



Shaping the Future of Monograph Publishing in the Liberal Arts

Results of a survey to Oberlin Group Faculty

28th January 2014

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Publishing Experience

- **The majority of respondents' recent publishing activity relates to journal articles, followed by book chapters and then books (see section 5.1).**
 - 83% have published at least one article; over half at least one book chapter, and over a third at least one book.
- **Just over half have not published a book within the last five years; a quarter of respondents have published one book (see section 5.2).**
 - Science scholars are less likely to have published a book while scholars in arts and humanities are publishing more books.
- **Arts and humanities books take longest to find a publisher.**
 - Science scholars publish less books but are most likely to find a publisher within 3 months (see section 5.2)
- **Once a publisher has been sourced, the majority of books are slow to publish.**
 - Arts and humanities books taking longest, three quarters take longer than 13 months (see section 5.2).
- **Faculty are currently most dissatisfied with pricing of their work, speed of publishing and remuneration for their work (see section 5.3).**
 - Highest satisfaction is with production quality, peer review quality and acceptance criteria, with over half of respondents very or somewhat satisfied.
- **Improvements for book publishing suggested by faculty (see section 5.3):**
 - **Financial improvements:** book pricing, royalty payments, cost of author copies, support for images, institutional support for the time cost involved in writing;
 - **Quality concerns:** improved editing, quality control, development editor input, permissions assistance, peer review processes and improved communication;
 - **Distribution and accessibility:** wider distribution, less copyright restrictions, license fair use terms, greater online availability;
 - **Speed to publication:** initial acceptance decisions, lags in communication, improvements in chasing co-authors, peer review processes;
 - **Author support:** Support from institution during the writing process, experienced editorial support from publisher, pre-publication peer support;
 - **Marketing expertise:** better market feedback and greater book promotion.

- **Just under 25% of respondents are very interested in publishing a short-form book and 45% are quite interested (see Section 5.4).**

1.2 Access to Scholarship for Teaching and Research

- **Almost three quarters of respondents are either very or somewhat satisfied with book access through their institution's library (see section 6.1).**
 - Overall, a third are using books from the library either daily or weekly. Amongst arts and humanities faculty this rises to 45% yet as a group, they are marginally less satisfied with access than others.
- **For research and teaching, journal articles via library subscriptions and books purchased personally are used by 70% of respondents frequently (see section 6.2).**
 - Least used are books freely available online (21% never use) and articles from personally subscribed to journals (23% never use).
- **Half of all respondents perceive free (non-journal) online content as of lower quality than books supplied through their library (see section 6.2)**
 - A large number answered "don't know" which may point to confusion about quality and authority in this rapidly expanding area.
- **There is support for a new publishing model with 39% "very likely" to use open access scholarly books (see Section 6.3).**
 - Within arts and humanities, the figure is higher with half of respondents "very likely". In contrast, almost a third of scientists answer that they are "not very likely" to use such resources. This mirrors the trend to use articles rather than books in science, and may not be a comment on open access per se.
 - The resounding message from comments solicited was that quality is key, from peer review through to the finished product. Additionally, the importance of prestige conferred on a book by a well-thought of and established publisher.
- **The current full-length monograph format is voted as either very or quite satisfactory by the majority of respondents (c. 80%). (See Section 6.4).**
 - Reasons for dissatisfaction include unsuitability for teaching, excessive length, high prices and limitations due to format or publisher license terms.

1.3 Publications and Career

- **Key reasons for book publishing**, in order of importance, are: developing research, communicating with other scholars, and for tenure/promotion (see section 7.1).
- **When considering where to publish their work, responses demonstrate the prevalence of a traditional view of book publishing.** Almost half ranked prestige of the publisher as most important. Quality of editorial support came next. Least important were royalty payments (see section 7.2).
- **90% of faculty feel publications play an important role for tenure and promotion.** This is slightly lower for science scholars. A number of comments point out that it is journal articles – not books - that truly count here (see section 7.3).
- **When considering what counts most for tenure and promotion**, almost 90% rank the quality of scholarship as important. Three quarters feel that the reputation of the publisher is important. Alternative metrics were ranked as least important (see section 7.3).
- **“Top 5” publishers mentioned for each specialty: (See section 7.4)**
Arts and humanities: Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Duke, Chicago
Social sciences: Oxford, Cambridge, Chicago, California, Harvard
*Sciences/Mathematics: Elsevier, Springer, Nature, Oxford, Wiley
* *Lots of journals mentioned*

1.4 New Publishing Initiatives

- **Around 50% of respondents were either positive or strongly positive about newer publishing initiatives but continue to see greatest value in traditional processes (see section 8.0).**
- Traditional book publishing features all rank of high importance whilst newer innovations are not seen as key
- **Publishing features ranking most important** are: high quality peer review, excellent editorial support and the reputation of people and/or institutions associated with the publishing venture. Almost all respondents ranked these as either very or somewhat important (see section 8.1).

- **Publishing features ranking least important** are: update functionality, innovative tools to encourage conversations about research, and the option to receive community feedback on a work in progress (**see section 8.1**).
- **There is enthusiasm about publishing with a new OA press** with 43% answering yes and a further 40% answering maybe. This was mirrored across tenured and untenured respondents (**see section 8.2**).

2.0 Research Objectives

At the end of 2013, TBI Communications undertook research on behalf of the Oberlin Group, an organization comprised of selective, top-ranked liberal arts colleges in the United States, to gather member institution faculty views on current book publishing activity, and to assess interest in new, more open forms of publishing that might better support scholarship. The key research objectives were to assess whether authors would be likely to support a new OA Press by submitting their work; and to understand their key motivations in selecting publication outlets.

This is the first phase of a two-part research project. Phase two will survey a wider group of faculty and enable us to compare and contrast findings with Oberlin Group faculty.

3.0 Research Method

An anonymous online questionnaire was used to capture faculty views. The survey link was circulated by Oberlin Group librarians to faculty within their institutions.

Filters have been applied during survey analysis to look for trend differences amongst different respondent groups. Where it makes sense, commentary on trend variances is made within a section.

Where specific disciplines are not mentioned, references to *areas of specialty* refer to the specialities respondents were asked to classify themselves under: Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences or Mathematics. Sciences and Mathematics have been collated into one group for the purposes of survey analysis and may be referred to as “Science”.

4.0 Respondent Profile

There were 626 respondents who gave informed consent and filled in an anonymous questionnaire. The research complies with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.

Not all respondents answered every question. Results in each section indicate the number of respondents who are represented.

99% were from a Liberal Arts College. Areas of Speciality are shown in the following table.

Area of Speciality	% response	No. survey responses
Arts and Humanities	43%	179
Social Sciences	29%	120
Sciences	21%	87
Mathematics	4%	18
Other (please specify)	3%	14

Answered question 418

Skipped question 208

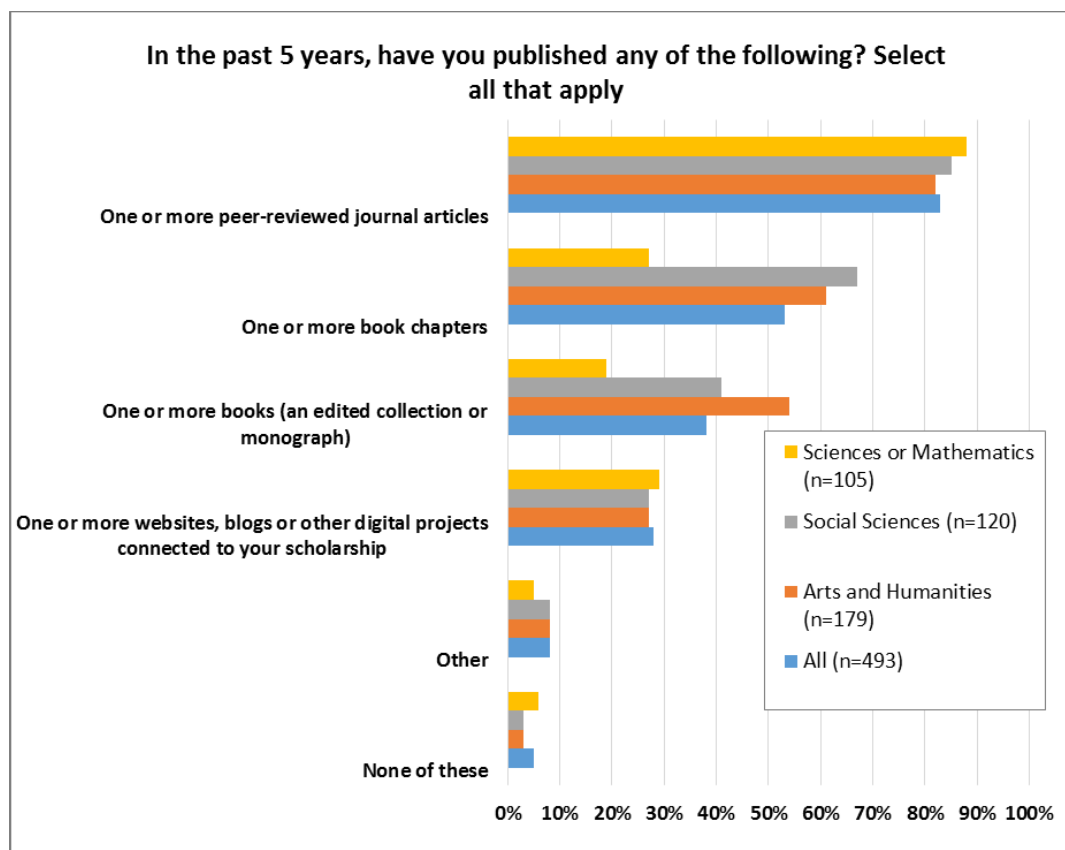
Most of those selecting *Other* classified themselves as Interdisciplinary. Psychology, Education. Librarianship also featured. The speciality breakdown is very similar when filtering on those who have tenure.

5.0 Publishing Experience

5.1 Publication Outlets

The graph below shows how respondent publication outlets overall compare to the breakdown for each speciality.

When looking at results for all respondents, the majority of publishing activity is of journal articles (83% of all respondents). Just over half of all respondents had published one or more book chapters and over a third (38%) had published one or more books. Just under a third had published digitally in another format connected to their scholarship.



There are variations when results are filtered by specialty:

- Science scholars are far less active in book or book chapter publishing than the other specialties
- Only the Science specialty sees digital publishing outweigh book or book chapter publishing

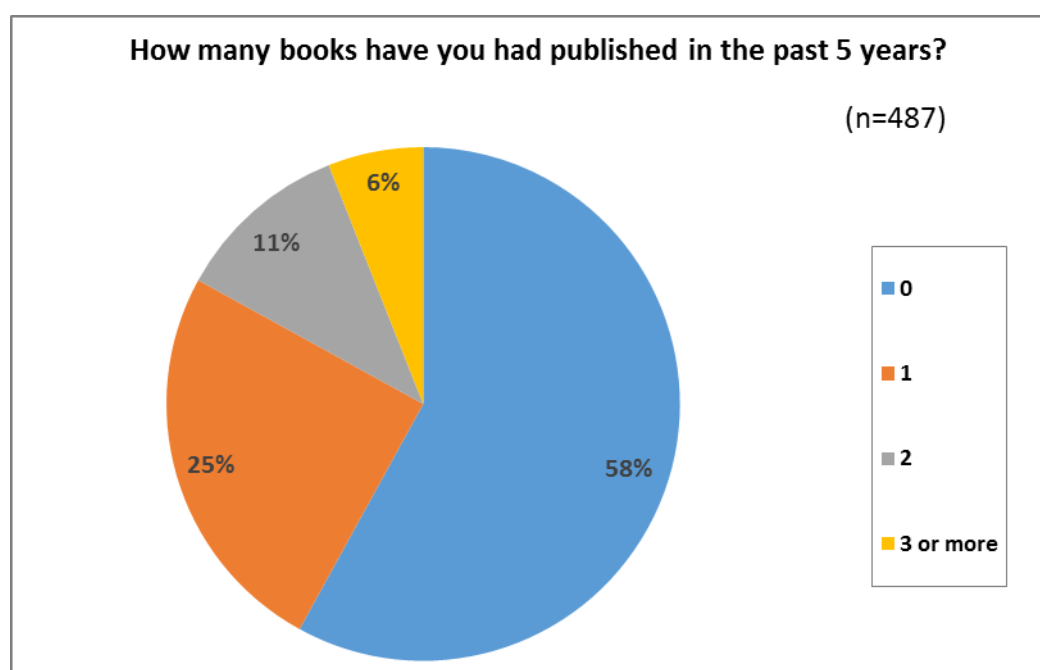
- Social Scientists are more likely to have published a book chapter than other specialties
- Arts and Humanities scholars are more likely to have published a book than other specialties.

The activity mentioned by those who chose “*Other*” as an option in the question shows how writing time is spent beyond the most common outlets. 39 respondents left a comment. Most common was **book reviews** followed by **conference papers**, **non-peer-reviewed articles**, and **journal involvement** of an editorial nature. Mentioned to a lesser extent were encyclopaedia or dictionary entries and creative or journalistic output including plays, stories, written journalism and documentary film.

5.2 Book Publishing Practice

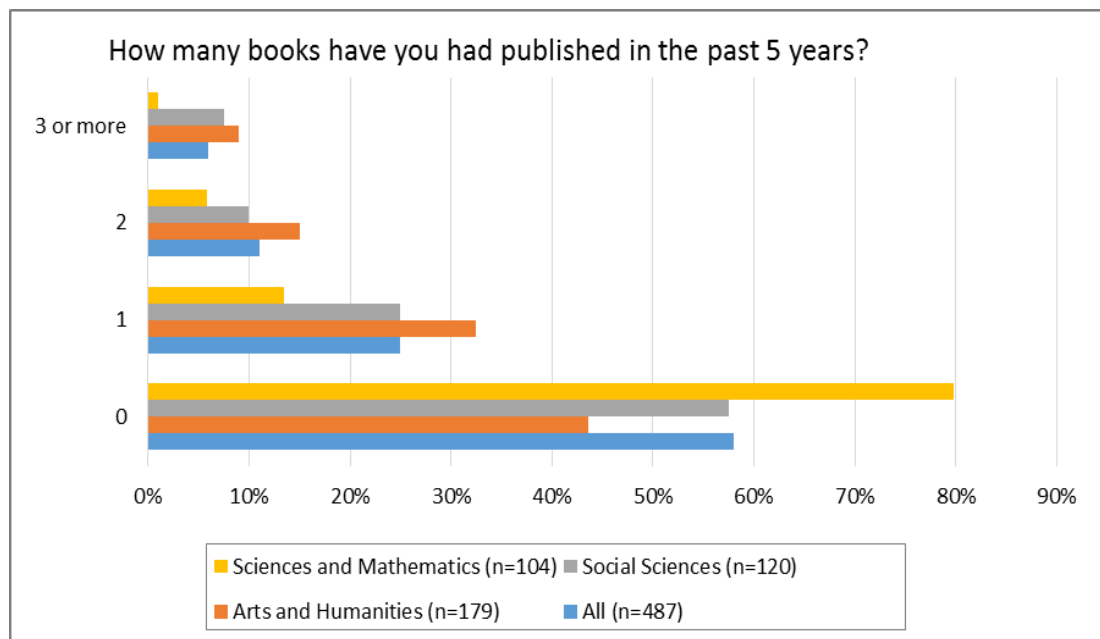
Number of books published in the past 5 years

Across all respondents, just over half had not published a book. A quarter had published one book, 11% had published two and 6% had published three or more books.



The bar chart below compares publishing activity of all respondents with the disciplinary specialties.

Those in **science** are **less likely** to have published a book.
 Those in **arts and humanities** are publishing **more books**.



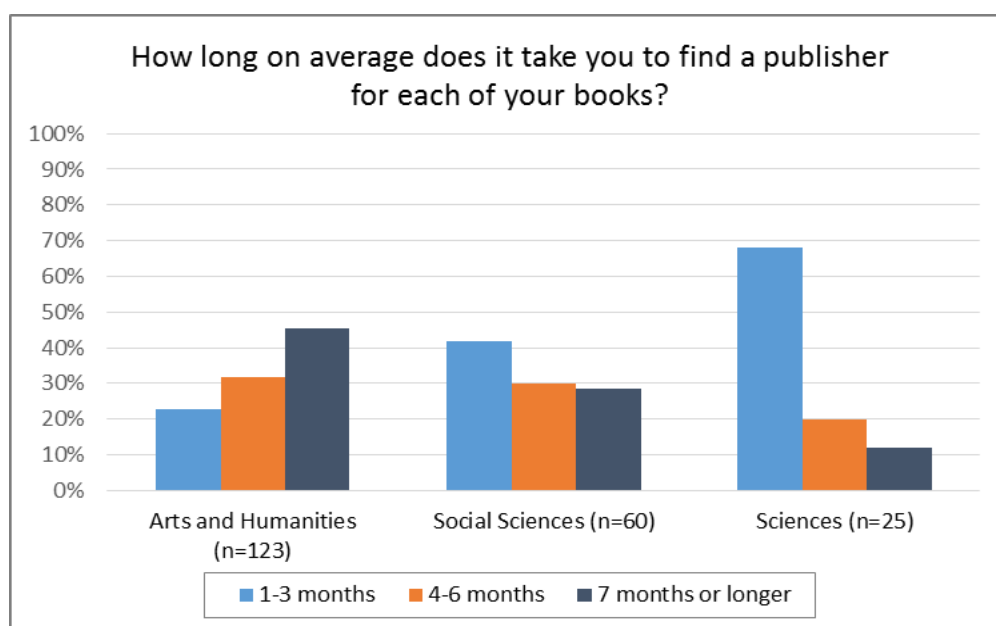
Length of time to find a book publisher

Half of respondents chose *not applicable*. Of the remainder, there is a fairly even distribution across the three options with a slight majority answering 7+ months. There are no clear conclusions here - the process of securing a publisher can be quick or slow.

Length of time	% response	No. survey responses
1-3 months	18%	83
4-6 months	15%	70
7 months or longer	18%	87
Not applicable	50%	233
TOTAL		473

The following breakdown by speciality with respondents answering 'not applicable' removed shows that arts and humanities scholars are taking longer to find a

publisher. Science scholars who do publish, most often find a publisher within 3 months.

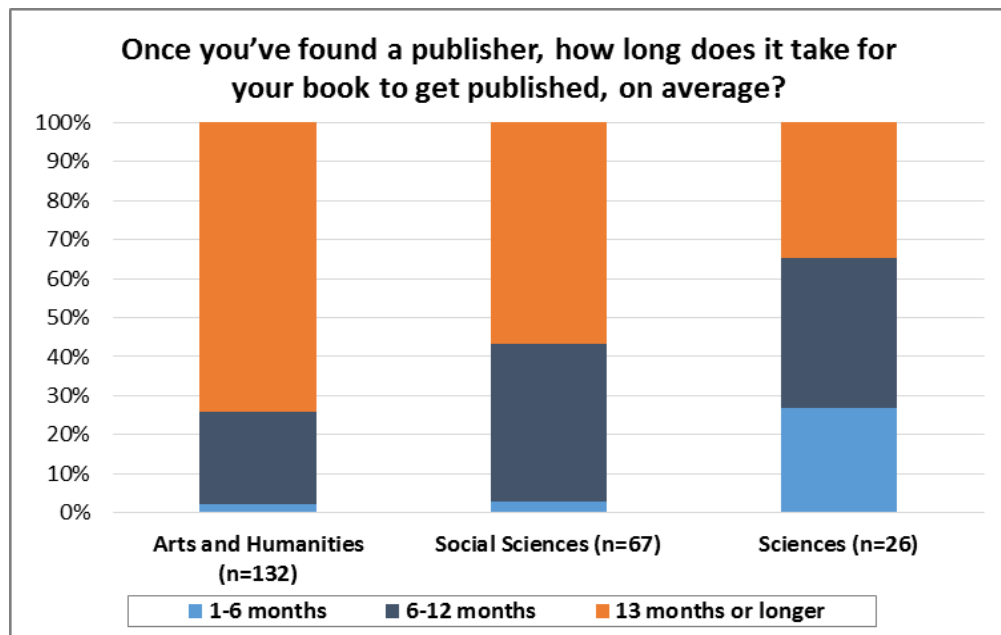


Length of time taken for a book to get published once a publisher has been found:

Length of time	% response	No. survey responses
1-6 months	3%	14
6-12 months	17%	79
13 months or longer	34%	164
Not applicable	50%	218
TOTAL		475

Almost half answered not applicable. Of the 259 others, the majority are experiencing slow publication with just 3% seeing their book published within 6 months.

The picture changes once the ‘not applicable data’ is removed and responses are broken down by specialty. Arts and humanities books are taking longest to get published; sciences are more evenly split amongst the three timeframes.



Volume of books declined by publishers in the last 5 years:

Books Declined	% response	No. survey responses
0	42.5%	203
1 or 2	10%	47
3 to 5	1%	3
6 or more	0.5%	2
None submitted	46%	222
Total		477

Almost half of respondents had not submitted a book. Of the remaining 255, the majority (80%) had not had a book declined. This trend holds true across the specialties and whether or not the author has tenure.

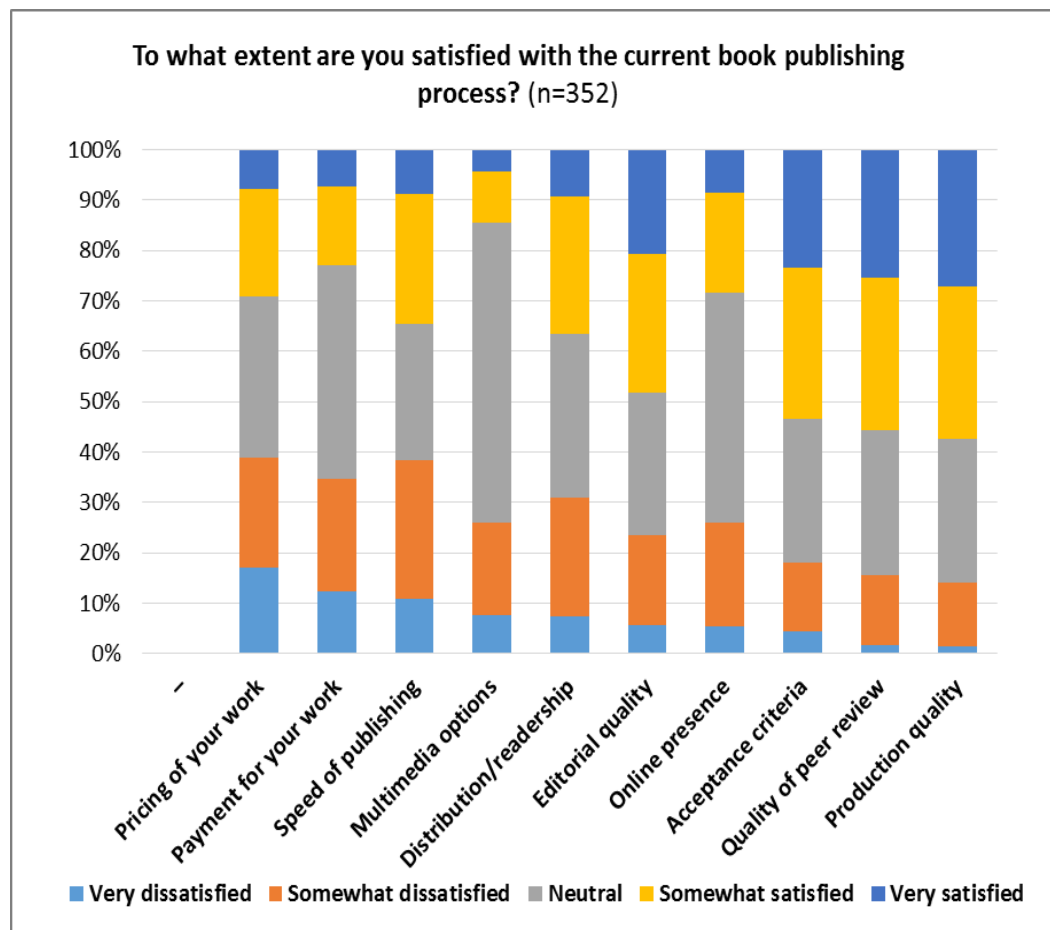
5.3 Views on Book Publishing

Satisfaction with the current book publishing process

Highest dissatisfaction is with **pricing of work** with 39% respondents either very or somewhat dissatisfied. Just behind is **speed of publishing** at 38% dissatisfied. Next, **payment for their work** left 35% of respondents dissatisfied.

Highest satisfaction was registered on **production quality** with 57% of respondents either somewhat or very satisfied, followed by **quality of peer review** with 56% satisfied. Over half were also satisfied with **acceptance criteria**.

A high neutral score of 60% was registered for satisfaction with multimedia options. It is possible that there is lack of knowledge or engagement here. Just under half were neutral about online presence also.



What do scholars want to see improved relating to their experience of getting their books published?

There were 109 responses to this free text question. The improvements suggested are grouped into themes below and ordered by popularity.

Financial concerns are the most frequently cited theme and relate to both author and reader. It is felt that highly priced books impact negatively on purchase and accessibility. For the author, low royalty payments, the cost of author's own copies, high print-on-demand costs, lack of support for inclusion of images, and the time cost involved in writing are all cited.

"The pricing puts the book beyond the reach of all but libraries, and so far I've made less than a dollar royalty from the 250 copies purchased."

Quality concerns are the next most commonly recurring theme. These break down into a desire for improved editing at all stages, better quality control in print and digital publications enabling a superior finished product, increased development editor input, more permissions assistance and support, better peer review processes, more access to editors and improved communication about changes.

"Publishers are very overworked."

Distribution and accessibility improvements in both print and online are sought. Wider distribution including better availability to the public, more library purchasing and both paperback and e-book versioning are mentioned. Accessibility would be improved by less copyright restrictions, a relaxation of license 'fair use' interpretations by publishers, greater online availability and lower pricing enabling more readers to purchase books. There are just a couple of open access advocates evident but online availability which allows for updating is popular.

Speed to publication is causing concerns. The speed of the whole process was lamented by many but particularly, it was felt:

- initial acceptance decisions are taking too long
- there are problematic lags in communication once a project is underway
- publishers must improve the chasing of slow co-authors
- slow peer review processes are a headache

"For me, the process has been effective, but excruciatingly slow."

Author support for a number of aspects of book publishing was raised. Support from the author's institution during the writing process and experienced and specialist

editorial support from the publisher would help. Pre-publication peer support in the form of writing groups, pre-publication consultations, project development, and proposal writing was also raised. Improved communication between author and publisher would be helpful also.

Marketing expertise and input are sought with better market feedback and greater book promotion.

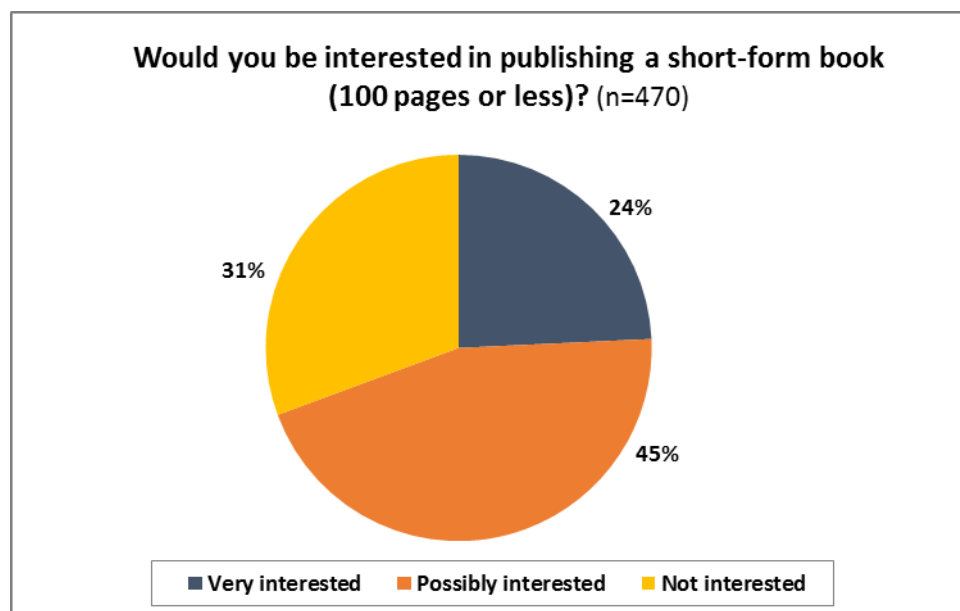
Finally, the issue of book publication conferring professional credentials raised interesting views, although only referred to by two respondents. One respondent suggested that “any online publication must contribute to gaining tenure and promotion” whilst another stated “Book publishing is shrinking. For the sake of young scholars we need to find other standards for hiring, promotion and tenure.”

The respondent’s quote below goes some way to summing up views.

“It would be great if the process were speedier, the on-demand reprints after first editions didn't cost so much, and if there were still real editors left on the planet.”

5.4 Short-Form Book Publishing Attitudes

Interest in publishing a short-form book:



Just under a quarter of respondents declared themselves **very interested**. Of these, just over half chose to comment (n=65). This group were familiar with the concept – either for current projects being worked on, past books they have published, for introduction or foundation levels they could foresee, for teaching purposes or because they felt often traditional monographs are unnecessarily over-long. Oxford’s “A brief Introduction to...” series, Palgrave “Pivots” and a series entitled “Short Cuts” were all mentioned.

“As long as I am able to present all my ideas in a succinct manner, I don't mind working on a shorter book as opposed to longer books.”

The majority of respondents (45%) answered that they were **possibly interested**. Of these almost half commented (n=99). Most were positive, intrigued or interested if it was felt to fit the project in question, was of high quality and could find a readership. Some could see value in this format for teaching undergraduates or as a textbook or manual. On the negative side, there was concern about a lack of positive impact on gaining tenure, the format being too short or being undistinguishable from an article.

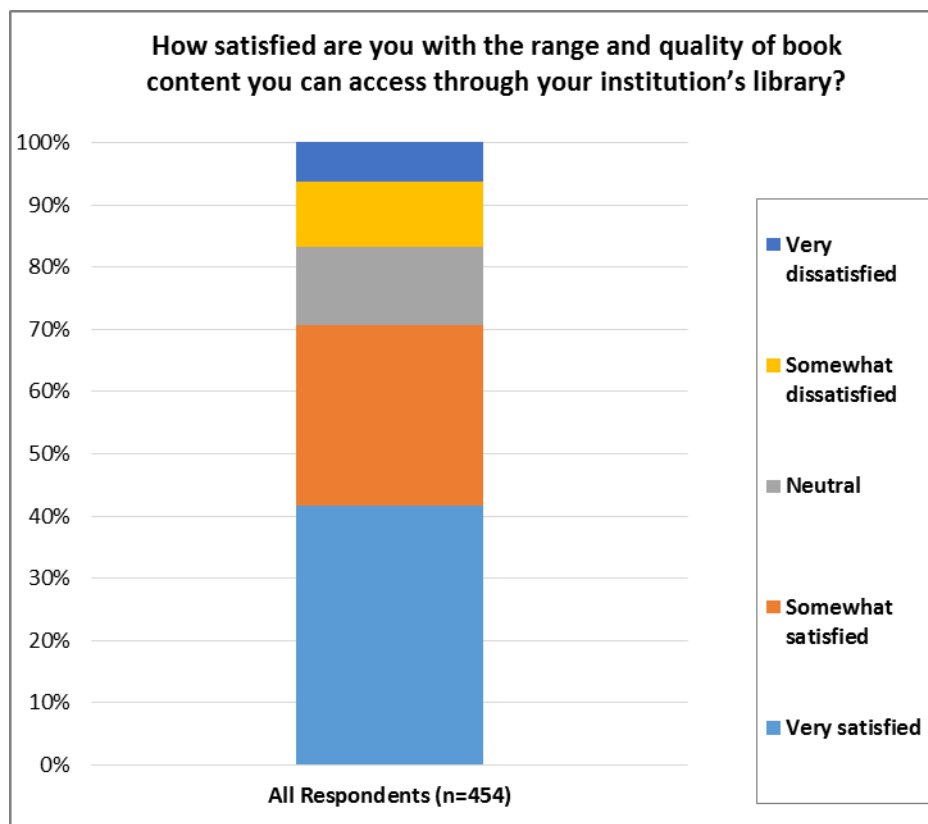
Just under a third declared themselves **not interested** in publishing in short form. Comments (n=57) and views expressed were a mixture of disdain for the format with a preference for traditional books, a lack appropriateness in the respondent’s field (where articles or longer length books are required), an inability to see a point if this form was “no good for tenure”.

“Not interested, because this would not be favorably evaluated in my field -- it would not help me to get tenure or otherwise move ahead.”

6.0 Access to Scholarship for Teaching and Research

6.1 Book access through the institutional library: views and practice

Are scholars satisfied with the range and quality of book content they can access through their institution's library?



Almost three quarters are either **very or somewhat satisfied** with book access through their institution's library. The distribution of responses for tenured respondents was broadly the same as was the distribution for scholars from each of the specialties: arts and humanities; social sciences; science and mathematics. Arts and humanities scholars were marginally less satisfied with access.

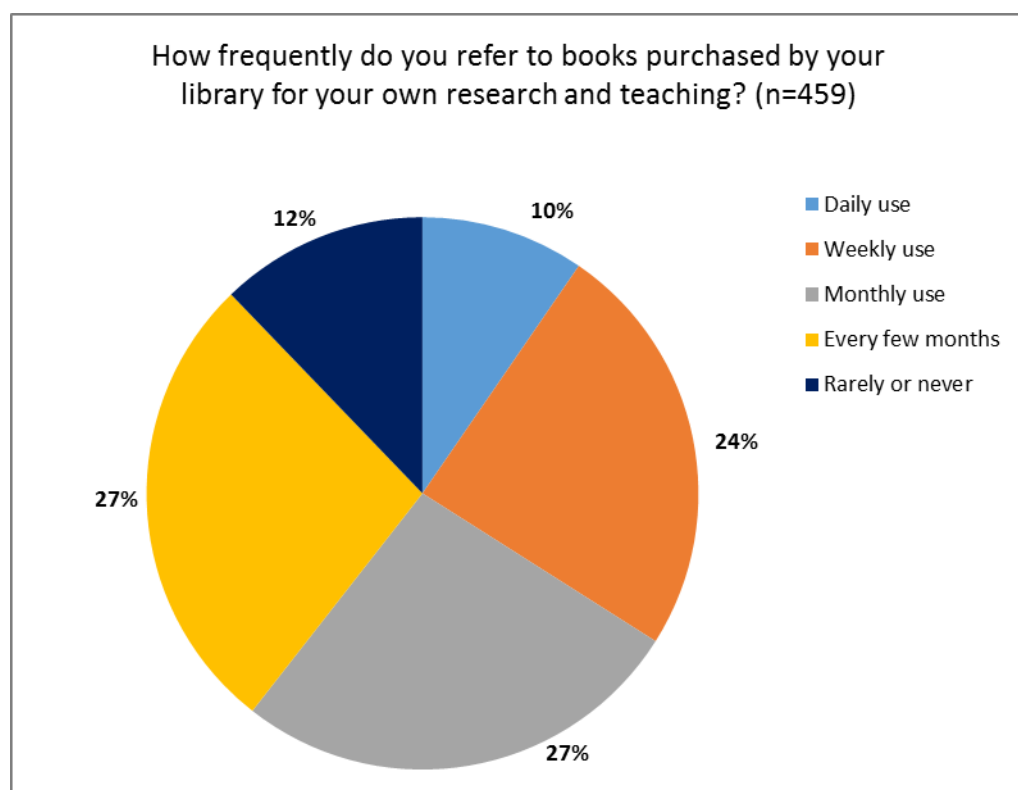
Those answering very satisfied were very complimentary about their own library, interlibrary loan services, local consortia purchasing and library staff.

Those who were less satisfied wanted **more e-book availability** (conversely some had “not embraced e-books”), or had specialized research interests that their own library was unable to serve. There was one complaint about lack of recently published book availability and one that collections are geared towards undergraduates, not advanced researchers.

Reference to books purchased by scholar’s own institutional library for research and teaching.

A third of respondents are using books from the library frequently, either daily or weekly with another 27% citing monthly use. 12% rarely or never use books from their library.

The results for tenured professors was almost identical. When filtering by specialty, only the arts and humanities group showed slightly higher frequency of usage, with 45% using books from their library either daily or monthly.



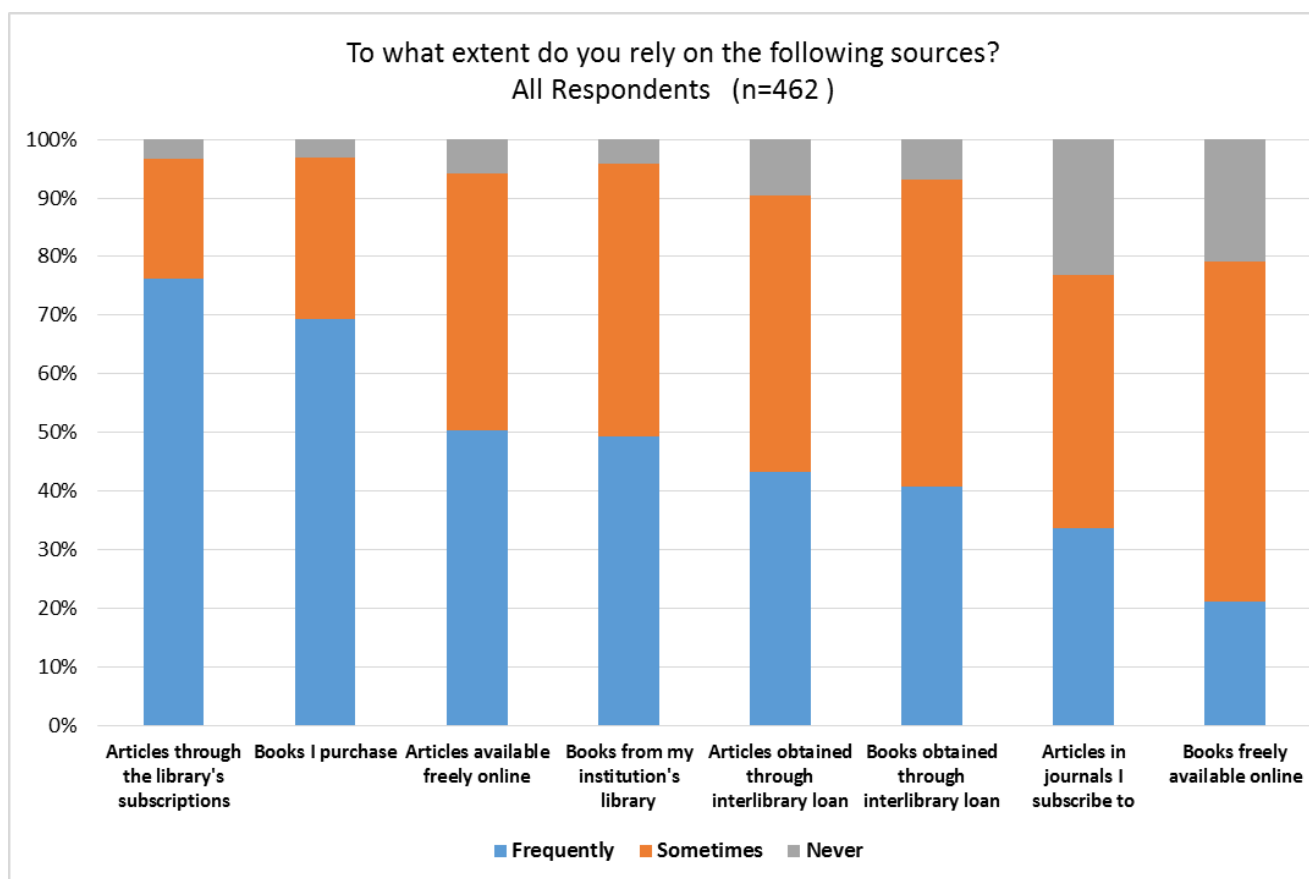
6.2 Accessing scholarship: traditional and non-traditional practice

Sources used for research and teaching.

Overall, **most frequently used** sources are articles through library subscriptions (75% of respondents are frequent users), books purchased personally (70% of respondents are frequent users), articles freely available online (50% frequent users), and books from the institution's library (49% of respondents frequent users).

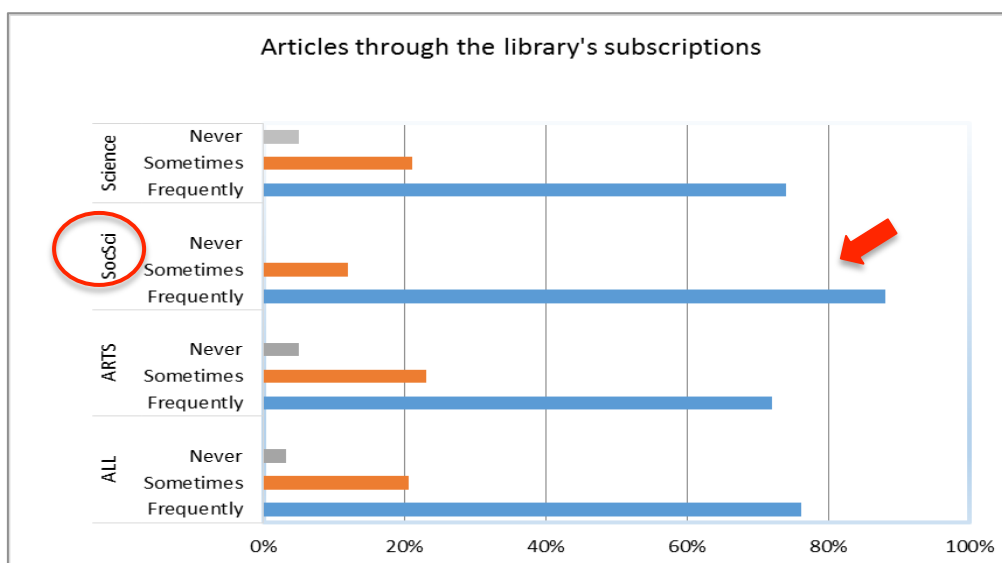
Overall, **least used** are books freely available online (21% of respondents never use) and articles from personally subscribed to journals (23% never use).

As journals have long been online and are mostly available through well-organized routes, we may not be surprised to see greater use of these than of the relatively recent online book. Similarly, with so many journals now available online through "big deals", individual personal subscriptions have fallen across the industry.

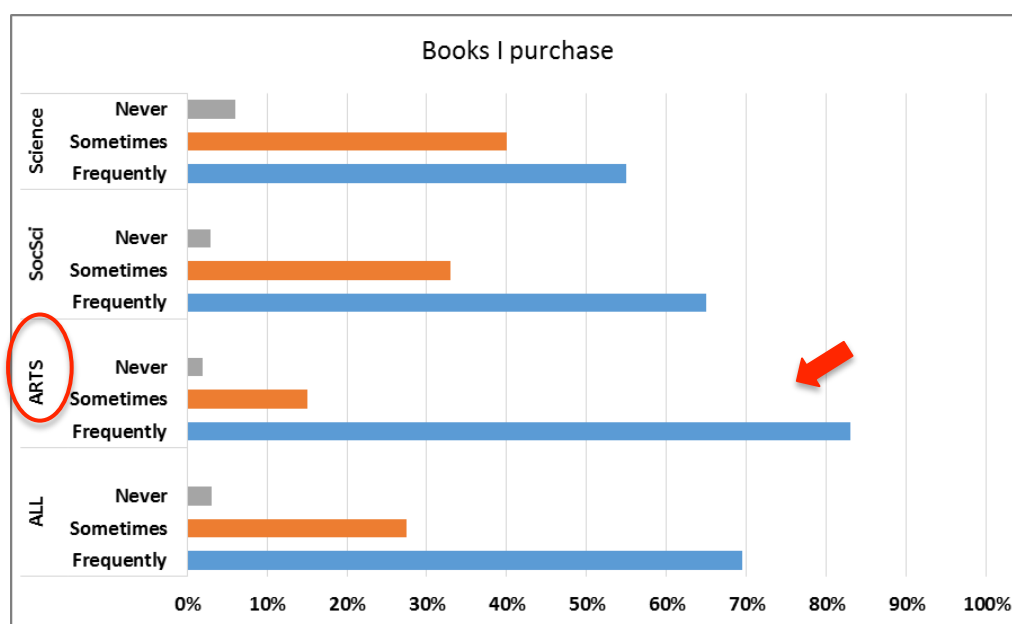


Trend Variations across subject areas.

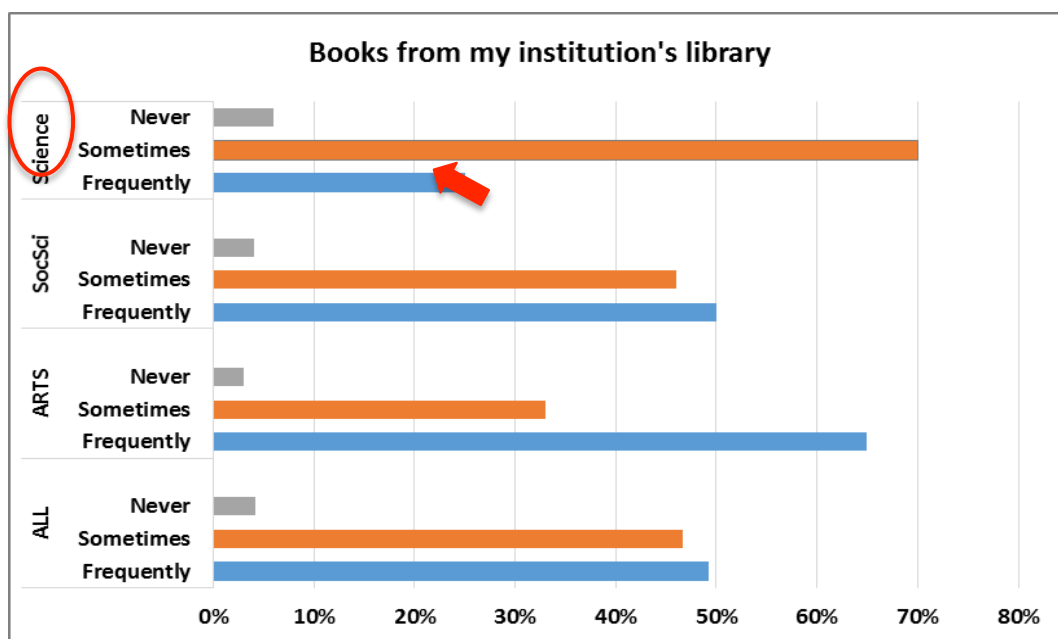
- Social Scientists are much more likely to be frequent users of articles through library subscriptions, They are also greater users of their own journal subscriptions than other groups.



Arts and humanities scholars frequently use more of their own purchased books and books from their own library and via interlibrary loan than other groups.



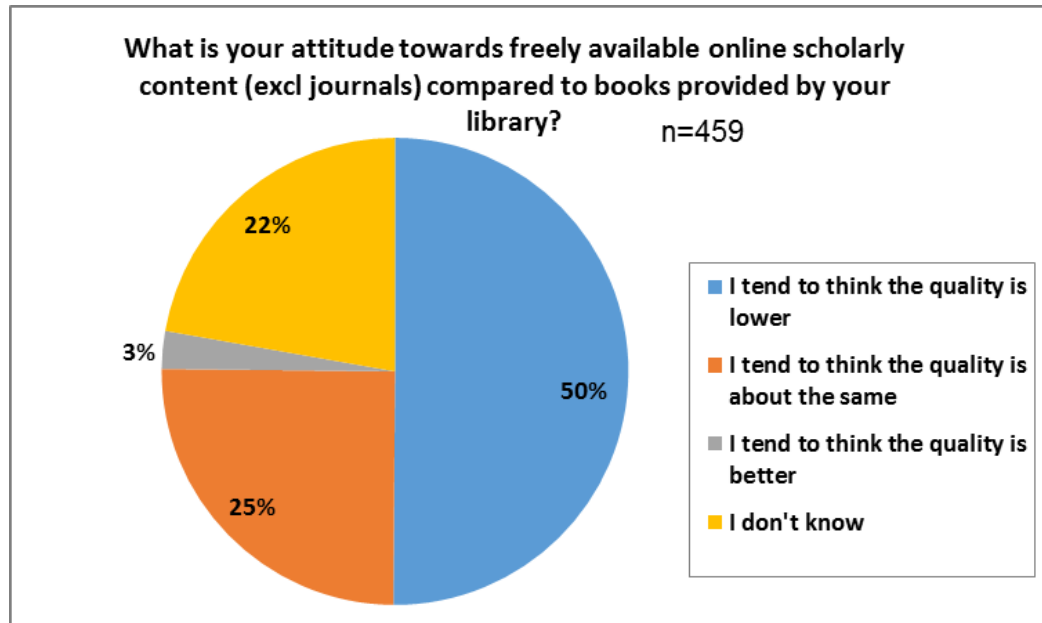
Scientists use books from the institution's library or via interlibrary loan much less frequently than other groups.



Attitudes towards freely available online scholarly content (excluding journals) compared to books provided by the library.

Half of all respondents perceive free (non-journal) online content as of lower quality than books supplied through their library. Another quarter think the the quality is the same. A large number answered “don’t know” which points to confusion about quality and authority in this rapidly expanding area.

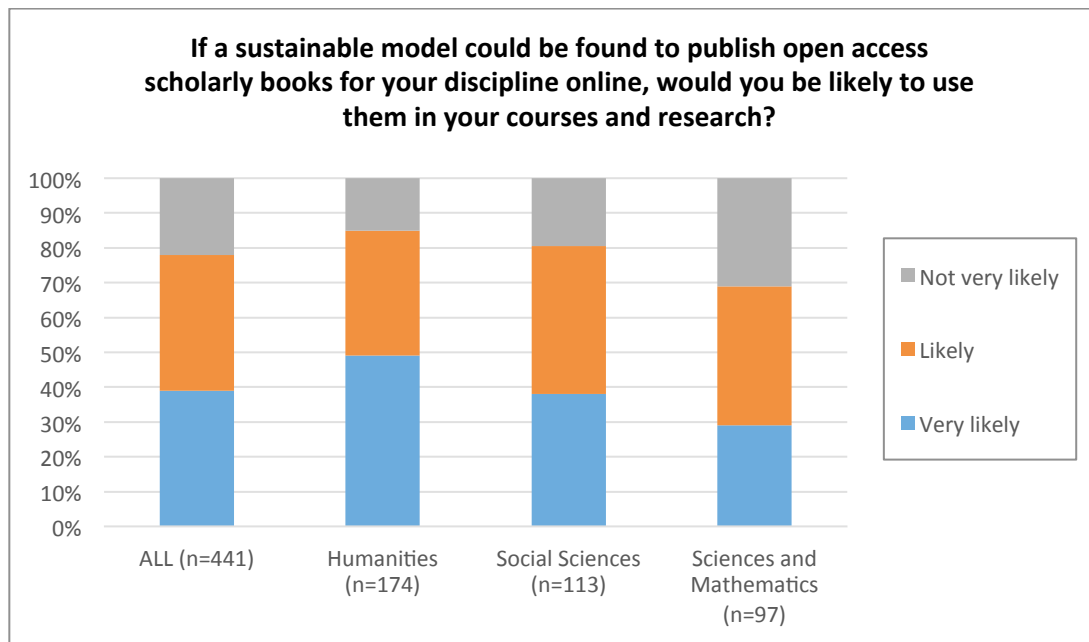
Trends were very similar for each area of specialty and regardless of whether the respondent is tenured.



6.3 Views on Open Online Scholarly Books

There is support for a new model from respondents with 39% overall “very likely” to use open access scholarly books. Within the arts and humanities speciality, the figure is higher with half of the respondents responding “very likely”.

Almost a third of the scientists answer that they are “not very likely” to use such resources but this could well mirror the trend to use articles rather than books in their disciplines, and not be a comment of open access per se.



119 respondents commented on this question and whether they were likely to use open books or not, the resounding message was that **quality is key**, from peer review through to the finished product. Another recurrent theme, mainly amongst those who responded that they were “not very likely” to use open online books, was that of the importance of **prestige** conferred on a book by a well-thought of and established publisher.

“I don't care about format - intellectual quality is intellectual quality.”

For positive commenters, the value to students and for teaching was encouraging as were potential low costs and convenience.

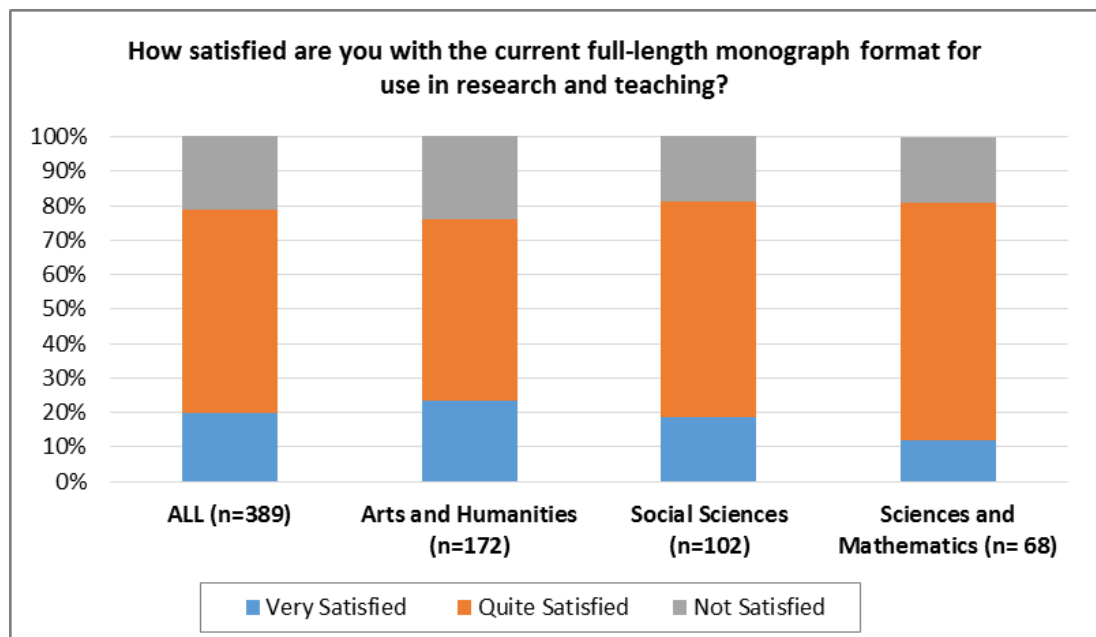
Across the board, a number of respondents pointed out their desire to have print copies of books or be able to print material easily for teaching.

“If it became a more popular avenue, then the stigma behind open access would diminish.”

6.4 Views on Monographs for Research and Teaching

The majority of respondents (c. 80%) are either very or quite satisfied with the current full-length monograph format for use in research and teaching.

Amongst the science specialties, those responding as “very satisfied” is a smaller percentage of the whole than for the other groups. This very likely reflects the fact that articles are more commonly used in these fields than books.



86% of respondents who answered “not satisfied” commented. Just under a third of the quite satisfied and very satisfied respondent groups left comments.

Recurring reasons given for dissatisfaction with current monographs, in order of frequency of appearance:

- Not useful for teaching;
- Excessive length of the format - only parts are used often;

“Many monographs should have been longish articles, but they’ve been inflated in order to qualify as “monographs.” I heard a rep from a scholarly press say as much at a conference.”

“There are often chapters that are not relevant to the course material. I am interested in more custom publishing.”

- Prohibitively expensive for both researchers and students;
- Outdated, restrictive (copyright issues) or limited in format (not providing up-to-date material or multiple online accesses); not showcasing all, especially young, scholars work).

“Online publishing should be sufficient for the vast majority of works. This would lower costs and raise access. The system needs to focus on raising the prestige of online publishing and open access resources generally.”

By contrast, the satisfied scholars felt the current monograph length was essential for developing and sustaining an intellectual idea as well as exposing students to quality intellectual writing as part of their higher education. A small number trust the scholarly quality bestowed by a prestigious press. These scholars are using monographs alongside other scholarly formats for their research and teaching.

“Full-length monographs form the core of everything I teach.”

“I am worried that, as a culture, we are sacrificing deep prolonged engagement with published texts for quick, fragmentary doses of information.”

“I have spent years teaching my students the importance of peer-reviewed scholarly monographs. If small liberal arts schools stop buying them it would do irreparable harm to my college, my profession, and higher education in the US.”

It is worth noting that a sizeable number did not understand the question or the terminology, this may suggest monograph publishing is not as central as it once was to all engaged in the research process and building an academic career.

7.0 Publications and Career

7.1 Motivations for Book Publishing

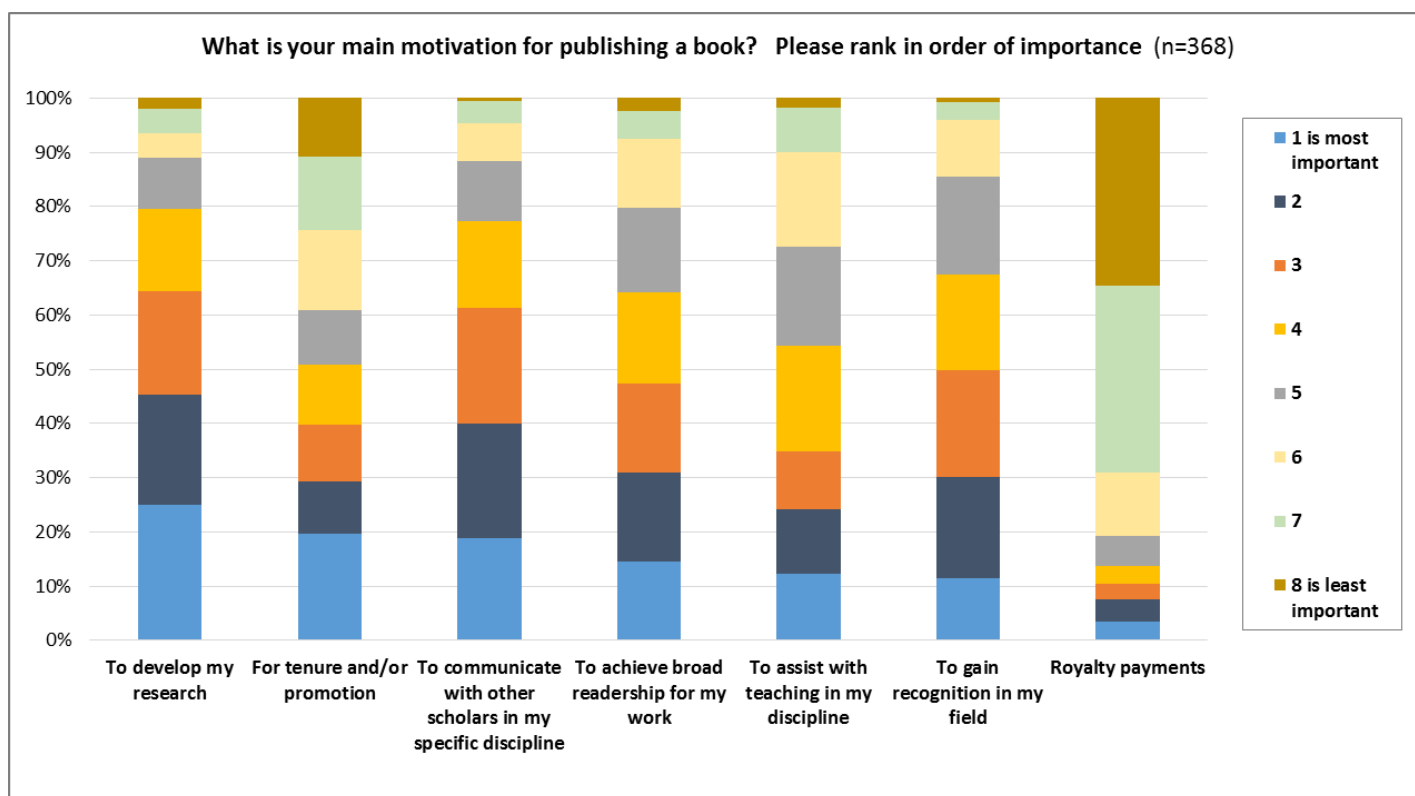
Developing their research was ranked as the most popular motivation by a quarter of respondents. Communicating with other scholars within the discipline and for tenure/promotion were the next most popular motivations and fairly evenly matched.

Only royalty payments is striking in terms of the majority ranking it of low importance.

The “other” option for this question solicited free-text responses including:

- Writing for Pleasure
- Expression and advancement of ideas
- Advancing knowledge

Some respondents stated that they would have rated tenure/promotion higher if earlier in their careers (pre-tenure).

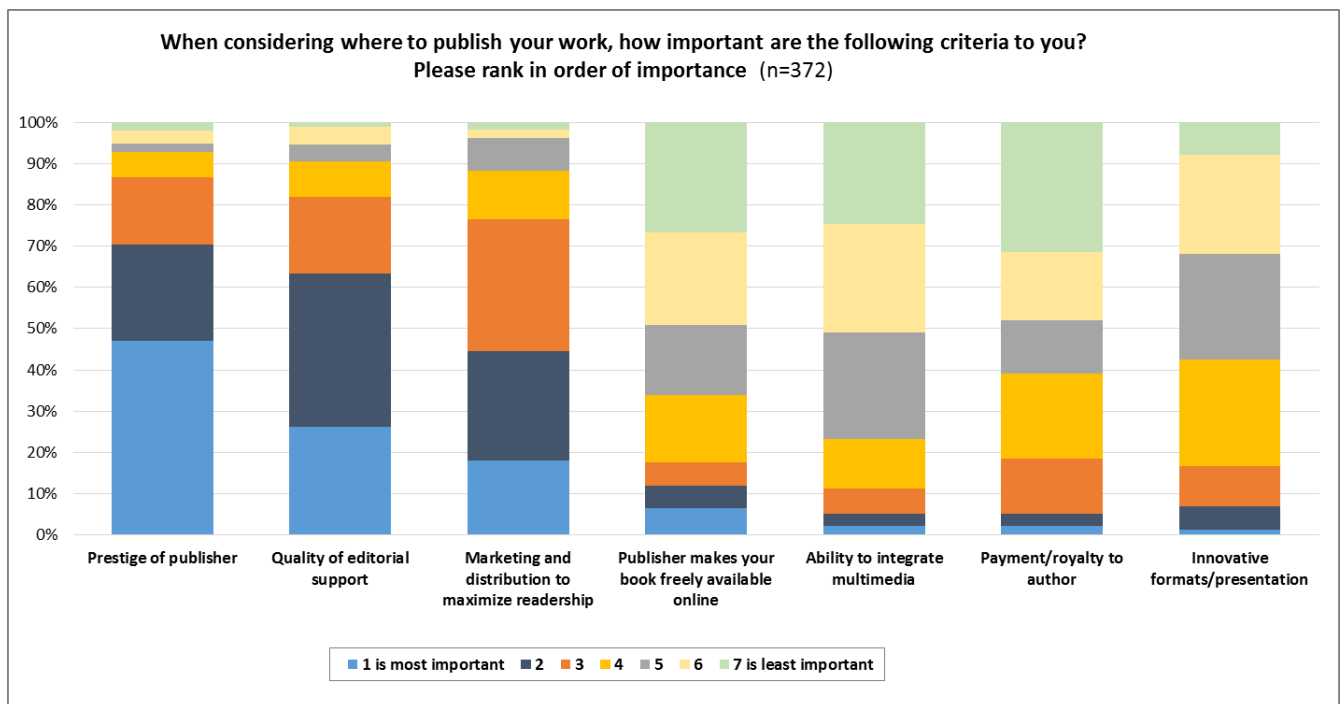


7.2 Choosing A Book Publisher

Almost half of respondents ranked **prestige of the publisher** as most important. **Quality of editorial support** came next with a quarter of respondents ranking it as most important.

Of least importance were royalty payments with just under a third ranking it least important. Close behind was a publisher making a book freely available online and the ability to integrate multimedia.

Trends were repeated when filtering on tenured respondents. When looking at trends across the specialties, the only significant deviation was that science scholars ranked marketing and distribution and availability of a free online copy as slightly more important than other specialties. Overall, answers demonstrate a fairly traditional view of book publishing holding sway.



The comments for this question solicited free-text responses that stated the publisher's commitment and pertinence to the book subject was of importance. Also that openness would be nice but prestige was most important if a book is to "get noticed".

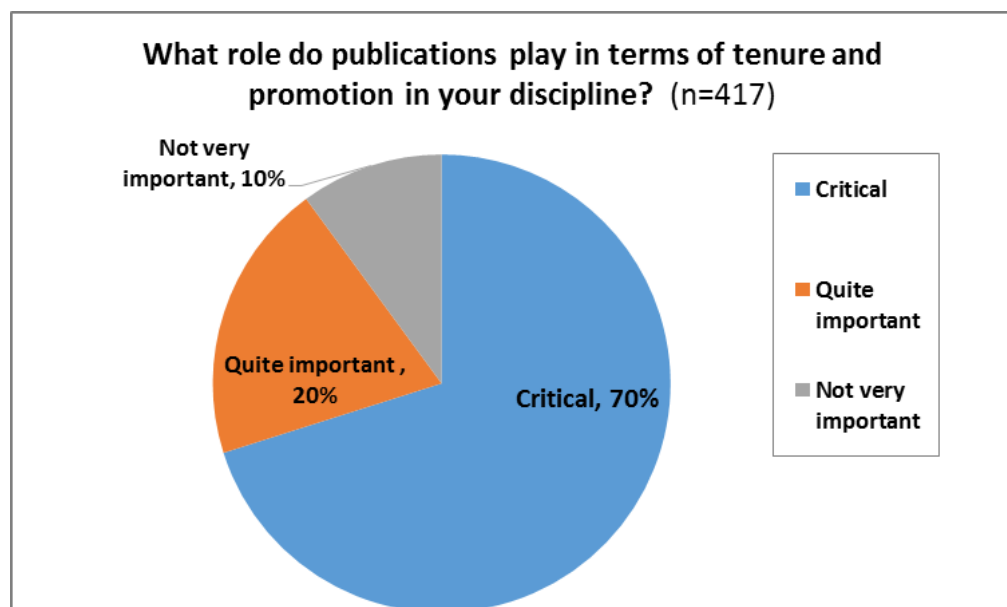
7.3 Publishing: tenure and promotion

90% of faculty respond that **publications play an important role in tenure and promotion**. This falls to 80% for science scholars. Also for this group, those responding that publications are not very important is 22% in comparison to 10% across all respondents.

The free-text comments solicited for this question in many instances pointed out that the importance of aforesaid publications refers to journal articles – not books. A few also bemoaned that books still bestow promotion credentials.

“Publications are critical - book publications are not at all important.”

“They are a BURDENSOME part of tenure and promotion.”

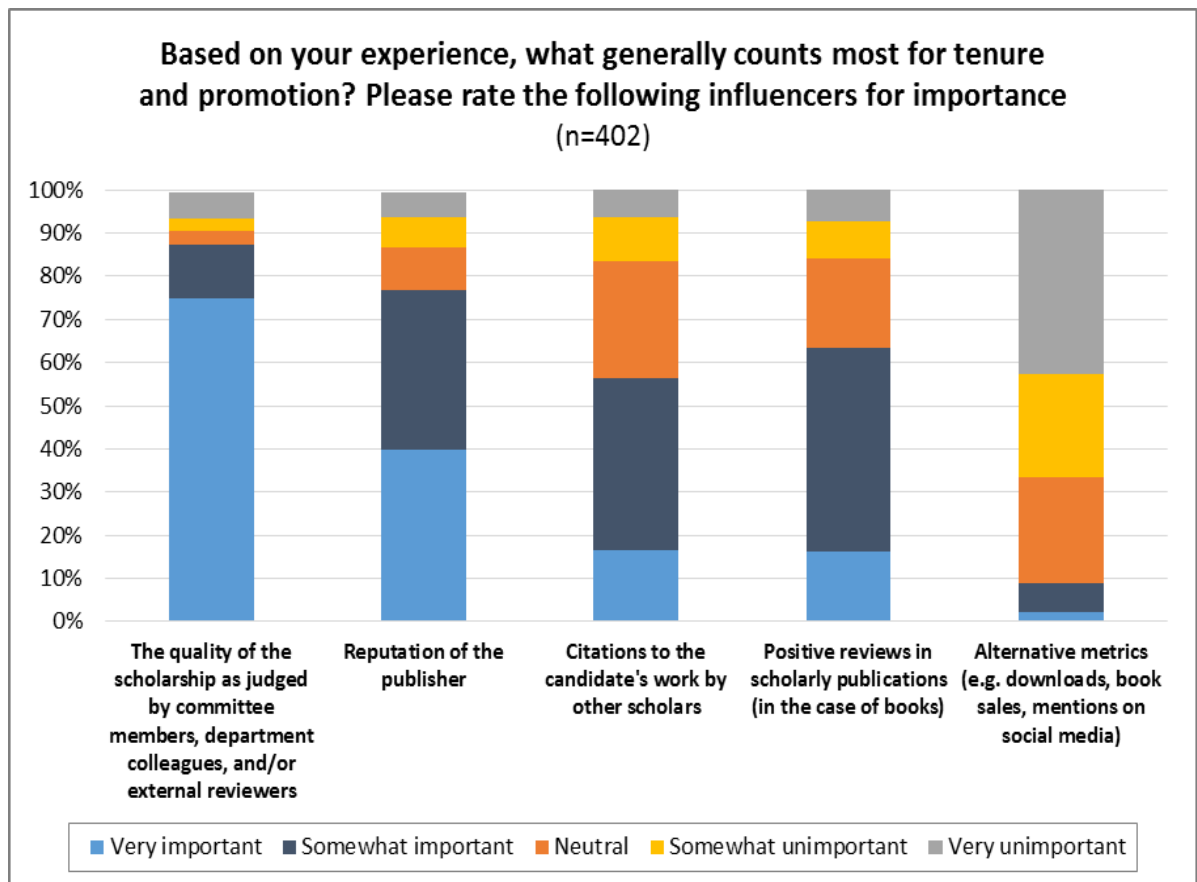


What counts most for tenure and promotion?

Almost 90% ranked the quality of the scholarship as judged by committee members, department colleagues, and/or external reviewers as either very or somewhat important. Three quarters felt that the reputation of the publisher was either very or somewhat important.

Alternative metrics were ranked as very or somewhat unimportant by 67% of respondents.

These trends are repeated across tenured respondents and are broadly the same across all specialties.



Two of the comments nicely indicate conflicting attitudes to newer alternative metrics (altmetrics):

“Why would mention on social media possibly influence tenure and promotion? Again, mass tastes mean nothing for academe.”

“Here, amongst more senior colleagues, there is contempt and suspicion for “Alternative metrics”, some perverse prejudice against being popular.”

7.4 Which Publishers Matter?

Which publishers are ranked highest by faculty in each area?

The word clouds below visualise this data so the most popular publishers suggested by respondents for each specialty can be seen.

Arts and Humanities



Social Sciences

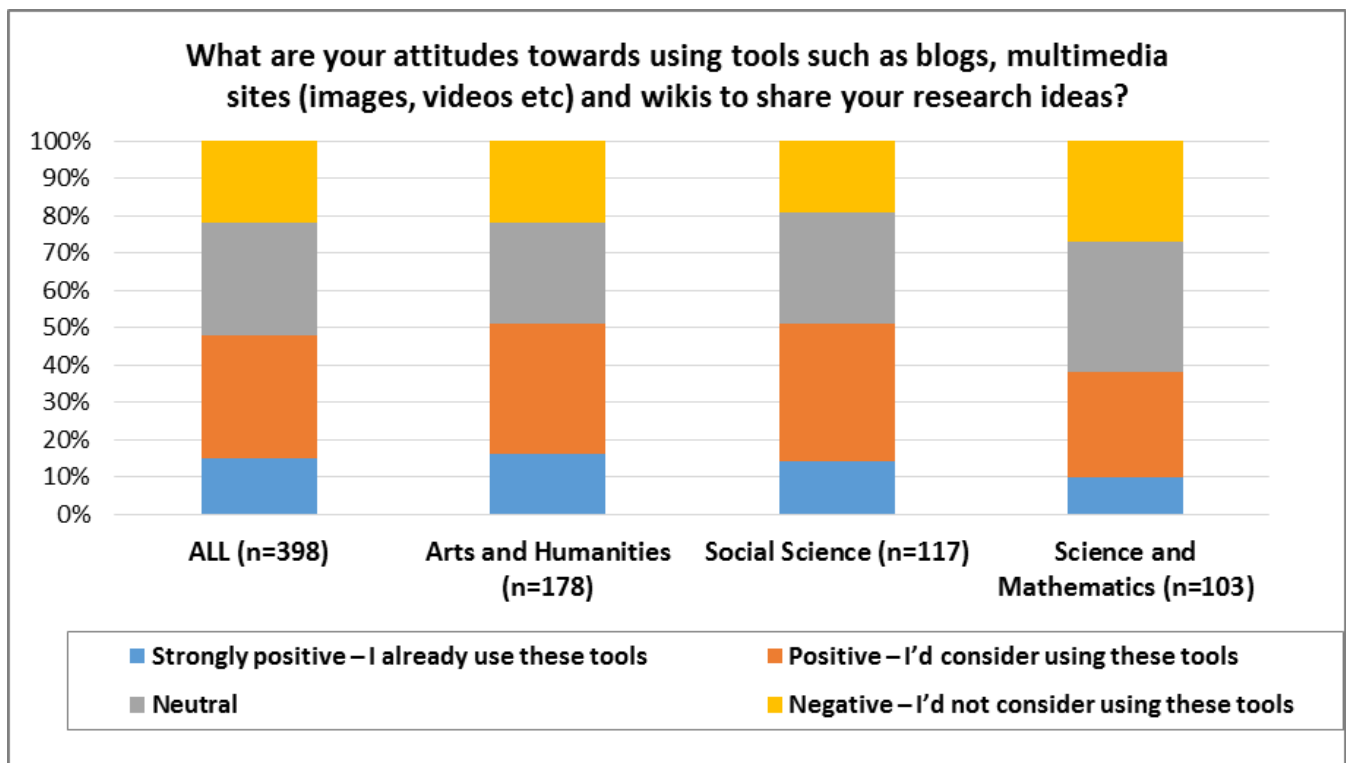


Shaping the Future of Monograph Publishing in the Liberal Arts.
Results of a Survey to Oberlin Group Faculty, 28th January 2014

[illegible]

8.0 New Publishing Initiatives

Around 50% of respondents were either positive or strongly positive about newer publishing initiatives. It breaks down pretty similarly by specialty apart from the science scholars exhibiting a higher level of negativity (27%). Tenured respondents followed the trends shown across all respondents.



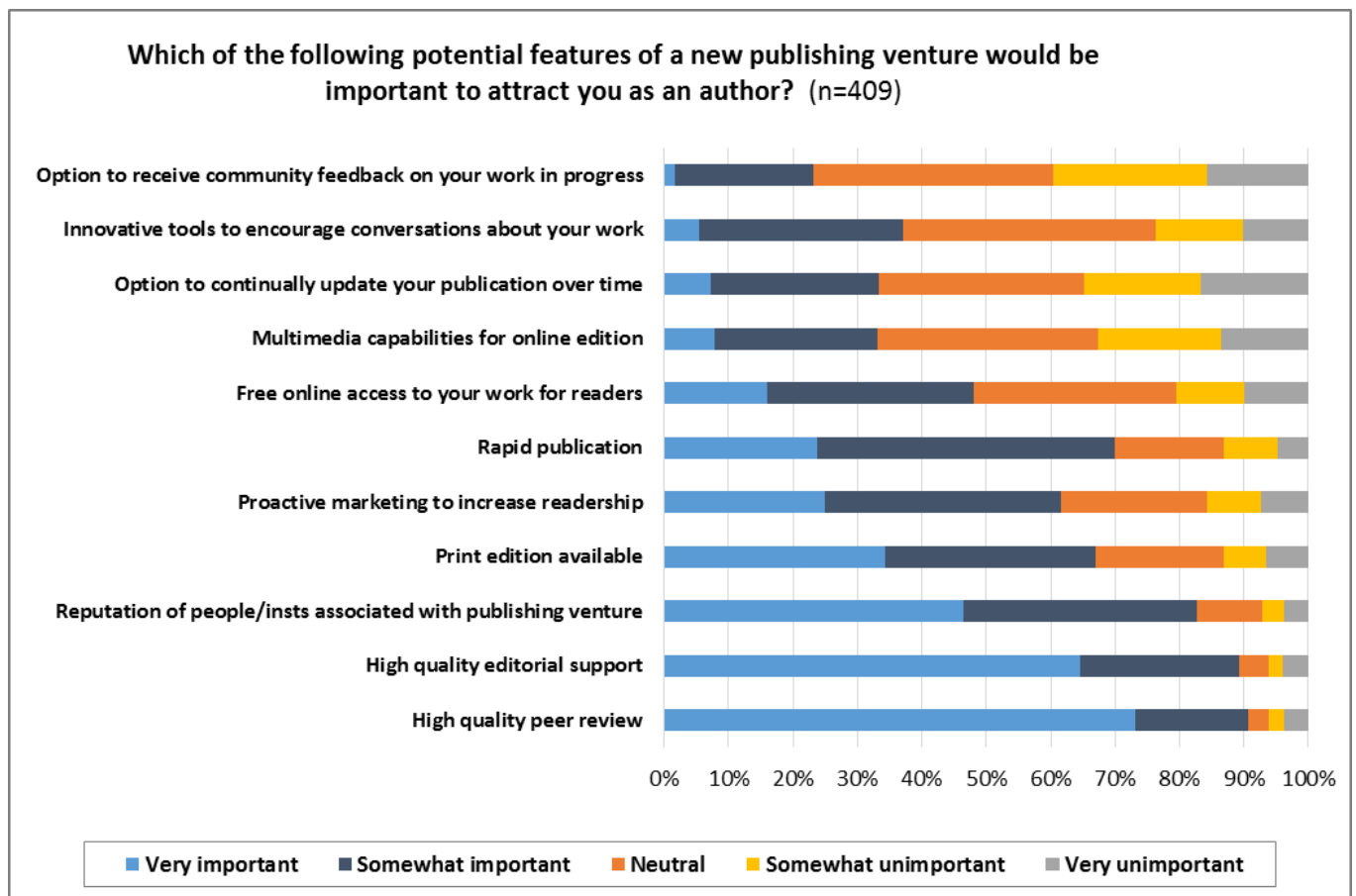
8.1 Important Features

The publishing features that respondents rank as most important are **high quality peer review**, **high quality editorial support** and the **reputation of people and/or institutions** associated with the publishing venture. Almost all respondents ranked these as either very or somewhat important.

At the other end, of least importance, were the option to continually update a publication over time, innovative tools to encourage conversations about work and the option to receive community feedback on a work in progress.

These trends are replicated across each discipline and when the data is filtered on tenured respondents.

Traditional book publishing features then all rate of high importance whilst newer innovations are not seen as key.

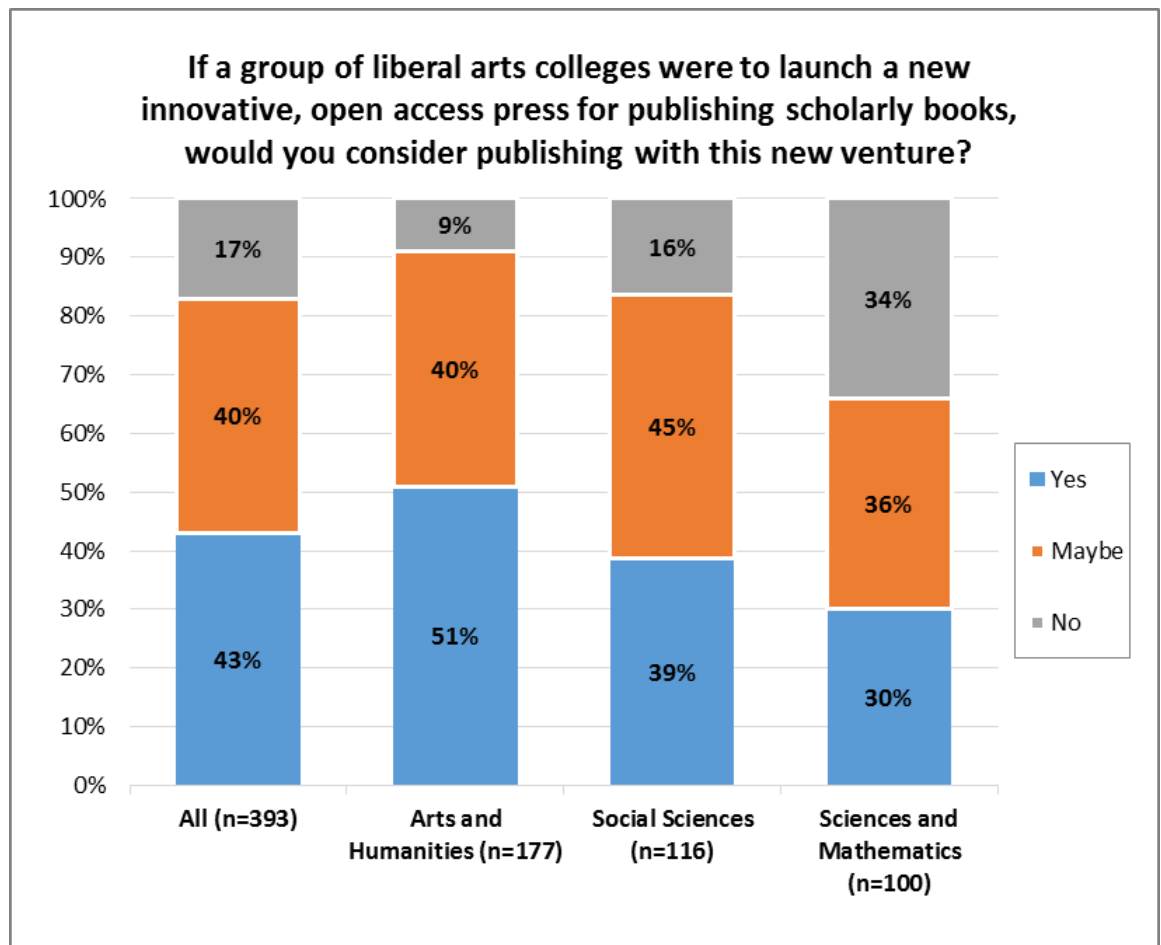


The comments for this question solicited free-text responses that stressed the importance of one's institution viewing the venture as "legitimate", wanted the venture to be easy to use, offer variable length publishing options. One respondent expressed concern that any such venture would mean cutting back on books purchased.

8.2 Would a new OA Press find authors?

There was enthusiasm about publishing with a new OA press with 43% of respondents answering yes and a further 40% answering maybe. This was mirrored across tenured and untenured respondents.

There is most enthusiasm amongst arts and humanities scholars. The science scholars are less enthusiastic, perhaps because they publish mainly in journals.



156 respondents commented on this question. Recurrent themes are summarised below.

- High quality peer review and editorial support is essential

“It would depend on the quality of editorial oversight and peer review; I would want to recognize names of people involved in the project. And I would also want my institution to formally acknowledge that innovative publishing media would be recognized in tenure/promotion.”

- This could be the future of publishing - a welcome additional outlet

“Sounds good. I dislike many features of the old way of publishing.”

- The reputation of any new press is paramount

“It all depends on how the venture is viewed by the field and by my university.”

- If it contributes to tenure and promotion

"I would need clear guidelines from my institution that such publications would count toward promotion the same way "traditional" publications would."

- Only if royalties are paid
- A preference to stick with traditional tried and trusted outlets

8.3 What's important in a new scholarly press?

Respondents were asked "What would be the single most important feature of a new publishing venture for you to consider publishing a book with them?" 212 respondents commented, most frequently recurring themes are summarised below in frequency order. Quality of scholarship, a strong reputation and excellent editorial services were clear frontrunners:

- Quality of peer review and scholarship
- Prestige of the press and strong reputation
- Excellent editorial support
- Accessibility (including beyond academia)
- Counts towards tenure and promotion
- Speedy publication process
- Interactivity, openness to a new approach and the potential to update
- Easy, flexible and convenience of publishing
- Marketing to reach readership
- Open access content
- Print copies available
- Royalties paid
- "Other scholars of renown choosing to be affiliated with it."

"Whether it advances my career the same way a print book would."

"Strong peer review, prestige and wide readership."

Additional views to help evaluate the need for a new publishing venture to make scholarship more open, accessible and interactive.

103 respondents offered comments, new themes are summarised below:

- Be mindful of the signal to noise ratio: be careful not to add to the noise. Work must be high quality scholarship
- Providing good editorial support could mark this venture out from traditional publishers where that support is disappearing
- Position it with a mission to provide scholarship that affects citizenship or general public culture and social concerns relevant to the history and future of liberal arts
- Get deans and provosts involved early so tenure considerations are thought through
- Do some profile raising of the format to educate academia.

“I prioritize open and accessible (and peer-reviewed/prestigious) far above interactive. A book is a book, not a blog.”

“Consider how to give digital formats the credibility of print. A digital format can go global with a click, so the market is swamped with low-quality products. We all need quicker access to carefully shaped and executed research-keep a balance between these imperatives.”

9.0 Conclusion

This first phase of research has offered up many useful insights about the publishing practices, views and motivations of Oberlin Group faculty. We set out to assess whether authors would be likely to support a new OA Press by submitting their work and to understand their key motivations in selecting publication outlets.

The majority of faculty in this sample are both actively using and publishing books and journals and see this as core to their academic life, both as researchers and educators. Having said that, current publishing practice is not without its challenges, and shortfalls as detailed within the report. Although there were faculty who were not in favour of the Oberlin Group establishing a new Press (see Appendix A: noteworthy comments for some representative statements), there is a clear interest and a willingness from many faculty to engage with a new OA Book Press initiative with 83% expressing an interest.

Many of the challenges in current books publishing outlined in the responses lead us to the elements that faculty would like to see addressed by a new Press. Perhaps contrary to some expectations, many of these elements are key components of a traditional print book publishing business. The following list contains those items that are of highest priority for these potential authors:

- Speed of publishing decision and speedy publication processes
- Lower book pricing
- Author remuneration
- High quality editorial services and peer review
- Good communication between press and author
- Excellent press reputation (enabled by list authors, editorial staff and perhaps association with existing university press publishers or professional societies)
- Clear tying together of publication to tenure credit
- Affordable author print copies
- Wide distribution and accessibility
- No restrictive copyright or licensing laws
- Good market feedback.

For this faculty sample, publishing features that are more synonymous with an innovative digital press, ranked as less important (e.g. update functionality, tools to encourage conversations about research and the option to receive community feedback on a work in progress).

Should the Press be developed, a sensible way forward could be to develop the excellent functionality that a digital online platform enables, but also focus closely on improving the traditional publishing features that this research suggests is key – substance as well as style.

Appendix A: Noteworthy Comments

Q. 8 Would you be interested in publishing a short-form book (100 pages or less)?

"It's not something I've considered, but the idea is intriguing."

"I do think that the "short-form" book is a good niche, but I would need to be convinced that you can follow-through on the intention that the cyber press would be long-lasting and that the editorial control would be excellent."

"Not all studies need to be the length of a book so authors end up fluffing them out unnecessarily. Most journals have word limits that constrain possibilities for publishing a full study so authors often break up the study into parts, weakening each contribution."

"I think the short-form book makes more sense than the traditional academic monograph."

"I believe in books, and <100 pages is on the borderline between a book and a pamphlet. It would encourage experimentation; it would discourage depth and thoroughness."

"This strikes me as very usable in a classroom setting. I am currently working on one for OUP."

Q. 9 Please tell us anything else you would like to see improved relating to your experience of getting your books published:

"All books should be available freely online now."

"I would like to see books priced so that people can afford them. It is ridiculous that academic books must appear first in expensive hardcover editions, priced, as I understand it, by the number of pages. Then no one can afford to buy them, so they don't get into paperback, so they don't reach the people (grad students, etc.) who would benefit from them. There is, as far as I can see, almost NO value-added in the current academic publishing system."

"An economic model that allows for everything of quality to be published in respected venues. More respect and quality control for digital publications."

"While I support open access publishing as a concept, I would be concerned that the process lacks rigor, quality editing, and sufficient editorial knowledge about the field (through peer review, perhaps). In any case, this effort needs to translate into something comparable to a book for tenure and promotion."

"The publishing house I went with has an old, established, reputation. They still use a process whereby authors work with a development editor before the book goes to be formatted. This house is now hiring very young, and not particularly informed or helpful staff to do the work that real pros used to do. I was very disappointed, both with the editorial assistance I received, and with the finished product that they turned out."

Q. 14 If a sustainable model could be found to publish open access scholarly books for your discipline online, would you be likely to use them in your courses and research?

"I don't care about format---intellectual quality is intellectual quality."

"The best scholarly books will continue to come out of the best university and trade presses."

"It depends on the quality of the books and the scholarly reputation of the reviewers."

"So long as the publisher is respectable and the content is reliable, I would be thrilled to access and use open-access scholarly books."

"If it became a more popular avenue, then the stigma behind open access would diminish."

Q. 15 How satisfied are you with the current full-length monograph format for use in research and teaching?

"I would like to see more interaction within the text with images, sound files, etc. Like a scholarly website with all the sources linked for further research."

"I'm satisfied for research but not for teaching. Of the nine courses I teach, only four have what I would call an adequate textbook. In all my courses, I am continually supplementing the textbook with a hodge-podge of other material."

"Many monographs should have been longish articles, but they've been inflated in order to qualify as "monographs." I heard a rep from a scholarly press say as much at a conference."

"Knowledge does not come in 500-page chunks. Useful knowledge is more granular."

"Monographs generally are no longer useful for students (who don't have the reading attention span), and they are uneven in quality for my own use. Largely I find scholarship in my field routinized and often boring."

"I am worried that, as a culture, we are sacrificing deep prolonged engagement with published texts for quick, fragmentary doses of information."

Q. 17 When considering where to publish your work, how important are the following criteria to you?

"I would like my work to be freely available, but to get it noticed I think I need to go with prestige of publisher."

"Making a book freely available online would destroy academic presses. We should encourage quality, not quantity of publication. Multimedia has nothing to do with books. If you want multimedia product then don't write a book."

"The prestige of the press continues to be a major consideration in my field and one reason why I would be rather hesitant about OA until I had received tenure."

Q. 18 What role do publications play in terms of tenure and promotion in your discipline?

"They are a BURDENSOME part of tenure and promotion."

"My department's new criteria for tenure explicitly require a book."

"“Critical” does not capture their role. They are essential/necessary."

Q. 19 Based on your experience, what generally counts most for tenure and promotion? Please rate the following influencers for importance.

*"Why would mention on social media possibly influence tenure and promotion?
Again, mass tastes mean nothing for academe."*

*"Here, amongst more senior colleagues, there is contempt and suspicion for
"Alternative metrics", some perverse prejudice against being popular."*

Q. 22 Which of the following potential features of a new publishing venture would be important to attract you as an author?

"I would not support any new venture because it would mean cutting back on the purchase of books from academic presses. I would oppose it at my college, and work with other scholars at other liberal arts schools to encourage them to oppose such a venture as well."

"I would want some assurance from my institution that it was a "legitimate" option and would be regarded equal to traditional publishing houses."

Q. 23 If a group of liberal arts colleges were to launch a new innovative, open access press for publishing scholarly books, would you consider publishing with this new venture?

"I would absolutely consider it. The big question is whether such a press would do what it claims to do. Again, the idea that scholars were actively choosing it instead of traditional presses is important - instead of choosing it because they can't get published in traditional formats."

"I'm tenured, senior, and frustrated with the current system, so what I have I got to lose?"

"It would take years for it to develop a reputation for quality, and I would not publish with it until it did so."

"This seems to be the likely future of publishing."

"Yes, very excited about this prospect. Academic publishing in my field is in many ways wholly corrupt."

"It would depend on the quality of editorial oversight and peer review; I would want to recognize names of people involved in the project. And I would also want my institution to formally acknowledge that innovative publishing media would be recognized in tenure/promotion."

"I have been a long-time advocate of this. The means to accomplish this have been established, and the value is there."

Q. 24 What would be the single most important feature of a new publishing venture for you to consider publishing a book with them?

"Accessibility beyond academics and academic libraries."

"Connection/partnership with an academic press."

"Option to receive readers' feedback."

"Other scholars of renown choosing to be affiliated with it."

"Speed and quality of publication."

Q. 25 Please tell us anything else you think would be useful in helping us evaluate the need for a new publishing venture to help make scholarship more open, accessible and interactive.

"Get deans and provosts involved."

"I prioritize open and accessible (and peer-reviewed/prestigious) far above interactive. A book is a book, not a blog."

"Thanks for pursuing alternatives! The current state of academic publishing is ossified and uninspiring."

"The main issue is peer-review, not openness. If openness comes with a failure of the peer-review process, then all we'll have is a two-tier system of "closed but good" and "open but poor"."

"Partnerships with other publishers might be useful in some cases. Authors could suggest publishing partners."

"Check out the Signale series at Cornell University Press and Library for another innovative venture."

"Other publishers are doing this already. No need I think for more players."

"Each school would need to adjust retention, promotion, and tenure metrics to accommodate this new publisher. Otherwise, it won't be useful at all."

"Launch a campaign to validate this form of publication in the mind of academia."

*"Get big names to sign on early... look to the model used by "sociological science"
<http://www.sociologicalscience.com/>"*