Open access monographs: data analysis project

Steering group meeting

Tuesday 16 October 2018, 4pm – 5pm GMT

Teleconference

In attendance: Roger Kain, Paul Ayris, Peter Berkery, Rupert Gatti, Roey Sweet, Frances Pinter, Ros Pyne, Helen Snaith

Apologies from: Michael Jubb, David Prosser, Caren Milloy, Steven Hill and Nigel Vincent

Project update

1. The secretariat provided a project update. The publisher, library, PVC (research) and researcher surveys have now closed. The consultants have received a high number of responses from researchers in particular (over 400 as of 9th October 2018). Respondents to the researcher survey:
    a. Represent a wide range of academics at various stages of their career. The number of ECRs, mid-career researchers and professoriate respondents are broadly similar. The survey has also captured responses from PhD students and from Emeritus professors.
    b. Represent a wide range of subject areas across REF Panels C and D. Significantly, when split by discipline, responses broadly map the number of monographs returned to REF 2014 (i.e. the highest number of survey responses are from scholars in English Literature, History and Modern Languages, the same UOAs which returned the highest number of academic books in REF 2014).

2. Notably, there have been few responses from Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research (or equivalent). This should be reflected upon in the final report.

3. Working with colleagues in the sector, the consultants have also come up with a suitable template for research librarians to export the required data from their systems. The template can be used by ALMA users and the data takes around 30-60 minutes to export, significantly reducing administrative time and burden.

4. The consultants continue to work with the Publishers Association (PA) and the Association of University Presses (AUP). Both the PA and the AUP are aggregating publisher data for members who wish to be involved in the project.

5. There have been some challenges in acquiring publisher data. For example, to ensure anonymity in the data provided by publishers, ISBNs and title names will not be provided. This does pose some challenges in answering some of the questions put forward by the steering group regarding titles submitted to the last REF. Specifically, these questions are:

    a. What percentage of publishers' books were returned to the REF 2014? Results should be disaggregated in order to determine, if possible:

      i.   What portion of their total published monographs does this represent?

     ii.   What portion of their whole book sales does this represent?

   iii.   What portion of the whole income of the company does this represent?

   b.   What analysis can be drawn from understanding the long tail of book sales (including ebook sales)? Specifically, are there any patterns in book sales for monographs submitted to REF 2014? Results should be disaggregated across UOA and type of output (monograph, scholarly edition, edited collection).

   c.   What analysis can be drawn from information on price points for long-form outputs, identifying trends across units of assessments (UoA) and type of output (for example, are 'trade' or crossover books priced lower than critical editions purchased by academic libraries)?

   d.   What proportion of monographs generate royalties for their author? Results should distinguish between royalties received, type of output and price point.

6.   The consultants continue to work with the PA, the AUP, and research librarians in order to iron out some of these challenges. The SG questions listed in paragraph 5 have been shared with publishers, who will (as far as is possible) seek to answer them, before returning the data to fullstopp (or to the PA or AUP). The deadline to return data is Wednesday 24 October, though it is anticipated that this date will slip given that there has been some revisions to the data templates.

7.   After the data has been collected, fullstopp will produce a final set of questions to answer through the data analysis. This final set of questions will be approved by the project steering group. The UUK OA Monograph meeting is scheduled to meet at the end of November and fullstopp will share preliminary findings with the group at this time.

8.   The final report from fullstopp will be delivered by the end of the calendar year, with publication scheduled in early 2019. The final report will be approved and signed off by the four project partners, by the steering group, and by the UUK OA monograph group.

9.   In response to the project update, SG members noted that the consultants had not received a response from some of the Welsh and Scottish institutions who had been invited to participate in the study. SG members noted that the inclusion of these institutions was required in order to ensure a good geographical spread, and to capture responses from mono-technic institutions.

Fullstopp GmbH and Knowledge Unlatched

10. Members of the steering group recognised that there have been some discussions across the sector with regards to the appointment of fullstopp to carry out a data analysis on open access monographs. Specifically, there have been conversations around the relationship between fullstopp and Knowledge Unlatched (KU). Fullstopp owns KU, an OA service provider which uses a crowdfunding model (paid for by libraries) to 'unlock' OA titles. KU was established as a not-for-profit organisation but changed its status to a for-profit organisation in 2016.

Public comments regarding the status of KU are available here:

a. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/10/02/the-expansion-of-open-access-is-being-driven-by-commercialisation-where-private-benefit-is-adopting-the-mantle-of-public-value/
b. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/10/03/knowledge-unlatched-failed-transparency-and-the-commercialisation-of-open-access-book-publishing/
c. http://blogs.openbookpublishers.com/why-obp-is-not-participating-in-ku-open-funding-and-why-libraries-should-understand-the-reasons/

11. In response to these comments, KU issued an email to its members outlining its change in legal status from a British Community Interest Company (CIC) to a German GmbH in 2016. GmbH was chosen as a for-profit structure for tax reasons. Based on their accounts in 2017, KU ran a pre-tax result of €40,000 on €2.1m revenue. After taxation of 24%, €26,000 profit remained.

12. The SG acknowledged that it needs to address and respond to concerns raised by colleagues. The SG also highlighted the need to ensure that the integrity of the project is not compromised, and the need to ensure stakeholders across the sector retain confidence in the work that will be produced.

13. Members of the steering group noted that KU is perceived as a competitor in the publishing industry, resulting in a conflict of interest. This conflict of interest may mean that publishers are less inclined to share data with fullstopp. Publishers are interested in sharing data and participating in the project, but commercial and competitive interests should be protected.

14. Members of the SG noted that some of the issues regarding the relationship between fullstopp and KU may be perceived issues. It is not widely understood that fullstopp are just carrying out a data analysis and that they will not be putting forward any recommendations in their final report. Fullstopp have not been asked to shape future OA activities. Fullstopp are not providing advice; rather they are collecting, aggregating and analysing data which has been informed through surveys and interviews.

15. The SG recognised that collecting data from publishers is a very sensitive activity. Some publishers will make the decision not to share data based on the relationship between fullstopp and KU. This may impact on the amount and the types of data collected. The SG should be aware that the group might not get as much information as they would have otherwise.

16. The SG noted that the PA and the AUP are acting as intermediaries in this project. The PA and the AUP have offered to aggregate data for their members if they do not wish to share data directly with fullstopp.

17. The SG noted the power of open research. Members of the SG noted that it would be useful to make data acquired by fullstopp as open as possible to ensure that they do not gain a competitive advantage.

18. The SG also noted that it would also be useful to make transcripts of the interviews openly available. Members also noted that no data/transcripts will be made openly available without the explicit permission of the parties supplying that information. The SG will gain approval from parties involved in the study and gain approval for anything released.

Recommendations

19. The steering group proposed the following recommendations to ensure openness and transparency for the data analysis project:
    a. Discussions about the project should be fostered and encouraged throughout the scholarly community, focusing on how the different strands (quantitative and qualitative) will be brought together.
    b. Interview questions used by fullstopp should be made publically available.
    c. Where possible, responses from interviewees (PVCrs, learned societies and publishers) should be openly available. This may be in the form of a formal written response.
    d. Where possible, data collected by fullstopp should be openly available.
    e. Touch base with interviewees to ensure that they were happy with the way in which interviews were carried out.
    f. A member of the Research England Council will provide an independent review of the final report.
    g. The final report will also receive comments from the steering group and from the UUK OA monograph working group.

20. The steering group recognise that some of the recommendations detailed in paragraph 19 may contain commercially sensitive details. It may be difficult for some organisations to share this information. Data will not be made openly available where this is the case.

21. The SG noted that the consultants will not be putting forward any recommendations on OA, nor will they be advising on future OA activities. The findings from fullstopp's analysis will be published alongside the findings from the two UUK engagement events which were held in September and October 2018. This collective body of evidence will be published as one final report in spring 2019.