

Registry of Electronic Licences (RELI) Briefing Paper

The Problem

Within the academic community, there is a desire on the part of users of resources¹ (and of the institutions within which those users work or study) to be compliant with terms established by rightsholders. As the medium for the distribution of resources moves increasingly from physical copies to the network, the need for users to know what permissions attach to the access and use of any particular resource becomes increasingly pressing due to considerable differentiation between licence terms. This is amplified by the increasing diversity of resource providers: organisations and individuals are developing resources that were once the preserve of commercial enterprises, with different objectives and constraints when it comes to making them available. Some resources are available under the terms of a Creative Commons licence; others under stricter commercial terms. It is difficult or impossible for users to discover for themselves the terms that apply to a particular resource.

With licences typically available only on paper (or its digital equivalent), reference to licence terms is labour intensive and slow. Different resource repertoires will have different licence terms for the foreseeable future, and technical support will be needed to facilitate compliance with licence terms without resorting to a “lowest common denominator” approach, i.e., assuming that all licences are as restrictive as the most restrictive licence. A “repertoire” is defined here as the group of resources which is covered by a particular licence.

One of the major issues that we will need to address as part of the project is finding a way of how to associate resources with licences.

How it is being addressed

The solution lies in the establishment of mechanisms by which key elements of licences can be made available so that a user can be provided with the most significant elements of licence information at the point of use – those that relate to permitted access and use. This needs to happen without additional human intervention; those significant licence terms must be machine interpretable. A licence registry (or many licence registries, in a more distributed model) is an essential element in the technical architecture necessary to support such functionality.

Developing a way of expressing permissions for access and use for interpretation by machines is beyond the scope of our project, but fortunately substantial work has been undertaken by EDItEUR in the development of ONIX for Licensing terms (O-LT). ONIX-LT is a messaging format for the

¹ We use the term “resource” in preference to terms such as “content”.

communication of licences; the RELI project will develop a database for the storage of licences. A Licence Registry informed by the same concepts and abstractions as ONIX-LT will integrate more easily into an overall framework for licence management.

Benefits to users

Stakeholder	Interest / stake	Importance to stakeholder
Rightsholder	The Registry will improve clarity of understanding of users in what they may or may not do with particular content. It would reduce requirement for staff to answer questions and assist compliance. The Registry will also help rightsholders provide better user service.	High
Librarians	Librarians are already having to deal with a wide range of digital content, and many different licence and sets of licence terms. This complexity will grow. The Registry will provide a information resource to support compliance and reduce the need for human intervention in enquiries. Also terms of different licences can be compared.	High
JISC Information Environment	The Registry needs to be able to play an effective role in the overall functionality of the JISC Information Environment.	Medium
End-users	Academics, teachers, students will be better able to understand accurately what they can do with content they have discovered.	Medium
JISC Content Company and other Content aggregators	Aggregators may have very different content types and rules governing with their use. The Registry will make it easier to manage and easier to obtain compliance.	Medium/High
Subscription agents	The key benefits for information aggregators are simplicity and clarity. This will reduce requirement for staff to answer questions and assist compliance.	High
Information & library systems suppliers	Systems suppliers will be able to offer richer services through connecting ERMs and other library management systems to the Licence Registry.	Medium

What is currently available for Implementation

As we are only in the early stages of the project - conducting a user-requirements analysis: currently nothing is available for implementation. As the user requirements analysis comes to a close the development of a pilot registry will begin.

Use Cases being analysed for requirements process

1. **Library or VLE acquires a new resource that needs a licence associated with it**
2. **Researcher locates a resource and wants to know what she can do with it in general**
3. **Lecturer locates a resource and wants to know if she can copy it for use by her students**

4. Research student searches for text and images to incorporate into thesis
5. Lecturer locates a digital image and *within the terms of the licence* tries to copy it for her students
6. Lecturer locates a digital image and wishes to copy it for an external student: the licence terms do not specify if this is permitted or not
7. Lecturer locates a digital image and wishes to copy it for an external student: the licence terms do not specify if this is permitted or not
8. Lecturer is seeking a resource that students can incorporate into their own projects
9. Lecturer has created a video that he wants to make available through his college's website; or Lecturer has created a video that he wants to make available through his college's repository
10. Lecturer has created an article that she wants to make available through PubMedCentral or Depot as well as the institutional repository
11. Librarian subscribes to new e-book collection for student use: the publisher requires that students read & click to accept the licence terms before each use
12. Distance learning student searches OPAC for books and articles to help write an essay
13. VLE manager adds content created by staff at her institution to the VLE
14. Publisher sells new "big deal" online subscription direct to institution with special licence terms
15. Agent sells new "big deal" online subscription to institution with standard licence terms
16. Publisher changes terms of existing licence
17. Publisher wishes to check own licence terms against those offered by other publishers
18. Librarian wishes to check own licence terms for subscription against those offered to other institutions