Where are we now?
Delivering content in academic libraries

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The transformation of academic content presents a direct challenge to the role of libraries. The content that we deliver is evolving and diversifying in a move not only from print to digital, but also from books and journal articles to new forms such as research data and learning materials. We are no longer defined by the collections within our buildings and the scope of the content we deliver is becoming difficult to define. How we deliver that content is changing and the traditional purchase and subscription models we worked with for many years have been overtaken by a shifting landscape of demand-driven and e-textbook models. As a result of the increase in what is available in the public domain or open access, much of what we provide access to is not even purchased or licensed by us. There are also changes in who we deliver that content to. The model of the 'inside out' library role is just as much about exposing and delivering university generated outputs to the outside world as providing licensed and purchased content to our own user communities. Subsequently delivery and discoverability are linked more closely than ever.

These changes present libraries with fundamental challenges. Our workflows and staffing were based on print, individual purchase models and although we've adapted well, we've had to supplement our ill-equipped library management systems with add-on modules and makeshift tools. The transition to new library services platforms that are capable of dealing with our hybrid environment is enabling us to completely review internal processes and structures.

How should we best divide up our teams? Traditional divisions of work, such as print/digital and one-off purchase/subscription are no longer helpful or relevant.

How should we manage our budgets? Our approach of allocating and accounting for expenditure on a subject basis collaboratively with our academic community doesn't fit with e-book packages and demand driven acquisition, both of which cut across subject boundaries. Emerging models do not necessarily sit comfortably alongside traditional ones. While in theory evidenced based acquisition supplements our selection of items to resource teaching, the practicalities of combining these models presents challenges to those of us who are trying to streamline our processes.

Libraries are also grappling with the question of who drives the delivery of their content. In the past ten years, we have transitioned from libraries developing and building collections on behalf of their users, through the hazy early days of demand driven acquisition when we handed over portions of our budget to allow our users to determine what content they needed. We have reached a point now where we are leading on the establishment of a middle way, in which users determine the content, but we are developing tools and systems which we use alongside professional judgement to

determine the most cost effective and suitable method of delivery, whether that's through document delivery, rental or purchase.

Publisher-librarian relationships have also evolved, from customer-seller to collaborative partnerships enabling us to learn from each other and develop models for the delivery of content that suit us and our users. Libraries are now negotiating with publishers and academics to provide textbooks directly through virtual learning environments, and we have an important role in ensuring that this method of delivery continues to provide value for money for our institutions. The boundaries between libraries and publishers are blurring, as our focus shifts towards facilitating the creation and delivery of content created by our own academic community. Libraries are taking advantage of these opportunities to develop new models of service. Many of us now act as distributors by providing the infrastructure to publish open access journals and books, and there's an increase in the number of libraries setting up full-blown publishing services.

What do these changes mean for library staff working to provide content? I propose that our traditional professional skills are still relevant, but are being exploited in different ways. We're adding metadata to research data and new forms of digital outputs to ensure that university research is available for discovery and reuse. Our preservation focus is now about ensuring born digital research outputs are prepared for long term storage in a way that means they remain accessible. And we're much more likely to be advising our academic community on the copyright implications of sharing their digital content than making students aware of photocopying limits.

However, there is also a need for us to develop skills in new areas. New library services platforms have opened up possibilities for action based analytics and superior management information for evidence based decision making. To take advantage of this, we need to be able to manipulate and interpret these quantities of data and make sense of the analytics and benchmarking tools we are using. Now that our focus is not on building up our own collections, but contributing to national solutions for the provision of content, collaboration is key. More than ever, we need to create flexible, agile and outward looking teams who are well equipped to deal with our changing environment. By taking advantage of these opportunities, libraries can continue to remain integral to this transformation.

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