

ERM Use Case - Cancellation of a journal title

Developed with University of Warwick (2 February 2011)

Generic Description – UC8 - Cancellation of a journal title - The library needs to cancel a journal title (print or electronic). The library has to check what post-cancellation access they have (print or electronic), the reliability of that access, and whether cancellation impacts on any 'total spend' (or other) agreements with supplier.

1. Use Case Description – What happens?

Activity - The cancellation of e-journal subscriptions has not been a major concern during the lengthy period of transfer from print, which coincided with widespread availability of funds. That situation appears to be changing with the financial climate. The processes surrounding the cancellation of journal titles could therefore be very important for the future. Furthermore, good portfolio / collection management requires evidence based processes for reflecting changes in academic focus, including cross-disciplinary interest in many titles, in the ongoing commitment to subscriptions.

The activity can be divided between 'selection' (identifying titles that could be cancelled and consulting with academics on priorities) and 'cancellation' (notifying agents and publishers and following through with Knowledge Base notifications and catalogue / ERM / discovery adjustments). These are detailed under workflow, with emphasis on the means of consulting with academics (e.g. through departmental portfolio listings) and the basis for shared decisions (combining quantitative and qualitative factors).

Driven by corporate budgetary requirements, a concentrated example of this activity took place at Warwick in the form of a periodicals review between June and August 2009. The review covered around 20% of journal titles as big deals were excluded, as they could not be subjected to short term change.

Finally we note that libraries will need effective means of negotiation, bearing in mind that the natural fallback in case of deadlock over culling resources may be to cut library services.

Volumes - The university has an information resources budget of c.£4m, which includes c. 28,000 e-journal titles; 80% of total e-journal titles are tied up in deals; 60% of e-journal expenditure is impacted by Exchange Rates; the clients are the 30 departments; a corporate 5% savings target had to be addressed in Summer 2009

Actors - The Library's Procurement team, Digital Access Manager (voting system, usage stats), Academic Support Librarians (ASLs), Departmental Library Representatives, Head of Academic Support (manager of ASLs), the University Information Policy & Strategy Committee (IPSC, chaired by PVC) which endorsed the process to be followed, and a further group of Faculty Chairs and the Chair of IPSC which took the final decision on what was to be cancelled

Data involved – For all journals outside deals: Departmental journals listing, did not provide cost, departments could request usage stats

Workflows - There are two aspects to the overall use case: (a) Selection and (b) Cancellation. The Warwick workflow is as follows:

- (a) The Selection workflow takes the form of a periodicals review involving
- Subscriptions are, wherever possible, allocated to a core department
 - A time limited process was initiated as follows
 - Departments are presented with a list of titles that can be cancelled (excluding big deals such as NESLi); this is in the form of an online listing against which a departmental vote [simple scale: 1=essential, cannot cancel through 3=no longer required, can cancel] can be entered against each title
 - The ASL works with the departmental library representative to review votes on titles
 - Usage data is offered on request (but this was not generally taken up)
 - Price information is not made available – though may form part of the evolving debate
 - The recommendations for cancellation were presented to the PVC chaired committee; whilst there was an iterative process that finally identified, after all academic views were cross-collated, only 40% of the target savings, the proposal was accepted based on the strength of process
- (b) The Cancellation workflow determined by the range of systems and services used in a particular university. The Warwick process is underpinned by the services taken from Serials Solutions, which bring together a number of potentially discrete steps, whilst I nevertheless involving time lags and leaving process gaps to be filled by the library staff responsible for the final result.
- The outcome of the selection process is reported to the Library's Procurement team
 - Procurement places a cancellation note on order record in the Millennium LMS to alert at point of renewal
 - Cancellation takes place when the title appears on the Millennium renewals checklist
 - The agent / publisher is informed
 - The Serials Solutions (SS) service is updated through their web form, including details of post-cancellation access (which probably involves accessing paper license records and possibly contacting the supplier)
 - SS supply the latest MARC records monthly (a complete reload) – including the post-cancellation rights (856 tag)
 - SS supply monthly coverage update for link resolver (Web Bridge)

Current Examples – In 2010-11 the Physics department has entered in to cancellation discussions in order to pay for new titles. The process builds on the approach designed for the 2009 review.

2. Motivation – What are the pain points?

What are the current problems -

The problems are largely related to the selection part of the process, though there are issues with the actual cancellation process (notably the disjointed nature of the process and the discontinuity and local effort involved in monthly data loads)

- Finding things to cancel outside the big deals
- Balancing cost per article and the document delivery alternative with specialist Research Group needs
- Providing the accurate quantitative evidence (usage) to place alongside departmental qualitative assessment

- The time involved and the time elapsed – the consultative process potentially involves a number of iterations, though this was avoided by being able to present good evidence to the Committee after the first round
- The reality that inflation, exchange rates and price hikes represent uncertainties beyond this process

Efficiency assessment - Periodic undertaking of the review (Selection) process will provide supporting evidence for routine library collection housekeeping

Economy assessment - This is about saving money; the review process provides the evidence and consultation necessary to enable difficult decisions.

Effectiveness assessment – However painful it may be, the process is geared to ensuring that finite funds are spent well, taking account of quantitative evidence and qualitative factors and informed by alternative delivery options (e.g. Doc Del).

3. Intended Benefits – What is the business case?

Library Service – Enabling the service to provide the most focused service possible within the available budget

Users – Securing access to the priority research, learning and teaching resources in a time of austerity

Suppliers – If the evidence is used proactively, the review process can potentially contribute to the health of the market by giving advance warning of at risk subscriptions; it is clear that some smaller publishers outside deals may be willing to adjust pricing to ensure supply.

4. Consequences of doing it ‘above campus’

Both the selection and cancellation aspects of this use case can benefit from above campus services. The efficiencies in terms of cancellation are explored in other use cases covering shared license and ERM data processing. Here we concentrate on the selection process.

What will happen? – The collation of usage data (currently under development in the JISC Usage Stats Portal (JUSP)) will both save time and add value to the quantitative assessment of cancellation options. Within a wider shared service, it could be extended to encompass feedback on qualitative titles cancellation considerations. Whilst some institutions may consider the ranking of titles as a competitive issue, it is suggested that the realities of cost control must prevail as well as the positive benefits of benchmarking.

The simple data of retention ranking and date could be very powerful, providing the opportunity to determine core subject area lists. Furthermore the shared service could collect feedback on the value of titles that are ‘protected’ within big deals. Assuming austerity will lead to increased flexibility for cancellations and variations within deals, this evidence could be vital in national negotiation.

Potential Risks – Perceived threat to competitive advantage; furthermore academics would not want to be doing such exercises but the libraries might need to (a 3 year review cycle may be realistic).

Potential Opportunities – Benchmarking; national negotiation potential; core subject area lists; note also that this represents another facet of the ‘Knowledge Base Plus’ shared intelligence concept that is explored in such as the Royal Holloway and Southampton use cases.

Consequences of not doing it – Given the direction of budgetary travel and the increasing incidence of new titles, each university will have to develop a rolling cancellations strategy, which will be dependent on local ability to provide usage and benchmark evidence, to develop an online review mechanism that engages input from faculties, and also the big deal issue.

5. Implementation Pointers – Things to take in to account

Here we concentrate on the pre-cancellation process.

Mechanism – Add qualitative factors to JUSP and integrate with the shared service Knowledge Base. The level of security (sharing institutional as well as aggregated data) would be key.

Inputs & Outputs – Participating universities would need to enter data for those titles under review, presumably as part of the interactive assessment process. The output would be in the form of reports and online displays, as illustrated in JUSP.

Standards & Protocols – There are no domain standards applying to the qualitative data collected in such as the Warwick review

Existing systems – We assume any similar exercises are undertaken using local methods outside core systems. However, JUSP could provide the basis for an above-campus approach.

Staffing – Considerable staff effort is needed to manage and inform cancellation exercises. An above campus approach would optimize the process over an extended period and would lessen the requirement for systems librarian support.

6. Challenges & Costs – Direct and indirect

Set up and Transition – The key issue for each university at set up would be the entry of Faculty / Title affiliations and the configuration of the set of required fields (e.g. Department, Title Score, Doc Del option). There would be no transition issues as such systems do not typically exist in any systematic form.

Ongoing – The key issue at set up would be configuration of the right set of titles (e.g. those under review this year at Warwick) and fields.