

A Study Evaluating Bibliographic and Citation Databases in use by the UK Higher Education Community

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Conducted by Nick Andrews Consultancy on behalf of JISC Collections

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1 Executive Summary

Aims

This study aims to help libraries to make informed decisions about future subscriptions to bibliographic databases. It forms part of the JISC mission to help higher education institutions to realise their ambitions in exploiting opportunities in ICT. The study presents the facts for librarians to consider alongside their own trials and tests, rather than providing any judgements on the services themselves.

Needs of the Library Community

The task of evaluating databases is highly complex and there are many factors (objective and subjective) to be taken into consideration. Discussions with the community have highlighted that librarians need not only to choose between databases covering similar subject areas, but also to consider a number of different platforms offering access to those same databases. What's more, along with this variety of databases and platforms comes a variety of prices, licences, features and functionality to assess alongside the content.

Despite the absence of set evaluation procedures in many organisations, the resounding response from the community polled was that in order to make informed purchasing decisions they require clear information about content coverage, pricing and access control. If nothing else were possible within the scope of this project, the ability to compare titles and coverage is a key requirement.

Online Comparison Service

For this reason, this study aims to gather detailed information about 20 major databases and 8 online services providing access to them.

The resulting data has been made available in the form of an interactive web site which provides users with a quick and easy way to compare the coverage of any combination of databases. It is hoped that this will provide a service of genuine use to the library community, which will enable better purchasing decisions and reduce the time required to research the different services available

Recommendations for Database Providers

One of the key findings from this study is that much of the information seen as essential for informed purchasing decisions is not easily available. In some cases the database providers themselves are currently unable to provide coverage information to the level of detail requested, and some were unable to respond at all.

This study therefore proposes a set of recommendations for database providers to enable them to meet the needs of the library community more fully in the future. These recommendations aim to ensure that providers are able to give their customers sufficient information about the resources they are purchasing.

Recommendations for Further Development

It should also be noted that the comparison web site is of value only so long as the data within it remains current. In order for the community to benefit from the time and cost saving that this powerful tool could offer, it is recommended that further provisions are put in place to update and expand on the information provided.

The JISC may choose to consider options either for periodic updates to the data within the comparison system, or to provide a means to allow each database provider to maintain the currency of their own data sets within the system. These options will be considered after completion of this current study.

Acknowledgements

Nick Andrews Consultancy and JISC Collections would like to acknowledge the help, feedback and advice of the following Library Panel members throughout this study:

- **Kathy Abbott**, Queen Mary, University of London
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- **Louise Jones**, University of Leicester
- **Mary Kelman Harrison**, Manchester Metropolitan University
- **Tony Kidd**, University of Glasgow
- **Roger Mills**, Oxford University Library Services
- **Mieko Yamaguchi**, University of Wales, Bangor

In addition, this study could not have been carried out without the generous help and assistance of all of the database suppliers, platform providers and listserv members who took the time to answer questions and complete surveys.

2 Introduction

The JISC Collections Portfolio includes a number of bibliographic databases, including *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, *British Education Index* and *EMBASE*.

This study aims to provide academic librarians with a clear and detailed analysis of **20** of these databases, plus **8** services which provide access to these databases, to allow them to compare and contrast them with each other.

In providing authoritative information on the duplication, differences, inclusion, omission and presentation of material, the study aims both to help librarians reach a fuller understanding of databases they are currently licensing, and make decisions on future database requirements and purchasing.

This study aims to gather and present information about each database and online service objectively, and therefore does not include any opinions or judgements about the relative merits of each of them.

3 Methodology

The following principles were seen as critical to the success of this study:

- To ensure that the study was clearly focused on the **practical needs of librarians**.
- To present the findings in a way which is **easy to use** as an **aid to decision-making**.

The project methodology aimed to put the practical needs of librarians at the heart of the process.

Since librarians must choose from an increasing number of bibliographic and citation services in order to make purchasing decisions, it is important to provide them with a clear and simple set of tools to compare and contrast different services on a like-for-like basis.

The study aimed to ensure that:

- The project gathered the information of most use for library decision-making.
- This information was made available in an extremely practical and easy-to-use way.

The following methodology was therefore employed:

A. Consultation with librarians

The detailed scope and requirements of the project was defined with input from librarians to ensure that the project met their needs. This was achieved in two ways:

1. A **panel of 8 academic librarians around the UK** was recruited to provide detailed input and feedback throughout the project. Comments were invited through phone calls, e-mails and online prototypes.
2. Input on certain key questions was gathered from the wider librarian community by **requesting comments from the library e-mail discussion lists** via an **online survey**.

Initially, librarians were consulted in this way on three key questions, with their responses then informing the rest of the project:

Q1. Which are the most important bibliographic and citation services to be included within the scope of this study?

It was important to gain input from librarians on the final list to be reviewed, to ensure that the project could focus on those services which play the biggest part in their purchasing decisions.

They were presented with a "long-list" of services, and asked to identify which ones they use or are interested in using, and also to note any additional services not listed.

Q2. What information is most useful when comparing different services?

The study aimed to ensure that the key drivers of library purchasing decisions were well understood, so that the information gathered throughout the project could be clearly targeted to support these.

These included cost, title/date coverage, indexing, linking, citations and other functionality. The study also assessed the relative importance of these areas to librarians.

Q3. How can this information most usefully be made available?

The study aimed to find out if librarians would find this information most useful as a written report, as an online tool to compare and contrast different services, or as a combination of the two.

It also sought to identify the sections of information, the query tools and the report formats which would prove to be most useful in the library decision-making process.

The results of this consultation with librarians are described in section 4 of this report.

B. Issue of a “request for information” to the most relevant service providers

Having identified which services were of most interest to librarians, and which pieces of information would be most useful to them, a “request for information” document was compiled to issue to all of the relevant service providers.

Although some or all of the relevant information requested was freely available on the each service’s website, it was important to request this formally from each service provider for two reasons:

1. It was essential that each service provider understood the context of this project, and provided their consent for information provided to be published by the JISC.
2. In order to ensure neutrality and to provide the best possible basis for like-for-like comparison between services, it was important to allow each service provider to prepare their own statement of title coverage, editorial policy, functionality, etc. in response to the same fixed list of questions.

In order to encourage responses, it was also important to convince each service provider of the neutral purpose of the project, the potential value to the librarian community, and the possible benefit of participation to their own subscription sales.

The results of this “request for information” to suppliers are described in section 5 of this report.

C. Checking of the information provided

A series of basic spot checks and sample searches were carried out to assess the accuracy of the data provided by database and platform suppliers (see Appendix C).

Since many database providers were unable to provide detailed start and end dates for coverage by title, some direct sampling of start and end dates for selected titles was considered in order to provide librarians with some indicative coverage information.

However, after consultation with the Librarian Panel, it was felt that it would not be useful to focus on supplementing information in this limited way for certain titles or subject areas, but rather that a full set of detailed coverage information was required instead.

Recommendations are therefore included below for database providers to take steps to make this information available.

D. Creation of an online comparison site

In order to make all of the information gathered as useful as possible for librarians, an online tool was created to allow any combination of services to be compared and contrasted.

The study compiled a database to include the full title coverage and detailed service information about each service surveyed. This was then used to create an online comparison site for use by librarians with the following key features:

- Select any combination of services for comparison.

- View a summary comparison table of all selected services, showing the number of unique titles in each service, plus the number of overlapping titles.
- View or download a detailed table highlighting all of the differences between the chosen services on a title-by-title basis.
- View or download a list of all of the overlapping titles between the chosen services.
- View the detailed information held about each service, including contact information, inclusion policy, pricing, search, indexing and citation services, etc.

Since the comparative data in each case is generated automatically from the source database, it is possible for a librarian to compare **any combination of services** in this way.

In order to ensure that the online service would meet the needs of librarians, an online prototype was created, and **the panel of librarians participated in testing**. The usability of the final system was then amended and improved in line with their feedback.

The database and platform providers who responded to the survey were also invited to test the system prior to launch in order to provide their feedback on the consolidated content and the comparison tool.

4 Librarian Feedback

4.1 Overview

In order to ensure that the study was clearly focused on the practical needs of librarians, almost **80** librarians were consulted for their feedback.

- A **panel of 8 academic librarians** was recruited from around the UK to provide feedback throughout the study.
- An **online survey** was circulated to the library e-mail discussion lists, which attracted **70+ responses**.

Findings from this consultation are outlined below.

4.2 Services to include in the study

Feedback from the librarian panel emphasised the importance of distinguishing between **databases** and **platforms** when undertaking any comparison of bibliographic services.

“Different platforms will have different indexing and functionality, and some won’t give you the same back file or access model as on other hosts.” (Kathy Abbott)

“Users know the platform rather than the database. [...] We have a new member of staff and one of his roles is trying to sort out the platform virtues and vices for the university. [...] Changing platforms can save you money, or can raise the visibility of a database.” (Roger Mills)

For the purpose of this study:

- **Database** – refers to a searchable collection of bibliographic data – including title, author, citation, subject area, keywords, and so on. A database may be accessible via multiple platforms.
- **Platform** – provides the means of using the data within a database, including access control and search functionality. A platform may provide access to multiple databases.

4.2.1 Top 20 databases

Two databases were initially named by the JISC as essential to include in the study:

- Scopus
- Web of Science

In addition to these, the following 18 were selected as the most useful databases to include by the librarian panel and online survey respondents:

Database	Votes
PsycInfo	52
Lexis Nexis	49
Business Source Premier (EBSCO)	43
PubMed	41
Westlaw	40
British Education Index	39
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	38
Inspec	34
British Humanities Index	33
COMPENDEX	33
MLA International Bibliographies	32

BIOSIS	28
EconLit	24
ABI Inform / ProQuest	23
Sociological Abstracts	21
EMBASE	20
Lawtel	20
Geobase	20

It should be noted that both *CINAHL* (The Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health) and *SPORTDiscus* were also popular choices, but narrowly missed the final cut due to the limitation of including 20 services only.

4.2.2 Top 8 platforms

A shortlist of content platforms to include was selected following consultation with the librarian panel and the JISC:

Platform

CSA Illumina
 EBSCO
 Engineering Village
 (Elsevier)
 OCLC
 Ovid
 ProQuest
 Thomson DataStar
 Web of Knowledge

4.2.3 Out of Scope

Over 200 additional resources were suggested via the online survey and interviews with the librarian panel. Clear leaders were *ASSIA* (from *CSA*), *CAB Abstracts* and *Medline*. Although *PubMed* is included in the final list of 20 chosen databases, several respondents commented on the requirement to see *Medline* via other routes including *Ovid*.

A sample of these suggested resources is provided below for reference, although it should be noted that these are all outside the scope of the current study:

Database	Votes
ASSIA applied social sciences index and abstracts	15
CAB Abstracts	11
Medline	7
Science Direct	6
Art Abstracts	5
Emerald full text	5
ERIC	5
Design & Applied Arts index (CSA)	4
Google Scholar	4
JSTOR	4
Mintel	4
SciFinder Scholar	4
Zetoc	4
Emerald Management Reviews	3
GeoRef	3
ICONDA (international construction database)	3
KeyNote reports	3

4.3 Evaluation criteria to include in the study

4.3.1 Information required by librarians when comparing services

The librarian panel and survey respondents were asked to rate the factors most important to them in making purchasing decisions. The list below was presented as an example evaluation checklist. Interestingly, 71% of the online survey respondents did NOT have a pre-existing checklist for evaluation of services. 2/8 of the library panel did have a formal checklist, but only one organisation made formal use of it.

Responses showed the top 3 'Essential' criteria to be:

- Relevance (*ie. which titles are included in the database, to what level of coverage?*)
- Authentication (*ie. is a flexible set of options including IP access, Athens, Shibboleth offered?*)
- Price

The importance of understanding the details of the content within each database in order to assess its relevance to the needs of a library was summed up the Library Panel:

"I think this study should concentrate on **content**: coverage of periodical titles in a narrow range of databases - which years are covered and how completely." (Kathy Abbott)

"What is most important in this study is being able to look at the content and see what is unique and what overlaps." (Linda Humphreys)

The following table indicates 'votes' cast by the librarian panel and survey respondents. Note that totals vary since respondents may choose to classify some criteria as neither essential nor desirable.

Name	Measure	Essential	Desirable
Relevance	Measured through title list and product description	61	8
Authentication	Does it provide IP or Athens etc.?	56	13
Price		56	15
Speed of server response		48	19
Ease of Use	Measured through trial and feedback	44	26
Alternative sources available	Information on how much content is unique or overlapping with other services	43	21
Access to full text	Does it include full text or OpenURL linking to full text?	42	28
Currency	Compare latest issue against the publisher site	35	31
Indexing Quality	Quality of indexing provided	29	38
Geographical Content		17	36
Support	Is there a help desk in the UK	12	43
Content Type	Does it include other content in addition to journals?	12	50
Training	Is training provided?	8	46

Notes

- When evaluating databases for renewals usage was also noted as a factor.
- The librarian panel noted that platform choice is often based on historical factors. Once a platform is in use by a library, there are benefits in staying with that platform, including user-familiarity, consistency of user experience, and the ability it may provide to search across databases. In many cases an alternative platform would only be sought if clear benefits could be demonstrated (e.g. price efficiency).
- Relevance was measured by subject coverage, title inclusion and academic opinion.

4.3.2 Information to include in “Request for Information” to providers

The study also asked librarians through panel interview and the online survey, what information was most important to request directly from service providers. Excluding contact and other company details, results showed the top 3 criteria to be:

- Authentication / Access control
- Coverage
- Licence terms

The following table indicates ‘votes’ cast by the librarian panel and survey respondents. Note that totals vary since respondents may choose to classify some criteria as neither essential nor desirable.

Name	Essential	Desirable
Authentication / Access control	73	4
Coverage	67	10
Licence terms	64	11
Usage statistics	62	15
Inclusion policies	61	15
Embargo rules	61	16
Full-text linking	51	26
Search	49	28
Citation linking	36	37
Geographical Coverage	35	36
Technical integration	33	33
Keywords and indexes	32	42
Accessibility	27	38
Authority files	25	49
Classification	24	43
Other functionality	17	51

Notes

- The librarian panel stated that the most important information required was database coverage and content. This was reflected in the wider survey results above where it came up as the second highest priority. The panel noted the key priority to be obtaining listings of the titles included, start and end dates, and details of the extent of coverage (e.g. cover to cover / articles only / etc).
- Researching licence terms was considered out of scope for this study, as licence terms are typically negotiated centrally by the JISC and then communicated to UK institutions.

4.4 Report Format

Librarians were asked if findings from the study would be most usefully made available as a written report, an online tool allowing them to compare and contrast different services, or a combination of the two.

Responses showed there was a clear preference for an online tool, with only 4 individuals suggesting they would not use this if it was made available.

Format	Votes
Online	49
Print Only	4
Both	25

As a result, it was decided that an online tool would be the most appropriate way to allow librarians to compare and contrast the data provided to this study. The written report is presented here as a companion to the online service.

5 Service Provider Feedback

5.1 Responses to Questionnaires

Questionnaires were sent to the following suppliers requesting detailed information about their databases and services. (The details of the questions asked of database and platform suppliers are provided as Appendix B.)

Each supplier was initially contacted by JISC Collections in early July 2006 to explain the context of the study and to request their participation. On agreement to take part each supplier was sent the relevant questionnaire, and invited to respond by the end of July 2006. Submissions were then accepted up until the 5th September 2006, which was the cut-off date for inclusion within the study.

Database	Response Provided?	Included in Study?
ABI Inform	Yes.	Yes.
BIOSIS Previews	Yes.	Yes.
British Education Index	Yes.	Yes.
British Humanities Index (BHI)	Yes.	Yes.
Business Source Premier (EBSCO)	Yes.	Yes.
Compendex	Yes.	Yes.
EconLit	Yes.	Yes.
EMBASE	Yes.	Yes.
GEOBASE	Yes.	Yes.
Inspec	Yes.	Yes.
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	Yes.	Yes.
ISI Web of Science	Yes.	Yes.
Lawtel	Yes, but title listings still in preparation.	No.
Lexis Nexis	No, response not provided during study.	No.
MLA International Bibliography	Yes.	Yes.
PsycInfo	No, response not provided during study.	No.
PubMed	No, response not provided during study.	No.
Scopus	Yes.	Yes.
Sociological Abstracts	Yes.	Yes.
Westlaw	Yes, but title listings still in preparation.	No.
Platform	Response Provided?	Included in Study?
CSA Illumina	Yes.	Yes.
DataStar (Thomson)	Yes.	Yes.
EBSCOHost	Yes.	Yes.
Engineering Village (Elsevier)	Yes.	Yes.
OCLC FirstSearch	Yes.	Yes.
Ovid / SilverPlatter	Yes.	Yes.
Proquest	Yes.	Yes.
Web of Knowledge	Yes.	Yes.

In the case of responses not received or listings still in preparation, the study has been completed in the absence of this data, but when this is available it can be added to the online comparison site.

Responses to questions can be viewed via the online comparison tool, where text supplied by service providers is included as provided.

In general, both database and platform providers had difficulty providing the information requested in a handful of key areas, which are outlined below:

5.1.1 Database Providers

Start/end dates for each title covered

A significant number of database suppliers were unable to provide precise start and end dates for every title covered. This had been identified as one of the key factors in making purchasing decisions by the librarian panel.

Database	Start/End Dates Provided by Title?
ABI Inform	Start dates only for most titles
BIOSIS Previews	None stated
British Education Index	Start+end dates for c. 2/3 titles
British Humanities Index (BHI)	Start years for all titles
Business Source Premier (EBSCO)	Start+end dates for most titles
Compendex	None stated
EconLit	Start+end dates for all titles
EMBASE	Start+end dates for most titles
GEOBASE	Start+end dates for most titles
Inspec	Start+end dates for all titles
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	Start dates only for c.1/2 titles
ISI Web of Science	Start dates only for all titles
Lawtel	N/A
Lexis Nexis	N/A
MLA International Bibliography	None stated
PsycInfo	N/A
PubMed	N/A
Scopus	None stated
Sociological Abstracts	None stated
Westlaw	N/A

The fact that many suppliers were apparently unable to provide details of the content their own databases was a matter of serious concern, as exemplified by the following comments from Mary Harrison from the study's Librarian Panel:

"It's so important and you would have thought would be standard information. How can we make proper comparisons if there's no data on the dates of coverage? How can our researchers be confident that they have run a thorough search if they don't know if they've searched the last 20 years or only the last 5 years of a journal's content?" (Mary Harrison)

Gaps in coverage for each title covered

Most of the database suppliers were unable to provide details of known gaps in coverage on a title-by-title basis, and the gap data which was provided was often incomplete – ie. noting a title as having gaps without listing all of the missing issues.

Details of level of coverage for each title covered

Many of the databases were not able to provide details of the extent of coverage (e.g. “cover-to-cover” / articles only) for the titles included in their service.

Database	% Titles with Level of Coverage Stated
ABI Inform	None stated
BIOSIS Previews	23%
British Education Index	100%
British Humanities Index (BHI)	None stated
Business Source Premier (EBSCO)	None stated
Compendex	100%
EconLit	None stated
EMBASE	None stated
GEOBASE	100%
Inspec	None stated
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	76%
ISI Web of Science	37%
Lawtel	N/A
Lexis Nexis	N/A
MLA International Bibliography	None stated
PsycInfo	N/A
PubMed	N/A
Scopus	None stated
Sociological Abstracts	100%
Westlaw	N/A

Print ISSN for each title

Since ISSN is used as the “unique key” by the comparison web site to identify overlapping titles between different databases, this is a particularly important piece of information. Where ISSN is not provided for a given title, the system must instead use title matching as an alternative means of identifying overlaps, which is a less accurate in that small variances in titles can lead to a failed match.

Database	% Titles Provided with Print ISSN
ABI Inform	90%
BIOSIS Previews	78%
British Education Index	68%
British Humanities Index (BHI)	100%
Business Source Premier (EBSCO)	27%
Compendex	87%
EconLit	95%
EMBASE	93%
GEOBASE	96%
Inspec	94%
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	71%
ISI Web of Science	94%
Lawtel	N/A
Lexis Nexis	N/A
MLA International Bibliography	87%
PsycInfo	N/A
PubMed	N/A
Scopus	94%
Sociological Abstracts	99%
Westlaw	N/A

5.1.2 Platform Providers**Accessibility compliance**

The majority of the platforms were able to confirm their level of accessibility against the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0, an internationally accepted standard for web site accessibility. This means that some may currently be excluding certain groups of users, including the disabled, elderly, and those using less up-to-date technology, from making use of their services.

Cross-browser compatibility

Many of the platform responses suggested that their services had not been widely tested across different web browsers. This means that some may currently be excluding users viewing content using non-standard browsers, or using Macs instead of PCs.

6 Discussion and Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for Database and Service Providers

Whilst it was already known that much of the information required for database evaluation was not readily available to the public, it was a cause of concern to discover during the course of this study that some of the information required was not available at all.

Budgetary constraints combined with the possibility of librarians using new metasearch technology in-house, will mean that database providers and platforms will not be able to rely on organizations renewing resources by default. Providers may find themselves under increasing pressure to provide full information and prove the value of their services should they wish to retain their subscriptions.

“We are starting to cancel the bibliographic databases in favour of electronic journal packages now. We can use metasearch tools to search across them, so databases will be in a weaker position now.” (Mieko Yamaguchi)

“We use a lot of different platforms. Where possible we provide access via SIRS [federated search] so that the interface is less of an issue. This means that they lose the alert features, however we find that only our expert researchers will go to the native interfaces.” (Louise Jones)

RECOMMENDATION: Database suppliers should put in place measures to ensure that detailed information is made available about their content and coverage, including print ISSNs and accurate content start and end dates for each title. See *Appendix A* below for more detailed recommendations.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Development

As outlined in the preceding report, the online comparison site could become a powerful tool to inform purchasing decisions, but will require the data contained within it to remain up-to-date.

“Only concern is that it's going to be a hellish job to keep this information, particularly titles and holdings lists, current ... but it's well worth doing as in the end you'll save libraries all over the country from repeating the same tedious tasks of unearthing the info from suppliers' websites and documentation.” (Mary Harrison)

Some recommendations are outlined below to ensure the value of this study on an ongoing basis, and to provide a basis for other similar studies to be conducted in the future:

- The content of this report and the accompanying comparison website will begin to go out-of-date as soon as the study is completed. This is because:
 - Service providers may change their content coverage, policies, functionality, etc.
 - New service providers may enter the market, and existing ones may withdraw.

RECOMMENDATION: A means of making ongoing content updates to the online comparison site should be put in place. Service providers could be encouraged to submit updated information on a regular basis, which could then be used to update the comparison site every week / month / quarter.

- Although the service has been through a series of prototypes tests and feedback, further feedback, questions and suggestions are likely to arise once the website is made publicly available.

RECOMMENDATION: A contact should be made available and feedback should be solicited via the comparison web site. This route could then be used to respond to any enquiries and collate any ideas for future development should the funding or means become available.

- Noting the importance of content start and end dates to the librarian community, an automated means of cataloguing all of the content from each featured database may provide a more consistent and immediate means of meeting this requirement.

RECOMMENDATION: A system for “spidering” detailed content information from the web sites of each supplier should be investigated by the JISC and/or the database providers. This technique, which works in the same way as a search engine such as Google when indexing content, could provide an external means of identifying accurate content information for every featured database.

Appendix A – Service Provider Checklist

A checklist is provided below on behalf of librarians, for the reference of database and platform service providers to make future improvements to their services:

Database Providers

The following information is seen as essential by librarians when making purchasing decisions, and should therefore be systematically compiled, maintained, and made publicly available.

- **Start/End Dates**
Wherever possible, provide start/end dates for every title covered in the database.
- **Gaps**
Wherever possible, provide a complete list of all known gaps in coverage for each title.
- **Coverage details**
Wherever possible, provide further details of coverage for each title. Does the coverage include abstracts/full text, letters, corrections and supplements etc.?
- **Print ISSN**
Wherever possible, print ISSNs should be stated for all titles to provide a reliable way of identifying overlapping titles between different databases.

Platform Providers

The following factors are of increasing importance to librarians and academic institutions. Accurate information should be provided about these areas, and steps should be taken to ensure good accessibility and browser compatibility in the future.

- **Accessibility**
Audit the service for its accessibility, and address accessibility problems that may be excluding some groups of users.
- **Browser testing**
Test the service across a range of web browsers and platforms to ensure it is fully functional in each.

Appendix B – Database and Platform Questionnaires

Following the initial consultation with librarians, questionnaires were issued to database and platform service providers, in order to capture information from them on a like-for-like basis. Consent was given by each provider to use their verbatim responses in the online comparison tool.

Database Questionnaire

The following information was requested from database providers:

Company Details

Including address and URL.

Content

Summary Description

A short summary description of the subject area(s) covered by the database.

Inclusion Policy

Editorial policies for what is included/excluded from the service in terms of type of content, and coverage of that content.

Geographical Coverage

The geographical range of the content covered (e.g. UK / Europe / World).

Platforms

Details of content platforms on which the database is available, including URLs.

Gap Fill Policy

Policy for filling gaps in content.

Archive Policy

Policy for adding content where a title's coverage does not currently begin at volume 1.

Embargo Rules

Description of any embargo rules regarding inclusion of recent content.

Update Frequency

How frequently content is updated (e.g. daily / weekly / monthly / yearly).

Content Classification

Details of any categorisation that is applied to content.

Keywords & Indexes

Description of any keyword and/or indexing schemes that are used.

Authority files

Details of authority files used to ensure consistency and accuracy of journal, author names or affiliations.

Citation linking

The type and extent of any citation linking which is provided.

Full-text linking

The type and extent of any full-text linking that is provided (e.g. OpenURL).

Coverage

Providers were asked to supply a full list of titles covered by the database in question, including the information that follows for each title:

Descriptive data

- Title
- Print ISSN
- Online ISSN
- Language
- Subject Grouping (e.g. Science/Medicine etc, if available)

Coverage start & end

- Start volume/issue
- Start date
- End volume/issue
- End date

Level of Coverage

- Core (cover-to-cover)
- Priority (50%+)
- Selected (less than 50%)

Types of Coverage

- Abstracts
- Letters
- Corrections
- News items
- Supplements

Gaps in Coverage (for each gap)

- Start volume/issue
- Start date
- End volume/issue
- End date

Platform Questionnaire

The following information was requested from platform providers:

Company Details

Including address and URL.

Content**Summary Description**

A short summary description of the subject area(s) covered by the platform.

Databases

A full list of databases included in the service.

Restrictions

Details of any restrictions on content included (e.g. if a database is not included in full)

Embargo Rules

Description of any embargo rules regarding inclusion of recent content.

Update Frequency

How frequently content is updated (e.g. daily / weekly / monthly / yearly).

Content Classification

Details of any categorisation that is applied to content.

Access Control**Authentication**

Methods of authentication supported by the service (eg. username/password, IP address, Athens).

Concurrent user limit

Support for limitation of access by concurrent users.

Other restrictions

Details of other restrictions on access (e.g. via Proxy Server / embargoed countries).

Free Trials

Availability of free trials of the service, including length of trials, and access methods available for trials (e.g. username/password, IP address).

Search**Search Features**

Whether the following search features are supported:

- Simple ("Quick") Search
- Advanced Search
- Exact phrase
- Keywords
- Wildcards
- Boolean AND
- Boolean OR
- Boolean NOT
- Spell Check
- Search by Title
- Search by Author
- Search by Subject
- Search by Date
- Search by Language
- Search by Content Type
- Search by Citation

Keywords & Indexes

Description of any keyword and/or indexing schemes that are used.

Cross Database search

Ability for searches to return results across multiple databases included on the platform (rather than needing to search each database separately).

Web search

Ability of the search to return results from the web alongside the database, and to list them separately.

Saved searches

Ability for users to save searches for future use.

Search Tips

Provision of a guide to searching, including information on search fields, wildcards etc.

Search Results Features

Whether the following search result features are supported:

- De-duplication of results
- Abstracts included in results
- Open URL linking in results

Ordering Results

Criteria on which search results can be sorted (e.g. alphabetically by title, by date etc).

Exporting Results

Ability to export search results to external software (e.g. EndNote, RefWork, e-mail client)

Other Functionality**Citation Linking**

The type and extent of any citation linking which is provided.

Full-text Linking

The type and extent of any full-text linking that is provided (e.g. OpenURL).

Help Pages

Provision of online help pages, contextual help, and training.

Interface Customisation

Whether users can customize the interface (e.g. add library logo, links to library OPAC).

Alerting

Details of content alerting services.

Usage Statistics

Provision of usage statistics to subscribing libraries, including COUNTER compliance.

Technical Integration

Support which the service provides for interfacing with other systems (e.g. federated searches, OpenURL, link servers, Z39.50, etc.)

Other

Description of other key functionality offered by the service.

Accessibility**W3C Compliance**

Statement of the website's compliance with WAI guidelines.

Browser Compatibility

Whether the website is fully functional across a range of PC and Mac web browsers:

- Internet Explorer (PC)
- Firefox (PC)
- Netscape (PC)
- Opera (PC)
- Internet Explorer (Mac)
- Safari (Mac)
- Firefox (Mac)

Plug-ins

List of browser plug-ins required in order to use the site.

Availability and Uptime

Uptime

Whether the site is available 24/7.

Downtime

The level of acceptable downtime specified in service level agreements.

Mirror sites

The number and location of mirror sites, if the site is mirrored.

Appendix C – Spot Checks of Data Provided by Suppliers

A large volume of data was provided by database and platform suppliers, of the following types:

From Database Suppliers:

- Detailed listings of titles and coverage (where available).
- A set of more general summary information about each content database.

From Platform Providers:

- A summary of the platform's features, functionality and content inclusion policies.
- Checklists indicating whether a list of key access control and search feature are provided.

The information included in the online site presents this information as provided by these suppliers. Detailed independent verification of all source data was not within the scope of the study, and users of the online comparison site should therefore be aware that the results obtained from it will only reflect the source data provided, and therefore should not necessarily be viewed as authoritative.

The following set of high-level spot-checks were carried out on the source data as part of the study in order to allow an assessment of a basic degree of accuracy:

Checks of Database Content Listings

The following spot-checks were carried out for each source database:

1. An online platform which provided access to the relevant database was selected.
2. A selection of 10 titles from the database listing provided was chosen at random.
3. Each of these titles was confirmed as part of the relevant database within the content platform.

Note that this level of checking only sought to ensure that the title listings provided appeared to relate to the correct content database as made available online. Each title spot-checked was found to be listed within the relevant database, and so these checks did not identify any discrepancies in the data.

Detailed systematic checking of the full listing of titles and the specific coverage of each title was not within the scope of the study, and the title lists and coverage information are therefore included "as provided" by the relevant database suppliers.

Checks of Platform-Specific Information

The following spot-checks were carried out for each content platform:

1. Login information for a test account was obtained from each platform provider.
2. The following tests were conducted within each platform:
 - Check that a resource of online 'Help' information is provided.
 - Search for articles by 'Title'
 - Search for articles by 'Author'
 - Search for articles by 'Subject'
 - Search for articles by 'Citation'
 - Search using Boolean operators AND, OR, NOT.
 - Filter search by content type (eg. Journal articles, book reviews, etc.)
 - View abstract information for search results.

Note that this level of checking only sought to ensure that the each online platform correctly offered these basic elements of functionality as described in their responses to the study's questionnaire. In each case the platforms tested were found to provide all of these features above.

Detailed systematic checking of the features and functionality of each online platform and analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each was not within the scope of the study, and the platform information included within the web site is therefore included "as provided" by the relevant suppliers.