

# CURL/BL Monograph Interlending Project: Recommendations

## CURL / BL Monograph Inter-Lending Project

### Recommendations of the Project Steering Group

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The report - *Monograph Inter-lending Service for the UK* – was circulated electronically to the CURL Board and senior managers of the British Library to provide a preview of the work of the Steering Group and the external consultant Marie Pierre Detraz. A presentation of the proposed scheme was also the focus of a meeting with potential principle contributors to the scheme at a meeting held in the British Library in March.
- 1.2 In preparation for further meetings for the potential partners, some preliminary work on technical and financial viability was carried out, and the Steering Group met to discuss these on 30 June. As well as reviewing these elements, the Steering Group also discussed at length the core principles underpinning the scheme, and the extent to which the environment had changed since the original report on Monograph Inter-lending was formulated in 2003. As a result the Steering Groups' perceptions of the viability of the service, together with the outline technical and costing reviews, has led the Steering Group to revise the final recommendations.

#### 2. Context

- 2.1 The key concept behind the project was to build on the existing strengths of the centralized British Library ILL service, creating a highly automated, more cost-effective, as well as end-user-orientated, service based on the principle of improving the fill rates for ILL. The Steering Group discussed in some detail the issues raised by the 2003 estimate of 20% non-fill rate, and the difficulty of gap-profiling. Discussion also included a review of new initiatives, including the Google digitization programme, the potential for developing services based on revealing content through *Amazoog*le strategies and the extent to which cooperative acquisition, storage and retrieval proposals might centralize access to lesser user stock. The Steering Group concluded that there was significant uncertainty in future projections of need, although it was clear that some of these options were medium and long term, rather than options to improve delivery rates now.
- 2.2 In technical terms the project sought to reap substantial benefits for future delivery from a viable infrastructure which would link up COPAC, local ILL management systems with BL developments in automated delivery. The review in June indicated that this work would probably be complex, and potentially expensive. Some significant progress however had been made with discussing system authentication and authorisation. Discussions with Dr Alan Robiette, until recently Head of the JISC Development Group, on the profiling of AthensDA and/or Shibboleth, had identified other possible options, including the idea that the BookNow authentication process might be based on an Amazon-type e-commerce application, with some extra information specific to the BookNow context (i.e. user's institutional affiliation and entitlement in terms of subsidised ILLs etc.). It was concluded that if Athens/Shibboleth remained the preferred option, then the JISC might be interested in a joint project with BookNow becoming a test bed for Shibboleth.
- 2.3 A preliminary estimate for the total cost of rolling out the project - excluding the provision of authentication and authorization - would be around £250,000, indicating that a careful assessment of cost-benefit needed to be made. Costings were also presented by the British Library based on figures which were shared with the Group on a commercial-in-confidence basis, indicating that to achieve the objectives outlined in BookNow, the cost per loan would be substantially higher than at present, if the user was to be charged a single price for searches and resolution across multiple centres, which may be too high to make it a viable business proposition. The investigations to establish costings also revealed that the current service provided by the British Library is not covering its costs at present, but that the British Library is already subsidising the monograph lending service. This fact, along with the

assumption that running the BookNow service on a consortial model, would add to that basic cost as unfulfilled requests are passed from partner library, indicated that the cost of the service would make it too expensive for most users. In factoring these costs the original conclusion of the 2003 report that consortial interlending would present opportunity savings for the BL by reducing duplication of resources was revised downwards, reducing the strategic viability of one of the original drivers.

### 3. Revised Conclusions of the Steering Group

At the June review the Project Steering Group reached the following conclusions:

- The Project has successfully fulfilled its brief, which was 'to explore further and take forward the principal recommendation made in the *Monograph Inter-lending for the Higher Education Research Community* report', i.e. 'the adoption and implementation of a 'BLDSC Plus' option that would involve the British Library forming a consortium with a range of partner libraries willing to provide monograph inter-lending services to defined service standards and charges'. An imaginative system was scoped via the BookNow model, and the key elements of an implementation workplan identified.
- While the initial costings are no substitute for a full business modelling exercise as presented in WP1 of the Implementation Plan, in the context of the three key issues identified at the June review, it is clear that there is still uncertainty over the cost-benefit of the model.
- Despite the concern over the financial viability of the model, the report identified areas where CURL and BL can work collaboratively to improve current practices. These are outlined in the following section.

### 4. Revised recommendations

- 4.1 It is accepted that the BookNow model would deliver a comprehensive user focused service to researchers in the UK, but is not economically viable due to the high cost of the individual loans.

*Recommendation 1: CURL and BL agree that the BookNow model as originally envisaged is not viable in terms of implementation*

- 4.2 CURL should promote improvements to the COPAC user interface to include ILL requesting as part of the process of redefining the role of COPAC as a national resource, and extending its active functionality in the context of the *Amazoogle* environment. As part of its ongoing COPAC development work, MIMAS has recently set up a link for openURL resolvers from its experimental COPAC V3, soon to become the standard COPAC interface. This will allow users to identify items of interest on COPAC and transmit the items' bibliographic information to their openURL resolvers. Users could then be presented with the option of making an online ILL request. In the case of an institution having an online request service, the information could be directly transferred into the institution's ILL system. Where online requesting could not be provided, it would be possible for the institution to develop a simple web form that could be populated with the information from the openURL resolver and either emailed or printed as required for submission to the institution's ILL department.

*Recommendation 2: the potential for enhancing the ILL features of COPAC should be scoped as part of an overall strategy for the development of a national resource. WP 3 - Item Discovery Mechanism – should be refocused to concentrate on developing an interface which institutions could customise to meet their particular needs by establishing a link between COPAC and the institution's ILL request procedure.*

- 4.3 The informal discussion with Alan Robiette indicated that authentication would be a key component in any direct user model for ILL delivery, and discussions should be pursued to help scope an effective authentication model for direct user service delivery through COPAC.

*Recommendation 3: CURL and the BL should resume discussions with the JISC to explore ways of implementing electronic authentication/authorisation procedures as viable models, with the option of exploring end-user initiated ILL as a test bed for the soon to be introduced Shibboleth system.*

- 4.4 It is clear from the evidence identified in the Report that service levels from first choice or backup support for ILL delivery vary across CURL institutions. The Steering Group believe that it would be an advantage to determine whether there is scope for a more defined system of supply. This could usefully be linked with a review of the current service offered by RLG-SHARES as a backup resource with the aim of reducing the 20% non-fill rate.

*Recommendation 4: Investigate the usefulness and feasibility of a Service Level Agreement for ILL delivery across the CURL community with a view to delivering a more consistent service for users across the UK whatever the origin of the loan.*

- 4.5 The significance of the Google and other digitisation projects, nationally and internationally, will have a potentially significant impact on the requirement for ILL, particularly in the humanities.

*Recommendation 5: CURL should keep under review the impact of major digitisation programmes, and engage with other providers in determining how links to digitised content can be harnessed to users' needs for access to less easily obtained material.*

- 4.6 The Director of the Research Information Network has shown a keen interest promoting the more effective sharing of research monographs. It is important that CURL and the BL present a realistic assessment of the barriers to improved collaborative systems, and offer options for promoting enhanced services for researchers.

*Recommendation 6: CURL and the BL should present clear recommendation to the RIN with the aim of achieving some funding to implement some of the recommendations.*