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**Autor:** Moon, Brenda E.

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## Kontakt/Contact

[Digizeitschriften e.V.](#)  
SUB Göttingen  
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 1  
37073 Göttingen

✉ [info@digizeitschriften.de](mailto:info@digizeitschriften.de)

# Interlibrary Lending - Decentralized Networking Solutions in the Context of Modern Technology

BRENDA E. MOON

*Librarian, Edinburgh University Library*

We have heard about the interlending scene as it appears from the centre - from the British Library Document Supply Centre. Nowadays the interlending scene in the United Kingdom is indeed dominated by Boston Spa; for most librarians most of the time it is the first port of call for any interlibrary loan request. The development of the Boston Spa service has been one of the great achievements of the twentieth century in the academic library world.

But it was not always there. It may be hard now to remember that ante-diluvian time when there was no Boston Spa, but it is not simply nostalgia that leads me to recall that more leisurely world, but a belief that the past can teach us about the future. Why have things changed? And how are they likely to change next? And how can we make sure they change for the better?

It was the start of the sixties. I was in charge of interlibrary loans in a large civic university in England. We borrowed about 1000 volumes a year from other libraries for our academic staff and research students, and we lent about 600 volumes a year in response to other libraries' requests. I did everything except pack the parcels, and I imagine that at today's rates the staff costs must have been about £ 12,000 a year, or £ 8 a loan, but as far as I know, nobody ever calculated the cost, nor asked whether it was acceptable.

This pleasant state of affairs worked on the basis of goodwill between librarians. The Standing Conference of National and University Libraries agreed that postal charges between members should be waived; they designed sturdy book boxes to protect their own and each others' books in transit; the members contributed information about their monograph acquisitions to the National Central Library's union catalogue, and information about the journals currently received to the British Union Catalogue of Periodicals. The greatest problem was to locate older monographs, then as now. Few academic libraries had published their catalogues in the present century, except for the British Museum Library, which did not lend. Inevitably the few lending libraries which had published catalogues came in for more than their fair share of requests, yet I do not recollect any reluctance to lend. The prevailing ethos was one of mutual assistance. A camaraderie existed between interlibrary loan assistants which had practical benefits. One came to know the libraries which were prompt and efficient and could supply the works one needed. One came to know, from

personal experience as well as from directories and without the aid of *Conspectus* exercises, the special collections in the fields of research in most demand.

Let us consider the major changes in the scene today. First of all there is Boston Spa itself. It was from the start in a class of its own. In an expansive era it could aim to acquire everything. Scientific journals went straight to the shelves on receipt, without cataloguing, classification or open access and so were available much sooner than in any ordinary library. Journals were left unbound and issued in parts, not volumes, so that many more readers could be satisfied at once than in an ordinary library. It was brilliantly successful, and when it expanded into the social sciences and humanities in later years it did so with almost equal success, though it had to countenance catalogues in the process, and interlibrary loans librarians learnt to try it for almost everything.

Boston Spa has had an overwhelming impact on the interlending scene not only because it is big, and can supply almost all our needs, but because it has taught librarians business sense. As we heard yesterday it has always charged for its services, and the librarian soon learnt that he was not simply engaged in a gentlemanly activity in which costs were waived between friends; he is involved in a business in which books and journals are assets and the information they contain has a market value. Boston Spa loan forms soon acquired an independent status, which librarians began to use as currency when dealing with each other, as well as when dealing with the library which issued it, Boston Spa.

With the pressures on resources in the later seventies and eighties, pressures both on our purchasing budgets and on our staff budgets, the need to supply required material not only as quickly but as cheaply as possible urged librarians again to the centralist solution, Boston Spa; for Boston Spa made relatively few demands on them. It had been a matter of pride in the old days to submit to another library only applications which had been thoroughly checked and were bibliographically perfect, but Boston Spa made it known that there was no need to undertake initial bibliographic checking. With its efficient control and long experience it can trace the majority of works required without difficulty and supply them quickly; and if it cannot supply them from stock it suggests another library which can, and gives credit where credit is due in the shape of its own currency. And in terms of staff costs the centralist solution has proved by far the cheapest way: according to a services costs survey which I have conducted in Edinburgh this spring, a interlibrary loan now costs £ 2.80 to arrange, compared with the £ 8.00 (at present prices) of 28 years ago. No wonder that, as university library finances have come under increased scrutiny, the attraction of the centralist solution has increased.

But it has never been the whole story. Even now, there is more to interlibrary lending than Boston Spa, even in the United Kingdom, proud though we all are of its achievements, and it is the other aspects of interlending that I want to turn

to now, and to examine other ways of satisfying readers' needs and to consider their future development.

It is interesting here to note the pattern of interlibrary loan activity as revealed by the statistics collected by SCONUL, the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries.

Now the first interesting thing about the 1985/86 statistics (the most recent figures available) is that of all requests received from readers, 8.5 % never reach the status of an interlibrary loan application. 6.5 % are in fact found to be in stock in the home library and already available. How can the reader have missed them? Maybe the catalogues are not sufficiently comprehensive or user-friendly; maybe he does not know how to use them; maybe the books are lost. Another 2 % of requests are not pursued for other reasons; maybe the librarian has had to impose restrictions on interlibrary loans to keep costs down, and the reader has exceeded his entitlement; maybe he has been able to tell the reader that the book or journal he wants is in another local library, and has directed the reader there; maybe he has found that the book is already on order, and can be available for him without undue delay. In many of these cases the readers' requests can be satisfied quickly without an interlibrary loan application at all, provided the librarian undertakes a simple basic screening of requests.

A crucial element is, the standing of the catalogues. In a large, scattered library such as Edinburgh University Library, the importance of the catalogue in the satisfying of readers' needs has been well demonstrated as our retroconversion programme has proceeded. When each section of the Library had its own manual catalogue, readers rarely used any section but that directly serving their departments. The zoologists, for example, used the zoology library almost exclusively. With the mounting of a union list of periodicals held in Edinburgh libraries, and an integrated catalogue of the biomedical holdings in the University Library online, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of each of the biomedical collections by readers from other parts of the University. A survey of readers in the main Medical Library one morning showed that 10 % of them were from the Science Faculty based two miles away. Of 4,409 interlibrary loan requests received in the Medical Library in the first six months of this session, 32 % could be satisfied by referral to other sections of the University Library.

When resources are scarce, and interlibrary loans cost money, it could be argued that the first aim of an interlibrary loans librarian should be to avert applications. This is not necessarily so, because of course finding ways of avoiding interlibrary loan applications may be more expensive than the applications themselves. But often I suspect it will be so, especially if the reader can take the necessary action rather than we ourselves, for the reader is the cheapest form of labour. If we provide easy, user-friendly catalogues, the reader

will often make his own way to the appropriate section of the Library, without submitting an interlibrary loan request at all.

If we look at the national figures again, we see that of those requests which are converted into interlibrary loan applications, a remarkable 80 % are satisfied from Boston Spa's own stock. Could they have been satisfied in some other equally convenient way?

The same experience might well be found by the different libraries of a group, as is found by the different sections of one Library such as Edinburgh University Library. I am indebted to Mr. Brian Burch for information on the preliminary results of a survey very recently undertaken by Mr. Alan MacDougall of Loughborough University Library on behalf of a group of libraries in the east midlands of England. I should stress that these are preliminary results of an ongoing project, COPEMAL, the Co-operative Project of East Midlands Academic Libraries. The libraries of Leicester, Nottingham and Loughborough Universities and Leicester and Trent Polytechnics have examined their separate applications to Boston Spa over a four month period, January to April this year, and they have found that 31 % of these applications could have been satisfied by libraries within their group. At the most striking point, they found that 43 % of Trent Polytechnic's applications to Boston Spa could have been satisfied by its nearest neighbour, Nottingham University. It may well be, of course, that Nottingham University Library would be overwhelmed if Trent Polytechnic simply redirected 43 % of its interlibrary loan applications. On the other hand all academic libraries provide a certain back-up role to Boston Spa. 5 % of applications which university libraries make are satisfied not from Boston Spa's own stock but from other libraries whose locations Boston Spa has provided, and a further 6 % by other libraries in response to direct requests. It may well be that Nottingham University Library would find it more convenient simply to admit the Trent Polytechnic reader to consult its collections on site; it is almost certain that the Trent Polytechnic reader would find that just as satisfactory as an interlibrary loan.

We have a magnificent star network, with Boston Spa at the centre, but we must not forget that we also have a good ring circuit. I am convinced that ring circuits, that is, direct links between individual first-level, primary libraries serving individual readers, have an important role to play in two particular ways: firstly in groupings based on subject specialisation and secondly in local groupings, for the fuller exploitation of the resources of an area.

The first may be demonstrated by our experience in Edinburgh University Library. In general the pattern of interlibrary borrowing follows the national pattern: 83 % of applications are made to Boston Spa. In the case of applications from the Main Library which receives the largest number of requests from readers, chiefly seeking monographs and theses on the broadest range of subjects, the proportion directed to Boston Spa is as high as 97 %, whereas in the

Veterinary Libraries, a specialised group of small libraries with close links with other veterinary stations throughout the world, it is as low as 49 %. Again, most applications in the field of chemistry are directed to the Royal Society of Chemistry, which has an excellent collection and a good service. The use of special subject networks often depends on the presence of a librarian with a deep familiarity not necessarily with the subject in the theoretical sense but with the collecting policies of other libraries in the field. It is no extravagance making use of such expertise if it is available and the lack of it may well be redeemed at least in part by good bibliographic control, including subject catalogues and directories. While it is doubtful whether conspectus surveys will ever be used in general libraries handling thousands of requests for individual items on a wide range of subjects each year, they may well play an invaluable part in guiding the speculative applications of informed librarians in highly specific fields.

Speculative applications have hitherto almost always, except for such specific subject fields, been directed to Boston Spa partly because of its own large lending stock and partly because of its ability through the union catalogue it maintained and by means of other tools, to redirect enquiries to appropriate locations. But with the growth of OPACs (online public access catalogues) and union catalogues, the speculation in approaching other libraries than Boston Spa will be reduced. Hence the great interest of all, including Boston Spa itself, in the development of substantial databases containing location information. Many such databases have been produced by groups of libraries or library suppliers with other purposes in mind - notably the sharing of catalogue data, so as to reduce the cost of cataloguing in individual libraries. Some of these have by now reached substantial proportions, as indicated in the LIBER directory, recently published. BLCMP (from Birmingham Libraries Co-operative Mechanisation Project), for instance, now has a database of 2.8 million records, adding 310,000 annually; it was founded in 1969 and now has 46 members, including 10 university, 16 polytechnic and 11 college libraries. SWALCAP (South Western Academic Libraries Co-operative Automation Project) founded in 1969, has 27 members including 22 university and polytechnic libraries, and a database of 2 million records with 200,000 added annually.

Only one bibliographic network in the United Kingdom today had its origin in an attempt to improve interlending services, and that is VISCOUNT, formed in 1985 from the database of LASER (London and South East Region) to establish links between libraries in the region and between the South-East and other regions of the United Kingdom. It serves primarily public libraries which have long been organised on a regional basis, and depends on public telecommunications networks. It contains locations for 2 million titles with 120,000 added annually.

By far the largest union catalogue providing locations which can reduce the speculation in interlending is that of OCLC (the Online Computer Library

Centre) established in 1967 in Ohio and as OCLC Europe entering LIBER's sphere in 1985. With 7,900 members world-wide and 79 in Europe alone, mainly academic, it has a stronger European base than any of the others, and by far the largest database with 17.1 million records, adding 2.3 million annually. The OCLC database acts as a resource for bibliographic records to PICA in the Netherlands and BLAISE in the United Kingdom, and has agreements with libraries in other countries. It is still, however, primarily a north American database and there is no evidence that it is consciously used as an interlending tool in the United Kingdom.

Indeed in spite of the existence of such union catalogues of library holdings, they do not yet appear to play a significant part in interlending. There are various reasons for this. Interlending does not simply mean locating an item, it means ordering it. Networks designed for the ordering of records from the database headquarters do not necessarily provide facilities for the ordering of books and journals from the members. In recent years a number of software packages have been developed and marketed for management of interlibrary loans, mostly based on microprocessors. They have been designed for the better control of the interlending process in the local library but have not necessarily provided the locating function. More recently both Lancaster and Exeter University Libraries have developed software which is mainframe-based. The Exeter software which is mounted on a Prime computer gives the facility for searching the SWALCAP database, identifying a holding library and placing an order. The software was brought into operation in February 1988 and it is too soon yet to say whether it will have a significant effect on the decentralisation of interlending.

Another reason why online union catalogues have had so little impact on interlending hitherto is because so few libraries have engaged in systematic retroconversion. The members of the cataloguing co-operatives are mostly simply cataloguing their current intake, which overlaps with that of other members and of Boston Spa itself. The catalogues of the major research libraries in which a current year's accessions represents a small proportion of total holdings are mostly not yet online. In this connection the potential value of a new database, that of CURL (the Consortium of University Research Libraries) should be noted. The seven largest university libraries in the United Kingdom (Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester and Oxford) are mounting their catalogues, as they convert and create them, on a Manchester Amdahl computer. This is not a union catalogue in the usual sense; the records are not merged, but for economy's sake still sit side by side on the database, with a joint index. The database is designed as a librarian's tool, intended in the first instance for sharing the burden of cataloguing; and include cataloguers' symbols which would be an impediment to the ordinary reader. But the importance for the interlending scene is the content of the database: all of the libraries involved purchase widely of foreign monographs and older works; two are copyright

libraries, two others have been libraries of legal deposit in earlier centuries; three are engaged in systematic retroconversion programmes. The database when mature is likely to hold an unusually high number of unique items. The CURL database is still under development, funded during the two-year development phase by the UGC (University Grants Committee). It will be accessible, when developed, to other university libraries on the same basis as to its own members, under the terms of the UGC grant. Thus for older material this is likely to be an important aid in interlibrary provision.

Meanwhile the British Library itself is including a growing proportion of its own holdings on the database, BLAISE, originally intended as a cataloguing tool. The UK Marc file dates back to 1950, and the ESTC (Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue) includes both British and overseas locations for the period. Most recently the database of the Library Resources Co-ordinating Committee of the University of London has been made available through BLAISE. The Document Supply Centre has engaged in some retroconversion of its monograph catalogues. Only as libraries mount the major part of their catalogues online will they become an easy and natural answer to the needs that the home library cannot supply. This is particularly true in the case of libraries with substantial collections of older books and specialist collections on specific subjects.

It is also true of libraries in a locality. The existence of a single central library at Boston Spa whose primary function has been to lend, and is now to supply, by post, can easily blind us to the advantages to the reader of local access. The truth of this has already been noticed in the Edinburgh experience: the existence of a union list of serials in Edinburgh libraries undoubtedly attracts librarians in Edinburgh to apply locally for the loan of journals, and local libraries can be included in the round made by the library van so that same-day or next-day delivery is often possible. Alternatively, material can be reserved for the reader to consult on site in person. In such circumstances British Library forms rarely change hands. Such local collaboration may enable journal stocks to be rationalised and a wider coverage to be ensured within a city or a district. Certainly holdings of other local libraries are taken into account in Edinburgh University Library's collections policy.

It might be argued that the cost in staff time in channelling interlibrary loan applications to other local libraries seriatim may be higher than that of channelling interlibrary loan applications through Boston Spa. But with the growth of OPACs and their connection in a user-friendly environment, the cost will largely fall not on the librarian but on the reader. With this intention the SALBIN (Scottish Academic Libraries Bibliographic Information Network) Project is currently under development, with a grant from the UGC, following a feasibility study funded by the British Library. The SALBIN project is a project to provide easy, user-friendly access via JANET (the Joint Academic Network) by readers themselves to other library catalogues. The Joint Academic Network,



a communications system linking the academic community in the United Kingdom, was established by the Computer Board for the Universities and the Research Councils, and at present connects British universities and polytechnics, the British Library, the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales, and certain government-supported research establishments. Use of JANET is free to the academic community, and so there is every incentive for academic librarians and others to use it, for their research, for electronic mail, and for information retrieval. But logging on to JANET is generally cumbersome, involving the keying in of strings of numbers. The SALBIN project will provide software which can be mounted on microprocessors to be placed in public areas in the libraries so that readers can search the catalogue of any other library in the group at the simple press of a button. The project will not be finished for 18 months but it is already possible to indicate how it could work: appendix, screen 1 shows the screen which would be presented on simply typing "SALBIN", offering a choice of catalogues. If none of the Scottish catalogues listed the item sought, the reader selecting the number 9 key would receive the second screen, offering a selection of English catalogues. If he then chose, for example, the number 7 key he would be transported directly to the Stirling University Library catalogue, and so on. He then follows the procedures for consulting that particular catalogue which Stirling University Library has devised. This is a decentralised solution to the location of required material in two senses: it does not require the construction of a union catalogue but makes use of the various types of catalogues distributed throughout the libraries of the group; and it does not require the assistance of an interlibrary loans office. It did, however, require the existence of a group of libraries prepared to work together to share resources. The software would be completely portable and available when developed for use by other groups.

The availability of OPAC databases and the facility to access them from remote sites are two factors in the impact which the new technology has had on the interlending scene. Communications technology is indeed having a fundamental influence both on the centralised and on the decentralised solution. Most academic libraries now transmit their applications to Boston Spa via ARTEL over the JANET network, thus reducing cost and saving time. Boston Spa can supply documents by facsimile transmission, again saving time, though trials with Group 4 fax have not yet proved entirely satisfactory and transmission using Group 3 fax is still a slow process.

Electronic mail is already a common means of interactive communication between researchers and between librarians, though less so yet between researchers and librarians. Requests can be placed and responses given, and there is every expectation that use will develop rapidly in the next few years. In Edinburgh University Library electronic mail is used for transmitting readers' requests from one section to another - for example from a hospital library to the central medical library. But not all universities have yet developed full 'email'

facilities nor have a sufficiently broad spread of terminals to and from which a substantial number of users can make contact with each other.

Yet perhaps the greatest revolution in the interlibrary lending scene will come with the fuller exploitation of the new methods of data storage. When original papers and books are not simply held in central stores such as Boston Spa and available for loan, but are reproduced in multiple locations on CD-ROM (compact disks with 'read-only' memory), borrowing and lending may diminish. Even now, the sum of all ancient Greek literature - the surviving output of a civilisation - is available on two disks through the IBYCUS system and in constant use in such libraries as New College Library, Edinburgh, part of the University Library network. The contents of over two hundred major biomedical journals are available on disks through the ADONIS system mounted at Boston Spa and in other European centres. But the effect of condensed data storage technology on interlibrary transactions is still not clear. The technology is available but the copyright owners are nervous. The use of ADONIS is still centrally controlled, and the full texts of papers mounted by a consortium of publishers are delivered only by authorised centres.

But when all is said and done, perhaps the greatest technological event of the century in the interlibrary loans field has been the photocopier. For with the photocopier came the first chance, now being repeated with the transmission of data over electronic networks, to give and to keep at one and the same time. This is surely the message of the new technology, be it photocopier, electronic network or disk: it is more blessed to give than to lend. So interlibrary lending makes way for document supply. And in document supply, Boston Spa is indeed the sun of our universe, but the primary academic libraries are the planets which bear the teeming life of research. They are feeling each other's influence, as well as the warmth of the sun. Both sun and planets have a part to play in the harmony of the spheres.

**Appendix**

## Screen 1

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=====
* SCOTTISH ACADEMIC LIBRARIES BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION NETWORK *
=====
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Enter Selection number or ESC to proceed manually

1	Dundee Geac	7	Stirling Dynix
2	Edinburgh Geac	8	Strathclyde Geac
3	Edinburgh Serials List	9	UK University Libraries
4	Edinburgh AmCat	10	Polytechnic Libraries
5	Glasgow Geac	11	Exit to PAD
6	Glasgow CAFS	12	Quit to MS.DOS

Selection:

## Screen 2

```
=====
* SCOTTISH ACADEMIC LIBRARIES BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION NETWORK *
=====
```

Enter Selection number or ESC to proceed manually

1	Aberystwyth SWALCAP	8	Leeds VuCat	15	Swansea SWALCAP
2	Aston Geac	9	London Geac	16	UWIST SWALCAP
3	Cambridge	10	Manchester	17	Warwick BLCMP
4	Durham Geac	11	Newcastle OCLC		
5	East Anglia	12	Oxford OCLC	19	SALBIN Libraries
6	Hull Geac	13	Surrey	20	Poly. Libraries
7	Leeds Geac	14	Sussex Geac	21	Quit to DOS

Selection:

Screen 3

SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DY  
SUL SUL  
SUL WELCOME TO STIRLING UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CATALOGUE SUL  
SUL SUL  
SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DYNIX\*SUL\*DY

NEW USERS

may like to look at the coloured guide cards next to terminal  
or type in question mark (?) followed by the "RETURN" key.  
REMOTE ACCESS USERS (campus network/JANET):  
please return to this screen at the end of your session, type in OFF  
and then clear your call. Ring 0786 73171 Ex. 2224 for advice.

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Now press the "RETURN" key