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DOCUMENT SUPPLY IN A LARGE RESEARCH LIBRARY: THE CASE OF LSE

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to describe the measures taken to deal with some issues affecting the LSE interlending and document delivery (IDD) department within the last two years.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides a descriptive approach.

Findings - There is a wide range of issues affecting document supply at present and a variety of approaches is needed to deal with them.

Research limitations/implications - Some research was carried out by a colleague into user satisfaction and what developments users would like to see in the future.

Originality/Value - LSE is a fairly unusual IDD department but the issues discussed will be familiar to many ILL colleagues. This case study describes one way of dealing with them that may help colleagues make decisions in their own departments.

Keywords Inter-lending, Document delivery, Research libraries, United Kingdom

Paper Type Case study

Introduction

In this article I propose to look at some of the issues that have affected the Inter-lending and Document Delivery (IDD) department at the London School of Economics (LSE) Library in the last two years. The LSE is a large university college

in Holborn, Central London. In the academic year 2004-05 the library served almost 28,000 users. An indication of how busy the library is that in the academic year 2004-2005 there were 1,499,013 entries through the library turnstiles, which was an increase of 6 per cent from the year before. This puts pressure on both staff time and the library's collection. The library collection contains over 4 million printed items, including 32,000 journal titles.

The IDD Department

The IDD department consists of one full time senior library assistant, two full time library assistants and one part time library assistant. All team members have regular duties on the service counter, which means that only part of their working day can be spent on specific inter-lending and document delivery tasks. The team is bigger than many equivalent departments around the UK. For example, at Middlesex University in the 1990s each campus library would only have one member of staff working on inter-lending tasks.

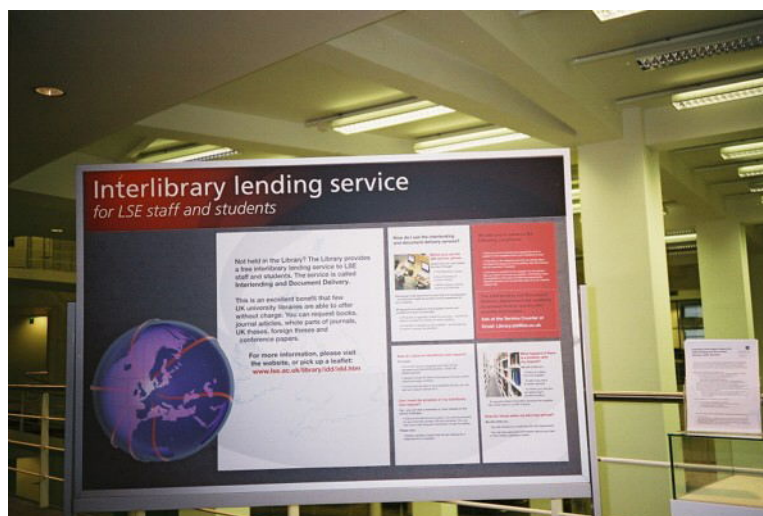
Within the last two years the department has changed its name from the interlibrary loans department to the interlending and document delivery department. All the team felt that the new name more accurately covered the range of tasks carried out by the department. The era of dealing with just books and photocopies is well and truly over. From discussions on LIS-ILL and at conferences with other inter-lending colleagues, library users are now requesting electronic journals, some of which are not available in hard copy and are increasingly willing to use digital versions of research papers and journal articles. This creates both opportunities and problems for an inter-lending team.

Like most colleagues, at least in the UK, the IDD department has witnessed a steady decline in overall requests from users (Lobhan, 2006). Requests from other libraries for LSE material have declined by 3 per cent in the last year, down from 2,696 to 2,606. Requests from LSE library users have declined by 12 per cent in the last year, down from 6,619 to 5,824. Looking at what we did with the department in the process of re-naming the department helped us focus on what services were actually needed and being used.

Advertising Campaign

The IDD team has embarked on a broad advertising campaign over the last two years. One of the reasons for this was the drop in the number of requests. We wanted to make sure potential users were aware of our services. A foyer display was developed jointly by the IDD team, and the communications and marketing manager and designers. (See Figure 1) The communications officer also put pieces in internal news sheets throughout LSE.

Figure 1 Display Advertising the IDD Department's Services



However the primary aim of the advertising campaign was user education. We wanted users to know how to use the IDD team's services effectively. This meant explaining to users the information we needed to source material as efficiently as possible. We developed a checklist of the information we needed to source different kinds of material. Handouts were printed and put along side the display and given out to all users collecting IDD material for a month. The handouts made it clear that we did not accept requests for material that was held at LSE. This part of the campaign has been successful. The percentage of requests that were satisfied rose by 6 to 83 per cent within a year.

When embarking on this advertising campaign we had to make sure staff found the time to deal with the requests created by the campaign. We found after awhile it became more a case of allowing staff to be flexible enough to help out with different tasks as the need arose; this led to the whole team spending a lot of time on training to make sure they knew how to carry out all these tasks. We developed a programme of shadowing colleagues to ensure help was available when needed. This was successful and we have recently planned a second programme of shadowing.

Journal Articles

For many years LSE had sourced journal articles from the LAMDA libraries, which involved printing out copies of articles scanned by other colleagues and sent to a dedicated computer within the department. LAMDA was a reciprocal and cooperative scheme servicing a number of UK universities, so LSE staff also scanned articles from the LSE collection to other colleagues. The LAMDA scheme has now ceased as technology has moved on and large institutions such as the British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) offer a similar service. LSE now uses the

BLDSC's secure electronic delivery (SED) system for journal articles. This has reduced our average turnaround time from four to two days. The IDD department is currently printing out SED files for users as they arrive in a dedicated generic inbox. Some users are now asking to have the articles sent straight to their desktops, thus avoiding the need to come into the library. A colleague's research project on user priorities last year showed that electronic delivery of requests was one of the developments users most wanted to see. This raises both legal and technical issues. How can we make sure the appropriate level of copyright protection is put in place and the technical support for all users to access their documents is available? The BLDSC has clear guidelines on the technical issues, but as every library will have a different mix of programmes on their network some individual investigation is needed into both the ability of users to easily access their documents, and to the copyright protection measures needed. The copyright issues involved with desk top delivery using library privilege have not yet been resolved satisfactorily at LSE.

The IDD team spent a long time discussing the issue. The major problem was technical support. There was also the problem that users would have to pick up their documents within fourteen days or lose them. We soon realised a large scale user education programme would be needed if and when, this change in the system happened.

External Requests

As LSE library is such a well known library, and holds a very large collection, there is a high demand from external users of all kinds to use LSE material through document delivery. To reduce our turnaround time and to make maximum use of available resources, we have looked into using our electronic journals to satisfy external users'

requests. The serials department have provided us with a list of what journals licences we hold that allow use for document delivery. The serials department is currently inputting details of all electronic licences onto Meridian, a serials management system LSE now uses. Many agreements will not allow this and for smaller institutions it may be more practical to assume that this is not allowed. We also now use Ariel to satisfy requests for articles from other libraries that supply us with an IP address and our previous experience with the LAMDA service was invaluable here. As an institution LSE is keen to market itself and use of the LSE collection through document delivery is one way to increase brand awareness, as well as raise revenue. Details of how the department has increased the number of external requests satisfied can be seen later in this article. The LSE has always used the British Library charges as a pricing structure for external requests and from this year has introduced a two tier pricing structure for articles supplied in hard copy or electronically in line with the British Library pricing structure.

External requests revenue is vital to maintain the current level of service in the IDD team. The number of external requests received has dropped from 2696 to 2606 in the last year, but the total number of requests satisfied has remained steady from 1,937 in 2003-2004 to 1,940 in the last year. Our number of volumes lent has actually increased in the last year by 34 per cent from 1,238 to 1,664. This is real achievement for the IDD team. This increase has been caused partly by advertising our services to potential customers and clarifying our lending policy so other libraries are clear what information we need to satisfy their requests. This has also encouraged repeat business. Another factor was the extent of LSE Library's collection. We have a lot of material that is very marketable as external requests and quick turnaround times. Staffing levels are a real issue here. To make the external requests scheme as

successful as it is we have to have a dedicated member of staff working on this full time.

Requests for Foreign Material

As LSE is a high profile research institution many of our users require material that is only available outside the UK. A total of 178 items were ordered from abroad in the academic year 2004-05. Our department's aim is to satisfy as many requests as possible and 84 per cent of user requests were satisfied in the academic year 2004-05. Examples of catalogues we use to search for material are WorldCat, FIZ Karlsruhe and COPAC. In a smaller department this may not be practical and the amount of requests may be so small that the British Library worldwide search service (WWS) may be sufficient. LSE are now part of the IFLA inter-lending scheme as both borrower and lender to various libraries throughout the world using IFLA vouchers. This has been a popular addition to our service as our users have been pleased at being able to borrow material that previously was inaccessible, particularly European material. We have also been able to increase usage of the LSE collection through inter-lending. In the academic year 2004-2005 we satisfied 74 per cent of requests from other libraries, up from 55 per cent in 2003.

Staff found the shift from using the British Library WWS service to doing more searching for foreign locations for material themselves an enjoyable challenge. The catalyst for this change was the high cost of the British Library's WWS service. It was very important that staff were willing to spend time trawling catalogues and seeking out useful union lists to search for foreign locations for material; it would not have been possible without the team's enthusiasm.

Free Requests

LSE library is quite unusual in that we do not charge our users for their inter-lending requests. Users are contacted when there is a long wait for requests to make sure they still need them and users whose records are expiring are having their requests cancelled to prevent 'wasted' requests.

LSE staff can often be away for long periods of time on research projects or conferences. To prevent the inter-lending shelves becoming clogged with material users are now asked to give the department details of when they will be away. Inter-lending staff can then keep all their journal articles in boxes away from the main shelves ready for collection. When users have a lot of material to pick up they are encouraged to arrange appointments to pick up material to prevent queues at the main service counter. It is only possible to maintain free requests by keeping a constant eye on the budget and constantly evaluating suppliers for value for money.

Scan and Send

LSE and the British Library have negotiated a concordat. Part of this agreement is to set up collection mapping web pages for west European government documents. The web pages help researchers working at one of the libraries to locate material where there the other library has complementary government documents. This has been a lengthy project which has taken several years to set up. Both libraries have spent a lot of time making sure their collections together cover as many west European government documents as possible. As part of this concordat a new 'Scan and Send' service was launched 2005. This service enables users at LSE and the British Library to order west European government documents to be sent from the other library

within two hours. The collection mapping web pages have been very popular but it appears users are happy to make separate visits to both libraries for material.

Future Development of Service

The inter-lending department at LSE has worked hard over the last few years to improve services. Its work is constantly changing as user expectations alter. At the moment the issues the department are looking at are: increasing the coverage of the inter-lending service, in particular access to Japanese and American collections, and end-user electronic document delivery. The LSE IDD team has just become a borrower on the OCLC service. At present we have only had a few requests back so it is too early to say how useful and cost effective this is. So far the signs are good.

Continued dramatic change ensures that our work remains interesting and demanding.

Reference

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