

Improving Access to Information – Defining Core Electronic Resources for Research and Wellbeing

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INTRODUCTION

Research and innovation are listed as the key success factors for the future development of Finnish prosperity and the Finnish economy. The Finnish libraries have developed a scenario to support this vision. University, polytechnic and research institute libraries as well as public libraries have defined the core electronic resources necessary to improve access to information in Finland. The primary aim of this work has been to provide information and justification for central funding for electronic resources to support the national goals. The secondary aim is to help with the reallocation of existing central funds to better support access to information.

THE NEW ROLE OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY AS A SERVICE CENTRE FOR THE LIBRARIES NETWORK

Helsinki University Library became the [National Library of Finland](#) in 2006. The new name formalized in the University Act emphasizes the importance of the library's national responsibilities. The steering mechanism of the library has changed. Cooperative mechanisms between the library network and the National Library have also been developed. Another important administrative development area is the budgetary system, where the aim has been to streamline the library's fairly complex financing arrangements, even though most of the funding is allocated by the Ministry of Education. Within the library network, the National Library is the only library conducting budgetary negotiations directly with the Ministry of Education.

Safeguarding the availability of a cultural heritage is a responsibility shared by national libraries in general. The task of developing services in conjunction with the library network, including the maintenance and development of library systems and the provision of centralized licensing services, for example, is almost unique. The core services of the library are shown in Figure 1.

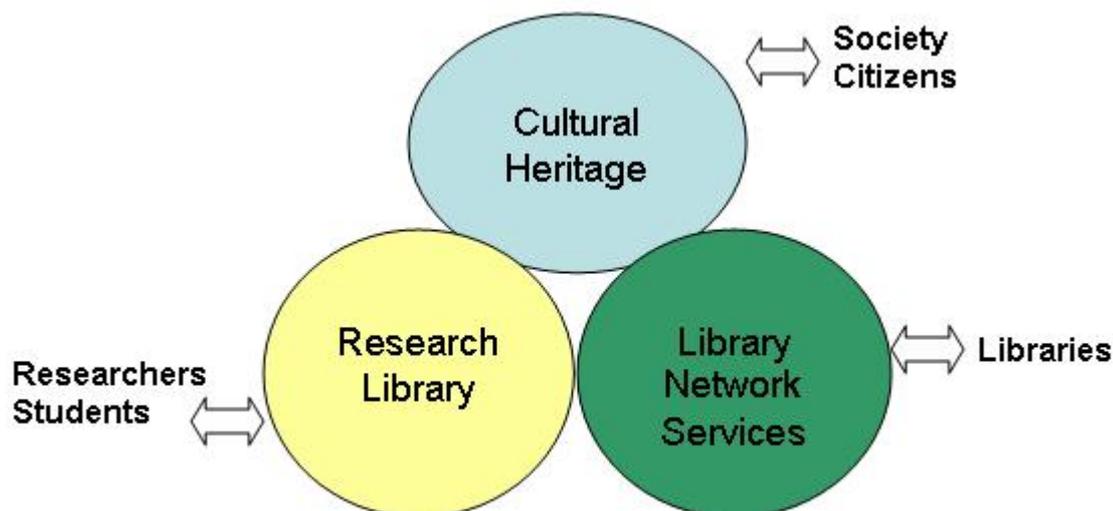


Figure 1. Core services of the National Library of Finland and its key customers

THE FINNISH LIBRARY NETWORK

In Finland, the library network is extremely efficient; the four main library sectors (university and polytechnic libraries, special libraries and public libraries) have organized their own activities and each sector has its own specific development areas as well as common interests with other sectors.

There are three library consortia in the country: [Linnea2](#) to coordinate and develop integrated library system issues mainly for university libraries, [FinELib](#) to coordinate centralized licensing and national portal development, and [AMKIT](#) to handle all issues related to polytechnic libraries.

Cooperation between the library sectors and library consortia is becoming increasingly important as a consequence of the National Library's changing role and the transformed working environment.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Major structural changes in the operating environment for universities, polytechnics, special libraries and public libraries are taking place in Finland and the process is expected to continue over several years. The polytechnic, university and research institute network is undergoing radical change. Cooperation between universities is intensifying and university consortiums are being created. Universities and polytechnics are increasing and intensifying their cooperation in many fields. Mergers of polytechnics are likely. The municipal structure is also changing. These changes will affect the operations of public libraries.

The structural changes will have an impact on the funding of universities and polytechnics. The share of external funding and cooperation between consortium members and companies will increase as the third task of the universities in forming partnerships with economic life and business is more thoroughly implemented.

The changes will also affect centrally coordinated services, for example licensing. Today in Finland licences are negotiated for whole organisations. When organisations or parts of organisations merge, the licences should be renegotiated in a new cost-effective way.

THE FINNISH ELECTRONIC LIBRARY CONSORTIUM, FINELIB

FinELib is a national consortium which supports research, teaching and studying in Finland by promoting the availability of high-quality information and its use in society. The members of the consortium are Finnish universities, polytechnics, public libraries and a large number of research institutes.

FinELib acquires most of the electronic resources in Finnish libraries. The resources available include tens of thousands of electronic journals and books plus hundreds of databases which attract tens of millions of information searches every year.

Turnover	EUR 15 million
Licences	60 licence agreements
Content	273 databases 18,600 e-journals 273,000 e-books
Usage	6.2 million downloads 42 million searches
Consortium	110 organisations

Table 1. Key figures for FinELib in 2007

CORE ELECTRONIC INFORMATION RESOURCES TO SUPPORT RESEARCH AND WELLBEING

A working group consisting of library directors and information specialists from four library sectors as well as specialists from the National Library has had the task of defining core electronic resources for universities, polytechnics and research institutes as well as for public libraries. The National Library coordinates licensing for the FinELib consortium and has collected a lot of information about the costs of licences, and about usage and user feedback on electronic resources.

Based on the ample information available on current licences, the working group decided to define two different portfolios to support access to information in society. The first portfolio consists of core information resources which support innovation and the competitiveness of research carried out at universities and research institutes. The second portfolio is designed to support the citizen in everyday life.

Criteria were defined for selecting the information resources. According to the criteria, the resources have to be much used and of high quality, mainly multidisciplinary and in a couple of cases they must support research in nationally defined strategic areas. Altogether, 10 different resources were listed. The portfolio for supporting research and innovation consists of electronic scientific journals, reference databases, aggregator databases, e-books and reference management tools.

Finland needs to finance the portfolio supporting innovation and the competitiveness of research because

- the development of the national innovation system requires high quality content;
- information resources are part of the national infrastructure for research;
- wide ranging access to information resources will support research in the structurally changing environment;
- broad access to information resources support the internationalisation of research.

The second portfolio comprises reference databases and reference works as well as dictionaries, altogether some 7 resources. Why should this portfolio be financed?

- The resources would guarantee equal access to information all over the country.
- The citizens have the right to access reliable information resources.
- The content would support studying and learning.

The cost of both portfolios is approx. EUR 10 million in total.

MARKETING AND LOBBYING FOR THE CONCEPT OF CORE RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH AND WELLBEING

A fairly extensive marketing programme was launched to raise support for the two content portfolios defined above. The first step was to introduce the idea and the related costs to the Ministry of Education as part of the National Library's budgetary negotiations. The Ministry found the proposals interesting and decided to introduce the idea of core electronic resources for research and innovation to the national research infrastructure programme.

Parliamentary elections were held in Finland in spring 2007 and the new Government started preparing the Government Programme in late spring. The libraries network represented by the chairpersons of the library sectors decided to lobby on behalf of the idea of core resources for research and innovation, and for wellbeing as included in the Government Programme. Even the media were involved in lobbying for the concept. The portfolio for supporting wellbeing was particularly well received. Promotion materials were prepared to help the libraries market the ideas to decision-makers and various interest groups. As a whole, many stakeholders participated in the marketing and lobbying process.

At the moment, the Government is preparing the budget for next year and the framework for the following three years. It is too early to predict the outcome of the proposals related to the content portfolios. However, so far the process has been very useful. It has helped all four library sectors to prioritise electronic resources. This will be very useful in the near future when discussions about reallocation of central funding for information content will be started. Lobbying to obtain financial support for core electronic content will continue.

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

AMKIT. <http://www.amkit.fi/index.php?eng>

FinElib – The National Electronic Library. <http://www.nationallibrary.fi/libraries/finelib.html>

Linnea2. <http://www.linneanet.fi/english/index.htm>

National Library of Finland. <http://www.nationallibrary.fi/index.html>