

Inter-Library Loans Survey April 2004

Report

1. Introduction & Methodology

- 1.1 The survey took the form of a Web based questionnaire which was e-mailed to 1,380 staff and students (612 staff; 614 research postgraduate students; 154 taught postgraduate students) who had made use of the Inter-Library Loans service between March 2003 and March 2004.
- 1.2 The survey remained live for a 2-week period between 19th March and 2nd April 2004.
- 1.3 The questionnaire is attached to this paper as Appendix 1.

2. Response & Respondents

- 2.1 In total, 483 responses were received. This represents quite a high response rate of 35%. Table 1 shows the response rate for each category of user:

Table 1

Category of User	Number of Responses	% Response rate
Staff	252	52.17%
PG Research	195	40.37%
PG Taught	20	4.14%
Other	10	2.07%
Not stated	6	1.24%

- 2.2 Responses were received from 40 Schools and Institutes with very significant responses from Medicine (69), Agriculture & Food Science (40), Biology & Biochemistry (32) and Chemistry (29).
- 2.3 Respondents were asked to indicate which Branch Library they used most often to access the Inter-Library Loans service. The responses are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Branch Library	Number of Responses	% Response rate
Agriculture & Food Science	50	10.35%
Biomedical Library	38	7.86%
Main Library	140	28.98%
Medical Library	57	11.80%
Science Library	185	38.30%
Veterinary Sciences Library	13	2.69%

- 2.4 Respondents were also asked to indicate the approximate number of individual books and journal articles which they had requested via the Inter-Library Loans service during the previous 12 months. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Number of requests March 2003-March 2004	Number of Responses	% Response rate
1-10	236	48.86%
11-30	174	36.02%
31-50	51	10.55%
51+	17	3.51%
Not Stated	3	0.62%

3. Feedback Received

The main body of the questionnaire sought to establish users' level of satisfaction with various aspects of the Inter-Library Loans service and the paragraphs below summarize the responses received.

4. Method of Requesting Books & Journal Articles (Currently by Completion of Printed Request Form)

4.1 Respondents' level of satisfaction with the current method of requesting books and journal articles is represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Level of Satisfaction	Number of Responses	% Response rate
Very Satisfied	154	31.88%
Satisfied	274	56.72%
Dissatisfied	46	9.52%
Very Dissatisfied	6	1.24%
Not Stated	3	0.62%

4.2 Representative Comments

"Would benefit from an online form (more convenient than a written form and doesn't necessitate going to library)."

"It would be useful to have an electronic form if there was some way of 'attaching' vouchers. Maybe everyone could be given electronic credits at the start of the year?"

"Electronic request form would be more appropriate. Ideally, the person requesting the loan would be able to see his/her ILL on screen."

"Since I often find references online, the ability to paste into a web form or e-mail would make this easier."

"I understand that, because of copyright issues, we need to submit every time a signed request, but I wonder if there is a possibility to have one signature on file and proceed with the request by e-mail or through the web for simplicity and speed."

"Electronic ordering would be an improvement. It wouldn't require us to collect slips from the library and would allow us to keep better records of what we had ordered."

4.3 Commentary

As the figures indicate, most users (88.6%) are either satisfied or very satisfied with the current method of requesting books and journal articles. However, very significant numbers of users would prefer an electronic requesting system. It is noteworthy that most respondents wrongly perceived the current voucher system as the over riding difficulty in implementing this facility, rather than the real difficulty which is the requirement for an authorised signature to accompany each request for copyright purposes. Apart from speed and convenience, being able to retain a local record of requests was seen as an added advantage. Many users also find the voucher system cumbersome.

5. Delivery Time (i.e. Between Placing Request and Receiving Item)

5.1 Respondents' level of satisfaction with the delivery time between placing a request and receiving the item is represented in Table 5.

Table 5

Level of Satisfaction	Number of Responses	% Response rate
Very Satisfied	144	29.81%
Satisfied	295	61.07%
Dissatisfied	31	6.41%
Very Dissatisfied	6	1.24%
Not Stated	7	1.44%

5.2 Representative Comments

"New direct delivery a great help"

"If items are not immediately available from the British Library, then there seems to be a delay in sourcing the items from different libraries."

"It varies a lot leading to a level of uncertainty as to whether the books will arrive or not. A method of tracking the loan would resolve this."

"Sometimes, when a book is difficult to track down, there can be a lengthy delay, which is irritating, but I imagine it is one of those things that Queen's has no control over. Overall, I think the service is fab."

"Obviously, some delivery times take longer than others because of availability, so don't think you could criticise!"

"Delivery times vary greatly. It would be better if we could be notified by e-mail rather than a note when a book arrives at the Library for us."

"Has improved with the direct posting of articles from the British Library to the person rather than via the library"

5.3 Commentary

Once again, most users (90.88%) are either satisfied or very satisfied with the delivery time for books and journal articles. Some respondents reported variable delivery times for books and journals (longer for books) but most recognised this as a factor relating to the availability of the item rather than the efficiency of the local service. They also referred to difficulty tracing more obscure items not available from the British Library.

The request for e-mail notification when items arrive was made several times. Several respondents also commented favourably on the recent introduction of direct delivery for journal articles.

6. Method of Delivery for Journal Articles (Currently Photocopy Delivered to School/Home/Work Address)

6.1 Respondents' level of satisfaction with the current method of delivery for journal articles is represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Level of Satisfaction	Number of Responses	% Response rate
Very Satisfied	264	54.65%
Satisfied	184	38.09%
Dissatisfied	12	2.48%
Very Dissatisfied	6	1.24%
Not Stated	17	3.51%

6.2 Representative Comments

"I would prefer pdf e-mail delivery."

"When article arrives in, notice is posted to home address which wastes valuable time waiting on post to be received. Surely an e-mail could be sent instead or as well also could some articles not be forwarded to e-mail address as read only document?"

"Scanned PDF versions would be great - but maybe it's not possible"

"Have had a few occasions when the photocopy of the paper was very poor, and the paper could not be read."

"In general it's fine to get a photocopy and I prefer in any case to read things in hard copy. Where the journal is available online, I would, however, be equally happy to receive an electronic version of the article in PDF format which I could then print."

"This system is very good, but it would be even better if QUB departmental address was used as default, as opposed to home address."

6.3 Commentary

The overwhelming majority of respondents (92.74%) indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the current method of delivery for journal articles. Predictably enough, however, respondents favoured a move to electronic delivery for journal articles and an overwhelming percentage of comments in this area related to this. It is noteworthy that the British Library only launched its Secure Electronic Delivery (SED) service in December 2003.

The only other issue raised related to occasional poor quality photocopies, especially for images or tables.

7. Staff Helpfulness and Knowledge

- 7.1 Respondents' level of satisfaction with staff helpfulness and knowledge is represented in Table 7.

Table 7

Level of Satisfaction	Number of Responses	% Response rate
Very Satisfied	272	56.31%
Satisfied	194	40.16%
Dissatisfied	12	2.48%
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Not Stated	5	1.03%

7.2 Representative Comments

[Large number of very positive comments omitted]

"This is not just a comment on interlibrary loans but it is a chance to say how helpful I have found the library staff over all queries."

"Staff are always very helpful, understanding and knowledgeable. The ILL service is one of the best services offered by the library."

"I have always found the staff very helpful - any problems that there have been appear to be a result of factors beyond their control."

"The helpfulness and knowledge of the staff is fine but only if you get to speak to the right person which at times is extremely difficult."

"I am not convinced that any initiative is being shown for more unusual items which are often required for research"

"Response time to e-mail communications should be improved. Staff should check e-mail at least every hour instead of once or twice a day."

"Follow-ups when there is an unavoidable delay in delivery are most appreciated."

7.3 Commentary

The overwhelming response on staff helpfulness and knowledge was very favourable (96.47% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied) and very many favourable comments were received on specific staff and groups of staff. The only real issue which has emerged is that when specialist Inter-Library Loan staff are absent, users may encounter difficulty in having their problems addressed.

8. Further Comments on Inter-Library Loans Service

8.1 Electronic requesting & delivery

"It would be useful to have an electronic ILL service - i.e. register the numbers on the vouchers, and submit your request along with the number via the library Web pages. It would cut down on paper, and time for staff to input details into the computer."

"I have found the service adequate and the staff helpful - perhaps electronic notification might speed things up as would the ability to order inter-library loans on line."

"Constantly writing out forms can be time consuming but on the whole I think it is a very efficient service."

8.2 E-mail notification

"If the item is held at Science Library for collection (e.g. book), it would be nice if notification could happen by E-mail rather than the slow internal mail system, since loan periods are often very short."

"Although it has been said that people would be contacted by e-mail re all library issues we still receive letters for inter-library loans etc. E-mail would be much more efficient."

8.3 Shortfall in local resources

"I could not do without it. It provides a way around our poor collection in some areas (e.g. periodicals in English literature which contain articles which are invaluable for teaching purposes.)"

"The university needs to move away from hard copy of journals to electronic format and to take more journals of relevance to the research interests of the staff. This would greatly reduce the number of articles requested through inter library loan."

"Inter-library loan is fine for occasional articles but is an unsatisfactory method for regular access to key journals in 2004. Too many are not available online at Queen's."

"Clearly the inter-library loans service is only used when the reference is not available electronically. The ideal would be to be able to access all journals electronically."

"My heavy use of the ILL service results from the poor monograph holdings of QUB especially of continental literature. I also find it ridiculous that items that I know to be available in Dublin libraries such as UCD should have to be requested via Boston Spa."

8.4 Voucher system

"The voucher system is a bit unwieldy to use."

"Is it necessary to have a voucher scheme? Surely with members of staff being assigned to the school it should be possible to bill schools without having to get vouchers?"

8.5 Progress Reports on Requests

"To be more helpful and effective information to the person who has asked for loan. Keep him/her updated."

"Estimated time of delivery would be very useful."

"In general the service is very good. It would be nice to know how long however of a delay one might be expected to wait until the book or journal arrives i.e. like a tracking service, however this may not be possible."

8.6 Importance of the Inter-Library Loan Service

"This is an invaluable service and one which I appreciate greatly"

"The inter-library loan service at QUB is invaluable; its importance in a library which has not kept up with its peers in terms of book and journal holdings cannot be overstated. For RAE 2008 it is vital that this service be maintained and enhanced."

"The ILL service is critical for the preservation of Queen's reputation for research excellence. Without it, staff would be at a loss as regards obtaining articles, etc. not available at Queen's."

8.7 Other areas of concern

"It would be good if, when ordering theses, one could request, and pay for, if necessary, a copy rather than receive a microfilm. Microfilm generally does the job, but the British Thesis Service is slow to respond to individuals as opposed to libraries"

"Not your fault, but receiving PhD thesis on microfiche from British Library and not being able to photocopy them is a waste of time and resources"

"Basically for many of the items I seek, there seems to be a lack of trust from the lending libraries. My success rate for obtaining requested books has been less than 50%."

"There was a proposal a few years ago to have a branch of TCD library within Queen's, so that depositary items would be more accessible. Did anything come of this?"

"I placed some requests for English translations of non-English papers but they were delivered to me in their original language with no help to me!"

"It might be a good idea to update the defunct requests on our ILL lists on our QCat accounts."

"I know that guidance is available on what services the library provides and how to access them, working at a remote site means that I get somewhat detached from these library services. A simple update guide would be very useful and reassuring."

"Good survey. Thanks for listening and please let us know the result and conclusion. Also there should be more surveys of this kind especially regarding the services provided by the Computing Services."

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 Implement Secure Electronic Delivery (SED) for journal articles from the British Library as soon as this is supported by TALIS (the Library Management System). Currently this function is not supported but will be included in the next upgrade which is due to be loaded in July 2004.
- 9.2 Pilot a limited electronic requesting service for QUB users in 2004-5; a previous trial was not well received when users realised that Web forms still had to be printed in order to submit the signature which is required by law.
- 9.3 Maintain a watching brief on developments in copyright legislation in this area – e.g. acceptability of electronic signatures.
- 9.4 Introduce e-mail notification of the arrival of Inter-Library Loan requests to QUB users during the 2004-5 academic year.
- 9.5 Review the current voucher system with a view to early replacement
- 9.6 Carry out an internal review into tracking of Inter-Library Loan requests and the feedback provided to users when delays occur.
- 9.7 Review back-up cover arrangements at Library Issue Desks when regular Inter-Library Loan staff are absent.
- 9.8 Publicise the results of this survey and the recommendations

9. Conclusion

Overall, the response to the survey is very encouraging. The response rate and extent of additional comments were impressive. Users obviously value the service very highly and monitor service developments closely. Overwhelmingly the results are very positive and high rates of satisfaction can be reported. Finally, all of the significant service enhancements requested (see paragraphs 9.1, 9.2, 9.4 and 9.5) already feature in Library development plans.

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