Summary of the 2015 institution as e-textbook publisher annual reports

Content Creation

One of the project teams (Liverpool) is working in partnership with its university press, the team from UCL is composed of staff from their press, while Nottingham has a long history of producing learning resources. All these teams therefore have a wealth of experience on which to draw. The remaining team (UHI with Napier) are two HEIs working together each of which has its own experience of producing learning resources and with special expertise at working remotely with a geographically diverse campus. They are aware of the challenges this involves, and are documenting their journey and involving all members in discussions on how the processes might be improved for the future. Despite these differences in prior experience, there are many similarities between the partners. Most project teams have found that draft content has been slower to be delivered than had been planned at the start of the project, although all teams are confident that the titles planned for originally will be written and published in good time. Reasons for the delays to plans are varied, but include the personal circumstances of authors such as changes to employment or ill health, that cannot be planned in advance. Even though one of our project teams (UHI with Napier) has been re-using a lot of existing teaching resources to create their textbooks, the content creation stage has still taken a little longer than anticipated. What might perhaps be allowed for better in the future is the increasing workload of academic authors, many of whom have found that the demands of regular teaching and research have left too little time to devote to the job of writing. A lesson to be learned here is that some (or more) relief from normal duties needs to be considered seriously by institutional managers if they wish to encourage academics to become textbook authors for their HEIs.

All teams are planning to learn from the content creation phase of the first e-textbook, when creating the next. One team (Liverpool) have planned to “road test” both their titles within their institution first, so that feedback can be incorporated into the next version before external publication is announced in 2016. In contrast, the Nottingham team plan to publish their titles before one of the modules next runs at Nottingham University. One of the advantages of e-books is that they are much easier to update than traditional print editions, and all teams plan to take advantage of this opportunity. The UHI with Napier team have reflected upon other improvements that could be considered including an updated workflow, using publishing contracts, and new ways to enlist the support of potential new authors. They are considering adopting a house style for authors to follow.

Teams are also creating the additional content that will support their textbooks, such as web pages. For UHI with Napier, the website is under construction and is planned to form a discussion forum on the material and the experiences of those taking relevant courses. They have found that creating the supporting website has caused the “book” to deviate from some of the planned work stages, with some stages being done in a different order, or the website or book development being contingent upon the development of the corresponding part of the other, rather than the two being in parallel. They are trying to use software available in the institutions already, or at low or no cost.

All the teams are dealing currently with any technical aspects or problems to enable their chosen methods of publication, as well as any issues of functionality required by the authors that may (or may not) be supported adequately by their chosen formats. A lesson for the future here is to scope the functionality likely to be required e.g. interactive quizzes or graphs, at the start of the project, in case this has a bearing on the selection of which format is used. The project teams have chosen a range of different formats: smashwords, ibook, Xerte, YUDU, BiblioLabs, and amazon e-books, so ease of use for both publishing team and end-user can be assessed once the books are in use. Some teams will also provide physical copies and flat pdfs, so we shall be able to comment on the popularity of the different formats in due course.

Some of the teams are adopting a “freemium” model i.e. as well as an Open Access version, other versions will be available to purchase, with enhanced features. The teams have reported that sorting out exactly what is required for each version, details of how the technology will work to make each version available, and appropriate pricing for each are areas that they are working on currently. For example, the Nottingham team will eventually have five different levels of access between their two titles, whereas the UCL team will have simply an Open Access version and a print-on-demand version to purchase. The UCL team will be testing the functionality of their chosen technology partner YUDU with both students and lecturers during the production
process to ensure that their needs are met and making sure the published version reflects the feedback received.

**Embedding, promotion, dissemination**

Promotion and dissemination are linked closely to the teams’ chosen business models. Some, like UHI with Napier’s selection of the Amazon business model, dictate the main promotional channels that will be used. In addition, they have been in touch with all the relevant module leaders in their own institutions to involve them in the process, but this also serves to alert them to the availability of the forthcoming publications. Internal promotion of the project titles should be relatively straightforward for most teams, as the books have been written with the needs of the institution’s own students paramount.

The teams from Liverpool and UCL are working in conjunction with their respective university presses, and so can slot their titles into the usual promotional activities carried out by academic publishing houses. These usually include activities such as inclusion in any relevant catalogues produced by the press, supplying data to sources that collect metadata, direct marketing activity to mailing lists created in the subject area (email is more usual than print), social media campaigns, insertion in web pages hosted by the publisher, inclusion in any relevant discipline conferences the publisher plans to attend, and consultation with the author to establish if s/he has other ideas or connections that can be exploited to promote the title.

For Nottingham and UHI with Napier, the task is a little more difficult as they have no existing infrastructure with which to work, but they have planned their campaigns in readiness. Nottingham has experience of publishing Open Educational Resources (OER) and will work with the university’s marketing and communication team to implement social media campaigns when the textbooks publish. UHI with Napier have chosen to use a commercial distributor, but raise the question of the purpose of the project and its relation to the universities’ purpose and how actively lecturers should engage with promotional activity for the books. They calculate that to reach break-even point will require sales of over 14,000 copies. Should this point be exceeded however, the question of how to use any profit generated will require discussion and agreement.

**Evaluation**

At this stage of the project, with no books published, teams have not yet been able to compare their titles with similar ones available from other sources in terms of use, but have identified relevant titles on which to conduct the analysis. A range of detailed measures have been gathered for each title so that comparisons can be made to judge how well the project fulfils its aims. The evaluation work has been planned, including surveys of users, and some interesting data have been collected on the nearest comparable titles.

Other evaluations are also planned, including the costs and benefits to the institution, to lecturers, authors and students. This will include data on library usage of the nearest comparable titles so that the project can measure how much or less used titles produced for the project are. UHI with Napier are planning some very interesting work to evaluate the different learning and teaching cultures within the two institutions, and how the project work and materials impact on them.

**Communication**

All teams have been working to present the project at relevant events internally and externally; both Liverpool and UCL have been particularly active in attending outside conferences and seminars to alert the HE community to the project’s objectives and work. These include UKSG, the Northern Collaboration, SCONUL, LIBER, and various university-based events on appropriate topics. Jisc representatives have also presented the project to various groups including UKSG, ALPSP, and other interested parties and will continue to do so over the life of the project.

**Further information**

If you would like more detailed information about any of the team’s work over the last year, refer to their annual reports, below. Most have been organised under standard section headings to enable those who would like to
dip in and out of the different reports. The UHI with Napier report is organised differently, but a version under the standard headings has been included here.

**Annual reports:**
- Notttingham
- UHI Napier
- UCL
- Liverpool
- UHI Nap templated