
Site License Initiatives in the United Kingdom: The PSLI and NESLI Experience

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This article examines the development of site licensing within the United Kingdom higher education community. In particular, it looks at how the pressure to make better use of dwindling fiscal resources led to the conclusion that information technology and its exploitation was necessary in order to create an effective library service. These conclusions, reached in the Follett Report of 1993, led to the establishment of a Pilot Site License Initiative and then a National Electronic Site License Initiative. The focus of this article is these initiatives and the issues they faced, which included off-site access, definition of a site and perhaps most importantly, the unbundling of print and electronic journals.

Increased competition for institution funding around the world has resulted in an erosion of library funding. In the United States state universities are receiving a decreasing portion of their funds from the state while private universities are forced to limit tuition increases due to outside market forces. In the United Kingdom the entitlement to free higher education is currently under attack and losing ground. Today's economic pressures are requiring individual libraries to make better use of their fiscal resources while the emphasis moves from being a repository for information to providing access to information.

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As in the United States, the use of consortia for cost sharing in the United Kingdom is becoming imperative as producers produce more electronic materials and make them available in full-text formats. Consortia, while originally formed to cooperate on interlibrary loans and union catalogs, have recently taken on a new role, driven by financial expediency, in negotiating electronic licenses for their members, and the percentage of vendor contracts with consortia are rising. Academic libraries cannot afford the prevalent pricing model that asks for the current print price plus an electronic surcharge plus projected inflation surcharges, therefore group purchasing power allows higher education institutions to leverage the money they have and to provide resources that would otherwise be unavailable. Advantages for the vendor include one negotiator and one technical person for the consortia as a whole. In addition, the use of consortia provide greater leverage in pushing for the need for stable archiving and for retaining the principles of fair use within the electronic environment as well as reminding publishers of the need for flexible and multiple economic models to deal with the diverse needs and funding structures of consortia.¹

During the spring of 1998, while visiting academic libraries in the United Kingdom, I looked at an existing initiative within the UK higher education community—the Pilot Site License Initiative (PSLI), which had begun as a response to the Follett Report and to rising journal prices. At the time the three-year initiative was nearing its end and its successor, the National Electronic Site License Initiative (NESLI), was already the topic of much discussion.

History

The concept of site licensing in the United Kingdom higher education

community had already been established, since 1988, by the Combined Higher Education Software Team (CHEST), based at the University of Bath. CHEST has negotiated site licenses with software suppliers and some large database producers through two different methods. Either the supplier sells a national license to CHEST, which passes it on to the individual institution or CHEST sells licenses to the institution on the suppliers behalf and passes the fees on to them (see figure 1).

CHEST works closely with National Information Services and Systems (NISS). NISS provides a focal point for the UK education and research communities to access information resources. NISS's Web service, the NISS Information gateway, provides a host for CHEST information such as Ebsco Masterfile and OCLC NetFirst. Most CHEST agreements are institution-wide site licenses that allow for all noncommercial use of the product, normally for five years to allow for incorporation into the curriculum. Once an institution signs up it is committed for the full term of the agreement. CHEST is not in the business of either evaluating products or differentiating among competing suppliers. Evaluations and purchase decisions are left up to the individual institutions.²

CHEST does set up and support e-mail discussion lists for each agreement so that users can discuss features and problems of the product among themselves. They also send out electronic news bulletins to provide advance warning of forthcoming agreements and to assess level of interest in future agreements. CHEST operates in a similar manner to many library consortia in the United States. The major differences are that it sells to higher education institutions as a whole so the products they sell include not only databases but also for example, software programs. This is also beginning to change in

the United States. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* mentions that institutions will not stop with library databases, "in the future we'll be negotiating site licenses for software and all sorts of things . . . not just databases."³

Although CHEST is substantially self-funding it is strongly supported (as is NISS) by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the Higher Education Funding Councils of England (HEFCE). The majority of public funding for higher education funding in the United Kingdom is funneled through the HEFCs (one each for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland). One of the JISC committees, the Information Services Subcommittee (ISSC), which in 1997 became part of the Committee for Electronic Information (CEI) defined principles for the delivery of content.⁴ They were:

- free at the point of use;
- subscriptions not transaction based;
- lowest common denominator;
- universality;
- commonality of interfaces and
- mass instruction.

Follett Report

In 1993 an investigation into how to deal with the pressures on library resources caused by the rapid expansion of student numbers and the worldwide explosion in academic knowledge and information was undertaken by the Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Group, chaired by Sir Brian Follett. This investigation resulted in the Follett Report. One of the key conclusions of the report was "The exploitation of IT is essential to create the effective

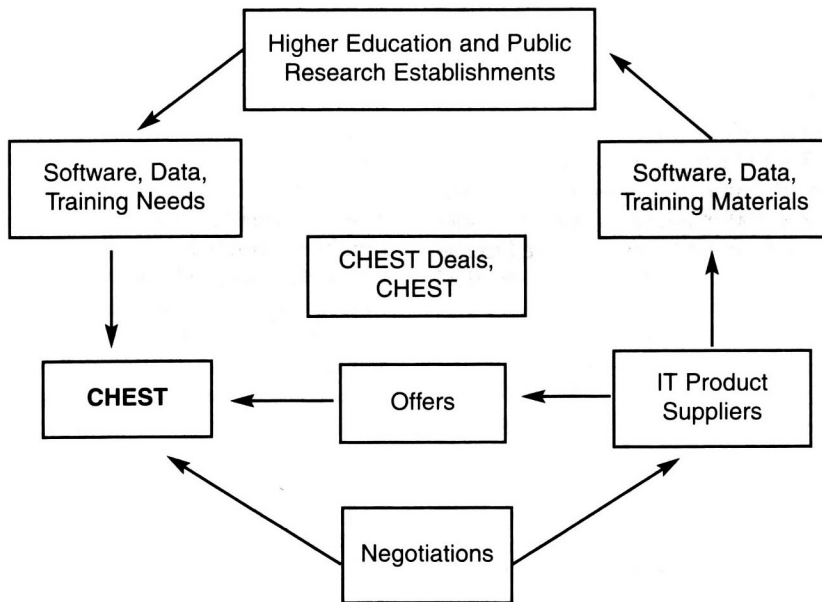
library service of the future." The review group recommended that as a starting point "a pilot initiative between a small number of institutions and a similar number of publishing houses should be sponsored by the funding councils to demonstrate in practical terms how material can be handled and distributed electronically."⁵ As a consequence £15 million was allocated to an Electronic Libraries Program, managed by JISC on behalf of HEFCE. The Electronic Libraries Program was to "engage the higher education community in developing and shaping the implementation of the electronic library."⁶ This project provided a body of electronic resources and services for UK higher education and influenced a cultural shift towards the acceptance and use of electronic resources instead of more traditional information storage and access methods.

PSLI

In May 1995 a pilot site license initiative subsidized by the funding councils was set up to:

- Test if the site license concept could provide wider access to journals for those in the academic community;
- See if it would allow more flexibility in the use of scholarly material;
- Test the methods for dissemination of scholarly material to the higher education sector in a variety of formats;
- Test legal models for a national site license program; and
- Explore the possibility for increased value for money from scholarly journals.⁷

Sixty-five publishers were invited by HEFCE to participate for three years commencing January 1, 1996. HEFCE was also responsible through JISC for the funding of the eLib program, but no formal links were established between the eLib project and



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Figure 1. CHEST Diagram

the PSLI.⁸ The final selection of four companies included Academic Press Ltd., Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Blackwell Science Ltd., and IOP Publishing Ltd. The publishers agreed to offer print journals to higher education institutions for discounts of between 30 and 40 percent over the three year period as well as electronic access as available. Originally the electronic journals were supposed to be the subsidiary component of the agreement but by the end of the agreement they had become the major focus. The PSLI achieved almost 100 percent take up among the higher education institutions due to the anticipated savings through the program.⁹

HEFCE did not specify how the publishers were to deliver their content. IOPP hosted the journals on their own server, for example, while Academic Press linked their IDEAL server to the Journals Online service at the University of Bath. One of the key provisions of the site license was the unlimited rights of authorized users to make photocopies (including their use within course packs) of the journals. Academic Press and IOPP provided full-text access to all their journals while Blackwell and Blackwell Science only allowed reading of full text where a print subscription existed. An integral part of the PSLI was that the funding from HEFCE to the higher education institutions was top sliced to support the discounted price offered to the institutions.

Several assessments of the initiative were made and a final evaluation of the pilot was concluded at the end of 1997. Initial surveys indicated subscription savings through the program (average annual savings were approximately £11,800 per annum) and the first report of the evaluation team showed a wide level of support for the project despite major problems with lack of communication in a timely manner.¹⁰ The team recommended an extension of

the PSLI to include more publishers and more emphasis on electronic delivery. One concern that was raised was ease of access, students had to know which system a journal they required was on. This was not easily discernible or user friendly. Evaluations by focus groups showed users wanted one single access point to all electronic journals.¹¹ Also unresolved was the need for one consistent interface to the electronic journals and a solution to the archiving issue.

At the end of the PSLI, HEFCE handed the next phase over to JISC. In the fall of 1997 JISC announced that a NESLI would be set up and a new steering group was established. NESLI was to be an electronic-only scheme and the invitation to tender went out at the end of 1997 with a decision to be made mid-1998.

National Electronic Site License Initiative

NESLI, a three-year JISC funded program, began on January 1, 1999 although the "official" launch was held at the British Library on June 15, 1999. It is an initiative to deliver a national electronic journal service to the United Kingdom higher education and research community (approximately 180 institutions) and is a successor program to the Pilot Site License Initiative (PSLI). In May 1998 JISC appointed a consortium of Swets and Zeitlinger and Manchester Computing (University of Manchester) to act as a managing agent (Swets and Blackwell Ltd. announced in June 1999 their intention to combine Swets Subscription Service and Blackwell's Information Services, the two subscription agency services). The managing agent represents the higher education institutions in negotiations with publishers, manages delivery of the electronic material through a single Web interface and oversees day-to-day operation of the program including the handling of subscriptions.¹²

The managing agent also encourages the widespread acceptance by publishers of a standard model site license, one of the objectives of this being to reduce the number and diversity of site definitions used by publishers. Other important provisions of the model site license addressed the issues of walk-in use by clients and the need for publishers to provide access to material previously subscribed to when a subscription is cancelled. The subscription model is currently the prevalent option although they are also working towards a pay-per-view option.¹³

Priority has been given to publishers who had been involved in the PSLI and to those publishers participating in SwetsNet, the delivery mechanism for the NESLI. SwetsNet is an electronic journal aggregation service that offers access to and management of Internet journals. Its search engine allows searching and browsing through titles from all publishers with links to the full-text articles. NESLI is not a mandatory initiative, the higher education institutions can choose whether to participate in proposals and can pursue their own arrangements individually or through their own consortiums if they wish.

While PSLI was basically a print-based initiative limited to a small number of publishers and funded via top slicing, NESLI is an electronic initiative aimed at involving many more publishers. It is designed to be self-funding, although it did receive some start-up funding. Although it is an electronic initiative, proposals that include print will be considered, as it is still not easy to separate print and electronic materials.¹⁴

The initiative addresses the most effective use, access, and purchase of electronic journals in the academic library community. Its aims include:

- access control—for on-site and remote users;
- cost;

- definition of a site;
- archiving; and
- unbundling print from electronic.

Access to SwetsNet, the delivery mechanism for journals included in NESLI, has now been supplemented by the option of Athens authentication. Athens, an authentication system developed by NISS, provides individuals affiliated with higher education institutions a single username and password for all electronic services they have permission to access. Athens is linked to SwetsNet to ensure access for off-site, remote, and distance learners who do not have a fixed IP address. This supplements SwetsNet's IP address authentication, which does not allow for individual access to TOC and SDI alerting. A help desk is available for all NESLI users through the University of Manchester.

The definition of a site is being addressed by the NESLI model site license, which tries to standardize site definitions (including access from places that authorized users work or study, including homes and residence halls); interlibrary loan (supplying an authorized user of another library a single paper copy of an electronic original of a individual document); walk-in-users; access to subscribed material in perpetuity (it provides for an archive to be made of the licensed material with access to the archive permissible after termination of the license); and inclusion of material in course packs. JISC's NESLI steering group approved the model NESLI site license on May 11, 1999 for use by the NESLI managing agent.¹⁵

The managing agent asks publishers to accept the model license with as few alterations as possible. During the term of the initiative the managing agent will be working on additional value added services. These include links from key indexing and abstracting services, provision of access via z39.50, linking from

library OPACs, creation of catalog records and assessing a model for e-journal delivery via subject clusters. In particular, they have begun to look at the technical issues concerned with providing MARC records for all electronic journals included in NESLI offers. Additionally they will be looking at solutions for longer term archiving of electronic journals to provide a comfort level for librarians purchasing electronic only copies.¹⁶

Two offers that have been made under the NESLI umbrella so far are Blackwell Sciences for 130 electronic journals and Johns Hopkins University Press for 46 electronic titles. Most recently two additional vendors have been added to the list. Elsevier has made a proposal to deliver full text content via the publishers ScienceDirect platform that includes the full text of more than 1,000 Elsevier science journals along with those of other publishers. A total of more than 3,800 journals would be included in the service.¹⁷ MCB University Press, an independent niche publisher, is offering access to 114 full text journals and secondary information in the area of management through its Emerald Intelligence + Fulltext service.

Similarly, here in the United States, California State University (CSU) put out for competitive tender a contract for the building of a customized database of 1200+ electronic journals based on the print titles subscribed to by 15 or more of the 22 campuses—Journal Access Core Collection (JACC). The journals will be made available via Pharos, a new Unified Information Access System for the CSU. Like Ohiolink, a consortium of 74 Ohio libraries, it will provide a common interface to electronic journals for students and faculty and will facilitate the development of distance learning programs.¹⁸ By unbundling the journals, libraries will no longer be required to pay for journals they do not want or need leading to moderate price savings. Additional

savings can be realized through the lowering of overhead costs achieved by system wide purchasing of core resources. Other issues being addressed within the JACC RFP included archiving and perpetual access to journal articles the university system has paid for, availability of e-journals in multiple formats, interlibrary loan of electronic documents, currency of content and cost value at the journal-title level.¹⁹ Currently 500 core journals are being provided under the JACC by Ebsco Information Services and the CSU plans on expanding those offerings.

Conclusion

As we move into the next millennium library consortia will continue to work together with vendors to further customize journal offerings. However it is still far too early to say whether NESLI will be successful or whether it will succeed in getting the publishing industry to accept the model site license. If it is to work within the higher education community, it will depend greatly on the flexibility and willingness of the publishers of scholarly journals. It has made a start by developing a license that sets a wider definition of a site and that deals realistically with the question of off-site access. By encouraging the unbundling of electronic and print subscriptions NESLI allows services to be tailored to specific needs of the information community, but it remains to be seen how many publishers are prepared to accept unbundled deals at this stage. Also as technology stabilizes and libraries acquire increasingly larger electronic collections, we will not be able to rely on license negotiations as the only way to influence pricing, access, and distribution. An additional problem that remains unaddressed by either PSLI or NESLI is the pressure on academics to publish in traditional journals and the cor-

responding rise in scholarly journal prices. NESLI neither encourages nor hinders changes in scholarly communication and therefore the question of restructuring the scholarly communication process remains.²⁰

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A Low-Cost Library Database Solution

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Two locally created databases are made available to the world via the Web using an inexpensive but highly functional search engine created in-house. The technology consists of a microcomputer running UNIX to serve relational databases. CGI forms created using the programming language Perl offer flexible interface designs for database users and database maintainers.

Many libraries maintain indexes to local collections or resources and create databases or bibliographies con-

cerning subjects of local or regional interest. These local resource indexes are of great value to researchers.

The Web provides an inexpensive means for broadly disseminating these indexes. For example, Kilcullen has described a nonsearchable, Web-based newspaper index that uses Microsoft Access 97.¹ Jacso has written about the use of Java applets to publish small directories and bibliographies.² Sturr has discussed the use of WAIS software to provide searchable online indexes.³ Many of the Web-based local databases and search interfaces currently used by libraries may:

- have problems with functionality;
- lack provisions for efficient searching;
- be based on unreliable software;
- be based on software and hardware that is expensive to purchase or implement;
- be difficult for patrons to use; and
- be difficult for staff to maintain.

After trying several alternatives, staff members at the North Dakota State University Libraries have implemented an inexpensive but highly functional and reliable solution. We are now providing searchable indexes on the Web using a microcomputer running UNIX to serve relational databases. CGI forms created at the North Dakota State University Libraries using the programming language Perl offer flexible interface designs for database users and database maintainers. This article describes how we have imple-

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