

An Open Book: Launching a Library-Based Open Access Books Hosting Service

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Abstract

Edinburgh Diamond is a service, situated within Edinburgh University Library, that supports the publication of academic and student-led Diamond Open Access journals and books. This case study reviews the launch of our Open Access book hosting programme, and also our rebrand, looking at the timeline and challenges, and offering recommendations for those wishing to launch their own service.

Keywords: Diamond Open Access; Open Access Publishing; Library Publishing; Hosting Service; Open Access Books

1. Introduction

Edinburgh University Library launched a journal hosting service in 2009, initially to support two journals. The service has since grown into a portfolio of 19 journals and a handful of conference proceedings. The purpose of this case study is to review the 2021 launch of our book hosting service and our service rebrand to Edinburgh Diamond, looking at the reasons for launching, the timeline and challenges, and offering recommendations for those wishing to launch their own service.

2. Landscape

Academic publishing is rapidly evolving, and libraries are carving out their own space, taking up a significant position in this new landscape.

Deville et al. (2019) have identified that academic book publishing “stands at a crossroads” and describe two primary paths: one that is “broader and more well-trodden” where “a small number of large commercial publishers are seen by a majority of academics as leading arbiters of quality of reputation”, with high-priced print and digital books that place barriers in front of users, and the other, lesser-trodden path exploring a “collection of publishing operations” focussing on Open Access “in which markers of reputation and prestige are built not through techniques of market dominance and the invocation of tradition, but by a broad scholarly community, including academics, universities and libraries.” Edinburgh Diamond has taken the lesser-trodden path in its mission to enhance the university’s commitment to Open Access and provide a hosting solution for content that might otherwise fall through the cracks. Based on the Scholarly Communications Team, Edinburgh Diamond works with academics, staff and students to foster a community of Open Access advocates.

Developments in funding legislation for Open Access, such as Plan S and UKRI, are also on the radar of many librarians, academics and publishers. Creating a funder-compliant route for authors is one reason a library may launch a hosting or publishing service, although there has been growth in this area for some time. Adema and Stone (2017), in a report for JISC that reviewed new university presses and academic-led publishing, reported that “In the 21st century we are seeing a return to this traditional role of library as scholarly publisher.” In the UK specifically, library-based initiatives that offer hosting and/or publishing services include: Edinburgh Diamond (2009), the University of St Andrews Journal Hosting Service (2011), White Rose University Press (2016), Liverpool John Moores University Hosting Service (2017), and Scottish Universities Press (2022).

Plan S (2021), on developing Open Access book policies, state that “a decisive step towards the realisation of full Open Access needs to be taken now” and in 2021 published their five recommendations for Open Access academic books (which includes monographs, book chapters and edited collections). The five recommendations include ensuring authors retain the intellectual property to their work to allow the book to be made Open Access, having the work published under a Creative Commons license, and a cap of twelve months on embargo periods. Similarly, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a core funder in the UK, announced a policy in 2021 that mandated that all of their funded research must be published Open Access from 1 January 2024,

with a one-year embargo permitted if necessary. As per the Plan S guidelines, and with funding body policies in mind, Edinburgh Diamond publishes Diamond Open Access books and journals, uses Creative Commons licences, allows authors to retain copyright to their own work, and doesn't have embargo periods. The University of Edinburgh is continuously reviewing and increasing its commitment to open research in general, and launching this service, which provides a funder-compliant route, is another step in this direction.

Although there has been plenty of discussion around OA journal publishing, there is still a developing discourse around OA monograph and book publishing. When comparing different models, Mongeau (2018) said that: "As demonstrated by innovations in Open Access publishing of journal articles and textbooks, OA is advantageous in many respects" and that OA "ensures ready access to quality scholarship for academics and non-academics around the world, making it easier to use for teaching." However, there are higher production costs associated with monographs which can contribute to unsustainable business models (Mongeau, 2018). These considerations, along with the rising costs of e-textbooks, contributed towards the decision to establish the book hosting side of Edinburgh Diamond. The service was also created to provide an opportunity for academics to create and tailor textbooks to their courses at no cost to the student, regardless of how many new versions are released. This allows the academic to ensure that textbooks match their classes closely, and makes the process of revisions and updates simpler. Fathallah (2022) notes that Book Processing Charges (BPCs) "can be prohibitive to authors and institutions" and that this "sits at odds with the values-based models and systems of several leading OA publishers." Edinburgh Diamond is fully Diamond Open Access: there are no BPCs, submission fees or charges to access content. This is in line with the values of the service, ensuring that there is a viable, professional and well-rounded hosting solution for those who need it.

Research is becoming increasingly online-based, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Edinburgh Diamond caters to this growing trend. As Adema and Stone (2017) point out, "questions are beginning to arise about the long-term sustainability of print publication for scholarly monographs" because of ever-tightening library budgets. The service doesn't currently offer print options, owing to lack of resource, but it's important to note that print still has a lot of value, especially in areas of digital poverty. Openness doesn't

always extend to print editions, and there are risks in neglecting those without easy access to the internet or university libraries. As Wilson et al. (2019) point out, “Many libraries impose financial and sometimes security barriers on entry to buildings, limiting access to collections in print and other non-digital formats.” We can see, then, that although libraries promote Open Access in some ways, in others they remain closed. However, the restrictions that Open Access removes create opportunities for wider readership and greater scholarly impact (Collins et al., 2015). For example, Springer Nature (n.d) has reported that, on average, Open Access books have 2.4-times more citations, 10-times more downloads and 10-times more online mentions than non-Open Access books.

Although this is merely a condensed and incomplete snapshot of academic publishing as it stands, this ever-developing landscape continues to provide many reasons to develop and launch a book hosting service.

3. Getting Started

Launching our new book hosting service was led by academic demand. Academics were found to be publishing their own content on online sites, which aren’t integrated with academic publishing workflows or existing metadata systems. A core purpose of Edinburgh Diamond is to provide a platform that could ensure this important research didn’t get lost in the future owing to issues around lack of archiving and link rot and was instead hosting somewhere more easily integrated with Crossref – in order to allocate and resolve Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) – as well as indexers. We therefore identified Open Monograph Press (OMP) – open-source software from the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) – as the most suitable platform to achieve this, particularly as the system is very similar to Open Journals Systems (OJS), which is used for the journal side of the service. This also meant we could ensure that our branding was consistent across the platforms.

As with the journals side of the service, we decided to be open to all subject areas, removing any subject barriers for potential users. Using an extensive book proposal form, we check for quality and that there will be no legal issues, such as defamation, when hosting the content. Edinburgh Diamond doesn’t currently have a peer-review process in place for the books, other than the preliminary internal review. This will cause a barrier for indexing,

particularly for submissions to the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB), so the team are looking into how to be open and inclusive while maintaining high-quality standards.

4. Service Provision

The service is provided free of charge to academics, staff and students at the University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh Diamond does not define itself as a publisher, despite providing publishing services; this is because we have no responsibility for submission or peer-review management, nor copyediting or typesetting. Instead, we provide users with everything they need to publish Diamond Open Access books. Our support includes a hosting solution for books to have a home and permalink; ongoing technical and general support; platform upgrades and bug fixes; archiving and preservation of content; guidance with academic publishing processes; workflow training, ISBN allocation (ISBNs are purchased in bulk from Nielsen); book and chapter DOI allocation (the metadata for which we send to Crossref); indexing support, including help with finding and submitting to all the relevant databases; and annual reporting that includes metrics on usage, citations, downloads, readership and discoverability. This is not an exhaustive list, and is very similar to what we offer on the journals side of the service. A core difference is that journals users are taught how to use the OJS workflow system, which includes managing submissions, coordinating peer-review and copyediting, and uploading and publishing the typeset files. For book users, the final files are uploaded by the service team, so that editors do not have to learn how to use OMP for the upload of perhaps a single book, and the time spent training them to use the system can be better spent on getting the book online ourselves.

5. Timeline & Launch

Formal project planning began in 2020, when we realised a book hosting service could be of benefit to the university and its researchers. We were approached by an academic who had seen our journal site and asked if we had a book hosting solution. We also already offered ISBNs on the Scholarly Communications Team (where the service is based), so we knew there were

plenty of potential users already working on their own book projects without formal publishing arrangements in place. We began planning the project and determining what we needed. The tech team requested the server required for the OMP setup in January 2021, but came across issues with databases installation and firewalls, which took multiple months to resolve. These issues were specific to the OMP installation as it is hosted on an entirely separate server to our OJS. In April 2021 we were able to upload OMP to the server, set up the database, define the virtual host for the OMP URL, complete the OMP configuration and install OMP. We added the domain to the load balancer and generated the SSL certificate. Although we then had both a test site and a live site ready, we had to remove these in May 2021 because of new security measures put in place. We had the site back up in July and began work on setting up the various pages, branding the site, and finalising documentation for end users. We were finally ready to launch in September, and chose to formally launch during the Open Access week in October 2021. We had a relatively small launch with one book, *Fundamentals of Music Theory*, which is a collaborative e-textbook project by staff and students of the Reid School of Music and the University's Open Educational Resources (OER) service. Adema and Stone (2017) stated that "Open access is beginning to gain traction as a financially viable model that could potentially increase readership", and indeed *Fundamentals of Music Theory* has had over 6,000 downloads since publication (as of January 2023), with users located around the world and referred from multiple sources. We decided to launch with one book, instead of waiting to commission more, as we had already experienced significant delays and thought we would be able to engage more potential users once we had a site for people to look at and a successful book for illustrative purposes. This proved to be a successful strategy, and we have since published six more books – a cookbook, an edited collection, two reports, two colouring books – with more books and collaborative projects in the pipeline.

6. Challenges

6.1. Technical Issues

The first challenge was related to the technical issues mentioned in section 5. Service development requires input and time from multiple teams who are busy juggling multiple projects and priorities. We ended up launching

around nine months later than we had originally hoped to, but experienced no negative consequences.

6.2. Incentivising

Although we don't see our role as convincing people that our route is better than traditional routes, we do want to ensure that academics, staff and students who would benefit from using our service (a) know about the service and (b) see a fully supported and well-rounded service, which may incentivise them towards Diamond Open Access as a realistic and achievable option. There are many benefits to using our service: we provide a route for those who wish to fully engage in Diamond Open Access publishing and host niche subject areas which may not be picked up by traditional publishers due to lack of commercial viability.

6.3. Quality Perception

There is still work to do in overcoming deeply ingrained community perceptions of Open Access content as inherently lesser quality. In their report on building a roadmap for Open Access monographs, Adema (2019) notes that "Author engagement is key to the success of OA for monographs. However, there is evidence to show that there is still a lot of mistrust and misinformation surrounding OA for monographs from many authors and their learned societies." The key areas they identified as being of concern to authors are:

- Quality and prestige
- Book Processing Charges and funding for OA monographs
- Derivatives and licences for OA books
- OA trade books and theses
- Marketing and exposure.

Our approach to combat these issues is to ensure that the service is well-supported to help create a sustainable and viable publishing route. Edinburgh Diamond does this by:

- Including a publication ethics statement for our users to follow, guided by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

- Creating policies in areas including digital preservation, open access, and copyright
- Using Creative Commons license
- Submitting the books for indexing as widely as possible to enhance discoverability, citations and downloads (an area of activity which is currently being developed by the team)
- Providing a marketing support pack, to provide editors and editorial boards with ideas for traditional and social media marketing.

6.4. Sustainability

Sustainability is an issue for many hosting services. Edinburgh Diamond is funded through the library's core budget, which covers the expenses for staff salaries as well as memberships to various professional organisations including Crossref (<https://www.crossref.org/>), OASPA (<https://oaspa.org/>), ALPSP (<https://www.alpssp.org/>), and CLOCKSS (<https://clockss.org/>). The current dedicated staffing level for Edinburgh Diamond comprises 1.4 FTE positions split between publishing support (1.0 FTE) and technical development (0.2 FTE). An additional 0.2 FTE management role oversees the service.

Between the salaries, memberships, infrastructure, and other expenses such as conference attendance, the overall service expenditure is approximately £71,000 per annum, although this figure fluctuates annually depending upon the number of articles published, etc., and does not include indirect costs, like space/estates and hardware. The salaries are set, but we require permission from the senior management team to make other investments. The main rationale for the Library to fund our Diamond Open Access service is to contribute to the University of Edinburgh's growing commitment to Open Research, and as the team expands funding will need to be reviewed to determine the source of income. As the service grows, the team will need to ensure budgets are in line with the needs and that sustainable growth can be achieved, ensuring the service is fit for purpose. The Edinburgh Diamond team are currently exploring business strategies for sustainable growth.

Edinburgh Diamond also believes that sustainability comes from cross-institutional teamwork. As such, we share all of our resources on our website (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/research-support/edinburgh-diamond/resources>).

7. Promoting the Service

Promoting the service was initially easier than it could have been as we had some networks in place due to our journal hosting service. We emailed the journal editors to inform them about the new aspect of the service to (a) ask them to help promote within their networks and (b) see if they had any relevant projects. We also liaised with internal colleagues in the library, including Academic Liaison Librarians, who promote the service through their own channels. We updated our internal webpages and try to link to the Edinburgh Diamond pages from as many relevant university pages as possible (although there are a lot, so this is ongoing!). Finally, we use and will continue to use word-of-mouth messaging, for example when attending internal and external events.

8. User Feedback

It's important to us to gather user feedback as we grow the service, to ensure we identify any issues along the way. We have included some feedback here from some of our OMP users, which demonstrates why they used our service and what they thought of the OMP system itself:

- “The new ebook platform will represent another step in the University’s commitment to open knowledge, Open Access and open education and will help the University achieve its vision to share our knowledge and make the world a better place.”
- “I hope this service will be a valuable first step in enabling the University to shift towards the use of open textbooks, benefiting the University by reducing textbook costs, benefiting staff by providing access to easily customisable open textbooks, and benefiting students by providing free, high-quality digital learning materials.”
- “Moving to OMP significantly increased the visibility and usage of our online publications. Readers are happy with the interface, which was customised to meet our needs, and we save time on processes that are automated through various plugins.”
- “OMP looked very flexible and I like the way it can accommodate a wide range of formats. The downside is having to generate all the different formats manually (see below), which may be a barrier to some colleagues using the service.”

Feedback has demonstrated that, overall, users are pleased with the service provided and the system itself. We can also see that a core reason for using our service was to engage in Open Access and the benefits that a book hosting service brings to the university and its staff and students, which very much aligns with our reasons for launching the book service in the first place. Users also noted that a downside of the service was having to manually generate different file formats – such as PDF, EPUB, HTML, XML – themselves. Edinburgh Diamond does not currently offer file format creation due to lack of resource, but it is something we try to support through guidance as much as possible. There are currently no book printing options, as we don't have the resource to manage this. However, the team are looking into print-on-demand (POD) options for readers who wish to obtain a physical copy, as well as how this could be managed.

9. The Future

Looking to the future, we will continue to develop our service strategy and policies to ensure we are always compliant with evolving industry standards as well as relevant funding legislation. We will continue to promote and grow Edinburgh Diamond so that more people are aware of the research they can freely access, and the service they can benefit from. This will include making the books as discoverable as possible by submitting them to various indexing databases. We will also seek further opportunities for involvement in teaching and learning so that the service, as it grows, becomes tailored to academic and student requirements. And finally, we will gather more feedback, again to grow the service according to user need.

In terms of outreach, it is important to tie ourselves in with initiatives that also focus on community-ownership within open publishing. Team members have been involved with the new Open Access Journal Toolkit from the DOAJ and Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), the Library Publishing Curriculum, a Rights Retention Policy, and the new ALPSP Library Publishing Special Interest Group (SIG).

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

The launch of our book hosting service has been a success. We have already had thousands of downloads and an abundance of positive feedback (from

the community, internal colleagues and users). We advise engaging your colleagues early on: services like this are often run by one or two people, and gathering feedback and advice along the way would be beneficial. The added bonus of having conversations with your fellow librarians, academics, researchers and students is that you won't be overly prescriptive with your service and instead ensure it is shaped by the requirements and demand.

Before you launch, we recommend getting all your policies, forms and user guides in place – although be prepared for elements you may have forgotten! Also, be clear about your mission and strategy. Why are you launching this service and who will it benefit? This is important because running such a service requires funding and you need to be able to demonstrate its importance to staff and students. Also, don't feel the need to launch with a huge portfolio; one or two key titles can be enough to draw people in.

A service such as this requires people with publishing and tech expertise, as journal and book editors often require guidance when it comes to areas such as funding legislation, publishing best practice and indexing. The tech expertise is a given considering your service will require someone to develop and maintain an OMP installation, server, upgrades and everything else. We found OMP really intuitive to use and particularly useful if you know OJS already. The only downsides are that there is no QuickSubmit plugin (allowing you to put books on without formally submitting them) and no Crossref metadata plugin (meaning you have to manually create xml metadata for the DOIs). Hopefully these plugins will become part of the core package in the future.

All of the above is important to ensure that your service is a success and that your users are fully supported, which incentivises them to choose Diamond Open Access.

We can assure you that it can be worthwhile taking the plunge, braving that lesser-trodden path, and the more of us that do so, the wider and more easily walkable it will be for others.

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