

Notes from Improving service visibility and impact workshop

Outputs from the FIL @ BLDSC Workshops, 16th March 2012

What is the profile of your interlending service?

For some in the workshops the answer was a relative invisibility, hard to find and the poor relation of library services. For others the total opposite was true, with the service operating a key and celebrated part of the library's services to patrons. There were issues from many of the delegates on the perception of just whom the service was for – some found that for example only researchers used their services despite them being open to all. Undergraduate students for example shouldn't need it in the early years of their study, but by the time they came to their final year were no longer as receptive as they used to be to new services and carried on irregardless.

Having specialist librarians (e.g. clinical) embedded within academic and specialist departments as a conduit to patrons, whom are well aware of the broad span of library services including ILL, was noted as a majorly successful way of raising a services profile.

On the other hand some delegates reported that while in the past they had been mentioned during induction events for new patrons, that with time pressures and so many services to be highlighted that they were often seen as an "easy" option to cut. The impact of this was a diminished awareness across all patrons of the service.

What have you done and considered doing to market or raise the visibility of interlending within your library services?

A couple of suggestions made were to use posters around the library or to use paper inserts in books within the library flagging up the ILL service and its benefits. Having a good web or intranet presence was also noted as an important step in reaching out to patrons. Turning up in person at student centric (e.g. a post-graduate fairs) or public events was another good approach to directly marketing the services offered by interlending teams, as well as the library as a whole.

Some delegates suggested that a campaign to promote ILLs, rather than one off events, was a more successful way of raising awareness. Linked in to the launch of new services (e.g. SEDs) so that it wasn't simply promoted the service as is, but taking the opportunity to flag up improvements as well – such as those offered through the BLDSS' new formats (full colour!).

What is the perception or understanding of your interlending services by library colleagues?

The answer from the workshops was a mixed bag.

For many there is a strong understanding of ILLs as most members of the interlending team are based across a number of departments, meaning the knowledge is shared further. Staff work in a mix of front of house and back office roles, and most appeared to be from non-converged (with IT) services. The message most often shared with all colleagues was that ILL are one of range of services to turn to in the supply of materials – that local resources (physical and electronic) should always be explored first, but beyond that the option of visiting other libraries or employing ILLs was one that many librarians advocated as a sound strategy.

For others though there is a poor understanding of how ILL functions from staff, especially more senior staff whom have never been involved with it. Some noted that they'd overheard inaccuracies being passed along to patrons which was frustrating. In these cases it was noted that training and advocacy of ILL services was need to be directed back to staff not involved to avoid misconceptions being passed along.

What is the perception of senior managers and department heads of interlending services?

Generally positive, as a benefit of the services offered by the library. A government librarian working in an essentially bookless library (!) said their patrons and senior managers "loved it" – no stock to manage reduced acquisition and curation costs to a just in time delivery of just what they needed. However, as noted above while the overwhelming feeling was that senior management respected and appreciated the ILL function and teams, that there was a disconnection in their awareness of the full range of impact that the services offered; which in itself was an area that could do with some redress.

What is the impact of any charging regimes

Passing on charges to patrons isn't a great marketing element, but it does help reinforce the high quality of the service offered. There were some concerns in the two sessions where over 70% of libraries represented levied a charge (nominal in most but not all cases) for all ILLs that especially in academic sector the new intake of higher fee students would be less satisfied with the service. As a result there is a need to more strongly market the ILL service's benefits to offset the need to recoup revenue.

Issues over recharging depts or devolving budgets to them were also touched on. Some delegates reported that while budgets were at the same level, now the funds were controlled by the departments outside of the library that there was an elevated reluctance to spend the money on resourcing ILL requests.

For many delegates beyond the service brand impact of charging, the fear was that without some kind of levelling mechanism like charging that the flood gates to irrelevant requests would be opened. However, it was noted that at least one organisation represented that doesn't charge had not experienced this problem.

Gareth J Johnson, Chair, Forum for Interlending and Information Delivery, March 2012