

## ***ILL in the faster lane: empowering users with HKALL***

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### ***Abstract***

In an environment of reduced funding for higher education institutions, and consequently reduced funding for the libraries of those institutions, three of the eight university libraries in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China (HKSAR) embarked on an ambitious trial. With a main objective to achieve greater value for money and greater quality of service in the use of their libraries' shrinking budgets, the libraries at the University of Hong Kong, the City University of Hong Kong, and Lingnan University sought to assess the impact of the introduction of a collaborative, user-initiated, unmediated, interlibrary loan service. Following a period of examination and discussion, INNOVATIVE's INN-Reach module was chosen as the preferred system to be used during the trial which commenced in January, 2004.

In this paper, the authors will explore the reasons behind conducting such a trial, the issues that confronted the collaborating partners before and during the trial, as well as an assessment of the degree of success of the project. In particular, following the trial period of nine months, the three university libraries sought answers to a number of important questions. Through a detailed analysis of available data, coupled with user and library staff evaluation obtained through surveys and focus groups, these questions were answered. In their paper the authors will outline the answers to these questions along with other lessons learned. The paper will conclude with a look to the future for collaborative, user-initiated, unmediated, interlibrary loan services in Hong Kong.

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## ***Introduction: Why we embarked on the experiment***

In 2004, three of the eight government funded universities in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China (HKSAR) embarked on an experiment in user initiated interlibrary lending. Over a period of nine months data was gathered and user reactions were gauged. The motivation for undertaking this test was manifold.

### **Changes in the higher education sector in Hong Kong**

Like most higher education sectors across the globe, the Hong Kong sector is undergoing a period of rapid and profound change. In 2002, the latest report into higher education in Hong Kong was released. The *Sutherland Report*<sup>1</sup> noted that the mere shift from education as “teaching” to “teaching and learning” marked a significant change to a more student centered approach (Sutherland, 2002, p23) for the Hong Kong higher education sector. The Report noted four further significant change factors. Broadly speaking these were changing student demographics (Hong Kong Government’s policy to expand post-secondary participation from just over 30% to 60% - renewed emphasis on lifelong learning), the economy (Hong Kong Government’s policy to move towards a knowledge based society), technology (opening up great opportunities but also notes the vast amount of rubbish readily accessible by students and highlights the need to educate students in assessing quality resources) and changes in knowledge development (information explosion has meant that no one person can have knowledge of all the things they need to know).

### **Higher education funding**

The 1990s saw a great period of growth for universities in Hong Kong. During the ten years from 1990 to 2000, the Government's recurrent grant to universities increased by 324%<sup>2</sup>. In 1996 it was foreshadowed by the Government that “there would be a total of 5% funding reduction within the six years from 1998/99 to 2004/05” as “tertiary education has entered a consolidation stage and in view of the public's demand for enhanced productivity in the public sector.” In fact total approved grant funding to UGC funded institutions dropped more significantly from 1998/99 (HK\$14 billion) to 2004/05 (HK\$12 billion) to the tune of 14%<sup>3</sup>.

This tumultuous environment of dramatic change and reduced funding have affected the sector dramatically and, in turn, these have affected the libraries and the librarians of those institutions, causing them to think differently about user needs, service delivery and the need to maximise the value of each dollar spent.

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<sup>1</sup> Sutherland, Stewart. *Higher education in Hong Kong: report of the University Grants Committee* / commissioned by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, [Hong Kong: University Grants Committee, 2002] available at <[http://www.ugc.edu.hk/english/documents/UGCpubs/her\\_e.html](http://www.ugc.edu.hk/english/documents/UGCpubs/her_e.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> *Speech by Mrs Fanny Law* Secretary for Education and Manpower at the Legislative Council Meeting on Wednesday, 4 April, 2001 Resumed Debate on the 2001 Appropriation Bill available at <<http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeid=135&uid=9126>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Amount of Approved Grants for UGC-funded Institutions, 1998-99 to 2004-05* available at <[http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/ugc/stat/grants\\_series.pdf](http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/ugc/stat/grants_series.pdf)>.

### **Cooperation and deeper collaboration**

First of all, and as is common knowledge, libraries enjoy a long tradition of cooperation and indeed collaboration. This is no different in Hong Kong. In particular, in the higher education sector, the Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee (JULAC) comprises the university librarians of all eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) and was established in 1967 as “a forum to discuss, coordinate, and collaborate on library information resources and services among the libraries of the eight tertiary education institutions” <<http://www.julac.org/>>.

In terms of resource sharing the motivation for greater collaboration is obvious: because library shelves lack sufficient resources to meet all of their users' needs; libraries do not have enough funds to buy all of the new things they need; they don't have adequate space to house these materials even if they did have the money; and they don't have the staff to buy, process, catalogue, shelve and preserve everything that is needed. Secondly, for Hong Kong's higher education sector, in the current and future economy, to remain competitive it must do more with the same or even fewer resources. It made sense for the eight government-sponsored university libraries to make better use of the materials they have, but which may not be fully utilised at all times. Third, this resource sharing style of cooperation both actually and symbolically fulfills the need to demonstrate that our university libraries are taking advantage of technology to deeply collaborate. Finally, if all of the JULAC libraries participated, the several million volumes accessible could serve as a safety net for each library while they try to meet their universities needs and as they strive to differentiate themselves from each other.

Notwithstanding all of these however, the opening up of resources to all university users serves the purpose of enhancing scholarship within Hong Kong and, it was hoped, doing so more efficiently than currently possible. This was, perhaps, the greatest motivating factor for our experiment.

### **Geography**

The implementation of a user initiated interlibrary loan service seemed by many to be an idea made for Hong Kong. Geographically, Hong Kong is small. Situated in Eastern Asia, bordering the South China Sea and mainland China, it covers 1,092 sq km (approximately three times the size of Malta, twice the size of Monaco or less than twice that of Singapore). With eight government funded universities contained within this small area, the timely delivery of materials between campuses struck many as a reality whose time had come.

### ***Background to the project***

In early 2002 a taskforce consisting of representatives from all eight Hong Kong universities was convened to investigate the feasibility of introducing a user initiated document delivery service among the eight universities. In many ways this taskforce was created from the previous experience of the then new librarian at the University of Hong Kong, Dr Tony Ferguson. Having recently arrived in Hong Kong from North America,

Ferguson brought with him positive experiences of deeper resource sharing opportunities. The group was specifically charged to explore:

- The experience of other consortia employing user initiated document delivery (allowing users to place online requests for materials from other libraries) including the pros and cons of its use;
- The use of software/utilities/systems which could be used by the JULAC Libraries to facilitate user initiated document delivery;
- The value/non value of using net borrower agreements by consortia with particular reference to consortia employing user initiated document delivery systems;
- The resource implications (e.g. reduce ILL-based borrowing and lending but will likely see significant increase on circulation increase, etc.).

Following an interim report that produced positive findings, the group was then charged to investigate and recommend the best software for enabling a user initiated interlibrary loan service in Hong Kong.

### **The chosen software**

At the outset, the taskforce formulated essential criteria to be met by the chosen software. Specifically these were:

- The system must accept user initiated online ILL requests;
- The system must support unmediated ILL requests directly from users to lending libraries;
- The system must support monograph loans;
- The system must check incoming ILL requests automatically against the user's own collection, and block that request if the requested item was available on the shelf;
- The system must support Chinese, Japanese and Korean (CJK) characters.

Following extensive deliberations the taskforce arrived at Innovative Interfaces Inc's (III's) INN-Reach software as the recommended platform for meeting the Hong Kong universities' needs. The INN-Reach software was judged the best system by that taskforce because it fulfilled all of the five criteria. Additionally, as it is produced by the same company as the existing integrated circulation, acquisitions, serials, and cataloguing systems of all eight institutions, questions of system compatibility did not arise.

Despite all the obvious, and indeed less than obvious, benefits of implementing such a service, there existed a degree of trepidation among several taskforce members. Some of the concerns included the cost of implementing the service, the impact on local collections and the possible threat of reduced funding. Subsequently, three of the eight JULAC Libraries, the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), Lingnan University (LU) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU), decided to test INN-Reach's effectiveness with a view to providing answers to the following questions in the hope of encouraging the other 5 institutions to participate. The questions we sought to answer included:

- Would the use of INN-Reach alter the amount of borrowing and lending between these three institutions;
- Would some libraries use it more than others;
- What subjects of materials would be borrowed;
- What would be the differences in the amount of Western language versus Chinese language books borrowed;
- Would the use of INN-Reach speed up the process of borrowing a book;
- Would the use of INN-Reach decrease the costs of processing a borrowing/lending request;
- What classes of users would use this new system more/less; and
- How would our patrons react to this new system?

Following the acceptance of the recommended platform a Working Group was established to oversee the implementation of the new service. The service was given the name Hong Kong Academic Library Link (HKALL).

### ***Issues that confronted us***

Behind HKALL there is a union catalogue and a circulation interface supported by INN-Reach. Issues facing the Working Group were thus naturally related to the building up of the union catalogue and also the setting up of various circulation rules and policies within the HKALL consortium.

#### **Building the HKALL Union Catalogue**

The HKALL Union Catalogue was created by matching and merging records from the member libraries and all participating libraries agreed to contribute all their records to the union database (with the understanding that they can still decide what materials were available for circulation within the consortium). During the record matching process, however, it was discovered that the matching algorithm, originally designed for Western bibliographic records, was far from satisfactory when handling CJK records. For libraries in Hong Kong, where a significant portion of the collections are CJK materials, this was a major concern.

With the commencement of the HKALL experimental project, the first build of the Union Catalogue among the three participating libraries took place in January 2004. The merge rate of the entire union database was just 17.5% and a large number of CJK records were found unmatched. Difference in cataloguing practices of the member libraries was suspected to be the culprit, for example, the LU Library enters CJK characters in Tag 245 of their bibliographic records, while HKU and CityU enter them in Tag 880. The original matching algorithm of INN-Reach simply did not match Tag 880 with Tag 245 and thus resulted in a low match rate. Other variants appeared in the ways that different libraries handle the edition statement (Tag 250), publisher statement (Tag 260) and pagination statement (Tag 300) and these also caused many failed matches. Differences in how CJK characters were encoded (CCCII and EACC) in the system of the three libraries were factors that could not be ignored either.

In November 2004, 10 months after HKALL was open up to users, it was decided that the Union Catalogue should be rebuilt, especially when all the member libraries had converted to UTF-8 mapping for their CJK characters in October 2004. HKALL borrowing was thus stopped for one week for this second rebuild and it was hoped that the match rate would improve this time. A new matching algorithm that matched Tag 880 with Tag 245 was used but it turned out that the match rate for CJK records had improved only slightly.

Other issues related to the building up of the Union Catalogue were comparatively simple and easy when compared to the CJK problems. Decisions on master record priority (that is, during the merging process, records from which library the system should take as the master ones) and load balancing priority (that is, which library the system should first send the borrowing requests to) could be quickly sorted out without any controversies. They were in fact not technical issues but decisions on “who” should come first. With mutual respect and trust, these were not problems at all for the participating libraries notwithstanding that it was only the pilot experiment.

#### **Setting up HKALL circulation rules and policies**

With the Union Database in place, another important task for participating libraries was to set up rules and policies that governed the circulation of books within the HKALL consortium.

Formulating central circulation rules and policies for HKALL had been a smooth process during the HKALL pilot experiment when there were only three libraries involved. However, there were still challenges. Given that each of the three participating libraries had their own set of local circulation policies and a full range of patron types that were specifically tailor-made for their own institutional environment, circulation librarians of the three experimenting libraries had to be very careful that the policies that they proposed for HKALL would not contradict with local considerations. It was therefore a common consensus among the circulation librarians that they would:

- minimise policies that interfere with local circulation practices while still trying to maximise use of the mega collection;
- ensure that the policies would not undermine the interest of users in the owning libraries; and
- make the policies as simple as possible so that:
  - they are easily understood by both users and operational staff members;
  - operational procedures are simple and administrative costs are minimal;
  - they can readily include new participating libraries.

With endorsement from the respective library directors, a set of central rules and policies was finally formulated for the HKALL pilot experiment:

1. *Materials for circulation:* all member libraries will strive to circulate to others what they circulate to their own users, with exception to AV, short-term loan materials and other collections that the local library dictates;
2. *Eligible users:* all staff members and students of the member libraries can borrow books through HKALL, disregarding their grades and levels of studies. This represented a significant change for most libraries who generally restricted interlibrary lending services to staff and postgraduates;
3. *Loan quotas and periods:* Users can borrow up to 10 HKALL items at any one time but there are two levels of loan periods, namely, 15 calendar days and 30 calendar days. The former is for academic and research staff members as well as postgraduate students and the latter is for general grade staff members as well as undergraduate and associate degree students. Patrons are given 5 calendar days to pick up the requested items before they are sent back to the owning libraries;
4. *Recalls:* Patrons of the other libraries cannot recall checked out HKALL items. Local patrons of the owning libraries, however, can do so through their local catalogues;
5. *Renewal:* a single self-renewal is allowed for the same number of days as the original entitlement provided that the item concerned is not being recalled by any local patron of the owning library;
6. *Overdues and fines:* Normal and overdue fines are HK\$2.00 and HK\$4.00 per item per calendar day respectively and are collected by the borrowing library. Fines collected will not be transferred between institutions because this would create unnecessary administrative costs;
7. *Loss and damage of books:* Since each of the member libraries has had their own set of book replacement and penalty policies, it was agreed that for cases of book loss or damage, the owning library will charge the HKALL patron according to their established local rules via the borrowing library.

The central circulation rules and policies for HKALL had proven to work fine during the HKALL pilot experiment. Looking back, throughout the discussion, there had been different opinions on “who” could borrow through HKALL, whether the services should be extended to the undergraduate and associate degree students. The dictum was that a university library should be able to locally meet the needs of this class of students. However, since numerically these students account for the largest group of patrons, it was finally decided that they should be included in the HKALL pilot experiment to see if they indeed needed the support. In fact, usage statistics (discussed below) did show that this category of students had borrowed extensively through HKALL and thus the need exists.

### ***Lessons learned: Quantitative analysis***

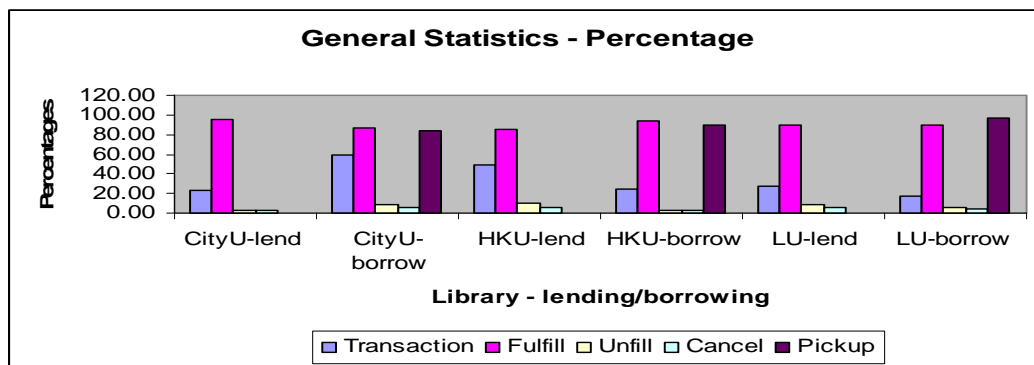
As the HKALL pilot service was intended to answer the questions posed (see above), the collection of data was essential to determining the value of the service in order to encourage the other 5 universities to participate. Data on the transactions of HKALL from February to September 2004 were collected and analysed for statistical purposes. Selected findings are presented in the following sections.

### General statistics

HKALL started in February 2004, the beginning of second semester/term of the 2003-04 academic year. It continued throughout the summer term into the ensuing academic year, 2004-05. Although not quite a full year, the pilot did provide data covering various times of the academic cycle, including those for the first month of a new academic year.

In the first 8 months that HKALL was offered, a total of 7633 borrowing/lending transactions were recorded. Within HKALL, CityU made the largest number of requests at around 58%, followed by HKU and then LU. Also within this period, HKU was the largest lender at around 49%, followed by LU and then CityU. The overall request fulfillment rate was very high at 88.5%; unfilled requests amounted to only 6.8% of the total, with the rest cancelled by the requesting patrons. CityU achieved a lending fulfillment rate of over 94% and HKU had a borrowing fulfillment rate of over 93%. Thus in terms of fulfilling requests, HKALL did a very good job.

For pickups, LU achieved the best rate at just over 97% on average over the period. In the months of April and August, their patrons picked up all of their fulfilled requests, achieving a 100% pickup rate. HKU's overall pickup rate was over 89%. Despite making the largest number of requests, CityU's pickup rate averaged at over 84%. The overall pickup rate was around 90%. Within the 8 month period, the launch of the service in February and the start of the new academic year in September saw the highest demands resulting in high pickup rates. The lowest pickup rates were recorded in May when students were about to break for summer.



A plausible reason for the above-mentioned good pickup rate was perhaps due to the pledged 2-working day turnaround time for HKALL interlibrary borrowing/lending. "Turnaround time" was the time from the submission of requests (directly by the patrons themselves) to the delivery of the requested items to the home libraries of patrons<sup>4</sup>, at which point pickup notices would be sent to the requesting patrons. Patrons were expected to collect their items within 5 days of receiving the pickup notification. HKALL deliberately kept the entire process on a tight schedule, enticing patrons to respond promptly.

<sup>4</sup> Collected data also showed that 95% of the requests of the pilot project were met within the two working days, compared with only 9% of ILL requests.



There is no doubt that the introduction of HKALL increased the amount of interlibrary loan borrowing. When we compared the amount of traditional interlibrary loan borrowing in 2003 and 2004 with that of HKALL, the amount of borrowing using HKALL was significantly larger as shown in the table below. This is the result of giving users an easy to use system and allowing them to borrow freely. Also, the pool of eligible users became larger with HKALL, as undergraduate students were allowed, for the first time, to use such interlibrary loan service. Further results of this will be shown in a later section.

<b>Period</b>	<b>CityU</b>	<b>HKU</b>	<b>LU</b>
<b>ILL 03</b>	1,229	570	282
<b>ILL 04</b>	921	242	222
<b>HKALL</b>	4,494	1,858	1,281

As mentioned above, in terms of requests made and fulfillment rates, akin with traditional ILL, there were net borrowers and lenders in HKALL. It is worth noting, at this point, the collection sizes of the three participating institutions. At June 2004, HKU held the largest collection with 2.3 million volumes, CityU held just under 1 million and LU had just under 0.4 million. Interestingly and even with the load balancing capabilities of the INN-Reach system, HKU and LU still lent more than they borrowed while CityU borrowed more than it lent.

<b>Library</b>	<b>Borrow</b>	<b>Lend</b>
<b>CityU</b>	3,870	1,682
<b>HKU</b>	1,736	3,191
<b>LU</b>	1,152	1,885
<b>Total</b>	6,758	6,758

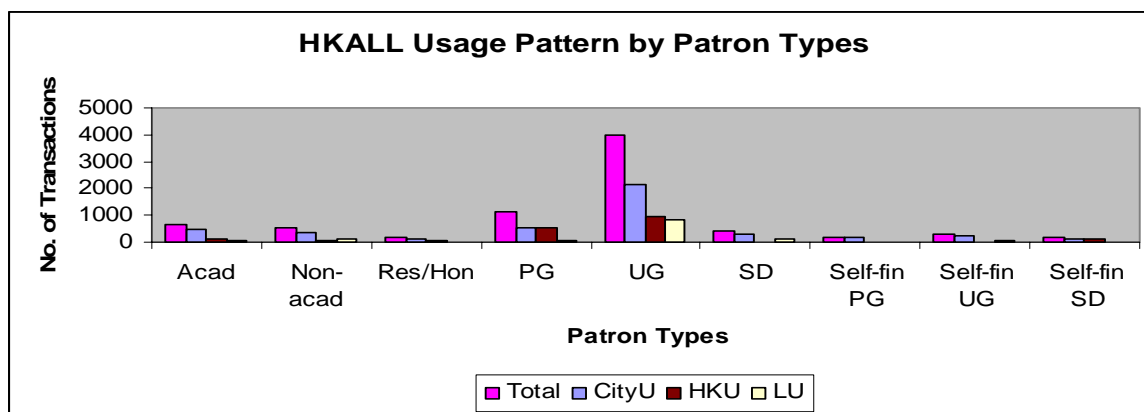
### **Patrons' usage pattern**

A major impetus for piloting HKALL was the desire to extend interlibrary loan services to undergraduate students and to observe the resulting need. The existing mediated ILL service is rather resource intensive, thus it is limited to more senior patrons of our libraries, such as academic staff and postgraduate students. However, demands from undergraduate students continue to grow and are becoming substantial. As no one library can satisfy all demands from its patrons, collaborating more cost-effectively has to be explored, and HKALL seems to provide a viable solution. Our statistics showed that the response from undergraduate students was overwhelming. They were, by far, the largest group of users of HKALL in all three partner libraries. Postgraduate students who are also entitled to use the existing ILL formed the second largest group of HKALL users overall, followed by academic staff, non-academic staff and sub-degree students.

<b>User Type</b>	<b>No. of Transactions</b>
<b>Staff (academic and non-academic)</b>	1,409
<b>PG Students</b>	1,357

<b>UG Students</b>	4,257
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Minor deviations existed amongst the libraries. At LU for example, their non-academic staff came second in terms of their HKALL usage, followed by their sub-degree students. Overall though, a pattern of using HKALL by eligible ILL users seemed to be emerging, more on this and other analyses in the section below comparing HKALL, ILL and JULAC Card services.



Res/Hon=Research staff, PG=Postgraduate students, UG=Undergraduate students, SD=Sub-degree students, Self-fin=Self-financing students

Preliminary analysis was also made to check whether the host libraries actually owned any of the titles requested by their patrons, as via HKALL, libraries could be borrowing and lending the same titles at the same time. Not surprisingly, patrons would try all means to obtain the titles they required, on average 48.4% of the total number of books requested were owned by the respective host libraries. The practice was most acute at HKU where it owned over 64.7% of the titles requested. LU had the lowest percentage of “self-owned” requests at 23% while CityU, despite making the most requests in numbers, is in the middle with 57.3% “self-owned” requests.

Library	Owned	Not Owned
CityU	2,577	1,917
HKU	1,044	692
LU	295	986

The ease of use of HKALL, the low merge rate of the union catalogue, and whether there were sufficient copies in the host libraries could all be contributing factors to this phenomenon. More detailed analyses on the titles and classifications of the requests, needed to be explored for more plausible explanations. Such detailed analysis is beyond the scope of the current paper.

### Titles requested

Of all the titles requested during the pilot period, more than 30% were in CJK. This roughly tallied with the percentage of CJK records in the union catalogue. Amongst the partners, there were slight variations, with LU requesting the most CJK titles at 38.6%,

followed by CityU at 34.4%, and then HKU at only 15.4%. As HKU had the largest CJK collection of the three, this requesting pattern seemed to reflect the size of the CJK collections in the respective libraries.

<b>Language of Item</b>	<b>No. of Transactions</b>
<b>CJK</b>	2,306
<b>Non-CJK</b>	5,206

In our analysis, we also found that three subject clusters dominated the borrowing and lending activities of all three libraries. They were: Social science, law and education; Science and technology; and Language and literature. The table below shows the distribution of the borrowing/lending of the subject disciplines in the three partnering libraries.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>CityU Top 3 B/L</b>	<b>HKU Top 3 B/L</b>	<b>LU Top 3 B/L</b>
<b>General Works/ Bibliography</b>	-	-	-
<b>Philosophy/ Psychology/ Religion</b>	-	-	B1
<b>Social Science/ Law/Education</b>	B1, L1	B1,L1	B2, L1
<b>Science / Technology</b>	B2, L3	B2, L2	L2
<b>Arts/Architecture</b>	-	-	-
<b>Language/ Literature</b>	B3, L2	B3, L3	B1, L3
<b>History/ Geography</b>	-	-	-

B=Borrow, L=Lend

Another point our analysis revealed was that unique items borrowed were frequently out of scope. HKU asked the question, “To what degree were unique items borrowed (not the duplicates borrowed) in or out of scope for their library?” To answer this question, unique items for five subjects were analysed by the assigned subject librarians to determine what percent were in scope.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Percent Judged Appropriate</b>
<b>Medical</b>	17
<b>Law</b>	24
<b>Arts / Architecture</b>	24
<b>Social Science / Education</b>	41
<b>Science / Technology</b>	49

The figures in the above table showed that the materials borrowed fulfilled two needs: out of scope but interesting materials were supplied more for some subjects than others;

comparatively more in scope and interesting but not purchased materials were supplied for other subjects.

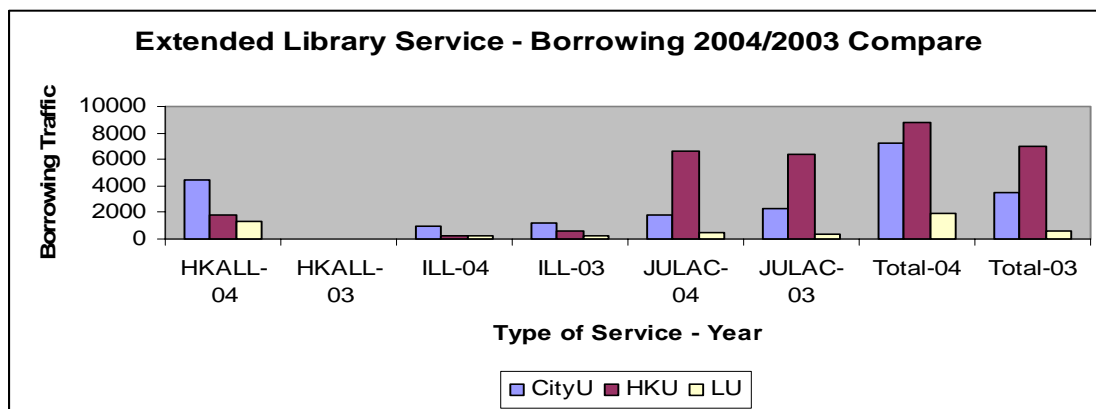
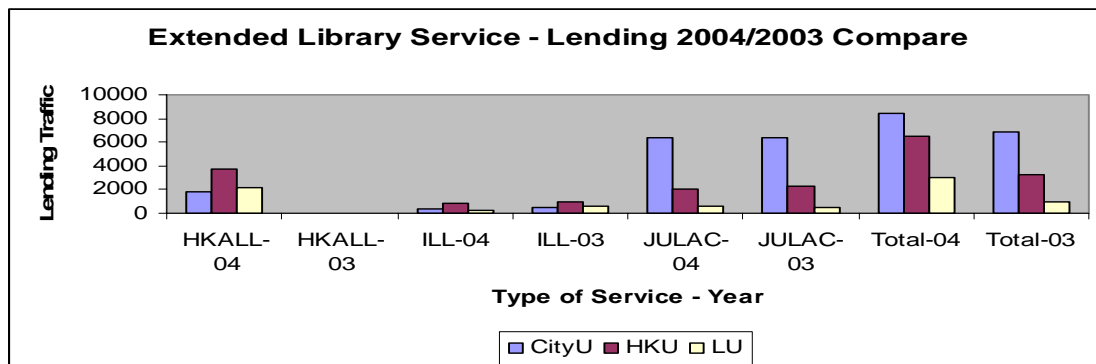
The simple analyses shown above on patrons' usage pattern and titles requested gave us some initial insights into the types of further research that could be undertaken. Fully analysed, such data from HKALL could help libraries identify strengths and weaknesses in their collections, which then could become useful inputs into collection development strategies. If all JULAC libraries were to participate in HKALL and collaborate on a concerted collection development effort, a more balanced collection amongst the JULAC libraries might well result.

#### **Comparisons between the different types of interlibrary loan services – HKALL/traditional ILL/JULAC Card**

Before the HKALL pilot exercise was conducted, eligible users in all eight JULAC libraries are already entitled to two types of interlibrary loan services, the traditional ILL service and the JULAC Card service. Apart from borrowing materials, the JULAC Card service allows eligible patrons to visit other JULAC libraries. This means that patrons with a JULAC Card can make use of the library facilities on the respective campuses. Together, the three services, HKALL, traditional ILL and JULAC Card can be grouped as “extended library services” to our users.

Although there were only three partners in the HKALL pilot, it would still be interesting to check whether the introduction of HKALL had any effect on the existing ILL and JULAC Card services, both of which involved all eight JULAC libraries. So data of the three services during the eight month pilot and those of corresponding periods in the previous years were collated and compared.

Compared to 2003, all three partners saw a decrease in ILL borrowing/lending traffic amongst themselves during the HKALL pilot period in 2004. The number of HKALL transactions generated by patrons who were also eligible for ILL was higher than the number of ILL transactions for all three libraries. A slight shift from ILL to HKALL was hence detectable. Within the period of the HKALL pilot, JULAC Card borrowing by CityU decreased slightly, while those by HKU and LU increased to a small extent. For JULAC Card lending, CityU, the number one lender, loaned out 2 items more in 2004 compared to the same period in 2003 albeit its heavy JULAC Card traffic in both periods. LU's lending went up by 175, while HKU loaned out 215 fewer items in 2004 via the JULAC Card service.



With only three partners in the HKALL pilot that had only been in operation for 8 months, it was too soon to make any deduction or conclusion of its impact on ILL and JULAC Card services. However, ILL and JULAC Card services had been established for some time and all eight JULAC libraries participated in these services, thus they were relatively well-known to our eligible patrons. Compared to HKALL which was launched in the second semester of the 2003-04 academic year with no major re-introduction at the beginning of the 2004-05 academic year, the fact that the collected data showed some shifting towards it by existing ILL-eligible patrons suggested added value in the HKALL initiative.

An important issue which should be considered in this discussion is the operating costs comparison between HKALL and the existing ILL as shown in the table below.

Per Item	HKALL HK\$	ILLiad HK\$	Difference
<b>Lending Cost</b>	8.37	14.48	6.11 (42%)
<b>Borrowing Cost</b>	5.97	10.9	4.93 (45%)

OCLC's ILLiad is the software package used to facilitate the provision of the existing ILL service. Due to the fact that HKALL enabled users to perform some of the work done by library staff members when processing an interlibrary loan request, we found that the cost of lending a book using HKALL was 42% less, and the cost of borrowing a book 45% less, than that using traditional ILL. We did not do a similar comparison between HKALL and JULAC Card as the JULAC Card service also allowed patrons to

visit the respective libraries, thereby complicating the borrowing/lending comparisons. However, the JULAC card service does have the extra administration of card creation and patron record synchronisation between the various library systems. In this respect, HKALL had provided savings and convenience as patron records creation and synchronisation were done automatically by the system.

It is perhaps also worth mentioning at this point that with the JULAC Card service, CityU has the highest number of transactions amongst the JULAC libraries. Compared to 2002-03, the overall JULAC Card traffic had gone up in 2003-04, showing an increase in demands for this service. But lending to CityU from HKU and LU had decreased in 2003-04; LU also borrowed fewer items from CityU while HKU had the least increase in borrowing from CityU amongst the remaining libraries where data were available. JULAC Card borrowing between HKU and LU has increased slightly; the numbers were small compared with some of the other libraries not in the HKALL pilot. These statistics tallied with the focus group discussions conducted with some student and staff users (described in the following section). Both CityU's and LU's own patrons expressed their desire to acquire the materials they need without having to visit other JULAC libraries in person. The decrease in JULAC Card borrowing/lending between CityU and LU, and the corresponding increase in HKALL traffic might be an effect of enacting this desire. Due to the easily accessible and central physical location of CityU, JULAC patrons from other libraries like to visit the CityU library. Inevitably, this added pressures to CityU library's physical facilities as well as its collection. HKALL may be providing an alternative for patrons to get their required materials without physically going to CityU.

Within the "extended library services" available to our patrons, the enlarged groups of patrons eligible to use HKALL had no doubt caused an increase in number of transactions. Compared to the same period in 2003, CityU's extended library service transactions (borrowing and lending) increased from 10,290 to 15,730 (52% more in 2004). In the same period, HKU's transactions have increased from 10,248 to 15,296 (49% more in 2004). LU, being a smaller library with fewer patrons, had an increase of over 3300 transactions (from 1602 in 2003 to 4912 in 2004) which translated to a percentage increase of 206%. Thus while such extended services are desirable as we always aim to better serve our patrons, the corresponding increase in the workload to library staff and the demand on resources should not be underestimated. However, from the costs and convenience perspectives, if we can steer our users towards using HKALL, not only will we be able to save costs, with the systems ease of use, we may also be able to shift some of our valuable staff resources into other areas of the library with the aim to further improve our services to patrons.

### ***Lessons learned: Qualitative analysis***

In addition to the extensive quantitative data collected, it was also thought to be essential that, in order to complement this data, a rigorous qualitative assessment project also be conducted and aimed primarily at users of the system.

### **User survey and focus group meetings**

Towards the end of the 9-month HKALL pilot experiment, an online user survey was conducted for one week in October 2004 with the aim to better understand how users found the services and to assess whether HKALL was worthy of continuation. A total of 598 users had responded to the online questionnaire and the result was very encouraging. The following is a summary:

1. 80% of them regarded HKALL as an excellent or good source of obtaining materials not available from their host library;
2. 73% welcomed the fact that HKALL is well integrated into the local library system whereby searches for desired items do not need to be performed in a totally different platform. In connection to this, 80% of the users found the feature of transferring searches from the local catalogue to HKALL with the click of a few buttons excellent or good;
3. A high percentage of users found it excellent or good that HKALL provides them with the autonomy to view outstanding requests (68%), cancel requests (65%) and renew items borrowed by themselves (71%);
4. The way that HKALL keeps users informed of their request status by various email notices (pickup, overdue, cancellation and so on) was also highly regarded (76%);
5. Users expressed a high degree of satisfaction with regard to the fulfillment rate (67%) and turnaround time (62%);
6. 88% of the respondents would like to see more libraries should be included in HKALL so that more items could be available to them;
7. When invited to provide comments, users mentioned the following in the survey:
  - “Excellent on the whole”
  - “... this scheme has been excellently carried out. With this scheme, resources in the universities can be better utilised.
  - “HKALL simply makes life easier. Thank you.....”
  - “It should include all eight institutions in HK.”

To solicit further comments and suggestions in a more direct and personal manner, focus group meetings involving both academic staff members and students were organised. Once again, the result reinforced the fact that HKALL was indeed a welcome service and extending HKALL to all university libraries is a unanimous wish.

### ***Future directions***

The results of the focus group surveys on users' satisfaction of HKALL echo the findings from other libraries.<sup>5</sup> Subjects found the turnaround time of HKALL to be faster and the mechanism of sending requests is more user-friendly than that of traditional ILL practices. In general the satisfaction level is high. In addition, they also voiced their expectations that more participants, more items, including non-prints and non-returnables, be made available in HKALL and that more renewals will benefit patrons even more.

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<sup>5</sup> Chmelir, Lynn (2005), “Patron-initiated borrowing and traditional ILL: the cascade experience”, *Interlending & Document Supply*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 35-41.

The expectations from HKALL users are no more than what has been described in the existing literature of interlibrary loan and document delivery<sup>6</sup>. In order to meet these rising expectations, it is the prime goal of the three participating libraries in the trial period to lobby this patron initiated interlibrary loan service to the other 5 University Grant Committee (UGC) funded libraries. In November 2004, a meeting was organised to share the experiences of the three participating libraries with the five non-participants. The history, the lessons learnt, the achievements and the issues encountered were presented to the non-participating Joint University Libraries Advisory Committee (JULAC) members. While, the JULAC directors were overwhelmed with the trial group's findings on the one hand, they immediately faced the major obstacle of funding on the other. Discussions on maintaining HKALL service but avoiding high investments were started right away. One recommendation was to locally build a virtual union catalogue. Models of prototypes were suggested. Eventually a local product was built by members of the Systems Department from the University of Hong Kong Libraries. Testing of the local product was done by JULAC members and comments were collected for JULAC directors' consideration. The prototype of the virtual union catalog and the local product worked. However it would take a long time to develop the product to function to the same degree of proficiency as INN-Reach and was therefore deemed unsuitable.

Consequently, and with the success of the nine month pilot of HKALL, the eight Hong Kong universities jointly applied for funding from the major higher education funding body in Hong Kong, the University Grants Committee (UGC) to expand the project to include all eight institutions. In April 2005, a presentation was made to the UGC panel by JULAC directors. The UGC Restructuring and Collaborating Fund (RCF) Specialist Group commented that HKALL was a commendable initiative containing many of the essential elements of the kind of collaborative project that the Group would like to see. The potential for deep collaboration resulting from the project is obvious and is of the ilk that the UGC are fostering within Hong Kong. The joint application was successful enabling all eight Hong Kong universities to participate in HKALL. A HKALL Steering Group was subsequently formed to oversee the implementation of the first fully extensive collaborative project in the history of interlending services in Hong Kong.

The first HKALL Steering Group meeting was held in July 2005. Representatives from all eight libraries met to discuss many of the issues discussed above. In particular the issues related to the rebuilding of the Union Catalogue<sup>7</sup> involving matching and merging of CJK records of libraries with differing cataloguing practices, the matter of priority records, loan policies, load balancing and user base are all requiring further discussion among the eight. Through discussions, these conflicting issues were resolved; meeting schedules, timeline for implementation and training and a soft launch date of the service

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<sup>6</sup> Jackson, Mary E. (2004), "The future of interlending", *Interlending & Document Supply*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 88-93.

<sup>7</sup> An additional bonus in developing a full union catalogue is that it provides a ready means of requesting materials from a joint storage facility which is another collaborative project currently underway among Hong Kong's university libraries.



were also determined. Further issues concerning network security, system setup and bibliographic records loading were further clarified through a conference call between the INN-Reach representative from Innovative Inc. and the HKALL Steering Group. A time table of data loading was decided and in August all bibliographic records from all eight universities were loaded to the central union catalog. While the new participants of the HKALL service eagerly await training, the new rejuvenated HKALL will be ready to launch in September 2005 to provide its services to the prospective 100,000 plus eligible users.

While the anticipation and excitement of launching the extended service is real, our librarians are already thinking what will be our next phase. What can we do to further improve on this already tremendous service? The obvious answer for us, and indeed for our patrons, is to have the service extended to include non-returnable lending and borrowing? While there may be some workaround methods of providing this, the true solution must be for a single, fully integrated system that can manage both interlibrary lending as well as document delivery. We await INN-Reach's inclusion of non-returnable transactions?

## **Conclusions**

Without doubt, the pilot HKALL project was a great success. During the nine months of the pilot, inter-library loans quadrupled among the 3 participating libraries; it was demonstrated that using HKALL was much cheaper than using the traditional ILL system where titles are 42 % cheaper to lend and 45% cheaper to borrow; the system provides a much faster service than the traditional ILL system with 95% of the requests of the pilot project met within two working days, compared with only 9% of traditional ILL requests; 80% of library users surveyed regarded the mode of service provided by the pilot test as an excellent or a very good source of obtaining materials not available from their host library. It is hoped, indeed envisaged, that similar results will be seen when the service is launched with all eight universities participating. With their participation, academic library users in Hong Kong will soon have access to a total collection size of almost 9 million volumes through HKALL, thus providing a richer environment for their study and research needs.

The subsequent government funding to the tune of HK\$10 million provides further testament to the obvious value that an initiative such as HKALL provides. HKALL's potential to maximise usage of available resources, its use of technology in an innovative manner and its demonstrative ability to foster deeper collaboration among the eight university libraries all serve to foster further scholarship in Hong Kong contributing to the Hong Kong Government's vision for a knowledge based society.