
Collaborating on collections – a structured approach



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The Bodleian Law Library, University of Oxford (BLL), the Squire Law Library, University of Cambridge and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library, University of London (IALS) each have wonderful law collections in their libraries, and for many years have replicated major parts of their collections. All were involved in the original Foreign Law Guide (FLAG)¹ project in which UK law libraries initiated a collaborative approach to sharing information about their collections. As members of the Foreign Law Research (FLARE) consortium, which also includes the British Library and the School of Oriental and African Studies, the librarians have worked with others to try to bring further cooperation to their collection-building. The first major area of content being tackled by FLARE is the collections of foreign gazettes held by libraries in the UK.² This project plans to bring together the partial runs held in various libraries, and to create a single, complete run for various jurisdictions, which will be housed at the BL's Boston Spa facility, and available to all.³

At the same time as the FLARE partners were looking at the big picture, librarians David Wills, Jules Winterton and Ruth Bird decided to focus on the duplication among our three libraries in law reports from several jurisdictions. The impetus for this comes from several directions. Much of the duplicated material is available in full-text databases to which we each subscribe. Lack of adequate space for ongoing growth in collections affects us all. And economic constraints, from both reducing budget allocations and adverse fluctuating currency values, have added to the pressure to do more with less. These matters all led to a conversation about collaborating more systematically on our paper purchases in the future.

We established the following guidelines:

- We should aim not to cancel any series that is unique to the United Kingdom.
- We would each keep some titles of series such as the National Reporter Series, but not all.
- We would only cancel paper runs of local series that were available in our own institution via the major databases.
- Our collaboration would be limited to series of law reports, and possibly to legislation.
- Where our researchers wanted a paper copy of a case that we no longer held in paper, we would collaborate among ourselves to provide it.
- Duplication would continue where we needed to do so for more heavily used materials, to support the research and teaching needs of our faculties.

It is already the case that academic researchers who need to consult a cancelled series more fully are allowed reciprocal visiting rights at the other libraries.

We decided to approach this on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis. The first jurisdiction we tackled was the United States. There were several reasons to start here:

- Many law libraries in the US have been divesting themselves of their runs of the National Reporter series from West and relying on the electronic access via the Westlaw or Lexis databases.
- The physical growth of these collections is a space challenge for all of us. Multiple large volumes arrive every year, and moving collections around to allow for growth is time-consuming.

- Use of paper has declined markedly in the past five or more years, as more and more researchers have relied on desktop access to the cases they needed. This was confirmed when volumes were examined after two or three years on the shelf and often did not appear to have been opened in that time.

We worked from an agreed list of titles, and from that we decided there are some titles we all need to retain for the next few years. However there were several that we felt we could propose to our respective library committees for cancellation from 2008 onwards.

At the end of the deliberations, we came up with the following list:

<i>Title</i>	<i>IALS</i>	<i>BLL</i>	<i>Squire</i>
West's Supreme Court Reporter		Retain	
Supreme Court Reports			
Lawyers' Edn	Retain		
American Maritime Cases	Retain		Retain
Corpus Juris Secundum			Retain
Federal Reporter	Retain	Retain	Retain
Federal Supplement	Retain	Retain	Retain
California Reporter	Retain	Retain	Retain
New York Reporter	Retain	Retain	Retain
Federal Rules Decisions	Retain		
Atlantic Reporter			Retain
North Western Reporter			Retain
North Eastern Reporter	Retain	Retain	
Pacific Reporter		Retain	
South Eastern Reporter			Retain
Southern Reporter	Retain		
South Western Reporter		Retain	

Our library committees were supportive of the decision, and we have all made the relevant cancellations. We were conservative in our approach, but we are all very keen to make decisions which bring our researchers along with us, rather than alienating them.

The next jurisdiction to come under scrutiny was Canada. We have undertaken a similar process, and found that many series actually replicated some of the core Canadian reporter series. We also thought long and hard about the Canadian Abridgment, which is a very costly and space-hungry series. In the end, we decided that this title will continue to be held by IALS and Oxford and will be reviewed again at Cambridge. Ironically, the cost of purchasing a full, up-to-date Canadian Abridgment on paper every three years has been less than the cost in money and time of

subscribing! Canada is another jurisdiction that is well represented on Westlaw and Lexis, and Lexis' Quicklaw is an additional online resource we can offer our researchers. The next country to be reviewed will be Australia.

We are taking a measured approach to this process because we need to have agreement from our faculties, and because there is no urgency for any of us in this process. What is more important for us – and, we believe, for our colleagues throughout the United Kingdom – is that we make these decisions keeping in mind the issue of retaining an accessible and current paper collection for the foreseeable future, but in a distributed form which has been thought through and agreed.

REFERENCES

- 1 FLAG is the internet gateway to the holdings of foreign, international and comparative law in UK universities and national libraries; see <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/flag/flag.htm>
- 2 The union list can be viewed at http://ials.sas.ac.uk/flare/flare_fog_unionlist_europe.htm
- 3 See Lesley Young and Jennie Grimshaw, 'Formation of a distributed national collection of foreign official gazettes: towards the celestial city?', *SCONUL Focus*, 36, Winter 2005, available at <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/36/13.pdf>