

## **Digital Platform**

A group of libraries in the University of London (Birkbeck, Central School of Speech and Drama, Goldsmiths, Heythrop, Institute of Education, Kings, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Queen Mary, Royal Holloway, SOAS, St George's and University of London Research Library Services) recently commissioned consultants Content Complete Ltd to investigate the possibility of collaborating on the acquisition of electronic resources. The model for this was the recent deals done by SHEDL and IReL.

The consultants made it clear from the outset that it was unlikely that any institution would save money, but that we might be able to obtain wider access to electronic resources across all the institutions for little or no increase in expenditure. They explained that for publishers it is more economical to sign up libraries to 'big deals' (access to all their products) and they wish to move to online only publication. There was therefore an opportunity to negotiate a big deal across the board, as SHEDL has done with three publishers. However, because VAT is applied to online only deals, to make such a move cost-neutral requires a discount by the publisher of at least 15%. A potential area for saving might be in administration costs if subscriptions were managed centrally. This is what is happening with IReL.

Three surveys were conducted among the group. The first was to identify the principal areas of spending among the group; this found 12 journal publishers with whom the aggregated spend was over £20,000, the total spend with these publishers was £3.9 million. Combined expenditure with 12 top database providers was over £1.1 million. Expenditure on e-books is currently only £115,000 but is expected to increase in the next few years.

The second survey aimed to identify publishers with whom members wanted to widen their access. This found that all 12 journal publishers and eight of the database publishers produced resources to which at least one and up to five libraries wanted wider access. (NB Not all libraries completed this survey).

The third survey asked for details of staff time spent on acquiring and managing journals, electronic resources and interlibrary loans. This revealed an estimated spend across the institutions of £2.5 million.

The consultants recommended approaching three publishers – SAGE, Oxford University Press and Springer – who might be sympathetic to some negotiation on big deals. They conducted preliminary negotiations with SAGE, who were prepared to offer big deal access free to smaller institutions but at an increased cost for some of the larger ones. They further recommended investigating the possibility of a joint e-books deal and the possibility of setting up a central acquisitions unit.

However, they also concluded that the group (which provides services to some 86,000 UK students and 45,000 on the external programme) was not sufficiently large to persuade publishers or aggregators to offer lower prices below Nesli2 rates.

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They also stated that publishers would only deal with a consortium that had some other purpose than purchasing resources. It was therefore agreed to ask whether members of the M25 Consortium would be interested in joining this venture and possibly in managing the acquisitions.

The M25 Steering Group agreed that members should be asked if they might be interested in exploring this idea. If so, a meeting will be held during the summer to consider how it could be furthered.

A copy of the executive summary of their final report is attached, with permission of Content Complete Ltd. Anyone who is interested is welcome to ask me for a copy of the full report.

**Mary Nixon**

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**University of London Collaborative Digital  
Library Platform  
Study  
Report by Content Complete Ltd**

<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Project Group Members</b>
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### Executive Summary

- In September 2008, a tender was issued by The University of London seeking a consultancy to investigate the “possibilities for benefits to be obtained through the adoption of a more consortial or collaborative approach to the acquisition of e-resources by the Colleges”. This was prompted by a belief that there was considerable overlap in the purchasing of some resources, whilst other content that might be relevant to smaller groups, was not available to all. The Terms of Reference of the consultancy were as follows:
  - 🕒 *To map the current provision of subscribed-to or purchased e-resources (databases, journals and e-books) across the constituent libraries of the defined group, together with their costs (including actual subscription/purchase costs, and associated staff and system costs as far as these can be ascertained according to a uniform model)*
  - 🕒 *To identify e-resources which any of the constituent libraries regards as a gap which they wish to fill, based on the profile or declared needs of their user communities*
  - 🕒 *To include with this mapping exercise the communities who do or should have access to these e-resources (including NHS users where appropriate)*
  - 🕒 *To assess opportunities for benefits to be obtained by developing a more consortial approach to the provision of these resources, taking into account licensing models from publishers*
  - 🕒 *To recommend next steps for the group in pursuing any such benefits that may be identified, including consortial cost-spreading models, negotiating mechanisms and presentational/branding/authentication issues.*
- University of London members are already participating in various national and regional initiatives. Almost all are participating in one of more of the NESLi2 e-journal agreements and the same is true for the key JISC Collections national agreements that are in place.
- The methodology adopted for the study was based on three activities:
  - 🕒 *Data surveys across member institutions*
  - 🕒 *Direct interviews with selected publishers and other organisations*
  - 🕒 *Desk research*

The surveys addressed the following:

- 🕒 *Calculating the current expenditure on the main e-resources (journals, databases and e-books) acquired by members to ascertain the potential for negotiations with publishers.*

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- 🕒 *Identifying those e-resources subscribed to by a number of members, that other members might also be interested in having access to.*
  - 🕒 *Calculating staffing and operational costs involved at each institution in acquiring and making the e-resources accessible to users*
  - 🕒 *Identifying the main e-resources acquired by Senate House Library that are also acquired by other member libraries and the potential to rationalise expenditure across the members.*
- The aggregated annual journals expenditure by the members with the larger publishers is not at a level where it would be possible to achieve lower pricing, particularly in the light of the national NESLi2 agreement in the UK, as providing the best terms for UK academic libraries.
  - If both LSE and UCL had also been members of the initiative, expenditure would increase substantially but still be at a level of where improved terms would not be achievable.
  - A consortial benefit that could potentially be negotiated is that of seeking agreement by a number of publishers to 'extend access' to e-journals and databases to all members. A number of these e-resources are already subscribed to by some of the member institutions and, where there is an interest by non-subscribing institutions, an agreement could be sought with publishers to extend electronic access to all members in exchange for an additional charge. In terms of subject interest and the likely willingness of publishers to respond positively, Springer, OUP and SAGE would be those we recommend contacting initially. From the results of the survey, there is relatively little interest by members in gaining access to additional databases compared to journals.
  - A significant number of the e-resources currently subscribed to / acquired by the Senate House Library, are also acquired by other colleges. In addition to being able to access these resources acquired by their own libraries, academic staff and students at individual colleges are able to sign up for offsite access to Senate House resources. There is an opportunity for a reduction in the overall expenditure with each of the publishers, as a result of this 'duplication' of e-resources acquisitions. Theoretically if access to resources by the individual libraries could be covered by the Senate House agreements with publishers, subscriptions could be cancelled. However, there are a number of issues to be considered, and these are included in the report.
  - The survey of staffing and operational costs across the member institutions provided information on a number of issues relating to the processing and management of print and electronic resources. The survey shows that the activities with the overall highest levels of operational costs are Document supply and ILL and the processing of print subscriptions. These activities dominate staff time with nearly 50% of time spent on them. Nearly 30% of staff time is spent evenly split between processing invoices and liaison with departments within the university and with subscription agents

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- We believe that potential efficiencies could be achieved by centralising parts of the acquisition processes and activities. The survey of operating costs shows that the total expenditure on staff across all members involved in the acquisitions of resources, and enabling access by users, amounts to £2.5m.
- The report provides descriptions of two significant consortia and their activities relating to journals and databases, one being SHEDL (The Scottish Higher Education Digital Library) and the other IReL (The Irish Research eLibrary)
- On the evidence of what was achieved by SHEDL, publishers are attracted by the prospects of offering online-only access to a consortium, accompanied by a single payment and a single contract. This combination enabled the members to gain extended access to all the journal

content of the three publishers. It did not enable existing subscribers (a number of the larger institutions) to reduce their expenditure commitment in any significant way.

- Our work on this project led us to the following conclusions:
  - ⌚ The aggregated expenditure on e-resources (journals, databases and e-books) by the members of the group, whilst substantial, is not extensive enough with each publisher such that pricing and terms could be improved compared with the national agreements currently in place (ie NESLi2 and JISC Collections agreements)
  - ⌚ The level of expenditure would increase fairly substantially if UCL and LSE were participating in the initiative, but even with these, the situation in 14.1 would still be valid. Conversely, the group would be severely diminished if Kings opted out
  - ⌚ For journals, there is the potential to provide each of the member libraries with greater access to more e-resource content at a relatively low level of cost additional to current expenditure. This could be achieved by negotiating with selected publishers for access to more titles and by all members.
  - ⌚ Many of the resources available at Senate House Library are accessed offsite by users at each of the member colleges. A number of the colleges are also subscribing to these resources and the amount spent by the colleges on these resources is substantial. There is the potential to cancel some of these resources at each member library and still have access via Senate House Library (subject to publishers' licences allowing this). Alternatively negotiations could take place with publishers of the resources to seek a reduction in the total expenditure by all the members, especially if the Group could set up arrangements to pay single invoices from publishers on behalf of all members, to use a single licence and to plan a migration to online-only for many of the journals subscribed to at each library. It may be that any work in this area commence with databases where issues like print subscriptions do not exist to complicate discussions

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- ⌚ There is substantial duplication across all members of the work involved in processing and managing print subscriptions and in handling the acquisitions of increasing numbers of e-resources and making these accessible to users. There is the potential to make substantial savings amongst all members by considering the creation of a central acquisitions unit, which, over a period of time could increasingly handle these activities on behalf of members.
- ⌚ With the existence of the UK Research Reserve, the group now has the opportunity to prepare a joint plan aimed at the de-duplication of print subscriptions across members combined with exploring a move to online-only. The national journals archive agreements negotiated by JISC Collections now provides access to many years of backfiles in a number of key subject areas and would be available to support the move away from print journals.
- ⌚ The scale of e-books purchasing is relatively small across the members and there is no central approach to the acquisitions of e-books. It is very likely that the purchase of e-books will grow substantially in all university libraries in the coming years not least because of the initiatives being undertaken by JISC Collections in this area but also

because of the growing amount of e-book content becoming available, The group has the opportunity now to consider preparing a joint approach to negotiations with e-book suppliers and considering a common aggregator platform for all members

- ⌚ Given that this report, and the responses from member institutions, did not address one of the original Terms of Reference, that of considering the inclusion of other communities like the NHS in any collaborative activity, the group may wish to undertake some additional work in this area themselves, especially in the light of the impending merger between Royal Holloway and St. Georges. Additionally, a representative from the group could put themselves forward to participate in the HE-NHS Procurement Group, established by JISC Collections and all members should familiarise themselves with JISC Collections' Additional Authorised User Initiative (see [http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/catalogue/aau\\_initiative.aspx](http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/catalogue/aau_initiative.aspx) for more details).

• We recommend that the following actions be undertaken by the group:

- ⌚ *Explore the viability of migrating to online-only versions of journals within each member and based on this establish a possible plan of action for implementing this, in conjunction with reducing the numbers of print titles held in each library.*
- ⌚ *Approach selected publishers, based on the findings in this report, to negotiate extended access to a greater amount of content for all members, at a low level of additional fee.*
- ⌚ *Explore whether arrangements could be set up that allow for the group to make single payments to publishers on behalf of all members and to use a single licence in any agreements.*

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- ⌚ *Appoint a member of staff to explore further the viability of setting up a central acquisitions unit.*
- ⌚ *Make contact with IReL to learn more the costs and procedures involved in establishing a central acquisitions unit*
- ⌚ *Make contact with the UK Research Reserve to discuss the options and costs for a programme of de-duplication of print subscriptions and a move to online-only journals*
- ⌚ *Establish whether there is enough interest in a particular e-book package from a publisher or aggregator and attempt to negotiate a group-wide agreement. Additionally consider piggy-backing on the forthcoming SUPC e-book tender with additional preferential terms negotiated for acting as a University of London consortium*
- ⌚ *Review the publishers' licences relating to the key Senate House e-resources agreements to check the allowance for use by members of other colleges. If necessary take legal advice. Based on the findings, identify a candidate journal and a database publisher and attempt to negotiate access for all colleges based on the Senate House subscription at a much reduced level of cost.*