

FIL Newsletter Issue 28

REVIEW OF THE FIL CONFERENCE 1998

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INTERLEND '98 CONFERENCE REPORT

We arrived at the University of Surrey well equipped with campus maps and conference programmes (all previously supplied). The registration desk was easily located and our FIL welcome included having our luggage carried to our accommodation quarters (thanks Piers!). Our rooms were as always bright, clean and comfortable.

We returned to the lecture hall in time to hear the keynote address which this year was given by **John Blagden, Librarian at Cranfield University**. Entitled '*Access vs. Holdings - beyond the rhetoric*', the paper profiled the nature of ILL provision at this largely research-based institution. The speaker argued that the access debate had been subjected to a large degree of hype. The reality was that within the UK higher education sector ILL's accounted for a mere 2.4% of total loans. ILL demand at Cranfield however, was well above this average, accounting for almost 20%. This volume was largely explained by the nature of the reader population - exclusively postgraduates, studying mainly in scientific fields. An access-oriented service, Cranfield has witnessed a twenty-fold increase in the use of electronic bibliographic databases over the past decade. It has found that in certain cases the cancellation of journal titles has made economic sense. Statistics reveal that the number of requests made for such cancelled journals has been largely insignificant. The costs for these ILL requests was low when compared with the amount saved through subscription cancellation.

And so to matters social. The conference dinner was held at Senate House. Proceedings kicked off with a lively wine reception. Dinner was served on the eighth floor (with a view unfortunately obscured by a polythene surround!). The evening was an exuberant mixture of food, wine and the odd brain teaser. Conversations were of the heat, holidays and Scotland's chances in the World Cup that evening. A quick transfer to the student bar concluded a most enjoyable evening. Incidentally, we found that the English spirit measure is somewhat smaller than its Irish counterpart!

As usual **Mike McGrath's (BLDSC)** witty and anecdotal delivery is a pleasure to hear and his paper '*From Paper to Electronic: hybrid or thoroughbred?*' commenced Wednesday's proceedings enthusiastically. This paper acknowledged that current document delivery is a puzzling environment, the future of which is difficult to predict. However, the consensus is that the virtual library is not developing as quickly as the literature might suggest as there is not a significant move within HE from holdings to access. Although the growth in electronic publishing continues, difficulties regarding copyright, technological issues (e.g. ease of downloading from WWW), high cost of set up and upgrade of software need to be resolved.

BLDSC supplies about 80% of priced document delivery in the UK. With the growth of electronic storage, access and delivery this percentage will decrease, and the critical mass issue will cause a vicious spiral which could result in the closure of BLDSC service as we know it today. To achieve critical mass cooperation is vital, e.g. all material must use compatible software, but such cooperation is difficult to envisage as the publishing industry is a fragmented one.

Robert Kirk's paper on *'Interlending and access'* outlined the current difficulties faced by ILL services within the public library sector in the UK. Most important of these has been the impact of local government reorganisation. Restructuring has meant the disaggregation of both stock and expertise. Joint arrangements between authorities has continued thanks largely to the commitment of former colleagues keen to maintain a high quality of service.

What has been required is the production of a framework for the future development of ILL provision and the adoption of an access strategy that promotes the principles of cooperation and resource sharing between authorities. It is always useful to have the opportunity to hear of the experience of other library sectors and Robert Kirk's paper certainly provided some insight into issues faced by those who work in local authority libraries.

Wednesday afternoon brought glorious sunshine - a perfect opportunity to enjoy outings to Polesden Lacey or RHS Wisley. Others chose a tour of the University of Surrey Library. Workshops were held in the evening and allowed for the usual exchange of experience, opinions and ideas.

Nancy Elkington opened the final day's proceedings with a most informative paper on *'The changing nature of international resource sharing'*. She started her presentation by comparing and contrasting US and UK interlending history and environments. She reported that the UK central supply model is often the envy of US counterparts. The speaker profiled the activities of SHARES, the RLG shared resource program of which several British libraries are now members. The paper considered the prospects, barriers, risks and benefits of international collaboration.

Continuing the theme of the conference, *'Forging links - cooperation versus competition'*, **John Blunden-Ellis'** (CALIM) paper outlined CALIM, the resource sharing operation of a consortium of higher education libraries in the Manchester area. CALIM was established in 1992 and serves a user base of over 100,000. With statistical aid, this paper demonstrated the holdings and supply patterns within the consortium and also gave some insight into the difficulties encountered in resource sharing, balanced with the benefits. This paper was especially interesting in its account of the practice of resource sharing within HE - the vision and reality.

If not the answer to all our prayers Z39.50 will certainly help ILL operations enormously. **Rosemary Russell** outlined the MODELS eLib project and the proposal which emerged to 'clump' by subject area or geographical region. Mention was made of the existing clumps, i.e. Music Consortium and work presently underway in the M25 group of HE libraries. Consultation with the EU projects and collaboration on the development of an international Z39.50 profile will allow for a global

marketplace, indicate library system requirements and jointly influence vendor implementation. Altogether exciting times!

Rosemary Russell's was the last paper of Interlend '98 and the formal proceedings drew to a close. The rush to collect luggage, to make connections for trains and planes, with promises to keep in touch, followed. Another successful FIL conference had ended and thanks are due to the hard work of the organising committee.

Interlend '98 had provided plenty of food for thought. The programme included a wide range of topics. The workshops were valuable and it was difficult to make a choice. The weather obliged, especially on Wednesday afternoon for the conference trips - Polesden Lacey looked splendid in the afternoon sunshine.

However, aside from the formal proceedings and organised events, the annual conference is a welcome opportunity to meet others working in the area of Interlibrary Loans and Document Supply. Names are put to faces, faces to names and the sociability is fun. We look forward to Interlend '99 at Durham.