

# The Liverpool Scene – University Library and University Press as partners

Andrew Barker

Head of Academic Liaison  
Special Collections & Archives  
University of Liverpool Library  
[Andrew.barker@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.barker@liverpool.ac.uk)

Over the last few years, the University of Liverpool Library and Liverpool University Press have been working towards a partnered approach to developing new resources and sharing knowledge and expertise. This article will outline what we have already done, what we are in the process of doing and how we might collaborate further in the future.

## Background – the beginning of a collaborative relationship

---

I began in my post as Head of Academic Liaison, Special Collections & Archives at the University of Liverpool Library in May 2013. I am responsible for heading up support for research, learning & teaching and for ensuring that the holdings of our Special Collections & Archives have the visibility that they deserve.

The starting point for what I wanted to achieve in my new role was to try to find a way for the library to be cleverer in the way it meets the needs of our undergraduates and researchers and to ensure that the holdings of Special Collections & Archives were more aligned in supporting the university's learning and teaching.

In the almost two years that I have been in Liverpool that objective has not changed, but much else has.

Once I began working at Liverpool, our then Head of Collections, Content and Discovery, Terry Bucknell, and our Research Support Lead, Martin Wolf, talked to me about the work they had been doing with Liverpool University Press (LUP) and suggested I meet LUP's Managing Director, Anthony Cond to find out more about the Press. So that's just what I did.

## Liverpool University Press – some background

---

Liverpool University Press is housed just a stone's throw away from our Sydney Jones Library; founded in 1899, it is the third oldest university press in the UK and has a long history of publishing exceptional research. Following a re-birth in 2004, when it became a limited company, it has expanded rapidly and now publishes around 70 books and 25 journals a year. Its specialisms are literature, modern languages, history and visual culture. In essence LUP is an ambitious press, committed to disseminating the research and teaching that comes out of the University of Liverpool. However, LUP has gone far beyond being just the 'university's press', and publishes material from other institutions and from writers not attached to any university, most often those writing on subjects relating to the great city of Liverpool.

## Developing the partnership

---

Although a great part of this article might suggest that the partnership between our library and LUP began when I arrived in 2013, join-up had been established well before I took up my new post. There was already a Library Advisory Board in place and plans were well advanced between Anthony Cond and Martin Wolf to develop 'Modern Languages Open' (MLO), an open-access platform for the dissemination of interdisciplinary research in the modern languages. The development of this platform as a partnership between press, library and University of Liverpool academics positions Liverpool strongly in this area, and the partnership was already well established.

The role of the Library Advisory Board is to discuss and select ongoing, mutually beneficial collaboration centred on the needs of the university, while each entity continues to do their 'core business' independent of the other. In every aspect of our relationship, it is a partnership of equals.

The starting point for my own involvement with Anthony and LUP was what one might call an 'informal' relationship: Anthony and I met occasionally for lunch, talked of our strong shared love for the Beatles and other beat groups of the



# The Liverpool Scene – University Library and University Press as partners

period, while plotting how our partnership might grow beyond the advisory board and MLO.

Our nascent thoughts in this direction were (perhaps rather obviously) about collaboration on the development of e-books. Our thinking was that universities are the primary producers of the content of scholarly publications, through the research, writing and peer reviewing of their academic authors and editors, while it is the university library that is often the primary home to those publications, whether they are monographs or textbooks recommended by an academic for their students.

In sum, as a producer and consumer of content the university has a significant investment in academic publishing. If you throw into the mix advances in technology, the rise of open access and external economic pressures, it makes sense for us to move to the concept of the university as book publisher. These informal discussions then led to thoughts about what we might publish and where funding might come from to turn the discussions into something near reality.

What we might publish was easy to answer, certainly for me, from a library perspective. The increasing challenge for university libraries is to ensure that we have sufficient copies of key textbooks in the right numbers at point of need. Survey feedback from students suggested that if we could successfully collaborate on textbooks, this would make a significant impact on our students' experience of the library. LUP agreed that a real benefit would come from collaboration on textbooks.

That strategic decision was very easy; the challenge was where the money might come from to fund such an initiative. The timing of our discussions was perfect, for just as we were thinking about how we might move on, JISC put out a call 'inviting UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) to participate in a three-year national project to explore the viability of institutions becoming e-textbook publishers'.<sup>1</sup>

## Developing the bid

---

Although the timing of the JISC call was perfect, the timescale for responding to the call was very tight. We had to move our thoughts from 'wouldn't it be great to publish an e-textbook' straight to 'this is what we want to publish, this is the impact our textbooks will have and this is how much it will cost us to develop the books' in around two weeks. Although it was a short turnaround, the timescale was ideal for a library / press partnership. We had the complementary skills in place to produce a workable bid very quickly.

Being responsible for academic liaison, I had the necessary academic contacts across the university. I could also see which subject areas might benefit from our creating bespoke textbooks. The press could use its editorial expertise to send a call for proposals for textbooks to Liverpool academics. Clearly, LUP's experience of commissioning books meant we could put out a call for submissions, assess the likely impact of each, price the proposal and complete the bid to JISC's timescale. Without our complementary skills, we just wouldn't have been able to make a bid within the timescale.

However, with that combined expertise, we turned the eleven expressions of interest that we received into two workable proposals. Our bid to JISC would be built round two possible textbooks: '*Essentials for financial management*', to be written by Jason Laws, an academic from the University of Liverpool Management School; this textbook would be used on the largest taught course in the institution (replacing a £56 textbook from a commercial publisher used by 900 students), while the second would be, '*Using primary sources*', to be edited by Jon Hogg from our History Department, and to be used across



# The Liverpool Scene – University Library and University Press as partners

twenty modules in the School of History. Crucially, the proposal for the Primary sources textbook would make use of material held in the library's Special Collections and Archives. So, for the library these two proposals would be closely aligned to our strategy of improving student experience and raising the visibility of our collections. This was key; the proposal of institution as textbook publisher would only be worth pursuing if the textbooks would bring real value to our stakeholders. The two textbooks that we selected would do that.

The textbooks would be open access under a creative commons licence. The library would be responsible for supporting the technical infrastructure with *Essentials* being produced on the openly available 'Xerte' platform; *Primary sources* would be made available via 'Biblioboard' (purchased by the library through a JISC deal). A print-on-demand copy would be sold alongside the open access digital textbooks. Although the prime focus of the development of the textbooks would be for University of Liverpool students, other institutions would, of course, utilise the open access materials but they would be LUP branded.

## From bid to books... and beyond?

---

We got our bid in to JISC and, within a month, we had the great news that it had been successful. Alongside the University of Liverpool, there were successful applications from University College London, the University of Nottingham and the University of the Highlands & Islands in partnership with Edinburgh Napier University. The projects are doing very different things, and the books will be published over the next two years. Our two books should be published in 2016. At present they are being written, while library staff work with the academics to support the transition from the written page to the selected platform.

Although the books are not yet written, LUP and the library are looking at our next steps. We face some significant challenges in taking this pilot further. We were very fortunate indeed that JISC Collections put the call out for funding an e-textbook project. Without that funding, however much we talked about the possibilities, we would have been unable to get the idea beyond the fantasy stage. So our challenge beyond these JISC-funded books comes down to sustainability. However successful these books are, there is not yet an answer to where ongoing funding would come from to enable us to scale up.

However, the success of the partnership in establishing the Library Advisory Board, in the development of Modern Languages Open platform and in the successful bid for the two e-textbooks suggest that we can continue to develop ideas that will have significant benefit to students and researchers of the University of Liverpool and beyond. One thing is certain: whatever we go on to develop, this partnership of equals will continue.

## Note

---

- 1 JISC Collections, 2014. Call for participation: Institution as e-textbook publisher [online]. Available from: <http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/News/Institution-as-e-textbook-publisher-call-for-participation/> [Accessed 27 February 2015]

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.

