SCURL SHEDL Case Study 2017

# Introduction

Scottish academic and research libraries have a strong history of creating successful frameworks for the practical development of shared services, particularly in the area of content purchasing and national licensing of subscription content. This has been and continues to be a major achievement in terms of maximising access to resources through collaborative action and part of the broader Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL) efforts to collaborate towards the creation of cooperative library infrastructure in Scotland.

The Scottish Higher Education Digital Library (SHEDL) was established by SCURL in 2009. This chapter examines SHEDL as it is in 2017 and reflects on the evolution of the work involved noting significant successes as well as current challenges.

# The SHEDL Model

SHEDL’s membership comprises all eighteen Scottish University and HEI libraries, including two Russell Group institutions, a number of post-92 universities and specialist institutions such as Glasgow School of Art and the Royal Conservatoire, plus the National Library of Scotland and the National Museum of Scotland[[1]](#footnote-1). SHEDL membership therefore includes some of the oldest university libraries in the world to some of the newest. Each library is a product of their particular history and disciplinary mix, their different academic and student communities and their location. Some libraries support a broad-based education; others are renowned for their specialism. SHEDL includes institutions beyond Higher Education, such as the National Library of Scotland, National Museums and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and their users have benefitted from deals negotiated by the consortium. In total SHEDL members support a huge breadth and depth of educational opportunities, including over 4,500 courses in 150 subject groups alongside engagement with independent researchers, adult learners, schoolchildren, subject enthusiasts and local community groups. In 2017, SHEDL has 21 contracts in place, which represents a sustained period of growth from starting with 3 contracts in 2009.

We work closely with bodies such as Jisc, however our consortial model varies significantly from those negotiated by Jisc in that each HEI is (on the whole) required to buy into the SHEDL negotiated deal, as the fundamental basis of SHEDL is to provide content to all staff and students working in HEIs in Scotland.

The participation of the National Library of Scotland is important because it means that access for Scottish researchers is not limited to those working inside HEIs - anyone with a main address in Scotland can become a registered National Library of Scotland user and access the licenced SHEDL resources from any computer outwith the National Library. Similarly, anyone can access the digital resources from computers in the Edinburgh and Glasgow public libraries. SHEDL has twice extended its collaborative partnership for specific deals, firstly with the two largest educational institutions in Northern Ireland - Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster for the procurement of print periodicals; secondly with the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) for a commitment based deal with the publisher Karger.

The initial focus for SHEDL was the joint procurement of electronic journals and, as such, formed only part of the joint procurement activities of SCURL. For example, SCURL has supported the joint procurement of print journals, and print and E-books through its SCOPNet work. The SCURL board recently agreed that all joint content procurement carried out by SCURL members would be done under the SHEDL banner as this is a well-known and easily recognised brand for these activities.

# A successful collaboration: alignment of purpose over time

Based in large part on his experience as SHEDL Chair, Richard Parsons, University Librarian at the University of Dundee identified a series of characteristics that define a successful collaborative creation of shared services[[2]](#footnote-2). The list of characteristics is some 37 items in length, grouped in five separate areas: strategic, design and plan, operational, sustainability, closure. The SHEDL work demonstrates many of these characteristics and the following particular elements have been prominent: alignment of purpose, trust, tolerance of risk, and the careful selection of areas of service over which to collaborate.

At a strategic level, alignment of purpose or goal congruence has been and continues to be important. This is shaped by the overarching SCURL objectives within which the SHEDL work is located:

* SCURL works to improve and develop services for the benefit of those who use our libraries, and maximise access to resources through collaborative action and shared services
* SCURL collaborates with other organisations, sectors and domains towards the creation of a cooperative library infrastructure in Scotland. More specifically SHEDL was launched with the clearly targeted goal to increase Scotland-wide HE access to digital journal content through collaborative, commitment based procurement and licensing.

### **Research Pools**

In 2009 an immediate impetus was the establishment of the Scottish Funding Council’s (SFC) Research Pools where researchers in different Scottish HEIs formed a critical mass in a particular subject or discipline. The researchers had different access rights to the same periodical content subscribed to by individual institutions creating an inequitable situation not conducive to successful cross institutional research success. At this point SCURL had a long history of collaborating to procure periodical and book content so the extension to create SHEDL was an ambitious aspiration with a manageable transition. The Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow provided funding for an Investigative Study to evaluate the viability of Scotland-wide HE access to journal content. The study, which included interviews with stakeholders including senior university administrators and policy makers from Universities Scotland (the representative body of Scotland’s 19 HEIs), as well as with librarians, was published in 2007[[3]](#footnote-3). It concluded that savings were possible through the commitment-based model and wider access could be achieved and would be beneficial to Scotland. Thus, SHEDL began with a clear and well defined purpose.

### **Complexity of SHEDL**

As both the scholarly publishing marketplace and the higher education context have evolved over the eight years of SHEDL’s existence, there has been a shared recognition of the increasing complexity of the service we are creating, the need to include meaningful review at regular intervals and to select carefully the areas of content procurement over which to collaborate. As Article Processing Charges (APCs) emerged as part of an open access scholarly publishing environment SHEDL negotiated APC discounts and/or vouchers as part of the contracts with individual publishers. The collaborative procurement is thus not just about purchasing content but also about supporting researchers to publish their work and making Scottish research openly accessible not just within Scotland but globally.

As publishers made more and more content available in digital formats, the initial focus on procuring content to support research clusters has expanded to include the collaborative procurement of content specifically targeted at student learning as well as to include new forms of scholarly digital content.

Parsons notes in the *Library Collaboration Toolkit* that the SHEDL work is located almost directly in the centre of a graph charting complexity against size of collaborative group against flexibility. Flexibility is generally highest within a single or small number of institutions, extending to the large national approaches such as NESLi licensing, which have limited flexibility. Complexity of the collaboration is generally high in national shared services, and even at the regional level the complexity of the service may engage specialists from the participating libraries. A similarity sharing index, or value, can be envisaged where the greater the similarity of process or service, the greater the efficiency gain for participating institutions. For Parsons SHEDL is just the right size and tackling the right issues to hit the "sweet spot" for successful collaborative service creation.

In a complex and changing environment the ability for SCURL to talk about the totality of our shared content procurement activities is really important. It allows the clear communication with all stakeholders necessary to foster a mutual understanding of the issues around procurement, and to sustain the shared commitment to ensuring the best possible value for money, licensing terms and conditions and preservation arrangements. As we stated earlier, SHEDL has grown to cover all SCURL shared content procurement activities despite the fact that not all the collaborative purchasing work done through SCURL is digital and neither does all of it result in a truly “shared library”

The lines between print and digital procurement, and between deals that result in consistent access for all consortia members and those that result in consistent pricing and licensing terms for members, are not hard and clearly delineated. Nevertheless, consistent alignment of purpose to widen access to content for all Scottish users and to derive best value for Scotland from the budgets invested in new content procurement supports the ability and willingness of SHEDL members to move beyond the original focus on digital journal content to bring all SCURL shared content procurement under the auspices of SHEDL.

# The challenges and opportunities of working in a diverse consortium

Given the diversity of institutions across the consortium, the University funding environment and specifically funding for the Library Service in each institution is on a wide spectrum. The SHEDL model takes account of the size of institution and their Library budgets and costs are apportioned accordingly. In Scotland we are interested in looking at different models of funding content, in particular, moving away from historic print spend to consider, for example, institutional income as a basis for cost allocation. This can create some volatility in the costs assigned to each institution and care needs to be taken to be sensitive to individual institutional circumstances. The drop in value of Sterling following the vote to leave the European Union is also likely to affect Library budgets. Working across these diverse institutions with different strategic goals, different mission intensities (teaching vs research), different structures (some Library Services incorporate e-learning which has influenced the type of content they are interested in licensing) is challenging both for the type of content we aim to licence and for the costs of that content across the consortium. These are factors that can put some strain on the SHEDL model. Nevertheless, Scottish HEIs are committed to SHEDL and to making it a success, particularly in the context of the Scottish Government’s commitment to shared services.

SHEDL works closely with Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) using different procurement models, for example tendering for content as well as direct negotiation with the publisher. The relationship with APUC is particularly helpful for the procurement of e-books and print books where APUC provide expertise and guidance on EU procurement regulations and contract maintenance. The developing open access landscape also presents challenges in our negotiations with publishers. For the more research intensive institutions offsetting of article processing charges has become an important element of any deal, however this is not easy or straightforward to negotiate.

Not all publishers are prepared to work with the SHEDL model and, in some cases, it has not been possible to renegotiate deals on terms that are acceptable to the consortium. In these cases, HEIs are free to take advantage of deals negotiated by other bodies, negotiate themselves directly with the publisher or manage without the content.

The consortium is also investigating the feasibility of licensing other kinds of product, for example databases, online courses and learning objects.

### **The benefits of the SHEDL approach**

The SHEDL deals that have been negotiated with publishers provide good value for money for all of the institutions involved in the consortium. Institutions gain access to content that they may otherwise not have considered and find that their staff and students use this content. The SHEDL work has reinforced the strong collaborative ties between institutions in Scotland – HEIs are investing sometimes significant amounts of money in procuring content together, and this requires and engenders trust across the consortium. This is fostering collaboration in other areas such as collection management, procurement of Library Management Systems and recently a new periodicals agent.

A significant benefit of collaborative procurement in Scotland is the opportunity that staff have been given to work together on the strategic development of SHEDL and other procurement activities, and to lead on negotiations with individual publishers. The SHEDL governance structure, in particular the SHEDL working group, which carries out the day-to-day business of the consortium, has enabled staff at middle-management levels in their organisation to take leadership roles across Scotland. This is building capacity back into their individual institutions. There are also economies of scale achieved across the consortium – one person negotiating with a publisher on behalf of 19 institutions, rather than 19 individual negotiations (also a selling point for publishers). The consortium relies on staff input from its members and the expertise that is being built up is invaluable.

# Trusted working relationships

Underpinning all this work is trust. SHEDL is in the fortunate position of being a comparatively small group with a reasonably long history. Kidd and Stevenson articulated the benefits of this:

*“The Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL) has been in existence under that title since 1992, with earlier incarnations going back to 1977. … The extended existence of SCURL with the comparatively small numbers involved, has led to a high degree of personal interaction and trust among director level library staff in Scotland, fostering an atmosphere where collaboration is an expected way forward – tempered of course by a recognition primary loyalty to the institution employer.” (Kidd & Stevenson, 2010[[4]](#footnote-4))*

Members understand the requirement for trust, valuing the relationships that already exist, and working to regularly sustain familiarity and trust. Face to face meetings are held regularly and leadership on individual negotiations is distributed within the working group. No formal constitution exists for SHEDL (although it does for SCURL). Regular reporting from SHEDL to the SCURL Business Committee supports ongoing engagement of Library Directors in supporting the work through both budget and enabling staff time for participation. Institutional and individual diversity is valued and task experts are encouraged and supported to apply their experience, knowledge and passion to the work. Within SHEDL we recognise that strategic and operational requirements can conflict and individual members have trust, which when combined with the goal congruence outline above has allowed

[[5]](#endnote-1)

SHEDL to take some risks in exploring new procurement models. This is because overall the group can tolerate moderate losses (e.g. investment in OA journals) and work together even when there is not complete clarity and certainty on the outcomes (e.g. e-book framework).

The high degree of trust and the wealth of experience in Scottish HEI libraries working collaboratively on procurement, and our strong partnership with APUC, has contributed to the success of other SCURL procurement activities outside the content area. Most notably the creation with APUC of a framework for library management system procurement for Scotland in 2016 from which 2 institutions have so far made purchases. Interestingly SCURL did consider a commitment based approach to library management system procurement i.e. seeking consensus for the purchase of a single LMS for all Scottish HEIs but determined that such a consensus was likely to be very difficult to achieve. WHELF, the Welsh equivalent of SCURL, did decide to commit to a single LMS for all Welsh HEIs and WHELF and SCURL continue to exchange information regularly on how the two different approaches are delivering value for the library users and the nations as a whole.

## The Future

Faced with increasing demands on budgets (which remain tight or flat in real terms) and as publisher prices continue to rise faster than inflation, few SCURL libraries are able to provide access to all of the journals, monographs and other content they would like. In this context SCURL collaborative content procurement activities are an important initiative reinforcing the world-class status of the Scottish higher education and research sectors by making access to knowledge easier and broadening the range of content available across the whole of Scotland. However, SCURL collaborative content procurement is also at risk as budgets decrease. In 2016 SHEDL, having looked carefully at usage data, collaboratively decided not to renew a contract because several members were unable to contribute to the proposed costs of the contract. We hope that by taking decisive action such as not renewing contracts SHEDL will be in a stronger negotiating position with other publishers.

At a strategic level agreeing targeted outcomes, which demonstrably deliver value for all members, will remain a significant challenge having picked off what might be regarded as the “low hanging fruit” of journal packages, which have a broad appeal across all the members. SHEDL will not seek to increase the size of our portfolio of contracts simply to be able to say we are continuing to increase. Renegotiating existing deals to achieve more favourable terms and to cover net elements such as APCs, coverage of overseas campuses and delivery of high quality metadata / discovery layer integration is just as important. Deciding when to negotiate for content at a Scottish national level through SHEDL and when greatest value for Scotland is delivered by participating in UK negotiations will remain an ongoing challenge.

SHEDL may also do more to use rich virtual meeting environments to enhance engagement. To date SHEDL has successfully used shared mailing lists, as well as shared network file storage to facilitate shared access to documentation (with a members’ only section of the SCURL website alongside Box hosted by the University of Dundee). This is supplemented by occasional teleconferences when formal agreement to a deal is required and a face to face meeting is not possible. We have not explored video conference tools or team messaging tools such as Slack and might benefit from doing so. However any increase in the use of digital engagement and collaborations tools needs to be done in a way that does not undermine the core requirement for trust between members and for the regular reinforcement of that trust and those personal relationships through face to face conversations.

## Statistics

In 2016 SHEDL member spent £6.7million on procuring collaborative content and in addition SCURL members spent over £13.5million on subscription agent contract, ebooks and print books. This is all funded directly from the institutions; there is no central support from the Scottish Funding Council for this activity. This collaborative content procurement through SHEDL means that there is parity of access to over 3,460 online journals and 39,000 ebooks from around 15 leading academic publishers. In 2017 SHEDL has 21 contracts in place which represents a sustained period of growth from starting with 3 publishers in 2009.

* The savings made by one institution participating in the SHEDL e-book deals have totalled more than £160k compared to buying the same content via Jisc.

Substantial access is demonstrated with, for example, one supplier reporting over 80% of collections accessed in 2016.

* Parity of access is demonstrated where, one supplier reported, most institutions made use of 85% of ebook titles from the supplier’s content
* Increase in usage is demonstrated from one supplier’s usage data from 2016 of over 5million section requests across SHEDL members
* We have demonstrated efficiency gains with reduced operation costs as a lead member of the Working Group liaises and negotiates with a publisher on behalf of the Consortium, other members take responsibility for collating metadata with a particular publisher on behalf of the consortium so efficiency gains are in evident. The Consortium did agree to jointly fund a SHEDL Digital Library Administrator post which centralises reporting work that would otherwise be distributed.
* Other procurement work happening alongside side SHEDL is the Single Sign-On to econtent with a commercial supplier, a single supplier subscription agent contract, the renewal of the print book contract, and continuation of the ebook mini competition.
* Through the expertise and knowledge gained from the collaborative experience of developing SHEDL, our colleagues are equipped to expand and broaden the scope of SCURL’s consortial procurement to other formats, tools and library infrastructure directly supporting the SCURL Strategic Plan 2017-2019[[6]](#footnote-5)

1. All SCURL members are SHEDL members and vice versa with the exception of the two major reference libraries in Edinburgh and Glasgow who are SCURL members but choose not to participate in SHEDL. The Royal Botanic Gardens joined SCURL in 2013 and is participating in SHEDL deals. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Library Collaboration Toolkit published 30th November 2016 <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/library-collaboration-toolkit> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Cox, J (2007) Investigative Study towards establishing a Scottish Higher Education Digital Library for Scottish Universities. John Cox Associates Ltd. Towcester. Research Information Network.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Kidd, T and Stevenson, L. SHEDL: the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library: an update. Serials 23 (3) November 2010, 196-200* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
6. SCURL Strategic Plan 2017-2019. http://scurl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SCURLStrategicPlan20172019.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)