ELECTRONIC SERIALS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES PROJECT:

SUMMARY OF INITIAL SURVEY FINDINGS

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This summary presents the results of a survey undertaken as part of the Electronic Serials in Public Libraries Project. The project is looking at the current and potential provision and exploitation of serials in electronic formats in the UK's public libraries.

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For the purposes of the project, serials have been defined as newspapers, magazines and e-zines. Very little attention has been given to the use and impact of these resources even though more and more electronic newspapers and magazines are appearing, both on the Internet and in CD-ROM format. Serials have sometimes been marginalised in public libraries, simply because of ever-increasing pressures on budgets; the Electronic Serials in Public Libraries project aims to discover whether or not electronic formats offer public libraries an opportunity to offer serials where they previously could not and whether electronic serials will enable public libraries to ensure that they deliver services which are of relevance to their users.

The project researchers are based within Loughborough University's Department of Information & Library Studies (DILS) and the project is funded by the British Library's Research and Innovation Centre.

Response rate - the overall response rate was 55%. High response rates came from counties, London boroughs, unitary authorities and Northern Ireland. The majority of responding authorities (75%) serve a population below 400,000.

Internet - authorities who provide access to the Internet are, by default, offering access to free Internet-based electronic serials. While this initial survey did not measure the use of these serials, it did measure Internet connectivity. About half of the responding authorities (48%) reported that Internet is available in their libraries. However, the level of connectivity was low; the average number of branches connected was only 1.29 branches.

OPAC - most authorities (78%) were using an OPAC. However, in many authorities not all branch libraries could access the OPAC. Also, serials were not always listed on the OPAC. In only 45% of authorities with an OPAC were all branches connected. Only 24% of authorities included printed serials on their OPAC, and only 19% included electronic serials.

Document delivery - most respondents were not using document delivery to supplement their serials holdings; just 37 authorities (34%) were doing so. Most of these were using the British Library's

Document Supply Centre (BLDSC), many reported that BLDSC was their sole supplier. Others used BLDSC in conjunction with other suppliers (usually regional co-operative schemes).

Expenditure - an average of 5.2% of total expenditure was devoted to printed serials, while an average of just 2.1% was devoted to electronic serials. Some respondents found it difficult to provide data relating to expenditure on serials, though more authorities were able to provide data about printed serials than about electronic serials.

Holdings - most authorities reported that they have holdings of printed serials somewhere within their authority, 88 in total (81%). However, authorities reporting holdings of electronic serials were fewer in number - 70 authorities (64%). The average number of electronic titles held by the respondents was 6 titles.

- *Main library* - printed serials were held in the main library by 82 authorities (75%), while 68 (62%) held electronic serials there. The number of printed serials held ranged enormously, from just 6 titles to 3,000; the number of electronic serials held ranged from 1 title to 60 titles.

- *Branch libraries* - printed serials were held in *some* branch libraries by 61 authorities (56%); only 23 authorities (21%) had access to electronic serials in some branches. The average number of printed serials available in branches ranged from just 2 titles to 310. The majority of respondents had an average of fewer than 20 printed serials in each branch library. In all authorities, branch libraries had access to fewer than 10 titles. Many more branch libraries have access to printed serials than to electronic serials; on average, 83% of an authority's branch libraries are likely to have access to printed serials, while only 24% are likely to have access to electronic serials.

Holdings lists - of the 88 authorities who have holdings of printed serials 78 provide a list of those holdings (89%). Far fewer of those with electronic serials holdings provide a list; just 28 of a total of the 70 respondents with holdings (40%). Lists most commonly take the form of either union lists for the whole authority or lists relating to the main library.

Electronic formats - all of the respondents providing electronic serials (70 authorities) were providing titles in CD-ROM format. Of these, the majority (65 authorities) were providing titles *only* in CD-ROM format. Other formats included Internet and on-line and multi-title services. The most commonly-held titles were newspapers on CD-ROM, in particular the national dailies (Guardian, Independent, Times).

Measuring use - most authorities were not measuring the use of serials. Only 39 authorities (44% of those with holdings) were measuring the use of printed serials. 26 authorities, (37% of those with holdings) were measuring the use of electronic serials. Many of the authorities measuring use were able to do so only infrequently or had only just begun to do so. Other authorities have a more formal framework in place. In some cases the measurements were restricted to particular libraries, to certain serial types, or to titles up for cancellation. Even where measures were made, it was often only on an informal basis. Some authorities noted the problems surrounding the surveying process, one noting that it was easier to measure the use of electronic titles.

- *Methods* - authorities tended to rely primarily on customer surveys when measuring the use of printed serials. For electronic serials they were more likely to employ use counts, either automated or user-driven.

- *Results* - only 2 authorities (5% of those measuring use) provided a figure for the number of uses of printed serials. 15 authorities (58% of those measuring use) provided a figure for the average uses of electronic titles (the average figure was 16.6 uses, per title, per week).

- *Top 10 titles* - some authorities (18 in total) gave an indication of their most-used printed serial titles; these fell into various subject categories, of which the top five were: local & regional newspapers; national newspapers; consumer titles; business, economics & finance; education.

Other authorities (20 in total) gave an indication of their most-used electronic serial titles, the top titles were: The Guardian; The Times; The Independent; The Financial Times; Daily Telegraph; The Economist; New Scientist.

- *Search types used* - usually browsing for printed serials and subject/keyword searching for electronic serials.

Policies - while nearly half of the respondents (45%) had a collection development policy, far fewer had a serials provision policy (13%), and just 1 authority reported the existence of a serials access policy. In many cases policy and related documents were still in development. Only 7 of the authorities who have policy documents make those documents available to library users.

Informal priorities - most respondents (80 in total, or 73%) reported that, even where there is no formal stock and/or serials policy, they do have informal priorities for the provision of serials. Just 12 authorities gave a figure for the number of titles they expect to provide, and these varied greatly. Many authorities, 60 in total, gave other details about their priorities for serials provision. These were expressed in various ways, as:

- the general functions serials should fulfil.
- the specific types of title to be held - most concentrated on newspapers (both national and local)
- the specific subject areas to be covered - the top five being: business and finance, including personal finance; local history; general science and technology; leisure and crafts; arts and humanities.
- specific titles - the top five being: Which; Economist; New Scientist; New Statesman; Times/Sunday Times
- other respondents made broad statements of intent:
  - to focus holdings according to demand
  - to maintain a broad and comprehensive selection of titles
  - only to hold titles of local relevance.

Barriers - predictably enough, the most frequently mentioned barrier was a lack of adequate funding, which had reportedly

impacted both on the provision of printed serials, and on the ability of libraries to provide the hardware required for the provision of electronic serials. Lack of funding had also prevented some authorities being able to fulfil policy decisions. Restructuring, and in particular LGR, had also had an impact on serials holdings in some authorities, both in terms of budgets and the division of stock between reorganised authorities.

Future plans - for some authorities, electronic serials simply do not feature in future plans. Other authorities are more keen to explore their provision, but are realistic about the need to maintain printed formats too. However, the provision of electronic serials is increasing; a number of authorities have plans to expand the range of titles held, both in CD-ROM format and through increased connectivity to the Internet. Of course, most of these future plans are dependent on funding. Plans reported include CD-ROM-based serials; Internet- and on-line-based serials; or both (where authorities future provision of electronic serials were included as part of larger plans).

Issues - authorities generally felt that the development of electronic serials was an important area, especially to reduce the need for storage space. However, there were concerns, which fell into the following categories (listed in order of most-mentioned):

- the long-term availability of formats and archiving of titles on the Internet
- networking and hardware costs
- copyright issues
- negotiating licenses and subscription services
- reliability of networks
- cataloguing and indexing of electronic serials
- increased demand for document delivery
- IT support and backup
- filtering the illegal or immoral material that can be accessed on the Internet

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