Digital Library and Research

Jean Sykes
London School of Economics
Outline of talk

- Why is the digital library important to researchers?
- How do researchers’ digital needs overlap with/differ from those of students?
- What do we know about researchers’ needs?
- How can we make things easier?
- What are the challenges?
Why is the digital library important to researchers?

- Their time is limited
- Often they are not on campus
- Their research is often collaborative
- They need to be comprehensive in their coverage of information sources
- In summary, they need access anywhere anytime to everything relevant
How do researchers’ digital needs overlap?

- Access to online catalogues, including union catalogues (e.g., COPAC)
- Online inter-library loan requesting
- Full-text journals
- Access to general information about library holdings, opening hours
- Google!
How do researchers’ digital needs differ?

- Access to advanced bibliographical tools
- Websites of other universities, research councils, grant-making organisations
- Datasets (eg census)
- Digitised primary content (eg archives)
- Scholarly communications (eg pre-prints, institutional archive servers)
What do we know about researchers’ needs?

- Difficult to assess because every research topic is by definition unique
- Researchers proceed by a process of discovery
- Researchers often use personal contacts and other libraries more than their home library
- What did the respondents to the RSLG study say?
Recent report in the UK – the first ever to address researchers’ library needs

- Survey of 3390 researchers: 4 main needs
- Print and electronic: hybrid library
- Better locating and access tools
- Access to other libraries
- Access to British Library resources
How have we made things easier?

- Research portals: LSE’s Electronic Library
- Collaborative gateways: ANGEL, Builder
- National gateways: Resource Discovery Network
- In Europe DECOMATE > NEREUS
- More work in hand: US, Australia, Europe
What are the challenges?

- Much research material is not yet catalogued online
- Standards for resource description are patchy (especially for periodicals)
- Linking technologies are not yet mature and pervasive
- Middleware is still under construction (eg ANGEL resource manager)
More challenges

- Access management has a long way to go
- Publishers are suspicious of e-resource sharing by libraries and users
- Researchers are reluctant to e-publish
- Copyright and IPR are unclear in the electronic world
- Digital preservation poses major challenges
There’s a long way to go: the UK vision

- The RSLG vision is a 10-year one: the Research Libraries Network
- SUNCAT (Serials Union Catalogue)
- The UK National Catalogue
- Metadata creation and cataloguing standards for digital resources
- Pursuit of new cost models for commercially owned digital content
The RLN continued

- Development of common standards for authentication and authorisation
- Programme of action to encourage scholarly communication
- Programme of work on the needs and costs of digital preservation
- National Catalogue to include borrowing status as basis for inter-lending
More on the RLN

- More sophisticated online cataloguing and search tools specifically for researchers
- Subject specific tools and portals
- Collaborative collection development for print collections based on National Catalogue
- Digital preservation and “last resort” archiving
There is a long way to go

• Research knows no geographical boundaries
• More European collaboration is needed