

FIL Benchmarking Project Su Fagg and Chris Beevers

Introduction

The final results of the FIL Benchmarking Project were presented to the Interlend 2015 conference held in Manchester in June. Delegates to the conference were asked to consider the main themes emerging from the survey, with a view to exploring best practice within the UK interlending community of the UK. An in-depth analysis of the survey findings was presented in a previous issue of this journal (Beevers 2015).

For brevity, a summary of the findings is produced here:

- Fulfilment rates seemed highest in the Health libraries, closely followed by Higher Education (HE), with Public libraries finding articles particularly difficult to complete. The wider range of materials is likely to have influenced these figures.
- Whilst Health and Public libraries in the survey supplied a high proportion of articles electronically, this figure varied more across the HE sector.
- Supply times in the Health sector tended to be much quicker than in HE or Public libraries, although the latter searched longer, which possibly influenced fulfilment rates.
- Staffing levels did not necessarily affect success or speed, with many services relying on less than 1 fte, although the range of staffing levels was widest in HEIs.
- In terms of supply route, some 64% of those surveyed used the British Library (BL) first, with a similar percentage checking that items were held with the BL before sending any requests.

The findings led the authors to ponder the best way to consider each of these in some detail, whilst making them of relevance to the interlending community. The annual conference, Interlend, is organised by FIL, and seemed an appropriate event for any discussion. In order to involve as many of the delegates as possible within the limited timeframe of the conference programme, it was decided to adopt a workshop approach.

The aims of the workshop were:

- To identify characteristics within the workflows of some libraries which explain their high (or low) performance.
- To define a toolkit for benchmarking ILL performance indicators in the future which can be used by libraries in any sector.

Workshop

Originally, the workshop proposal was designed as a parallel session for approximately 30 delegates. We were somewhat flustered to be given a main slot for all delegates, numbering over 80. The

logistics of the workshop therefore had to be re-configured, made possible by the availability of an additional, 'break-out' room. On the day, the 85 delegates were divided into two groups, one to remain in the main conference room and the other to go to an adjoining meeting room.

Once thus divided, the groups were split into smaller units of approx. 7-8 delegates. As it had been impossible to 'randomise' the groupings, delegates from the same organisation were requested to join different groups. The intention was to obtain a cross-sectorial presence in each discussion group, although there was a natural bias towards the HE sector, since they always send the most delegates. (Of the 89 names on the delegate list, over three-quarters (69) represented HEIs. Public library services accounted for just 7% with 6 delegates, whilst Health libraries made up 5% with 4 delegates).

Each of the 10 groups had 15 -20 minutes to discuss the key question allocated to them. A scribe recorded the main comments on flipchart paper, for sharing later.

Five questions were asked, one for each of the groups in the two rooms:

- What does your library do to enable you to supply ILLs asap?
- What does your library do to ensure you fulfil as many requests as possible?
- What do you think is a realistic service level: To promote to your own customers? To publicise to other libraries?
- How do you assess what your users want from your service? And how do you find out whether they are satisfied?
- Do you market your ILL service to all your users or to certain groups of customers?

After 20 minutes, the delegates re-convened in the main conference room, and a discussion around each of the questions was led by the authors. Volunteers from each of the groups reported back on the main factors contributing to their responses. This sparked debate amongst delegates across the room.

The responses were photographed at the end of the session and are attached as Appendix 1.

Considering each of the questions in turn:

What does your library do to enable you to supply ILLs ASAP?

The benchmarking survey found little correlation between the speed of turnaround on requests and obvious factors such as staffing levels. Process seemed to be the key. Checking a succession of possible sources, including the home collection, before requesting, cut down on the time taken to get a response from a supplier. E book rental as a fulfilment route is also becoming more widely considered. A paper presented at the conference was based on a pilot scheme detailing just how such an approach works (Moore 2015). Setting processing times to, for example, 24 hours can have implications on staffing, requiring more staff to be trained for interlending duties than has been accepted historically. This move comes with the development of more 'document delivery' services, which encompass other library services such as digitisation, alternative formats, resource lists etc.

Interestingly, both groups discussing this question mentioned sending requests to the British Library before trying other sources. The ability to have articles delivered directly to customers through the

Secure Electronic Delivery 'add address' service was mentioned as an obvious way to speed up the process.

The use of union catalogues, institutional repositories and Google Scholar were all mentioned as ways to speed up searches, and often supply times could be cut by using electronic formats. Consortia arrangements often meant that these requests were given priority over requests for supply from libraries not in the groups.

Mention was also made of giving priority to their own requesters over those from other libraries, something that may be expressed in service agreements.

What does your library do to ensure you fulfil as many requests as possible?

This discussion again ranged over the process each library undertakes to source each request. The main consideration seemed to be requesting items from libraries that actually have them! This may sound obvious, and can mean more work processing each request, but it does lead to higher fulfilment rates. Union catalogues, such as COPAC, SUNCAT and WorldCat were consulted to establish where items were located, and to give an indication if lending was a possibility.

Other immediate solutions include purchasing an item, usually if under a certain pre-arranged cost, or leasing through an e-book provider. Consortia members found sharing catalogues helped to source items successfully, especially amongst the Health libraries. Public libraries are able to avail themselves of Unity UK, which lists the holdings of most public libraries in the UK. All of this allows libraries to request from the most likely holding library, again improving the fulfilment rate.

The British Library remains the first port of call for many operations, with some using the FIFM and GIFM services now offered. These enhanced searches were particularly welcomed by small interlending teams or sole practitioners who could offset the added expense against saved staff time.

Other ways of targeting requests to libraries more likely to supply included using the specialist lists maintained through JISC, and /or sending 'speculative requests' to particular libraries known to hold the item.

Good housekeeping was also mentioned as being important. For example, wasted messages can be reduced by keeping note of those libraries notifying the lists that they are suspending their service for whatever reason. Following up requests after the 'courtesy' two weeks' time has lapsed serves as a useful prompt, and again reduces unnecessary searching and emailing.

Finally, some delegates found items by contacting publishers, authors or learned societies directly.

What do you think is a realistic service level: To promote to your own customers? To publicise to other libraries?

Many interlending services are part of libraries that are seeking recognition of their activity by means of outside quality standards and awards. The importance of Service Level Agreements (SLA), customer charters and the Customer Service Excellence Awards are all leading managers to consider aspects of the service offering.

As expressed in the question, it was agreed that there are two parts to this; what can be expected by the libraries' own customers, and the level of service offered to other libraries.

In general, the discussions ranged around managing expectations, by having realistic service levels that can be updated as variables, such as the LMS, change. As one delegate noted, "Don't make promises you can't keep!" There was also the recognition that many of the factors are beyond the control of individual libraries, with postal or courier services being particularly important in calculating supply times.

Delegates from organisations currently operating SLAs set their own desired 'processing' times and then added the average supply time achieved by their major supplier, usually the British Library.

The importance of keeping requesters updated on the progress of their requests, especially if any delay was anticipated, was stressed as a way to avoid negative feedback.

In terms of supplying other libraries, some aimed to respond within 48 hours, whilst others responded within 'reasonable times'. At certain busy times of year, own customers took priority, but details could often be found on service websites, so that any enquiring library would know beforehand.

It was interesting to note that the FIL guidelines still play a part in shaping the operations. These are available on the FIL website at <http://www.forumforinterlending.org.uk/best-practice-guidelines>

How do you assess what your users want from your service? And how do you find out whether they are satisfied?

Most delegates reported that surveys of user needs, and satisfaction rates, tended to be done as part of an overall Library Survey, rather than something aimed specifically at ILL users. Nonetheless, a variety of means to illicit comments were mentioned, including user and staff feedback, VOX pops, focus groups and general surveys. The use of social media for quick votes and asking questions about the service is also growing.

Users appeared to value:

- Speed of service
- Value for money (whether free or charged)
- Range of material that can be sourced
- Convenience
- Accessibility- information available and easy to use online forms
- Quality of service
- Options
- Good communications

Do you market your ILL service to all your users or certain groups of customers?

Marketing is always a popular topic at Interlend, and was the main theme of last year's conference.

As with SLAs and surveys, much of the marketing of interlending takes place as part of the more general promotion of the library and its services. An online presence took the form of prominent links on organisations' homepages, separate ILL webpages and the use of social media. Articles for the library blog were specifically highlighted, often providing an ideal opportunity to get the 'interlending' message across.

HEIs had a library presence at events such as University Open Days, Fresher's Fairs and during student induction activities. Delegates also spoke about the use of student ambassadors and library champions for word-of-mouth promotion of services.

Paper-based promotion was still very much in evidence, with mention of guides, leaflets and posters being produced, either for display in the library, its surroundings, or targeted at specific events. One suggestion was the use of leaflets being placed in loan items, both to promote the service and to ensure that borrowers were made aware that the items came from elsewhere. This could also be a useful way of surveying actual users of the service.

Surveys and focus groups were also mentioned as ways to promote the service through the interaction of staff and respondents. Other activities included conferences and networking events, either internal or external. As this discussion was taking place at a national conference, recognition of the importance of this in marketing services was to be applauded!

Conclusion

As with many of these surveys, the number and range of respondents can influence the nature of the findings. However, by exploring the main issues with a broader group, the delegates to a national conference, it is clear that some similarities exist across the sectors.

By far the most successful libraries seem to be those in the NHS. By having merged catalogues, libraries are able to find a location holding a request, and have it supplied electronically in most cases. This improves both the fulfilment rate, and speed of supply over the more disparate sectors, most of whom rely on the British Library as first choice for supply.

As major contributors to both the Benchmarking survey and the conference attendees, HEIs need to explore the differences in their performances, and the reasons for this. Put simply, staff numbers and available budgets do not explain the range of performances, although it has to be admitted that user profiles etc must play important roles here (in terms of the nature of requesting, returned requests, percentage of research students etc)

Other presentations at both this and previous Interlend conferences have explored aspects of the whole interlending process and how it can be streamlined to meet today's expectations. It is to be hoped that some of those services showing particular traits of best practice within their sector can be encouraged to write in this journal about their processes and approaches, in an attempt to establish guidelines for everyone to see and compare individual performances.

The authors hope to be able to report on the possible toolkit that emerges from all of this combined effort in a future issue.

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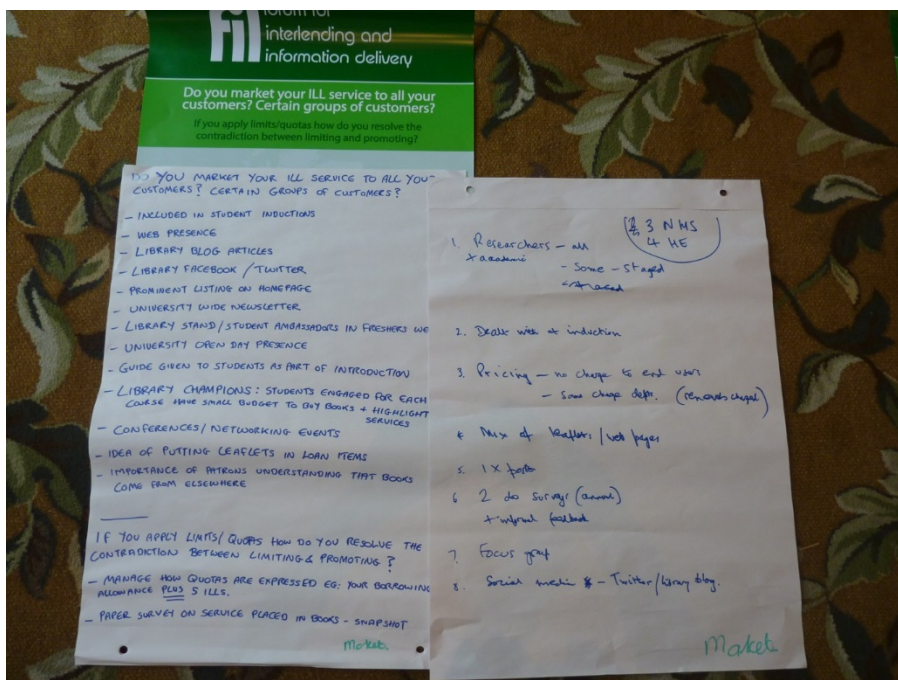
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Appendix 1. The completed flipchart sheets from the workshop: 2 for each question.



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What does your library do to ensure you fulfill as many requests as possible?

Checking for locations
 BLDSC FIFM/GIFM
 OCLC Purchase (Amazon?)
 COPAC Consortial partners
 WorldShare WW searches

Options when fulfilling
 1) DBL Request or 7LIS-link request.
 → Lease (EOL) → Public libraries use
 or → Purchase (either way) UNITY
 - if none is not possible -
 2) Email Libraries directly (author or serial)
 - if none doesn't yield as workable -
 3) Email Publisher, author, or collection society.

- BL
- UNITY UK
- COPAC (check availability + lending policies)
- WORLDCAT (Go v. speed)
- SWICAT
- 'FAVOURITE LENDERS'
- CHASE PENDING REQUESTS REGULARLY
- PURCHASE (Amazon)
- FIFM/GIFM
- LISTS FOR: LAST ORDER LENDERS OUT OF ACTION
- CONTACT AUTHOR (no. eg. LinkedIn)
- SPECULATIVE REQUESTS

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What do you think is a realistic Service Level?
 To promise to your own customers?
 To publicise to other libraries?
 How do you think what customers would consider a good service level as a group staff on loan, but realistic service level?

5 days? 7 days? 10 days? 2 weeks?
 24hrs? 24hrs? 3 days? 4 days? 5 days?
 Working days? Actual days?

Submission of requests? Receipt of request?
 will supply a book on Inter-library Loans within a range of 10 working days from receiving request at the Chris Beavers Site Library when a Library Person works two and a half days

Service Levels

- to customers - currently say one on process times
- Depends where it is
- Don't make promises you can't keep
- Be realistic
- Keep them updated
- Depends on B.
- Customers want to know how long is a piece of string
- Realistic???

To other libraries - easier to control

- Up to (within a week) providing it is available
- Depends on number of requests / staff
- Depends on availability
- Longer if held on other sites
- Most would chase after 2 weeks

(uph)

- 3 days to process + standard BL waiting times
- we advise - could take 2-3 weeks - but usually much quicker → no formal SLTs
- danger of telling user how long something will take → best to hedge your bets → manage expectations 'we aim to supply' not 'we will supply'
- for other libraries - FIL guidelines
- aim to process/respond to other libraries in 4 B hrs
- general consensus - no SLTs for supply to other libraries - but do our best to supply in 'reasonable time'
- also do not have formal targets for supplying requests to users → out of our control

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How do you assess what your users want from your service? And how do you find out whether they are satisfied?

What do you think matters to customers? Produce a prioritised list of the top five features that you think customers value most about your ILL service

Not specific to ILL, but an element within general library survey.

Feedback from other library staff eg. Academic Liaison

1. Speed of service
2. Value for money (free)
3. Ability/range of material that can be sourced
4. Convenience
5. Accessibility/Ease of online forms information available

What we do:

Surveys
User feedback
VOX pops
Library Focus Groups

ILL Values

- Speed
- Quality
- Availability
- Options
- Clear communication
- Requesting 24/7

What we could do

- ask questions about the service by using Twitter
- Exit surveys
- Quick vote

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Do you market your ILL service to all your customers? Certain groups of customers?

If you apply limits/quota how do you resolve the contradiction between limiting and promoting?

DO YOU MARKET YOUR ILL SERVICE TO ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS? CERTAIN GROUPS OF CUSTOMERS?

- INCLUDED IN STUDENT INDUCTIONS
- WEB PRESENCE
- LIBRARY BLOG ARTICLES
- LIBRARY FACEBOOK / TWITTER
- PROMINENT LISTING ON HOMEPAGE
- UNIVERSITY WIDE NEWSLETTER
- LIBRARY STANDS / STUDENT AMBASSADORS IN FRESHERS WK
- UNIVERSITY OPEN DAY PRESENCE
- GUIDE GIVEN TO STUDENTS AS PART OF INTRODUCTION
- LIBRARY CHAMPIONS: STUDENTS ENGAGED FOR EACH COURSE HAVE SMALL BUDGET TO BUY BOOKS + HIGHLIGHT SERVICES
- CONFERENCES / NETWORKING EVENTS
- IDEA OF PUTTING LEAFLETS IN LOAN ITEMS
- IMPORTANCE OF PATRONS UNDERSTANDING THAT BOOKS COME FROM ELSEWHERE

IF YOU APPLY LIMITS / QUOTAS HOW DO YOU RESOLVE THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN LIMITING & PROMOTING?

- MANAGE HOW QUOTAS ARE EXPRESSED EG: YOUR BORROWING ALLOWANCE PLUS 5 ILLS.
- PAPER SURVEY ON SERVICE PLACED IN BOOKS - SNAPSHOT

Market

1. Researchers - all academic (3 NHS 4 HE) - Some - Staged - ~~academic~~

2. Dedic web at induction

3. Pricing - no charge to end user - low charge dep. (remains cheap)

4. Mix of leaflets / web pages

5. 1 x poster

6. 2 do survey (annual) + annual feedback

7. Focus group

8. Social media - Twitter / library blog.

Market