

Introduction

In 2016–18 the Academic Book of the Future project coalesced academic interest in investigating the writing, publishing and selling of academic text. In looking to the future, the project also invoked contemporary stakeholders, drawing together teams of writers, publishers, librarians and booksellers. The *Gatherings* series of monographs builds on that collaboration, and as a contributing Element of *Gatherings*, *Capital Letters* interrogates the current ecology of academic bookselling. Throughout, *Capital Letters* establishes the premise that academic bookselling is heavily dependent on the marketplace, both exposed to and benefitting from market forces which include legislative and social influences as well as the individual financial decisions of textual consumers, and at the same time argues that academic booksellers have the capacity to understand, utilise and build on the transformative opportunities offered by that marketplace.

Capital Letters commences with a discussion of the definition of academic bookselling, and moves on to discuss the developing market within which the industry operates. With a primary focus on the United Kingdom, *Capital Letters* then discusses the increasing influence and opportunity of the worldwide marketplace for academic text, particularly in the second section of this Element, which covers pricing to that market. The third section covers the shifting ecology of the current marketplace in terms of market influencers, encompassing both external pressure and internal innovation. In the final section, *Capital Letters* examines the future of academic bookselling.

The Bookshop

In 1984, when Rachel Evans and Jack Meadows produced the monograph *Bookselling in Higher Education*, they confined their research to the campus bookshop; ‘bookshops on, or very close to, the site of the institution’ (Evans *et al.* 1984). In 2016, bookseller Craig Dadds stated in *The Academic Book of the Future*, ‘Whatever form the academic book of the future predominately takes – whether virtual or physical – it is about providing options for our students and academics’ (Lyons *et al.* 2016). The academic bookshop has become as fluid and inclusive as the text it purveys, bestriding both the

traditional local economy of the bricks-and-mortar bookshop and the world-wide technological marketplace. Today, the academic bookshop ranges from worldwide online providers to temporary site-specific pop-up bookstalls. It includes providers curating campus bookstalls (Kelvin Books); open access self-publishers working from their laptops (OpenIntro); established aggregators encompassing physical and digital text (Blackwell UK, John Smith's); EdTech companies which see themselves as online innovators rather than textual providers (Kortext, VitalSource); new economic models of text distribution from both established and new providers (New University Presses, academic-led presses, Knowledge Unlatched, Oxford University Press); and the many textual providers working through illegitimate distribution networks.

Yet the basic model of the academic bookshop remains, in both image and principle, the campus bookshop: a skills-based provider of academic text encompassing local representation, be that a physical presence on campus or branded digital provision.

The Market

The Booksellers Association lists 262 academic bookshops in the UK in 2018 (Campbell 2018), of which approximately 150 are chain bookshops with considerable online resources (John Smith's, Blackwell UK, and Waterstones) while the remainder are independent bookshops. Student survey responses in the UK (Hawker 2018h) indicate Amazon, Blackwell UK and John Smith's are the market leaders for online supply of physical text; digital text purchasers cite Amazon Kindle and CourseSmart (owned by VitalSource) as e-book sources for personal buyers. Digital chapter rental models are available in the UK for students (Benson-Armer 2014), but with the UK's lower textbook prices, postal-based physical rental models are yet to establish a market. Institutional purchasers of digital text, mediated by procurement frameworks, utilise market leaders VitalSource and Kortext, as well as library supplier platforms such as Dawsons. Individual academic publishers supply through both their own websites and platforms and/or through text aggregators. Individual writers can self-publish digital and/or physical text, with or without peer review, through a wide variety of sites. Legitimacy varies, and so

does the ability of a secondary supplier to access or distribute that text. Open access publishers provide text through their own platforms and/or adopt existing multiuser platforms. In addition to these legitimate sources, there are few digitised textbooks which are not available via torrent sites such as PirateBay, while pirated digital articles and monographs are concentrated on host sites such as SciHub and LibGen. Pirated physical text is available via the Amazon UK Marketplace (Hoffelder 2017) and other online bookshops (Stop Counterfeit Books 2017), as well as through local suppliers (Hawker 2018i).

The Academic Text

From this snapshot of academic text providers, it is clear that the nature of academic text has also changed. The archetypical academic book as seen from the academic bookshop is the student textbook, physical and/or digital, accounting for 56 per cent of 2017 sales at Blackwell Edinburgh, the second largest physical academic bookshop in the UK (Hawker 2018a). The basic form of the academic book from an institutional perspective, particularly for academic readers and writers in the humanities, remains the monograph (The Academic Book of the Future 2015). In terms of sales, the value metric of bookshop and publisher, monographs are seldom supplied to individual purchasers but rather to institutions, and thus for the bookshop the value and academic prestige of the monograph is considerably outweighed by textbook provision to students. In production quantities, the journal article, a swift summary of research and a gateway to further publication, is by far the most common form of academic text. As a UK publication articles are now predominately digital and open access (Crossick 2015), and almost entirely supplied by the publisher (traditional or new) to institutional or personal purchaser.

Thus, for the academic bookshop the student textbook is their primary product, and it is on long-form, student-orientated text that *Capital Letters* will concentrate. The textbook itself, however, has developed since that initial 1984 report on the economics of academic bookselling to encompass digital text, physical/digital text, and the use of enhanced text and/or analytics. Textbooks have been deconstructed, with chapters alone increasingly cited as course reading and extracts utilised for flipped and blended

learning modules on VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments). With the addition of visible course notes, reviews and commentary online from author, course leaders and students, text has also become inclusive of ongoing interpretation, affirmation, correction and commentary. Accessing this enhanced and/or disarticulated digital text has meant not only new models of supply for established publishers, but new methods of publication from new digital providers, for whom content is only one of the many building blocks of EdTech. The academic ‘book’, as seen from the bookshop, is an inclusive and dynamic text: the successful academic bookshop has equally embraced innovation.

1 The Developing Marketplace

Within the current marketplace, academic booksellers currently face the dichotomies of increased demand for academic text and dire predictions for the state of the campus bookshop. Such uncertainty is not new: ‘It may well be that we live in an epoch when the bookshop is an institution suspended between “the dying old society” and the “society struggling to be born.” It has few defenders,’ Edward Shils (Shils 1963); ‘In the last few years, economic pressures have increased and times have become much harder for academic bookshops,’ Rachel Evans and Jack Meadows (Evans *et al.* 1984); ‘The move to digital and new forms of courseware will, however, make on-campus retailing uneconomic at some universities,’ Peter Lake (Lake 2016b). ‘Spotify for Books’ e-book websites have come and gone with unnerving speed, and open access publishers have committed to libertarian ideals, argued for and against peer review and restructured funding models to encompass academic ideals and political patronage alongside content distribution. Traditional booksellers have moved online, and online booksellers have moved into the physical marketplace. EdTech includes academic text creators and compilers who do not define themselves as booksellers or publishers.

Change, for the academic bookshop, is the one defining feature of the marketplace. Yet that change is not ungoverned. There are quantifiable factors shaping the local and global market for academic text, and in examining those legislative and social drivers, the ways in which academic

booksellers have sought not only to respond to these challenges but to predict, shape and provide text for future readers can be discovered.

1.1 Market Values

In 2017, Bookmap valued the global book market as a whole at £122bn (Anderson 2017). Taking into account issues with recording the value of book sales, related to the changing definition of text and what constitutes a book in both academic and general markets (Kovač 2017), these figures are considered to be conservative (Williams 2017). The International Association for Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers (STM) valued the total academic share of this market ‘including journals, books, technical information and standards, databases and tools, and medical communications and some related areas’ at \$25.7 billion in 2017 (Johnson 2018): this figure, of course, only relates to STM titles. The International Publisher’s Association pilot report of 2018, relating to the publishing industry of 2015–16, reveals some of the issues involved in collating global academic text sales: there are no figures available for 10 of the 35 countries surveyed (International Publisher’s Association 2018). Despite the lack of ongoing statistical measurement, with 25 per cent of the world’s population under fourteen years of age (The World Bank 2018) and many governments investing heavily in educational material (Williams 2018), the market is considered to be buoyant: Elsevier, currently the world’s largest educational publisher, reported profits of £913m in 2017 (Matthews 2018).

In 2017, the Publisher’s Association stated that academic and professional publishing sales in the United Kingdom were up 10 per cent on the previous year to £2.4bn. This figure is inclusive of digital academic and professional text, for which sales increased by 6 per cent to £277m (The Publisher’s Association 2017). £1.3bn of these sales were processed through bookshops (excluding online bookshops): although 18 per cent of UK bookshops identify as academic bookshops (Centre for Economics and Business Research 2017), the sale of academic text is not restricted to those bookshops, so to state that campus bookshops alone achieved these sales would be inaccurate. The majority of academic text is sold through online bookshops, or by publishers direct to institutions. In 2005, for example, online sellers held an 11 per cent share of the overall UK retail

text market (The Bookseller's Association 2014): by 2014, this was 46 per cent (The Bookseller's Association 2017).

It is hard not to see the ongoing closures of academic bookshops on campus correlating with this market shift. For example, Plymouth University's Plymouth e-books project (Kavanagh 2015), commencing in 2011 and, by 2014, providing 4,062 students with 25,931 e-books sourced directly from publishers, corresponds with the closure of the Plymouth University Bookshop (Campbell 2016f). In total, eight academic bookshops closed between 2014 and 2017 (Campbell 2016e). Nielsen's Students' Information Sources in the Digital World 2015/16 reported that 72 per cent of students purchase course books from Amazon (Nielsen Book 2016). Yet 41 per cent of those same students had also purchased from a campus bookshop: Blackwell UK reported a 6 per cent profit increase in 2016–17, and after a 6 per cent drop in profits during 2015–16, John Smith's reported year-on-year results in 2016–17 and forecast additional confirmed income due in 2017–18. The marketplace remains buoyant for some academic booksellers.

1.2 Drivers

Yet book sales made at academic bookshops are not a simple transaction between customer and bookshop in an open marketplace. Consumer choice and effective bookshop management may be the apparent sales drivers, but legislative changes in the funding structure of research grants and student fees have a profound impact on the academic bookselling market, offering both incentives and barriers to textual provision through academic bookshops both on campus and online. This is particularly evident in the contrast between Scottish campus bookshops and those in the rest of the UK: both John Smith's and Blackwell have seen their Scottish bookshops consistently outperform equivalent stores in the rest of the UK, an ongoing model which is hard not to correlate with legislative differences in student funding. This legislation, directed at student and institution, has reshaped not only the marketplace of academia but the landscape of academic text.

1.2.1 Research Excellence Framework

Higher Education Funding Council for England (now UK Research & Innovation) Head of Research Policy Steven Hill created some controversy

within the book trade when discussing the next-but-one Research Excellence Framework process, beginning in 2021 but given the predicted title of REF 2027. REF, the Research Excellence Framework, covers funding for research at institutions in the same way that TEF covers teaching and learning (Office for Students 2017). Unlike TEF, REF covers the whole of the UK, with results being taken into account by the four separate funding bodies of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales in determining research grants. The current REF has been instrumental in changing the ecology of journal text creation and distribution by requiring open access publication for funded research across the UK. Initiating body HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) stated:

The core of the REF 2021 open access policy is that journal articles and conference proceedings must be available in an open access form to be eligible for the next REF. In practice, this means that these outputs must be uploaded to an institutional or subject repository. (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2016b)

This policy has led to major shifts in established publisher journal output, moving many UK-based journals to open access availability, but also ushering in the era of ‘pay to publish’ APCs (article processing charges) for academics and ‘double-dipping’ fees for libraries, who argued that they were paying subscription fees to access published material already funded by APCs (Research Libraries UK 2013). In addition, APCs themselves were often funded via an academic’s host library. Publishers contested this argument. But with academic libraries already spending an estimated 72 per cent of their acquisition budget on journals and subscription services in 2017 (Publishers Communication Group 2017), up from 70 per cent in 2015, the cost of providing access to bundled journal articles is a considerable and controversial burden on libraries now also tasked with supporting TEF-related textual demands and, potentially, the development of new library-based publishing options (Pinfield *et al.* 2016).

While open access journal publishing has had little impact on academic bookshops – for most subscription services had moved to direct publisher

supply by 2012, when the OA Gold Standard came into force – REF 2027, as described by Steven Hill, will have an impact not only on academic publishers, but also on academic bookshops.

Speaking at the 2018 Redux University Press conference in February 2018 (University College London Press 2018), Steven Hill stated that monographs submitted for the REF 2027 process would need to be open access publications (Hill 2018b). This requirement had been discussed in the December 2016 Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2016a), but alongside an intention to ‘move towards an open-access requirement for monographs’ the consultation also acknowledged the need for flexibility and for exemptions. Hill did not discuss these issues in his speech, which created some controversy among conference attendees and later book trade commentators (Page 2018b). Immediate responses suggested views such as those of Bristol University Press publisher Alison Shaw, stating, ‘We would happily publish open access, as long as we were confident that the revenue stream would come in.’ Another anonymous publisher suggested this was a policy directed at ‘decoupling the academic monograph from publishers’, and ‘an inexplicable direct attack on a thriving industry which fulfils the essential functions of development (through peer review), curation, dissemination and promotion’ (Page 2018b). Academic publishers, holding an emergency IPG (Independent Publishers Guild) meeting in March 2018 (Page 2018a), argued that a requirement for monograph open access publishing, introducing APCs, would impact on early career academics; on those without well-resourced institutions, or without access to funding at all (Peter Clifford of Boydell and Brewer); on academics wishing to publish outside the UK in areas, such as the United States, without institutional open access publishing; and on universities forced to take money from research to fund publication (Sarah Caro of Princeton University Press).

While monograph sales to personal customers through bookshops are limited – and at any given moment less than 1 per cent of an academic bookshop’s stock consists of monograph publications (Hawker 2018b), and those largely from local authors – academic bookshops do supply monographs to their academic libraries, particularly through procurement frameworks like APUC (Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges)

in Scotland and SUPAC (Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium) in England. If monograph production does become open access, funded through APCs, it is likely that (a) publication will retreat to digital production, as it has for journal articles, and (b) libraries will be asked to purchase monographs as bundles, as they do journals. These options exclude bookshops as physical text providers.

Even more disturbingly, REF 2027, in declaring all monograph publication open access, may have an impact on titles which border monograph and book, and academic and general audience. This category (Shapiro 1997) includes titles like the best-selling *Women & Power: A Manifesto*, by Mary Beard, the *Chicago Manual of Style*, or Rachel Carson's influential *Silent Spring*. 'Are they saying authors in the Humanities like Simon Schama and Mary Beard won't feature in the assessment of quality [because their trade publishers won't publish them open access]? Or are they saying we should give Mary Beard's books away? It is absurd,' said Ivon Asquith of Edinburgh University Press (Page 2018a). If, indeed, without the flexibility suggested by the Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework, academic authors who receive funding through REF can only publish text as open access, then what happens to the academic bookshop, with the vast majority of its stock written by academic authors? Should the academic bookshop become nothing more than a repository of classics? Or, indeed, will the academic bookshop, with its mission to curate, disseminate, enable and gate keep, aid discovery and innovation and engage in outreach, become obsolete?

Steven Hill took the time to discuss publisher and bookseller queries in an interview for *The Bookseller* in March 2018 (Page 2018b). He promised consultation with academic publishers, and stated that the new models of REF 2027 are aimed at 'maximising the benefit of research findings by maximising the number of people who can access them' and the principle 'that the research, by and large, is funded out of public funds, and the idea that there are ethical arguments around the fact that it is not accessible to the people who funded it.' Hall added that the policy change, therefore, is because 'we are charged with spending taxpayers' money and making sure it is used as effectively as possible, and the push towards OA is driven by that,' whilst recognising that the scholarly publishing system 'needs to be

financially sustainable, so we need business models that enable people to operate'. It seems apparent from this interview that Hill was disconcerted by the level of resistance met by his policy statements, and by the anger at failure to communicate: his model appears very much drawn from short-form academic publishing, applied to long-form academic publishing without much recognition that the two are not built on the same structure in argument, in form, in funding or in distribution. Hill promises stakeholder consultation – 'opportunity for discussion and consultation and calls for evidence and all of that' – although, as with TEF, it appears inevitable that academic bookshops will be forced to adapt as best they can to a bookselling ecology profoundly influenced by the legislation of educational policy.

1.2.2 Teaching Excellence Framework and National Student Survey

Student tuition fees were introduced in 1998 and expanded after the publication of the Browne Report in 2010 to provide funding for institutions providing higher education. They are governed by the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). TEF 'recognises excellent teaching in UK higher education providers by rating them as gold, silver or bronze' (Office for Students 2016). The value of the TEF award indicates the monetary value of the tuition fee which the institution can assign to students, and thus the income available to the institution. As of 2018, 262 institutions across the UK participate in the TEF awards scheme, currently voluntary, although any institution registered with the Office for Students will be obliged to enter the next round of TEF assessments if they have more than 500 students attending courses. TEF participation in Scotland, where institutional funding is governed through the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) and Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), has been low, with only 5 of the 19 eligible institutions participating in TEF. English and EU undergraduate students studying in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, or Wales currently face a maximum tuition fee of £9,250/annum: in Scotland, 'young students', defined as under twenty-five years of age, from Scotland or from the EU pay no tuition fees. Maintenance and hardship grants are available in all participating countries.