

Recent Developments at BLDSC

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is not to be an all embracing description of the British Library Document Supply Centre — there are many other papers which cover its history, subsequent development and current activities — but to focus on some of the more recent and significant developments which are likely to impact on the range and quality of the Centre's services in the future.

The British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) and its predecessors, the British Library Lending Division (BLLD) and the National Lending Library for Science and Technology (NLLST), have now been in the document supply business for over thirty years. Indeed the NLLST was officially opened at Boston Spa in Yorkshire by Lord Hailsham on 5 November 1962.

The man who, more than any other, was responsible for the creation of the Centre was Dr Donald Urquhart. He was a man with great clarity of thought and vision and it is a lasting tribute to him that so many of the policies and practices which he introduced in the 1960s are still with us today.

One of his decisions, to locate the NLLST on a rural site, where there was a great deal of scope for expansion and where land was cheap, has stood not only the DSC in good stead but more recently has also been of enormous benefit to the British Library as a whole. Faced with the increasing costs of maintaining buildings and organising services in London, the Board of the Library has decided to move out of London all those activities which it was not essential to carry out there. As a consequence some 300 jobs in the acquisitions, cataloguing,

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computing, bibliographic services and administration areas of the Library have been transferred to the 65 acre site at Boston Spa. New buildings have had to be built and will continue to be built as not only people but also little used stock, hitherto stored in London, is moved to Yorkshire.

In parallel with relocation, the opportunity has been taken to restructure the British Library. Under the Library's Chief Executive the two Directors General will be responsible respectively for London Services and Boston Spa Services. Of particular importance to DSC has been the decision to remove from its direct control responsibility for acquisitions, cataloguing, computing, telecommunications and administration. These activities will be carried out inside other Directorates on the Boston Spa site and these Directorates will also service the London-based Directorates. Services to the Document Supply Centre will be the subject of inter directorate Service Level Agreements. It will of course still be up to DSC to decide how much of its budget it spends on, for instance, computing services and acquisitions. Whether Service Level Agreements will allow the Centre the same measure of control over these essential operations remains to be seen.

Budgets

The money which the Library needs, but does not earn for itself, is received in the form of a grant-in-aid from the

Government's Department of National Heritage (DNH). In the last few years (leaving aside the money made available for constructing the Library's new building at St Pancras in London) the grant-in-aid has been increasing at a slower rate than inflation. In addition the Library has been having to find from this grant-in-aid, significant sums to allow it to move into its new building in 1994. Over the next few years the financial position looks even worse since the Library expects to receive from Government no more in cash terms than it has been given this year. As for DSC itself, it has been receiving a gradually declining proportion of the grant-in-aid.

The major impact on DSC of these budgetary pressures has been on its staffing levels, and on its acquisition and preservation activities. Last year saw an across-the-Library staff reduction of 6%. At DSC this resulted in reduced levels of service within BookNet, the Music Service and in the Reading Room; we also privatised Current Research in Britain, our register of current research, thereby cutting several more jobs. On the preservation side, several years ago we were spending over £½ million per year whilst this year it will be less than £300,000. Our acquisitions budget is able to buy less and less and has led us to narrow the scope of books bought and to cancel many serial titles — it is beginning to look as if a further 6000 titles will have to go this autumn. These titles are those which have either never been used in the last three years or have been used very little. The impact on our service of cancelling little used titles will fortunately be minimal since they will continue to be available to our customers through either Cambridge University Library or the Library's other collections in London. Indeed the concept of Common Stock under which the whole of the BL collections are, other than in exceptional circumstances, available to support reference and remote supply is a key strategy for the Library for the next 10 years.

However, Common Stock is unlikely to be the total solution to acquisition cuts. It seems quite likely that the Centre will have to develop further its links with other libraries and it may even look beyond the UK to do this. Other major libraries in Germany, Holland and France are showing interest in arrangements which would allow us to provide mutual support in these difficult times.

Another major development currently affecting the Library in general and DSC in particular is Market Testing — a Government initiative aimed at ensuring that in all government departments and government funded organisations, operations and services are being provided as cost effectively as possible. Under this initiative the Library, like all government bodies, will have to explore whether any of its operations can be carried out more cost effectively in the private sector. Needless to say the needs of our customers will remain at the forefront of any such investigation and it is far too early to say what the outcome of the initiative will be.

Budgetary pressures and political initiatives are usually unwelcome but they can be helpful from time to time in forcing organisations to reassess objectives, priorities and goals. This the Document Supply Centre has been doing during the last 12 months. As a result, we feel that all is not doom and gloom. By expanding our markets, by finding out about and responding to customer needs, by being far more flexible in both the range and price of services offered, by exploiting new technology and in developing business alliances with others we hope to operate from a platform that will ensure that the DSC goes from strength to strength over the next 10 years and beyond.

Developing Services

To begin with we have set ourselves the ambitious overall business objective of doubling the number of documents supplied

by 2002. This means that, by then, we hope to be receiving around 7 million requests per year and supplying over 6 million documents.

To do this we recognise that we must make our services more attractive. In this way we hope not only to keep our existing customers in the face of increasing competition but to capture new business at a time when libraries and end users are becoming at the same time more aware of what is published and less able to purchase it in its traditional form.

What does it mean to “make our service more attractive”?

- 1) making ordering easier: we have plans to improve ARTtel and to provide for instance e-mail access. As a result of various agreements the number of data base hosts that have on line ordering facilities linked to DSC is steadily increasing and we now allow casual users to order over the telephone.
- 2) making payment easier: although forms and coupons will continue to be sold, a new automated account system will become the principal means of controlling billing and payments. However, less frequent users will be able to pay on demand. Indeed, individuals can already use credit cards. For heavy users discounts will be offered.
- 3) a wider range of services: our copyright cleared service, the Lexicon service and our urgent action service are examples of those we already provide. It is likely that our current standard service will be broken down into, for example, loan, photocopy, bibliographic checking and extended search. It is expected that different services will attract different charges which will reflect the cost of providing them.
- 4) better and more reliable service speeds: different services will have speed targets and, by making more use of electronic storage, fax and networks, very fast services will be available.

Marketing Initiatives

We are attempting to increase demand not only by providing better services but by marketing them more effectively. To this end we have increased the number of staff in marketing, despite making cuts elsewhere. Evidence of our marketing efforts is in the wide range of brochures and leaflets which are currently available in different languages, the number of exhibitions we attend, the user courses which we run, the customer panels which we hold around the country and abroad, the appointment of a major accounts manager, the number of visitors we encourage, the direct mail and other advertising campaigns which we have run and the much increased number of enquiries we are handling as a result.

Currently around 25% of the demand for our services comes from outside the UK. We realise that if our objective of doubling demand is to be achieved we need to promote the service more actively in overseas markets. Given our limited staff resources, linguistic skills and knowledge of foreign markets we are relying extensively on local agents and as part of the marketing plan we have signed a global agency agreement with British Council. At the same time we have given some of our staff responsibility for maintaining a watching brief on certain key countries. Among their tasks is the job of managing the local agency arrangements. Perhaps the most important overseas market for us to penetrate is that in North America. The question of how to do this most effectively is under discussion and it seems unlikely that there will be a single answer. It could well be however that the BL will establish a local office over there and that this will be used as a focus for a range of Library services including SRIS's Patent Express as well as DSC's photocopy service.

For the time being the bulk of our overseas demand comes from Western Europe. However we are keen to provide services into Eastern Europe as well and we

are currently offering a 30% reduction in the cost of the international photocopy service to customers in those countries in an attempt to stimulate and support economic growth and development.

Part of our marketing initiative is to publish lists of holdings and you will, I hope, be aware of some of these publications — Current Serials Received, British Reports Translations and Theses, Index of Conference Proceedings Received, Keyword Index to Serial Titles, Books at Boston Spa etc. You may not be aware that our serial holdings, conference proceedings and book titles have, over the last year of two, also been made available in CD-ROM format.

In addition to marketing either directly or indirectly through agents, the Centre has recognised the desirability of working closely with other organisations in order to enhance the quality of their services and at the same time provide outlets for ours, thereby providing mutual benefit. To explore and develop such opportunities we have, within the last 18 months, created the post of Business Development Officer.

Co-operative Ventures

The Centre has developed relationships mainly with a number of North American organisations. Since last summer over 25,000 of DSC's serial titles have been entered as locations on OCLC's Online Union Catalogue and as a result there has been a significant increase in the number of requests received via OCLC. CARL Systems and RLG have started to mount our serial and conference files. At the same time DSC has for the last 12 months been acting as a back-up document supplier to support CARL's Uncover 2 Service. In the longer term it is planned to give Uncover users the facility to order copies of any items in DSC's stock. The Centre is also working with NTIS, which will obtain from DSC and list information on British grey literature which can be supplied from the Centre, and

with UMI which for a number of years has cooperated with the Centre in announcing British doctoral theses which are available from Boston Spa.

Other organisations including RR Bowker, British Education Index and Bowker-Saur are undertaking exercises to add DSC shelfmarks to items listed in their products.

DSC itself has for many years operated a successful, albeit low-key, Journals Contents Page Service, based on the provision of photocopies of contents pages, which has met the needs of a relatively small number of subscribers. This has undoubtedly led to some demand for our document supply service.

Now, as a result of some encouraging market research, we are about to launch ETOC — an Electronic Table of Contents Service which will produce a weekly machine readable file covering our top 10,000 most used titles. It is expected that the service will be attractive to intermediaries who will provide access to the data over private networks. DSC believes that there will be a sufficiently large number of organisations willing to purchase the file for the undertaking to be financially viable and to assist in exploiting the Centre's collections.

Database hosts such as DataStar and ESA have been working with DSC to develop the facility to send requests for articles directly to DSC after a search of any of their numerous files. In March DataStar launched a new ordering mechanism which is already generating an increasing number of requests to DSC. ESA is keen to press ahead with a project to enable non-registered customers of DSC to request and receive articles.

DSC has also been having discussions with CHEST (Combined Higher Education Software Team) and through them with BIDS (Bath Information and Data Services) about providing access to DSC's document supply services based initially on the ISI databases mounted by BIDS. The BIDS

service is accessible over the JANET network to institutions that have subscribed to the CHEST/ISI deal. So far 61 institutions are making extensive use of the service and DSC believes there is scope for increasing the volume of requests for documents, particularly from end-users.

DSC has been involved for some time in testing, with Loughborough University, *Engineering Information's* Ei Reference Desk, a workstation containing integrated searching and document ordering functions using normal telephone lines. More recently Ei has put forward a proposal for an engineering information network that would involve Ei in providing bibliographic data, RLG in providing technical input, and DSC as the document supplier. Discussions are still at an early stage.

JANET, the Joint Academic Network, is already heavily used by UK academic libraries for transmitting requests to DSC. Over 850,000 requests a year are received at the Centre in this way and in the last 12 months 195 organisations used JANET for request transmission. DSC is discussing with the Joint Network Team how it can make use of the new enhancements introduced to JANET for the purpose of electronic document delivery as well as for electronic messaging.

Trials are planned this autumn with Nottingham University to test JANET for electronic document delivery. If successful, the trials will be extended to three more sites.

Potentially, the use of JANET for document delivery offers benefits in terms of speed and cost. In due course DSC will experiment with the electronic transmission of documents over JANET direct to end-users' terminals.

DSC's continuing involvement with CARL Systems and CARL's need for speedy document transmission to the US has necessitated experimenting with file transfer technology linking JANET to the Internet. At present DSC is using high-speed Group 3 fax to transmit documents to

CARL end-users, but this is an expensive and labour-intensive method and is not a suitable platform for growth.

A proposal to the *CEC Libraries' Programme* in which DSC is involved, for the linking of electronic document delivery systems in France, Germany, Netherlands and UK has recently gained preliminary approval. DSC will be working in close conjunction with a number of European organisations, including Pica in Holland and TIB in Germany, to test the interchange of electronic documents between main European networks using a common standard developed by the Group on Electronic Document Interchange (GEDI). The project is known as EDIL (Electronic Document Interchange between libraries).

Copyright

The despatch of electronic copies over networks will become an increasingly important element of our business. This brings with it the need to address and resolve new copyright issues. DSC has traditionally provided, quite legitimately, copyright free services. However the UK law limits what it has been possible to provide and under what conditions. In an attempt to be more flexible in service provision, the Centre, two years ago, signed an agreement with the Copyright Licensing Agency and now also provides a Copyright Cleared Service. This agreement, however, covers only photocopying. The making and disseminating of electronic copies is another matter. The CLA, and indeed most other Rights organisations, has, as yet, no mandate from publishers to act in this area and whether we are talking of material acquired in electronic form, eg the Adonis service, material which one might wish to scan and store in electronic form for future use, or material which one might wish to scan and transmit on demand it is necessary to deal directly with the publishers. There is certainly no doubt in our minds that the law in the UK does not allow electronic copying

and distribution without permission.

Given the Centre's desire to reach agreements on electrocopying it would benefit us enormously if we could avoid talking separately with every single publisher represented in our collections. We would like to be able to deal, as with our photocopying licence, with a single mandated rights organisation charged with negotiating non-exclusive licences on behalf of most publishers inside and outside the UK. As to charges, they need to be set at a level which attracts use and recompenses owners at the same time. The collection of charges should also be simple and the charges themselves should be straight forward and easy to understand. Any tendency to fix complex pricing structures to reflect use, user, type of material or any other factor should be avoided.

It will be obvious from the above, that DSC is becoming increasingly committed to new technology in the provision of its services and sees a sound new-technology platform as the key to success in the increasingly competitive field of document supply. At the same time many of our systems and procedures will rely on human intervention for many years. We are certainly not expecting that our need for staff will decline since we are hoping that increasing business will more than compensate for any staff savings brought about through the use of new technology.

Quality

Whether we are talking about new technology or more traditional processes it

is important that DSC is regarded by both itself and its customers as a quality organisation. To this end the last 2 years have seen the introduction into the Centre of a Total Quality programme. With the assistance of consultants, through the setting up of a TQ office, through training, project groups and process improvement groups, we are becoming increasingly customer driven, removing waste, getting things right first time, involving all levels of staff in decision making and reducing costs. The benefits of this initiative are already being felt but will increase exponentially as time goes by.

Conclusion

I hope that this short paper has been sufficient to assure you that despite its continuing success in the document supply business over the last 30 years we are not resting on our laurels at Boston Spa. Indeed I think we recognise more than at any other time in our history the need to look to those laurels. We must take nothing for granted. We do not have a God-given right to be the world's foremost supplier of documents to remote users. In the face of increasing competition, if we cannot provide services which increasingly sophisticated customers require, at a price which allows us to depend less and less on government funds then we will fail. We have every intention of succeeding.