French Report on Costs, Benefits and Limitations of Electronic Resources Sharing:

Elements for International Comparison and Proposals

The scientific and technical information market is characterized by the weight of academic journals, of which the academic and research libraries are the major customers. Some 64% of the articles in these journals, nearly all online, are published by commercial publishers (including a number of big companies which alone account for thousands of titles), 30% by learned societies, 4% by academic publishers and 2% by others. The share of open access published articles is still limited. The book sector is also getting involved, but more slowly, in electronic publishing. The growing number of publications and their constant cost increase (about 10 to 15% per year in the eighties and nineties) led scientific institutions in many countries to form consortia, allowing them to better negotiate prices for electronic resources and to group their purchases, and that led to some moderation in price increase during the past decade (between 5 to 10%).

If the consortia, for the most part created between 1995 and 2000, present a variety of legal statuses, they all rely on public bodies. This report is based on detailed data from about fifteen consortia. They differ in the degree of integration in larger activities (computing network infrastructures or computing centres, for instance) as well as their degree of coordination or centralization. Their primary missions are negotiating, purchasing and managing electronic resources and training in their use, and these missions are often combined with other cooperation missions (shared acquisition and conservation, joint catalogues) or with larger missions in the information technology field (management and preservation, open archiving), but only a few consortia are also in charge of a bibliographic agency or of an interlending centre. The members – between ten and several hundred institutions – are higher education or research institutions, generally from the public sector, more rarely from the private sector. They are run, as the case may be, by academics or librarians, or by councils combining the two, and for the most they have strategic plans. Their operational managers are librarians duly elected, sometimes hosted by a body within an institution. Their strategic plans and annual reports are for the most published on their websites.

On the financial level, we may note two categories of consortia: the first manage only a running budget or else have their running expenses paid directly by the members; the others bear the costs of the electronic resources, mainly owing to contributions from the members or in some cases thanks to national or regional financing. On the human resources level, the consortia are run by reduced teams, and the bigger ones (who have larger missions than electronic resources acquiring and managing) have between 10 and 20 FTE; but many consortia rely on appointed experts from the member institutions, whose contribution in human resources is rarely calculated.

Most of the consortia negotiate an important number of resources. The average licensed databases range from twenty to one hundred. There are around thirty average licensed

journals packages, the less developed sector being e-books. Generally, the permanent team of the consortium is in charge of negotiating, with experts from the member institutions sometimes being appointed, and at present the consortia only have recourse to an external negotiator on rare occasions. When asked to mention the five biggest publishers or providers (in financial terms), the surveyed consortia cited eighteen societies, comprising eleven commercial publishers and seven learned societies. The three most important are: Elsevier, Springer and Wiley-Blackwell.

When the consortium pays a single bill, the criteria for splitting the bill between members are in most cases the publisher's criteria (the historical amount paid for the packages of journals), more rarely their relative size in terms of the number of students or teachers, the share of use, or the proportion of grants in the case of the British consortium JISC. Billing for management charges is rarely practiced, and for instance JISC did not impose this charge in 2009 due to library budget problem.

The contracts are generally negotiated on a multi-year basis, only rarely being renegotiated on an annual basis. However, Ohio LINK has opt-out clauses in the event of insufficient funds and in certain cases pre-set means of reducing the cost. Clauses allowing individual members to opt out before the end of an agreement are generally included, Ohio LINK giving the preference to opt out of certain titles as a complete group. In general, corporate companies are not allowed to take part in consortial agreements. **More flexible models should be introduced in licensing multi-year contracts, so as to allow annual adjustments related to budget problems or to evidence-based usage.**

In some cases (southern Europe, German-speaking regions, northern Europe), multi-consortial agreements involving several countries have been set up, mainly with small and medium publishers.

Some consortia tested innovative models: in particular a "cost for content" provision (Ohio LINK), a conversion of pay-per-view in subscription linked to a certain amount of use (JISC), a model for e-books (JISC). Other models were unsuccessfully tried, for instance a usage-based model (for which it was difficult to forecast the amount), while publishers have had difficulties in devising a new model for e-only which would be free of the reference to the paper's cost.

Although most of the consortia have been giving access to the full text of journals since 1995, a growing number are purchasing back files from the first issue, either via permanent access or via local storage. In France, institutions are purchasing these back files without coordination, at a heavier cost than if they had set up via national license agreements. Many countries (Germany, Brazil, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, and Switzerland) have concluded national licences for scientific archives, in most cases with a combination of central and local budgets. In some cases (for instance Germany and Brazil), financing is 100% central.

For current resources, e-only contracts are supplanting paper plus electronic access contracts, but this trend is impeded by the difference in VAT rates between paper and electronic

products, which varies from a minimum of 5.2% and a maximum of 17.5%, France being at the top. **Harmonizing VAT rates is a priority for developing access to electronic resources.**

Concerning open access to some part of the publications, the author-pay model is not generally provided for in licence contracts, half of which allow authors to publish in a national or institutional open archive after an embargo period. **Licence contracts with publishers should systematically allow for articles to be openly accessible following an acceptable lapse of time after publication.**

In general, users can access the resources remotely after authentication. In some cases, this access is provided by a national portal. It is still unusual for Electronic Resources Management Systems (ERMS) to be implemented at consortium level, and for electronic resources to be listed in national union catalogues. Some consortia also provide other services for their users, such as bibliometric studies on scientific results, open archives and training.

The local hosting of resources is rarely practiced, online access being preferred. Concerning long-term availability of content, only a few preservation policies exist at national level (in Europe, above all in Germany and the United Kingdom). In parallel, policies for preserving electronic content are implemented more at a cooperative level (as in the LOCKSS project) or via a third party (the Portico foundation) than at regional or national levels, but national strategies are taking shape in Germany and Switzerland. **In France, in parallel with the transition towards e-only subscriptions, it would be desirable to draw up simultaneously a national plan for preserving print versions and a national plan for the long-term archiving of electronic content with the support of the major institutions (Abes, INIST-CNRS, BnF).**

Usage statistics are often incomplete, and some consortia are unable to provide a global report, so it is difficult to follow the major indicator of cost per downloading for all the resources. Also, few consortia are able to provide the percentage of titles downloaded within a package, which is a strategic indicator for negotiating resources. The advantages resulting from a wider offer, although impossible to calculate, are nonetheless appreciable: in the case of the leading universities, there are between two and ten times more subscriptions to online journals collections compared with previous subscriptions, and in the case of small universities, there is a hundredfold difference. Qualitative studies are also made by consortia or researchers. So **improving usage assessment is of common interest.**

Consortia have only incomplete data on the acquisition expenditures of their members, and this does not allow them to evaluate the shared expenses in the overall total. Also, at present only the United Kingdom makes an annual calculation of the costs savings resulting from JIS Collections and Eduserv consortial agreements. The calculation of savings resulting from online resources management in shelving or in staff time is not made. However, some studies have been made about the impact of online access on research, as well on publishing activities and on time saved. They show that the number of scientific publications is increasing in parallel with downloading by researchers (for instance in Brazil), and that the most important savings are those resulting from more efficient use of time on the part of researchers. The main return on investment is in the field of research performance. **It is recommended that the cost savings resulting from the licence agreements be monitored each year using a certified methodology, and that a methodology be devised for assessing the impact of electronic resources sharing on the running costs of libraries and on research activities.**

There are several organization schemes for consortia on a national scale: a single consortium operating for the academic and research libraries in the country (and sometimes also for the public libraries), combination of regional or interregional or thematic consortia with a more or less strong national initiative, parallel specific networks for research institutions, and so on. These models are linked to the organization and financing models of universities and research and to the relative weight of the stakeholders (central State, regions, universities, other institutions). However, when several consortia coexist, they perform better when they cooperate, reach an agreement on their respective responsibilities and undertake collective negotiations for some of the resources.

This national effort is sometimes supported by projects linking various countries, either in cross-border cooperation or in multinational initiatives. Above and beyond multi-consortial initiatives, we note a trend for consortia to merge, especially in the US. This trend, caused by the economic crisis, is matching the merging of publishers, making possible the critical mass necessary for negotiating from the strongest possible position.

As regards the situation in France, it is recommended that coordination between universities and research institutions be strengthened, within the framework of a national strategy for access to scientific and technical information endowed with an explicit budget based on global indicators for assessing the costs and uses of electronic resources. Cooperation between universities and research institutions does have some limitations: teachers and researchers access resources via different portals, but this diversity neither secures a generalized access to a common set of resources nor perennial archiving. Setting up a multi-year programme for purchasing national licences, linked to the Bibliothèque nationale de France and supported by funding from the State and from institutions, and perhaps from corporate research as well, is the guiding principle for coordinating all the stakeholders, for giving wider and cheaper access to electronic resources, and for enabling all the various research communities to enlarge the offer in more specialized contents.