The UK's National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative (NESLI)

Hazel Woodward

SUMMARY. In 1998 the UK created the National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative (NESLI) to increase and improve access to electronic journals and to negotiate license agreements on behalf of academic libraries. The use of a model license agreement and the success of site licensing is discussed. Highlights from an interim evaluation by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) are noted and key issues and questions arising from the evaluation are identified. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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The UK's National Site Licensing Initiative (NESLI)[1] began in 1998. In its first phase, it is a three year project funded by the Joint Informa-

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tion Systems Committee (JISC)[2]–the body which oversees the information systems and technology requirements of the UK's higher and further education funding councils. The major aims of NESLI are:

- to increase and improve access to electronic journals (e-journals)
- to negotiate value for money deals for e-journals

HOW DOES NESLI WORK?

NESLI might best be described as a "loose" consortia of academic libraries. The NESLI consortia originally consisted of over 180 UK higher education libraries. However, from 2001, the consortia has expanded to include all further education libraries, bringing the total number of potential members to over 300. Negotiation with publishers to date have been carried out on behalf of approximately 120 higher education institutions, but this number is set to increase significantly as further education institutions are included in the negotiations. However, it is important to note that agreements are brokered on an individual library "opt-in" basis. Currently, some 50 institutions have signed up to one or more of the NESLI offers and 70 have expressed an interest and participated in trials of one or more agreements.

The strategic aims of NESLI are set by and for librarians through the NESLI Steering Group, comprised of eight senior academic librarians and three JISC support staff. The initiative forms part of the wider JISC Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER) strategy[3] which is a managed learning environment for accessing quality assured, electronic information resources, available from a wide variety of sources. These resources include scholarly journals, monographs, textbooks, abstracts, manuscripts, maps, music scores, still images, geospatial images, as well as moving picture and sound collections. Since its inception in 1996 the DNER has established considerable pace and momentum with the creation of a DNER programme management team, and award of some $20,000,000 in funding for projects and services in tailoring services for use in learning and teaching.

The day-to-day operations of NESLI are undertaken by the Managing Agent. The Managing Agent–a consortium of the University of Manchester and Swets and Zeitlinger–was appointed in May 1998, after open European procurement. The role of the Managing Agent is to: negotiate value for money licenses with scholarly publishers; handle subscriptions to e-journals; provide a single interface for access to

e-journals; address the technical issues surrounding authentication; and encourage the widespread acceptance of a standard Model Site License which is based on the Publishers Association/JISC Model License.[4]

Following initial negotiations by the Managing Agent with publishers–which can be lengthy and involve a number of meetings–offers are considered by the Steering Group. They are evaluated and assessed using a software package specially commissioned by NESLI from the Library and Information Statistical Unit based at Loughborough University. The software is a modelling programme which runs each offer through a range of different types of library budgets representing small, medium and large academic institutions in order to assess the economic outcomes. After this process, it is certainly not unknown for initial offers to be returned to the publisher by the Steering Group for further negotiation!

Assessing the value for money of each offer has proved much more difficult and complex than was first envisaged by the Steering Group. In many cases value for money has been dependant upon the size of the individual institution and the number of journals already subscribed to in print format. In addition, the financial outcome for individual institutions frequently depends on whether they are prepared to cancel printed journals and move to electronic-only provision. If such a decision is taken then savings can certainly be made.

It has also proved difficult to compare offers from each publisher. If there has been one constant in NESLI deals it is that each publisher has produced a different economic model for its offer! The spreadsheet used by the Steering Group to compare the financial basis of each deal grows larger by the day and includes such factors as:

- individual titles or all titles
- electronic only or combined with print
- content fee
- platform fee
- national entry fee
- cross access
- discount on print
- cancellations allowed
- minimum spend/number of sites
- length of agreement

Once the Steering Group is convinced that the best possible agreement has been negotiated with the publisher, the Managing Agent sends

out information to the community via an email list. Each institution has a nominated NESLI representative whose task it is to receive and disseminate information about offers to colleagues within their own institution. Each offer is then evaluated according to local circumstances and orders placed as appropriate.

The Managing Agent produces a regular, electronic *NESLI Newsletter* and convenes a NESLI Advisory Group, comprising representatives from the library, intermediary and publishing communities.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

By February 2001, institutions had been offered e-journal agreements from 17 publishers: American Chemical Society; Association of Computing Machinery; Blackwell Publishers; Blackwell Science/Munksgaard; CABI Publishing; CRC Press; Elsevier Science; Internet Archaeology; Kluwer Academic; Mary Ann Liebert; MCB University Press; MIT Press; National Research Council, Canada; Oxford University Press; Project MUSE; and Sage Publications. Offers from the American Physical Society, John Wiley and Springer Verlag are currently being considered by the Steering Group. In addition, the Managing Agent is in active negotiation with many other journal publishers–including some of the major international scholarly publishers not listed above.

Further areas where significant progress has been made are, firstly, the adoption of the Model License by publishers. Unsurprisingly, the most contentious clause in the license relates to electronic interlibrary loan provision. Nevertheless, the vast majority of publishers offering NESLI deals have agreed to use the Model License. A second area concerns use/usage statistics for both libraries and publishers. Reports which have been identified as most useful include: data organised by publisher and then alphabetically by journal title showing hits at table of contents, abstract and full-text levels; and all journals sorted by number of full text accesses. The NESLI Steering Group also has representatives on another JISC/Publishers Association committee, whose aim is to produce guidelines for use statistics for e-journals. This committee is working in close collaboration with the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) working group which is currently updating the *ICOLC Guidelines for Statistical Measures of Usage of Web-Based Indexed, Abstracted and Full Text Resources,*[5] as well as the Association of Research Libraries E-Metrics initiative.

Other NESLI initiatives under active development include the provision of MARC records and negotiations with a range of publishers to develop subject clusters of e-journals. Trial MARC records have been available from the Managing Agent since November 1999 and work is ongoing on the first of the subject clusters–political science–building on the success of the Electronic Libraries Programme SuperJournal Project in this area.[6]

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Towards the end of 2000 the JISC commissioned an interim evaluation of NESLI by HUSAT, an Institute based at Loughborough University, specialising in research and consultancy in the human factors aspects of advanced technology. Feedback from this interim evaluation demonstrates that librarians are convinced that the UK higher and further education community stands to benefit from single national negotiation for e-journals. What is also clear is that publishers feel that they too stand to benefit from single national negotiations for e-journals. The cost of handling multiple negotiations is eliminated, there is potential to develop a bigger share of the journals marketplace, and publishers participating in NESLI have a direct connection to (and therefore an ability to influence) national policy on electronic information resources.

There is little doubt that NESLI is gathering momentum–as demonstrated by the number of publishers currently in negotiation with the Managing Agent and the number of libraries accepting the offers. However, the Steering Group is under no illusions that NESLI has got it all right. The interim evaluation makes it clear that various stakeholders have concerns about the current and future impact of the NESLI model. Some librarians and publishers are concerned that NESLI has created a virtual monopoly, both as regards the access front-end (SwetsNet) and as regards the source through which they must acquire their electronic subscriptions. Subscription agents articulate similar concerns arguing that separating the role of negotiation with publishers from the role of supplying the service could overcome this problem.

These specific issues and a range of wider questions relating to the dissemination of journal content are currently being addressed by the Steering Group as the first phase of NESLI comes to an end in 2001. A draft *JISC 3-Year Collection Strategy for the DNER* has recently been issued and this identifies eight key collecting areas as priorities–journals, books, discovery tools, geospatial resources, images, learning ma-

terials, moving pictures and sound, and primary research data. Working Groups have been set up to oversee each of these collecting areas and NESLI will migrate to the Journals Working Group.

In the meantime, the NESLI Steering Group is having discussions with a wide range of e-journal stakeholders. Questions being addressed include: How long will libraries be prepared to pay for dual (print and electronic) delivery? In the short term, do libraries wish to "cherry pick" individual journal titles from publishers lists or are they prepared to pay a small premium to acquire the entire journal output of a publisher? How quickly (or not) will e-journals become the main vehicle of journal information provision? What are the economic consequences for libraries and publishers of a large scale move to "pay per view"? What about archiving? Will the concept of the journal issue survive in the medium to long term?

New economic models for the delivery of journal content clearly need to be tested and NESLI believes that it can be a major catalyst in this process. To this end, the Steering Group will be continuing discussions with a range of stakeholders on how the new NESLI contract will be framed and how the various activities might be undertaken to provide best service and value-for-money to the academic community. Priorities for the coming year will be to undertake renewals of existing offers, negotiate new offers with a number of targeted publishers, and to migrate negotiations for databases and datesets to the new Journals Working Group.

NOTES

1. NESLI: www.nesli.ac.uk/.
2. JISC: www.jisc.ac.uk/.
3. DNER Strategy document: www.jisc.ac.uk/pub99/dner_vision.html.
4. Model NESLI Site License: www.nesli.ac.uk/ModelLicence8a.html.
5. ICOLC Guidelines: www.library.yale.edu/consortia/webstats.html.
6. SuperJournal project: www. Superjournal.ac.uk/sj/.