Long-term access to e-journals: what exactly can we promise our readers?

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Many readers and librarians are concerned about long-term access to electronic resources, particularly e-journals. Oxford University Library Services (OULS) is committed to ensuring long-term access to licensed electronic journal content where the publisher and licensing model allow for this. But, as with everything to do with electronic access, the position is complicated. This article presents and explains the 'Long-term Access Policy for E-Journals' formulated by OULS.

Introduction

Experience shows that many readers and librarians at Oxford are concerned about long-term access to electronic resources, particularly e-journals. In order to explain the situation in some detail and give librarians and readers insight into the complexity and diversity offered through licence agreements, a 'Long-term Access Policy for E-Journals' was formulated and distributed widely. The document was initially circulated to all subject and site librarians in Oxford, who were invited to share the policy with readers when asked about long-term access. It has recently also been made available to the public on the Oxford University e-Journals website <http://ejournals.ouls.ox.ac.uk/>.

As a rule, Oxford University Library Services (OULS) is committed to ensuring long-term access to licensed electronic journal content where the publisher and licensing model allow for this. Already at this point the authors faced the real problem underlying the whole situation, namely the proviso: *'where the publisher and licensing model allow for this'*.

So, are libraries at the complete mercy of publishers with regard to long-term access to e-journals? Yes and no. Although licence agreements are normally dictated by publishers, libraries have negotiating power – particularly if they act collectively, as in NESLi (National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative) or JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee). On the other hand, responsibility for long-term access no longer resides with the publisher alone. The second section of the policy below highlights the growing importance of non-publisher programmes for ensuring long-term access.

The policy of Oxford University, as shown below, has two sections which deal with 'Provision in licence agreements' and 'Non-publisher programmes securing perpetual access'. In order to offer the highest level of security, it is important that libraries pay attention to, or support, both options.

The first section of the agreement deals with provision in licence agreements and explains the importance and variations of post-cancellation

access. It also clarifies the situation with JSTOR and open access journals. The second section, 'Non-publisher programmes securing perpetual access', offers a short overview of third party systems which support libraries and publishers in their efforts to ensure long-term access. LOCKSS, CLOCKSS and Portico are presented. OULS has now become a subscriber and founding member of Portico, which ensures permanent campus-wide access to archived material no longer available from the publisher.

Oxford University Library Services (OULS) Long-term Access Policy for E-Journals*

1   Provision in licence agreements

1.1   *Post-cancellation access to current years*

1.1.1   Ideally, all OULS licences should include a clause on **post-cancellation access**. This means that the university retains access to previously paid for electronic journals *after* the contractual agreement for these materials has been terminated in the same way as OULS would retain previously acquired print copies on library shelves for future years.

1.1.2   However, a licence clause on post-cancellation access does not necessarily guarantee easy access to the content.
   a. The preferred option is that the content is available online from the publisher's platform or via third party system (e.g. Portico). This model ensures that content and functionality are updated or migrated regularly as technology continues to develop. Example: *Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis.*
   b. The less preferred option is when a publisher provides the library with full text files on a data carrier and the library is required to upload the data and make it browse- and searchable. Unfortunately, OULS does not yet have a system or workflow in place to make such files available through the campus network. Example: *Project Muse.*
   c. As indicated above, OULS prefers option (a) and will continue to put pressure on publishers to comply with this more user friendly and convenient model.

1.1.3   Post-cancellation access gives users continued access to the full texts for those journals and volumes to which a subscription was held. In the case of 'Big Deals' or other publishers' packages, conditions vary whether the library also has post-cancellation access to those journals to which *no* paid print subscription is or was held. Example: *Wiley.*

1.1.4   Nearly all journal publishers allow post-cancellation access, however, there are some exceptions where journals are part of aggregator databases. Providers of aggregator databases typically negotiate the full text content with publishers and we observe a rapid turnover of content. These providers, who typically operate in the field of Business and Law, are in direct competition with each other for key journal content which explains why aggregators are unable to make promises about long-term access. Example: *ProQuest ABI INFORM, EBSCOhost Business Source Complete.*

1.1.5   A further problem arises where a journal publisher changes and original publisher no longer retains the rights to publish or display that content. In this case OULS cannot necessarily guarantee to provide continued access to that journal but would make all reasonable efforts to negotiate such rights with the new publisher. This is a recognised problem across the publishing industry and many publishers are working to find a solution. [This is not an issue with JSTOR as described in section 1.3].

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* For publication in *Serials*, the policy has been very slightly abbreviated.

1.2   Access to back volumes

1.2.1   Journal content prior to c. 1996 is normally offered under separate licence agreements from current volumes. Back volumes can be purchased outright or subscribed to on an annual basis. The situation with JSTOR is mentioned in a separate section 1.3.

      a.   Some back volumes are purchased outright, either as individual journal titles or in subject or publisher bundles. Outright purchase gives OULS legal right to perpetual access. Long-term access is achieved through one of the two models described in section 1.1.2. OULS has a strong preference for option (a).

      b.   In some cases back volumes are paid for on a subscription basis. In these cases no further access is granted once the subscription is cancelled. <u>Example</u>: *American Chemical Society*.

1.3   JSTOR

1.3.1   JSTOR acts an e-journal aggregator for back volumes and is one of the most popular online services in Oxford. However, few librarians and readers are aware of the fact that JSTOR is a subscription-based service and termination of our subscription would mean immediate exclusion from access. This rule applies not only to Oxford University, but to all universities in the UK and abroad.

1.3.2   On the other hand, content with JSTOR is comparatively secure, as publishers are under no circumstances allowed to withdraw any content from the service.

1.3.3   A similar arrangement also applies to other third party backfile providers such as *BioOne*.

1.4   Open Access journals and free back content

1.4.1   Not all e-journals are accessed based on a licence agreement. The most obvious exceptions are Open Access journals. In addition to OA journals, some other publishers – mainly not-for-profit STM societies – make all their back content freely available on the internet. In these cases OULS cannot secure long-term access via licence agreement. <u>Examples</u>: *National Academy of Sciences, American Association for Cancer Research, BMJ Publishing, Soil Science Society of America and many others.*

1.4.2   Many of these societies place their back file content on PubMed and Highwire. There are no guarantees on continuing long-term access other than individual publisher statements about making their back files freely available.

2   Non-publisher programmes securing perpetual access

2.1.1   Regular post-cancellation access depends on the publisher being able to provide access. However, possible scenarios can be imagined where a publisher is no longer able to offer access to their content: a publisher can stop operations, cease to publish a title, or there can be catastrophic and sustained failure of a publisher's delivery platform;

2.1.2   In order to offer secure access in such circumstances OULS subscribes or supports to several initiatives

2.2   LOCKSS (www.lockss.org)

2.2.1   LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) is a Stanford University Libraries project, founded in 1998. This is a non-profit initiative providing tools and support for libraries in preserving web-published materials. The technology is open source, peer-to-peer, decentralised digital preservation infrastructure. It uses a special web-crawler to collect copies of material and can verify that permission from the publisher has been granted if necessary. The system allows a library to collect and preserve material to which it is subscribed, for which they have permission from the publisher. Open Access titles can also be preserved. The material is then stored in a 'LOCKSS Box' – a normal PC converted into a digital preservation appliance. All formats and genres of web published content are stored. LOCKSS is OAIS-compliant; the software migrates content forward in time; and the bits and bytes are

continually audited and repaired. Content preserved through LOCKSS becomes a part of a library's collection, and they have perpetual access to all of the titles preserved in their LOCKSS Box. Access occurs when content is not available from a publisher, so post-cancellation access is provided for all preserved material.

2.2.2   A list of publishers and their titles that are available for preservation in a LOCKSS Box is available here: http://www.lockss.org/lockss/Publishers_and_Titles.

2.2.3   Over 200 publishers are currently listed here (plus additional Open Access titles), although it is important to recognise that not all of their titles will be authorized for preservation via LOCKSS. For example, the *Institute of Physics* is listed as a participating publisher but only two of their journals are involved in this scheme.

2.2.4   OULS is a member of LOCKSS, i.e. Oxford holds a 'LOCKSS Box'. However, the Oxford server is only sufficient for the archiving function and could not provide a production delivery service. Further investment in infrastructure and development time would be required for LOCKSS to provide an online service. Further, it has limited coverage in terms of our subscriptions.

2.3   CLOCKSS (www.lockss.org/clockss)

2.3.1   'Controlled LOCKSS' is an example of a 'Private LOCKSS Network'. CLOCKSS Host libraries are collecting and preserving a comprehensive collection of scholarly material, including materials to which they do and do not have a subscription. There are seven CLOCKSS Host libraries (and this number will not grow to more than fifteen) with two LOCKSS boxes each, who are preserving content on behalf of everyone. Twelve major publishers are involved: *American Chemical Society, American Medical Association, American Physiological Society, Wiley-Blackwell, Elsevier, Institute of Physics, Nature Publishing Group, Oxford University Press, SAGE Publications, Springe, Taylor & Francis*, as well as seven institutions: Indiana University, the New York Public Library, the OCLC, Rice University, Stanford University, the University of Virginia and the University of Edinburgh.

2.3.2   Access to the material will be provided when no publisher has current responsibility for the material and no one is providing electronic access to selected content. Should this happen, impacted material will be made available to everyone via a hosting platform.

2.3.3   The ultimate goal of the CLOCKSS initiative is to cover all the titles produced by the publishers listed, although this only covers twelve publishers.

2.3.4   OULS is not a member of CLOCKSS.

2.4   Portico (www.portico.org)

2.4.1   Originally launched by JSTOR in 2002, Portico is an electronic archiving service which provides "*a permanent archive of electronic (peer-reviewed) scholarly journals*". The material is mainly preserved via 'migration', so content is transitioned from one file format to another as technology evolves and older formats become obsolete. The service therefore offers a permanent archive of the material, protecting against the potential loss of e-literature from a library's collection. Portico will provide campus-wide access to archived material when titles are no longer available from the publisher (or elsewhere). Access is also provided following certain 'trigger' events, including: a publisher ceasing operation, ceasing to publish a particular title, ceasing to offer back issues or after a 'catastrophic and sustained failure' of their delivery platform. Participating publishers can choose to designate Portico as their provider of post-cancellation access.

2.4.2   Portico's operating costs are covered from diversified funding sources. Both publishers and libraries are asked to make annual contribution to defray a portion of Portico's costs. For libraries, payments towards operational costs are tiered according to a self-reported total Library Materials Expenditure (LME).

2.4.3   The list of participating publishers can be found here: http://www.portico.org/about/ part_publishers.html.

2.4.4   The Portico initiative covers proportionally more larger, scholarly publishers (46 publishers are currently listed) than either LOCKSS or CLOCKSS, and covers a far higher number of journal titles (6,071 are currently committed). OULS consider the collection available through Portico superior to the content of LOCKSS or CLOCKSS.

2.4.5   Portico experienced its first trigger event in December 2007. *Graft: Organ and Cell Transplantation*, published by SAGE Publications from January 2001 to March 2003, will be removed from SAGE's online offering at the end of 2007 creating the first ever trigger event for the Portico archive and Portico's participating publishers and libraries. Following this event, Portico will make *Graft* available to its library participants via the Portico website. This event also acted as a trigger for CLOCKSS which now offers access to the journal in question.

2.4.6   OULS is a subscriber and Founding Member of Portico.

Conclusion

When asked to formulate a policy statement on long-term access, we could not find anything suitable on the Internet to serve as a template of example. It is to be hoped that sharing this policy will assist and encourage other librarians in developing their own institutional policies in this area.

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