Measuring the magnificence of monographs
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“Assessing our work through numbers is like asking engineers to assess their work through dance.”
Monographs

- Are a critical means of scholarly communication in the AHSS – they are not going away
- Are not systematically covered by commercial citation benchmarking tools
- Are covered by Google, but subject to problems
- More importantly, citations don’t mean the same thing in AH as they do in STEM
- So how do we assess their quality?
### Alternative indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who published it?</strong></td>
<td>General agreement on the Big 6 and who to avoid</td>
<td>Long tail of smaller, high quality, niche disciplinary publishers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Book reviews:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How many? Where reviewed? What did it say?</td>
<td>Book review indexes exist</td>
<td>Reviews take a long time to appear; lack of reviews doesn’t mean poor quality work; in small disciplines bad reviews are rare.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Book sales</strong></td>
<td>Numerical indicators</td>
<td>Sales are limited by print run; affected by size of market</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listed on reading lists</strong></td>
<td>Easily accessible numerical indicator (via Altmetric)</td>
<td>Favours text-books over monographs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Altmetric attention</strong></td>
<td>Easily accessible numerical indicator (via Altmetric)</td>
<td>Altmetric attention doesn’t claim to be a quality indicator; more visibility and impact</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of a usable indicator

• Normalisable
  – Can normalise for disciplinary differences (at least)

• Benchmarkable
  – Comprehensive data is available at different entity levels (individual, university, discipline, etc) to compare performance

• Obtainable
  – Needs to be relatively easy to get hold of and use

None of these apply to monographs yet.
Measuring the magnificence of monographs

• Can only responsibly be done through peer review
• Evidence can be used to tell good stories, but not meaningfully compare quality.