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# Impact without the effort: patron-driven access and the student experience at Buckinghamshire New University

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## INTRODUCTION

In February 2013, the library at Buckinghamshire New University (Bucks) launched a four-month trial of patron-driven access (PDA) to print and e-book titles for its students. Bucks has 7,500 students; the library staff managing PDA comprises two part-time acquisitions librarians, one cataloguer and some library assistant support for processing print titles. Our PDA is comparatively small scale, as is our resourcing to support it. We have always wanted to offer this service, having heard and read so much about the benefits in terms of student satisfaction, collection development and digital literacy. We feel very much like trend followers rather than trail blazers. We hope that our experience of PDA, which we are now offering as a service, shows that impact can be made on the student experience without too much effort and with careful planning built on sector experience and lessons learnt from our trial.

## PDA E-BOOK VENDOR AND PARAMETERS

For the PDA trial we used Dawson Books' Dawsonera<sup>1</sup> platform for e-book title purchases, the

preferred platform for browsing and reading e-book titles. Overall satisfaction with it and the ease of PDA set up has led us to decide to continue using it for e-book supply for our PDA service. This has simplified the acquisition channel for students when using the service. As with Durham University's More Books campaign,<sup>2</sup> we want to make it easy for students to obtain the books they want. We were concerned about running out of money during the trial so we set some parameters. For example, subject librarians had to approve print-title requests before purchase; and it was necessary for e-book titles to be suggested twice in order for them to be bought. We now treat all student book suggestions in the same way: if students want them, we will buy them. The only parameter we have set is a price limit of £150 per title and, should the cost be slightly above this amount, the acquisitions department makes a quick decision to purchase or not. The library has not spent time and effort devising a complex purchasing strategy; rather, we have taken a simplified approach, thus improving efficiency in delivering PDA to students with minimal restrictions. Our Dawsonera model works with an automatic purchase if the student suggests a title or if they click to continue reading after a five-minute preview. The suggestions are generated from Dawsonera and the acquisitions librarians then purchase and notify the student of e-book title availability.

We took the decision not to limit PDA by subject, so the trial was and the service now is open equally to all students. Our subject librarians like and support this approach. We have switched off two known children's book publishers in the Dawsonera admin portal because one children's book was purchased. All other titles purchased so far demonstrate appropriate use of the service as titles are not only relevant but, have on occasion, pre-empted academic staff selection.

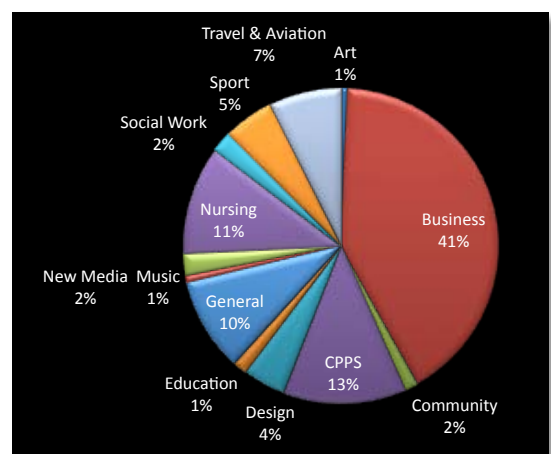


Fig. 1 Titles purchased: percentage by subject

## PDA FOR PRINT TITLES

During the trial we used Amazon's wish list for students to compile their print-title suggestions. We did not specify how many titles they could suggest, so we were occasionally inundated with requests. We involved subject librarians in vetting suggestions, which meant that time and communication weren't used very effectively, and this was reflected in student feedback. We have now established a more efficient workflow which improves the handling print-title suggestions. Students complete an online request form and send an email which is picked up by the acquisitions department. Requests are then ordered on Amazon, Abebooks or another online source.

The image shows a screenshot of a web form titled 'Print Title Request Form (Student Led Purchasing Scheme)' from Bucks University. The form is divided into two main sections: 'Your Details' and 'Book Details'. The 'Your Details' section includes fields for Name, Student ID, Address, Course, and Year of Course (with a dropdown menu and a text box for 'Other'). The 'Book Details' section includes fields for Title, Author, ISBN, Publisher, Place published, and Year published. The form also includes a header with the Bucks University logo and a footer with instructions to complete the form online and submit it to suggestbk@bucks.ac.uk.

Fig. 2 Print-title request form

An email is sent to the student confirming that a reservation has been made and indicating where the book can be collected from. When it arrives, the book is given priority accessioning, cataloguing, covering and labelling, with the aim of having it ready for collection the same day. The student is notified by email and text. We have had a relatively small number of print-title requests so far. For the service to have the desired impact, an instant response to the request is necessary; so far our workflow responds well.

## PDA AND SEARCH DISCOVERY

Students access library-purchased e-books and the Dawsonera platform through LibrarySearch, our search discovery tool. Dawsonera is set as a searchable resource in the Primo Central Index and all its titles are visible when the search is expanded beyond library-owned materials. Students are then able to suggest titles for purchase or take a five-minute preview.

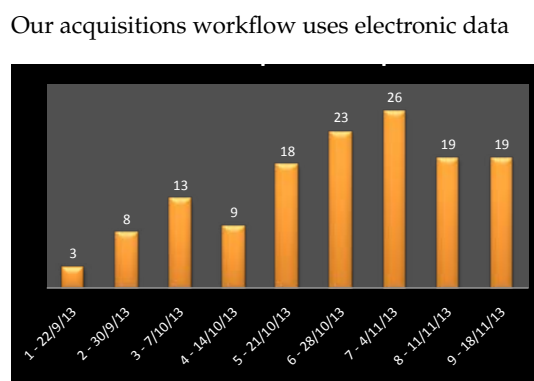
There is no need to flood our Sirsi Dynix Symphony library management system with thousands of MARC records, with the subsequent

upheaval and effort this has caused a number of other institutions. We do not have to manage the removal of MARC records, with the risk of leaving a few stray records behind; nor are we facing a potential rise in maintenance costs for a vastly enlarged library catalogue. We find the process of offering PDA through our search discovery tool efficient and time effective.

## PDA AND SYMPHONY

Our PDA service had been operational for around two months by mid-November 2013, by which time 138 titles had been purchased.

Fig. 3 Number of titles purchased per week



Our acquisitions workflow uses electronic data

interchange (EDI) and shelf-ready supply with Electronic Data Interchange For Administration, Commerce and Transport (EDIFACT) reports delivering acquisitions data automatically into Symphony. PDA print and e-book acquisition has to fit into our workflow without too much additional effort. We receive purchase notification of e-books, MARC records and e-book invoices from Dawson Books by email. In Symphony, we use a blanket order form with multiple order lines for each PDA e-book title. These order lines are created manually by the acquisitions librarians. MARC records are loaded by our cataloguer and the acquisitions department manually input the invoices in Symphony. Because our acquisitions workflow maximises EDI delivery, we can afford the time for the manual aspects of PDA acquisition.

A brief title record is created in Symphony, a basic order is attached to this record and a reservation placed for the student.

## PDA AND PROMOTION

To promote or not to promote PDA! Our caution was based on the experience of other higher education institutions such as the University of Roehampton, where students managed to spend

£30,000 in 21 days. So our trial had a very soft launch and our students found PDA without the need for active promotion; they bought 100 e-book titles during the first eleven weeks and spent around £5,000. When the number of titles selected began to plateau during April 2013, we decided to promote the trial. Students who participated gave us feedback on how they found out about PDA (see Fig. 4).

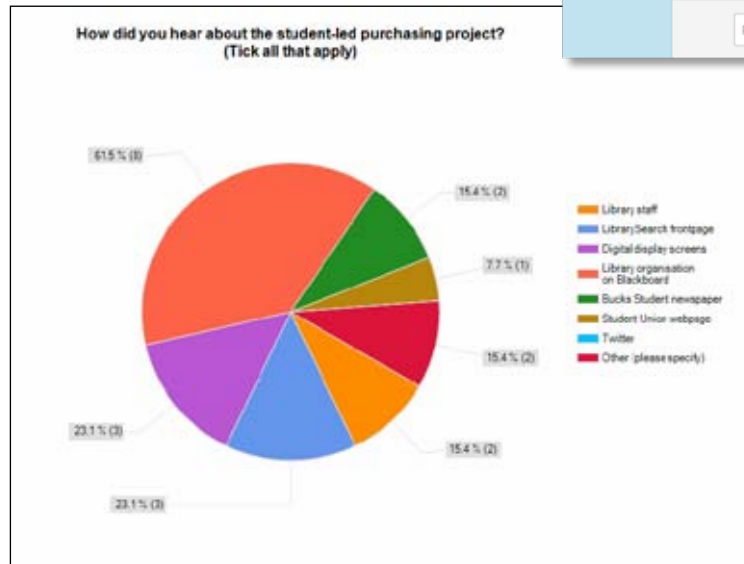


Fig. 4 Student feedback on how they heard about the trial

We have used the following channels to promote the service

- Twitter @BucksLib, @bucksnewuni
- BucksStudent newspaper
- Blackboard VLE
- Digital display screens around the university

Fig. 5 Promotion on the university's digital display screens and BucksStudent newspaper



Fig. 6 Promotion of PDA on @BucksLib

These are our standard channels of communication for making announcements to students. We are considering encouraging a wider student following by making greater use of our student texting service.'

#### COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Our subject librarians expressed concern over the relevance of titles purchased by students. At face value, suggested print and e-book titles appear relevant. However, in the longer term, a more in-depth analysis of usage statistics of student-purchased titles is needed in order to provide evidence for PDA as an ongoing service. It is too soon to draw a conclusion on whether these titles contribute positively to the library's collection development, but it is something that we shall analyse and use to support the case for continuing to offer PDA as a service.

#### MEASURING THE IMPACT OF PDA

Student feedback from our four-month trial told us that September to January would be the optimum time to offer a PDA service, so our current service started in September and will run until the £20,000 is spent.

The admin portal in Dawsonera will enable us to collect and analyse usage statistics of student-selected titles. However, qualitative as well as quantitative data are needed for measuring impact. A title accessed only once may have more impact on the student experience than one accessed more frequently. In order to gather valuable qualitative data to measure impact, we shall ask those students who have made suggestions to fill in a feedback survey; however, it will always

be difficult to capture feedback from students who unknowingly purchase e-books.

An increased satisfaction score in the 2014 National Student Survey could indicate that PDA had made an impact. In the shorter term, positive informal feedback from students when they discover that the book they need can be bought instantly, and without costing them a penny, indicates that PDA is making an impact on their experience.

#### **NOTES**

- 1 <http://www.dawsonera.com>
- 2 <http://www.durham.ac.uk/library/more-books>