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Open Access Books: an international collaboration to explore the practical implications for librarians of increasing access to scholarly research outputs

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Abstract:

Open access advocacy and partnership is an established role for libraries across the world: books continue to be a challenge. Books and book chapters remain a vital output for many research areas. Open access policies have focused primarily on journal articles and serial publications, potentially creating an imbalance in the research literature freely available, and possibly having a negative impact on book publications in terms of readership and citations. Publisher permissions for journal articles can usually be accessed from Sherpa RoMEO, but book contracts continue to be a mostly hidden agreement between publisher and researcher, inaccessible to librarians who are supporting and driving the open access agenda within an institution.

What are the current challenges for librarians in making academics books openly available? To what extent will this limit the mediating role of librarians in scholarly communication? Is this role sustainable? A global perspective is provided with a comparison of distinctive experiences at two leading international universities: Swansea University; and the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. Swansea University is seeking to create more open access book content in line with the United Kingdom's Higher Education Funding Council for Education Research Excellence Framework Open Access policy. The University of Nottingham Ningbo China is seeking to maximize the dissemination and visibility of research to a global audience through open access.

This paper focusses on the issues and challenges for librarians who wish to increase the number of books and book chapters available open access, including: relationships with global publishing partners; the complexity of publisher policies for books; challenging existing researcher practices; and, reskilling librarians for advocacy and influencing roles in scholarly communication. A set of recommendations is drawn from this in order to improve the library and information service roles in supporting research, publishing process and improving open access to book content.

Keywords: Open Access Books; China and Open Access; United Kingdom and Open Access; Scholarly Communication Licencing in Universities; Copyright and Open Access.

1. Introduction

How easy is it for librarians to make books available open access to a global audience? Open access advocacy and partnership is an established role for most university research libraries. This paper focusses on the issues and challenges for librarians who wish to increase the number of peer reviewed books and book chapters that are available open access in university institutional repositories. A global perspective is provided with a comparison of experiences at two leading international universities: Swansea University in Wales, United Kingdom; and the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. What are the current challenges for librarians in making academics books openly available? To what extent will this limit the mediating role of librarians in scholarly communication in the future? A set of recommendations is drawn from this in order to improve the library and information service roles in supporting research and improving open access to book content.

2. Motivations

So why an international collaboration? The initial motivation was one friend moving to China and wanting to stay in touch. The professional motivations included maintaining a network of expertise in key areas; collaborating to share knowledge; and embracing the challenge of book visibility, from contracts to outputs. Motivations are shared between the universities.

Both universities operate in research intensive contexts. Swansea University is a major research-led institution ranked 26th in the UK for the quality of research and 22nd for research impact according to the United Kingdom's Research Excellence Framework 2014. The University of Nottingham Ningbo China is part of a global university: the University of Nottingham research was ranked 8th in the United Kingdom for Research Power in the Research Excellence Framework 2014.

The importance of open access for both institutions is related closely to research assessment, particularly the United Kingdom Research Excellence Framework (REF). The REF 2021 open access policy covers journal articles and serial conference proceedings. It does not require books and book chapters submitted to be open access in the next exercise [1] but the longer term intent is that monographs will be required to be open access in 2027. This was signalled through consultation [2] and the earlier monographs and open access study [3]. In the shorter term, however, REF panels will develop criteria in 2018 to show how submitting units have gone beyond the minimum requirements in the policy, including outputs beyond the scope of the minimum policy requirements [4]. Open access development at international campuses could also be included in Environment statements for the REF.

China does not have a research assessment exercise comparable with the framework in the United Kingdom. But there are funder policies mandating open access to research publications: the Chinese Academy of Sciences policy focuses on open access to journal articles, while recognising a future of evolution, improvement and harmonisation [5]; the National Natural Science Foundation of China policy also focuses on academic journals, but again indicating that all research publications that are publicly funded should be open access [6].

Both universities have long established university institutional repositories and open access policies that include all research publications. Swansea University, for example, requires that all research outputs are added to the university repository (Cronfa) regardless of where else they may be uploaded, including book content: “Wherever possible researchers will be expected to make all published research outputs available as Green Open Access, however, recognizing the still changing landscape, it is initially mandatory for journal articles and conference proceedings” [7]. The University of Nottingham policy states that all research papers, including book chapters and similar material, where copyright allows, should be made available in an open access form upon publication through the University repository [8].

Academic books are important research outputs for both universities. The University of Nottingham, for example, was in the top five institutions in terms of books submitted to the REF 2014 Panel D for arts and humanities [9]. Analysis of book chapters published at Swansea University shows that they make up over 30% of the total outputs for the subject areas of Law and the Humanities, significantly more than other subject areas. Books, however, have not yet been the focus of open access policies which focus on journal articles and serial conference proceedings. This creates an imbalance in the research literature available open access, possibly having a negative impact on book publications in terms of readership, citations and impact. Publisher policies and the related permissions and conditions for journal articles can usually be accessed from Sherpa RoMEO. But book contracts continue to be a mostly hidden agreement between publisher and researcher, inaccessible to librarians who are supporting and driving the open access agenda within universities. Librarians are largely reliant on the policies that publishers have made available on websites.

3. Method

This collaboration aimed to explore the practical challenges for librarians to support authors to make more book outputs open access.

The first step was to identify book publications. Swansea University extracted bibliographic data from the repository for the REF output types: “Authored Book”, “Edited Book”, “Book Chapter” and “Scholarly Edition”. The University of Nottingham Ningbo China bibliographic data was obtained from several sources: current content in the institutional repository; Scopus; Web of Science; a survey of academic staff publication pages; and submissions from academic staff during the course of the collaboration; the books identified do not include reference works, handbooks, textbooks or trade publications. Publications are not in the University of Nottingham repository unless there is a version with permission for deposit.

Having obtained bibliographic book data, a combined list of publishers was extracted and simplified. Publisher copyright permissions data was obtained by searching publisher web pages. The book contracts signed by authors were not included as librarians do not have access to this. The survey focused on four categories of permissions: publisher version of the whole book; accepted manuscript / author version of the whole book; publisher version of a book chapter; accepted manuscript / author version of the book chapter.

The data was collated between July and December 2017. Some publishers, such as Elsevier, were contacted in 2018 about areas where policies were unknown or unclear. There was no systematic attempt to contact all of the publishers identified in the survey, and for many there was a simple “data issue” where a policy could not be identified. The resulting policies were then analysed to consider how much book content could be made open access and how easy this would be to do, assuming authors were able and willing to provide the required manuscript version.

4. Results

4.1 Summary of book data

In this study, 620 book publications were identified, including monographs, edited books and book chapters. 153 publishers were identified and their policies were surveyed. For the purposes of the study, some publishers or imprints were combined. Swansea University’s repository has unmediated deposit so the data for book outputs was incomplete in some cases, for example with missing publisher names. This reflects the manual process for an author to add a book; journal articles can be imported via DOI. The University of Nottingham Ningbo China extracted data from Scopus and Web of Science, with some publications identified through mediated deposit or librarian actions.

4.2 Publishers

Nine publishers had more than ten publications each, representing 58% of the total number of publications identified in the study: Taylor & Francis; Springer; Palgrave; Elsevier; Oxford University Press; Wiley Blackwell; Brill; Cambridge University Press; and Sage. In the data collated for this study Taylor & Francis included Ashgate and Routledge. Figure 1 shows the distribution of all publications. There is a long tail of publications and a clear concentration: 130 publishers had 1-3 publications.

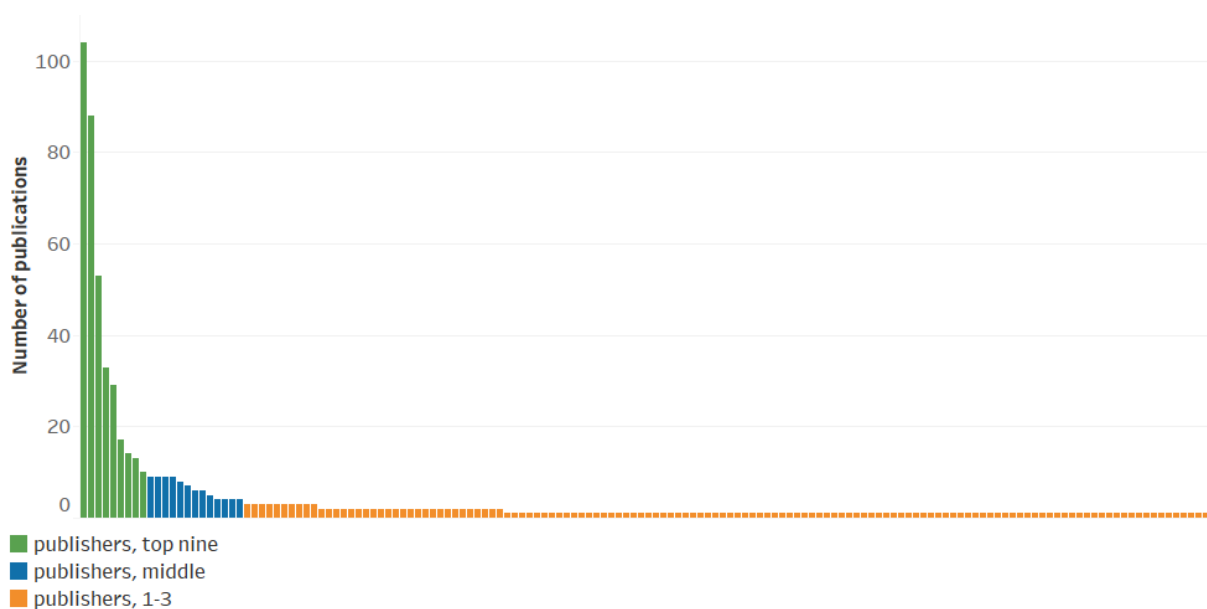


Figure 1: The distribution of publications.

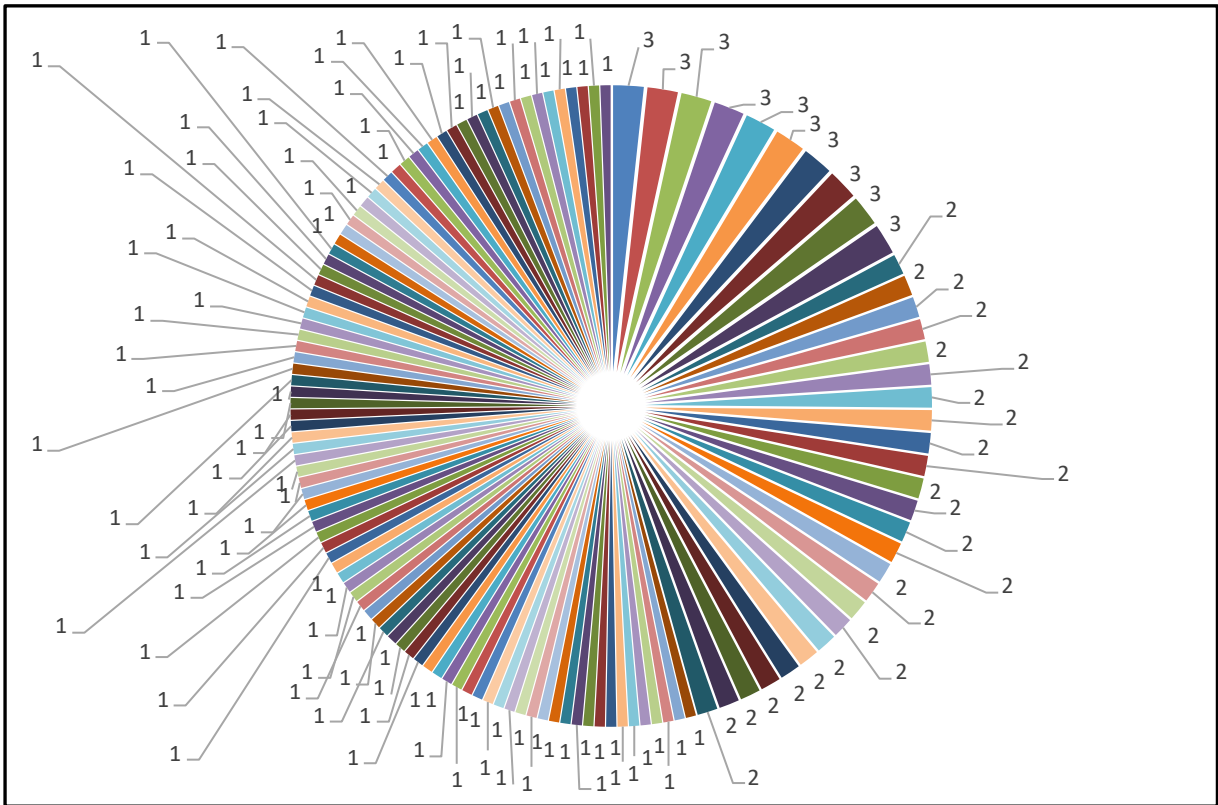


Figure 2: The long tail.

The long tail had 175 publications in total. This is 28% of total publications in the study; 95 publishers had just one publication each, with 15% of the total publications (Figure 2).

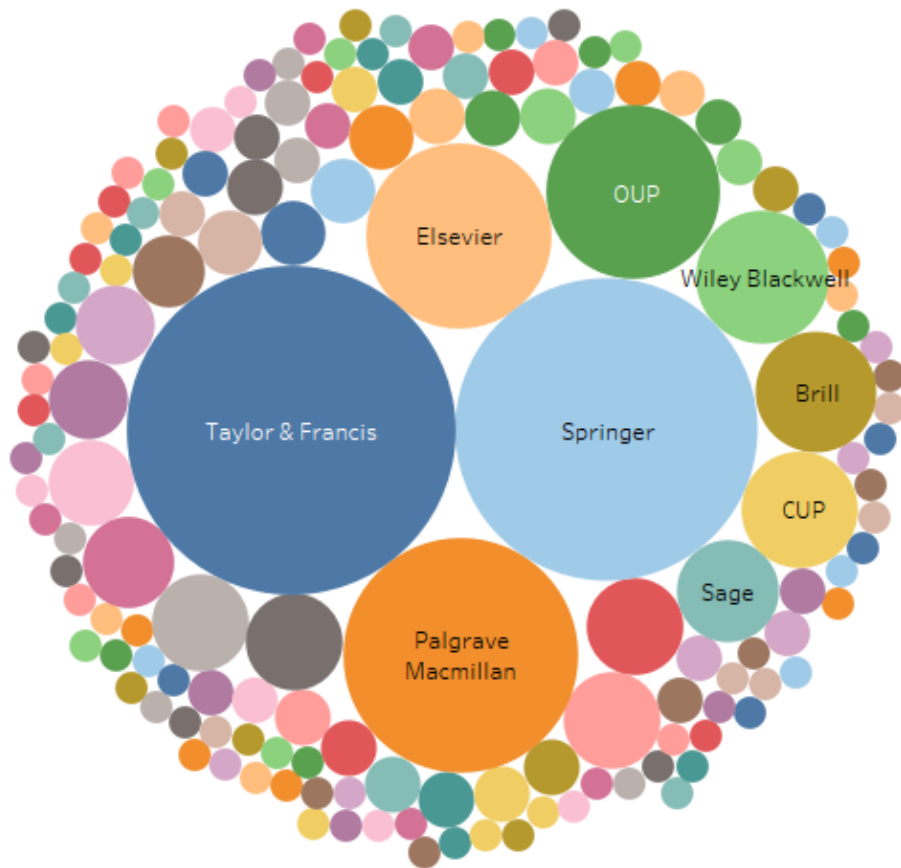


Figure 3: The Concentration of Content.

There is a clear concentration of content with a small group of publishers (Figure 3).

4.4 Permissions

4.4.1 Whole Book Publisher Version (payment required)

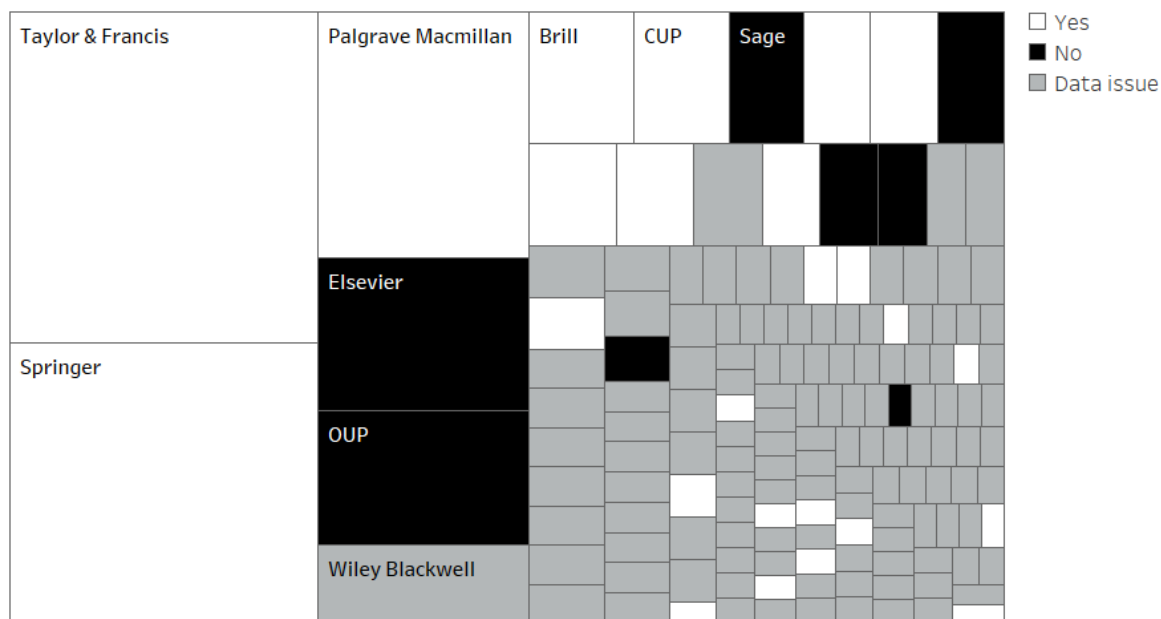


Figure 4: Publisher Open Access Policies and the Publisher Version: Whole Book

There are large and small publishers with policies for the Publisher Version of the entire book to be made open access, but this was for a fee. Many smaller publishers had no policy (or no clear policy) on open access for the Publisher Version of the whole book (Figure 4).

4.4.2 Whole Book University Version (Author Accepted Manuscript)

The University Version is the Author Accepted Manuscript in the institutional repository.

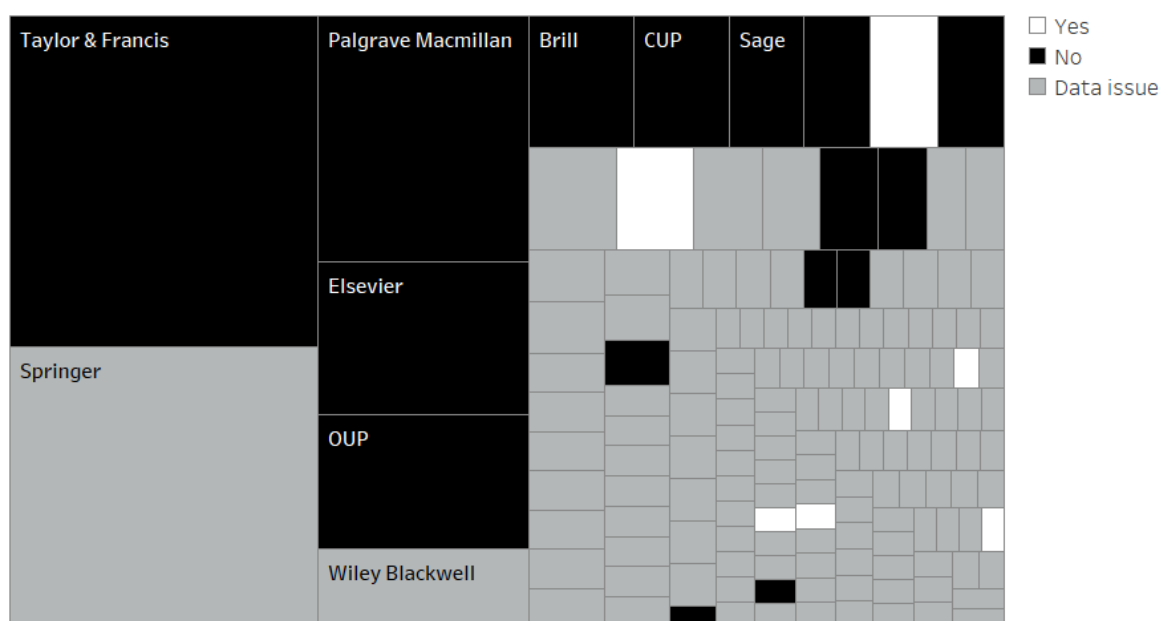


Figure 5: Publisher Open Access Policies and the University Version: Whole Book.

The version permitted on an institutional repository is usually an Author Accepted Manuscript. There are many publishers where there is no clear policy for a whole book manuscript to be deposited in a university institutional repository (Figure 5).

4.4.3 Book Chapter Publisher Version (payment required)

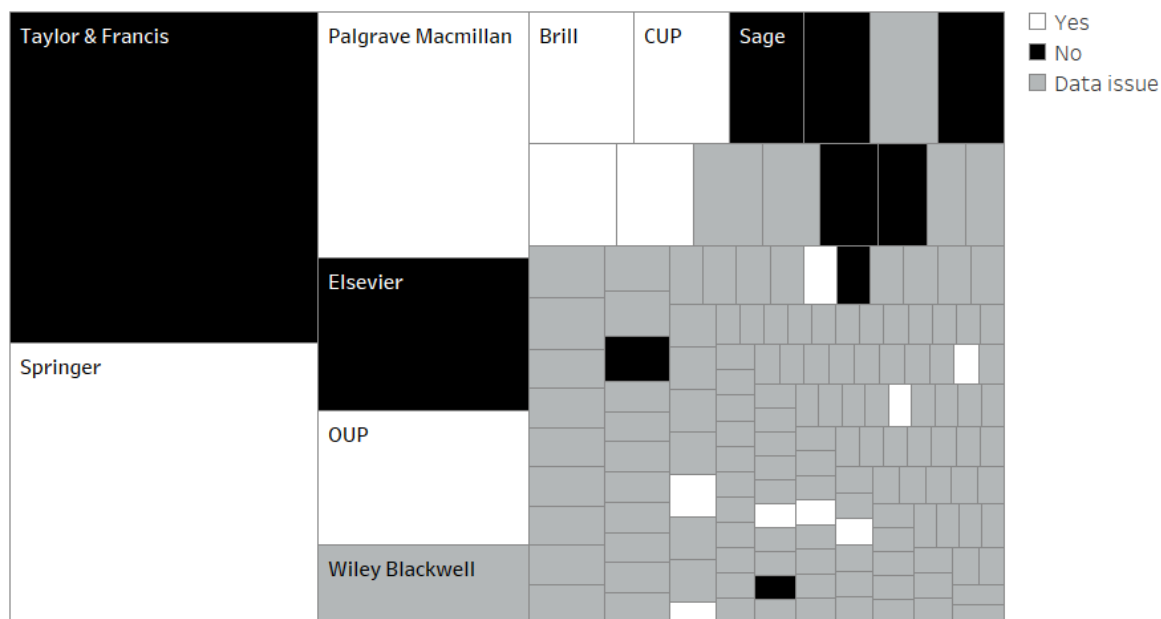


Figure 6: Publisher Open Access Policies and the Publisher Version: Book Chapter

Some publishers do allow the Publisher Version of the Book Chapter to be open access but for a fee. There are many smaller publishers where there is no clear policy (Figure 6).

4.4.4 Book Chapter University Version (Author Accepted Manuscript)

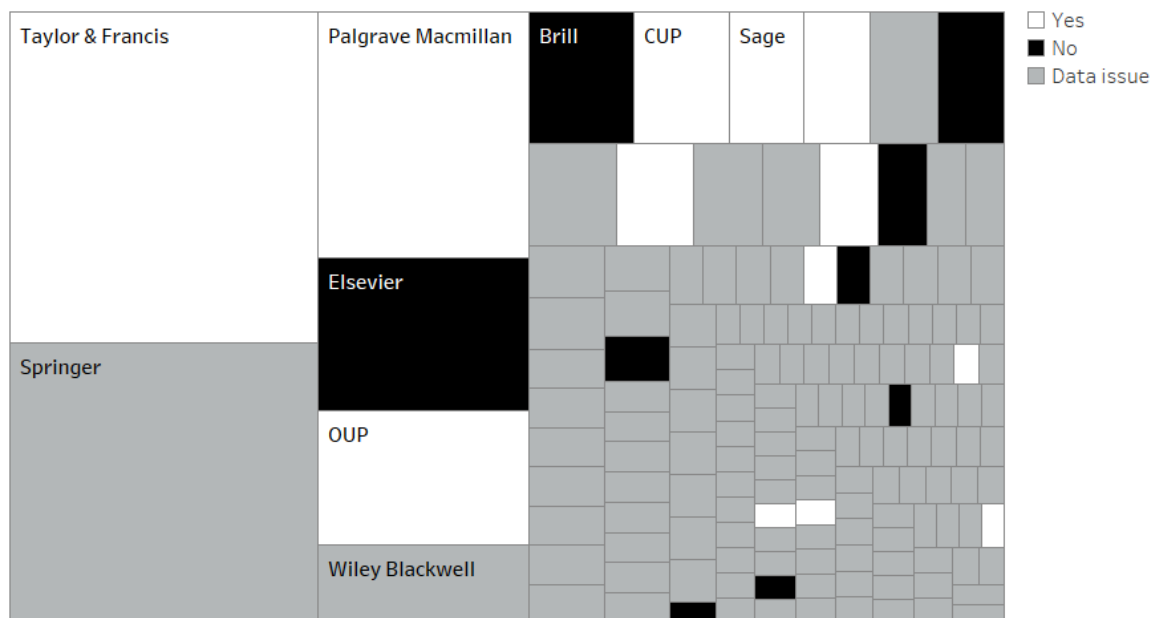


Figure 7: University Version: Book Chapter

Some publishers have policies that allow the University Version of the Book Chapter to be deposited in institutional repositories, including Taylor & Francis, Palgrave Macmillan, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press and Sage (Figure 7).

5. Practical Implications

5.1 Finding Publisher Policies

Finding information on publisher websites ranged from easy to impossible. Some publishers have clear policies that are easy to find. Good examples include Cambridge University Press which has a simple table showing how different versions can be archived and when, including one chapter of the author manuscript six months after publication [10].

	Personal web page	Department or institutional repository	Non-commercial subject repository	Commercial repository or social media site (e.g. ResearchGate, Academia.edu, SSRN)
SMUR	At any time	At any time	At any time	At any time
AM	One chapter six months after publication	One chapter six months after publication	One chapter six months after publication	One chapter six months after publication
VoR	One chapter six months after publication	One chapter six months after publication	One chapter six months after publication	One chapter six months after publication

Figure 8: Cambridge University Press: Green open access policy for books.

Edinburgh University Press have a straightforward explanation of licences and a link to Creative Commons [11]. Some publishers, such as Leuven University Press, are clear in their policy that accepted manuscripts cannot be deposited in institutional repositories without permission [12]. Too many publishers, however, do not have a policy for open access books but focus on journal articles, such as IGI Global [13]. The Elsevier Permissions Helpdesk Manager confirmed the “Elsevier policy does not allow the posting of book chapters by authors and contributors to websites, including institutional repositories” [14]. The Elsevier policy is not available on the web.

5.2 Interpreting Publisher Policies

Interpreting publisher policies is a challenge. In this study we have collated Ashgate and Routledge under Taylor & Francis, but it is not clear if one policy covers all publications now these companies have merged. It is unclear which policy applies for librarian decisions about deposit in a university institutional repository: is it the book contract, which may have been signed many years ago, or the current publisher policy?

There was disagreement and confusion about one publisher: Brill. In China the Brill policy was interpreted from a document titled “Open Access Publishing at Brill”: there is a specific policy available for books, chapters and extra pages, with different charges for CC-BY-NC (ND) and CC-BY but it does not include the University Version [15]. In Swansea the Brill policy was interpreted as permitting the Book Chapter University Version [16]. The data visualisation above (Figure 7) is based on the interpretation in China.

5.3 Costs

Where publishers do have a policy for open access books, the focus is on paid options. One study which focussed on two University presses put the costs for monographs at around \$27,000 [17]; Ithaka looked across 20 university presses and listed costs from \$15,140 to \$129,909 [18]; a recent article suggested £7,500 [19]. Neither Swansea nor Ningbo have designated institutional funding available for open access books; the emphasis by publishers on payment for open access is not helpful.

5.5 Library Workflows

Librarians and authors need clear policies that can be followed without additional processes for permissions. Even when there is a policy permitting deposit, there are further conditions. Policy Press, for example, requires authors to seek permission with a possible delay of four weeks for such requests [20]. Open access to author versions is not always immediate, with embargo periods up to 36 months stated by some publishers, including Palgrave and Edinburgh University Press. Further conditions can include: a limit to one chapter; one chapter for each book author or contributor; citing and providing a link to the published version; a limit of only 20% of the total work to be posted online; the inclusion of a set statement and a link to the publisher's web site; variations for edited collections, such as the condition that each contributor may archive their own single chapter alongside the less specific statement that the number of different chapters that are archived should be "minimised" [10]. Policy Press require a statement that the version in the repository "is not to be cited" [20]. Further niggling courtesy steps include informing the publisher when a chapter has been added to a repository and updating records for a manuscript version when the work has book has been published, such as Oxford University Press [21].

All these steps are understandable from the publisher perspective but require extra work, either for the author or librarian. Librarians need realistic conditions and shared expectations: we want to save the time of our researchers and minimise the costs of publishing for our universities.

5.6 How much can be made Open Access?

In this study 380 publications (61.3%) could be made open access, but a fee is usually required. For the Publisher Version of the whole book 53.9% of the publications could be made open access via the payment of fees. In contrast, for the University Version of the whole book only 3.5% could be made open access. The current policy environment for book chapters is much more promising. For the Publisher Version of the book chapter 36.1% could be made open access for the payment of a fee. But a slightly higher number, 38.4%, of the University Version Author Accepted Manuscripts could be made open access, albeit not immediately at publication.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Publisher Policies

Publishers need to recognise that open access book content in university institutional repositories is possible and desirable. There are examples of best practice that publishers can follow; niggling terms and conditions are not necessary and should be removed. Changes in policy by a few major publishers could make a big difference. The widespread adoption of DOIs would make it easier to link back to the publisher version.

6.2 The Role of Librarians

Publishers want relationships with authors but librarians have a key role in making content open access, including:

- Leadership in advocating and influencing for change.
- Advising researchers on publications strategies before contracts are signed.
- Research skills teaching on open access for postgraduate research students, early career researchers and researchers at all stages in academic careers.
- Raising awareness of alternative models, such as the Open Library of the Humanities and Knowledge Unlatched.
- Encouraging universities to develop new licences, such as the UK Scholarly Communication Licence or the China Scholarly Communication Licence.

6.3 Global Knowledge Exchange

We conducted our own search for publisher permissions but there is a community maintained Google spreadsheet available. We need an organisation, such as JISC's Sherpa services, to develop and maintain a database for publisher copyright policies.

7. Conclusion

This small study highlights some of the challenges for librarians in making books available open access through university institutional repositories. A significant amount of book content can be made open access in institutional repositories but the workload and workflows are significantly more complex and onerous than for journal articles. There is also the challenge of influencing and persuading academic researchers to engage. This collaboration was about sharing expertise and there were benefits for librarians and authors at both institutions, including an awareness of global similarities and differences in making publications open access.

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