
By any means necessary: a future for multiple copy provision?



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INTRODUCTION

'The area shown to be the most in need of attention was the availability of books when they were needed. There appeared to be a disparity between the demands on resources and actual provision made, particularly where assignments were set for large courses and therefore a large number of students required the same texts at the same time'

The purchase of multiple text book copies has been a challenge endemic to education libraries for many years in terms of financial pressures and space restrictions, as the above comment from Warwick's recent student satisfaction survey shows.

*'Why are there only enough books for 2% of my course to get hold of them?'*¹

As student numbers continue to increase there is a growing realisation that it is neither possible nor practical to continue to enlarge collection sizes sufficiently to meet current expectations. Demand for immediate text availability could ultimately only be met by the physical provision of one copy of each text per student. Multiple copies of textbooks are not a realistic or sustainable long-term strategy and thus other solutions to the provision of educational course support materials must be further explored. However as one colleague commented recently:

'Physical textbooks are still very important to staff and students at a taught course level'

SURVEYS

At the University of Warwick the Research & Innovation Unit (RIU), is exploring a variety of different ways in which student demands can be satiated. To this end, in early 2005 a short survey was conducted via heavy traffic email lists² of higher and further education institutional libraries. Five key questions were used pertaining to multiple copy purchases, related policies and approaches to this issue.

Responses were received from 25 UK institutions, two thirds of which were primarily higher education only. However, whilst this random sampling was a useful indicator for what was considered current practice across the country, few of the responding institutions were directly comparable to Warwick.

Following an examination of the responses from this first study, similar activities within the Russell Group of institutions were examined. As appropriate comparators to the University of Warwick library, it was hoped that through examining the approaches taken at these peer institutions with regard to collection development, purchase and provision of multiple copies that some common themes would emerge. The methodology adopted for this study was slightly different to that used in the original. Rather than simply emailing a set of questions to each institution, the online statements of collection management/development policies freely available on the Web were located and examined. Where these were not clear, or unavailable, then direct personal contact was attempted with each institutional library, through the most appropriate member of staff.

This was a qualified success. Large quantities of information are freely available on most library and information service sites, and many librarians responded to emailed questions helpfully. It can be noted that of the eighteen other institutions within the Russell Group detailed information was gleaned from all but two³. The University of Warwick Library's own policies were included within the analysis set, as befitting a member of the Russell Group.

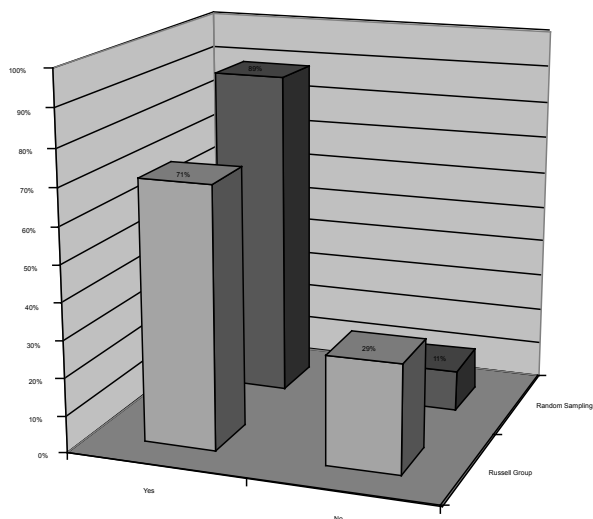
It was hoped that the results of these studies would answer or at least illustrate three key questions for the future of Warwick's learning material provision.

- How does Warwick's approach compare with that adopted elsewhere?

- What seems to be the current median approach?
- What solutions and future directions is this area taking?

USE OF MULTIPLE COPIES

Higher & Further Education libraries using multicopies of textbooks

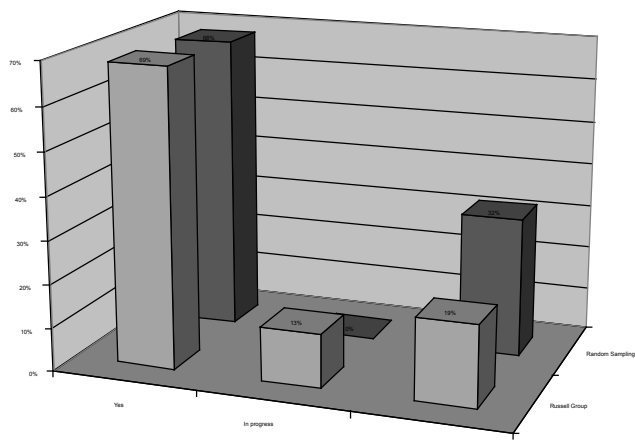


Of those Russell Group institutions who responded 71% made use of multiple copies of textbooks to support teaching and learning activities. This contrasts with the random sampling where 89% of responding institutions used them. This slight decrease in reliance may well reflect the research-led teaching approach and broad collections possessed by Russell Group member libraries.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT POLICIES

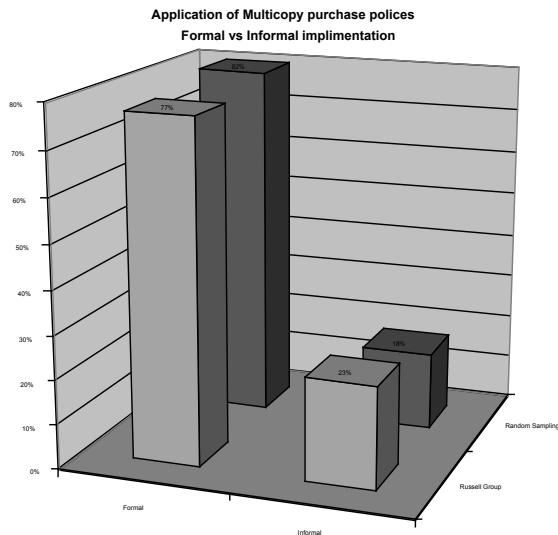
The vast majority of Russell Group libraries either have a collection management policy (69%) relating to multiple copy purchase, or they have one in development (13%). Only a small number (19%) have either no policy, or no approach to multiple copy purchase⁴.

Russell Group University Libraries: Collection management policies in place



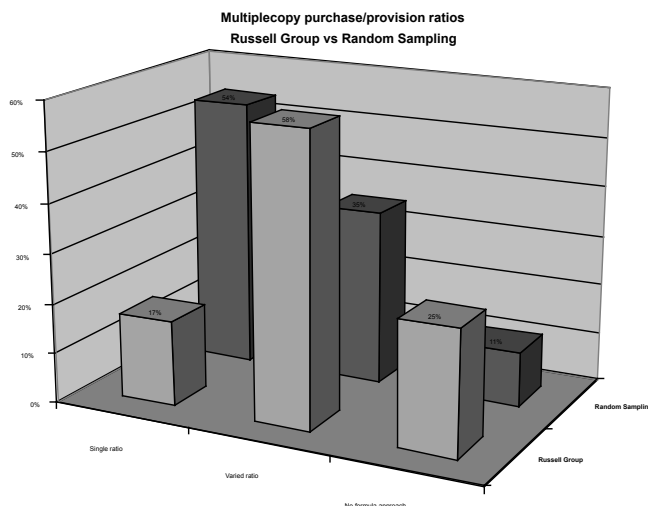
This equates neatly with the random sample where 68% of responding institutions had collection management policies in place. Thus it seems within these samplings that approaches to multiple copies are a matter of policy in two-thirds of UK institutions.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT POLICY FORMALITY



Within those Russell Group libraries who have stated collection management and analogous policies the bulk of these are formalised (77%), for a minority of institutions this is not the case (23%). Again this was close to the random sampling where 82% of policies were formally applied. Whilst the random sampling did include a number of further educational institutions, it was within the higher educational ones that the greatest formal application existed. Within the Russell Group a small number of institutions where policies have existed for sometime noted that they are in the process of revising them.

PURCHASE/PROVISION RATIOS



There was a significant variance when comparing the Russell Group institutional libraries' approaches with those employed in the random sampling. Within the random sampling the use of simple formulae for number of copies purchased was a very common approach, with ratios of one book per 5/10/20 etc. students common throughout the responses. Despite this level of provision, demand for more copies is regrettably continuing to increase, with institutions responding by adopting ever more generous ratios.

Multiple copies provided per student⁵

Copy : Student ratio	Percentage
No multiple copies	11%
1: <=5	11%
1: <=10	44%
1: <=20	22%
1: <=30	6%
1: >30	6%

However, some institutions were more hard-line in their adoption of no, or limited, multiple copies policies. Many did note that if reader demand proved sufficient then multiple copies would still be provided. In cases such as this, it was often felt that it was a greater student responsibility to purchase a larger part of their key reading. However this was not true for all libraries and many students depended upon them to provide texts. As can be seen in the table the vast majority of those libraries in the random sampling purchasing / providing multiple copies to a formula, tend to gravitate to one copy per ten students. Most respondents were using multiple copies in tandem with other solutions to meet student learning demands, as discussed below. For those within the Russell Group libraries, whilst a formula-based mechanistic approach was espoused by many, there was a far greater variance in the actual formulae applied. UCL has particularly clear examples of how department policies impact on this issue in a very formalised way. For other institutions, including Warwick, the guidelines are more freely adapted by the subject librarians. Not every Russell Group library believes that policies at a subject level are worthwhile, with one noting that:

'Establishing subject policies seemed a lot of effort in proportion to the benefits gained'

In a number of those taking a formal approach, such as Birmingham, a sliding scale of book / student ratios has been adopted, allowing a prescribed response to rising student numbers and the number of texts that will be made available

for them. Many other institutions such as Bristol and Newcastle, whilst not engaging with such complex matrix formulae, still used considerable variations of student/book ratios. Very few institutions believe that an exact formula is inappropriate, and rather set an upper limit upon the total physical number (e.g. 20) of key textbook editions stocked.

For the Russell Group, with such a degree of variance in the student/book ratios within each institution and the approaches adopted, it was not possible to say with certainty where the median ratio value lies. Since so many institutions leave the final ratio to be determined through their subject librarians' experience and awareness of demand, it is this sensitivity that seems to be a key element. However, even organisations who did purchase significantly large volumes of multiple copies expressed that student concerns remained over the availability of texts.

ALTERNATIVES

From this study, it seems that the following were the six main suggested alternative approaches to multicopy provision.

Key alternatives to multiple copies

Increased investment in and use of reference stock and short loan collections.	Introduction of an electronic reserve of digitised copies of locally held stock.
Purchase and promotion of full-text online materials (e-books and e-journals) for areas in high demand.	Expectation of students purchasing core texts.
Instigating a change in institutional educational ethos.	Formulation and implementation of an integrated Collection Management policy in partnership with academic departments.

It seems there is no single solution with sufficient acceptance that offers a cure-for-all-ills. However, with the accessibility bonuses proffered by e-collections over physical items it is of little surprise that these are commonly utilised approaches throughout the sector. Some institutions have proposed more radical solutions, requiring a very close working relationship between module and course leaders, and the respective libraries.

'There shall be no more reading lists [as they are currently understood]! Reading lists should only contain material for which an acceptable access strategy can be provided'

Needless to say this approach requires wholesale support at every level, from the very highest echelon of institutional management through to academic staff. The introduction of the research library approach was one that some libraries are actively exploring, with a collection's strength reflected through breadth rather than volume. The development of mature partnerships with academics was noted to be key for embracing such dynamic change, rather than attempting to enforcing such a shift upon them.

The use of reference, closed and short loan collections was a commonly used solution, as it has been for many years at a large number of institutions. However, increasingly efforts are being made to direct or guide lecturers towards increased adoption of online sources within their recommended readings. Unfortunately the availability of materials advocated by lecturers, is not always matched in library electronic holdings or even existence in this format. Where access to suitable e-journals or e-books is not possible, then a few respondents had experimented with digitising their own collections, working in partnership with the HERON Service. While digitisation of print library materials is technologically easy, the not inconsiderable copyright clearance expense remains a significant obstacle to wide scale adoption.

Unsurprisingly, most –if not all– institutions make use of commercial e-print materials as either a supplement or alternative to additional copies of text books. Users who do not like using e-prints are an important factor to consider against the wholesale adoption of electronic media. That said, this has not assuaged the ever increasing student demands for physical copies as was noted by a number of respondents. The impossibility of purchasing enough copies is an acknowledged issue at Warwick, where the recently elected union sabbatical deputy president has stated his number one priority as:

'The first thing I'd like to do is go ahead with improving the library and the creation of space to make way for more books.'

From this it is possible to surmise that there is still a way to go to resolve student misconceptions over what constitutes library course provision.

Solutions previously suggested by Warwick's students included shortening borrowing times, more books in general, or more books in the short-loan reserve collection (SRC) – very much focusing on traditional teaching delivery methodology.

Other options used by many institutions include changes in loan-periods as well as integration of core-texts into short loan collections. Notably within those Russell Group libraries examined only a few appear to have made the provision of course packs a serious alternative method of learning material provision. However, these institutions still supplement provision heavily through multiple copy provision. Where few multiple copies were made available students were encouraged to make greater use of document supply facilities to satisfy their demands. Others even actively encouraged their students to regularly use neighbouring institutional libraries, where this was regionally viable. Another suggestion was linking with the Students' Union to promote their second hand books sales more widely.

CONCLUSIONS

In terms of my original questions there are three main conclusions.

The current median approach: We would conclude that within all institutions the provision of multiple copies of core texts remains a key factor for meeting students' learning demands. However, in contrast with the non-Russell Group libraries, it does appear that there is an increased, if slight, reliance on collection breadth for institutions such as Warwick.

How does Warwick's approach compare: The library's approach of a two step multiple copies formula, amended by the subject librarians in the light of their experiences with the departments falls very much in the average region of responses. Indeed in comparison to some comparator institutions it verges on the generous. Whether the students are appreciative of this or not is matter for further investigation. This provision is naturally backed up through the provision of e-books and journals, and the present SRC. However, a pending revision in the SRC's scale will increase the need for other solutions to be engaged with.

Solutions and future directions: One overriding theme at virtually all the institutions examined is the major role that subject librarians play in the provision of learning materials. Even those institutions with highly developed formulae for

calculating the number of books to provide, still relied upon their subject staff. These librarians used their experience and wisdom to modify the quantities and loan categories of texts available to more closely match individual departments' teaching and learning goals. In light of recent developments in the sector, this is an important factor that must be stressed.

The overriding fact that was clear from both these studies is that the purchase and provision of multiple copies remains a topic of concern in most higher education institutions. At the University of Warwick it has been evidenced during each student election of recent years with repeated campaigning on a more books for the library ticket. Other current RIU projects are expected to shed more light on this desire for multiple copies in print, contrasted against the developing strengths of a broad research collection.

Marketing collections and services better may be one way to help eliminate the apparent current student misconceptions over current levels of library provision, and in time decrease the reliance on multiple copies to meet their learning needs. For Warwick, a wish to decrease reliance on physical textbook volume and to continue to focus upon developing a research collection may require significant promotion, if misconceptions are to be avoided. As such, the necessity of exploring all provision alternatives to meet student needs remains.

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Acknowledgements: With major thanks to all those people and institutions who shared their policies and comments with me.

- 1 Quote from recent interview with a Warwick undergraduate student
- 2 lis-link, lis-ucr, cofhe @jiscmail.ac.uk
- 3 Kings College London, & University of Manchester
- 4 Total of 101% due to rounding up of values
- 5 In random sampling of institutions