

Scoping and discussion paper

Context for the project

1. Although this project emerges from the immediate need for HEFCE, other funding councils and research councils to understand the ways in which monographs and other long-form publications might be positioned in relation to their policies for open access journals and conference proceedings, it has a much broader provenance. This provenance includes long-standing concern about the future of the monograph, the trend towards online access to knowledge in general and open access in particular, and the increasing attempts to address these together through innovative business models for open access monograph publication.

2. The consideration of open access monographs is clearly related to that of open access journals, in that both draw on the same impulse to secure the freest possible access to publicly-funded research. Both also draw on the same imperative to protect the reputation of UK research and those of individual authors that is bound up with peer review processes. There are, however, very important points of difference: monographs have a distinct place within the patterns and culture of scholarly communication in the disciplines where they are important; open access is far more developed in terms of both business models and debate with respect to journals than it is in relation to monographs and other long-form publications; and the funding councils have indicated that they will not require open access for long-form publications submitted to the successor to REF 2014.

3. In defining the specific forms of publication that are of interest to this project, we intend to cast the net wide. We therefore use 'monographs' as a shorthand term, which should be interpreted to cover a wider range of publications, including (but not limited to) monographs, collections of articles by one or many authors, and scholarly editions of texts.

4. Talk of a crisis in monographs seems to have been with us for a very long time and yet we have only a limited sense of its character and scale. Indeed, there are some who dispute that it exists. We do know that the unit cost of monographs has risen substantially in recent decades, whereas expenditure by academic libraries, often under pressure from rising journal prices and stretched acquisition budgets, has not kept pace. There is talk of significantly reduced print runs for new monographs and reduced sales. Among other factors, this poses fundamental questions about the continued survival of the academic monograph in a world where libraries are finding it harder to purchase them and where prices for most make personal purchases much less frequent than they once were.

5. Meanwhile, sources of access to scholarly information and scholarly publications are becoming available that are rooted in the digital world. Scholars and students are

increasingly reliant on these to access and use knowledge. The relationship between journals and open access is the most prominently debated dimension of this process, and in journals and conference proceedings open access has made considerable progress in recent years, often with the active encouragement of research funders. This is a dynamic field, one in which funders and policy makers are responding, publishers are variously seeking to address their own business models, and researchers are themselves embracing a wider world of freely-available knowledge. It is in this context that the future role of monographs has become the subject of increasing debate. Views differ widely, with an unhelpful polarisation separating those who see printed monographs as an anachronism that must either respond to the new environment or risk becoming irrelevant and disappearing from those who argue that printed monographs are vital to scholarly culture and must be protected in their current form. That polarised debate can, at times, conceal the intermediary ground that is developing as people seek to find ways of securing the contribution made by the monograph while also responding to the imperatives of a digital and increasingly open-access landscape for scholarly information.

6. Innovative models are therefore continuing to develop. Established publishers are making books available online while also experimenting with open access; dedicated and open-access book publishers are emerging; new and often experimental models for open access books are starting to emerge, tackling difficult issues such as financing, distribution and sustainability. The market in this area remains at an early stage of development. We cannot assume which, if any, of the emerging models will be viable and sustainable in the long run, and no models have yet gained the traction necessary to effect real transformation in the monograph publishing landscape. Even more important, none of the models, nor indeed open access monographs in general, have secured the cultural buy-in from authors, publishers, higher education institutions and readers without which their development on a significant scale is unlikely.

Background to the project

7. In July 2013, the four UK higher education funding bodies consulted on proposals to require that outputs submitted to a future Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise be made available in an open access format. After advice received during pre-consultation, these proposals excluded monographs from the open access requirement. It was felt that open-access monograph publishing had yet to reach a point where it was widely considered to be able to support such a requirement, and that HEFCE should instead work to establish what more could be done to gather evidence and help the various players, including the scholarly community and publishers, to bring about any change that might appear to be necessary in this area.

8. HEFCE recognises that there continue to be substantial issues surrounding both print and open access monographs, and is keen to maintain an interest in this area in order to play a constructive role as may seem appropriate. HEFCE's interest may in due course include establishing how its own policies should evolve to contribute to securing both sustainability and openness in monograph publishing. Before that point, however,

HEFCE is keen to explore a range of evidence concerning monographs, both print and open access, including available models and options that could support sustainability and innovation in monograph publishing, including digital and open access publishing, into the future.

Expert Reference Group

9. The Expert Reference Group has been established to provide advice to the Steering Group on the diverse body of evidence needed to meet the objectives of the HEFCE Monographs and Open Access Project. This may include assisting the Steering Group in the specification of any additional research requirements. This advice on evidence will emerge for the group's discussion of the various issues surrounding monograph publishing and approaches to open access.

10. The project is not intended to develop policy proposals or advice for a future REF nor for future requirements of UK research councils.

Project objectives

11. The project has three objectives. It should:

- i. Develop an evidence-based understanding of the scale and nature of the difficulties that are thought to be facing monograph publishing.
- ii. Develop an evidence-based understanding of the place, purpose and appropriateness of the scholarly monograph within the overall ecology of scholarly communication in those humanities and social science disciplines where it plays a significant part. This should include, amongst other issues, the importance of the monograph to scholarly communication, to reputation and career progression, and to student learning.
- iii. Examine the role that innovation in publishing and access models can play in ensuring that the various benefits and attributes associated with the monograph can be sustained. This will involve examining a range of opportunities, risks, challenges and solutions, which should include an identification and examination of current and emerging models for monograph publishing, with particular reference to open access models.

Discussion

Below follows a brief discussion of each of the objectives.

The 'monograph in difficulties' objective

The project should develop an evidence-based understanding of the scale and nature of the difficulties that are thought to be facing monograph publishing.

Initial thoughts

12. If we are to understand the context for the discussion of open access monographs, then it is essential to explore the problems that print monographs are thought to be facing. Those problems constitute the essential background to some of the benefits associated with open access in this area. The evidence for the supposed crisis that is currently available is patchy and often anecdotal. This is a fundamental issue to be addressed if we are to consider that dimension of the case for open access which sees it as a solution to the problems facing the print monograph.

13. It is often said that monograph publishing should no longer be considered a sustainable line of business, but we do not know how widespread this view is among publishers. Do we need evidence of the ways in which monograph publishers now see the market for these and similar long-form publications? Do publishers see it in straightforward terms of the profitability of individual books, or is the business model that supports monographs a broader one that also includes the publisher's reputation, attracting authors, attracting journals, and building a more broadly-based set of benefits? In other words, is there a culture of the monograph amongst publishers as well as amongst academics, and is it a viable one?

14. Much of the international literature on open access monographs (for example in the USA and Australia) focuses to a greater extent on university presses than it does in the UK. University presses represent a distinctive model whose origins lie in support for their parent institution's academic community, and that mission has survived in different ways across countries. To what extent is the monograph in the UK bound into a broader and more explicitly commercial framework? Furthermore, does that affect the extent to which some version of the university press might be presented as a solution to problems in monograph publishing and as a location for open access models?

15. Insofar as the market for monographs is declining, and insofar as publishers' attitudes to monographs are changing, we need to explore the reasons behind these developments. Is demand for monographs falling off as a result of pressure on library budgets? Is this primarily a cost crisis, with production costs and therefore prices rising, producing a supposedly downward spiral as sales fall, reducing both library and private sales? It is, of course, possible that issues of price and budgets are less important than changing habits of scholarly communication – authors might want to write monographs,

but that does not necessarily mean that scholars wish to read them. We should not assume that authors and readers have the same attitude to the monograph, not even when the same individual occupies both those roles.

16. We therefore need to move beyond anecdote and understand the scale of the problem. We need some basic numbers for the publication of monographs, the sales of individual titles, and how this varies by discipline and by geographical market. It would also be helpful to situate this in the context of readership – how many people on average read (and/or access parts of) individual monographs?

The ‘culture’ objective

The project should develop an evidence-based understanding of the place, purpose and appropriateness of the scholarly monograph within the overall ecology of scholarly communication in those humanities and social science disciplines where it plays a significant part. This should include, amongst other issues, the importance of the monograph to scholarly communication, to reputation and career progression, and to student learning.

Initial thoughts

17. It is important that the monograph, which has long been a significant part of the overall research communication structure for many humanities and social science disciplines, is not perceived as some awkward outlier in relation to a mainstream system defined by the sciences. The starting point of any work must be the historic importance of the monograph and this means that any developing system – whether print or online, behind pay walls or open access – must take account of the strengths conventionally associated with the monograph as a basis for understanding how these might be sustained or reproduced in a changing environment for publishing and communication.

18. For many, the monograph’s importance lies in its ability to allow the author to express more complex and richer ideas, arguments and insights, supported by carefully contextualised analysis and evidence, in a way that is not possible in shorter texts. Indeed, for as long as the printed word has been thought of as the pre-eminent technology for the transfer of qualitative knowledge and analysis, the long-form text has taken pride of place as the most advanced expression of this technology and the culture that has come to be associated with it. As a result, monographs are commonly seen as vital to the preservation and advancement of knowledge within many disciplines. We need a better understanding of how far this conventional view remains important for academics across the disciplines concerned. How does this vary by discipline, or by academic career stage? How important are monographs to particular disciplines compared with journal articles, for example?

19. The monograph plays a significant role in both esteem and career advancement for academics in many humanities and social science disciplines. Promotion committees in particular, perhaps even more so than appointment panels, are said to put a great deal

of weight on the presence or otherwise of monographs in a candidate's publication record. There is a danger that this approach takes too little account of the relative willingness of publishers to commit themselves to monographs in particular disciplines or particular parts of disciplines. As the Director of one US university press commented, 'no-one's promotion should depend on our business model.' We need to move beyond the stories that are told about promotion criteria and seek evidence on the importance of the monograph for career advancement in different disciplines. It is also important to establish what it is about the monograph that gives it this status, and the extent to which those same characteristics and qualities can be demonstrated in any new system of scholarly publication that might develop. Connected to this, there is a growing trend towards requiring that PhD graduates publish or deposit their doctoral thesis in an open-access format. This is in tension with the established practice, in many disciplines, that a doctoral thesis forms the basis of an academic's first book, as the open-access nature of the thesis may discourage some publishers.

20. Advances in digital information technologies have created opportunities and driven cultural changes that many see as challenging the pre-eminent position of the monograph. The ability to access and digest knowledge and information in a much more selective manner, set alongside the sheer volume of information available, has produced challenges to established thinking about how knowledge and communication should interact. This connects with how information should be reused, which is bound up with issues of licensing and intellectual property, and, for many, issues around the integrity of the published work itself. There are some who question the relevance of long-form texts in a world where the speed of dissemination and the efficiency of use of information is considered to be paramount. If the monograph has an importance in this new knowledge environment, then how might that importance be sustained and what changes might be needed, in both form and mode of access, to help this? We need to ask questions about people's attitudes to monographs and their expectations of them, and we need evidence of trends in monograph readership and associated behaviours.

The 'models' objective

The project should examine the role that innovation in publishing and access models can play in ensuring that the various benefits and attributes associated with the monograph can be sustained. This will involve examining a range of opportunities, risks, challenges and solutions, which should include an identification and examination of current and emerging models for monograph publishing, with particular reference to open access models.

Initial thoughts

21. Innovation can transform markets by disrupting them, especially dysfunctional markets. The potential for digital technology and open access models to disrupt the monograph ecology is obvious: unrestricted, electronic access not only allows for monographs to meet the expectation of more efficient access to information, it also allows for evolutions of form and format that could transform the monograph medium

itself. Digital access allows for the inclusion of richer media, such as video and audio, into the text as well as smarter presentation of data. The introduction of interactive elements within and surrounding the book offers a range of new possibilities. It can facilitate greater reader engagement and discussion of a text, creating communities of debate around a publication. If digital access has the potential to increase the plasticity of the monograph, we need to know more about the range of possible opportunities here, the ways in which the integrity of the initial publication should and could be protected in this new environment, and what role publishers, research funders and others might play in facilitating such developments. In other words, it is important to identify the opportunities for enhancement bound up with open access for monograph, to be set alongside the difficulties of which many are aware.

22. The appropriate business model for open access monographs constitutes one of the most obvious of these difficulties. As far as journals are concerned, debate continues over the right model for open access but the alternatives seem reasonably few and the choices relatively clear. This is not currently the case with respect to open access monographs, and identifying the right model(s) will be a significant challenge for any proposals to move in that direction. It will be important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different models judged in relation to the dissemination of book-length scholarly publications for readers and their sustainable future for libraries and publishers. The issues do appear to be more complex in relation to monograph publishing than they are for journals, and the project needs to explore and clarify some of the key issues relating to business models. The future is likely to be one where not one but a variety of business models prevails.

23. A sub-set of these issues is concerned with innovations in format, in purchasing models, and in methods of curation and preservation for open access digital texts. In order for the project to advise on the current state of monograph publishing and to identify areas for possible development work, we need a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the range and scale of emerging models globally, as well as their advantages and disadvantages in relation to both communication and sustainability. It will be important to look internationally and not restrict our view of innovation to that available in the UK. This will also require us to consider issues around discoverability, licensing, repositories and other practical questions important for discussion of open access.

A note on other initiatives

24. Amongst the various initiatives that are underway in relation to monographs, there are two in particular which will be worth noting for their complementarity with the HEFCE project. The first of these is a project being undertaken by Jisc to establish both the necessity for and parameters of a national monographs strategy. The project is looking across the range of issues and (primarily technical) challenges relating to monograph authorship, readership, publication, storage and curation, and access. It is operating within a flexible project scope, taking cues from an advisory group on where to

focus. Initial discussions have outlined some of the challenges facing university libraries and publishers; challenges have been voiced mainly around the technical aspects of storage and access of monographs. The project is intended to conclude by the end of 2013, with outputs primarily intended to recommend whether a national strategy is necessary and, if so, what areas it might cover.

25. The second initiative to note is the work of OAPEN-UK. OAPEN-UK is a collaborative research project gathering evidence to help stakeholders make informed decisions on the future of open access scholarly monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). The research programme is consulting with all stakeholders to gather data on attitudes, perceptions, challenges, opportunities and practical workflow-related issues associated with any move to open access monograph publishing. In addition, OAPEN-UK is running a pilot scheme with several publishers to evaluate and compare the sales and usage of open access HSS monographs with a control group of monographs that are not available in open access. The project is intended to run until 2015.

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