

Co-operation the key

Patrick O'Neill, CASL Consortia and Licensing Working Group

At a meeting in Hobart on 22–23 March 2001, members of the Council of Australian State Libraries (CASL) signed a landmark agreement to form a consortium for the purchase of access to commercial electronic information resources. All of the state and territory libraries and the National Library of Australia are members of CASL and are participating in the consortium; combined with the public libraries in the ACT and Tasmania, this makes a total membership of twenty-two libraries at federal, state and local government level.

Recognising that online products are proliferating in number and scope and are often expensive with complex licensing arrangements, CASL formed a Consortia and Licensing Working Group (CLWG) in October 1999 to investigate the feasibility of establishing a consortium. The aim was to simplify licensing arrangements, improve cost benefits, and to explore opportunities to make electronic products more widely available to Australians.

During its first year, through monthly teleconferences and a private e-list, the CLWG worked through the many preliminary questions about setting up a consortium, including governance, fund-

ing, products to be subscribed to, licence agreements, access, training and promotion. Fourteen recommendations were made to the CASL meeting held in October 2000, and formal approval was given for a one-year trial from February 2001.

The consortium model selected enables the National Library of Australia to act as lead negotiator for the consortium and authorises it to sign agreements on behalf of other member libraries. The National Library of Australia is also bearing the administrative costs for three years. Some consortia subscribe to a core set of products for all members, but given the diversity of members, their current subscriptions, and their financial situations, there are no mandatory products for the CASL Consortium.

One of the main aims of the consortium has been to simplify licence negotiation. A *Statement of principles guiding licence negotiation* has been formulated in an attempt to streamline negotiations with vendors, informing them of requirements, particularly in relation to core library business, including document supply, provision of information to remote readers, and the need for long-term access to information. The *Statement* contains mandatory, highly desirable and desirable conditions that the consortium wishes to see in licence agreements.

The consortium website includes information on consortium members, the products subscribed to, and links to appropriate entry points for gaining access to the products. For the moment, of course, you must be at one of the subscribing libraries to gain access, but ultimately, the website may serve as a point of access for library patrons to login to products from their homes. The website also includes links to online training.

Assistance with technical difficulties in gaining access to the products is provided by the Kinetica Help Desk.

The agreement signed in Hobart defines the operating principles and procedures of the consortium for the twelve month trial. In view of the success of the consortium approach in achieving savings in subscription costs, more library-friendly licence agreements, and the benefits of central administration, it is safe to assume that the consortium will be put on a

permanent footing next year. In subsequent years, it is intended to extend membership to public libraries, and to provide the option of 'remote access' to products, that is, access from patrons' homes. The ultimate vision of the CLWG is a consortium potentially comprising all public, state, territory and national libraries, that would enable all Australians, regardless of where they live, to have equitable access to a core set of online information resources.

The consortium selected five products for access during the first year. Negotiations for four of these — *Australian Public Affairs Full Text* (RMIT Publishing), *Business Who's Who of Australia* and an associated product, *Jobson's Online* (Dun & Bradstreet), and Gale's *Health and Wellness Resource Center* — have been finalised and access to them is now available in the subscribing libraries. Licence agreements for another product are still under discussion, and the CLWG has begun the process of selecting products for subscription after the trial period.

Margaret Phillips, CLWG convenor at the National Library of Australia, worked full-time on the consortium project from April 2000 until May 2001. Margaret reports that getting into the complexities of establishing a consortium and negotiating licence agreements involved a steep learning curve. 'The greatest achievement for the project,' she says, 'was bringing together nine libraries of different sizes, and with budgets ranging from adequate to woefully low. Among the member libraries, there was also a variety of models for relating to user communities and providing access to online information. Some participating libraries have close working relationships with public libraries and some have none at all. Devising administrative arrangements that suited all parties was quite challenging but, with good will and the determination of all involved, we succeeded.' Margaret is currently acting senior manager of the National Library's Monograph Acquisitions and Cataloguing section, and Patrick O'Neill, recently returned to Information Services after a stint at the Parliamentary Library, is acting convenor of the CLWG in her stead.

The CASL Consortium is an excellent example of co-operation among Australian libraries that enables expertise to be shared, the value of the taxpayer's dollar to be maximised, and services extended to a wider range of library patrons. ■

Announcing ... Library and Information Week 2002

Library and Information Week, the library and information services sector's major promotional event of the year, will take place next year from Monday 20 to Sunday 26 May 2002. LIW 2002 will coincide with the ALIA 2002 biennial conference which is being held in Sydney from 20 to 22 May.

A Library and Information Week 2002 working group and the ALIA 2002 biennial conference committee will work closely together to maximise opportunities to raise the public profile of the profession.

Library and Information Week 2002 will adopt the theme of the biennial conference *Powering our future: contribute to the information agenda.*

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