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ILL. a dying breed or a new brand? The Experience of Edinburgh University

Introduction

Conversations between Interlibrary Loans staff suggest that ILL requests are on the decline, and statistics seem to confirm this. ILL departments have progressed a long way since the labour-intensive days of typewriters, triplicate BLDSC request forms and carbon paper which were so common only 10-15 years ago. Most academic libraries now use some form of automated requesting system. Many have adopted electronic document delivery and are now pushing towards full desk-top delivery to end-users. What follows is a journey through the experiences of Edinburgh University Library (EUL) over the last decade or so. It will look amongst other things at the trends in ILL activity, the impact of electronic journals, attempts to introduce electronic document delivery, the increase in overseas traffic and current frustrations.

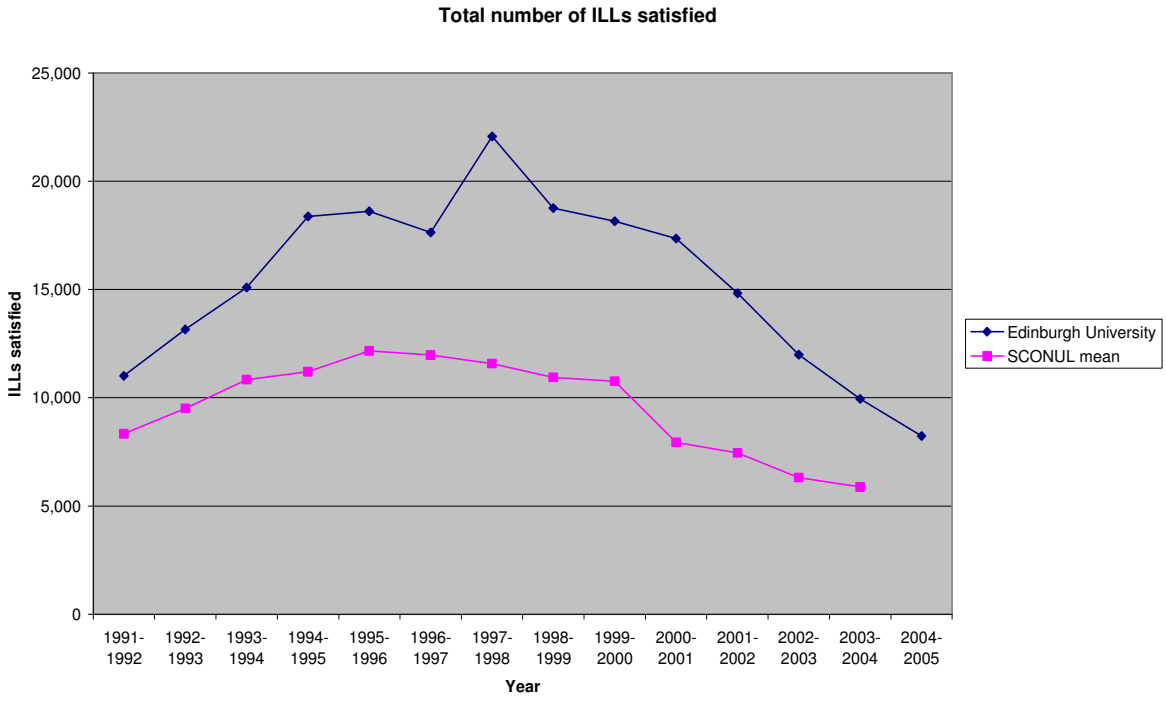
ILL in Edinburgh

Following a financial crisis in 1992, EUL made large-scale cancellations of serials subscriptions. The Library's materials budget was dropping in real terms each year, while the cost of serials subscriptions continued to rise by about 8-9% per annum. Figure 1 illustrates how the number of ILL requests satisfied for staff and students of the University of Edinburgh doubled from 11,005 in 1991-2 to 22,073 in 1997-8. The figure for 1997-8 was unexpectedly high, but examination of mean SCONUL (Standing Committee of National and University Libraries) figures for the same period confirms that EUL was following the general trend of other SCONUL libraries.

Initially we had assumed (perhaps naïvely) that electronic journals would be much kinder to library budgets than the print versions. Many publishers offered free electronic access with a print subscription. Other electronic titles were introduced, some at almost double the rate of the print version. However by this time many academics at the University were smitten with the electronic bug and were convinced that never again could they survive without electronic journals.

In some disciplines the attraction of instant access was somewhat tempered by the slightly poorer quality of some plates, for example in the field of histology, and the inability to print colour photos because few Schools owned a colour printer. On the whole, our Medical and Science academics were extremely enthusiastic towards electronic publications, to the point where they assumed that access was automatically available and free!

Figure 1



The introduction of e-journals brought a range of new management challenges, and changes to Library services. It is not within the scope of this article to document these, but a couple of typical examples follow. The majority of electronic subscriptions were linked to print subscriptions, and access to electronic titles was often lost without warning if the renewal of the related print subscription had been delayed. This particular problem has diminished as most publishers now allow a reasonable grace period over the renewal period. Some categories of Library users e.g National Health Service (NHS) clinical staff also discovered that because of the publishers' licence agreements, they were not entitled to access EUL electronic subscriptions, whereas they had unrestricted access to the print equivalents. These issues, combined with the exponential rise in the number of electronic titles meant that within a few years, serials staff found it impossible to cope with the increased volume of work, and a new post of Electronic Resources Librarian was created at Edinburgh.

Then the Big, "all you can eat" Deal (Ball, 2004) came on stage. Librarians hoped that bundled deals would help to simplify the rules. By subscribing to large bundles, administration would be reduced to a minimum, as all titles in the bundle would operate under a single licence. Access would be provided to many more titles than could be afforded in print form. However David Ball argues that while Librarians had the freedom to select the individual titles for their print collections, control over the choice of components of electronic collections has shifted from the Librarian to the publisher. This

shift continues to impact on collection management decisions, and on budgeting for new resources.

The impact of e-journals on Interlibrary Loans has been well-documented in the last few years. Tony Kidd's analysis of the effect of ScienceDirect on document delivery at Glasgow University Library appears to confirm the perception that electronic journals have played a significant role in the drop in requests for journal articles (Kidd, 2003).

Glasgow's experiences with ScienceDirect would suggest that a small number of major titles account for a large share of "hits", and that the majority of titles obtain relatively few hits.

Following on from the Glasgow study, we have recently undertaken a preliminary survey in Edinburgh of all titles now available to the University through ScienceDirect. We started by examining the number of ILL requests which were submitted for these titles from August 1995 to July 2001, and similarly from August 2001 to date. Approximately 1800 ScienceDirect titles have been available to Edinburgh since 2001 and cover issues back to 1995. Slightly over half of these titles were the subject of ILL requests between 1995 and 2001 (9280 requests) and about one third of the titles have been requested since 2001 (1940 requests). Although these 1940 requests have not yet been scrutinised in detail, it is assumed that they were for pre-1995 issues not covered by the ScienceDirect licence.

It is true that bundles of electronic titles provide access to titles which would otherwise never be available. Unfortunately, the terms of some licence agreements may also restrict the number of titles which can be cancelled, so institutions find themselves unable to discard the less popular items. The time will come when libraries are forced to evaluate large-scale investment in packages, sections of which are little used.

Document supply from electronic journals

The upsurge in the number of electronic titles has clearly been of great benefit to our users. However the new technology does present new challenges. Each publisher has its own terms and conditions and its own way of defining them. Therefore in common with many legal documents, the secret lies in the extraction and interpretation of the relevant information, including permission or refusal to provide copies on Interlibrary Loan. The survey at the University of Illinois (Wiley, 2004) suggests that many ILL staff do not have access to the licences, and that even if they do, the extra steps involved in scouring through the legal jargon actively discourages them from proceeding any further. ILL staff in EUL have found this very frustrating in their role as lender as well as borrower. We will generally turn down requests from other libraries for electronic titles, simply because we have been unable to readily establish what, if any restrictions stand in our way. By the same token, we expect requests to libraries whose only holdings are electronic to be rejected. This is a great pity, because as more libraries discard their print holdings in favour of electronic only, the time-honoured cooperation between libraries is being put at risk. As work progresses on the development of a database of licensing information for electronic resources, we have been surprised how many publishers do appear to include

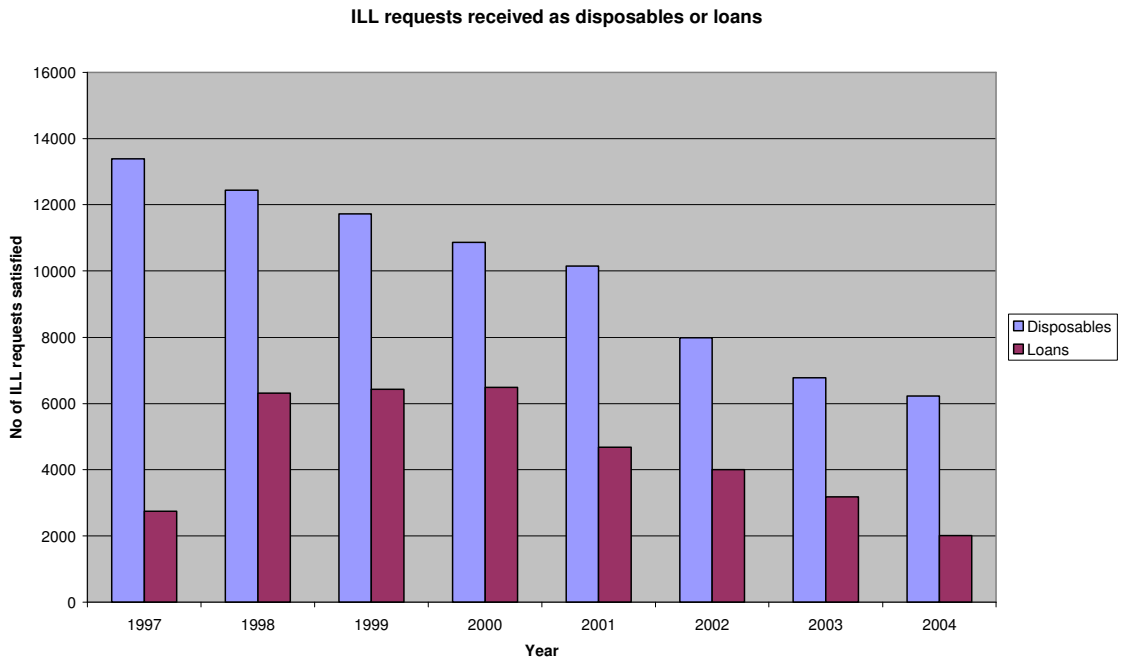
Interlibrary Loan provision. However, in the same way that we will never stop painting the Forth Bridge, the job of maintaining such a list could never be finished. Details would constantly have to be re-examined and updated.

EUL has decided to purchase one of the growing number of Electronic Resource Management (ERM) packages on the market, and this should ease the task of extracting appropriate ILL information from licences. However it still begs the question: why do publishers seem to be so much more concerned about the misuse of electronic text than of printed text? Electronic journals are themselves likely to be more secure than the printed copies on the shelves, because they require authentication. Printed journals are open to anyone who has access to the library. However if anyone chooses to flout copyright legislation, it would still be technically and practically possible to make multiple copies of an article, whether the journal is in print or electronic form.

Types of ILL request

We would have expected the impact of electronic journals to fall on requests for articles rather than requests for loans. However further examination of ILL trends since 1997 shows that the number of loans acquired for EUL users has also been dropping each year (Figure 2). Unfortunately, preliminary investigations have failed to explain this. It was thought that an increase in the number of requests for more obscure requests might have resulted in more requests being abandoned, but our statistics do not suggest this. The cause therefore remains a mystery.

Figure 2



The overall decline in the number of ILL requests during the last decade disguises the fact that EUL has experienced a slow but steady rise in the number and proportion of requests filled from overseas. In 1997/8, 76 applications were satisfied by overseas libraries (0.4% of the total for that year). By 2004/5, these figures had risen to 329 and 4% respectively. There is likely to be more than one explanation for this. Until recently, there were few options available: if BLDSC could not supply, we would search COPAC; failing that, we would ask the National Library of Scotland to do a UK location search for us. Overseas options such as BLDSC World-wide searches were rarely considered, mainly on the grounds of expense. Also, although it was possible to widen the search abroad by means of WorldCat, the subsequent workflow involving exchanges direct with the holding library was considered very expensive and time consuming for ILL staff.

By 2000, it appeared that more requests were being submitted which quite clearly could not be satisfied within the UK. Many of these requests had been placed by overseas students who themselves were paying substantial fees to study at the University. The ILL department was faced with a dilemma: invest proportionately more time and funds in these requests, or risk providing an inferior service for an important section of the University's population. A lifeline appeared in the shape of the Research Libraries Group Net Lending Scheme (RLG SHARES). Along with a number of other CURL libraries in the UK, EUL joined the SHARES scheme in about 2001. Although the system allows CURL libraries to borrow from each other within the UK, the main benefit lies in the ability to draw upon the resources of the large US research libraries. The income and expenditure from all transactions are calculated at the end of the year, resulting in a single cheque for each net lending library and a single invoice for each net borrower.

"Net Lending" has existed in the USA since the 1970s, possibly in the absence of anything resembling BLDSC. Instead, US libraries are able to lend and borrow amongst themselves with very little need to look beyond their own shores, a fact which is evident from the relatively few loans supplied to US libraries from the UK.

Theses

The borrowing and lending of theses poses an ever growing challenge. As access to the bibliographic details of new theses increases, so do the expectations of researchers. Unfortunately the traditional secure location of theses within Special Collections Departments has meant that libraries are not always willing to allow them beyond the limits of the Library building. BLDSC's thesis microfilm service aims to get round this problem. In EUL, the microfilm readers themselves are situated within Special Collections which has more restricted opening hours than other sections of the library. There is also a common complaint that microfilms are more difficult to read than hard copies. They are therefore not universally welcomed with open arms by researchers, and we occasionally find ourselves buying a hard copy through BL's Thesis service and adding it to library stock.

The number of requests for overseas theses continues to rise, and although many libraries have similar policies to ours, we never cease to be amazed at the number of small US libraries who are delighted to share their research with us at little or no cost. We have also

been known in sheer desperation to contact authors directly and ask for help in locating an item: our reward – a full-text pdf by return.

EUL's policy allows an EUL PhD thesis to be lent within the UK provided that there are two copies in stock. It currently does not permit lending overseas, so reluctantly we have to reject many requests which come to us from all corners of the globe. John MacColl makes reference to the "thick, black-bound volumes standing forbiddingly in rows on library shelves, very probably in closed access stack" (MacColl, 2002). It is highly likely that a large proportion of such collections will never see the light of day, and the academic world will never benefit from the research that they contain. I regret having to turn down requests for loans, so the creation of an electronic archive of theses was a welcome prospect. *Theses Alive!* was a project aiming to do just that. Led by the University of Edinburgh, it worked to produce a management system for electronic theses. The project ceased at the end of 2004, but one of the most exciting outcomes of the project was the establishment of the Edinburgh Research Archive (ERA), a repository for electronic theses awarded by the University of Edinburgh and other research material. This archive is still in the early stages of deployment, but it is already proving to be a valuable resource. Indeed, as many as 2000 hits have been recorded for the most heavily used items, and steps have already been taken to ensure that eventually, all Edinburgh doctoral theses will be submitted electronically to the archive. It has even been suggested that older theses currently held in hard copy could be digitized on demand. However certain copyright issues would have to be addressed before this is possible. This will not necessarily benefit the Interlibrary Loans department directly, but it will help to redress the disappointment currently felt when we have to reject requests.

Secure Electronic Delivery (SED)

The arrival of Secure Electronic Delivery from BLDSC has not been without its hiccups. In common with a number of other institutions, Edinburgh deferred implementation until early problems were resolved. BLDSC's advertising campaign along with paper copies of articles was expected to produce a flood of requests from academics wanting to sign up, but we are not aware of a single such case. However in February 2005, we decided to launch a trial with the cooperation of about thirty postgraduates and staff who regularly received articles from BLDSC. They were sent a brief explanation of the scheme and invited to join the trial. Those who were interested were then sent instructions on how to download their digital rights management (DRM), and by the end of the exercise, we had successfully recruited about fifteen to the trial. This was a smaller number than intended. However it did give us the opportunity to move carefully and deal with problems calmly and methodically, rather than hit large-scale difficulties all at once. A core group of about eight people took to SED very well, and were soon submitting requests regularly. One or two others encountered problems with DRM and pulled out. Occasional difficulties were experienced with articles arriving on Library PCs instead of going directly to the end user. BLDSC were aware of the problems and have introduced measures to resolve the difficulties

The decision was then taken, following BLDSC's decision to offer a slightly cheaper price for SED than conventional delivery, to publicise SED more actively. Fliers were sent to

sites; Liaison Librarians were asked to canvass their own communities; an article was placed in the University bulletin; the service was highlighted on the Library's web pages. The campaign has met with mixed reaction. The Medical academics have been reasonably enthusiastic, but the scientists have for the most part ignored all attempts to recruit them. Some have problems with different email systems which apparently do not display the attachments or open the links to the URL. Others encountered difficulties setting up their DRM. Also, at the time of writing, disaster has struck in that our most prolific user of SED has had a recent spate of problems and has intimated that she would like to return to paper copies.

The apparent indifference towards SED has come as a surprise, because many of our academics have always appeared to be technophiles, eager to embrace new developments. The Library now faces a dilemma. On the basis of articles supplied by BLDSC in 2004-5, Edinburgh could now expect to pay £2,000 more for paper copies than for SED documents. On the other hand, a great deal of staff time has already been expended liaising with BLDSC customer services and disgruntled academics. There was a hope that SED could eventually become the default method of delivery. However, this will not progress in Edinburgh until technical difficulties have been addressed. We as ILL staff do not have the expertise to solve IT-related problems, so we have to rely on the services of our own already stretched IT departments, and ask our users to do the same at their end.

Electronic Document Delivery (EDD)

SED may not have taken off with a bang, but EUL can boast considerable success with its own electronic delivery system. Although the majority of EUL's fourteen sites are situated in the centre of the city or at the King's Buildings Science Campus two miles away, there are other sites dispersed across the whole city and beyond.
Until price rises and lack of shelf space started to bite, it was not uncommon for EUL to have multiple subscriptions to journal titles so that everyone had access to a copy in their "home" sites. Imagine the furore when duplicate subscriptions and later, unique titles were cut. Electronic access addressed some concerns, but the question then arose - who would hold the single remaining copy? Oncology journals caused particular concern. Edinburgh's main oncology unit is situated at the Western General Hospital, so it seemed sensible to deposit the oncology titles in the Library there. However, staff at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in the city centre presented a perfectly valid argument that they also had a need for such titles. At that time there was no NHS e-Library, so electronic journals were not an option for clinical staff.

EUL has a service agreement with the Lothian Universities NHS Trust, and as such, something had to be done to address the problem of access to remotely situated journals. Staff at the Erskine Medical Library (EML) in the centre of town embarked on a pilot project to provide electronic copies of articles to sites. After some investigation of software, Ariel was chosen. A large book scanner was purchased and the project began. Initially, documents were scanned from EML to the Western General Hospital Library, and occasionally to the King's Buildings or Easter Bush sites. The articles were sent to the receiving library's IP address (usually the Service Desk PC) and printed off there for the end user. However Ariel has scope for direct Patron Delivery, whereby articles can be

scanned directly to the end user's email address. The principle is very similar to that of BLDSC's SED. The recipient does not require Ariel to be installed on his PC. Instead, an email is sent with a link to the requested article which has been scanned onto the supplying library's server. The link remains for a limited time. End users therefore have to be reminded not to request an article the day before they depart for a three-week holiday in the Styx!

In time, six more "send and receive" Ariel 3.4 licences were purchased along with smaller desk-top scanners. Seven sites can therefore now transmit and receive articles on their Desk IP addresses. The remaining seven sites were given access to the more limited Ariel 2 licence which allows them only to receive documents.

The closure of the old Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh in 2003 meant that all the NHS Clinical staff previously based in the centre of town, were transferred either to the new Royal Infirmary or to the Western General. Then, in May 2004, EML itself closed and its entire stock was moved into the Main Library. As crate after crate was brought into the Main Library, the image came to mind of a crowd of students trying to cram into a telephone kiosk. Quite clearly, there was not going to be enough open shelving to take an entire library's stock. In the end, all dead journal runs were transferred to closed access, rolling stacks in the basement. These developments have provided an idea opportunity to promote EDD to a wider section of the University community.

The concept of closed access stores was a relatively new one for EUL clientele, and not one to which they have readily warmed. Academics and clinicians who had previously enjoyed browsing through journals now found themselves based miles away, and unable to peruse their favourite titles, even if they took the trouble to come into town in person. Some ILL staff had never used a scanner before, but were about to be given plenty of practice. The first couple of months were frustrating as we grappled with the whims of the scanner. Nevertheless, a return to the photocopier was no longer an option if we were to compensate the Medics for the loss of their library. One year on, we have accepted our new toy and its occasional tantrums, and are transmitting around 150 articles per month to other EUL sites or directly to end-users. We have also intimated to other institutions that we are happy to supply electronic copies instead of paper and that we intend to follow the BLDSC two-tier pricing model.

Collaborative Academic Store for Scotland (CASS)

EUL is not unique in finding itself short of space. Over the last few years, some stock has found its way into compact, closed access stores, but there is still sustained pressure from University authorities to cut back on Estates and Buildings.

In November 2001, the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL) was given Scottish Executive funding for a study into a possible collaborative store and delivery service for Scottish University Libraries. As a result, in January 2004, CASS was launched as a pilot service in facilities owned by the National Library of Scotland (NLS) who also provide the staff to run the store. The other partner libraries are Edinburgh, St Andrews, Aberdeen, Stirling, Paisley and Glasgow Caledonian Universities and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. Each partner rents shelf space from

NLS where they deposit materials from their own stock. Most partners have chosen to transfer little-used journals, but one partner has taken the bold step of shifting print journals, including current subscriptions, for which they have access to the electronic version.

The deposited material is available for use by all partner libraries, and as the CASS catalogue is freely available, stock is also theoretically available to non-partner libraries. In practice, however, it tends to be the "owning" library that requests its own stock. Items can be borrowed or articles photocopied or scanned using Ariel. Very few of the partner libraries have purchased Ariel, due to cost and perceived value beyond CASS. As a result, most requests are currently satisfied as loans or paper copies.

CASS still operates as a pilot, but several long-term decisions are already requiring attention. As shelf space starts to run out, duplicate stock is appearing on the shelves, and a policy will soon have to be agreed on de-duplication and ownership. Some partners are also independently attempting to solve their own growing storage problems and are looking for their own larger offsite facilities, so the future of CASS will depend to some extent at least on the wider plans of the partner libraries.

What does the future hold?

Interlibrary Loans departments have traditionally found themselves drowning in paper. Copyright legislation has required the retention of request archives, and until the mid-1990s, most records were kept on paper. The advent of computerised ILL systems has significantly reduced the workload, but still the mountains of paper pile up in store cupboards. EUL is a typical example.

Most requests arrive on paper forms with the copyright signature at the foot. Although the service is heavily subsidised by the Library, individual readers are required to attach a prepaid voucher (currently £4.00) to the request. The ILL management system in use in EUL is the University of Lancaster's ILLOS system which has its own web application forms which we are keen to adopt. However there is currently no incentive for our readers to use them. Basic stand-alone web request forms already exist, but applicants must still print off a user agreement and send it in to the library with a voucher.

Two obstacles stand in the way of a fully streamlined desk-top service in Edinburgh.

Electronic signatures, or the absence of them, play a regular part in discussions about copyright (Prowse, 2004). The "are they legal?" debate has rumbled on for years, with the two sides still poles apart. As in the case of electronic journal licences, the problem seems to lie in the interpretation of the legislation. Most institutions are reluctant to take the risk of being the test case.

The other difficulty lies in the form of payment. As long as requests have to be pre-paid, the applicant must submit a paper voucher in the post before the request is processed. An online payment system exists within the University, enabling payments to be made by credit or debit card. However this does not currently feed into the ILL system, so credit

still has to be loaded manually onto the applicant's ILL record. Such a system would be susceptible to human error if it were adopted on a large scale. One possible solution would be to remove charges altogether, but the result would be a substantial loss of income to the Library. There is also a danger that readers would be less accountable for their requests and would apply for non-essential items. Another option is to invoice the Schools retrospectively. Understandably, there could be some opposition to this from Schools, as it would increase their administrative burden. However life for the individual requesters and for the ILL department would be considerably simpler. Negotiations continue!

Conclusion

There is a perception that experiences in EUL mirror the general decline in Interlibrary Loan traffic. Electronic journals have undoubtedly been a major factor in this. However financial and physical squeezes on space have allowed other related projects to develop. Cancellations of print subscriptions have resulted in an increased demand for Electronic Document Delivery to sites and directly to patrons who are widely dispersed across the city and beyond. The rise in closed access and offsite storage has also placed the drive towards full desk-top delivery to the forefront of the Library's strategy. Unfortunately obstacles have hampered progress. There has been less incentive to push for electronic signatures because we still had to address the issue of payment methods, and vice versa. If one of these issues were to be resolved, there would be a stronger impetus to deal with the other.

Interlibrary Loans activities as we knew them ten years ago are now moving aside in favour of a more local service. The majority of traffic used to be between libraries and BLDSC, but in Edinburgh there is now a clear shift towards an in-house EDD service. The feeling here is that far from disappearing altogether, ILL staff will simply find their roles changing. Viva Interlibrary Loans!

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