

Offering an economical alternative to commercial publishing, e-presses can satisfy preferences for open access and print-on-demand. [Agata Mrva-Montoya](#) writes that academic e-presses are the best fit for the future of academic publishing.



Undoubtedly, open access is one of the best tools used to ensure the broad dissemination of scholarship: SUP's top-downloaded book [Let sleeping dogs lie?](#) has had over 11,500 downloads since its release in October 2010. ANU e-press titles were downloaded over [four million times](#) in 2011.

Many researchers, [university administrators](#), librarians and governments believe that if the research has been funded by public money and carried out at a government-funded university, the results should be made available to the general public for free. In fact, many of research grant organisations make open access compulsory within a specific timeframe, for example the Scientific Council of the European Research Council (ERC), the US National Institutes of Health and the Australian Research Council (ARC). Earlier this year, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) released a statement [supporting open access mandate](#).

Numerous universities have adopted a similar policy (such as MIT, Harvard, University College London, Queensland University of Technology) and most tertiary institutions in the Western world including Australia now have institutional repositories which provide access to the research outputs of the institution's researchers.

Not surprisingly, the support for open access is not popular with commercial publishers, as the recently proposed [Research Works Act in the US](#) has shown.

The future

The Research Works Act and the recent [boycott of Elsevier](#) are part of a wider debate about the future of scholarly publishing and the ownership of research output, a debate that has divided university publishing in Australia.

In a report released on 9th November 2011, the Book Industry Strategy Group[1] [called for the government](#) to provide financial support of Australian \$10 million, matched by Australian \$6 million from the university sector, to establish a national university press network to facilitate a subsidy, infrastructure and marketing program to publish and disseminate Australian scholarly monographs.

The proposed network is supported by the four commercially driven university presses and relies on traditional print and distribution models used in trade publishing. It is over-costed and not sustainable in the long term. Moreover, the BISG's proposal entirely ignores the recent developments in the ecosystem of scholarly communication practices driven by policies requiring publications resulting from government-funded research to be available in open access mode.

The BISG's scheme contrasts with the model used by the e-presses, based on innovative and cost-effective production and distribution processes, and the ability of the internet to help with the low-cost and the widespread dissemination of knowledge. It is unquestionably the more efficient and successful way to publish and publicise the research output of Australian scholars.

I would argue it is also a more effective use of the government money. The funding could go towards supporting the dissemination of Australian scholarship and encouraging further research and expansion of knowledge rather than propping up commercially driven university press model.

It remains to be seen which model will win the government's support.

Nevertheless, there is space for both commercial and not-for-profit university publishing models to co-

exist in Australia.

The commercial university publishers with their economies of scale, highly developed distribution and marketing channels are placed well to publish books that can sell and bring a return on investment, books that are often described as 'trade academic' and written by scholars for the general readership.

While crossovers between monographs and textbooks for higher-level courses are not uncommon, textbooks *sensu stricto* are not recognised as scholarly output by HERDC. Tertiary textbook publishing in Australia remains the domain of educational publishers and operates according to different economic and publishing models.

In contrast, specialist monographs that fulfil HERDC requirements and make a valuable contribution to knowledge but have limited market potential are likely to remain the domain of not-for-profit publishers that can publish and distribute books at cost, whether using open access or print-on-demand. These presses not only offer a more economical way to maximise dissemination, visibility and impact of scholarship, but are also a better fit for scholarly communication with its culture of sharing and collaboration, and dedication to the advancement of knowledge.

In December 2011 several of the non-for-profit university publishers created a collective identity and collaboration platform called Australian University Publishing (AUP) in order to formalise the existing partnerships in the area of software development, operations and publishing workflows. Working together with libraries, IT departments and faculty, they are well placed to drive the development of emerging areas in scholarly communication and publishing in a sustainable way.

Note: This article gives the views of the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

Related posts:

1. [E-presses punch well above their weight: They are the future of scholarly monograph publishing](#)
2. [What comes after the Elsevier boycott? The answer might be found by following the 'Green' road to open access.](#)
3. [There is a pathetic lack of functionality in scholarly publishing. We must end for-profit publishing and allow libraries to make available the works of their scholars for all](#)
4. [Academics must be applauded for making a stand by boycotting Elsevier. It's time for librarians to join the conversation on the future of dissemination, but not join the boycott.](#)
5. [Five Minutes with Tim Gowers and Tyler Neylon: "The boycott has made Elsevier more concerned about its public image".](#)