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## **Collaboration in electronic resource provision in university libraries: SHEDL, a Scottish case study**

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### **Abstract**

This case study examines the growth of collaboration among Scottish higher education institutions. Following a summary of the work of the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL), more detailed information is provided on collaboration in the fields of acquisition, licensing, selection and purchasing. Some of the UK background is outlined, relating to NESLi2 in particular, in order to illuminate the options within Scotland. The origins of negotiations on electronic resource provision within Scotland are described, drawing on developments in other countries including Ireland and Scandinavia. After initial setbacks, the implementation of the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library (SHEDL) from 2007 to 2009 is detailed. Current benefits arising from SHEDL are explained, and some possible future developments are discussed.

## **Collaboration in electronic resource provision in university libraries: SHEDL, a Scottish case study**

Scotland has a long tradition of library co-operation and collaboration, both within higher education and more broadly – although this article will confine its attention largely to the higher education sector. The population of Scotland, around five million, and the relatively compact geography of the country, lend themselves to collaboration, and this is supported by a political and social culture that encourages co-operative values. In these respects, Scotland is similar to, for example, some of the Scandinavian countries or Ireland. Scotland is small enough to facilitate co-operation, but large enough to provide a critical mass of funding, and of numbers of researchers and students in higher education institutions (HEIs).

### **Current collaboration among Scotland's higher education institutions**

The current lead body concerned with HEI library co-operation, the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL), was first formed in 1977 – initially under the name of Working Party on Cooperation in Acquisition (reflecting pressures on resource acquisition budgets that have never gone away in the succeeding thirty years), then Working Group on Library Cooperation, with the current SCURL designation only being adopted in 1992 (its website is <http://scurl.ac.uk>). This is not the place to go into any detail on the history and development of SCURL, which is covered very ably in Janet Usher's 2003 MSc thesis (Usher, 2003), but the history reflects both the opportunities and challenges leading towards collaboration, and the countervailing pressures to preserve individual libraries' freedom of action in what is very much a competitive environment between universities. It is fair to say that the spirit of co-operation has gained an advantage as the years have passed, but as long as separate institutions compete for limited funds collaboration cannot be unconditional.

From its inception in 1977, the National Library of Scotland (NLS) (<http://www.nls.uk>) has played a leading part in the work of SCURL, and until recently SCURL formally existed as a committee of the Board of Trustees of the NLS. SCURL's Service Development Manager is based at the NLS. The pivotal role of the NLS reflects its very large research collections and its consequent importance to researchers, within and outside HEIs, in Scotland and beyond.

The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) and SCURL have also had closer relations in recent years. SLIC (<http://www.slainte.org.uk/Slic/slicindex.htm>) is the independent advisory body to the Scottish Government and Scottish ministers on library and information matters, and includes HEI library representatives on its Board, as well as representatives from many other sectors. The SLIC Director attends SCURL meetings. This liaison activity ensures that higher education concerns are reflected within the wider library community, and that information requirements beyond HEIs are not forgotten by SCURL.

SCURL also includes the two major public reference libraries in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and the Open University in Scotland. Representatives from the Northern Ireland universities (Queen's Belfast, and Ulster), from National Museums Scotland, from the Scottish Further Education Unit, and from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), also attend meetings. The involvement of the SFC, which is the government funding agency for higher and further education within Scotland, is vital to allow SCURL to carry out lobbying and networking directly with the body responsible for a large proportion of total HEI funding. Close relations are also maintained with Universities Scotland, the representative body of the Principals (chief executives) of the Scottish universities.

Such a comprehensive network of contacts would have been unthinkable for much of SCURL's existence. In its initial years, it was often ignored, actually or potentially, during consultations on matters directly bearing on the future of libraries within Scotland, but it is now widely recognised as the representative voice of Scottish HEI information resource requirements. Much of its current activity is facilitated by the existence of a relatively small Business Committee (set up in 2001) which meets regularly between broader plenary meetings, and also by the appointment of a fulltime Development Director, now Service Development Manager, from 2000 onwards, funded jointly by the NLS and SLIC.

A broad remit is reflected in SCURL's aims, as listed on its website, with the leading two bullet points firmly concentrating on the promotion of collaboration and co-operation:

- to improve services for users and maximise resource through collaborative action;
- to work with other organisations, sectors and domains towards the creation of a co-operative library infrastructure in Scotland;
- to lobby funding and planning bodies on matters of shared interest;
- to provide mutual support for members.

In addition to its broad strategic objectives and activities, there is a wide variety of SCURL working groups and affiliated groups covering topics such as access, health, North American studies, official publications, rare books, special needs, and visual arts, indicating the strength of the co-operative impulse operating within Scotland.

Much else could be said about collaborative activity within Scotland, particularly under the broad heading of what might loosely be called technical development. From its beginnings in the 1970s with SCOLCAP (Scottish Libraries' Co-operative Automation Project), which predates the establishment of SCURL and its predecessors (see e.g. Gallivan, 1980), through to SALBIN (Scottish Academic Libraries Bibliographic Information Network) (Ralls, 1989) and SALSER (originally Scottish Academic Libraries Serials), which is still going strong hosted by the Edinburgh-based national academic data centre at EDINA at <http://edina.ac.uk/salser/>, technical co-operation has been a continuing theme. Within SCURL, discussions are currently underway on expanding the work and remit of the Scottish Digital Library Consortium (SDLC), which provides library management and other software infrastructure services to a number of SCURL members (see also Cannell & Guy, 2001).

The work of the Centre for Digital Library Research at the University of Strathclyde (<http://cdlr.strath.ac.uk>) has promoted co-operation in Scotland with projects and services such as CAIRNS (Co-operative Information Retrieval Network for Scotland – <http://cairns.lib.strath.ac.uk> – Nicholson et al, 2000), SCONE (Scottish Collections Network - <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/service/> - Winch, 2003), and SDDL (Scottish Distributed Digital Library - <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/sddl/index.cfm>).

More recently, Scotland has been at the forefront of Institutional Repository developments in the UK, hosting for example the JISC-funded IRIScotland (<http://www.iriscotland.lib.ed.ac.uk/>), establishing an Institutional Repository infrastructure for Scotland, originally proposed by SCURL. A successor project, ERIS, Enriching Repository Infrastructure in Scotland, (<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/inf11/eris.aspx>), has just successfully bid for funding from JISC, which will run from April 2009 to March 2011.

Finally, mention should be made of CASS, the Collaborative Academic Store for Scotland, established by SCURL in 2004 following a feasibility study funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (Nicholson & Brown, 2002). This pioneering service, in the context of UK HEI information provision, has enabled libraries to relegate lesser-used material, mainly but not entirely older journal backruns, to a central store hosted by the National Library of Scotland, where they have been available if required to researchers, by scanning and document delivery or by loan (Nicholson, 2005). CASS has acted as an exemplar for the more recent UK Research Reserve (UKRR), now entering a Phase 2 service, following a successful Phase 1 pilot (<http://www.ukrr.ac.uk> - Shorley, 2008). The UKRR seeks to allow libraries to dispose of print journal backruns, duplicated in many libraries throughout the UK and increasingly superseded by online journal backfiles, safe in the knowledge that at least three print journal copies remain in the UK, in the British Library plus two other libraries.

### **Collaboration in acquisition and purchasing**

Following this brief review of some other co-operative activities between Scotland's HEI libraries, mainly under the auspices of SCURL, the focus of this article moves to the more specific area of co-operation in acquiring library materials.

From its earliest days, SCURL, under its original title of the Working Party on Co-operation in Acquisition, took an interest in such matters, maintaining for example a list of individual libraries' expensive purchases which could be consulted by all in order to avoid costly duplication.

In the mid to late 1990s, however, more formal policies became the norm with a growing realisation that institutional accountability and optimum value for money depended on the pursuit of more structured and transparent procedures. Before then, purchasing of both journals and books had been a relatively dispersed and individual business. For monographs, the Net Book Agreement, one of the last surviving examples of legally

permitted retail price maintenance in the UK, meant that there was no competition on pricing – the ‘Library Licence’ discount of 10% on list price, no more and no less, was available to all. The Agreement remained in force until growing competitive pressures led to its abandonment in 1995 (Ansell, 1998). Journals were purchased from a number of different agents, or direct from the publisher, with some concern for pricing of course, but few systematic comparisons and no formal tendering activity.

Increasing pressure on library budgets, plus the implementation of European Union (EU) regulations requiring tendering for public sector procurement above certain relatively low limits, and the growing professionalisation of procurement activity within universities, led to a review both of procedures and of prevailing attitudes.

Northern Ireland was probably the first part of the UK to carry out a formal tendering exercise for journal supply (Lyttle & Shorley, 1994), followed closely by the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium, including many of the universities in the south of England (Ball & Wright, 1997), and then in 1998 by Scotland.

This first round of consortia building was restricted to journal purchases, given that journal expenditure was and is the largest part of the library materials budget, and that journals purchasing was concentrated with a relatively small number of subscription agents. Consortium formation, as opposed to individual libraries going out to tender, was also encouraged by the the need to implement the complex EU tendering regulations, pooling scarce procurement expertise over a number of universities.

SHERAL, the Scottish Higher Education and Research Acquisitions Librarians group, affiliated to SCURL (<http://scurl.ac.uk/about/sheral.html>), set up its first journals consortium agreement in 1998 to cover three years, extended by a further two years, including all Scottish HEI libraries plus the National Library of Scotland. A second round of negotiations, this time adding the Northern Ireland university libraries and the National Museums of Scotland to the list of members, was carried through in 2003, concluding another three plus two years deal. The addition of Northern Ireland led to a name change to SNIPES, Scotland and Northern Ireland PERiodicals Supply (<http://scurl.ac.uk/affiliated/SNIPES/index.html>). Last year, 2008, a third round was successfully negotiated, for a four year agreement, the maximum available under EU regulations.

Negotiations on consortium book supply soon followed the periodicals example, with the establishment of SCABS, the Scottish Consortium for Academic Book Supply (<http://scurl.ac.uk/affiliated/SCABS/index.html>). As with periodicals, agreements have gone through a number of iterations, with a separate tender for electronic book (e-book) supply presently being undertaken.

### **Electronic access**

These agreements with serials agents and with book suppliers have worked well enough over the past decade, resulting in both improved financial terms and improved service

performance, facilitated by regular six monthly meetings between library representatives and the consortium agents and suppliers. Similar agreements operate in other parts of the UK.

However, the growth of electronic access, e-access, over the past ten to fifteen years, and the differing arrangements operating for the purchase or licensing of e-access to journals in particular, has resulted in a number of different models operating in this area, and these are relevant to the understanding of the current position within Scotland. These pressures are also now affecting the growing provision of e-books, but this article will concentrate on the more established area of electronic journal, e-journal, provision.

In the mid 1990s, electronic provision of journal articles was just beginning to take off. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which channels government funding for higher education to individual universities in England (the equivalent body for Scotland is the Scottish Funding Council mentioned earlier with reference to SCURL), arranged, along with funding councils in other parts of the UK, to provide e-access to all journals published by Academic Press, Blackwell Publishers, Blackwell Science, and Institute of Physics Publishing. This arrangement, the Pilot Site Licence Initiative (PSLI), ran from 1995 to 1997, with HEFCE paying the publishers a top-sliced sum for access provision to all UK HEIs i.e. there was no charge for individual institutions or libraries (CHEMS, 1997; CHEMS, 1998). This initiative was most important in setting up a critical mass of journal content that was instrumental in changing the attitudes of researchers, encouraging them to begin to expect online access to articles as standard. Now of course e-access is commonplace, indeed almost universal, but this was not the case at that time.

It was not possible for the UK funding councils to continue what was in effect open-ended financial support for e-access provision after the initial PSLI period. It can in fact be argued that, while the PSLI was successful in raising awareness of e-journal content, the experience discouraged universal provision of online access in the UK for the succeeding decade, and that it is only now, partly as a result of initiatives such as SHEDL, that this kind of provision is once more on the agenda.

This concern for the financial implications of universal access meant that the successor to the PSLI, the National Electronic Site Licence Initiative (NESLI) was set up by JISC on an opt-in basis (Woodward, 1999). JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee, is funded by all the UK higher education funding councils to provide UK wide network services, and has also proved to be a major catalyst in the field of content provision. The mission of JISC Collections, originally operating within JISC but set up as a separate JISC-funded service in 2006, is 'to support UK education and research by delivering affordable, relevant and sustainable online content' (<http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/>).

JISC Collections negotiates directly with publishers concerning non-journal content, but retains a managing agent, currently Content Complete Ltd (<http://www.contentcomplete.com/>), to agree journal deals with publishers, under what is now the NESLi2 banner (<http://www.nesli2.ac.uk>). NESLi2 has always been a UK-wide

consortium, and has successfully negotiated bundle deals (access to all or most of a publisher's title collection) with most of the largest publishers. There has always however been a sense that its bargaining power is limited to some extent, as there is no means of knowing in advance exactly how many institutions will sign up to a particular deal, so there is no actual sum of money available on the table. Once a deal has been struck, and approved by JISC Collections, it is then up to individual institutions to decide whether or not to participate.

The terms of a deal for a particular library are usually based on what is known as JISC banding, whereby more is charged to institutions in Band A (the largest and best funded universities), and then less down through the bands to Band J representing the smallest institutions: a list of institutions by band is at [http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/jisc\\_banding.aspx](http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/jisc_banding.aspx).

In addition, a number of deals offer better terms as a result of a 'single invoice' arrangement, where Content Complete Ltd receives one invoice from the publisher – thus saving publisher costs – and then re-invoices participating libraries individually. These single invoices, and the NESLi2 deals in general, are usually only for the *additional* cost of a bundle deal, providing access to the publisher titles not already received and paid for.

Although this arrangement can cut down administrative costs, there are often still protracted negotiations between publishers and individual libraries in order to establish agreement on the individual subscriptions taken by the library. This can be very difficult if the publisher or the library records are not as organised as they could be. Subscription agents often have the most comprehensive records of individual subscriptions, although these also may not be complete if there is some direct ordering between library and publisher. There is also the question of departmental subscriptions (i.e titles taken by individual departments within an HEI, rather than centrally by the library). It is important to ensure that the correct list is agreed, as many of the bundle deals forbid, or at least very severely limit, the opportunities for cancellation of individual titles. It can be galling to say the least for a library to discover that it has somehow committed itself to pay for a title that was cancelled a year or two earlier, or for titles cancelled by a department over whose subscriptions the library itself has no control.

In addition to the NESLi2 agreements to which individual libraries may opt in or not, there are of course other e-access offers from publishers or groups of publishers which libraries can take up either directly with the publisher, or via the approved consortium (e.g. SNIPES) subscription agent.

As can be seen from this very brief description of some of the aspects of the current landscape, there are opportunities here for confusion, and for tension between different players. While it is true that the system has provided a huge increase in online access to e-journal content over the last ten years, and there is little evidence of deep dissatisfaction, nevertheless there are suggestions that improvements could be made.



For example, there can be tensions between JISC Collections/NESLi2 and the regional consortia such as SNIPES. A single invoice arrangement organised via the NESLi2 managing agent has the effect of reducing turnover with the regional consortium subscription agent. Many regional consortia contracts include an element specifying that terms depend in part on the maintenance of a set level of volume of business with the agent. Taking business away from the subscription agent, and making payments to the NESLi2 agent, can reduce overall expenditure below the threshold, and lead to worse terms, which may or may not be offset by the better NESLi2 terms following on from the single invoice arrangement.

The opt-in nature of NESLi2 deals is another potential problem. Not only does this result in the financial terms being rather less good than would otherwise be the case, but it also means that there is less widespread availability of content than under some kind of a national deal. Of course, it is not necessarily appropriate or essential that every institution has access to the same content (and in the current financial climate some bundle deals will become harder to sustain in any case), but students and staff now expect immediate access to content, all content – and the marginal cost of extending online access to all UK HEIs is very low, if not approaching zero.

A final example of inefficiencies in terms of payments to a publisher is the separation of the bulk of the total which still goes via a subscription agent for individual titles, from the add-on for the additional bundle titles which is negotiated via NESLi2 or perhaps directly with a publisher. The individual subscriptions may refer to titles which might have been cancelled (possibly to be replaced by others) had the bundle deal agreement allowed such a possibility, and moreover are increasingly online only and thus in practice indistinguishable from all the other titles made available online by that particular publisher.

### **The Scottish angle**

This lengthy digression, although still by no means covering all aspects of e-journal acquisition and licensing in Scotland and the rest of the UK, has been necessary to set out some of the background and illustrate some of the pressures under which the current system operates.

For a number of years in Scotland, we have been seeking, under the auspices of SCURL, to explore whether there was scope for more intense collaborative efforts to overcome some of the obstacles outlined above, in order, in a nutshell, to provide more content more widely more economically.

We have had the example of other countries of a similar size in front of us as we have looked to make progress in this direction. The Scandinavian countries, such as Finland, Sweden, and Iceland, have in different ways been able to provide a wider range of content more comprehensively in recent years, via services such as FinELib (Hakli, 2002) and BIBSAM (Stange, 2006), which have provided significant content to all constituent institutions, including national libraries, and some public and health libraries, in addition

to universities. Iceland has in many ways had the most comprehensive policy, making content available to all throughout the country (Gylfadottir & Hlynsdottir, 2006), although the population of Iceland is much smaller and it may well be that there are difficulties at present as a result of Iceland's financial problems over the past year or more.

More recently, since 2004, the Irish Research eLibrary (IREL) (<http://www.irelibrary.ie/>) has made available a wide-ranging and expanding service that provides online content to staff and students of the Irish universities (Dunne, 2008; IUA, 2007). IREL currently provides access to content from 110 different publishers, databases, etc, with the emphasis on fulltext journal articles, but also including databases, reference works, statistics, data, business and financial information, original sources, newspapers and e-books. This service is funded centrally by the Higher Education Authority and Science Foundation Ireland. The present phase comes to an end in 2009, and it will be interesting to see whether, or to what extent, funding is continued after this year, given the changing economic circumstances and pressures on public finances in Ireland as in other countries. The service is undoubtedly popular and highly-regarded within the Irish research community.

These various examples have acted as a spur to SCURL, looking for a way to emulate, within the UK and Scottish context, some of these achievements in Ireland and other countries where there are many similarities to Scotland.

Serious discussions on practical actions began in 2003, as the National Library of Scotland continued to move forward with refocussing its science information services. The Scottish Science Information Strategy Working Group (SSISWG) was set up, with representatives from the NLS, from SLIC (the Scottish Library and Information Council), from the Scottish university libraries, and from other stakeholders. Over the next two to three years, much effort was expended exploring the possibilities of national deals to give access to journal and other information to many different constituencies within Scotland, including:

- The National Library of Scotland, wishing to provide a more straightforward online scientific information service beyond its physical location in Edinburgh;
- Public libraries, which were of primary concern to SLIC, including People's Network provision;
- HEIs;
- Further Education colleges, especially from 2005 when the previously separate funding bodies for further and higher education merged to form the Scottish Funding Council;
- Schools;
- The National Health Service in Scotland, already developing a full NHS Scotland e-Library (<http://www.elib.scot.nhs.uk/>);
- Research institutes;
- The business sector.

A number of publishers were approached, or approached the Group. Product demonstrations took place, offers were received, and negotiations were undertaken. On a parallel track, proposals were drawn up to solicit public funding, following such Scottish Executive initiatives as Smart Successful Scotland and Digital Scotland, which appeared to support the premise of much greater access to online information.

Despite much activity, these initial ambitions were not fulfilled over that time period, although other projects arising from the same Group did come to fruition. For example, a Scottish Declaration on Open Access was prepared and launched in October 2004 (OATS, 2004), and work on institutional repositories, culminating in the establishment of the IRIScotland Project, mentioned above, was also successful.

The overriding reason for the failure to achieve the information access aims was the difficulty in bringing together funding from a wide variety of different sources. While all stakeholders were interested in making progress, the complexity of achieving the necessary funding take-off was just too great. For some sectors, although interested, this particular path was perhaps not quite high enough priority. It was also the case that there was insufficient market testing – without strong evidence of demand (and of course that in itself would require funding to demonstrate), it was easier for this particular project to be put on one side by funding organisations.

### **Working towards SHEDL**

Following a regrouping, and a time for reconsideration, SCURL felt that the prospect of wider access still had considerable merit, but that this should initially be restricted to HEI staff and students, where the need was most obvious and most immediate. Access could and should be broadened in due course to other sectors, but this should only happen following successful implementation within higher education.

One particular driver that was new to the higher education stage in Scotland was the development of ‘research pools’. Research pools arose from the perception that, in order to maximise success (as evidenced by high scores in the Research Assessment Exercise run by the funding councils every few years, and forming a major resource allocation element), it was necessary for researchers from different Scottish universities to be brought together to form a critical mass, with the purpose of driving up performance and competing with the larger English universities.

The first research pools were established in physics (SUPA - <http://www.supa.ac.uk/>) in 2004, and chemistry (EastCHEM - <http://ch-www.st-and.ac.uk/eastchem/>, and WestCHEM - <http://www.westchem.ac.uk/>), set up in 2005. Since then at least seven other pools have been established under the auspices of the Scottish Funding Council, including ERPEM (Engineering/Mathematics), SAGES (Geoscience/Environment/Society), SIRE (Economics), SRPE (Engineering), SULSA (Life Sciences), SINAPSE (Medical Imaging), and SICSA (Informatics/Computer Science). The results from the most recent Research Assessment Exercise were released

in December 2008, and in general vindicated the research pooling developments of the previous few years.

From the point of view of access to information however it became clear that there were major discrepancies in the resources available to researchers at the larger universities and to their colleagues, part of the same research pool, in some of the smaller institutions. This discrepancy has become a key element in the arguments put forward in favour of wider access.

While there were new arguments in favour of collaboration, SCURL members also felt that, following a lengthy period of a rather frustrating failure to progress, it was necessary to obtain an external view on whether this was in fact the right path to follow, and, if so, what were the best practical methods to ensure success.

To pursue this, a proposal was developed and put to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (<http://www.carnegie-trust.org/>) in the autumn of 2006. This proposal sought funding for an external consultant to address a number of questions as follows, under the banner of collaborative collection management:

- How will current and future trends in information provision influence the acquisition and licensing policies of individual university libraries in Scotland, and what benefits can be derived from these trends for Scotland?
- In what ways should collaborative collection management be practised by Scottish higher education institutions acting together?
- Could a collaborative collection management approach lead to both benefits to all Universities through broader access, and also deliver savings to each University?
- How can these developments best support present and future patterns of research in Scottish universities, especially in the context of research pooling?
- How does Scottish collaborative collection management relate to JISC activities and what would be the benefits to Scotland of a specifically Scottish approach?
- What role do Open Access journals and institutional repositories play in this process and how is that role likely to develop and affect proposals for collaborative acquisition?
- What scope is there to negotiate collaborative access to journal backfiles for Scottish universities, extending the access which already exists in some universities?
- How should storage and preservation of online journals develop in a Scottish context, in the light of existing local, national and international initiatives?
- Is there scope to extend this collaborative access to the wider Scottish research and learning community, including other research institutions/further education/schools/the population at large via public libraries?
- What can we learn from other countries in collaborative collection management?

The Carnegie Trust had previously funded the report that led to the establishment of CASS, mentioned above, but was not on this occasion able to approve the necessary funding for this project.

However, one of the members of the panel reviewing the bid was the Principal of Glasgow University, Sir Muir Russell, who felt that the investigative study should indeed go ahead. After consultation with his counterpart at the University of Edinburgh, Sir Timothy O'Shea, they agreed that the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow should jointly fund a study.

It was at this point that the designation SHEDL, Scottish Higher Education Digital Library, emerged, and a SHEDL Steering Group was set up, under the auspices of SCURL, initially chaired by this article's author, Tony Kidd from the University of Glasgow, currently chaired by Gillian Anderson, Librarian of the UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands) Millennium Institute.

Following a tendering process, the SHEDL Steering Group appointed John Cox, of John Cox Associates, in the spring of 2007 to carry out what became known as the *Investigative Study towards establishing a Scottish Higher Education Digital Library for Scottish Universities* (John Cox Associates, 2007). Cox held interviews with staff from all Scottish HEI libraries, with researchers, research pool representatives, and research vice-principals, with representatives from Universities Scotland and the SFC, from the National Library of Scotland, and from SLIC, the larger public libraries and NHS Scotland. He also approached JISC Collections and the newly established procurement body APUC, Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (<http://www.apuc-scot.ac.uk/>). APUC was set up in 2007 by the SFC, as one of a number of procurement bodies covering different sectors of public procurement within Scotland, following the publication of the McLelland Report (McLelland, 2006) a year earlier, which had recommended a much more co-ordinated approach to procurement within the Scottish public sector, forecasting that significant savings were achievable.

The study concluded, after a comprehensive analysis which will not be repeated here, that SHEDL should indeed be established, and that it should develop a coherent acquisition strategy aimed at:

- providing online desktop access to a range of scholarly and research publications beyond the capability of any individual institution alone;
- meeting the needs of all SHEDL stakeholders, so that each participating institution derives a clear benefit from its participation, both financial and managerial;
- meeting the information requirements of the Research Pools and other research needs;
- demonstrating a significant aggregate cost-benefit: i.e. more content to more users within existing aggregate expenditure on information provision.

Cox asserted that the provision of access to all of a publisher's current journal titles for all Scottish HEIs, paid for by a single invoice from the publisher, with an agreed three-year lifetime for the deal, would create significant economies, in contrast to the sub-optimal 'opt-in' NESLi2 negotiations, where neither the publisher nor Content Complete

Ltd, negotiating on behalf of libraries, know exactly how many libraries will participate, and therefore what payments will be made.

The report was launched at an event in Edinburgh in October 2007, attended by representatives from a wide variety of stakeholders, and immediately aroused much interest and curiosity, from possible publisher participants and from other libraries and library groupings within the UK.

### **Implementation of SHEDL**

Given a favourable reception by SCURL libraries, the SHEDL Steering Group set a target of reaching agreement with a small number of publishers in time for implementation of a pilot SHEDL service from January 2009. The three publishers selected were the American Chemical Society (ACS), Cambridge University Press and Springer. The primary concern was to ensure a broad subject spread, so that there were benefits from the start for each of the nineteen Scottish HEIs, ranging from large research universities, through to smaller specialist institutions such as the Scottish Agricultural College, Glasgow School of Art, Edinburgh College of Art, and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. In addition, the publishers represented varying degrees of NESLi2 'penetration' within Scotland, varying levels of already existing expenditure, and varying balances between online and print provision.

There was much discussion on how negotiations should proceed, and who would carry out the negotiations. The Cox study suggested three options on structure based on experience in other countries – that SHEDL should be based in the National Library of Scotland; that there should be a separate not-for-profit company owned by SCURL/SHEDL members; or that APUC should lead on this as part of its procurement responsibilities.

The first two options were not thought to be appropriate, if only because additional funding would have been required, and there was no additional funding available. And after due consideration, APUC recognised that their staff did not possess the relevant expertise to negotiate in this rather distinctive area (where in some respects at least each publisher operates in a quasi-monopoly position). So in due course it was agreed that JISC Collections were best placed to act for SCURL, for two main reasons. JISC, and JISC Collections, are funded by the UK higher education funding councils precisely to provide this kind of service for HEIs, so that it seemed appropriate to draw on their long experience of negotiating with publishers, and on the experience of their agents Content Complete Ltd. JISC Collections were also very interested in the SHEDL concept – providing online content to all members of a particular group, at a single negotiated price – with a view to assessing whether that concept could be implemented more broadly in certain circumstances within the UK.

In order to inform the negotiations, existing expenditure figures were gathered from each HEI, including all current journal expenditure with the relevant publishers, print and

online, not just payments reflecting existing NESLi2 commitments. This was completed, although not a straightforward process:

- Foreign currency payments – the US Dollar is the base currency for ACS, and the Euro for Springer. Some libraries paid in the base currency, some in sterling, converted at different times, depending on arrangements with the subscription agent. The complexities here were compounded by the severe deterioration of sterling against both the dollar and the Euro during 2008 and 2009;
- Value Added Tax (VAT) – in the UK VAT (sales tax) is levied on online subscriptions, but not on print purchases. Many publishers operate a hybrid rate, as instructed by their local tax office, for print plus online subscriptions. It was not always clear exactly what VAT rate, if any, existing libraries were paying on different segments of their expenditure with each publisher;
- Coverage – libraries could not always easily determine exactly which titles were published by a given publisher, partly because at the margin titles transfer from one publisher to another, and therefore found some difficulty in establishing their overall payments publisher by publisher.

In order to reap the benefits of a single negotiation and blanket content coverage, it was necessary for each of the nineteen Scottish HEI libraries to commit to participate in SHEDL, for three years, if suitable deals were agreed with each publisher. Although libraries were used to entering multi-year agreements for several database subscriptions, and for a number of NESLi2 agreements, the concept of a commitment in advance was new, and did require significant discussions with individual institutions. A Letter of Commitment was drawn up, setting out financial targets, and covering other aspects of the negotiations. These Letters were signed by all the HEIs in July 2008, and delivered to JISC Collections, enabling Content Complete Ltd to negotiate with confidence with the the individual publishers.

As was to be expected, negotiations with the publishers were complex and quite lengthy, but were satisfactorily completed by the end of October 2008. Licences were drawn up, based on the Model NESLi2 Licence for Journals (Model NESLi2 Licence, 2008). Single invoices for each institution, for each publisher, were issued by Content Complete Ltd in December 2008. Access to the journals of each publisher was made available from January 2009 to each of the nineteen SHEDL members.

### **SHEDL experience so far**

At the time of writing, May 2009, our experience of a ‘live’ SHEDL service is necessarily limited, but results have certainly been very positive so far.

Implementation of actual access to the content has gone well, with only a few teething problems in the first days of January. Access is via IP address ranges, ATHENS, and/or Shibboleth. At this stage at least, there is no separate SHEDL portal, with access being made available by individual libraries alongside their existing e-journal service. There have been some delays in activating SHEDL publisher lists with the different link

services used by libraries, via Serials Solutions, SFX, Ebsco, etc, but these problems have for the most part been solved.

Usage statistics are now available on a consortium wide basis, as well as for individual institutions, and show a healthy increase on previous years, although it is too early to provide any detailed information on this. The three publishers between them provide access to more than 1500 journal titles.

The number of print subscriptions has reduced significantly, although detailed figures are not yet available. The negotiated price for the SHEDL deals relates to online access only, although 'deeply discounted price' (from list price) additional subscriptions are available for those still requiring print. This trend benefits both publishers and libraries, and is likely to continue to accelerate into the future.

There has been substantial publicity for the SHEDL initiative (e.g. RIN, 2009; SCURL, 2009), with particular interest expressed by some other parts of the UK wishing to move in the same direction. JISC Collections remains very interested in the universal provision aspects of SHEDL as an exemplar for future negotiations. SCURL members themselves have expressed full support for SHEDL at a number of meetings.

All Scottish HEIs have benefitted from the advent of SHEDL. While the increase in content availability may be greatest for the smaller and medium-sized institutions, even the largest libraries have seen some additional content, while the prices paid are less than would otherwise have been the case, even for the largest institutions. There are also potential savings in administration within libraries, relating to negotiation and for example maintenance of subscription lists. General benefits from collaboration and working together include the ability to point to library contributions towards the shared services agenda, a key SFC, and Scottish Government, policy promoting the efficiencies and synergy arising from collaborative provision of base services (York Consulting LLP, 2007).

While the small SHEDL Steering Group, reporting to SCURL, continues to lead on policy and strategic decisions and developments, a SHEDL Working Group has also been set up, with representatives from each of the nineteen HEIs, to take forward more detailed points, and also to bring forward recommendations on content to the Steering Group.

### **Future developments**

Negotiations are just underway with a second tranche of publishers, larger and smaller, building on the current licences, with a view to reaching agreement to implement access from the beginning of 2010. The publishers were selected following a voting exercise including all Scottish HEIs. In the current financial climate, attention will be focussed as much, or more, on cost-saving as on extending access, but the principle of universal provision remains a very high priority. Because of this, it remains essential that some content is of interest to each member, and for example one or more publishers have been selected this year that are of particular interest to the small specialist institutions.



Current deals have concentrated on journal articles, the central requirement for researchers particularly in the sciences. It is intended that in due course content will extend beyond current journals to databases, e-books, journal backfiles etc, but the initial emphasis remains on the core research needs.

Similarly, SHEDL plans in due course to extend beyond higher education. The National Library of Scotland, a key SCURL member, and publicly funded research institutes are the most likely first targets, but other sectors including further education colleges and the National Health Service are also highly relevant.

Cost allocation is a thorny question. Currently, costs are allocated among members according to base expenditure before SHEDL implementation, so that, for example, libraries that had no ACS subscriptions are paying nothing initially. However, this question will be reviewed during the second year, and cost allocations may be changed, with agreement, during the third year. This is likely to be a complex and difficult process, with the involvement of a number of different factors, including, probably, size and usage, as well as existing expenditure. Other consortia have also found this a complicated and fraught procedure (e.g. Stange, 2003). It should be noted that the logical conclusion if SHEDL develops over a number of years is that funding for basic journal content in particular becomes a top-sliced element recognised as a standard infrastructure requirement akin to network provision.

Promotion and raising awareness continue to be vital concerns. A seminar is due to take place in autumn 2009, which will bring together various stakeholders within Scotland, as well as participating publishers, the negotiators, and other interested consortia within the UK. A SHEDL logo is, somewhat belatedly, about to be launched, and a dedicated website should no doubt be developed. Some publicity has already taken place on individual library sites, but this should be co-ordinated and formalised, so that staff and students are aware of the potentials of access throughout Scotland.

Analysis of usage and awareness is also crucial in this context. An impact survey will be required in due course, to demonstrate benefit for researchers and students, for individual institutions, and for the sector overall. While central funding for content licensing remains unlikely, it may well be possible to obtain external funding either within Scotland or more broadly from elsewhere in the UK to carry out a survey of this nature.

Finally, the position of the subscription agent, alluded to earlier in this paper, remains a concern. On the one hand, it can be hard to see a place for the traditional agent within an online consortium environment. On the other hand, there are still administrative demands to be met beyond the actual negotiation of the deal. Agents are developing more sophisticated services to take over and simplify much of this administration, and libraries may still find it worthwhile to pay for this work to be outsourced.

## **Conclusion**

SHEDL is a pioneering concept within the UK context. While it may not look particularly revolutionary when compared with the situation elsewhere, it is certainly a departure from standard procedures in this country over the last few years. As such, it is an exciting venture for SHEDL participants, and will be watched closely by others within the UK. Although currently still in a pilot phase, it is so far proving to be very successful, with a strong development path into the future.

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