

Purchasing models for scholarly materials in the UK: a case-study

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The E-Resources Management Handbook – UKSG

The current purchasing models employed at the London School of Economics (LSE) for the acquisition of e-resources are outlined. The authors present LSE's fund structure and how budgets are distributed between print and electronic purchases. A discussion that ranges from format types to national deals and consortia provides the context for LSE's collection development and preservation policies. The uncertain position of e-books is examined, as for the first time issues normally limited to journals stray into the realm of monographs, affecting purchasing decisions for this newcomer to the e-resources sphere. Conditions that would need to be met before LSE could consider adopting an e-only purchasing policy are discussed.

Introduction

The [British Library of Political and Economic Science](#) (LSE Library) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is the world's largest research library specializing in the social sciences. It is a member of the [Consortium of University Research Libraries \(CURL\)](#) and in October 2005 was granted *Designated Status* by the [Museums, Libraries and Archives \(MLA\) Council](#). The LSE Library has a large print collection which has been extended and complemented by a sizeable collection (in UK terms) of electronic resources (e-resources). Like all academic libraries, models for purchase and management of e-resources at the LSE Library have been developing over the last ten years or so. Purchase and management of these resources now form a considerable part of the Library's activities. The solutions that have been so far developed work reasonably well in the case of this library. That is not to say that these solutions are the only models and it is important to point out that they are still undergoing change and development. The library world is waiting for models offered by suppliers and publishers to settle down and for other uncertain factors such as open access publication to be resolved.

An overview of acquisitions budgets and fund structure at the LSE Library

At LSE, the acquisitions budgets are held by the Library and not the academic departments. It is possible to divide up an acquisitions budget in a variety of ways; by subject, academic department, publication type, and so on. The LSE Library has elected to split its acquisitions budget at the top level, separating monographs and serials. Further divisions are made between teaching and research, by format of the title, or by language of publication, into approximately 40 funds. Developments in the academic publishing



Figure 1. London School of Economics Library, stairs with book-shelves in the background

world have necessitated the introduction of new funds, largely to accommodate electronic formats, and it is essential that the LSE's fund structure remains flexible and able to respond to these changes.

- **Main Collection:** mostly print and divided by region (for example UK, US or Europe) and by official and non-official publications. As a general rule, one copy of each title is purchased.
- **Course Collection budget:** for the purchase of books to support teaching, as identified on reading lists, often covering the purchase of multiple copies. Items reside in the Course Collection, a discrete short-loan collection with access normally limited to LSE staff and students. Any e-books purchased for teaching purposes are paid for from this budget.

- **Journals budget:** this budget is for the purchase of single-title print journals. Priority for new subscriptions is given to titles required for teaching, followed by those needed for research. However, with retention of existing subscriptions this is not always the case: we have cancelled print titles required for teaching. Selection (and cancellation) is agreed by the Serials Review Group (SRG), which meets bi-monthly, following recommendations from academic staff and Academic Liaison Librarians. In addition to funds for continued subscriptions, the LSE Library has a designated fund for new titles approved for purchase at SRG. This fund provides room for growth in our collections. Relegating print titles does not receive as much attention as new additions: this situation has become compounded by the restrictions applied by publishers as part of their e-journal package licences for cancelling subscriptions.
- **eSources** (LSE term for all e-resources) **budget:** subdivided into three sections:
 - *E-journals:* Like their print counterparts, e-journals are selected by the SRG and managed by the serials team. This category includes full-text packages offered by publishers via bodies such as NESLi2 (the National E-journals Initiative) deals and any title for which LSE has a single electronic-only subscription. In contrast to print journals, no fund exists for new e-journal subscriptions, consequently, the LSE Library tends to maintain existing e-journal packages rather than subscribe to new deals. Exceptions to this general pattern may occur towards the end of the fiscal year if the library is facing an underspend. However, these are usually one-off purchases such as e-journal archives, which do not become part of the annual expenditure.
 - *Datasets:* Being a research-led social sciences institution means that it is necessary to provide a relevant collection of datasets, many of which are expensive. Datasets are the responsibility of the Data Librarian who has a budget especially for this purpose. Selection is agreed by the Data Advisory Group which includes a number of academic staff amongst its members.
 - *Electronic sources:* The LSE sub-category of eSources includes any electronic resources which are not covered by any of the categories above, for example, abstracting and indexing databases, e-books for reference and research support, image collections and full-text databases such as *AccessUN*. The eServices Librarian is responsible for this category, and selection, based on relevance for teaching and/or research, is made in consultation with Academic Liaison Librarians.

A brief history of purchasing models at the LSE Library

The current purchasing models employed by the LSE Library differ little today from those employed five years ago. The main shift has been in terms of the format of purchases, with growth in the allocation given to e-resources budgets and concomitant creation of appropriate funds. For example, 'eSources' is a relatively new fund in the LSE Library's fund structure. This development should come as no surprise, given the greater availability of electronic products for libraries in today's market.

In fiscal years 1999–2000 and 2000–01, 25% of the Library's acquisitions budget for serials was allocated to e-resources (note that this figure does not include datasets). This rose to 30% in 2001–02, where it remained steady for three years.

Technology plays an important role in determining what e-resources are available and the methods for accessing them. Consequently, these technological issues have informed purchasing decisions. Without developments in authenticating services such as [Athens](#), [Shibboleth](#) and proxy servers, spending increasing amounts on electronic resources would not be justifiable. So, external developments lend support to an increase in the purchase of electronic formats.

Consequentially, the budgetary allocation for serials print titles at LSE has fallen in relation to the rise in allocation for e-resources. In particular, the allocation for new print subscriptions was steady at around 2% of the print total for years 1999 to 2003, after which it fell by half to around 1% for the last two fiscal years. Such flexibility is possible because titles assigned to the new subscription fund code in one year roll over into their permanent funds the following year. This fund has no commitment at the beginning of each fiscal year.

Current purchasing models

At the time of writing, the allocation of acquisitions funds for 2005-6 had not been finalized. However, provisional calculations indicate that the percentage allocated to e-resources versus print serials has risen again, to 34% of the serials budget.

In summary, LSE spends more on e-resources today than it did five years ago. Priority is still given to teaching titles over those for research. The percentage of the budget allocated for subscribing to new print titles each year remained steady for the first few years of the millennium and then dropped by half for the past few years. Although e-resources budget allocations are increasing, print budgets still account for the majority of the LSE Library's acquisitions: the largest fund is for printed journals in English. This fund is accumulating more subscriptions and grows each year as the majority of titles purchased as new subscriptions (as agreed at SRG) roll over into the following fiscal year.

Occasionally, a special case is made for additional funds for eSources and datasets. For example, the Library bid for extra resources from central funding to enable new money to be allocated to datasets during 2003-04 because there were a number of titles without which research would suffer.

When single-print titles are accepted for purchase at SRG meetings, the policy is to order a current print subscription with electronic access, providing the electronic component is no more than 10% of the print price, where print and electronic prices are unbundled. Orders for electronic-only single titles are not placed unless there is a particular reason, or an advantage in doing so. In addition, favourable licensing and access conditions are sought, namely permanent access to subscribed content after cancellation, and off-campus access.

The LSE Library has approximately 10,000 active subscriptions to print serials, roughly 50% of which are commercially produced, the remainder being largely official publications. The use of a subscription agent has obvious benefits when trying to manage the administration, supply and purchase of all these print serials. The benefits for all libraries are well documented and include:

- single/minimal point of contact
- add-on services that save serials staff time and provide administrative data
- management information
- invoices in a single currency.

UK national deals

The deals arranged by national negotiating bodies are of enormous importance to LSE. Competitive prices coupled with favourable licence terms mean that any deal for a resource which is relevant for teaching and/or research is considered. These deals also remove the need to negotiate from the less effective bargaining position of being a single institution, and also save staff time. If the funds to pay for the resource are not immediately available and it is deemed worthy of serious consideration, the title is added to a 'wish list' in case of cancellation of another title or more money being made available at a later date.

The LSE Library licenses and has access to around 20,000 electronic journals, the major proportion of which are part of large e-journal packages or can be accessed via the 90 databases subscribed to by the Library. Where available, LSE subscribes to e-journal packages and e-resources that have been negotiated via bodies such as NESLi2, the JISC ([Joint Information Systems Committee](#)) and EduserV [CHEST \(Combined Higher Education Software Team\)](#) national deals. The advantages of these deals to LSE and other participating institutions are:

- a model licence is used. The benefits are that librarians do not have to rely heavily on legal interpretation skills, and the same criteria are asked of all publishers/suppliers
- the ability to add titles to a wish list for future consideration and the opportunity to compose a wish list of preferred publishers and type of deal
- as an independent agent is used to carry out negotiations, librarians do not have to go head-to-head with the publisher. And since the licence is offered to all in HE, the negotiation can be carried out once rather than individually for each library

- competitive prices
- fixed costs for a set period (usually three years) for many resources, resulting in savings. Set periods have to be considered carefully because of funds being tied up for long periods and the lack of flexibility this causes
- site licences, which usually allow for unlimited concurrent users
- licences which allow walk-in users to access the resources (of high importance at LSE with 10,000 registered external users)
- Athens authentication (until the move to Shibboleth)
- supply of MARC records.

So far, we have considered what LSE purchases, with little consideration of what we stop purchasing. As already stated, journal cancellations do not receive as much attention as maintaining current subscriptions and taking out new ones. However, cancellation and relegation of titles no longer required should be an aspect of collection development. Serials reviews have been carried out in the past at LSE. Currently, reviews are incorporated into Serials Review Group considerations. The Group has a remit to review parts of our subscription profile on a regular basis. These considerations are compromised by first having to consider if a title is eligible for cancellation, since institutions are often restricted from cancelling titles by publishers with whom they participate in an e-journals deal.

eSources and datasets are considered carefully at every renewal point. Titles are cancelled if they are, for example, under-used and/or no longer relevant. The overall value to the School is also taken into consideration.

Why LSE employs the purchasing models described above

At the LSE Library priority is given to purchasing print format for core book and journal titles required for teaching and research: these are supplemented by e-journal and e-book packages. By their nature, datasets and databases often do not have a print counterpart, which makes the purchasing policy for these formats easy. The LSE Library has no policy to purchase electronic versions only for core journals. This situation will continue whilst problems with perpetual access to subscribed content and back-files, and uncertainty regarding the state of flux of titles between publishers, continue. One major consideration for the Library as a national and internationally recognized library with *MLA Designated Status* is provision for visiting researchers, of which there are approximately 10,000 registered external users. Removing print collections in favour of electronic collections would have a negative impact on these users where the publishers restrict access.

Until relatively recently, electronic access for single titles that LSE also takes in print has been included as part of the print price where possible. The financial benefits of this are well known in libraries: unless an electronic-only journal is less than 82.5% of the print-only price no immediate financial saving can be made because of VAT. However, in 2004–5 the SRG approved the subscription to some single electronic-only journals where an academic made a request for electronic only, despite not currently having an electronic-only purchasing policy.

Recent investigations by library staff into the feasibility of moving to electronic-only for three major official publication collections resulted in the recommendation of maintaining the print collections in each case. Problems regarding access, completeness of online versions and uncertainty of obsolete formats in the long term were cited as the basis for the recommendations.

Increasingly, the serials section at LSE is sent letters by subscription agents informing us that previously bundled titles, where electronic access was 'free' as part of the print subscription, now incur an additional charge for electronic access. LSE policy is to investigate each on a case-by-case basis. Factors considered include current usage statistics, availability in other databases and the percentage increase in annual price.

As a largely single-subject institution, selecting e-journal packages for subscription is a relatively easy process at the LSE Library compared, presumably, to other higher education institutions that provide the full spectrum of academic disciplines. We do not have the difficult task of deciding whether to purchase

an expensive STM (science, technology and medicine) package or a relatively cheaper arts package. Where possible the Library opts for relevant subject collections rather than the 'big deal' which invariably includes many titles that are out of scope for LSE users, as the big deals normally include electronic access to all titles that a publisher produces. Additionally, LSE Library budget holders are responsible for making purchases that represent value for money. For eSources acquisitions this means purchasing nationally negotiated deals where available and placing subscriptions via vendors that are preferred with the [London Universities Purchasing Consortium \(LUPC\)](#), which entitles LSE to a discount on purchases of all goods including library acquisitions.

The 'all you can eat' big deal and its inclusion of titles traditionally out of LSE's scope could be considered to skew our collections when these titles are loaded into our OPAC. Careful collection policy decisions that are made at the title level when considering individual subscriptions cannot be applied with the same scrutiny at the e-journal package deal. LSE is a medium rather than small institution but only has one main subject area. However, as social sciences become increasingly interdisciplinary, there is a growing pressure on the library to subscribe to 'fringe' titles. For example, the formation of the new BIOS research centre (Centre for the Study of Bioscience, Biomedicine, Biotechnology and Society) at LSE with its biosciences focus means that the big deal packages become more appropriate.

Problems of space affect purchasing decisions. For example, the decisions to cancel duplicate journals held in the course collection, and to subscribe only to the electronic version of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, were taken in order to save shelf space.

Trials of new e-resources

Until recently, trials of e-resources were commonplace at LSE, with around twenty trials per annum up to the end of the LSE financial year 2004–05 (1 August–31 July). Since budgets have become tighter, trials are now fairly rare events. The thought processes behind this change are that it is unfair to 'dangle the carrot' of a new resource under the noses of users when there is no prospect of being able to subscribe to that title. Occasionally, the Library trials a prospective resource but restricts the trial to library staff only, the hope being that any unsuitable titles are weeded out early before presenting to academic departments. Trials to a wider audience are undertaken if there are definitely funds available or if academics are being offered a choice between a new and an existing title.



Figure 2. London School of Economics Library, stairs and lift

The case for e-books¹

Neither libraries nor publishers have arrived at a consensus for models for e-books. What is offered by publishers differs according to 'brand'. The number of titles available has not yet reached a critical mass and publishers differ on access and payment methods. The online version may also differ from the print version, for example in content or pagination.

On the other hand, decisions need to be taken in libraries about e-books, such as whether the print version should form the same or a separate record on the catalogue, where and how links to e-books should be placed, whether access should be made available at title or collection level (or both) and how workflows for the importing and management of catalogue records should be adapted.

Because this format is in such a confused stage of development, LSE is currently considering the issues in order to arrive at a preferred model for the purchase of e-books. As LSE increases its e-book collections, decisions will be taken such as:

- whether the Library only accepts e-book collections which include MARC records in the cost or at an affordable price
- the procedure for checking the quality of MARC records and whether there are staff available to amend poor records to an acceptable standard
- the provision of adequate staffing for the maintenance of e-book collections. (Serials are maintained by outsourcing to [Serials Solutions](#): this is not currently an option for e-books)
- the procedures and preferred purchase models acceptable for the provision of e-books that form part of the Course Collection
- defining a policy for subscription to e-book packages, for example stating the circumstances when outright purchase might be preferable to a subscription model
- whether the lack of adequate usage statistics is a reason for not subscribing.

The answers to these and other fundamental questions will form the basis for the purchasing model for e-books at the LSE Library. This issue will be decided by the newly-formed eBooks Working Group (eBWG) during the academic year 2005–06. Because LSE does not currently form part of an e-books purchasing consortium, any national deals provided by bodies such as the JISC will continue to be of major importance. Other factors which are likely to be of importance for decisions regarding subscription will be:

- the ability to purchase at a micro-level (particularly for titles/chapters required for courses provided via the School's virtual learning environment)
- flexibility to select and deselect titles from collections
- ability to opt for unlimited concurrent users. For text books LSE often requires that a title (or even a section of a title) is available for a short time (perhaps even only a couple of weeks), but by a large cohort of users. This is where access to physical copies becomes difficult and the option to have unlimited concurrent users for an electronic version is attractive.

Books differ from journals in that the library has no need to continue subscribing year after year in order to build a series. However, lack of perpetual access to a title could be problematic for research titles. The ability to retain access after ceasing a subscription is an issue which will be considered seriously by the eBWG.

It is worth pointing out that no one publisher meets all LSE needs. Subject collections or aggregators may offer better options that allow LSE to select social science titles from across a number of publishers. Hence LSE's needs may be better met by a mix of publishers and content providers.

Setting and monitoring budgets

The LSE Library's acquisition allocations for the various funds are set at the beginning of the academic year. However, the Library bids to the School a year in advance of this, and figures are largely based upon

the previous year's expenditure plus a carefully researched estimate for inflation. The Library is informed of the result of its bid for funding six months before the start of each new academic year. When acquisitions budgets are allocated in the library management system, they are done so from a total that has been fixed. Once set, they tend to remain unchanged for that period. Unfortunately, it is not guaranteed that the budget will rise any more than inflation each year. Subscription costs and price inflation predictions are closely monitored for change. Because of the general lack of increase in real terms, subscriptions to new eSources and dataset titles have to be considered against possible cancellation of other titles. The result of this is that it is necessary to work closely with suppliers and publishers and sometimes to negotiate prices. Any increases above the rate of inflation become subject to detailed scrutiny.

It has rarely been necessary to negotiate licence terms, probably owing to the fact that LSE takes advantage of many national deals which have model licences arranged (see above). Library IT Support Services have contacted suppliers to agree permission to arrange access via proxy server for off-campus use.

It is worth mentioning that the LSE Library has recently implemented an electronic resources management system, *Meridian*, from Endeavor. Although the system is still being set up and data added, it is hoped that this application will enable LSE to manage its e-resources more efficiently and provide useful management reporting information. *Meridian* is designed to integrate with the library management system, so allowing acquisition and cataloguing information to be accessed and reported along with other management information.

Usage statistics for e-resources are gathered wherever possible. As is the case in most libraries, the gathering and collating of usage statistics currently proves something of a challenge. The LSE Library is attempting to gather what is available (although the quality of reporting by different suppliers varies enormously) to enable informed subscription decisions. The Library does not rely totally on such statistics: they form part of a larger picture of decision-making. Also, context is everything, as low usage does not necessarily indicate low value to the institution.

Future plans

Will the LSE Library's purchasing model for e-resources change and if so, in what way and for what reasons? For the Library to begin thinking about relegating current print collections off-site, and therefore free up space on the shelves, and to consider cancelling current print subscriptions, two major changes must be made: the formation of a permanent store for the collections; and licences from publishers that permit permanent access to subscribed content for all registered users.

One major stumbling block to cancelling print subscriptions and relegating hard copy collections is the restrictions imposed by some publishers on access to subscribed electronic content after cancellation. In the recent round of consideration of NESLi2 offers, LSE has so far not taken up any offers of converting print subscriptions to electronic only. Why not? Because it would not save any money and because either publishers are not guaranteeing perpetual access after cancellation or we are not confident of their abilities when they do guarantee such access in perpetuity. We also have to be mindful of user preferences: some like to read from a printed page and not a computer screen.

Even for those publishers that do provide perpetual access to subscribed content, there is unease within the LSE Library for the long term. Who can say whether a state-of-the-art web server and the content it stores in 2005 will be accessible in 2105? This may seem far-fetched but users of the LSE Library do not have any problems accessing the 1905 print volumes of, for example, *Nature*, either now or in the foreseeable future.

One recent development that presents the Library with the opportunity to own forever, rather than merely lease, electronic journals is LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe). The LOCKSS programme is 'a community based, open source, persistent access digital preservation system'. As libraries are able to store and maintain content locally that they have purchased and stored on their own server, perpetual, long-term access is once again the responsibility and right of the library. Perhaps a reversion to this more

traditional library activity will make acquisitions managers increasingly confident of moving print serials into a central store and taking the electronic-only plunge as persistent access to content becomes possible for libraries to offer.

Consortia have been a positive development for libraries. More specialized consortia reflecting the fact that not all higher education institutions offer all academic subjects would be advantageous.

Changes are happening in the academic publishing community that may force a change on LSE Library purchasing policies. A widespread adoption of the publication charge via the open access² model may mean that old acquisitions budgets move from the control of the Library out to academic departments to help them finance publication.

Internal factors

The purchasing models described above have evolved over a number of years within LSE. In many ways, these models work for the institution and have proved to be the optimum method of informing decision-making. Collection development policies to support research within LSE state the Library's priorities for each subject area, and the disposal policy aids decision-making for cancellation. Detailed policies and strategies for e-resources are in the process of being written although a general e-resources collection development policy already exists. These detailed policies will state clearly the criteria for selection and relegation, collection development for all e-resources and an overarching eServices strategy. Preferred purchasing models and what the Library is willing to accept will be agreed and clearly set out.

Change is inevitable and these changes will be driven by:

- the technology
- outcomes of discussions regarding preferred purchasing models, maintenance and management
- user preferences and improvements to user services.

The LSE Library takes the views of its users seriously. User surveys for students and academic staff are undertaken annually and biennially, respectively. Serious dissatisfaction with any particular aspect of e-resources is investigated. For example, in the 2004 survey a number of users suggested that the Library subscribe to extra titles that are not social science titles but which reflected the increasing interdisciplinary nature of subjects. Users have also indicated how important off-campus access is. Results like these therefore help to inform, change and develop the purchasing model over time.

Much has been written about the reasons for setting up institutional repositories, including those who believe that the existence of such repositories will allow institutions to cancel journal subscriptions and therefore address the problem of the effect of hard-pressed budgets and increasing costs. The LSE Library has an institutional repository, [LSE Research Online](#), but the philosophy behind its existence is a) to provide a central repository of the School's research output, b) to increase visibility and impact of the works contained therein, c) to enable long-term preservation of the items and d) to aid RAE management. It is not specifically designed to affect any purchase models. Over the coming years the functions of LSE Research Online and repositories at other institutions may change: LSE will keep a watching brief on the situation.

Conclusions

The purchasing models adopted and developed by the LSE Library are not unique; neither are they necessarily the optimum methods that would be suitable for other institutions. There are some areas where the Library has developed a reasonable model for this particular institution, but others where there is room for improvement. This is coupled, of course, with the fact that the situation, both internally and externally, is fluid and constantly changing.

Our current purchasing models are shaped by what is and is not available and by our specific subject specialism. On top of this is what budgets are available and what Library users want and need access to.

LSE does not have a policy to purchase electronic-only where a print version also exists. However, it does purchase e-resources that result in having some titles in electronic format only. So, despite our best efforts to develop purchasing policies and stick to them, we have to be flexible in order to achieve collections that are as close as possible in approximation to what users want and need and thus ensure the purchasing model is always fit for purpose.

Web sites of organizations included

British Library of Political and Economic Science

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/library>

Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL)

<http://www.curl.ac.uk/>

Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) Council

[http://www.mla.gov.uk/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=73&Document/@id=18395&Section\[@stateId_eq_left_hand_root\]/@id=4332](http://www.mla.gov.uk/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=73&Document/@id=18395&Section[@stateId_eq_left_hand_root]/@id=4332)

The National E-journals Initiative (NESLi2)

<http://www.nesli2.ac.uk>

Athens

<http://www.athens.ac.uk/>

Shibboleth

<http://shibboleth.internet2.edu/about-shibboleth.html>

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

Eduserv CHEST (Combined Higher Education Software Team)

<http://www.eduserv.org.uk/chest/>

London Universities Purchasing Consortium (LUPC)

<http://lupc.procureweb.ac.uk>

Serials Solutions

<http://www.serialssolutions.com/>

Meridian

<http://www.endinfosys.com/meridian/>

Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe (LOCKSS)

<http://lockss.stanford.edu/>

LSE Research Online

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>

References

1. For details of some issues associated with e-books see the presentations available from the event held in November 2005 by UKSG, 'E-book: the new serial? A seminar on e-books – business models, usage and marketing'. Available at <http://www.uksg.org/events/091105.asp>
2. For an explanation of this means of publication see the JISC briefing paper *Open Access*. Available at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=pub_openaccess

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Sally Rumsey is eServices Librarian at LSE. Her role is to develop the Library's strategy for and delivery of electronic resources and online discovery services for printed resources. She is involved in all aspects of e-resources provision including development of the School's institutional repository, LSE Research Online. Sally is a member of the JISC eBooks Working Group.

To view more chapters from *The E-Resources Management Handbook*, published by UKSG, click here:

<http://www.uksg.org/serials/handbook.asp>