Jisc Institution as E-Textbook Publisher project
Insights into the costs

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How to fund Institutions as publishers: Survey for Resource Profiling towards Project Embedding

by Errol Rivera, Edinburgh Napier University

Yeah…but how much did it *really* cost?

Like a lot of funded projects, we bid on ours. Jisc wanted to see if university staff could produce a high quality e-textbook. So we did what responsible bid winners do: We figured what our expenses would be, justified them, and made a plan that we could stick to.

As assistant Evaluator on the UHI's bid for the project, my job is to put my research skills to work, as a kind of third party that observes and reports on the project to Jisc and the academic community. Since I'm not part of the production process, I can be more objective about how successful that process is. When I report what I observe, I call on my background in pedagogic research and the literary publishing industry to backup my observations. It's more like a kind of ethnography than anything else.

Like a lot of bid projects, the real outcome wasn't the thing that was made – that was just a proof of concept. That's the thing about bid projects, they're less about the product and more about the process. This bid wasn't about producing e-textbooks. It was about producing *A WAY TO MAKE* e-textbooks. The goal was to do something financially sustainable – a model for publishing e-textbooks that institutions like the University of the Highlands and Islands or Edinburgh Napier University, could carry on under their own steam once the Jisc money ran out.

Of course, that sort of thing is up to senior management. If they're going to embed any kind of model for publishing e-textbooks (let alone a good model), and make that process part of the university's regular activities, they need to be able to understand the benefits to their university. And you can't understand the benefit unless you know what kind of resource you're committing. Academic idealism is great, but it doesn't pay for anything.

Understanding resource commitment isn't just about money, though. Paying a world class chef £1000 to make dinner for you and a friend tonight is a bit excessive. But paying £2000 in several instalments over the course of a year to feed a whole family? That might sound a bit more reasonable to some people – and it's also why the wedding industry survives. You have to think about the skills and knowledge you're employing, as well as the time involved.

The challenge for us is that The Institution as Publisher is a relatively new concept with regard to e-textbooks. So judging all the costs and benefits gets that much harder. Innovations are lost when innovators make poor work of contextualising what they're offering benefactors. Senior management need to be able to quickly understand the diversity and range of skill required in order to make their production model sustainable. They also need to know how much those skills cost, and the time on task that affects those costs over a financial year.

So we did what any responsible researchers would do… we made a survey.

This survey is a tool meant to enable the embedding of a viable and sustainable model for the publication of e-textbooks by a university. Unlike other pedagogical innovations which happen 'in the wild', this eTIPs publication process started out with a bid. And what is a bid, if not "initial resource". That means people, money, and time specifically earmarked for the project. The upside to this is obvious: It allows the production process to take shape in optimal conditions. Theoretically speaking, you've got everything you need from the start…

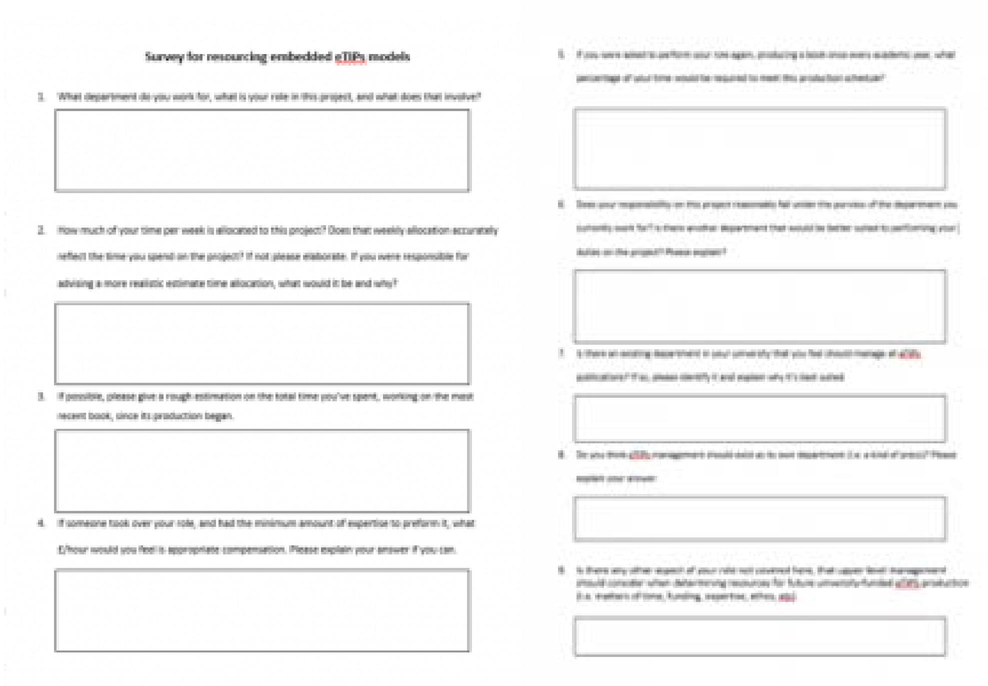
…theoretically.

There's another problematic word in there too, 'optimal conditions.' Most of the time, when it comes to conditions, optimal might as well mean 'artificial.'

Teams like UHI can work diligently to provide a realistic bid which seeks to outline a plan for the resource to be used, but even in the most optimal conditions, these projects are living things. People get excited, busy, new creative opportunities arise, and 'the plan' often changes in the interest of the project. The project may be a success, but often the actual work turns out to be more innovative, more challenging, and more exciting – and the bids and plans don't do them justice. This means that when the time comes to permanently support initially funded projects, a project team's success can ironically undermine future endeavours, even with an accurately reported budget.

Now that multiple books have been created using our process, we the project evaluators, Laurence Patterson and Errol Rivera, can look back on 'the real work' that was done. Or least, we can try.

The Survey and the Information it Gathers



Survey for resourcing embedded eTIPs models

1. What department do you work for, what is your role in this project, and what does that involve?

2. How much of your time per week is allocated to this project? Does that weekly allocation accurately reflect the time you spend on the project? If not please elaborate. If you were responsible for advising a more realistic estimate time allocation, what would it be and why?

3. If possible, please give a rough estimation on the total time you've spent, working on the most recent book, since its production began.

4. If someone took over your role, and had the minimum amount of expertise to preform it, what £/hour would you feel is appropriate compensation. Please explain your answer if you can.

We start by making sure the survey covers 4 basic concepts which we felt had the most direct effect on a project's resource.

1. The Skills used
2. The Time Spend
3. The Appropriate Compensation
4. The Place in the University's structure.

Then we focus on the work done on the project, asking questions that overlap these four concepts, in order to ensure that responders aren't thinking about their answers in the abstract, or worse – guessing. Questions about 'time spent' were asked in the context of 'appropriate compensation' or 'The skills used.' The survey is then distributed to everyone who worked on the project.
Their full answer is filed under the appropriate question (bold). Then their answer is broken down into the constituent concepts (italicised).

2. How much of your time per week is allocated to this project? Does that weekly allocation accurately reflect the time you spend on the project? If not please elaborate. If you were responsible for advising a more realistic estimate time allocation, what would it be and why?	*Currently Weekly Allocation*	*Per Book/Regardless of which book*

4. If someone took over your role, and had the minimum amount of expertise to preform it, what £/hour would you feel is appropriate compensation. Please explain your answer if you can.	*Recommended Skill Set*	*Recommended £/hr*

Adding up all the respondents' answers from questions like Question 2 and 4 gives us a realistic reflection of time spend on task, as well how much that time was worth in retrospect for each respondent, based on their idea skills required. Adding up the answers from all respondents, can give a project-wide view of budget, human resource needs, and work load allocation. Asking a two-part questions like Question 4 is crucial – it gets the responder thinking about things in relation to each other, which ensures a response that reflects reality more than an ideal.

5. If you were asked to perform your role again, producing a book once every academic year, what percentage of your time would be required to meet this production schedule?	*Recommended Weekly Work Allocation*

6. Does your responsibility on this project reasonably fall under the purview of the department you currently work for? Is there another department that would be better suited to performing your duties on the project? Please explain?	*Current Department Appropriate*	*Recommended Department*	*Justification*

Questions like Question 5 and 6 aren't hard information but utilise the expertise of the respondent to inform important decisions about the future of the project, and its sustainability.

So What Now?

For the responder, these questions promote valuable reflection about the journey or the project, but our real goal is to produce hard numbers from the harder-to-measure aspects of human endeavour. That's a bit tougher. Beyond that, we want to collect reflections about what would need to be done differently in the future, based on the view of experts who did the work. Essentially we're asking "Think about what you've been doing as if it were part of a pilot project. What would need to change in order to make it someone's day job?" The benefit to this comes in when Senior Management consider embedding, because it means boots-on-the-ground workers are essentially contributing to what may become university policy.

Of course, some project team members won't be able to answer these questions as easily as others, from a logistical standpoint. For example, authors don't put time into the project in the same way an editor or a web designer would. The practicalities of that skill set don't lend themselves well to 'clocking in'.

While some team members found this survey easy and straightforward, others found parts difficult to answer, and some found the entire thing impossible. The main challenges in getting this information arise from the following…

- Being able to calculate the average weekly time spent on the project
- Placing a monetary value on their own skill set

However, it was discovered that with assisted reflection, many were able to answer the survey with confidence. When respondents answered the questions optimally, the information yielded was invaluable.

This leads the evaluation team to suggest that this method is sound, but rich data like this requires one-to-one support from the evaluator. Respondents often need facilitation in looking at their skills objectively, and some expertise is required in asking the respondent probing questions. However, the UHI Evaluation team has the skillset to provide respondents with that support, and even though this data is still being gathered, the benefits have already shown themselves to be worth the effort.
This can be a powerful tool for senior management, as it provides them with more than just information and numbers – it provides them with perspective and expertise, truncated for easy digested, enabling them to make decisions that will better ensure the health and longevity of the embedding and implementation, as well as the satisfaction of the workforce.

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Cost to publish an e-textbook

by Laurence Patterson, Edinburgh Napier University

Opting to produce bespoke learning content over buying-in something off-the-shelf is, in these rather austere and unpredictably inverse times, certainly a daunting prospect. You may have the planning and writing process down to a fine art, it might even be the case that most of your content is already written and edited, but unless the time you'll take is accounted for from your standard working hours, you're going to discover, rather quickly, that the first time you produce your own book for students is content creation is expensive.

Initial costs lie in setup. Let's consider that you have a rough outline – a plan – that you know the theme of the book – medicine, commercial law, sports science. Because of this, you might already know your audience – your own students. Or perhaps you see the audience as more broad – as we did in for eTIPS' first two eTextbooks – a combination of our own students, and the millions of Kindle readers across the globe. Consider, then, that you already have in place a few individuals whose roles in producing the eBook are clear (though whose time is not entire in producing it – they have other projects, too). And consider that you do have most of the content already, albeit rather more cobbled together than in a coherent form, and only the writing – nothing visual, interactive, or otherwise 'ready-to-go' at this stage, a little from lecturers' notes, and from the one or two conversations you've had as a group.

Those costs of setup reflect the creation of four key strands of work which continue through a bespoke eBook project – commissioning (the book theme), distribution (the audience), collaboration (the production team), and creation (the content). Arguably, the more efficient one is in commissioning a title, the more streamlined the strands that follow are.

Ongoing costs lie in staff time. As you move through an eBook publishing project, the collaboration and creation strands will require most from your budget. Consider the time and effort required to outline what content might look like, how effective distribution streams may be established, what points of accompanying interactivity, images, tables and multimedia the eBook may have, and who manages the process to the point of (and beyond) publication. There are likely countless meetings between the academic and the instructional designer and, if content is provided online, where you would place this – the VLE, a website, or somewhere else. Written eBook content may be sourced from existing sources – for example, from lecture notes, conversation with academics, external open-source materials – so that the bespoke nature of content is in its procurement and adaptation, an activity undertaken by a designer. Alternatively, content may be sourced directly (though with some mediation from a designer) from and written by academics, and is therefore entirely original and bespoke.

Importantly, as a group of people learn a method of doing something, and repeat, they improve – and the time they'll spend doing it, and therefore the costs of doing it, will go down. Taking a stance toward continual improvement and careful accounting of costs across strands of activity will help to limit unnecessary spend in successive publications, and build towards a workable process of production and distribution.

What is the point of your eBook? Establishing your 'return-on-investment' is important. Are there opportunities to recoup costs? Is it internal only, dovetailing to your institution's strategic objectives around publication, research, learning and teaching, digital resource management, open education agenda? Are you seeking commercial opportunity through Amazon distribution, creating paperback versions of your publications to broaden appeal?

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The cost of creating *Using Primary Sources*

by Alison Welsby, Editorial Director at Liverpool University Press

Anyone contemplating publishing an e-textbook will undoubtedly have cost at the forefront of their mind. This blog post concerns the expenditure associated with *Using Primary Sources*, an Open Access teaching and study resource that combines rare archival source materials with high quality peerreviewed chapters by leading academics, published by Liverpool University Press and the University of Liverpool Library. The library had subscribed to the platform, Biblioboard, prior to discussions regarding the e-textbook as it provided students and academics with material curated by other libraries and institutions (including The British Library) and gave academics the opportunity to create their own collections for teaching and research purposes. So we already had the software in place to create *Using Primary Sources*, which was certainly an advantage in budgeting for the project. The remaining costs to create and publish *Using Primary Sources* are as follows:

- **Commissioning**. As part of the contract agreements, payments were made on publication to the General Editor, the Assistant Editor and to the individual contributors for their work on the e-textbook and essays. We also paid external academics to write independent peer reviews of the e-textbook on publication.
- **Acquisition of third party material**. We tried to use as much primary source material as possible from the University of Liverpool Library's Special Collections and Archives department. However, some of the contributors requested material for their essay that was not available in Special Collections, so we sourced and paid for primary source material from other institutions, museums and collections, from whom there was an acquisition / supply of material charge as well as a permission / licence charge. In one instance, we paid for the specialised and high-definition digitisation of a rare and fragile medieval text so that we could include it in the e-textbook. Whilst this was relatively expensive, we considered making this material available for the first time in a digital format and therefore accessible to students as being essential to the aims of the e-textbook
- **Production**. This included copyediting and typesetting of each chapter as well as an e-book cover design and logo.
- **Marketing**. Many marketing activities have been relatively 'cost free' – see blog post by Emily Felton on Marketing Engagement and Creativity. However, we did employ traditional marketing activities such as printing colour flyers, which were, and continue to be, distributed to students at lectures, as well as at conference attended by Liverpool University Press and the General Editor. We also included *Using Primary Sources* in our seasonal catalogues and created three standing display banners: one for permanent display in the Sydney Jones Library foyer, one for the reception area of the Department of History at the University of Liverpool and one for Liverpool University Press to take to conferences.
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However, the biggest cost of all would be staffing costs. The staff members at Liverpool University Press and the University of Liverpool Library working on this e-textbook in addition to their current employment and workload are listed below in alphabetical order:

- Patrick Brereton (Head of Production, Liverpool University Press)
- Paul Catherall (E-Learning Librarian, University of Liverpool Library)
- Emily Felton (Marketing Executive, Liverpool University Press)
- Heather Gallagher (Books Marketing Manager, Liverpool University Press)
- Jenny Higham (Special Collections & Archives Manager, University of Liverpool Library)

- Catherine McManamon (Liaison Librarian, University of Liverpool Library)
- Karen Phair (Finance Assistant, Liverpool University Press)
- Emma Thompson (Education Lead, University of Liverpool Library)
- Alison Welsby (Editorial Director, Liverpool University Press)

The number of hours invested by these people over the past three years is incalculable. At times the project was quiet, as the contributors worked on their essays. At other times, it was the main daily activity and workload of some of the people listed above, often for prolonged periods of time. Special mention must be made to Dr Jon Hogg (General Editor), whose commitment and energy to the project has been essential throughout, and, whilst a six-month research leave was granted during the three years of the project, still had to manage this e-textbook on top of his teaching, research and administration duties. In hindsight, a project manager should have been employed to manage the project once the chapters were completed and sources identified (approximately two days a week for the final two years of the project, increased during intense periods such as the three months prior to launch in January 2017), to support the library in the acquiring and scanning of the primary source material and to take full responsibility of uploading all the material onto Biblioboard. Whilst the project manager would not require a high level of technical expertise, it would be essential they were competent in the digitisation of primary source material and data software platforms.