

CAUL Procurement: Statement on eBook provision by publishers

CAUL Procurement in consultation with CAUL Consortium Members, has identified several issues related to the provision of eBooks to the academic sector. CAUL Procurement would like publishers to consider these points and to respond with improved models for eBook provision.

Publishers should be mindful that content needs to be supplied within the legislative instrument of [Guidance note: Staffing, learning resources and educational support - 2017](#), [Higher Education Support Act 2003](#) and [Schedule 1, Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021 \(Cth\)](#), in particular:

3.3 *Learning Resources and Educational Support*

3. *Access to learning resources does not present unexpected barriers, costs or technology requirements for students, including for students with special needs and those who study off campus.*

Academics should be aware of issues detailed below, when selecting required resources for students, i.e. textbooks and readings. It is advisable for textbook authors to verify with publishers as to how their books are made available and consider alternative routes to publishing, such as Open Education Resources (OER). Additionally, both academics and authors are strongly encouraged to consult with their university library in making informed decisions.

Issues identified, where provision of eBooks are not compliant with the Higher Education Standards Framework, impacting eBook provision to students with disability and off campus students, include:

- Limitations on how users can access eBooks including removal of rights to print, copy, and download PDF chapters to users choice of eBook reader.
- Highly restrictive access models for libraries with limited numbers of simultaneous users being able to access a single text at any one time, reducing the libraries' capacity to provide access and thereby disadvantaging students.
- Restrictions on printing from eBooks impact adversely on students with disabilities, who often require access to print materials.
- Highly restrictive access with some eBooks only being available to be accessed for 12 to 72 hours.
- Impacts on learning and assessment, particularly in exams, due to unclear and inflexible parameters on loan conditions and procedures.
- Confusion for end users where the different access rules apply to multiple copies of the same title.
- Poorly designed student interfaces.
- Embargos on eBooks, meaning that they are not available until many months after a print version is available, reducing the opportunity for students and researchers to access the latest information and disadvantaging students who require access to electronic copies.
- Pagination issues create difficulties in referencing material in learning resources and assignments.
- "Restricted Country Rights" for some titles that are difficult to navigate.

CAUL Procurement would like to highlight that current publisher business models reduce the opportunities for university libraries to make content available:

- Books being split into modules and sold in packages, bundled with many unwanted titles.
- Books only being accessible as part of a subscription to a learning management platform, often bundled with additional features such as quizzes and videos.
- Individual books being sold for many thousands of dollars, on a rental model, where only 3 users can access at any one time.
- Usage statistics are not supplied to industry standard, making return on investment analysis difficult.
- Subscription models, with no perpetual access, create difficulties around cost and loss of access to previous editions.
- Publishers need to be mindful of differing academic calendars when making changes to title availability. Any changes in availability should be advised well in advance (6 months minimum) to allow class coordinators and libraries time to respond and make alternate arrangements as necessary.
- Unstable internet connectivity affects the ability to read online. Downloadable DRM free content is therefore required to enable digital equity.

These business models impact on student access to critical learning resources, thereby impacting adversely on student learning outcomes and creating issues with equity of access to learning resources. Publishers need to provide multiple and flexible options for purchase to meet the diverse needs of individual institutions.

CAUL also supports the [ICOLC Statement on AI in Licensing](#). CAUL is actively engaging with the sector to ensure that licensing for eBook provision is fit for purpose.

CAUL Procurement and consortium members request that all publishers consider these issues for provision of eBook content to the academic sector and address these by rethinking business models in the interest of student learning success.

CAUL welcomes discussion with publishers about eBook provision models.

Further enquiries:

Angus Cook
Director, Content Procurement
CAUL

angus.cook@caul.edu.au

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About CAUL Inc.

The [Council of Australian University Librarians Incorporated \(CAUL\)](#) is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia and New Zealand. CAUL Members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia and the 8 members of the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL). CAUL makes a significant contribution to higher education strategy, policy and outcomes through a commitment to a shared purpose: To transform how people experience knowledge – how it can be discovered, used, and shared. CAUL’s vision is that society is transformed through the power of research, teaching, and learning. University libraries are essential knowledge and information infrastructures that enable student achievement and research excellence.