National Acquisitions Group
The Studio, Leeds
Thursday 8th November 2018

The Combined Regions Discussion Session:
The Future of Inter Library Loans

- What aspects of our current systems and practices work well?
- How can libraries work better together - what is currently holding us back?
- What do our users want, what are their expectations?
- What areas do we need to develop - how can emerging national projects help?

Current picture and issues:
- Are we seeing a general withdrawal of inter loan provision?
- Attendees generally feedback that ILLs are still being offered but also aware of increasing numbers of services withdrawing from provision, which makes the inter loan system harder to run and justify
- Some authorities are only paying lip service to making material available whilst levying charges that effectively choke off demand
- Significant concerns that authorities which are net lenders are propping up other authorities
- Net lenders perceive an increase in fragmentation of the system
- Some authorities questioning what is in it for them to be a net lender
- Use is decreasing and costs are increasing
- Charges – many at around the £8 level, some making a full recharge of the BL fee
- Even this is not full cost recovery, as no local costs are included
- Some taking an up-front admin payment of £5 which is not refundable if the item can't be supplied
- British Library's cost recovery stance is pushing up all charges
- Fees for local customers are increasing, caused to an extent by the increase in BL fees
- Costs for accessing journals limits access – hard for services to justify subscriptions for low numbers of users
- However, in some authorities provision of journal articles has now exceeded ILL book request levels
- Some authorities are taking the decision to withdraw from Unity UK
- Concern expressed around the national postcode lottery of provision
- Breadth of Non-Fiction purchasing is reducing across the country
- Reduced pooling of stock drives up charges for all remaining services
- Some services are still promoting the offer that any item of stock can be obtained and around the room, all are signed up to the principle of access to anything required
- Expertise is declining as lack of experience is reducing the levels of awareness, and reduced confidence in handling enquiries
- Challenges around channelling of requests to particular specialist teams vs. Service-level awareness of availability of ILLs (or lack of)
- Issue with ILL teams being isolated from the wider staff, lack of awareness of the service
- Front line staff, and volunteers in community managed libraries unaware of wider networks and principles of access to knowledge

- Senior management raise concerns around the levels of loaning vs borrowing, and staff time being directed to inter-lending
- Decision to purchase or ILL – the decision to purchase an item puts it in to the system, and means another authority won't need to make the purchase. Sometimes it is now cheaper to buy a copy than pursue an ILL. Price point threshold for obtaining items is changing
- Questions around subsequent disposal / adding to stock and condition of material supplied
- Type of stock requested: used to be Large Print, Audiobooks, Series fiction; much reduced requesting for fiction due to Amazon

Regional fiction reserves:
- Many now not contributing to the scheme
- Some reserves still extant, but not being added to
- Some senior management questioning the value of the provision, and indeed potential revenue generation from disposal
- Scheme is probably effectively defunct, but no clarity on whether a successor system is necessary or achievable

Customer experience and expectations:
- Relatively low numbers of users, but making more frequent use of the service
- Customers experience increasing expense of making use of the service – however this has not resulted in any significant level of complaints / profile of the issue
- We are living in an Amazon Prime / Netflix world, which shapes customer expectation
- Many users expecting next-day service, whereas current infrastructure is reducing the speed of access
- Impact of Google Books – expectation that everything is available and digitised, when in fact this isn't the case at all
- Many users will want the material regardless of condition
- Big divide between new users, who come to the service with no/low expectations, vs. those who expect a fully up to date, modern system
- Variable charging from authority to authority makes the service harder to administer
- Not a level playing field with the range of charges in place – local / regional / national differences
- "If you need it, we will get it" – was/is a founding principle of public library provision but not sure this manifests as general practice these days. Needs to be re-affirmed/established

Areas for improvement/development:
- Resources should become more visible through the National Bibliographic Knowledgebase
- Are there any regional-level solutions that would support provision?
- Is there any scope for development of one or two libraries becoming ILL Hubs for a region?
- ILLs still seen as a very useful service at a practitioner level.
- There is a notable division of access between academic and public libraries. The type of material being requested through public libraries is generally not deeply academic; often a higher level than general stock on open access, but not purely scholarly. General perception that although all library sectors are struggling, pressures appear to be more acute in FE than HE - ILLs can bridge a gap in access to CPD opportunities – on leaving University the world of work often has no easy access to regular CPD; access to journals can provide a stepping stone to keeping up to date with a chosen profession
- Significant requests for older fiction
- Access to databases to identify and find sources working well

- o Many authorities still have substantial reserve collections - Although resources are currently available, there are internal pressures to reduce sites and achieve cost reductions, so need to address this before it's too late

Single Digital Presence:
- o Will the budgets to create and maintain the provision be sustainable?
- o Is the concept really a quick win, or will it divert attention even further from local level provision?
- o SDP will be reliant on the whole adopting and participating
- o What will be the success measures? - Dependent on use by our populations
- o Will it result in further diminution of the regions?
- o What about the physical presence and provision; how will this be maintained or is the idea to digitise and share resources that way?