

International Sources of Knowledge for Everybody in Higher Education and Research in Norway

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**INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE
FOR EVERYBODY
IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN
NORWAY**

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The National Office for Research Documentation, Academic and Special Libraries ([RBT](#)) is the State's highest authority in the field of professional and research documentation and for academic and special libraries in Norway. We have a certain responsibility for securing access to, and the effective use of, professional documentation in higher education and research, regardless of the primary source.

Through the years, librarians have been their institutions' link with, and the communicators of, external and internal knowledge through their co-operation networks. Their primary function has been connected to the administration of knowledge; the registration, the storage, and the conveyance of knowledge. Academic and special libraries began to use databases in their reference work at an early stage, and they have been the sole users of these for a long time; the technology and the price of these services have not opened up for network solutions. It is still primarily libraries which are responsible for building up competence in searching in professional databases. The fact that the net resources are directly available to a larger user group, demands a high level of competence among librarians in academic and professional libraries in regard to instruction and guidance. Students who during their years of studying have learned to make use of professional databases will probably demand services equivalent to these when conducting research or teaching.

This winter I read in President Bill Clinton's *"Remarks by the President"* in *"The State of the Union Address"* of an action to strengthen the education system through a plan called *"Action for American Education"*, based on 10 Principles. The 10th principle is to connect every classroom to the Internet.

Action is also being taken in Norway to ensure quality in education through several educational reforms. We are facing high-cost educational reforms which are to be accomplished without extensive resources being transferred to the educational sector as a whole; reforms such as the Government's plans for the increased use of problem-based learning, and an extended offer of distance learning courses and life-long learning.

Increased access to electronic information sources and tools is conditional if studies are to be based to a larger extent on self-tuition by the students. One of the goals of The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in Norway is that the teaching shall be based on research, and that the students shall be able to conclude their studies within a reasonable period of time. The lack of knowledge regarding special subject surveys and the lack of access to information for tutors, as well as students, results in the students spending more time on their studies than is actually necessary. Teaching based on research is only possible if students as well as staff actively consult electronic surveys of professional information sources in addition to the traditional paper versions.

A challenge for both teachers and librarians will be to cooperate in instructing the students in information knowledge, and thus enable the students to seek, manage, analyse and make use of this information in an effective and correct way. This is an important contribution in developing the students' ability in independent thinking and their ability to critically assess the information acquired. It will also teach them to solve problems in an effective way and give them a more solid platform when making decisions.

During the last 10 to 20 years the number of published titles in the scientific milieu has multiplied several times. In addition to searches in the local library database, it is expected that the library can offer a wide range of international electronic reference sources in order to visualise relevant sources of knowledge.

A Norwegian governmental committee suggested the introduction of consortium agreements for databases in the academic sector as early as in 1988. The proposal was promoted as one of several initiatives connected to the development of an infrastructure for information retrieval and exchange, in order to connect universities and colleges together in a national network of knowledge (NOU 1988:28; "*Med viten og vilje*").

A better infrastructure for information retrieval was looked upon as an important issue owing to the amalgamation of academic resources through a governmental reorganisation of the colleges. The reform is, in many ways, similar to the reform which took place at the same time in the United Kingdom, where the earlier polytechnics were joined together to form new universities or incorporated in an existing university.

After two years preparation by a working-group, several surveys of the use and costs of databases in academic libraries. RBT signed to agreements in December 1995, one with Online Computer Library Center ([OCLC](#)) and one with Institute for Scientific Information (ISI).

OCLC FirstSearch

After an information day in Spring 1994 with lectures and demonstrations of OCLC Europe, six institutions representing the academic sector attended a pilot project which aimed to evaluate FirstSearch. From January 1st 1996 approximately 40 institutions within higher education and research in Norway could offer their students and employees free use of eight databases from OCLC through FirstSearch via Telnet and from March 1996 through WWW.

The agreement gives access to a core package of OCLC databases which includes WorldCat (OLUC), ArticleFirst, ContentsFirst, PapersFirst, ProceedingsFirst, FastDoc and ERIC.

From January 1997 the core package also includes NetFirst.

As part of the introduction of OCLC databases in the academic sector in Norway, we arranged a workshop in November 1995 for 10 people specially elected for their skills in database searching and reference work. In January 1996 we followed up with courses for one contactperson from each member institution. During the first six months, use was based on 10 ports. The user statistics showed that we had underestimated the interest and in October 1996 we increased the ports to 20.

In 1996 11 institutions also started to subscribe on OCLCs interlibrary loan-service PRISM ILL. Today 31 library units subscribe on ILL. After an offer to the member institutions in the fall 1996, many of the members of the agreement also subscribes to special databases through OCLC, such as Medline and RILM.

RBT has established a Nordic User Group together with OCLC users in the other Nordic countries, The group has a web page and a mail list administrated by RBT.

Together with OCLC Europe and the Norwegian academic library system BIBSYS we are working with the possibility to make hyperlinks between records in e.g. WorldCat and the holding information in the BIBSYS database. The benefit is a more cost effective use of collections in Norwegian academic libraries.

ISI

The paradox is that not only do the international professional databases provide us with a better survey of international resources, they also contribute to making the Norwegian material more noticeable and thereby to a wider exploitation of national resources. In the FirstSearch databases PapersFirst and ProceedingsFirst, there are papers from small conferences arranged at small places in Norway which are not registered in the national academic database BIBSYS. For the RBT it has been an important issue to ensure that access to national research documentation is as good as the access to international research documentation. A great effort has therefore been made to update the database for research documentation in BIBSYS: FORSKDOK and the fulltext database FULLDOK.

When we decided to license the citation indexes from ISI we could choose between two technical solutions: A CD-ROM subscription with a client-server solution where one institution would have to be the site or to purchase the data and build up a database a database with software etc. Through the library and information system BIBSYS, the academic libraries in Norway share holding information on books, journals etc. and automated library services. BIBSYS has extensive experience in building databases via WWW and gave us the idea to link the new database to the BIBSYS holding via hypertext-links. In addition to this, The National Office for Research Documentation, Academic and Special Libraries was concerned that the building of competence should be on a national level, securing an optimal exploitation of the investments made in the last few years. After careful consideration RBT choose a license agreement where BIBSYS was asked to host the ISI-databases. The attention received internationally, understate that BIBSYS has accomplished their mission in the best possible way. As far as we know it is unique also on an

international level that the ISI-databases is linked to national holdings.

From the summer of 1996 the ISI bases Science Citation Index, Social Science Citation Index and Arts&Humanities Citation Index have been accessible through a WWW interface in BIBSYS. We went through a similar process as with OCLC before the decision was made.

The three-year agreement gives access to the three citations databases back to 1992. The consortia today have 36 members representing universities, colleges and research institutions. But at this moment we are in the final negotiations on behalf of 13 new institutions. The user-statistics for January 1997 shows that the daily use of the database is already over 2000 searches (find/scan).

As mentioned earlier, the other Nordic countries have witnessed the establishment of the two Norwegian joint agreements with growing interest, and are using them as a model for similar national agreements with ISI. On an informal basis, the Nordic countries have committed themselves to a co-operation programme with the mutual exchange of experience and assessment of possible cooperational projects in the future. Sweden has decided to use BIBSYS as a host for their licence agreement with ISI.

RBT is now working on similar agreements for libraries and their users in the medical sector. We will initiate a pilot project in April-September 1997, where a set of medical databases will be tested by end users, librarians and super users at 8 test institutions. The databases will be tested through a web interface as provided through different hosts; OCLC, Silverplatter and OVID. It is hoped that an agreement will be signed by 1st January 1998.

RBT has developed web-pages with general information about the agreements with links to other relevant web-pages which will hopefully fulfils the immediate needs for information. In addition we will look at the need for courses and information-days.

As co-ordinator, I have a special responsibility to ensure that the participating institutions are closely followed up through their contact persons, information pages at our web server, news lists, courses, and the development of relevant material. RBT has developed web pages with general information about the agreements with links to other relevant web pages which hopefully will fulfil the immediate needs for information. In addition we look at the need for additional courses and information days.

The libraries has not been the target group for this agreement, but the students and the teachers. The aim for RBT is that this agreements shall be a central agent for libraries to underline their central position as «knowledge brokers» in the electronic age. As far as know this is the first agreement in the world which gives all staff and students at universities and colleges in a country, free access to a core package of databases from OCLC and the three citation indexes from ISI.

But it is the members of the consortia's responsibility to ensure that the databases is heavy used and defends their price through high courses activity and heavily distributing of information about the services locally.

Finally I would like to mention that RBT also hopes that better access to international knowledge through databases also can be a way to better use of the www-resources generally, and therefore look at supportment to and arranging of courses to encourage competence development in the libraries as an important part of our job.