The idea of providing nationwide access to electronic information in Iceland is now 10 years old. Upplysing, the Association of Libraries and Librarianship, called the conference which was held on October 15, 2007 to celebrate this occasion. The fact that Icelandic people have free and unlimited access to the contents of about 14,000 electronic journals in all aspects of knowledge, plus several databases, has been the envy of librarians and scientists from around the world. It was therefore considered highly appropriate to look back, but also to look forward and study the likely developments in the field of access to information in Iceland. The main questions were: How has this project benefited the Icelandic society and what is likely to happen in the future?

To look back briefly on this development, it all started in 1997. It was becoming clear then in Iceland as in other countries that the future of access to scientific information would be through electronic access rather than through printed media. The Association of Research Librarians in Iceland (predecessor of Upplysing) decided to focus on what was happening in the world and called a conference on September 11, 1997 titled: Information on the Internet: Conference on the Access to Information for Industry as well as the Scientific Community. The invited speaker was Dr. Leslie Campell Rampey, a librarian from the state of Georgia in the USA who described how the libraries in Georgia had joined forces to reach agreements with producers and suppliers of databases and information resources. Through this cooperation it had been possible to reach a better deal with the suppliers than libraries could reach individually. This struck a cord with the Icelandic library community and at the end of the conference a resolution was passed, directed to the Prime Minister of Iceland, where the government was encouraged to appoint a committee that would work out a proposal on how to guarantee to the Icelandic people that they have as much access as possible to electronic information through the Internet. The committee should deliver the proposals no later than March 1998.

In the spring of 1998 a committee was appointed to work out a plan of how to proceed. The committee consisted of professional li-
brarians and computer specialists. The com-
mittee presented their proposals in April of
1999 and had then surveyed the field to find
out how interested Icelandic librarians were in
the idea of licensing. To make a long story
short, the first agreement was signed by the
Minister of Education, Björn Bjarnason on
April 23, 1999 with *Encyclopedia Britannica*,
and the most remarkable fact is that *Britan-
nica* was made searchable to every single com-
puter in Iceland, linked to the Internet. This
was a historical moment for the Icelandic li-
brary community as well as for all users of
information in the country.

Other licenses followed and now, on the
10th anniversary, the Icelandic nation has ac-
cess to about 14,000 electronic journals in all
fields of knowledge as well as several databas-
es, access that is free and unlimited to the in-
dividual user. Users do not need to be linked
to an institution or a library; all Icelandic IP-
numbers provide this access. This fact has
changed the research facilities in Iceland im-
mensely and scientists in Iceland have now
among the most comprehensive access availa-
ble to any scientific community in the world
from their home computers. It is now possible
to open small research institutes in the most
remote parts of the country, providing a
wealth of information without much cost in
acquisition of research material. Students, as
well as the general public, can all access the
most recent scientific materials wherever they
are located and at any time, day or night. This
nationwide access costs the Icelandic society
about 1.1 million Euros and is paid for by li-
braries and institutions and the payment is
based on different types of models, depending
on the type of institution or library. The Min-
istry of Education also provides a grant to sub-
didize the license fees. Most libraries in the
country contribute to the project and the us-
ers can download as much as they like.

The anniversary conference that was held
on October 15, 2007 consisted of three main
themes: A brief history and development of
the project and the experience of the users;
the next national project, and thirdly the fo-
cus was on future information policies as well
as some possible scenarios in the field.

After a brief historical survey of the project
given by the President of Upplýsing, Sigrún
Klara Hannesdóttir, the conference was opened
by the Minister of Education, Thörgerdur
Katrín Gunnarsdóttir. In her presentation she
outlined how important the nationwide li-
censes were in the development of universities
and research institutes, as in fact all distance
education and the development of higher ed-
ucation in the country. The government has
set the policy to provide equal access and equal
educational opportunities for everybody in
the country and this is one of the key elements
in fulfilling this policy. Access is equally as
good on the campus of the largest universities
as it is on an isolated farm in the north-east.

*Sander Verboom*, Account Development
Manager with Elsevier who has followed the
development of the use of Elsevier sources in
Iceland, presented a very positive picture of
the constant increase in the use of scientific
information, and he made an effort to link to-
gether the increase in the publication of re-
viewed articles by Icelandic scientists with the
increased use of the electronic sources. He
called his paper *ScienceDirect in Iceland - A
Ten-Year Subscription to Growth.*

*Pállina Hédinsdóttir*, Librarian at the Natu-
ral Institute Library, has just completed her
MLIS-degree where she looked at the changes
that have taken place in her library with the
advent of this electronic access. She cited a sci-
entist that she interviewed for her study who
claimed that without this access, some of his
research could not be carried out. Two people
from the medical field talked about their ex-
perience with the nationwide licensing and
how the increased access had helped them
with their research, teaching and practice.

Dagrún Ellen Árnadóttir gave a presentation on the information behavior of university students who make great use of this facility. All agreed that the gigantic improvement in access has made their life, studies and scientific work easier and more effective. They all wished for more material and cited some sources that were high on their list of preferences.

The second factor that is of special interest to the Icelandic scientific community at the moment is the registration of research in progress and the preservation of scientific data in digital repositories as well as open access to research publications. Arne Jakobsson, Library Director and Project Manager for NORA, gave a comprehensive view the development of institutional repositories in Norway. The Norwegian approach to shared preservation of digital resources and their concepts on open access seems in many aspects to be the ideal model for Iceland. Halla Björg Baldursdóttir, Project Manager from the Prime Ministry gave a short review of a committee report on the preservation of electronic documents which has just been completed. Dirk Willinghöfer, Senior Project Manager gave an introduction to DigiTool, which is a system developed by Ex Libris to control and make electronic documents available. He described the technical details of the system and how it reacts with Aleph, the Library System in use in all Icelandic libraries.

The conference finished with two forward looking presentations. Sólveig Porsteinsdóttir, Director of Libraries and Information at the National Hospital described her future vision on open access and the possible future scenario. Guðbjörg Sigurðardóttir, Chair of the Policy Department of the Prime Ministry, described the work on the next governmental policy for the Icelandic Information Society.

It was very interesting to get the users’ own experience with nationwide access, and it would also be a very interesting study to look at how the various problems that have come up during the lifetime of the project have been approached and solved. The Icelandic nationwide access is unique in the world so there were few models to follow and all solutions had to be developed locally to fit the Icelandic situation. The future of the project seems to be secure and for the scientific community as well as for industry it would be hard to imagine what would happen if this facility would be closed down.