

Less is more: Managing monograph collections in the 21st century

Executive summary






Collaborative monographs management has concerned library managers from all sectors for many years. In response to cross-community interest UKRR facilitated a discussion forum in London in March 2011.

The aim of the day was to determine whether there was interest and commitment to tackle the many issues and implications surrounding collaborative monographs management, in whatever form that might take. The discussion was kept at a high level and did not venture into processes or operational matters. It was however grounded in the reality of the UK's economic climate and public sector funding constraints.

The discussions were lively and revealed many synergies between the different stakeholders. A clear message from the research community was that any rationalisation of monographs would greatly affect the humanities research process. The steer from the delegates was though it would be useful to address these issues collaboratively it was not currently top of their institution's priorities.

There appeared to be no strong demand for a large scale national initiative like UKRR. All recognised the useful work of smaller initiatives such as the White Rose Consortium/COPAC collection management tools project¹. The feeling was that it would be better to build on these existing regional initiatives, rather than go back to first principles.

Whilst there was a shared sense of ownership of the issues from the many stakeholders, no specific recommendations emerged. Indeed the group decided that now was not the time to commission a scoping study to look at this further. However certain principles to underpin any future initiatives came to the fore:

-  *Do no harm i.e. the scholarly process was paramount so any scheme should be predicated on protecting research information.*
-  *Take a holistic view of collection management.*
-  *Take into account existing regional, subject or local initiatives rather than formulating a new national scheme.*
-  *Explore an incremental building block approach rather than an all encompassing initiative dealing with all types of monographs and their inherent challenges.*
-  *Content or object – identify the aims and objectives.*

¹ <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/content/copac-collections-management-project>.



Background

Collaborative collection management as both a phrase and a methodology is well established within the librarians' lexicon. There are, and have been, many projects² and initiatives researching, investigating and implementing a cooperative model both in the UK and globally. One of the recent Higher Education (HE) initiatives is the UK Research Reserve (UKRR) which systematically coordinates the management of low use research print journals.³

Both UKRR members and the wider community had approached UKRR as a visible and successful scheme about other types of material, and in particular monographs. Whilst UKRR has neither the mandate, resources nor the capacity to deal with monographs, a jointly sponsored event with the RLUK and RIN⁴ was held in London in March 2011 in response to the interest.

This document records the day's discussions. The presentations and posters from the event are available on the UKRR [website](#).⁵

Context

The scope of the day was broad with a programme structured to encourage wide ranging discussion. The event was open to all from the library and information community though delegate numbers were limited to foster active participation. The speakers and the panel members represented different stakeholders, bringing as many perspectives as possible to the discussions.

Delegates were split into groups and, with a facilitator, wove their way through 25 minutes of discussion distilling their thoughts down to a number of punchy responses to the broad questions. Two groups looked at each of the four questions and each shared their findings in the final plenary session.

The structure of this report reflects the four broad areas discussed⁶.

² Some projects are listed in the appendix.

³ More details can be found in the glossary section

⁴ See appendix

⁵ www.ukrr.ac.uk

⁶ Forum programme @ http://www.ukrr.ac.uk/resources/SMM2011_delegates_programme.pdf



1. Is there a need for cooperative strategic management of monographs?

Whilst there is much coverage and debate in the literature around the expediency of collaborative collection management the groups considered the basic premise of the day. The delegates were asked to provide reasons why the community should concern itself with collaborative collection management of monographs.

The reasons identified:

- ❏ It is sound professional practice to manage collections in this way, because it is strategic.
- ❏ It provides the community with a more coherent way to do what individual libraries are doing already.
- ❏ Any national scheme, such as UKRR, would prove helpful in terms of advocacy at a local level.
- ❏ It demonstrates sound stewardship and minimises the risk of losing valuable collections.
- ❏ In the UK there is already a robust network of people, document supply services and digital information in place. These resources and connections are a good platform to build on.
- ❏ Libraries cannot afford, either fiscally or reputationally, merely to store collections. The mapping of individual collections is a prerequisite of active curation and disclosure to users.
- ❏ There is constant pressure on libraries across all sectors to reduce their estate footprint. So space needs to be used creatively to provide a tangible return on investment.
- ❏ Shared stewardship chimes with the prevailing shared services climate in the UK and may provide leverage to attract funding.
- ❏ In these difficult financial times libraries have a responsibility to only house collections which are of value to their institution. To be valuable these physical collections need to be discoverable and as such librarians must know what they actually hold.⁷
- ❏ Monographs may be subject to different drivers, processes, and risks from journals.

Taking the discussion groups in isolation there would appear to be support for the notion of collaborative monograph management from the librarians' perspective⁸. However this needs to be seen through the lens of other stakeholders.

Other perspectives were raised by the speakers in the earlier session. There was a timely reminder ([Dr Jubb's presentation](#)) that discussions on joint monograph initiatives had been going on for many decades⁹. This begs the question why they remain unresolved. Indeed we need to consider whether there is any evidence that

- a. we need to adopt a more collaborative approach
- b. now is the time to start.

⁷ *Getting to know your collections has been one of the spin off value added benefits to UKRR*

⁸ *Over 80% of delegates were librarians in the afternoon session*

⁹ <http://www.ukrr.ac.uk/news/SMM2011.aspx>



Whilst there has been success in managing *journals* through a number of different initiatives, experience and momentum gained may not be directly transferrable to monographs. The ecology of monographs is complex: how they are purchased, their format, the pricing models, their online market saturation and how they are used by scholars. The ecology of monographs is fundamentally different. For journals releasing space by deduplicating long print runs was a relatively easy quick win. There may be no such incentive to rationalise monograph collections.

Both groups strongly supported the value of working collaboratively. However they felt that the first most important step was to articulate a clear vision supported by all stakeholders.

2. What are the risks and challenges to a collaborative model?

The groups considering this broad question worked on the assumption that collaborative management for monographs was needed. The risks and challenges identified are shown in the table below.

Table 1: The risks and challenges to any potential collaborative scheme

Theme	Risks	Challenges
Big picture (vision/scope)	Getting the vision wrong and focusing too narrowly on deduplication	Getting the vision right and not having a grand plan
	That we are creating a solution for a problem which most libraries do not have	The risk/reward ratio is not as quantifiable as for journals
	Misjudging the scope of any initiative	Aligning with strategic collection management not just a one off de-duplication exercise
	Setting any partners' and participants' commitment at an achievable level (e.g. retain item for x years)	
	Current drivers will change e.g. space may not always be as important due to increasing acquisition of e-books	
	Over reliance on the UKRR model; exploit lessons learnt by UKRR but need to be open to other models as monographs might need a completely different approach	
Advocacy	Not gaining local staff support. Implications for staffing resource may affect local library buy in for any initiative	How to obtain the institutional and academic acceptance and buy-in?
		How to encourage all stakeholders to join in?
Theme	Risk	Challenges



Selection	Difficulty in scoping and identifying shared selection criteria to deduplicate	How to futureproof any decisions
		How to identify material from incomplete and inaccurate local bibliographic records
		Deciding whether a book's physical condition is relevant
		Ascertaining whether there is a digital copy available
		How to decide what identifier to use when there is no ISBN
Funding	Lack of funding to stimulate the move from the theoretical model to a practical implementation	Falling book acquisitions, and how to factor in when ebooks are the preferred format
Capacity		Demonstrating need for all stakeholders
		Pressure on peer to peer document supply
		Increasing demands on local service if previously undiscovered treasures stimulate demand
Process		How to maintain access to the content
		How to deal with deduplicated material e.g. recycle, offer etc
		No one model will fit all institutions
		What identifiers to use?

3. Barriers to success

The groups were asked to consider why any collaborative scheme might fail. Not surprisingly many of the reasons mentioned matched the risks and challenges in the table above. (It is worth noting that this question was discussed by a different group so the issues flagged were arrived at independently)

- ❏ Failure of fundamental project management principles such as a lack of:
 - credible business case
 - definition
 - framework
 - funding
 - leadership
 - ownership
 - scope
 - vision

- ❏ The drivers need to be broader than financial so that the benefits add value for all stakeholders.
- ❏ Stakeholders cannot reach an agreement and a collaborative approach is not possible.
- ❏ Lack of best practice:
 - on a big enough scale – very few examples to plan against and learn from
 - at an institutional level when internal duplication challenges have yet to be resolved.
- ❏ Institutional reputation and identity issues; deduplicating continues to be a sensitive issue.
- ❏ Metadata issues concerning quality, cost and ownership of the data.
- ❏ Missing the window of opportunity for collaboration so that institutions deduplicate independently instead.
- ❏ Operational challenges such as material without ISBNs, copyright, digitisation and licensing.
- ❏ Being unable to sustain interest and commitment to the big idea among all partners and stakeholders.



4. Next steps

The groups were asked to discuss how to put the ideas into practice. There was a predictable match between the issues raised in response to other questions and those proposed as next steps.

Four main areas were identified as plausible steps.

a. High level:

- ❏ Partnership development - build on existing relationships to facilitate a building block approach learning from existing projects.
- ❏ Define and explore roles and responsibilities of potential stakeholders and partners.
- ❏ Define scope, main aims and objectives.
- ❏ Develop rationale and conduct a needs analysis.
- ❏ Define milestones and critical success factors.
- ❏ Look at governance structure e.g. who or what would lead and manage any scheme.

b. Funding:

- ❏ Devise and test a plausible business case and model.
- ❏ Scope potential funding options.
- ❏ Devise robust benefit analysis and return on investment arguments e.g. space, financial, infrastructure savings, opportunity benefits etc.
- ❏ Scope the level of investment (staff and money) for all stakeholders.

c. Practical:

- ❏ Create a working group to develop a concept and outline probable activity streams e.g.:
 - Data analysis – how and what to collect
 - Explore and cost potential access options to the deduplicated material
 - Institutional collection mapping tools
 - Scope a pilot phase focusing on 'quick wins' e.g. a distinct subset of material e.g. series, material with ISBNs
- ❏ Develop communications plan and advocacy toolkits.
- ❏ Start the dialogue and consultation with all stakeholders e.g. academics.



5. Conclusions

A clear consensus on many issues emerged from the day's discussions. There was appetite for collaborative work but a strong sense that any initiative should encompass the wider issues of strategic collection management and not be limited to deduplication activity. A cross-sector approach was attractive as it would bring value to all parties. However a pan-European approach was considered too ambitious.

The meeting closed with a straw poll. This revealed no clear wish to pursue the idea on a national scale at this time. However a clear message resounded in delegates' ears as they left. Whatever happened next a 'doing no harm' principle in holistic collection management local initiatives must be preserved.

UKRR and its partners will maintain a watching brief.

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Useful links

-  The British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/>
-  EDINA: <http://edina.ac.uk/>
-  Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE): <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>
-  ITHAKA: What to withdraw project: <http://www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/what-to-withdraw>
-  MIMAS: <http://mimas.ac.uk/>
-  OCLC: Managing print collections work:
<http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-01.pdf>
-  Research Information Network (RIN): <http://www.rin.ac.uk/>
-  Research Libraries UK (RLUK): <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/>
-  UK Research Reserve (UKRR): <http://www.ukrr.ac.uk/>
-  White Rose University Consortium/RLUK Project
<http://www.rluk.ac.uk/content/rluk-sponsors-new-collections-management-project>

About UKRR

The UK Research Reserve ([UKRR](#)) is a collaborative distributed national research collection managed by a partnership between the Higher Education sector and the British Library. It allows Higher Education libraries to de-duplicate their journal holdings of a title if two copies are held by other UKRR members, ensuring continued access to low-use journals, whilst allowing libraries to release space to meet the changing needs of their users. The scheme is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for five years, until January 2014.

About RLUK

[RLUK](#)'s vision is that the UK should have the best research library support in the world. Its mission is to work with our members and with our partners, nationally and internationally, to shape and to realise the vision of the modern research library.

About RIN

The [Research Information Network](#) is a policy unit funded by the UK higher education funding councils, the seven research councils and the three national libraries.

We aim to enhance and broaden understanding of how researchers in the UK create and use information resources and services of all kinds and to support the development of effective policies and practices for researchers, institutions, funders, information professionals and everyone who is involved in the information landscape.

About the Delegates

The event was open to all sectors though the majority of [delegates](#) were from HE libraries (71%), 15% were from HE service providers and mission groups, with the remaining cohort from a mix of funding councils, research councils and public and research libraries.

