Report Workshop: Valuing your Licence

24 September 2010, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, United Kingdom

On 24 September 2010 Knowledge Exchange (KE) organised a workshop focused on investigating whether usage statistics can be used as a basis for managerial decisions on licences. Examples of projects from three countries were presented on how usage statistics are being used for defining strategies for the acquisition of licences. Usage portals developed in the UK and Germany were demonstrated. Questions regarding the relevance of international comparisons, privacy and non-disclosure were discussed.

This workshop followed on earlier Knowledge Exchange workshops on Usage Statistics and their outcomes, including a briefing paper 'Combined Usage Statistics as the basis for Research Intelligence'1.

Presentation by Angela Conyers: Measurement of use and impact of electronic information services

Angela summarised the involvement of JISC in different projects on statistics. These projects were started to inform libraries in order to support them making purchasing and renewal decisions, and to demonstrate how well a deal is being used.

Angela demonstrated a study2 on the uptake of the NESLi23 deals from 2004 onwards. The information about the Nesli2 deals is gathered and the figures are used as Key Performance Indicators which are an important tool in the process of deciding to renew a subscription. The figures do vary over subject areas. Not only usage statistics are gathered but financial data is also included which is needed to inform purchasing decisions and to demonstrate that a deal offers good value for money.

The study showed that there is low take up of the NESLi2 deals. There are several reasons for this: they do not appear to offer good value for money as the deal is not appropriate to the users. Furthermore the offers are too complicated and too time consuming to work them out.

To provide more insight Evidence Base, the department at the University of Central England at which Angela is employed, has developed the Yield method; a method which calculates what value the libraries are getting per pound spent. Yield provides a measure of the value of additional unsubscribed journals being offered in a deal by comparing the list price of unsubscribed titles with the total fee for e-access for all titles in a deal. This measure can be

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2 http://www.ebase.bcu.ac.uk/docs/jiscnesli2summaryeb.pdf
3 http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/nesli2/
used for evaluating big deals. For some libraries the extra value of a big deal is less important as not all titles are actually in use. However cancelling a big deal is not lucrative as buying all the titles separately is not realistic. When withdrawing out of a big deal a library looses the benefit of a price cap and it will have to invest time in finding out the right titles to subscribe to.

Angela explained that usage statistics only show downloads, and don’t show actual use. However this is also the case when students or employees loan a book, in which case a library doesn’t know if they actually read the book. 50-75% of requests are sometimes for titles which were not previously available in a deal. Thus a big deal is bringing down the average price per request for the unsubscribed items.

Interlibrary loan is another topic worth looking into. Interlibrary loan is a lot more expensive outside a big deal because staff costs in handling the materials have to be included as well. Also each request only addresses the demand of one individual.

Nil use for priced titles is varied and can be between 4% (larger institutes) and 37% (small institutes). Libraries feel that they are getting good value for money, the nil use is negligible.

Cherry picking was also discussed; whether it is worthwhile for libraries select specific titles to subscribe to rather than subscribing to a full packet so that the costs per item would lower. In order to simplify the process of comparing journals and deals it would be helpful for librarians to view journal titles classed under broad subject categories. To date it appears to be very difficult to agree on such a list.

**Wouter Gerritsma: use of parameters in negotiations with publishers**

Wouter showed examples on how Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) as a large university use the package deals, and how the university uses parameters to distribute costs within the university. The tool WUR uses is an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet illustrated that 80% of the usage represents 50% of cumulative contract value. Using the spreadsheet each university in the Netherlands can trace which journals cover 80% of the usage. This collection of journals will not be the same for each of the universities. To produce one single shrunk deal for all universities in the Netherlands would be quite a challenge.

The statistics show which journals are responsible for the downloads, which helps to illustrate the needs of the universities. It will for instance give them an idea if the titles, which they are not entitled to, would be a better option for them to subscribe to. Based on these statistics WUR reevaluated their deals, this did not lead to a change in subscriptions, it was not possible to define a smaller deal with only 80% of the titles.

WUR also incorporates bibliometrics when assessing the value of a licence. Bibliometrics are used in research assessment, the national organisation CWTS takes care of this. WUR registers all research information at the university and has a link to to Web of Science to
collect the latest data on citations. They can trace the numbers of citations from WUR to a journal, which makes it possible to trace which department is using which journals and so distribute costs. These figures are also used to decide on which journal should be acquired. The system is implemented on the repository, Wageningen yield, this provides a comprehensive database of all outputs and results in the Spikman factor. This factor illustrates how the costs are to be distributed over the departments.

Ross MacIntyre: JISC Journal Usage Statistics Portal

Ross presented the JISC Journal Usage Statistics Portal (JUSP)\(^4\). This portal has been built to support libraries when analysing the NESLi2 deals. By using JUSP libraries don’t have to visit all the separate publishers’ sites to collect the usage statistics. The libraries agreed to full disclosure and agreed to implement the SUSHI\(^5\) protocol for the exchange of information. SCONUL collects reports for all of the UK libraries and the usage statistics portal can pass on this information. Benchmarking allows universities to compare their usage to that in other comparable universities.

![Image](image.jpg)

A number of challenges arose when setting up the portal: getting price information in a machine readable form (ONIX) is really difficult, there is also not a machine readable table of journals available and information on suppliers is very hard to come by. CrossRef\(^6\) files are not always usable and publishers use different methods for authorisation to grant access to the figures.

In the JISC Collections Benchmarking Survey which was conducted in March 2010 libraries indicated that they had several wishes regarding the portal. They preferred institutions to be mentioned by name. Other criteria the libraries wanted to be inserted were a classification in the same mission group, the possibility to select their own particular subset of named institutions, similar size institutions, usage, spend and downloads, cost per download, SCONUL divisions and a division by area (Scotland/Wales), they also wanted to see the trend over several years.

In the future JISC will be working on the production of the service, the further development of the database, further exploration of “added value” services, benchmarking, COUNTER reports on eBooks, scaling up of institutions and suppliers, further assistance to libraries in analysing usage and making the code available in open source.

The participants commented that average figures are not useful unless accompanied by other institutional data. They also had additional requirements such as getting price information on journals, showing which titles are in a deal, and showing the usage/non usage of titles.

\(^4\) [http://www.jusp.mimas.ac.uk/](http://www.jusp.mimas.ac.uk/)
\(^5\) [http://www.niso.org/workrooms/sushi](http://www.niso.org/workrooms/sushi)
\(^6\) [http://www.crossref.org/](http://www.crossref.org/)
Some issues were discussed in more depth: SUSHI, the uploading of publishers’ price lists, the lack of machine-readable sources, the required authority files to populate the journal and supplier tables, and the subject categorisation of journals.

**Sylvia Weber: Cooperative Statistics Server**

Sylvia presented the project of the Cooperative Statistics Server which was started by ReDI\(^7\) and the HeBIS Konsortium\(^8\). The project will deliver useful and flexible tools to inform libraries on renewal decisions for licences. It makes it possible to cross-search for publishers, years and libraries.

The project aims at overcoming weaknesses with the existing system, such as high manual effort and the data model, which is not flexible enough to incorporate all kinds of different journal packages. The challenges faced by university libraries are the growing diversity of publishers’ formats, the growing amount of usage data, and the growing requirements by users.

Access management is necessary to protect the privacy of the users of the server. Users wish to avoid the high manual effort required at present and wish to include information on pricing. Metadata will be held against statistics data. There is a preference for loading metadata from existing routes. In her presentation\(^9\) she presented an overview on publisher compliance with SUSHI and the types of different journal reports being offered.

The information on national licences is important for 500 institutions. If possible the statistic server will therefore also be available for national use and not just the current regional use. The metadata will be collected from journals, databases, and other metadata sources.

**Nol Verhagen – a critical view of usage statistics**

Nol opened his presentation by paraphrasing Alan Singleton’s comment in ‘Why usage is useless’, an editorial in Learned Publishing\(^{10}\). Authors are interested in being downloaded frequently and being cited frequently, but for authors being published is the most important of all. Librarians are mainly concerned with usage related to current or future usage. For them quantitatively measuring usage is utterly attractive; the same goes for administrators, funders, assessors and institutions. For the latter the focus on measurement is on impact rather than on usage. Publishers in turn are mainly interested in usage as a sales argument. Usage is not a source

\(^{7}\) Database and Information Service in Baden-Württemberg, http://www-fr.redi-bw.de/

\(^{8}\) The consortium for Library information in Hessen, http://www.hebis.de

\(^{9}\) http://www.knowledge-exchange.info/Default.aspx?ID=405

\(^{10}\) Learned Publishing, Volume 23, Number 3, editorial pg 179-184, June 2010
of income, but an indirect proof of importance. Users and readers are interested in usage as a means of being kept up to date rather than searching. During the discussion it was argued, that being published means that the researcher is accepted as a fellow contributor to the field of research. Library subscriptions can be seen as a distortion of the system. There should be a distinction between services to authors versus services to readers and these interests should be balanced when financing the system.

**Break out session**

The participants were divided into three groups and they were asked to address a range of questions in order to reflect on in what way KE could be helpful in the field of usage statistics on licenced materials. The questions were the following:

- Is it worthwhile and cost effective to pay attention to usage statistics?
- Should parameters be shared?
- Which parameters need to be shared and do licences allow benchmarking?
- How important is international exchange?
- What will you use usage data for?

**Outcomes:**

The first group came to the conclusion that, when dealing with publishers the problems are at present not only an institutional, regional, or national matter. Similar activities are taking place in the different KE countries. It would be helpful to have people looking into the problems full-time as at present staff are undertaking these activities as a part of their jobs within a range of other tasks.

It would be helpful to have a clearing house for KE countries in collaboration with the publishers which would receive data from publishers and pass this on to institutions. This would also help to avoid parallel work undertaken at present and to improve the exchange of technical information, new information, ensure that link resolvers remain available and collect list prices. There are currently similar activities, like the LIB-stat list, but these are working groups and not permanent. It would be helpful to have dedicated staff and organisations to work on this. KE can also be very valuable in putting pressure on organisations to improve information and to organise a test case against confidentiality clauses.

The second group agreed that international comparisons are extremely relevant. Confidentiality clauses do make it difficult to compare figures, but it is fruitful to discuss and compare with international colleagues. Confidentiality clauses should not forbid sharing statistics. The price per download is a sensitive figure. Universities could compare with comparable universities in other countries. Competition law does forbid the sharing of information by publishers amongst themselves.
For some institutions it is cost effective to review usage statistics namely for those regularly reconsidering their licences. For a large consortium it might less regularly be reviewed. If you have to justify expenses regularly then instruments need to be in place. The Netherlands should start setting up a database and is very interested in adopting the JISC usage statistics portal.

The third and final group felt that it is necessary to provide figures to management to justify the work done on usage statistics. KE can be valuable in giving instructions to countries and libraries and helping libraries to acquire all the required metadata. The JISC portal could be shared as it will be available as an open source tool.

KE could also be helpful in putting pressure on (smaller) publishers to use SUSHI, and help libraries by ensuring that there is a provision in the licence to support the provision of usage statistics data.

Finally KE could set up an authoritative list of journals and share that amongst countries. Subject categories are appreciated but it might prove worthwhile to start off with easier information.

KE could be helpful by looking into:

- List prices, as they are a difficult concept, are different per country and per currency. This is public information;
- The Clearinghouse concept, which should be discussed;
- How to put pressure on organisations and publishers to provide the right information in the right format. KE could build an international community to support this.
- Drafting a Model provision;
- Authoritative list of journals (in subject categories);
- Broader study on usage statistics and legal issues sharing usage data.

**Conclusion**

Wilma Mossink closed the workshop by summarising the possible activities for the KE Licensing Working Group. Possible future work could include a study on how the JISC Usage Statistics Portal can be extended beyond the NESLi2 scope.

A lot of information offered by publishers has to be corrected by each institution; it would offer benefits to all to have reliable information available. A recommendation could be written on how an authoritative list of journals could be achieved. Such a service will require a sustainable business model; this should be included in the recommendations. Perhaps this service could be provided by existing frameworks.

Institutions requested pressure be put on existing organisations and publishers to adhere to...
standards. COUNTER\textsuperscript{11} is aware of their wishes and this request should be discussed with this organisation. Simply including a promise in negotiations is not proving to be enough. Another line of work would be a Model provision in licenses which ensures that metadata is made available.

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\textsuperscript{11} http://www.projectcounter.org/