects and it is difficult to decide which is right for institution
- e-books are not on the bibliographic database used by those ordering books (“we use BookFind-Online which does not have e-book data but believe Bowker Global Books in Print does”)

- No equivalent to Global Books in Print for e-books
- Not yet listed in bibliographical sources as alternatives to print, so time consuming to identify on a title-by-title basis
- There are also problems when you place an order and then discover it is not available outside USA
- Ascertaining whether they are the same as the print-based versions
- Quite often cannot see lists of e-books until you've joined the service
- Subject listings would be useful from their Websites, but you have to be a member
- Publishers Websites that are not up to speed – slow, inactive links, etc.

The first five concerns listed reflect the central problem of the lack of systematic bibliographical control of e-books. The fundamental cause lies in the fact that legal deposit does not extend to this format in the UK, and there is consequently an absence of a national bibliography for electronic formats – an issue which is discussed below.

Respondents were also asked how they located e-books. The Table shows the diversity of approaches taken and, in the variety, points to the difficulties surrounding bibliographical access. It can be seen that publishers' information sources predominate, and where publishers provide information, their catalogues and Websites are far less useful than flyers and publicity brochures; mailing lists are also perceived as important sources (these are discussed below). Serendipity, particularly in the form of peer recommendations and the Internet, plays as important a part as information obtained directly from the publisher. Surprisingly, virtually no respondents referred to the array of established bibliographical approaches delineated in the "map", below.

Given the paucity of literature about modes of bibliographical access to e-books, we have drawn up a framework of approaches, which transcends the sources listed in the Table. This constitutes a "map" which must be viewed as indicative rather than definitive.

4 A Map of Bibliographical Sources

The most obvious starting point of our "map" is a national listing of e-books which would be the consequence of legal deposit extending to electronic resources.

4.1 Legal Deposit and National Listings

Central to the discussion of bibliographical access to e-books is the issue of legal deposit of electronic publications, an issue that was articulated by Ratcliffe in 1999 [5]. Significant developments have occurred in the UK since the publication

Table 1. Sources of bibliographic information on e-books used by respondents (IMPACT, 2002)

Sources of information	Number of institutions citing
Publishers advertising	11
Discussion/Mailing lists	10
Staff recommendations	4
Publisher Websites	2
CHEST/JISC mailings	2
Internet	2
Subject lists	1
Library press	1
Publisher catalogues	1
Other library Websites	1
Conferences & exhibitions	1
Serendipity	1
Journals	1
Contacts	1
As for printed books	1

of that work. In 1997, the Government had published its long-awaited consultation paper, *Legal Deposit of Publications: a Consultation Paper* [6] which offered an important opportunity to re-evaluate the implications of extending legal deposit legislation to electronic formats. Following responses to the consultation paper, a working group was established in 1998, chaired by Sir Anthony Kenny to consider ways of moving forward on the issue of legal deposit. With the publication of the report of the group [7], the Voluntary Deposit of Electronic Publications (VDEP) was established in January 2000, which has resulted in several hundred CD-ROMs being deposited voluntarily in the British Library. MARC records are created and titles listed in the catalogue and the *British National Bibliography*. The low number of titles deposited means that as yet no separate listing is warranted but one is anticipated.

The VDEP is a two-year pilot project with formal legislation being a possible outcome, and it is noteworthy that the British Library is "starting to discuss voluntary deposit and archiving of online publications with publishers, [including e-books], and working to address the difficult technical issues in preserving these for the future" [8]. There is no doubting, however, that it will be significantly easier to harness CD-ROM material than Web materials. The consultative paper cited above devotes comparatively little space to the discussion of Internet publications

and emphasise the extensive problematic issues "which must be resolved before any system of legal deposit could be introduced" [6, 9, 10].

A Regulatory Impact Assessment to "assess the costs and other quantifiable impacts on the publishing trade and to the legal deposit libraries of the extension of legal deposit to non-print publication" [8] is now being undertaken by the British Library, and this suggests that it will be some time before change can be effected if the results of the study are favourable. Ultimately, it is envisaged that a national bibliographical listing will be produced offering a central point of access to electronic materials including e-books.

4.2 Publisher Sites

Publishers' Websites, catalogues and marketing materials are perceived by the respondents in the IMPACT survey as constituting the prime medium for identifying new e-book titles, a finding which echoes that of the initial 1998 survey [2]. In our previous study we reported that there was no guide to UK publishers who publish electronically. This is still the case and thus it is no easy task track down publishers, a particular dilemma for those searching broader disciplines, for example the hard and soft sciences and the humanities, and there are difficulties, too, in locating the smaller specialist publishers.

A further problem concerns the nature of some publishers' Websites, which fail to differentiate between print and electronic titles and consequently exacerbate considerably the search time. Respondents report that they also frequently contain slow and inactive links and another criticism raised is that it is often not possible to view lists of e-books until a subscription or purchase is made.

There is evidence that some e-book publishers (e.g. Boson) are providing bibliographical hyperlinks to other electronic book publishers – seemingly a paradox, but presumably believing that it will serve to develop and expand the e-book market, thus a welcome initiative.

4.3 Book Trade Bibliographies

Since our first study [1] there is still little evidence that librarians have been made aware of the potential of the major book trade bibliographies as a source for e-books, and few university librarians surveyed in the IMPACT study chose to select from these sources. Indeed, some of the comments cited above (under 3.0) reveal the ignorance that exists about the potential of trade bibliographies as a source for identifying e-book titles. The book trade bibliographies published by BookData and Whitaker constitute important bibliographical sources for collection management internationally, and e-books on CD-ROM are now included in the databases of both companies, although the proportion of titles listed that were appropriate for the

academic market remains small. The impressive searching and annotation features of BookData suggest that it could be a useful tool in the bibliographical armoury, and whilst Web monographs are not yet included in the bibliographic databases of either company, they recognised the inevitability of this, and they have the capacity to facilitate this. Given the potential difficulties of extending legal deposit to Web books, such a move would create a unique bibliographical source.

4.4 Internet E-book Suppliers

Increasingly, the Internet bookshops (e.g. Amazon.com, Powells.com) are entering the e-book market, focussing largely upon fiction and an array of non-academic titles, and we are hoping to investigate their potential further. However, since our initial survey, a new bibliographical source has emerged – the Internet E-book Suppliers. BookLocker and e-bookAD.com are two such recent examples, the latter offering access to in excess of 12,000 titles in a range of subject fields as well as genre and non-genre fiction. Respondents in the IMPACT study made no mention of this source and there is a need to investigate these companies and their role in supporting selection and evaluation in the academic library; in particular, the degree to which they make available scholarly monographs and text books.

4.5 Mailing Lists

Anecdotal evidence from workshops on the collection development of electronic resources conducted by the authors had indicated that mailing lists were a potentially important source for tracing new publications. The IMPACT study confirmed the role that mailing lists play in helping LIS staff to identify new e-book titles, particularly in discrete subject fields. To our knowledge, no studies have been undertaken into the effectiveness of mailing lists as a bibliographical source, the respondents, however, perceive this as an effective, albeit ad hoc, approach.

4.6 Journals

Professional and academic journals remain a primary source, especially for subject specialist librarians and information officers working within particular disciplines. Furthermore, they are still the most comprehensive source of reviews of CD-ROM and increasingly Web e-books and remain another amorphous area and one worthy of further investigation.

4.7 Aggregators

The appearance of netLibrary, Questia, Ebrary and other aggregators of e-books has, for some libraries, apparently eased the problem of bibliographical control.

Given the significant critical mass of material made available through these companies, the e-book collections of some libraries will be acquired entirely from this source, and in consequence, the need to forage through the bibliographical apparatus for other e-book titles is largely eliminated. As a caveat, the JUSTEIS survey of Websites reveals that only a very small minority of surveyed HE and FE institutions in the UK currently subscribe to any of these three aggregators. The IMPACT study unearthed a range of reasons for this including the pricing structure and the lack of appropriate academic content.

For those libraries who do not subscribe to netLibrary, it is still possible to identify titles of e-books held in their database since titles are included in Blackwells Collection Manager, Talis Information Ltd, and other library information systems. However, one might conjecture that few librarians are aware of this particular link, and their potential as selection aids.

4.8 Serendipity

The IMPACT study revealed the significance of serendipity as a means of identifying relevant e-book titles. Indeed, our surveys underlined the significance of different forms of serendipity and informal resources such as information gleaned fortuitously at conferences and exhibitions, and the "academic grapevine" as major means of locating titles. The latter, in particular, is an important source that suggests the need to reinforce links between LIS staff and faculty.

Academic librarians in the UK have another bibliographical approach open to them, although it is not yet clear whether it should be regarded as an element of the map or as an alternative. This is manifest in national bodies that have assumed responsibility for facilitating electronic publications for the tertiary sector.

5 JISC E-books Working Group

A new dimension to bibliographical access, at least for the academic sector in the UK, arises from the national licence agreements brokered by the JISC. The role of the JISC is to

"promote the innovative application and use of information systems and information technology in FE and HE across the UK, by providing vision and leadership, and funding the network infrastructure, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and information services, development projects and high quality materials for education. Its central role ensures that the uptake of new technologies and methods is cost-effective, comprehensive and well focused." [11]

In furtherance of its remit to develop "high-quality materials", the JISC has appointed collection development officers to negotiate favourable licences that may be taken up by academic libraries.

One of the implications of this higher-level collection development is that librarians in HE and FE libraries may elect to purchase materials entirely through the JISC. This poses similar pedagogic issues to those that surround aggregators: the collections grow according to what is available rather than according to specific curricular needs. The difference lies in the fact that the JISC's work is founded upon the premise of UK academics and librarians collaborating with the JISC to determine collection needs. Another major consequence is that there is no longer a need for LIS staff to use bibliographical tools to discover what electronic resources are available.

The JISC has collection development strategies in place for a number of formats such as journals, images, moving pictures and sound, geospatial materials, and, of course, e-books. Since our first paper [1], working groups have been set up for each discrete collection. The JISC e-Books Working Group is responsible for strategic development within one of these eight major collecting areas and group membership comprises key stakeholders involved in the e-book publishing chain, including publishers, academic staff and librarians. Its terms of reference can be summarised as follows:

- to monitor the e-book industry world-wide and influence its development for the benefit of FE and HE in the UK;
- to secure cost-effective access to a comprehensive and relevant collection of electronic books for universities and colleges;
- to achieve sustainable economic models for electronic books;
- to assess the impact of new hardware and software, emerging e-book standards and digital rights;
- to encourage the option of electronic publication for authors whilst maintaining a realistic view of new technology;
- to take a balanced view of the role of e-books and understand how they can be integrated effectively into learning and research;

and, importantly in the context of this paper:

- to define and establish strategies to ensure efficient bibliographic control of e-books.

An overview of the e-book industry and an outline of the main issues on e-book acquisition was produced by the Group in September 2001 [12]. It concluded that critical success factors for the format included availability of content, quality of content, pricing models and distribution. The collection development plan for 2002/03 has three main foci for the acquisition of content: to create a portfolio of major

reference works for both FE and HE; to offer collections of major monographs; and to agree with leading UK publishers on suitable models for the provision of textbook material.

At least partially in response to these foci, a significant research project funded by the Working Group – the Subject Mapping exercise involving librarians, academics and publishers that was referred to above – is using focus-group discussions with LIS and academic staff to ensure appropriate collection development activities by the JISC. One of the elements under investigation is a more detailed analysis of the bibliographical problems experienced by librarians undertaking the selection and acquisition of e-books.

Clearly, every effort is being made to provide straightforward academic access to e-books in the UK although an interesting consequence may need further consideration. A corollary to the umbrella approach offered by JISC collection development is that licences are likely to be facilitated with larger publishers offering major lists of titles in specific subject disciplines. Smaller publishing houses with only a modest number of titles may not be approached by the JISC and may be marginalised. Thus, there remains a need for pro-active collection development by library staff, using the bibliographical “map” described above, to discover titles that fall outside of JISC licences.

6 Conclusion

The premise underlying this paper is that academic libraries experience particular difficulties when identifying and selecting e-books as a result of a poor and poorly documented bibliographical apparatus. Our research has revealed that LIS staff do in fact experience problems in identifying titles. The research also revealed that the same staff use a limited and diffuse array of bibliographical approaches. The fundamental reason for this would appear to be the lack of a comprehensive national listing associated with the absence of legal deposit for electronic resources. In the UK, there is considerable activity in this arena, and during the debate surrounding the extension of legislation to electronic materials, a voluntary systems has been put in place as a precursor with a view to creating a specialist bibliographical listing.

Lack of any discussion in the literature about the bibliographical issues surrounding e-books has led us to offer a map of potential bibliographical approaches. The map should be viewed as dynamic and may need modification according to professional and cultural considerations. It is critical that libraries should ensure that collection development and selection policies include such a listing. Given that some of the bibliographical sources have only recently been established, some further investigation of their contribution may be in order.

One fundamental development in the UK has been the establishment of the national body – the JISC – which through its work of developing national collections for e-books might well offer an alternative or additional medium through which to facilitate access to e-books in the UK academic sector. The significance of the JISC approach is such that other countries may well derive benefit from their example.

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