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National Electronic Information Consortium as the Leader of Cooperative Acquisition of E-resources in Russia

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Meeting:	**113 — *Developing collections in hard financial times: proactive collaboration, balancing e-resources vs. print, low-cost options and alternative resources, fee resources... — * Acquisition and Collection Development Section**

Abstract:

Most Russian libraries began to use web-based scholarly e-resources in the late 1990s. Two national consortia play the leading role in providing libraries with these resources.
The National Electronic Information Consortium (NEICON) has more than 700 member libraries. Its activities are funded primarily by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. Each year, NEICON operates more than 2000 free site licenses for its members. The consortium uses cost-effective licensing models including the so-called "rotation" scheme that allows changing the list of subscribing institutions during the license period.

NEICON plays an important role in promoting e-resources to Russian libraries. It organizes promotional events, such as seminars, resource presentations, training sessions, etc., on a regular basis. The team of experts from the leading Russian libraries work for NEICON evaluating e-resources and selecting those best fit for conducting research on priority directions of science and technology established by the Ministry of Education and Science.

In the 1990s, after the Soviet Union disintegration, Russia suffered hard times of radical changes in its political and economic system. These changes induced dramatic shifts in the development of Russian science. The funding of research institutions decreased substantially. Russian scientists could not conduct research. Many of them, mainly the most creative members of the academic community, left Russia to work in western universities;

some of them moved to other sectors of the economy to earn more money. Information support of science and technology decreased dramatically: the funding of libraries was so inadequate that they could not acquire research literature, especially high-priced foreign periodicals and books.

In December 1998, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), which was funded by the Russian Government and established for the purpose of distributing grants to support basic research in Russian research institutions, launched the project "Scientific Electronic Library" within which many Russian institutions gained access to more than 2,000 authoritative academic journals in digital format. This project has been a great success. Access to electronic resources is being given to all grantees of RFBR and to two national libraries, i.e. Russian State Library in Moscow and Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.

In late 1999, Russia joined eIFL Direct, the joint international project of the Open Society Institute (OSI) and EBSCO Publishing. Many Russian libraries were given free access to EBSCO's full text resources. It was supposed that after a certain period of time they would begin paying for these resources. Meanwhile, the most advanced libraries began to subscribe to e-resources of their choice themselves.

Libraries which had little or no experience with e-resources were very interested in establishing a library consortium to negotiate purchasing e-resources, to raise funds and to make cross-border payments in foreign currency. Thus, in 2002, the National Electronic Information Consortium (NEICON) was established as a noncommercial partnership. At that time, its staff consisted of three members only. NEICON was successful in attracting funds from the Russian Ministry of Culture, Soros Foundation and Ford Foundation. Among the first resources subscribed to by the consortium were:

- EBSCO Publishing full text databases
- Cambridge University Press e-journals
- Oxford Reference Online.
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Starting from the end of 2005, the Russian Ministry of Education and Science began holding contests on providing information support to research and education institutions within the framework of the Federal Target Programs (FTP). The program "Research and Developments along the Priority Directions of Science and Technology Development in Russia", which was set up by the Ministry in 2005, outlines five Priority Directions:

- Living systems
- Nanoindustry and nanomaterials
- Information technologies
- Environmental management
- Energy saving.
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Due to these programs the Russian Government allocated substantial budgetary funds which were used to organize access to the most important academic e-resources for Russian research and education institutions. NEICON has been the winner of two FTP contests. Though the amount of subscription funds was unprecedented for Russia, it was still lower than the funds spent by a large western university for subscription to e- resources.

Governmental funding of two FTPs allowed NEICON to subscribe 470 institutions to selected e-resources on a free of charge basis. Figure 1 shows a year-to-year increase in the number of the NEICON member libraries. Note a substantial increase in 2006 when the consortium started working under the contract with the Ministry.
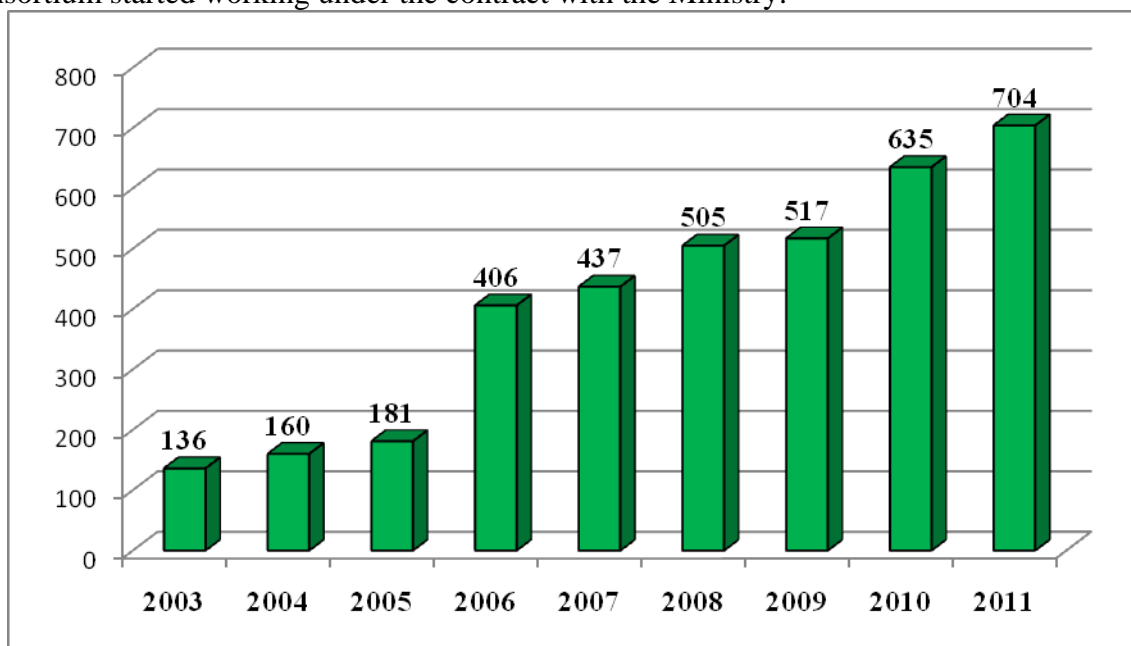

Figure 1. Year-to-year increase in the number of NEICON member libraries.

Russia is the largest country in the world, and the NEICON member libraries are distributed all over its vast territory. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the consortium's members across Russian cities (107 cities in total).
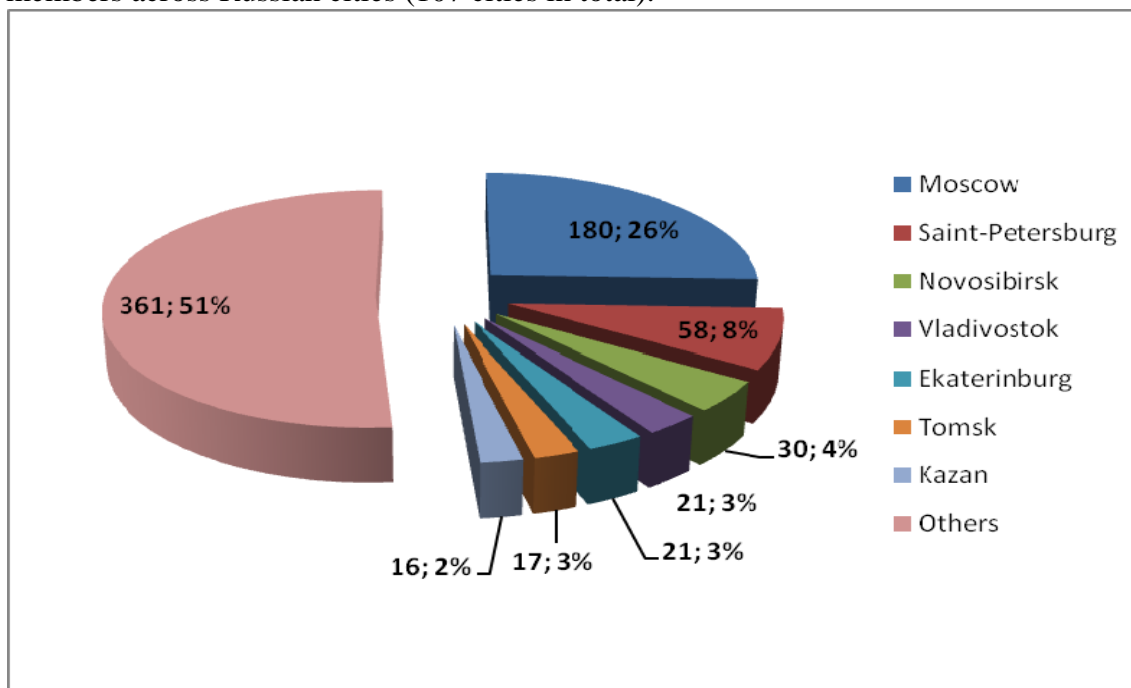

Figure 2. The distribution of NEICON member libraries across Russian cities.

E-resources for consortium subscription are selected by the NEICON staff and by the experts from the leading Russian libraries working under fixed-term contracts. The selection process consists of four steps:

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1. Preparation and refining of search queries to search for the documents relevant to a priority direction (for instance, nanotechnology).
2. Search of documents in the Web of Science and Scopus databases.
3. Preparation of ranked lists of the most productive periodicals for each priority direction.
4. Identification of publishers and/or aggregators which offer these periodicals.
5.

The selection process winds up by negotiations with publishers/aggregators and signing of license agreements.

The usage statistics of the selected resources show that, in most cases, they meet the needs of Russian institutions. As a rule, NEICON renews the subscriptions each year. Since 2005, it has cancelled subscription to three resources only. One subscription has been cancelled because of a substantial price increase and two subscriptions, because of low-usage statistics. The following thirteen items which have been subscribed to for over three years make a list of the top-level resources related to the priority directions of the development of science and technology in Russia.

1. American Chemical Society journal package
2. American Institute of Physics journal package
3. Oxford University Press journal package
4. Taylor & Francis journal package
5. Sage Publications journal package
6. Business Source Complete (EBSCO Publishing)
7. Inspec database (IET)
8. SPIE Digital Library
9. Optics InfoBase (Optical Society of America)
10. Nature Publishing Group Journal Package
11. Science Magazine (AAAS)
12. Cell Press journal Package
13. QPAT database (Questel Orbit)

License agreements signed by NEICON usually include (a) a clause stating that the license is granted to a certain number of institutions and (b) a list of institutions which have access to the licensed materials *at the first stage* of the license period. The NEICON management team determines a number of institutions for each resource by assessing the potential number of institutions interested in the given resource, the cost involved and the budget available. The number of subscribers varies from 12 to 185. In 2009, the year of global economic crisis, NEICON faced a difficult situation: the Ministry of Education and Science cut funding for the NEICON subscription programs; at the same time, Russian ruble fell to US dollar and Euro. NEICON had to decrease the number of subscribers but retained all subscriptions.

The NEICON team collects applications of member libraries for each resource and makes a list of institutions which are given access to this resource. Most often, the number of applicants is 1.5 times greater than the number of subscribers. The applicants are selected based on two criteria:
- Usage statistics of a resource in the previous subscription period (for continuing resources);

- Correspondence of the resource subject scope to the institution's profile.

Institutions which are not given access at the first stage of the license period are put on a waiting list.

Most NEICON licenses have an important clause stating that the list of subscribing institutions can be changed during the license period. This is called "a rotation clause". This clause allows libraries which have not been put on the list of subscribers use the resource after a certain period of time (after three or six months). The NEICON staff analyze usage statistics and exclude libraries with low usage from the list and include libraries from the waiting list.

The mean number of sub-licenses which NEICON operates each year within the framework of the contracts with the Ministry exceeds 2000. All licensees are provided free access to the resources.

Most NEICON licenses are the so-called "big deal" licenses, i.e. subscription is arranged to standard packages of periodicals offered by publishers/aggregators. The consortium benefits from the well-known advantages of big deals. First, they allow spending less money compared to the selection of journals from standard packages. Second, large numbers of subscribers in Russia guarantee that all journals in a package will be required and used.

Still, in some cases, a selective approach is practiced to a journal list attached to the license agreement and to the articles downloaded. For example, our license from Elsevier is granted for a 80,000 pre-paid full text article downloads at a discount price. This license allows for providing Russian institutions with articles on nanotechnology which is one of the priority directions of science and technology development in Russia.

Full-scale assessment of resource usage is based on usage statistics. Usage statistics are collected and analyzed regularly by the NEICON staff. Of primary importance for us is the economic efficiency of subscription which is assessed on the basis of cost per download. For resources subscribed to by NEICON it varies from 0,5 to 5,0 U.S. dollars. Cost per download higher than 5,0 dollars is considered to be a signal of inefficient use of a resource and results in subscription cancellation.

Another important indicator of resource usage is downloads dynamics. A substantial increase in the number of downloads accompanied by slight changes in subscribed resources is an evidence of e-resource increasing popularity in Russia.

Figure 3 demonstrates an increase in full text downloads from e-resources subscribed to by NEICON for its member libraries.
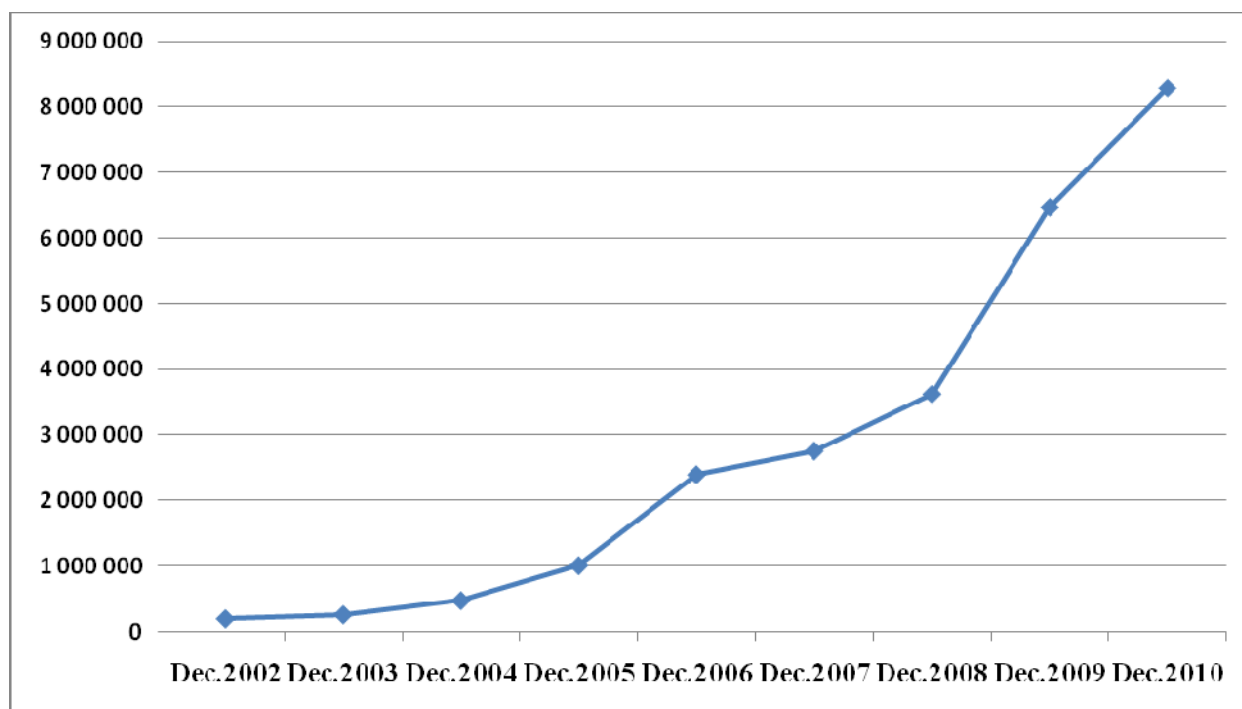
Figure 3. Full text downloads dynamics

Absolute figures are not high. They are comparable to usage statistics of a large western university. There are two main reasons for that. First, Russian researchers began to use e-resources relatively late and many of them are not experienced enough to use them efficiently for research and education. Second, for the older generation, the language barrier remains a serious obstacle to use e-resources in English: in the Soviet Union, there was a well-developed system of translation services and researchers did not need to know English. Nowadays, the second reason is becoming less meaningful. Young researchers eagerly learn foreign languages, especially English, because they are more integrated into the international scholarly communications. In addition, knowledge of foreign languages has become vitally important for the younger generation due to the need to use international information on the Internet.

Figure 3 demonstrates a substantial increase in e-resource usage since the establishment of the NEICON consortium. This is mainly due to the series of promotional efforts made by NEICON which considers promotional activities of great importance for Russian users. These activities include:

- Resource presentations and training sessions
- Workshops/seminars on different aspects of usage of the resources, such as licensing, management, etc.
- Specialized conferences organized under the aegis of the Russian Library Association, the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and other interested organizations and institutions.
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These efforts are really fruitful. What is most important, the research community acknowledges the importance of e-resources for the information support of science and education. Leading Russian universities subscribe to the ever growing number of resources. The increasing number of resources stimulates librarians to search for efficient methods of selection, acquisition and usage.

In 2010, NEICON conducted a survey among the members receiving free resources funded by the Ministry. 116 libraries out of 247 responded to this survey, resulting in a response rate was 33%. The analysis of the data collected demonstrated that most librarians realize the importance of special services designed to improve e-resource usage and management, but, in many cases, they could not implement these services because of budget constraints. This situation is illustrated by Figure 4.
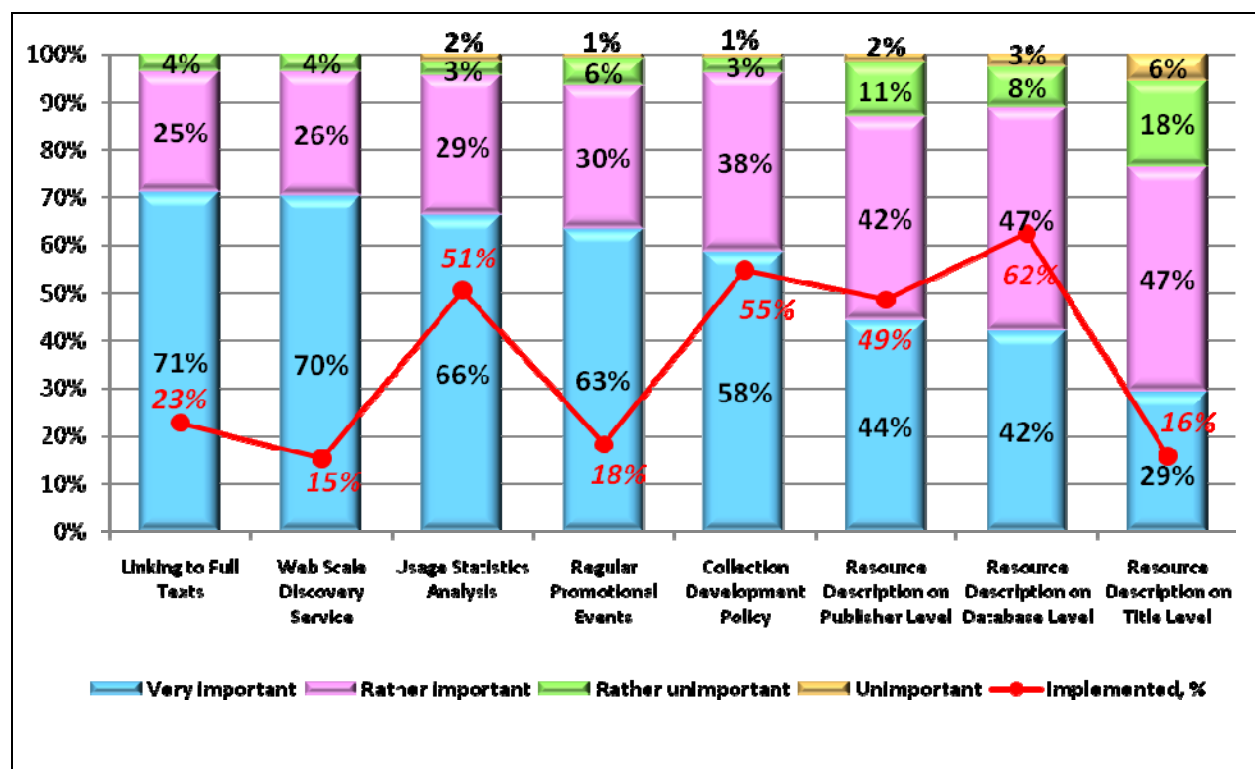

Figure 4. Assessment of the importance of special services.

The main goal of the projects funded by the Ministry of Education and Science is to get Russian research and education institutions acquainted with the wealth of international electronic research resources and stimulate them to use these resources efficiently. This goal has been partly achieved. Further development of the projects supposes gradual decrease in the governmental funding in order to give libraries an impetus to subscribe to e-resources from their own budgets. Are Russian libraries ready for this? To find out the answer to this question we conducted another survey in 2011. More than 200 libraries responded to it.

NEICON members belong to three main types:

- Libraries of research institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences
- University libraries
- Public libraries including two national libraries.

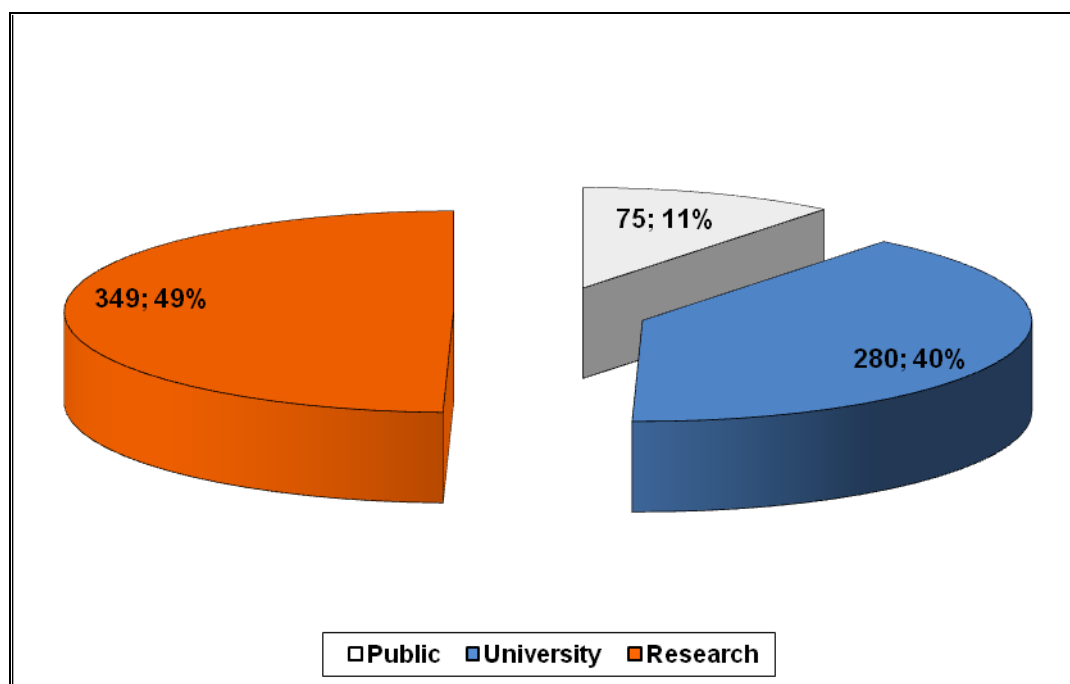Figure 5 shows the distribution of member libraries by type.

Figure 5. NEICON members by type.

The distribution by type of the libraries which responded to the NEICON survey turned out to be virtually the same.

The results of the survey show great difference between libraries of different types as regards subscription to e-resources from their own budgets. University libraries seem to be prepared for this better than others. They are already subscribing to many packages using their own money. There is a common tendency for university libraries: their e-resource purchasing expenses increase both in absolute figures and as a percentage of acquisition budgets. Several leading universities spend annually about one million U.S. dollars on the most expensive foreign scholarly resources. Such amount of money is considered to be very large for a Russian institution. Compare this with 80,000 U.S. dollars which constitute mean expenses of a Russian university for the acquisition of e-resources. Thus, a leading university spends on e-resources 10-15 times more than an average university. Funding of public libraries differs substantially: national libraries are in a better position than regional public libraries; still, they spend less money than leading universities. Libraries of research institutions are in the worst situation. A great majority of them rely completely on the resources subscribed to by RFBR, NEICON and Russian Academy of Sciences as they are unable to pay for them from their own budgets.

Thus, the survey shows that research institution libraries will suffer more than others from the gradual decrease in governmental funding. One possible solution to this would be aggregation of scholarly resources in regional public libraries which allow walk-in users to access license materials.

None the less, NEICON has to decrease funding of current subscriptions for its member libraries. After 2014, they are to pay for their subscriptions themselves. At the same time, NEICON will develop a special program to purchase scholarly archives and organize

local loading. The program will secure long-term preservation of the archives on Russian servers and provide hundreds of institutions across Russia with access to them.