

An introduction to the JISC Academic Database Assessment Tool

The JISC Academic Database Assessment Tool (ADAT) aims to help libraries to make informed decisions about future subscriptions to bibliographic databases. The ADAT is freely available and provides access to detailed information and title lists for major bibliographic and full-text databases, and key service information for database and e-book content platforms.

This paper will provide an introduction to the ADAT, why it was created, where it is today, reactions to it from both the academic and publishing communities and how libraries and service providers can help to develop the service and ensure it is kept up to date and free.



LIAM EARNEY
Collections Team Manager
JISC Collections

Background – Why develop the JISC Academic Database Assessment Tool?

Web of Science had for many years been the core general bibliographic database for the UK academic community, with well over 100 universities and colleges subscribing. In addition there was (and indeed is) a rich landscape of bibliographic and full-text databases, of a more specific disciplinary nature, available for institutional subscription as well². Overall, one had the impression of a relatively stable landscape where institutions routinely renewed their subscriptions and, once adopted, a database was unlikely to be cancelled.

However, by 2005 a range of factors were impacting on this *status quo* and suggesting that it might be unlikely to continue:

1. The first of these was the release by Elsevier of Scopus³, a large multidisciplinary abstract and citation database, that if not a direct competitor to Web of Science in the eyes of its creators, was certainly viewed like that by the academic library community who asked themselves, 'Do I need both of these databases and, if not, which one?'
2. The second was the launch of Google Scholar⁴, which again promised a simple and free multidisciplinary search of the scholarly literature. If not altogether trusted by librarians, who were wary of the lack of information about the

selection and editorial policies, it certainly appeared to be being used by a large number of students, and asked the question, 'Does my institution need any of these subscription bibliographic databases?'

3. Finally, academic libraries were starting to review their usage statistics and realize that some of the databases they licensed did not appear to be receiving that much use. With increased availability of full-text databases, ongoing pressure on materials budgets and resources such as Web of Science and Scopus offering ever increasing coverage of the scholarly literature, the question was again posed, 'Do I really need all of these databases and, if not, which ones can I afford to cancel?'

To help librarians answer these questions, at the end of 2005 the JIBS User Group ran an event at Birkbeck College, London, entitled, 'Battle of the Giants: a comparison of Web of Knowledge, Scopus and Google Scholar'⁵. This event sought to provide an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of these databases through reviews of coverage, depth, accuracy and gaps. It also sought to provide librarians with an opportunity to share experiences of the databases amongst themselves and representatives of Web of Science and Scopus.

What was clear at the event was both the level of interest in the questions, and the fact that some sort of systematic analysis of the databases was required. As a result of this event, JISC Collections commissioned the 'Study Evaluating Bibliographic and Citation Databases in Use by the UK Higher Education Community'⁶. The study was undertaken by DataSalon.

This study aimed to help librarians make informed decisions about their subscriptions to bibliographic databases by providing them with accurate, unbiased information on the content of 20 bibliographic⁷ and full-text databases and eight platforms⁸ that librarians themselves believed to be of core interest to them. (That a further 200 databases were mentioned by the respondents to the consultation shows the scale of the challenge from a librarian's point of view – so many databases, so little time!) The study was not intended as a review of any of the databases or platforms and always attempted to remain absolutely neutral.

In order to make all of the information gathered as useful as possible for librarians, an online tool was created to allow any combination of services to be compared and contrasted.

The study compiled a database to include the full-title coverage (including start and end dates of titles, gaps in coverage and level of coverage) and detailed service information about each service surveyed. This was then used to create an online comparison site for use by librarians with the following key features:

- select any combination of services for comparison
- view a summary comparison table of all selected services, showing the number of unique titles in each service, plus the number of overlapping titles
- view or download a detailed table highlighting all of the differences between the chosen services on a title-by-title basis
- view or download a list of all of the overlapping titles between the chosen services
- view the detailed information held about each service, including contact information, inclusion policy, pricing, search, indexing and citation services, etc.

Since the comparative data in each case was generated automatically from the source database,

it was possible for a librarian to compare any combination of services in this way.

Issues arising from the study

The major surprise arising from the study was the difficulty DataSalon faced sourcing the information from the service providers – many simply were not able to give details of start and end dates, gaps in coverage and the level of coverage of each title within the databases they provided.

There were also significant problems in getting data from all the service providers that the library community had identified as of core interest. DataSalon and JISC Collections were simply unable to get some providers to participate despite considerable effort on both their parts. The time and effort involved in participation on the part of the service provider would certainly have been a contributing factor. However, there was a suspicion that some service providers felt they either had little to gain from participating and allowing their content to be compared with that of their peers, or that their resources were so essential that institutions would continue to license them regardless.

This meant that most of the information had to come with some health warnings about how to review the information, and that it should be viewed as tool to support decision making within the institution rather than the final source on which decisions should be based.

A further issue was the question of currency. As soon as the original version of the website was made available, it was going to start going out of date and we were well aware that the longer we went without updating the information the less use the site would be to institutions – as well as potentially misleading them. Should the site prove useful, how could it be sustained?

Finally, there was the validity of the information that was provided to us by service providers and how one might verify it. As soon as the information was released, it was questioned – more often than not by other service providers who believed that the way in which information was being provided might lead institutions to draw false conclusions or that other service providers had given information that might portray their resources in an overly positive manner.

Developing the Academic Database Assessment Tool

Despite these issues, the ADAT received a positive response. As one librarian who was able to justify why they did not take a certain database said, “we feel this tool has earned its keep already!” JISC Collections also received positive feedback from academic libraries outside of the UK, but whilst everyone appreciated the original version, everyone wanted to see more! More figures, more databases and more regular updates.

With this in mind, JISC Collections and DataSalon agreed the following plan for a new

version of the ADAT, released in autumn 2007 (see Figure 1, relaunched ADAT home page).

More databases and more analysis

More databases should be included and more fields would be required, that would allow a greater depth of analysis and to make sure that users were comparing ‘apples with apples’ and not ‘apples with pears’. So in the new version, database providers would be able to upload information about any number of databases, in a set format, in order to allow greater breadth of comparisons. (See Figure 2

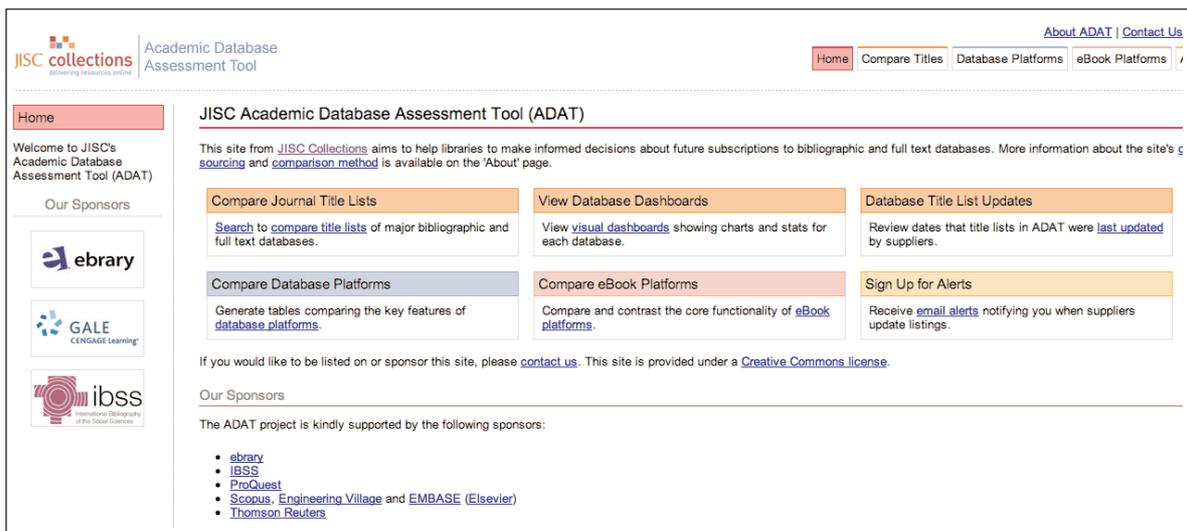


Figure 1. The relaunched ADAT home page

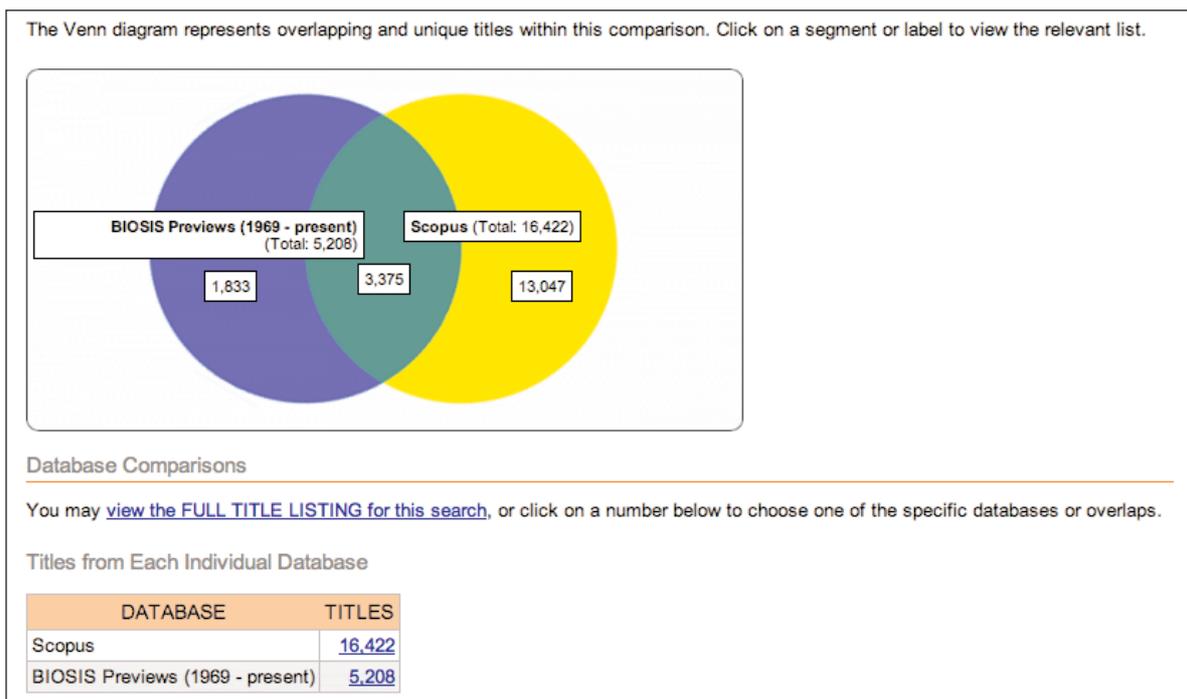


Figure 2. Sample database comparison

for a sample database comparison). The ADAT also provides guidance on how to read the information, what is and is not included and any caveats that should be considered when analyzing results.

There would also be information on where full text is included as opposed to just bibliographic information, what is the nature of the material within a database, e.g. journal, country report, etc.

Given the growing interest in e-books, and the challenges that libraries faced in deciding which aggregator platform best met their institutional needs, the ADAT would be included to incorporate all of the major e-book platforms as well (see Figure 3 for a sample e-book platform comparison)

Keeping the ADAT up to date

The data needs to be up to date. This was seen as absolutely essential by all stakeholders and was a

prerequisite for both participation and use. In Version 2 we would allow service providers to update the information on their resources at a time of their own choosing, but would send requests for updates on a systematic basis and crucially provide users with a traffic light system showing the last time the content information was updated by the service provider (see Figure 4).

Keep it free

It was felt that the site should continue to be freely available and that anyone, anywhere should be able to make use of the site. Whilst this resource has been created with UK universities in mind, JISC Collections believes that by maintaining an up-to-date, independent and neutral resource it will also be of value to publishers and aggregators alike.

NOTE: All data is shown as provided by the eBook platforms. Please visit our [About ADAT](#) page for

Comparison of:

- [EBL - Ebook Library](#)
- [NetLibrary](#)
- [dawsonera](#)
- [ebrary](#)

Functionality	Platforms			
	EBL - Ebook Library	NetLibrary	dawsonera	ebrary
Access Control				
Username/Password	Y	Y	Y	Y
IP Address	Y	Y	N	Y
Classic Athens	Y	Y	Y	Y
SAML Compliant (e.g. Shibboleth)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Referring URL	Y	Y	Y	Y
EZ Proxy	Y	Y	Y	Y
Member of UK Access Management Federation	Y	N	Y	Y
Search				
Advanced Search	Y	Y	Y	Y
Boolean AND	Y	Y	Y	Y

Figure 3. Sample e-book platform comparison

Database Title List Updates					
<p>NOTE: The table below shows the date that each title list within the ADAT site was last updated by the relevant database provider. Please visit our About ADAT more information on our data sourcing and comparison method.</p>					
Bibliographic Databases		Provider	Chased	Updated	Key
BIOSIS Previews (1969 - present)	About Dashboard	Thomson	Sep 2009	02 Oct 2008	Updated in the last 6 months
British Education Index	About Dashboard	BEI	Sep 2009	20 Jul 2009	Updated in the last year
British Humanities Index (BHI)	About Dashboard	ProQuest	Sep 2009	19 Sep 2008	Updated over a year ago
Compendex	About Dashboard	Elsevier	Sep 2009	25 Sep 2008	
EMBASE	About Dashboard	Elsevier	Sep 2009	29 Jan 2009	
EconLit	About Dashboard	AEA	Sep 2009	02 Oct 2008	
GEOBASE	About Dashboard	Elsevier	Sep 2009	25 Sep 2008	
Inspec	About Dashboard	Inspec	Sep 2009	02 Nov 2007	
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	About Dashboard	IBSS	Sep 2009	15 Dec 2008	
MLA International Bibliography	About Dashboard	MLA	Sep 2009	05 Aug 2009	
Scopus	About Dashboard	Elsevier	Sep 2009	18 Feb 2009	
Sociological Abstracts	About Dashboard	ProQuest	Sep 2009	19 Sep 2008	
Web of Science	About Dashboard	Thomson	Sep 2009	27 Apr 2009	
Zetoc	About Dashboard	Zetoc	Sep 2009	26 Jan 2009	
Full Text Databases		Provider	Chased	Updated	

Figure 4. Database Title List Updates

This meant that JISC Collections had to find a business model to support the ADAT, which had previously been funded as a project. In the end, JISC Collections decided to fund the service itself on an ongoing basis to provide the basic level, but to seek sponsorship as a way of both recouping costs, and also providing additional funds for developments in line with feedback from libraries and service providers. In this respect, JISC Collections has been extremely grateful for the support of Elsevier, ProQuest, Cengage Learning, Thomson Reuters, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences and ebrary over the last two years.

Make it easier for service providers to participate

DataSalon have used their expertise in the management and presentation of data to create a new administrative interface that keeps the need for human intervention as small as possible. Service providers are required to upload information on database content in a specific format, but they are able to do so whenever they want – with the preference being as regularly as possible. DataSalon and JISC Collections have worked as closely as possible with all of the participating service providers to make sure that end-users are

provided with an accurate reflection of the data within their resources.

The ADAT today

Today the ADAT⁹ allows libraries, their users and service providers to compare more detailed information about more bibliographic databases, full-text collections, platforms and e-book collections than ever:

- **14 bibliographic databases**

(http://www.jisc-adat.com/adat/adat_plat.pl)
 BIOSIS Previews (1969 – present)
 British Education Index
 British Humanities Index (BHI)
 Compendex
 EconLit
 EMBASE
 GEOBASE
 Inspec
 International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
 MLA International Bibliography
 Scopus
 Sociological Abstracts
 Web of Science
 Zetoc

- **Nine full-text databases**
 (http://www.jisc-adat.com/adat/adat_plat.pl)
 ABI/INFORM
 Academic Onefile
 Academic Search Complete
 Academic Search Premier
 Business Source Complete
 Business Source Premier
 General Onefile
 SocINDEX with Full Text
 Wilson OmniFile Full Text, Mega Edition
- **Ten database platforms**
 (http://www.jisc-adat.com/adat/adat_plat.pl)
 CSA Illumina (ProQuest)
 DataStar (Dialog)
 EBSCOHost (EBSCO)
 Engineering Village (Elsevier)
 FirstSearch (OCLC)
 ISI Web of Knowledge (Thomson Reuters)
 Informit (RMIT Publishing)
 ProQuest (ProQuest)
 SilverPlatter (Wolters Kluwer)
 WilsonWeb (H.W. Wilson)
- **Seven e-Book Platforms**
 (http://www.jisc-adat.com/adat/adat_ebooks.pl)
 Credo Reference
 EBL – Ebook Library
 MyiLibrary
 NetLibrary
 Taylor & Francis eBookstore
 dawsonera
 ebrary.

Reactions to the ADAT

For a time after the new version of the ADAT was launched, it seemed that the only people taking an interest in the ADAT were us and the service providers who contacted us on an ongoing basis to discuss the presentation of information on their and their competitor’s resources. However, usage by librarians has grown and August 2009 witnessed the ADAT’s highest usage stats to date with over 4,500 unique visitors (see Figure 5: usage 2007–2009).

Increasingly, the ADAT has been referenced on e-mail lists such as UKSG’s own lis-e-resources, as librarians facing an increasingly tough budgetary environment look to sources of information that will help them make rational decisions about the resources they may unfortunately have to cancel. But, the ADAT is only ever going to provide some of the information that a librarian needs, and the preferences of individual institutions and their users will always come first.

Plans for the future of the ADAT

JISC Collections and DataSalon would like to encourage more service providers, aggregators and publishers to provide information on their collections so that the ADAT can continue to grow as a one-stop shop for information librarians needing to make effective and well-informed procurement decisions.

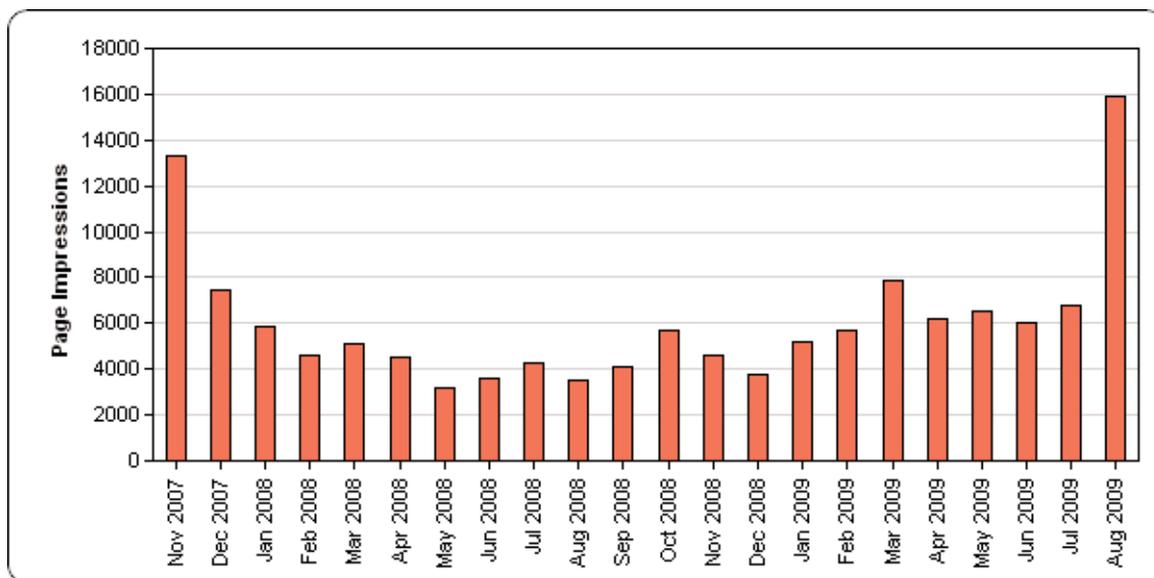


Figure 5. ADAT usage, November 2007-August 2009

In particular, JISC Collections would like to work with e-book aggregators and publishers to provide librarians with information on the titles available in the wide variety of platforms available. Currently, this information is hard to find and compare, and its absence acts as an obstacle to the take up of these collections by the academic community.

Finally, JISC Collections would welcome any offers of sponsorship, which would allow it to develop the ADAT further to meet the needs of librarians everywhere.

References and notes

1. The JISC Academic Database Assessment Tool (ADAT): www.jisc-adat.com (accessed 16 September 2009).
2. For example, EBSCOhost offers access to more than 300 full text and bibliographic databases.
3. Scopus: <http://info.scopus.com/> (accessed 16 September 2009).
4. Google Scholar: <http://scholar.google.co.uk/intl/en/scholar/about.html> (accessed 16 September 2009).
5. <http://www.jibs.ac.uk/events/workshops/giants/index.html> (accessed 16 September 2009).
6. A Study Evaluating Bibliographic and Citation Databases in use by the UK Higher Education Community. Conducted by Nick Andrews Consultancy on behalf of JISC Collections; September 2006: http://www.jisc-adat.com/adat/docs/Bibliographic_and_Citation_Databases.pdf (accessed 16 September 2009).
7. The 20 databases selected following a consultation with academic librarians in the UK were Web of Science, Scopus, PsycInfo, Lexis Nexis, Business Source Premier (EBSCO), PubMed, Westlaw, British Education Index, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Inspec, British Humanities Index, COMPENDEX, MLA International Bibliographies, BIOSIS, EconLit, ABI Inform, Sociological Abstracts, EMBASE, Lawtel and Geobase.
8. The eight platforms selected following a consultation with academic librarians in the UK were: CSA Illumina, EBSCO, Engineering Village, OCLC, Ovid, ProQuest, Thomson DataStar and Web of Knowledge.
9. http://www.jisc-adat.com/adat/help_about.pl (accessed 16 September 2009).

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■ Liam Earney

Collections Team Manager, JISC Collections
Bettenham House, 5 Lancaster Place
London WC2E 7EN, UK
E-mail: l.earney@jisc.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)20 3006 6002

About JISC Collections

(www.jisc-collections.ac.uk)

JISC Collections was established by the UK Higher and Further Education funding councils to negotiate at a national level with publishers and owners of digital content on behalf of the academic and research community. This national negotiating role provides the UK academic community with efficiency gains in excess of £40 million per annum.

About DataSalon

(www.datasalon.com)

DataSalon Ltd is based in Oxford, UK and specializes in providing flexible and powerful tools for data integration and analysis which are also extremely user-friendly and easy to implement. DataSalon's core product MasterVision provides publishers with single view of all of their customer data drawn from multiple sources (subscribers, authors, e-commerce, etc.), and clients include Oxford University Press, BMJ Group, the American Medical Association, and The Royal Society of Chemistry.

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The DOI for this article is 10.1629/22199. Click here to access via DOI:

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