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Challenges in managing e-books collections in UK academic libraries

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Abstract

This paper reports on research into issues surrounding the collection management of e-books in tertiary education libraries in the UK. Focus groups were conducted with university librarians representing three disciplines—business and management; engineering; and health and medicine, and librarians in post-16 education. Semistructured interview schedules were employed, and the proceedings were recorded and transcribed. The research identified the types and levels of e-books required. The nature of bibliographical control and the selection, acquisition, modes of access, and issues surrounding the licensing of e-books were delineated. The study identified problems associated with these fields and confirmed the need for a national model licence.
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1. Introduction

E-books were first discussed as a library resource in the 1990s, and recently it has been reported that one consultancy firm is predicting that "by 2005, e-books will make up 10% of all book sales." [1, p. 144] During the late 1990s there was a growing recognition

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among publishers and the Information and Library Services (ILS) profession in the UK of the importance of the e-book market. Within the post-16 education sector, the government-funded body responsible for the network infrastructure to universities and colleges, and the provision and licensing of electronic resources, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), also recognised the significance of e-books as a new electronic medium. As a result, it commissioned the first national study of the production and provision of electronic academic monographs and textbooks, which offered an analysis of publishing trends and the nature of e-books, and identified issues associated with access and delivery. [2]

Subsequently, this led to the establishment of a national e-Books Working Group, charged with promoting the provision and use of e-books within the tertiary education sector. This sector includes both universities—higher education (HE) and further education (FE), which cover all other post-16 institutions. The remit of the Working Group is to provide leadership in establishing a strategy for the development of e-books which embraces both the creation of a critical mass of e-book titles, and the management of e-book collections within academic libraries. A detailed discussion of the national strategy established by the e-Book Working Group is offered by Lonsdale and Armstrong. [3]

Thus far, the published literature on e-books has focussed on the nature of technology and the process of publishing. There has been a gradual increase in awareness of a need to explore the challenges which e-books present for collection development. This has been reported in the literature, usually in the guise of case studies relating to individual institutions [4–8] offer useful summaries of the emerging literature. Cognizant that there had been no substantive investigations into the issues surrounding the management of e-book collections in academic libraries in the UK, the e-Book Working Group commissioned research-the e-Book Mapping Exercise. This was the first of a number of studies to facilitate the uptake of e-books by the FE and HE communities. The study was undertaken by the authors in conjunction with Louise Edwards, then the JISC Collection Manager for e-books, and reported in 2003. [9]

This paper presents those findings of the study which relate to the nature of e-book collections and the issues surrounding selection and acquisition, bibliographical control, and licensing. These results are supplemented by relevant findings from a wider study of the provision and use of electronic resources in academic libraries in the UK. That project, JUSTEIS, was a 5-year longitudinal study co-directed by the authors, which constituted a significant element of the JISC User Behaviour Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which concluded in 2004. A statement of the aims, methodology, and findings can be found in Banwell. [10] Discussion of both pieces of research is set in the context of the international literature and other relevant research which was commissioned by the e-Books Working Group during the past 2 years.

1.1. Aims and objectives of the e-book mapping exercise

The primary aim of the e-Book Mapping Exercise was to inform the Working Group on the e-book needs of specific disciplines within FE and HE and on the issues which