

# Patron-driven obsession

## Adopting patron-driven acquisition as UWE's sole method of e-book acquisition

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UWE Bristol is an ambitious university delivering courses to a large and diverse student base stretching across four UK campuses, as well as in ten countries across the world. Satisfying the demands of over 30,000 students worldwide, while maintaining a consistently high standard of taught UWE programs and the wide range of information resources to match, is a mammoth task. Nevertheless, with consistently high NSS scores – 92% in the 2016 survey – UWE Bristol Library Service has proven expertise in delivering the content students need, when they need it.

In spring 2016, we had been newly recruited to our posts of librarians responsible for delivering books and course materials to students. For Matt, this meant taking responsibility for rolling out reading-list software for the first time at UWE Bristol, while Ted was tasked with looking after the book acquisitions section of the service. Although the library service had a hard-earned reputation across the university for innovation in the delivery of academic skills and efficiency in the management of its resources budget, many of the acquisition processes had been in place for many years without taking into account the potential that new products and technologies offered us.

### Performance analysis

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A usage analysis carried out on all recently purchased e-books revealed that over 20% of those purchased in the academic year 2014–15 had not been accessed by May 2016. A similar piece of analysis of our print collection revealed that around a third of books purchased were yet to be issued a year later. This was attributed primarily to the fact that in an attempt to widen our collection, subject librarians were speculatively purchasing books relevant to certain degree programs, with no guarantee that they would actually be used by students. We needed to find a way of mitigating this inefficiency without compromising the breadth of content we were able to provide to students.

### Discovering PDA+

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At the same time, we became aware of a relatively new service from Askews & Holts Library Services (AHL) called PDA+. We had been experimenting with criteria-based patron-driven acquisition (PDA) through AHL for a couple of years, though never spanning an entire academic year and omitting certain key Dewey ranges either by mistake or for fear of spending up our PDA budget far too quickly. PDA+ is different from a traditional PDA though, as it allows librarians to add titles of their own choosing to the PDA, including titles falling outside the normal PDA criteria. This seemed like the perfect solution to our problem of wasting money on speculative purchases. We now had the ability to select speculatively as many titles as we wanted, without having to make any kind of financial commitment unless the books were actually used.

A paper submitted to senior management in July included results of the usage analysis and a proposal to switch all e-book acquisition from direct purchase to PDA. This proposal was approved unanimously by the faculty librarians and senior management at a meeting of the Academic Management Group – predictions of potential savings that could be ploughed back into purchasing additional content proved compelling. The PDA+ method of making e-books available to students had additional benefits, such as content being available immediately after selection and flexible PDA models of rental and full purchase. Once approval was gained, this left us just over a month to implement an entirely new method of e-book acquisition for the service.

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### Implementation and challenges

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One of the biggest challenges was in building the book budget for the 2016–17 academic year. Previous PDAs had proved that accurate predictions of how much the PDA might swallow up were near impossible. In the end, we allocated a significant amount of the previous year's e-book budget to the PDA, with additional money available to top it up through the year as required. Other challenges included training every stock selector in library services (over 30 of them across our four campuses); providing AHLS with a complete de-duplication list of our previously purchased e-books; devising a system for processing invoices and new MARC records; and creating multiple PDA profiles to fit each faculty's requirements. In the end, we created 18 different profiles between our four faculties, combining a mixture of normal PDA / PDA+ and rental / full purchase profiles.

Our initial target was to complete implementation for the start of the new academic term in September. In fact, we completed all of these processes a week before the end of August, which gave us some breathing room to iron out any teething issues before the influx of students in Freshers' Week. Once everything was fully rolled out, work started on ensuring that the new processes became 'business as usual', including financial monitoring, occasional profile updates and general troubleshooting as and when required. The results of our careful monitoring enabled us to gather various statistics which we have been able to share with subject librarians, including the most popular day of the week (Monday), busiest hour of the day (between 14:00 and 15:00) and the Dewey numbers with most spending against them (658 and 616).

### Measuring success

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One year on, we have been able to assess the success of this new process. While we had a fair idea that things were going well, being able to compare 2016–17's spending with previous years has proved to us the value of being bold enough to change our entire e-book acquisition process two months before term started. Implementation of PDA+ as our primary method of e-book acquisition did increase our expenditure on e-books by 16% compared to the previous year, but we saw a 39% rise in the number of books we paid to provide access to. This was a drop of £13 in average price per book from £75 to £62. While the PDA process itself is not transparent to students, we hope that they have been satisfied with increased breadth of content we have been able to give them access to.

We're guessing that many people reading this article may have been stung by PDA before – seeing costs spiralling out of control and budgets being spent up far too quickly. While we were able to secure significant investment from the university to support our commitment to user-selected content, the model is adaptable for universities with a wide range of budgetary limitations. UWE used a mixed approach with normal criteria-based PDA operating alongside PDA+, but those with far tighter budgets could use PDA+ on its own, or merely limit the criteria upon which their normal PDA is based in order to restrict spending.

By implementing such a bold but flexible PDA model, we have not only been able to provide more content at better value for money, but we have given the library service the flexibility to expand or contract its spending depending on the changing requirements of the budget. All that remains now is for us to prepare for year two and see where the process can be improved even more.

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