

# **Collaborative Collection Management in Australia**

## **Talk for CURL – 26 March – Dublin**

In common with other countries Australia's governing bodies are far more interested in collaboration to make Australia more competitive in the global knowledge economy and to ensure that public resources are not wasted through duplication of effort. The Australian government in its recent reform agenda identified a number of problems with the Australian higher education sector - particularly duplication of activities and amongst the proposals that support the agenda are the need for greater collaboration, international benchmarking and more investment in research infrastructure. These are issues that librarians have been actively engaged in for years and we are well ahead of these reform agendas in responding to issues of collaboration for common benefit.

In Australia, the initial urge for libraries to collaborate in a formal way began in 1928 when the precursor to the Council of Australian University Libraries was established. The purpose of CAUL (then CRAUL) was an understanding by the librarians that there was a need for a wider base of skills than any individual university could provide avoiding duplication of effort, pooling resources to achieve common goals, shared benefit, sharing good practice, providing access to particular areas of expertise and having a common voice on issues that require advocacy.

Surprisingly perhaps the 1928 agenda of CRAUL addresses many of the issues that would be expected to be on a CURL agenda. These were:-

- Australian bibliography
- statistics on library expenditure
- catalogue of scientific publications
- consortial purchasing of books and serials
- pooling of library resources
- library addresses to students (information skills training)
- the importance of the library in the university
- the extension of library privileges to walk in users
- relationship of university libraries to the professional library movement (ALIA).

In 2004 CAUL has four goal areas which are remarkably like the 1928 agenda. These are:-

- maximising access to resources and services
- transforming the current scholarly communication system
- promoting continuous improvement in university libraries
- advocating effective policies in an appropriate legal and regulatory environment

CAUL and CRAUL understood that there are common agendas that are best approached collaboratively (the sum is greater than the parts) and that no library can tackle without allies.

Australian libraries were probably forced to collaborate earlier than some of their overseas colleagues due to the isolation of Australia where researchers had to make voyages to access information from other parts of the world and because Australia has long been dependent on information created elsewhere, importing around 80% of information from the US and Europe – predominantly from the UK. Self sufficiency has never been an option for Australian libraries. There are differences between Australia and UK in collaboration which are cultural and there are organisational differences. The cultural difference is that Australian libraries are both competitors

and collaborators and one can easily overtake the other at any time depending on opportunity. There is not a JISC that provides services to members that libraries would otherwise invent themselves. This may account for the greater level of risk taking or as Australians would have it "giving it a go" which has also resulted in some well documented failures such as JANUS. Perhaps also because of the distances between states and territories new strong collaborations have formed outside CAUL around regional groups but also around different university missions. Libraries in states and territories have agreed collaborative goals and action plans as do research universities, regional universities, technical universities and post 1992 universities – so allegiances are many and will be influenced by opportunity to meet personal and institutional initiatives. Many national (CAUL) initiatives have started out as regional initiatives (such as reciprocal borrowing) and once established they have been extended nationally.

Librarians world-wide are reluctant to deny the all encompassing common good of collaboration, but increasingly words like 'coopertition' have crept into Australian library jargon and this reflects the problem that librarians often find it difficult to accommodate collaboration in the increasingly competitive environment of higher education. As universities become more dependent on contestable external funding reputation and excellence become differentiators and librarians have, as part of their universities, joined the league table. This being said, one of the arguments that has kept libraries in the collaborative as against the competitive environment has been that it is regarded by many that it is not what you have, but how you use it that counts.

Therefore it is argued even if everyone has the same research resources the 'value add' of the library in terms of access and enrichment will be different. So the term 'precompetitive' gained credence but in Australia even this fails to apply where collaboration brings vastly differential benefit or no benefit at all to some members of the group.

Some of CAUL's current core programmes supporting collaborative collection management are:-

1. **The Australian Digital Theses Programme** is a national programme aimed at establishing a distributed database of digital copies of theses produced by postgraduate research students. The programme improves information about and access to a large and under-utilised information resource and is aimed at raising the profile of Australian researchers and universities. Initially funded from a government ARC grant the database now has around two thousand theses and plans to rapidly populate the database are in progress leading to additions of about 110 theses per month. Subject to the permission of the author and the policies of their university, digital copies of these theses can now be delivered to the desktop. Twenty-eight university libraries are reported as in the programme on 28 January 2004. Funding has recently been provided by the Australian government to extend this programme. Recently, Deputy Vice-Chancellors for research have taken a strong interest in this programme that they previously ignored and would not support.
2. **University Library Australia** is a national borrowing scheme which entitles staff and enrolled students to enrol as borrowers at any university library in Australia on presentation of a photo ID and documentation establishing their status as an Australian university student. In most cases this is free although a few libraries require a small annual fee. The main principle underlying this programme is that it should be simple to use and simple to administer. The student only needs a current ID card from their home institution to register and all losses are automatically indemnified.

### 3. **Electronic Database Services and Consortium Purchasing**

CAUL's Electronic Information Resources Committee (CEIRC) operates as a 'buying club' for large electronic datasets for which they pay an annual fee of \$1000. To maximise purchasing power membership is extended for free to external organisations outside CAUL such as CSIRO and the New Zealand universities. This has resulted in considerable savings to libraries as well as to vendors who are dealing with one negotiator, rather than many and services have improved as greater influence to make software changes and improve pricing structures which better meet the needs of users. Greater expertise is developed by the negotiating group which by September 2003 had negotiated 64 agreements with another 31 under current negotiation. The average number of participants in each "deal" is 20 and the highest number in any deal is 40 for PROQUEST 500 and PsychInfo. The basis of CEIRC has always been one of opt in/opt out and when the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee decided to attempt to take this role from CAUL it was only partly successful. The AVCC led an approach to Elsevir's Science Direct and Web of Science. Only Web of Science was agreed. There were a number of reasons why this negotiation did not succeed. The first was that licences for Elsevir's Science Direct had already been negotiated by some libraries which in some cases were more beneficial than the deal negotiated. My own university would have paid over \$900,000 Aus more. Basically for the same amount the sector was currently paying for uneven and (possibly well thought through) access to the Elsevir list rather than the Science Direct list. The payment structure based on total user numbers and acquisitions budgets meant greater cross-subsidisation and the larger were only willing to share the larger cost if the benefit was great enough. Even short term government funding was insufficient to persuade all libraries to opt in to the "all or nothing" deal. In hindsight the opt in opt out approach to big deals has probably served Australia well and is more sustainable in the longer term. Indeed the long term future of national site licences is being questioned in Australia and is unlikely to grow much beyond its current level even in the short term.

#### **Copyright**

As part of CAUL's role in providing access to collections the maintenance of fair use provisions and educational licence in copyright law is of vital interest to universities. CAUL contributes funds and membership to Australian Libraries Copyright Committee. The Committee monitors changes in copyright legislation and seeks to defend access to information in the public interest. The Committee employs a specialist legal advisor paid for from these fees and who makes connections at the government level. This has strongly influenced legislation in favour of a fair copyright scheme.

#### **Information Literacy Standards**

As access to collections is predicated on the need for library users to have information literacy skills CAUL has assisted in the development of a set of Australian standards for information literacy in higher education adapted from the ACRL (ALA) standards to assist universities to equip their students with lifelong learning skills. These standards have been endorsed by Vice-Chancellors through the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee paving the way for academic boards to adopt the standards as part of their teaching and learning management plans. CAUL is also involved in ongoing research with US colleagues into the development of an assessment instrument for information literacy.

4. **Research Resources Australia** is a concept of a common national last copy store built around existing repositories within a new framework and agreed management protocols which would enable a last copy item to be held in one of possibly several stores and shipped to users under agreed protocols. The store potentially could also ship material not required for last copy to aid libraries in under-developed countries. The store would be owned by the higher education sector and would allow all libraries to reduce the cost of sharing little used items. The concept as business case has been developed that would lead to many benefits including:-
- lower overall costs for all universities to store little used items (\$2 compared with \$8)
  - increased visibility for researchers on the national research effort
  - ability to support the development of alternative models of academic publishing
  - greater access to a wide range of materials
  - reduced "loss" of research materials through individual disposal.

The Australian Government is however more interested in building infrastructure for a digital future than solving management problems for conventional collections and as CAUL members support has been mixed, this concept will no doubt be modified over time to achieve a new kind of store or stores within current resources.

5. **AARLIN**

The Australian Academic and Research Library Network is a government funded project to develop a national portal framework to provide access to resources for staff and postgraduate researchers. This is a five year plan aimed to provide services to researchers including

- accessing a uniform search interface permitting distributed searching of multiple electronic sources such as databases, gateways, etc
- providing information that matches the researchers profile as determined by their authenticated users profile
- permitting personalised searches and providing literature alerts
- allowing document delivery requests to be made
- linking to other services and sources including full text where available.

The project is supported by 18 university libraries and the National Library of Australia.

6. **JANUS**

JANUS followed on from the Distributed National Collection that achieved partial success although in limited subject areas. For example language studies, areas of studies (Indonesian, South American) rather than in large discipline areas such as medicine. Early assumptions about massive collection overlap were also not born out in practice and at the time the benefits on a large scale were not convincing. Not all of the collaborative initiatives have been completely successful. One of the most spectacular failures 1998 was JANUS. Perhaps the name representing the god of doors in Roman mythology with two faces looking in opposite directions was prophetic. There were many views about the value of this project and the collaborative/competitive issue was a major barrier without strategic new funding as an incentive to participate.

The idea was an extension of the original Distributed National Collection. It was proposed that a set of collaborative information centres be established to address the diminishing national financial resources for research information in Australian universities by providing a focus for national collaborative purchasing by discipline with one stop shop access to research information in those disciplines.

The project failed because the business models selected were too expensive adding another layer to existing infrastructure, the subscriptions were too high for areas of limited interest and the loss of control over the ability to respond to local user needs above national interest – an issue that will always exist without central funding. Nevertheless bringing academics together did provide a lot of new information and surprising 'buy-in' from some groups e.g. chemistry.

#### **7. Scholarly Communication Fighting Fund and the Coalition for Innovation in Scholarly Communication**

A more successful initiative commenced in 1998 when a few research librarians got together to discuss the newly coined "Crisis in Scholarly Communication". The ANU began by putting \$40,000 from its acquisitions budget into a fighting fund to publicise the crisis and raise support – other research libraries followed suit and after developing brochures and bombarding newspapers the Coalition for Innovation in Scholarly Communication was created to formulate a national response to the growing problem of the research information crisis and the need for an agenda for change.

A workshop of interested groups including government representatives, academics and librarians was held in March 1999 and an agenda for change was agreed. Five projects arose out of the agenda for change including –

- A series of snapshots of the size and nature of economic investment in information infrastructure.
- A survey of the national projects supporting the infrastructure.
- A survey of the expectations of various user groups.
- A summary of international best practice in information infrastructure.
- An analysis of the economic and business models underlying Australia's access to global scholarly information.

Although the National Scholarly Communications Forum already provided opportunities for scholars and librarians to discuss common issues and themes, the Coalition for Innovation in Scholarly Communication raised research information issues to a new level of awareness and sparked many of the initiatives that now appear on the CAUL agenda such as the scholarly communication working group. It also helped to raise the profile of library information infrastructure to government bodies which has undoubtedly contributed to the higher level of funding support that was allocated to Australian collaborative initiatives in 2003.

In late 2003 the Australian Government announced that \$12M would be provided to improve information infrastructure based on four new projects as well as international consultation and collaboration. The four projects are:-

1. **An extension to the Australian Digital Theses Program**

This project is aimed at redeveloping the central metadata repository of the ADT program to increase coverage and accessibility for researchers. The coverage will be expended to include all Australian higher education theses, whether digital or not. It will provide more efficient search services and metadata support services and a partnership with ProQuest Information and Learning for retrospective digitisation will enable the database to be populated more rapidly than would otherwise have been possible. Bibliographic information will be extracted from Kinetica the Australian National Bibliographic database.

2. **The Australian Research Repositories Online to the World (ARROW)**

Using open standards ARROW will test best practice solutions for institutional digital repositories for a range of digital content types. The aim is to achieve a university epress as a sustainable publishing alternative to commercial services offered on a subscription or pay-per-view basis. The project aims to tackle pricing and intellectual property issues and offer advantages, including speed of publishing over current models. This model will be tested in four institutions but presents a potential migration path for the Australian Digital Theses Metadata repository using The National Library of Australia to develop national resource discovery services using metadata harvested from the institutional repositories and exposing the metadata to provide services via protocols and toolkits.

3. **An Australian Partnership for Sustainable Repositories**

To coordinate Australian effort to identify, manage and maintain access to key research and information assets in digital form in universities. The aim is a network of sustainable research repositories that can act in a coordinated way building on work that has commenced in many universities to develop electronic research archives. The project will review international best practice in digital continuity and sustainability issues and consider how federated searching across collaborating repositories can be achieved on a national level.

4. **Meta Access Management Project**

This looks at the integration of multiple solutions for managing authentication and authorisation. The aim is to introduce the model locally, but consider its potential for interinstitutional collaboration using "middleware" as an essential component of the architecture.

### Conclusion

The collaborative initiatives that began in 1928 when the research libraries considered the need for a catalogue of scientific periodicals have become far more complex and early interinstitutional collaborations have come to span continents and professional affiliations but the overarching rationale remains the same – providing value added information to users and easier access to information resources by overcoming barriers to access and identifying new opportunities for making information more relevant, usable and immediate.