

Peer Review Event: Scenarios

In the 'Scenarios' session, each group considered the following questions, and their responses are summarised below.

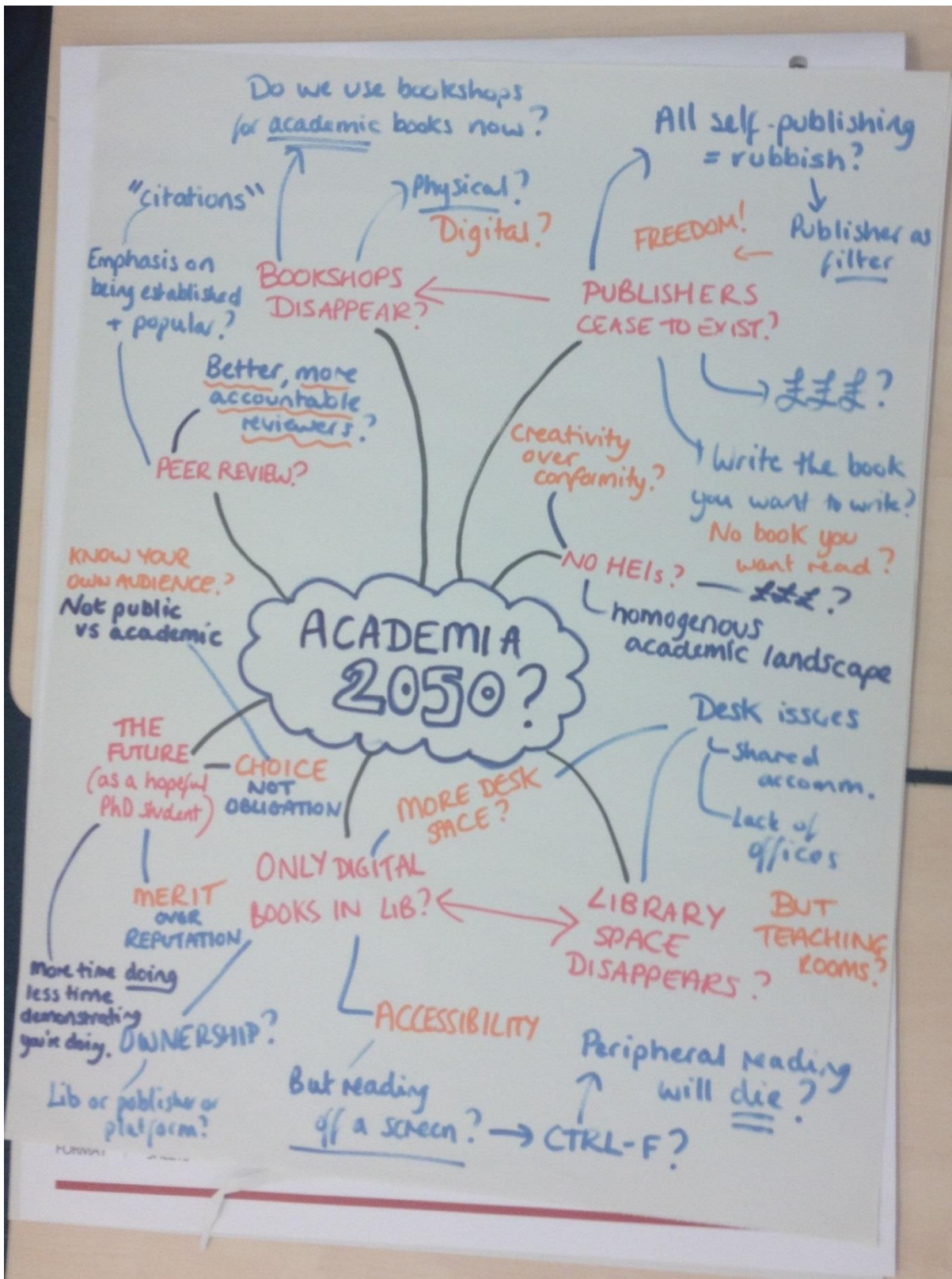
- What would happen if libraries just had digital books? How would you feel about that?
- What would happen if publishers (ie non-University Press publishers) ceased to exist?
- What would happen if we lost all bookshops?
- What would happen if the library as a physical space no longer existed? EG university libraries close down, and instead content is embedded in virtual learning environments and access databases?
- As a PhD researcher, how would you like research and publications to develop in the future?
- How would you like peer review to work in the future? How could the current system be improved?

Group 1

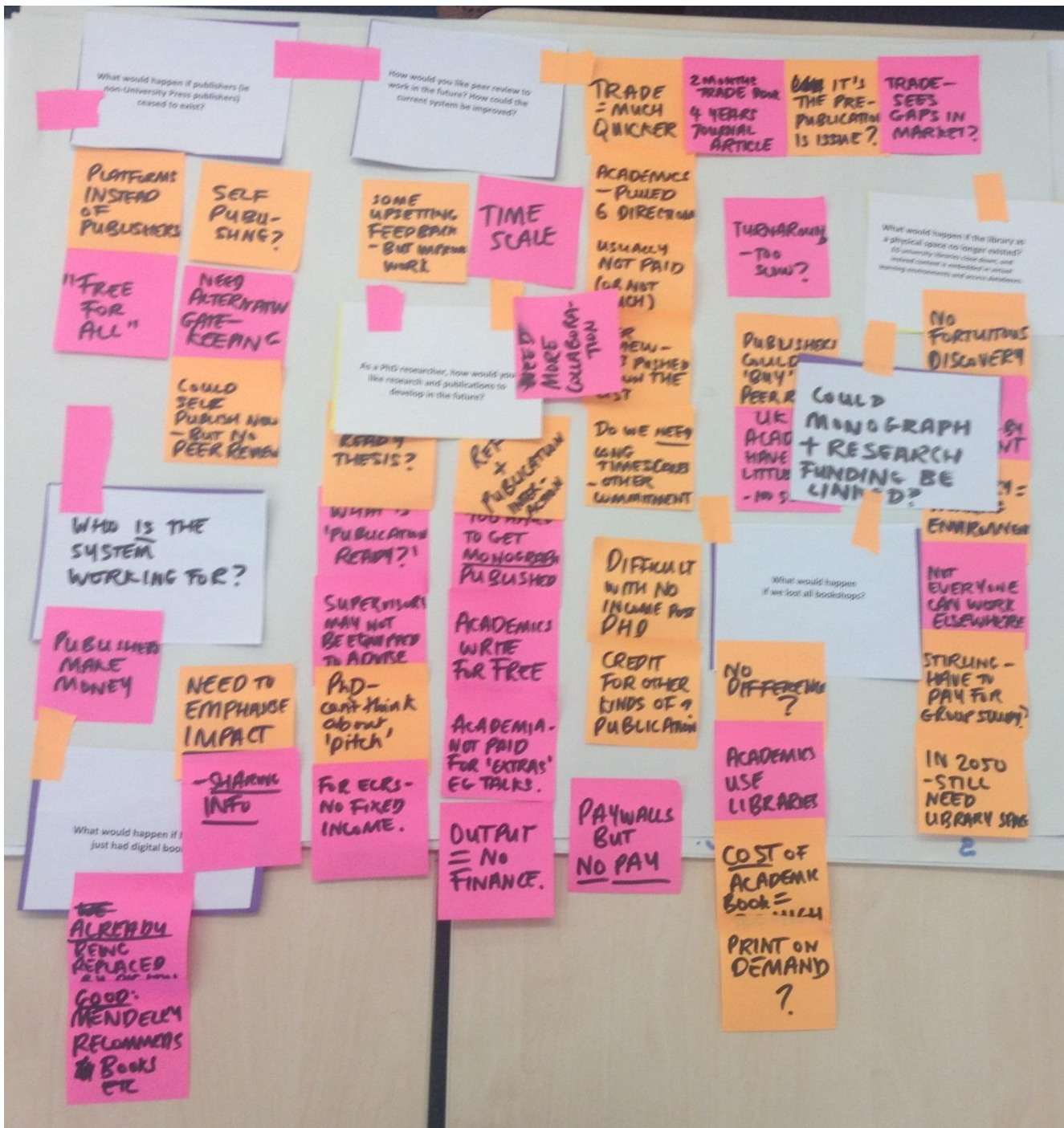
- Group 1 expressed a general sense of new freedoms and unexpected possibilities that might arrive with changes in publishing. For example, traditional publishers might be replaced by something that offers more choice and flexibility.
- Finance: This group noted that money is a key concern for almost all future scenarios – who controls it, where it's coming from, how you fund academics, its role for universities and publishers, who pays for new digital platforms.
- Increased choice: The group found reasons for optimism for the future – for example, members of the group suggested that new platforms for publishing and research might offer more choice and flexibility in what to do with one's own work.
- Future developments: This group would like to see a shift to merit over reputation as a criteria for publication – they suggested that this might be facilitated by altmetrics and online sharing.
- An advantage of digital platforms was the ability to identify a public audience, using altmetrics, tracking etc. Also, the possibility of extended access rather than a traditional closed 'ivory tower' model.

Group 2

- Finance: This group noted the difficulties for early career researchers working on multiple roles with insubstantial income – they felt that this may not change in the future, and in fact might be exacerbated in several of the scenarios suggested (for example, digital books might still be unaffordable, but without access to libraries to get copies).
- Changing publishing forms: This group felt changes in timescales might be achievable in new publishing scenarios, and particularly welcomed a possible increase in the speed of publication once works are completed (compared the example of trade publication: 2 months to publish; academic publication: 4 years.)
- Publishers as gatekeepers: In a posited move from traditional publishing to self-publishing, publishers no longer act as gatekeepers; this group suggested it might be more difficult to get work read and recognised without that system of quality control (Group 1 suggest altmetrics).
- Digital formats and the possibility of libraries being supplanted by digital products caused some consternation for this group. Very few of us purchase academic monographs, so libraries are central to access to new materials for research. Also, the loss of libraries would be a problem if they were not replaced by comparably suitable spaces for work and research. Finally, libraries play a valuable role in prompting new avenues for research that may not be replaced by a digital format.
- Already happening: This group pointed out that there are already steps to address many of the concerns envisaged in response to the 'scenarios', eg Mendeley suggests different texts you may be interested in, replicating the library bookshelf – so it's possible the things we value about the physical space may be replicated in digital environments. However, issues such as research space remained an issue in the libraries scenario.



Group 2: Poster



Conclusion

- Both groups agreed that many of the 'scenarios' already exist in embryo form, and both felt that the worst-case scenarios might be avoided by careful planning and judgement.
- There was a sense of a need to achieve a balance between optimism for the future and awareness of what traditional advantages might be lost.
- Both groups identified finance and economic flows as crucial to the development of new forms and platforms in the future, and both raised concerns about increasing pressure on early career researchers in terms of finance, time and space for independent research, and access to resources.