nag
National Acquisitions Group

takingstock

Sharing Today, Securing Tomorrow

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Editorial

This issue of Taking Stock focuses on the content of the very successful National Acquisitions Group Conference 2013, which took place in September at York.

There are articles written by the keynote speaker Annie Mauger, contributors who gave papers or who ran workshops and from the first time attendees who were lucky enough to win sponsored places. We have borrowed the theme from the title of the Conference "Sharing Today, Securing Tomorrow".

The theme of this issue also runs through our feature from Paul Meehan who explains how JUSP can assist Academic librarians with managing and reporting their journal usage statistics, and also in our Reflections piece from Heather Sherman who leaves the NAG committee after an impressive 7 years of great service. We will miss her very much!

I do hope that this issue will give you some food for thought, particularly about how we share our knowledge and experience; our resources and workloads; our hopes, plans, thoughts and even fears, not just within our own workplaces but with colleagues from across the sector and with our suppliers.

The future often seems scary or even looks bleak, but if we communicate well and work together we can and will deal with whatever is ahead for libraries and information resources – as we always have.

Editor
Jenny Hill,

Winter 2013/14

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Is the digital library our future?

■ Susanne Cullen and Carol Hollier

In 2010, the University of Nottingham released its strategic plan for the next five years. Mapping the University's future, the plan states that "The University will accelerate the adoption of digital information resources, including e-books and e-journals, in order to make efficient use of library space, and promote their use by providing simple tools for discovery and access."[1] As subject librarians in the Arts Team, working with staff and students in traditionally print-based Arts and Humanities disciplines, we have been putting this plan into action. The process has raised challenges, and has highlighted that Arts Faculty researchers, students and lecturers find some types of resources better suited to digital form than others.

Increasing our electronic holdings of journals has been embraced by the Arts Faculty, so much so that we cannot keep up with their demand for titles. There is no doubt that academics rely on e-journals and their use is "well embedded in academic practice."[2] Indeed, at Nottingham, we have concrete evidence of our Faculty's confidence and ease with e-journals, as they agreed, over the past year, for us to withdraw from our off-site storage facility the print copies of journals which were duplicated in our JSTOR holdings. However, our exercise of withdrawing the JSTOR duplicates simultaneously demonstrated our Arts academics' attachment to print, even when they accepted the necessity of withdrawing the titles. When we told them the long discussed withdrawal was imminent, to our surprise they asked if they could have the withdrawn print copies. Of the 106 titles we withdrew, academics requested sixty.

If the Arts Faculty has a voracious appetite for ejournals, it has the same for databases. Having these databases at Nottingham allows staff and students to do research that would otherwise require travel or, especially in the case of undergraduate students, be impossible. For our users, our acquisition of databases would seem to have no negative side. The biggest difficulty

around databases for us as librarians is the annual access fees, which are carried on our book budgets. As we accelerate our purchases of databases, we tie up more of our annual book budgets with access fees, and the more databases we purchase the more of a problem this becomes.

Another popular turn to the digital has been the service we offer for digitising key readings - journal articles, book chapters or images - for teaching purposes. We embed these digitised copies within reading lists in our Virtual Learning Environment. Demand for the service has climbed sharply over the past three years.

Digital journals, databases, and digitised key readings all share some characteristics that make them palatable and indeed desirable to Arts Faculty staff and students, who appreciate their anytime, anywhere accessibility. In contrast to books, all three tend to be used in smaller sections. A journal article can be read on the screen in a relatively short time, or, because copyright law allows it, can be printed off by the user to be read on paper. Similarly, digitised readings are never more than one article long, or one chapter in a book, and can also be printed off if desired, as can sections of database content. Because of these characteristics, ejournals, databases and digitised key readings are attractive to our users, even when their attendant expenses strain our budgets.

However, electronic books are more complicated. Ebook pricing is unpredictable. A multi-user licence is often about double the price of a print copy, and can - as we discovered when we did a small exercise last year comparing print prices to electronic prices for titles requested by our academics - cost as much as 1000% more than the print copy of the same title. The multi-user license is usually good value for books we know will be in high demand, but for lower demand research books the price difference is too significant to ignore, especially for our smallest

book budgets.[3] Availability can also be a problem. Some titles, such as reference books and long series, are well suited to digital use. But when we mapped our books of this type three years ago against electronic options, we discovered that eversions were not always available. We also find that ebooks can be available for purchase, but crucially not on an institutional license, or not on a multi-user license, or not licensed for the UK.

Our users' attitude toward electronic monographs is more ambivalent than their enthusiasm for other electronic resources. In an internal survey of students run in early 2013, 67% of respondents said that, given the choice, they would prefer to use print books over electronic, although most would use an electronic book if that were the only option available.[4] Research indicates that a preference for print monographs over electronic also holds true for staff. The Ithaka S+R | Jisc | RLUK UK Survey of Academics 2012 found that almost 90% of academics across disciplines said it was easier to read books cover-to-cover for in-depth research in print than in digital format.[5] These national findings reflect what we hear from our Arts Faculty locally, many of whom make it clear that they much prefer print copies of the many books they must read. In contrast to ejournals and databases, which allow users who prefer to read from paper to do so, copyright restricts how much of an electronic book can be printed; with ebooks, people are forced to use the screen version, regardless of preference, when they need to read the entire book.

Paradoxically, the accelerated adoption of digital undermines another tenet in the University strategic plan, which is opening up our resources to the local community. Section 8 of the plan states: "We believe in embedding community engagement and social responsibility in our planning, people, resources and strategic infrastructure across all academic schools and professional services".[6] As part of our University Widening Participation programme, up to 400

local school students visit our library each year to use our open shelf collections. Community members also sign up for visitor cards to use our resources. Although many electronic resource licences do allow for use through a walk-in user PC, our University has only three of these on our UK campuses. Practically speaking, the more our collections are online the less accessible they are to the community. This is an unintended but significant repercussion of the digital strategy.

The University of Nottingham's accelerated adoption of electronic resources in our libraries is an exciting development but also one that creates challenges. Undoubtedly it enhances our collection, the University's research climate and reputation. But we agree with the instructor at Harvard's Library Test Kitchen who said "the library is being changed by the people who run the library, but library users should have a voice."[7] We would argue that our most important challenge in implementing our University's digital strategy is to recognise and respond to the concerns and desires of our Faculty and students, for whom we provide our library collections. An important part of this is recognising the value of our print collection even as we embrace the world of digital collections. It is worth pointing out that even so-called digital libraries often have immense print collections, too. A close reading of an article on a digital library of the future subtitled "short on books, long on tech" reveals, ironically, that this library actually houses two million print volumes.[8] That is the kind of digital library we need in the future, one where print and digital go hand in hand.

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About the Authors

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NAG Events 2014

Look out for the following events:

■ Towards the end of May we will be holding our **4th Collection Development Seminar for Academic Libraries**. This will take place in Birmingham, and we will advertise the exact date and venue as soon as they are confirmed. What is already certain is that it will be a packed, informative and very useful day – as attendance at and feedback from the earlier three have shown.

■ **NAG Conference 2014** Although the theme is not yet confirmed, the dates and venue are, and on Wednesday 3rd and Thursday 4th September we will be returning to our venue for the last 2 years – the Royal York Hotel in the City of York which provides excellent facilities and comfortable accommodation. The location is accessible, with good road and rail links (and Leeds Bradford International Airport within 30 miles).

– As well as a programme of presentations and workshops, our Conference offers you the opportunity to network, exchange real life experience with colleagues, view the latest products and talk to a range of suppliers.

– There will be a range of sponsorship and advertising opportunities – please contact us at **nag.office@nag.org.uk** if you would like some general information about these.

http://www.nag.org.uk

Advertising opportunities:

■ NAG Members hold key positions in libraries not only across the UK and Ireland, but in parts of Europe and North America. Why not reach out to them with your company message in the publications below. Visit **www.nag.org.uk** or email the NAG office for details and our competitive advertising rates.

■ **Taking Stock**
■ **NAG Website**
■ **Conference and seminar packs**
■ **Conference sponsorship opportunities include:**
■ A place for a new delegate ■ Conference badges
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