Otago Renewals Rubric – an aid to subscription eresource renewals decision-making

Background

Since 2016 the renewals team in the Library's Information Resources Department have been refining their subscriptions renewal processes. This resulted in the development of a renewals rubric to aid decision-making. The rubric was established in mid-2017 and incorporates an academic value assessment.

The rubric was presented at a Collection Assessment & ROI Datasets meeting (via Zoom) on 18 June 2018. This meeting was a follow-up to the February CAUL Dataset Coordinator meeting in which there was interest in sharing ideas and best practice around assessment methodology. This paper complements the presentation by providing detailed information on the rubric and its development.
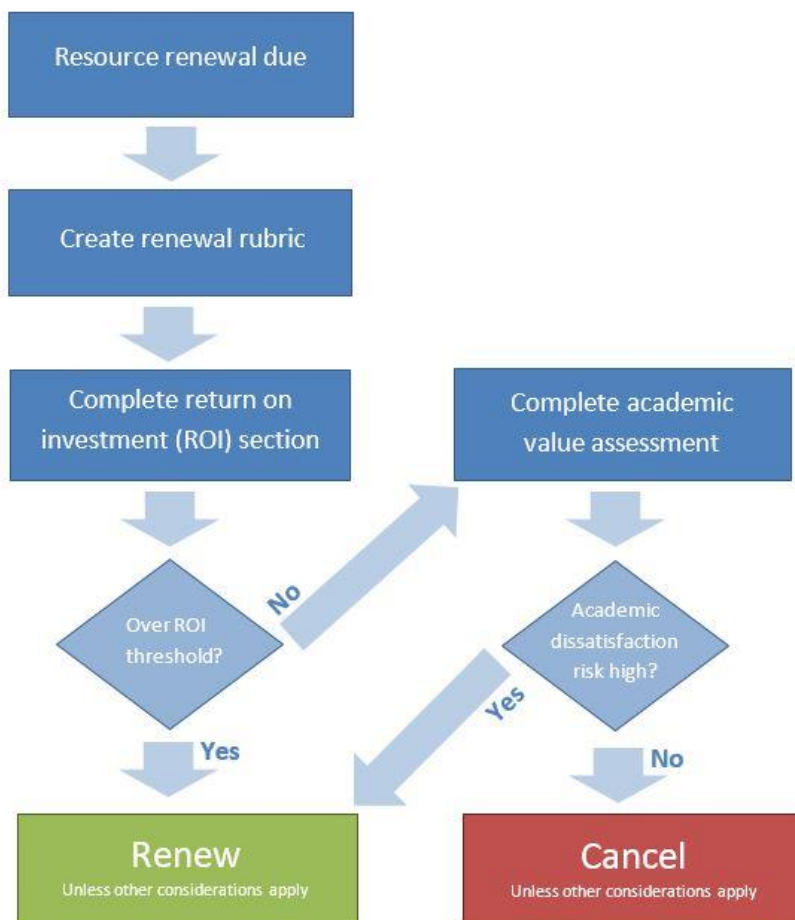
Description

There are three sections in the rubric:
1. Return on Investment (ROI)
2. Academic Value Assessment (AVA)
3. Academic Dissatisfaction Risk Assessment (ADRA)

Figure one shows how the rubric works within the subscription renewal decision-making process.

Figure 1. Subscriptions renewal process

The rubric utilises a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which contains the AVA form and other worksheets. The rubric worksheet is the primary focus. The spreadsheet format provides flexibility to add relevant information to additional worksheets. For example, usage summary data is routinely added. The spreadsheet contains a Rubric Key with the categories and explanatory notes. Each rubric spreadsheet is located in a shared folder, accessible by all library staff. Confidential information such as full price and contract negotiations are not included.

1. Return on Investment

The ROI section includes cost per use (amounts and trends), price differences, content overlap and access issues. The renewals team in the Library Information Resources Department complete this section. If ROI weighting is under the threshold, then we seek an academic value assessment from subject librarians.

2. Academic Value Assessment

The relevant subject librarian is sent an email requesting they complete the Academic Value Assessment form. This request is cc'd to all subject librarians to give an opportunity for others to contribute if the resource is relevant to their area as well. The subject librarians consult with academic staff if needed and complete the AVA form, which contains a teaching support assessment, a research support assessment and a cancellation impact assessment.

3. Academic Dissatisfaction Risk Assessment

This section of the rubric updates automatically. It is based on overlap and AVA data. The calculation looks at the categorisation of academic value (from "Not necessary" to "Essential") and the overlap categories (from "Full overlap" to "No overlap") and provides an impact category (from "Low" to "Very high"). If either teaching support or research support show a "High" or "Very high" cancellation impact, then the resource should be renewed.

Combining overlap with academic value allows a more nuanced assessment of cancellation impact. Academic staff will only be impacted if they cannot obtain a copy of a resource when they need it. If a resource is important or essential and the content not available elsewhere, then the impact of cancellation will be very high. However, if there is access (full overlap) to that resource elsewhere (aggregator or other package) then access is not an issue for academic staff, so cancellation of the direct subscription is only likely to cause moderate/low impact.

We first considered the concept of assessing academic dissatisfaction risk after reading a paper from the University of Queensland (UQ) on Risk Identification (2016, University of Queensland Library and Majella Pugh). UQ developed two risk assessment tools to assist their renewals decision-making. While we have taken a different approach to incorporating academic dissatisfaction risk into our overall process, the UQ paper stimulated our thinking in this direction and highlighted the importance of this concept in relation to renewals.

Discussion

The Otago renewals rubric has been tested throughout a peak renewals period (August to December 2017) with a range of subscription information eresources (individual journals, packages, databases). It has not been used for eBooks due to the different purchase models we employ.

In January 2018 we evaluated the performance of the rubric. We consulted with information resources and subject librarian staff. Based on this feedback the following changes were made:
- Changed the look of the rubric to improve clarity.
- Incorporated more automated aspects to data entry, for example, adding drop down menus and linking formulas.

- The AVA form was simplified. Previously, teaching and research support contained several sub-categories each. These did not work well in practice so the form was reduced to a single assessment each.

Advantages of using the rubric:
- The use of categories in the rubric streamlines and provides guidelines for what is essentially a subjective process.
- It improves consistency with decisions by showing strong/weak areas and enables clear articulation of the reasoning behind decisions.
- There is greater transparency of decisions as all library staff can access the rubrics. If an AVA has been completed, we also advise the subject librarians of the final decision. This allows them to close the feedback loop with any academics they consulted in a timely manner.
- Apart from some confidential information, each rubric provides a comprehensive summary of the criteria for renewals decisions in a single location.

Disadvantages of using the rubric:
- Each rubric takes time to set up and complete although automation alleviates this aspect.
- Each rubric is not quite a 'one-stop-shop' as some relevant information such as pricing cannot be included due to confidentiality.

An important point to note is that the thresholds provided in the rubric are not intended to be applied rigidly. They act as an indication of the strength or weakness of the case for renewal. It is possible to deviate from applying the threshold but the reasons for such decisions must be clearly articulated and justified.

A blank copy of the rubric is shown in Appendix One. The AVA is shown in Appendix Two and the Rubric Key in Appendix Three. The values in the Cost Per Use (CPU) and Price Increase sections have not been included. It is up to individual institutions to set these according to their priorities and practices. For example, there will be different 'tolerance' levels to price increases depending on an institution's budgetary position.

We are happy to share the Rubric spreadsheet with other libraries as long as attribution is made. Please contact Jo Kennedy (details below) to be emailed the template and if you have any questions about the process.

References:

University of Queensland Library and Pugh, Majella. (2016). *Risk identification: client dissatisfaction with subscription cancellations.* http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:553594

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Appendix One:

Otago Renewals Rubric – Rubric Worksheet (blank)

		Very strong
		Strong
		Weak
		Very weak

Resource

Vendor

Subscription Period

Renewal Decision

Decision date

Summary

Return on Investment [50%]

*Cost per use (CPU) = price divided by usage

*Cost per use [20% weighting]	-
*Cost Per Use Trend [10% weighting]	-
Price difference [10% weighting]	-
Content overlap [10% weighting]	-
Re-occurring performance/ access issues [negative weighting]	-

ROI Threshold — 0% — *The case for renewal is strengthened if the ROI categories total 30% or more (green highlight)*

Academic Value [50%]

Academic Value for Teaching support	-
Academic Value for Research support	-

Academic Dissatisfaction Risk Assessment

	Academic Value Weighting	Content Overlap Weighting
Teaching support	-	-
Research support	-	-

Cancellation Impact

If either section is red then cancellation is likely to cause Very high or High academic dissatisfaction. If both sections are green then cancellation is likely to cause only moderate or low dissatisfaction.

Renewals Rubric (value and risk assessment University of Otago Library)

Appendix Two:

Otago Renewals Rubric – Academic Value Assessment Worksheet (blank)

Resource	
Vendor	
Subscription Period	
PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS BELOW (white boxes only):	
Enter names of contributing library staff:	
Enter names of academic staff consulted (include role and department):	
Overlap Assessment:	
IR-assessed overlap: *(for detail refer to table below)*	
If IS categorisation differs, enter details:	
Academic Value for TEACHING	
Rate the value of this resource to support teaching activities:	
Detail how the resource is used to support teaching: *(include copied academic feedback and examples, if available)*	
Academic Value for RESEARCH	
Rate the value of this resource to support research activities:	
Detail how the resource is used to support research: *(include copied academic feedback and examples, if available)*	
Academic Dissatisfaction Risk Assessment	
Indicate the level of impact if this resource were to be cancelled:	
Any Other Comments:	

Academic Value Assessment - University of Otago Library

Appendix Three:

Otago Renewals Rubric – Rubric Key (CPU and Price Increase values removed)

Rubric Key

Criteria weightings

	Very weak		Weak		Strong		Very strong	
Return on Investment:								
CPU (in NZD)	5%	Over $xx	10%	Between $xx and $xx	15%	Between $xx and $xx	20%	Less than $xx
CPU Trend	1%	Trending up significantly	4%	Trending up slightly	7%	Stable	10%	Trending down
Price Difference	1%	xx% or higher increase	4%	Between xx% & xx% increase	7%	xx% or less increase	10%	Decrease/no change
Overlap/content elsewhere in collection	1%	Full overlap — When the resource is fully available through aggregators with no embargo periods or through another package.	4%	Reasonable amount of overlap — When a reasonable amount of aggregator coverage, i.e. more than 50% coverage and/or embargo period less than 1 year.	7%	Some overlap but this better option — When there is only weak coverage elsewhere, i.e. less than 50% aggregator coverage and/or embargo periods 1 year or higher.	10%	No overlap (unique) — When the resource is unique and not available elsewhere.
Re-occuring performance/ access issues	-5%	25% downtime or more per annum	-2%	Betw 10% & 25% downtime per annum			0%	10% or less downtime per annum
Academic Value:								
Academic Value for Teaching support	6%	Not necessary	12%	Supplementary/ secondary	18%	Important but not essential	25%	Essential
Academic Value for Research support	6%	Not necessary	12%	Supplementary/ secondary	18%	Important but not essential	25%	Essential

Cancellation impact assessment

	Very weak		Weak		Strong		Very strong	
	6%	Not necessary	12%	Supplementary/ secondary	18%	Important but not essential	25%	Essential
1% Full overlap		Low		Low		Low		Moderate
4% Reasonable overlap		Low		Low		Moderate		High
7% Not much overlap		Low		Low		High		Very high
10% No overlap		Low		Moderate		Very high		Very high