

E-journals – what do you get for your money?

As libraries move to licensing access to e-journals, issues of digital preservation arise in terms of assurance of continued access to licensed content. While it is generally accepted that libraries should continue to provide a preservation role in the digital age, responsibilities are much less clear-cut, particularly with regard to licensed content. JISC has done much work in addressing digital preservation challenges, including funding a range of activities. One of these is focusing on options for continued access to licensed e-journals. The JISC Model licence includes clauses related to archiving and suggests three broad options for continued access. These are: continued online access from the publisher's server, an archival copy delivered to the Licensee, or an archival copy delivered to a central facility operated on behalf of UK HE. The JISC-funded consultancy will scope options and requirements for implementing the concept of the central archiving facility and other potential options.



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Background

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has made digital preservation one of its key priorities for some time. It has co-hosted two workshops at the University of Warwick, one in 1995 and one in 1999, both focusing on how to articulate the specific challenges associated with ensuring the survival of important digital resources and in developing means of overcoming those challenges. One of the recommendations from the second Warwick workshop was that there needed to be a post established which could focus exclusively on digital preservation. The JISC Digital Preservation Focus position was subsequently established and Neil Beagrie was appointed to it in June 2000. An early task for Neil was establishing a Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC)¹ which, at the time of writing, has twenty-three members. Both CURL and the British Library were among the founding members of the DPC. JISC has also funded, or co-funded, two digital preservation projects. The Cedars Project² was the only eLib project which focused on digital preservation and was funded for four years, finishing in April 2002. The CAMiLEON project³ is a collaborative project between JISC and the National Science Foundation in the US. So JISC has made a clear commitment to digital preservation

and in particular, to helping to develop practical solutions to digital preservation challenges. The establishment of the JISC Digital Preservation Focus has enabled an acceleration of activity related to digital preservation activity, which is seen as increasingly urgent. The Continuing Access and Digital Preservation Strategy for JISC 2002-2005⁴ makes clear the need to address the many and varied challenges associated with the successful retention of important digital resources:

'Unless significant effort is put urgently into digital preservation and securing long-term access to these digital resources, uncertainties over archiving will continue to impede the growth and take-up of digital services, e-science, and new working practices.'

The fact that JISC has made a clear commitment to digital preservation over a number of years is entirely consistent with its aim of encouraging the use of information and communications technology by further and higher education institutions. A logical corollary of this encouragement is the need to ensure it can be effectively preserved so that it remains accessible for as long as it is needed. The development programme aimed at implementing the JISC Digital Preservation Strategy includes a suite of activities covering a range of aspects. One of these is focusing on the particular challenges posed

by licensed e-journals, and this article deals with this project.

Licensed e-journals are an interesting example of the ambiguity on roles and responsibilities which the digital environment imposes. In the traditional print model, it was absolutely clear where responsibilities started and finished. The publisher delivered the print journal to the library in exchange for a subscription fee. The library then had full control over this product as they owned it and they kept it for as long as they wished. The publisher's responsibility stopped once the journal was satisfactorily delivered. The library's responsibility to store it and preserve it was unequivocal, there was not the slightest expectation from either side that the publisher might undertake this role. Things are not nearly as clear-cut in the electronic environment. When libraries licence access to e-journals, they are essentially renting the information, they do not own the product, as they did with print, and have no control over it. The content remains within the publisher's control, and in order for preservation, and therefore continued access, to be assured, they need to either make arrangements for a third party to archive them or undertake this task themselves. So what exactly are libraries buying when they licence access to electronic journals? What precisely does their (often quite substantial) licensing fee entitle them to? Clearly libraries would like it to provide them with assured continued access for as long as they require it but this can by no means be automatically assumed. There is also a blurring between service delivery and archiving, at least for the short-term so that, for a publisher to provide online access to their products, they will need to invest in an electronic archive, even if they do not intend to undertake a long-term preservation commitment. Both libraries and publishers need to develop new models for providing their respective services and it has become axiomatic to suggest that this can be most effectively accomplished through collaboration, and an ongoing and open dialogue between the two sectors. A relatively early example of successful collaboration was the development of the JISC/Publishers Association (PA) Model Licence.

The model licence

The JISC/PA Model licence has been refined and developed over the years to try to respond to

identified needs. Since 1999 the model licence has contained clauses related specifically to archiving arrangements. These are as follows⁵:

2.2.2 After termination of this licence, the Publisher will provide the Licensee and its Authorised and Walk-in Users with access to the full text of the Licensed Material which was published and paid for within the Subscription period, either by continuing online access to the same material on the Publisher's server or a third party server or by supplying an archival copy in an electronic medium mutually agreed between the parties which will be delivered to the Licensee or to a central archiving facility operated on behalf of the UK HE community without charge.

5.4.1 Upon termination of this licence, the Publisher undertakes at no charge either to provide or make arrangements for a third party to provide an archive of the Licensed material.

5.4.2 The Publisher allows Authorised and Walk-in Users to access and use such archive after termination of this Licence, as further specified in Clause 2.2.2.

The JISC Journals Working Group has overseen the implementation of these clauses which publishers have, by and large, been prepared to sign up to. The existence of these archiving clauses has accomplished what it set out to achieve, in providing some degree of reassurance to libraries in moving to e-only access. However, JISC was acutely aware that one of the options foreshadowed in the model licence, the 'central archiving facility operated on behalf of the UK HE', does not yet exist. It was therefore decided to initiate a consultancy for one year with the aim of scoping what is required in order to implement this option. The consultancy is scheduled to run from May 2002 to April 2003.

Survey of libraries

A survey of libraries⁶ conducted as part of this JISC e-journals consultancy between September–November 2002 revealed that convenience of access (24x7) and the increasing needs and expectations of users are major imperatives for an increasing move to electronic access. Several respondents also noted potential space savings as

a bonus of moving to e-only, although, as one respondent noted, these savings are difficult to quantify in the short term. When asked to nominate factors inhibiting a move to e-only access, concerns about archiving and VAT are the two issues causing most concern to libraries in moving to e-only. VAT is outside the scope of this consultancy but it was cited by almost all respondents, who referred to the inequity of having to pay more for e-only, even in cases where print cancellations are permitted. Most respondents noted concerns about archiving arrangements and continuing access post-cancellation. While these concerns do not necessarily prevent a strategic move towards e-only access by the library community, they certainly cause considerable anxiety about doing so. The alternative of retaining both print and electronic is not regarded as a sustainable option; there are issues of version difference to contend with, even where there are supposedly parallel print and electronic as well as other practical considerations. In any case, one would expect that it will increasingly be the case that electronic journals do not simply mimic their print counterpart but exploit the capability of the technology for improved functionality.

Archiving options

The archiving clauses in the model licence do provide some degree of reassurance to libraries, but one survey respondent probably voiced the unease of several in noting the lack of practical procedures to implement them. The central archiving facility referred to does not yet exist. This leaves two options in the model licence clauses, either continued online access from the publishers' server, or provision of an archival copy to the Licensee. In practice, most publishers prefer the latter, unless the licence is renewed. The archival copy also tends to be cd-rom. This presents some difficulties for libraries, many of which noted a strategic move away from cd-rom. There are also clear inefficiencies in several libraries maintaining the same title on cd-rom. Furthermore, in the absence of clearly defined archiving responsibilities for e-journals, cd-roms randomly scattered across the country are not going to provide a sustainable long-term solution. If the least preferred option for libraries is also likely to be the most likely option for publishers post-cancellation, then it is clearly time to implement

some changes which hold the prospect of improving the situation for libraries, without causing an unreasonable burden on publishers. Libraries also mentioned other concerns at having so much dependence on the publisher in terms of assurance of continued access. What if the publisher is merged or goes out of business? How can they guarantee that they will be able to honour archiving clauses in such a rapidly changing marketplace? Do they necessarily hold the requisite rights to preserve all the content they publish? How can third party publishers assume this responsibility?

The publishers' role

The response rate for the sample survey of publishers was too low to be able to formulate valid conclusions. There are however some assumptions which might reasonably be made. One is that publishers do not see themselves as playing an archival role. Their motivation for publishing could be safely assumed to be to make a return on their investment, either a commercial profit, or, for not-for-profit publishers, at least budget neutral. It seems reasonable that they should not be expected to take on a preservation role. The difficulty is that, even if libraries completely agree with this point of view, there is only a limited role they can assume in the case of licensed e-journals, which remain under the control of publishers. Even assuming publishers were willing to transfer their content to a designated archive for safekeeping, they are unlikely to permit access from it except in highly controlled circumstances. With service aspects bound so closely together with preservation aspects, there remains the question of whether there will be sufficient incentive for anyone to undertake the considerable investment in building an archive, and then ongoing costs in maintaining it, without the benefit of being able to provide access. There would in any case need to be some form of access, however restricted, in order to ensure the continued integrity and safety of the material contained in the archive. All of which leads to a kind of circularity in debates about roles and responsibilities regarding archiving.

Related developments

Legal Deposit

Many survey respondents looked to the British Library (BL) for leadership in preserving digital

publications. The BL has made it very clear that it intends to take on a significant role. One key area where the BL has been planning a role for some time lies in the anticipated extension of legal deposit legislation to include non-print publications, including digital. This is a very important development and several other national libraries have also signalled a similar intention to extend their national preservation responsibilities to the equivalent digital published output, however it is defined. However, this cannot be expected to provide a solution to the particular problem facing libraries who are licensing e-journals. For one thing, the legal (and in the interim, voluntary) deposit, will only extend to those items originating in the UK. More importantly, both legal and voluntary deposit have always had access restrictions imposed, patrons have only been able to view the deposit copy at the deposit library. These restrictions are expected to be continued in the digital environment, so the BL will provide a custodial, rather than a service role and it is the latter which libraries will need to ensure continued access to content they have paid for.

Institutional e-print archives

The growth of e-print archives offers the prospect of a viable alternative model of scholarly communication, complementing, or in some cases possibly replacing, published electronic journals. It is still too early to see how these will impact on long-term preservation issues but it is clear that they will have a significant impact on the overall landscape.

Mellon Foundation e-journals projects

The challenges associated with ensuring continued access to published e-journals are not of course confined to the UK. Other countries are also investigating issues and potential solutions and it makes sense to learn from those. In the US, seven projects were awarded funding from the Mellon Foundation to undertake a one year planning effort focusing on archiving of e-journals⁷. Five of these projects involved collaborations between publishers and libraries in building an archive managed by the library and storing publishers' source files. At the time of writing, three of these projects had produced

detailed reports of their findings⁸. In essence, the projects found that it is feasible to archive e-journals to the extent that it is possible to regard them, rather than their print counterparts, as the publication of record. The experience of working collaboratively between the publishers and the libraries involved was generally very positive. The major sticking point, however, was the point at which access would be permitted from the archives and what might constitute triggering events for such access. The conclusion of the Mellon Foundation was that new organisations will be necessary to act in the broad interest of libraries and publishers. The Mellon Foundation have stated an intention to explore models "that serve the public good but that do not threaten the publishers' business"⁹. Accordingly, funding has been provided to LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) and JSTOR to develop two very different models in the belief that there is unlikely to be a single definitive solution. The BL, and the Universities of Cambridge and Leeds are test sites for LOCKSS in the UK. Many institutions worldwide subscribe to JSTOR and it has established a good reputation as a trusted, not-for-profit archive, so both models are known quantities in the UK.

The OCLC digital archive

The OCLC have been actively involved in digital preservation activities for a number of years. The development of a digital archive represents a logical extension of these activities, combining solid preservation experience with a sound business model¹⁰.

Where to from here?

It is clear that there needs to be a better model for providing the assurances libraries need, at prices they can afford, and without making impractical demands on publishers. What is not clear is what are the best options for achieving that. Should it be an entirely new entity, or one which builds on an existing service? Should it be a collaborative model or an independent one? How should it be funded? These and other questions were raised at an invitation-only workshop held on 17 February 2003. Workshop participants, drawn from both the library and publishing sectors, discussed what

steps need to be taken to pave the way for the next stage.

Conclusion

It can be expected that there will be increasing demand for e-journals. NESLI statistics indicate that almost 4,000 journal titles from eighteen publishers were licensed in NESLI deals during 2002. These yielded 587,430 full-text accesses. Whatever new models of scholarly communication evolve, libraries will still need to be assured that access to the published e-journals they have already paid for will continue for as long as they and their users need and at a cost they can afford.

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