Recent developments in Remote Document Supply (RDS) in the UK – 2

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Shortly after ILDS published a celebratory article on LAMDA (Goodier, 2005) – the document supply service that grew from a project among selected HE libraries – the end of the service was announced, officially terminating on 31st July 2005. Which is not to suggest anything in the way of a curse, for the writing had been on the wall for a considerable time. Goodier rightly identifies the increase in electronic journal holdings among HE libraries as a primary factor in the decline of LAMDA requests as well as the British Library (BL) move to SED. However, I would point to a number of other factors that also contributed to the slow death of LAMDA. Perhaps the first seeds were sown with the reduction of the support office from full-time to part-time. The costs of providing full-time support were simply not sustainable, but it meant that the role of the office was limited to administration – collecting data and processing invoices. Earlier, support staff had been involved in marketing and promotion.

Having been involved in LAMDA from the beginning I saw first hand how a number of developments and opportunities for expansion would come to nothing. Article supply to foreign libraries was one such venture. We used to have a customer library in South Africa but requests from them were short-lived and no other library outside the UK joined. Was there a strategy to invite others? Expansion to other markets such as FE and the NHS were often on the agenda without coming to fruition. The problem of penetrating the NHS firewall was, I think, a determining factor for failure. Even expansion to other UK HE libraries was not vigorously pursued – growth seemed to come piecemeal and then to stop.

An early collaboration (2001) with the Headline (1) project team at the LSE offered the chance to develop an article supply service directly to end users (EEDD – End User Document Delivery).This would have functioned in much the same way that the BL's SED service does now – articles would be scanned and posted to a server (in this case at the LSE). On arrival, users would be emailed notification along with the URL offering access to the article. Unfortunately the scheme never progressed beyond a trial, although it did prompt us at King's to offer our own users an electronic delivery option.

A late rebirth of LAMDA looked possible with the start-up of the Docusend project. (Bower 2005). But when this terminated at the project phase, and didn't develop into a service as originally planned, then that was the final straw.

The strategy undertaken by BLDSC to counter the inroads made by LAMDA into its document supply market would also be a major factor in its decline. Once BLDSC scrapped its loan/photocopy voucher system and introduced variable pricing, making the supply of copies much cheaper, then LAMDA was always going to struggle. Having always to maintain a healthy difference in price meant that LAMDA's options for increases were limited, and in fact prices were never raised once £4.20 was reached. With BLDSC offering rapid delivery by Ariel, another advantage and incentive for sticking with LAMDA was removed. A number of

users remained fiercely loyal, but effectively LAMDA had reached a natural end. For a long time it was just a question of when that would be made official.

FIL conference

The conference organised by the Forum for Interlending and Information Delivery takes place over three days every July in various institutions around the UK (and once in Ireland). It brings together those involved and interested in RDS from different sectors in an informal and enjoyable atmosphere. The 2005 conference was held in the pleasant coastal setting of Swansea University and got off to a terrific start with an outstanding keynote from Poul Erlandsen of the Danish National Library of Education. This had the twin effect of creating a real buzz that lasted for the duration of the conference but also of overshadowing everything that followed. Poul described the current Danish interlending scene – an enviable situation from the user's perspective of being able to find out about holdings nationwide from online catalogues, then being able to order items and have them delivered locally – and all for free! It certainly seemed like an interlending utopia in that respect, although delegates' sympathies were with those who had to manage the huge increase in traffic without a commensurate increase in staffing. Unfortunately Poul's paper is not available with the other conference presentations on the FIL website, but similar territory is covered in a paper on managing change in Danish libraries (Pors, 2003).

As well as showing a striking alternative to our national RDS picture, Poul also had a couple of criticisms to make of UK practice. A particular bone of contention is the high cost facing foreign libraries of obtaining items from BLDSC. The other obstacle foreign libraries face when requesting from the UK is the lack of RDS policies on libraries' websites. Unlike BL prices, this is a problem we can all do something about. It is important that libraries provide details of what they will lend to other libraries, costs and means of requesting and delivery. To create a perfect one for your library look at (Morris 2005) for information on what to include.

Decline and fall?

The boom in RDS in Denmark contrasts strongly with a decline in the UK. Unfortunately, detailed RDS statistics are no longer available from BLDSC. The reason given is that this information is now 'commercially sensitive'. If the bottom drops out of your market you wouldn't want to widely advertise that fact, but I think it's a shame that, compared to the riches of the past, we are left to scrape together a few crumbs from the Annual Report. So, rather than do that, I'll look to another source to see what it can tell us of the current state of UK RDS activity.

A natural place to start is the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) at Loughborough University, which regularly publishes statistical information on libraries. LISU's 'Annual Library Statistics' series contains a wealth of information about public and academic libraries, and has the added bonus of 10-year trend analyses of the data. Reports from recent years are available for free download from their website. Checking back, I find that the last we hear of interlending statistics for BLDSC is for the year 2001-2002 when 2.3 million requests from the UK were received – a fall of 12% from the previous year (Creaser, 2003). Looking back to the first article in this series I also found that BLDSC hit a peak of over 3 million in 1995-96. As there was a dip in the following year we can be confident that 1995-96 represented the high water mark of UK RDS requests to BLDSC. Data from LISU on inter-library loans in

the HE sector (BLDSC's largest customer market) from 1993 confirms this peak (Creaser, 2005). Although the figures from BLDSC and LISU are for different things – requests made against items obtained - it is nevertheless interesting to run comparisons. For instance, in 1995-96 total HE ILLs obtained traffic was roughly equivalent to 47% of requests received at BLDSC, while for 2001-02 it had barely changed to 46%. If this is a reliable comparator then we can estimate that for 2003-04 BLDSC's UK requests would be around 1.8 million. But I wouldn't be surprised if in fact the actual figure is quite a bit lower. So we can guess that from 1995/96 to 2005/06 the number of requests to BLDSC has roughly halved.

Looking closer at the LISU statistics, the number of items obtained in 2003-04 was 862,000 which is the lowest for all years, beginning in 1993-94. It was only in 2002-03 that the total dropped below 1 million.

For public libraries the report on 2001-02 mentions that ILLs received have fallen for the fourth consecutive year. The latest report, covering 2003-04, says that this figure has now reached its lowest level since 1993-94 – 344,000 from a high of 483,000 in 1997-98.

In addition to the academic and public sectors, and some pages on the national libraries, there is a summary table on Government departmental libraries. This too shows that the latest year, 2003-04, has recorded the lowest activity – 3,111 outgoing ILLs and 18,210 incoming. The high point for these libraries was 1993-94 when a staggering 80,108 outgoing and 52,870 incoming were recorded. Even accounting for the fact that the returns are based on responses from far fewer libraries (38 against 12 for outgoing and 47 against 18 for incoming) this still represents a serious decline. While the figure of 80,108 looks suspiciously high when viewed in context (as 11,588 in 1998-99 looks suspiciously low) the trend downwards is clear.

In that first article where I looked at RDS traffic I asked if the drop in 1996-97 was just a 'blip' or the beginning of a trend. Well, the statistical evidence is now clear – RDS activity has reduced significantly over the last 10 years and now stands at a new low.

FIL book

One of the good things to appear over the course of the last year has been a book produced under the auspices of FIL on RDS in the UK (Bradford and Brine, 2006). It gives a picture of RDS today in various sectors and for various formats and shows how we got here and where we could be going. Designed to be of practical use, it was written by practising RDS librarians and is the first time such a publication for the UK has been produced. It's a good milestone for FIL, as the organisation has done much to promote RDS as a life-affirming activity! Although it was published only recently, inevitably events have overtaken some of the content. I contributed two chapters and although that on library management systems (LMS) just managed to cover the merger of Sirsi and Dynix it was too soon to report on the acquisition of Fretwell Downing Informatics (FDI) by OCLC PICA. Having carved out a notable presence for itself, FDI is going to keep its identity and trade under its own name.

The Unity wars

Staff who have been involved in RDS since the mid 1990s will recall the sometimes intense rivalry between two national bibliographic utilities – Unity and LASER's Viscount system – that were used by many public libraries. Although both offered holdings data, Viscount also allowed management of the whole RDS process – something that was still on the wishlist for

Unity users. There didn't seem any prospect of the two being combined, even though many would have liked it to happen. Both have undergone numerous changes over the years – Unity was originally a co-operative of library regions, national libraries and others with systems being supplied by a company called Libris Computing Ltd. When Libris folded in September 1998 development of the database known as Unity was taken on by BLCMP, a well-known co-operative of the time. BLCMP eventually became Talis and Unity became UnityWeb. Since then Talis has developed UnityWeb in partnership with the Combined Regions. Meanwhile, Viscount metamorphosed into V3 Online before moving to a company called LIBPAC and then subsequently to OCLC PICA who renamed it V3.Web. It was only in April 2005 that V3.Web was revamped as LinkUK. Soon after OCLC PICA's acquisition of FDI came the news that the new company had won a tender to finally realise a dream for many – merging and developing the two systems into a single national resource. A cheaper service with improved functionality and closer integration with library management systems has been promised. Managing to produce a system in a remarkably short time, FDI and OCLC PICA have launched the service as UnityUK.

Talis, on the other hand, has its own product to offer. Deciding not to bid in the tender exercise the company isn't simply handing over its UnityWeb database for another company to develop, although it is contracted to supply a copy. Having built up a large union catalogue of over 400 library collections, with input from around 140 institutions, Talis intends to continue to offer a service and believes that it will retain their customers. Beginning in May 2006, 'Talis Source' (2) will emerge as their latest incarnation of UnityWeb. Customers who send and refresh their holdings data to the database will enjoy free search access while those who wish to use the interlending requesting facility will pay £500 per annum. In the publicity for the new product Talis has taken an early sideswipe at the competition by emphasising its current rather than projected status – the largest UK union catalogue – and by pointing out that, for contributors, Talis Source will be free, unlike other products that rely on subscriptions.

It seems somewhat extraordinary that a company that didn't engage in the tender process is nevertheless offering a product that aims to do what the successful bidder promised. Talis claim that their users want them to continue offering a product, while FDI and OCLC PICA say users of UnityWeb are switching to their new service and they have the backing of the Combined Regions. With two national systems of resource discovery and requesting, both bidding for the same market, the Unity wars are set to continue. The question is – will we see an eventual winner?

Reviewing the future – we're all doomed

The decision to go out to tender for the development of UnityWeb was taken by the Combined Regions after the publication of a report they commissioned with Talis on the future of resource sharing (Kentwood Associates, 2004). UnityWeb users were looking for improvements such as the development of an RDS module, more accurate data and the inclusion of real-time circulation information. This prompted the Combined Regions to look at what the market could offer (Talis, 2005) and then take the decision to award the contract to OCLC PICA and FDI.

Apart from seeking the views of users of UnityWeb the report's authors also looked at two other areas – 1) the strategic importance of resource sharing, and 2) the main issues within resource sharing and the drivers for change. Meetings, focus groups and telephone interviews

were held with relevant parties and written submissions were also received. The report's findings are rather gloomy but, nevertheless, what you would expect. RDS seems to function well but it is an overlooked, taken for granted service that receives little attention, particularly in public libraries. The lack of leadership and discussion at strategic level in the public library sector is contrasted with significant progress in HE - *"We felt that in the national strategic context an atmosphere of paralysis had settled upon ILL in public libraries, with all the key players waiting for someone else to take the first steps"*. The vacuum thus created by the non-engagement of major players is described as *"unhelpful and potentially dangerous."*

Technology is identified as a driver for change but again the report is rather damning of practice, saying that it is not always used as efficiently as it could be. Indeed, there would appear to be a distrust of RDS modules and LMS. Examples given are seemingly redundant use of manual procedures as backups or support for automated systems, or use of stand-alone PCs in addition to integrated modules. The prevailing philosophy seems to be that paper records should be maintained or the data stored on an individual's PC in case the main system fails.

Although the authors report that there is no immediate crisis in RDS, the situation does not look good. The lack of the following - funds for stock, specialist knowledge in RDS and music, system compatibility, leadership and strategic direction, and co-ordination of what initiatives are taking place - paints a dismal picture.

RDS in the NHS

More doom and gloom can always be found in the National Health Service (NHS), NHS, but then, for those so inclined, a contrasting view can also be taken. Job losses, bed closures and even exorbitant car parking charges make national headlines while reduced waiting times for operations present a contrasting picture. Currently facing anything up to an £800 million deficit, the sector hasn't received much attention in RDS literature. Depending on your view it is also possible to find the RDS glass half empty or half.

Even though £50 million is spent by the NHS on its libraries every year, RDS services operate on little money. Rather than use BLDSC, requests are made and supplied within regional networks operating on a free or low charge basis. Local union catalogues are maintained, as are protocols for requesting and supplying. There is some use of modern technology but article supply is very much paper-based and the sector as a whole lags behind in RDS developments. Some libraries may be set up as first or last resort libraries within regions while a few HE libraries act as support. The HE libraries tend to operate outside the reciprocal, no charge agreements and so, by default, act as last resort libraries. In addition to the regional networks there are two national schemes – the Nursing Union List of Journals (209 member libraries) and the Psychiatric Libraries Cooperative Scheme (118 members). The NULJ operates on a small annual membership fee and free RDS; for PLCS it's free membership and £2.50 for each RDS request.

With the aim of being the best health library and information service in the world, the National Library for Health (NLH) was set up to bring together all NHS library and information services. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for all NHS staff, students, patients and carers (3). For well over a year now consideration has been given to developing a national RDS service covering all of England. The exact nature of this service is still open to question but a couple of experiments have taken place that may show the way forward. In the

northwest, NHS library services have been using Dialog's eLinks system while in the southwest libraries have been working with VDX. A future model is likely to build on the work that has been done on compiling union lists of print journal holdings but also including ejournals. Ideally the service would offer a one-stop-shop where RDS staff could check a list of journals, check holdings, link to full text of ejournals, and place requests. And at least some of these activities could be opened up for users to do themselves.

But before we get to that stage the NLH will have to consider a business case that is currently being put together and approve funding. Wider consultation will then take place to decide on the set-up of a national RDS service. Should there be agreement on the need for a service and the form it should take then a tendering process is likely. And if say FDI/OCLC PICA prepared a bid and was successful then we could see the UnityUK model providing the infrastructure for both public/academic and NHS sectors. But at the moment that's pure speculation.

The open access wars

Publishers have been experimenting with various business models for open access (OA). Some journals are wholly OA, some become OA after a period e.g. one year, others are partly OA - whereby it is up to authors whether they want their article to be OA or not and so they pay accordingly. What should publishers charge for OA, is there a preferred business model, does OA have a future? To try and come up with some conclusive evidence ALPSP commissioned a research report on the subject (Kaufman Wills Group, 2005). I think it's fair to say, however, that, rather than putting various theories to bed, the report has stirred up further controversy and dispute. In fact the whole OA debate seems to have become increasingly acrimonious and the positions of those for and those against even more entrenched. The report's conclusion, that it is too early to say whether a wholly open access business model is sustainable, places it firmly on the fence, and contrasts strongly with the long-held position of the Wellcome Trust (SQW Ltd, 2004).

Naturally, ALPSP has sought to defend the position of the smaller societies and publishers that it represents. Their argument is that if a journal is available via OA then why should libraries continue to pay a subscription for it? Therefore, if their publishers move to OA they will be putting themselves in a very precarious position. Supporters of OA will argue that traditional journals can exist alongside OA and point to publishers of physics journals still in business after many years of co-existing with a well-stocked OA archive. Both of which are fair points. However, the status quo is not doing any favours to small publishers since it is their journals that currently rate as prime targets for subscription cancellation. The larger publishers have tied up libraries in big deal packages that greatly limit the number of cancellations they can make.

OA may not be progressing as quickly as some would like, or making as rapid progress and inroads into conventional publishing, but it's not something that is going to go away. Major publishers have recognised this and have sought to embrace OA, in their own fashion.

Google Purge

Librarians enjoy something of a love/hate relationship with Google. Is it a useful collaborator developing great products that can aid librarians in helping users find the information they want, or is it an all-consuming monster, even worse than Microsoft, that encourages users to

think they don't need librarians any more? Whatever your shade of opinion there's been no shortage of controversy surrounding Google over the last year.

There was a storm over collaborating in censorship with the Chinese government and another over riding roughshod over copyright laws. The latter occurred after the company unveiled the Google Print project (now renamed the Library Project) - the planned digitisation of millions of books from Harvard, Michigan, and Stanford universities, the New York Public Library, and our very own Oxford University. Once scanned, the libraries will be given electronic copies of the works they own and Google will make them available to anyone with internet access, or at least the out of copyright ones will be available. For the others Google will make only a few pages available so that users can see what the book is like and be able to search the text. Publishers were not happy when Google gave them the option of submitting a list of titles that they didn't want digitised. They argued it should operate the other way round. Google's argument that the project will stimulate demand for the books may be true, but misses the point.

There's a humorous piece in the online satirical magazine 'The Onion' about Google (Anon, 2005) which is worth looking at, for not only is it funny but it encapsulates the increasingly uneasy feeling people now have about Google, particularly in its Animal Farm makeover of the company's famous mission statement to do no evil. With remarkable prescience this statement essentially pre-empted what Google would actually say in justification of their policy of censoring searches in China.

Not wanting to lose further ground, it wasn't long before Google's rivals were announcing their own digitisation programme. Yahoo has launched a programme with the University of California, the University of Toronto, the Internet Archive and the UK National Archives to digitise selected American works. Microsoft and the British Library will be digitising around 100,000 out of copyright works from the BL's stock. Both these programmes emphasised that they would not be digitising works that were not already in the public domain. There would not be any copyright controversy here. And in a move to counter U.S. dominance, the French government and the Bibliotheque Nationale have set up their own initiative – Gallica – to digitise works in French.

What will be the effect of this mass digitisation on RDS? Will the increased availability of material lead to fewer requests or, as one writer (Morris, 2006) believes, more requests, as a result of people being more aware of what's out there? The British Library has also teamed up with Google to ensure that hits from searches on Google Scholar are matched against BL holdings and then links provided to the BL's new RDS service – British Library Direct. This new service is aimed at end users and by becoming the default supplier in Google Scholar the BL is well placed to draw in many of them.

National Research Reserve, (NRR)

As well as having around one million of their books digitised, Oxford University is also embarking on a major building project, one component of which is an off-site store for less-used materials. It is planned to use robots in the store. I don't know how these will function but hearing of this news reminded of a digest of an article I saw some years ago that outlined how robots could be used to retrieve and scan material in an off-site store (RLG, 2002). Is that the future for RDS?

Storage space, or the lack of it, is a major concern that all libraries face at one time or another. With the move to e only journals progressing very slowly libraries are still hanging on to their print collections. Now, however, they want to outhouse them. But not all libraries have such storage space and it's not always conveniently located nearby in case users require access or delivery. The idea of some type of co-operative store, with an RDS service, has been mooted as a solution.

Scotland is ahead of the game by establishing its own such store. CASS (Collaborative Academic Store for Scotland) was set up in the National Library of Scotland in 2004 by various partners. Operating by lease arrangement, partner libraries can send journals, books and other material to the store and request items for electronic or postal delivery. Alternatively, as the National Library is conveniently situated near the heart of Edinburgh, users can visit the building to access material. On the CASS website (4) are a number of presentations that report on developments one year on. Among the figures listed are the following – 3,449 metres of shelving occupied, 2,200 unoccupied with a further 8,000 metres that could be added; 418 requests received with 383 satisfied.

If libraries all want to remove low-use material but without actually disposing of it then it makes sense to co-ordinate efforts on a national basis. There was a survey that looked at libraries around the M25 to see if a store was feasible. The final report of the CoolPerStor project (Sykes, 2005) calculated that £3 million would be needed to set up a store and run it for five years. But for this sort of outlay there wasn't enough commitment.

There are some controversial areas that need to be resolved before setting up collaborative stores. Perhaps the major sticking point relates to ownership. Does each library retain ownership rights over any material it deposits, or does such material become the property of the managing authority? To maximise efficiencies the authority will need to de-duplicate stock but this may be a step too far for some libraries. What guarantees will be in place for the long-term retention and what will happen if the store eventually folds? Is the retention of a single copy enough for preservation? These are questions that potential stakeholders of a collaborative store will have to agree on. The degree of agreement will affect what model of store comes into being.

As the CoolPerStor project didn't find enough support for a regional scheme, attention then turned to establishing a national one. A study on behalf of CURL and the BL was undertaken to establish an efficient and cost effective solution (CHEMS, 2005). It offered four different models, according to how the user community felt about questions of ownership etc., and a fifth option of leaving each institution to decide and sort out its own storage solution. The favoured model is similar to CASS in that it builds on the already well established resources of a national library. In this case the BL would house the items, guarantee their holdings in perpetuity and provide any RDS service. Libraries could send unwanted stock to this National Research Reserve (NRR), probably located at Boston Spa. There was some concern, notably from Cambridge and Oxford, that retention of only a single copy of any journal would not be sufficient to guarantee long-term preservation. The community has since been reassured that the NRR will now stock more than one copy of titles. Work is currently being done on turning the model into a reality.

National monograph interlending

CHEMS Consulting also produced the report on beneficial models for national monograph interlending (HECG and CHEMS, 2003). Like the NRR, a group was established after the report's publication to examine the feasibility of bringing the preferred model to fruition. An article in an earlier issue of *Interlending & Document Supply* (Shoebridge, 2006) reported on the progress and difficulties the group faced, outlined how a request and delivery model called BookNow could work, and the group's final recommendations. In the end the cost of establishing BookNow proved to be too high to contemplate making it a reality.

 The technical aspects were always likely to prove a major obstacle and this turned out to be the case. In fact there was never a satisfactory solution to the problem of user authentication and this also posed a potentially very high cost to be factored into prices.

The idea of posting items directly to users seemed to touch a nerve. To my mind there was excessive concern over potential loss of stock. Any library that engages in RDS, lending to its own community or even simply providing access runs a risk of loss. It's something we live with quite happily day to day, but become overly concerned with when asked to take on something new such as lending abroad or lending directly to users.

Of the recommendations for further development that came from the group – some progress has been made on developing COPAC to facilitate interlending, while there hasn't been any further work on service level agreements or testing unmediated requesting and delivery.

Reviewing the future revisited – we're still doomed

From all the foregoing a likely scenario of RDS in the future emerges. Users will increasingly have access to materials online – thanks to further expansion of ejournal portfolios, wider availability via OA and open archives, and books and other items becoming available through digitisation programmes. It will become easier (but certainly not cheaper) for users to go directly to publishers and document suppliers to request items as these suppliers provide services to end users. Direct end user requesting and supply will become an option in library subscription packages. Users will also increasingly be able to request books from other libraries without going through an intermediary. This is already happening within academic and public library consortia, and to a lesser extent cross-sectorally such as Linc y Gogledd in Wales which partners public and academic libraries. New and future national RDS schemes can facilitate direct end user requesting and delivery. This could see demand rise significantly, as in Denmark, but RDS really then becomes part of regular circulation routines. Once users can reserve and renew items themselves and self-issue books thanks to RFID then obtaining material from a wider range of libraries becomes another facility. Should items have to be retrieved from stores then this will be done by robots, which can also scan material. This doesn't leave much for RDS staff, but then it may not happen – it just looks like it will.

Notes

(1) Headline (Hybrid Electronic Access and Delivery in the Library Networked Environment) was a 3-year project to design and implement a working model of the hybrid library from the point of view of the user. See http://www.headline.ac.uk/ for further details.

(2) The numbering of this article serves to show that it is now part of a formalised sequence, following a preceding article that in itself was one of a number on a similar theme. All previous articles (Prowse, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2004) are listed in the references.

(3) Talis Source http://www.talis.com/source

(4) National Library for Health - http://www.library.nhs.uk/

(5) CASS - http://cass.nls.uk/

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