Investigating Interlending:

a scoping study of resource discovery, sharing and cooperation

Report produced by the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society (CPLIS), Information School, University of Sheffield, for TCR (The Combined Regions)

September 2015

Dr. Briony Birdi

Dr. Stephen Pinfield

Sophie Rutter

Dr. Simon Wakeling
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents work commissioned by The Combined Regions (TCR) and undertaken by a team from CPLIS (the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society) in the Information School at the University of Sheffield, to investigate the factors influencing interlending and resource sharing in public libraries, and identify potential future models of cooperation. The research was led by Dr. Briony Birdi as Principal Investigator, with Dr. Stephen Pinfield as Co-Investigator, and Sophie Rutter and Dr. Simon Wakeling as Research Associates.

The research consisted of three phases, conducted sequentially between January and June 2015:

**Phase 1:** A review of the relevant academic and professional (including policy-related) literature was conducted to identify and synthesise key research into interlending provision.

**Phase 2:** An online survey was distributed to members of SCL and the UnityUK mailing list, which resulted in a total of 65 responses. The primary objectives of the survey were to establish the current levels of provision of ILL services in public libraries, and to investigate library managers’ views of the role of the digital environment in resource discovery and resource sharing.

**Phase 3:** Interviews were conducted with twenty individuals associated with interlending in public libraries. The interviews explored perspectives on current interlending services, the impact of the digital environment, and visions of the future for interlending.

Taken together, results from these three phases of research indicate several areas of consensus within the interlending community:

**Declining rates**
There seems little doubt that interlending rates are declining nationally, and that this decline is due to a combination of public library budget cuts, low public awareness, rising costs to library users, the increased availability of digital content, and the ever improving cost-effectiveness of e-commerce services.

**E-content is a problem**
Participants in phases two and three also agreed that the sharing of e-content was highly problematic. These problems are due to general issues with acquiring e-content, as well as licensing and technical issues making the sharing of e-resources extremely difficult.

**HE involvement adds value**
The results of this study also indicate that there is a clear perceived benefit to entering into consortia schemes that include one or more HE institutions, particularly as a means of leveraging HE
experience with and access to digital material, and allowing users access to specialist academic material.

**Lack of awareness of services**

Many participants in this research spoke of a lack of public awareness about interlending. Even if aware of the service in general, users were also perceived to be confused by the variety of ILL schemes being offered, and the associated costs and delivery arrangements. The variety of interlending schemes utilised by libraries, and the different rationales for its provision, have perhaps contributed to the lack of a coherent message to be communicated to users.

**Potential for a national catalogue**

Discussion of the future of interlending and potential developments in resource sharing frequently centred on the development of a national catalogue. Most participants saw some value in a system with national coverage, but only if that system has universal coverage, and incorporated unmediated user reservation functionality. While it is beyond the scope of this report to draw firm conclusions about the feasibility of such a system, we note several significant barriers to its development and implementation. Aside from the significant technical challenges associated with such a system, these barriers relate to the capital, both human and organisational, invested in the status quo, and the difficulties associated with obtaining buy-in from the whole public library community.

Perhaps the most striking feature of results from all three phases was the lack of consensus regarding many key aspects of interlending. These can be summarised as follows:

**Use of Interlending Terminology**

It was noticeable that the terminology relating to resource sharing was not used consistently by participants in the research. This was particularly evidenced in the different applications of the terms “interlending” and “interlibrary loan”. It seems likely that the established vocabulary of resource sharing has not been consistently adapted to the modern landscape of interlending.

**How schemes operate**

Descriptions of national, regional and sub-regional schemes revealed significant variation in all aspects of service delivery. These included the transfer of stock (post vs. van), library to library fees (free vs. nominal vs. cost price), mediation (self-service vs. librarian instigated), patron fee (free vs. subsidised vs. full recovery), and systems used (shared LMS vs. union catalogue vs. independent systems). This had a number of implications for our ability to construct a coherent picture of the state of interlending, and for future developments in the field. We also found the variety of schemes negatively impacted individual authorities’ ability to determine the cost-effectiveness of interlending, and made the sharing of best practice between consortia problematic. It was also suggested that the range of schemes operated by individual authorities is confusing for library users. Finally we note that
the diversity of existing interlending schemes makes the development of any future national scheme problematic.

**The moral imperative**

Opinion among our participants was divided over the extent to which public libraries operated under a moral imperative to offer interlending. We generally observed three broad perspectives on this issue. Some identified strongly with the moral argument, and viewed the provision of interlending as the realisation of a duty to meet any and all needs of library users. A larger group shared this perspective in principle, but were more pragmatic about the likelihood of interlending being sustained in a harsh economic environment. A final group might be characterised as rejecting entirely the notion of a moral imperative to offer interlending. A natural question of great significance to the future of interlending is the extent to which any one of these viewpoints represent a majority opinion at an appropriately senior level.

**Impact of the digital environment**

There are significant challenges relating to the provision of e-content, particularly the licensing of e-books, integration of open access content, and the access to and functionality of publisher e-content platforms. Some see such barriers as essentially insurmountable, and that the future rationale for interlending lies in its capacity to deliver print copies in an increasingly digital world, while others believe the widespread availability of digital content will terminally reduce demand for interlending. Developing a digital strategy for interlending would seem to require two complementary facets; a comprehensive analysis of the perspectives of library users towards digital content, and a thorough study of the technical challenges associated with the digital publishing and licensing landscape.

**Interlending, collections and shrinking budgets**

One of the starkest contradictions to emerge from this research was the difference between participants who see interlending as a means of coping with reduced budgets, and those for whom the reduced budgets themselves represent a threat to interlending services. In most cases schemes were found to cost net lenders money, and several consortia agreements include arrangements to compensate for this. In a few instances, however, it was seen as preferable to be a net borrower. In both cases there was clear evidence from this study of tensions between net lenders and net borrowers within schemes. Assuming that a perfect equilibrium is impossible, there will always be net lenders and net borrowers. The best that can be hoped for is that tensions are clearly and appropriately addressed at a consortia level, and compensation schemes for authorities disadvantaged financially by interlending clearly help in this regard.
Recommendations

We believe that this study has thrown light on some key issues at a local, regional and national level, and we present the following recommendations for consideration. The first of these relate specifically to further research or enquiry in order to inform future decision-making regarding interlending and resource-sharing, and the second are recommendations to those involved in planning and delivering such services.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. To conduct a user study to understand the needs and perspective of those utilising the service (and those not), to ensure that staff perceptions are accurate

2. To investigate and compare e-content licensing models (state of the art, future plans, publisher perspective etc.)

3. To identify synergies between HE and public library sectors and, specifically, the motivation of HE stakeholders to participate in regional and national consortia

4. To conduct cost-benefit analysis of local and regional schemes, and to develop benchmarking tools for wider dissemination and use.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

1. To establish a consistent terminology for interlending that is used in discussions in order to promote coherence in policy-making and service delivery

2. To develop unified marketing tools, material and strategies for libraries keen to promote interlending, emphasising the value of the service to library users

3. To develop further marketing tools for use by managers and senior stakeholders to lobby other organisations (e.g. other local authorities, HE providers) and national organisations (CILIP, SCL) to gain their support for developing a more unified approach

4. To identify action that needs to be taken regarding licensing e-content, possibly including an education program and liaison with publishers, followed by implementation of the identified actions

5. To establish an inter-consortia forum for sharing best practice – perhaps facilitated by the FiL or TCR, or alternatively discussed in a free-standing summit

6. To review the current relationship with other sectors, particularly the higher education sector, with a view to developing possible synergies

7. To coordinate discussion regarding the feasibility of a universal, national catalogue with reservation functionality, and specifically, to determine whether further investment is justified.
1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents work commissioned by The Combined Regions (TCR) and undertaken by a team from CPLIS (the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society) in the Information School at the University of Sheffield, to investigate the factors influencing interlending and resource sharing in public libraries, and identify potential future models of cooperation. The research was led by Dr. Briony Birdi as Principal Investigator, with Dr. Stephen Pinfield as Co-Investigator, and Sophie Rutter and Dr. Simon Wakeling as Research Associates.

The research was motivated by a need to better understand the apparent decline in rates of interlending indicated by falling rates of both searching and lending through the UnityUK system.

It is perhaps telling that our investigation coincided with increased debate about interlending on forums such as the LIS-PUB-LIBS email discussion list, much of it prompted by this email:

Date: 3 June 2015 16:42:24 CEST
To: LIS-PUB-LIBS@JISCMAIL.AC.UK
Subject: Inter Library Loans
Reply-To: [Name]@MILTON-KEYNES.GOV.UK

Can I ask is there anyone who has thought about or who has actually opted out of providing Inter Library Loans to their users in the light of budget cuts? Our loans on this are dwindling fast

It is therefore important to acknowledge the political, technological and economic context for this research. The widely offered and low-cost interlending service that was found in the public library system for much of the twentieth century has been increasingly threatened by large cuts to public library funding. Interlending is just one of many public library services under threat, and as such we are currently experiencing a wide-spread public debate about the future role libraries could or should play in our common future. At the same time, advances in technology have not only increased the potential scope and functionality of online library catalogues, but have also made digital content more easily accessible to users elsewhere on the web, whether it be through commercial e-commerce sites or open access repositories. With budgets shrinking, and alternative means of sourcing information apparently available, this research serves to investigate the extent to which interlending should remain a key offering of public libraries, and the models that might be employed to sustain it.

The research itself was conducted in three phases between January and August 2015:
Phase 1: January to February 2015

A review of the relevant academic and professional (including policy-related) literature was conducted to identify and synthesise key research into interlending provision. Attention was also paid to interlending models operating outside the UK.

Phase 2: February to April 2015

An online survey was distributed to members of SCL and the UnityUK mailing list, which resulted in a total of 65 responses. The primary objectives of the survey were to establish the current levels of provision of ILL services in public libraries, and to investigate library managers’ views of the role of the digital environment in resource discovery and resource sharing. The survey investigated the range and effectiveness of interlending schemes, the rationale for offering interlending, the impact of the digital agenda, and the perceived future of the service.

Phase 3: April to June 2015

Interviews were conducted with twenty individuals associated with interlending in public libraries. The interviews explored perspectives on current interlending services, the impact of the digital environment, and visions of the future for interlending.

The report begins with a summary of findings from the literature review (Section 2), before presenting the results of the Survey (Section 3) and Interviews (section 4). Section 5 presents a discussion of the results from the empirical research, and the report concludes with recommendations for future action (Section 6).
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Current levels of provision

There is a widespread belief that rates of interlibrary loan are declining globally, a view supported by a wealth of literature from around the world (e.g. Boukacem-Zeghmouri et al., 2006; Echeverria and Barredo, 2005; Missingham and Moreno, 2005; Pfleger, 2008; Sagnert, 2007). In the UK, data from UnityUK offers perhaps the clearest indication of current levels of provision, and recent trends. The latest figures, as at March 2014, show 222,000 searches and almost 89,000 requests placed in twelve months, a decline of 11.7% and 15.3% respectively over the previous twelve month period. It is instructive to note a similar decline in demand for the British Library’s Document Supply Service (Figure 1), with current levels of provision less than a quarter of that in 2000.

Figure 1: Demand for British Library Document Supply Service (Appleyard 2015).

A wide range of factors have been suggested to explain this decline. These include the emergence of the internet as a source of rare and niche material that was once the preserve of ILL (Goldner & Birch, 2012), and of freely available open access content (Koyama et al., 2011; Corthouts et al., 2011). In addition, declining public library budgets mean increased sensitivity to ILL charges, and pressures to reduce or eliminate associated staff costs. The increasing reliance on passing costs on to users has also limits use of the service (McGrath, 2011). Budgetary constraints are also believed to be limiting memberships of specialisation schemes, and the capacity of libraries to maintain stores of out-of-print items. It is of course possible, indeed likely, that these aggregated national statistics hide differing trends among constituent regional and sub-regional partnerships, although extensive searching was not able to produce data for more than a few regions (e.g. LIEM), who all show a decline in ILL. Johnson (2011), however, presents results of a survey of interlending staff from libraries both

1 Figures based on OCLC’s report to the meeting of TCR Management Board, March 2014
academic and public, showing that around 20% of respondents reported a moderate increase in patron ILL requests.

It is important to note, however, that while UK public library rates of ILL are falling, this is not necessarily true of all countries, nor is it true of all library sectors. While not as recent as the UnityUk and BL figures, rises in ILL requests have been extensively reported in US and Canadian academic libraries (e.g. Porat & Fine, 2008; Duy & Larivière 2014, Beaubien, 2007, Schmidt, 2009). It is also possible to find examples of UK academic libraries reporting an upward trend in ILL (e.g. Rauter 2009, Walton 2008). The example of Denmark, which generates 2 million ILL requests per year in a country of only 4.5 million people, at the very least demonstrates that the right ILL offering will engage library users (Thorhauge, 2010).

2.2 Rationale and strategies for ILL

The origins of interlibrary loan can be traced to a conviction that “the library's mandate to serve its community goes beyond what can be satisfied by its own collection” (Tague & Wolfe, 1998: 132). This perspective is complemented by a belief that knowledge as a commodity should be unrestricted by ownership. As Kaser puts it:

The centuries-old practice of one library lending its books to another is based upon the premise that although books may physically be the chattel of the institution that bought and paid for them, they belong intellectually to the general cultural heritage of mankind and ought somehow to be made available to all men. (1972: 398).

While the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 falls short of explicitly mandating the provision of inter-library loan, it is sometimes interpreted as doing so in spirit, in particular the requirements presented in section 7(1):

“It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, and for that purpose to employ such officers, to provide and maintain such buildings and equipment, and such books and other materials, and to do such other things, as may be requisite.”

The moral and social argument, therefore, which can be seen as the underlying rationale for ILL, is supported at least partially by legislation. However for balance it should be noted that this argument is not universally accepted. Several authors have noted that the small proportion of users served by ILL cost libraries disproportionately large amounts of time and money (e.g. Robinson, 1983; White, 1987). There is also an acknowledged and inherent imbalance in the demands placed on libraries depending on their status as net borrowers and lenders. As Kaser notes, the labour-intensive nature of ILL led to a re-assessment by larger libraries in the 1960s and 70s of the extent to which they were
willing or able to essentially subsidise the of collection deficiencies of smaller libraries. This tension between perceived moral duty and pragmatic realism is now perhaps more acute than ever.

While certainly not representing a core rationale for interlibrary loan, ILL has served purposes beyond meeting the requests of users. Records of ILL transactions have been used to identify collection weaknesses and therefore influence acquisitions strategies (Tague & Wolfe, 1998). More commonly ILL and interlending are factored into collection development strategies and joint procurement, with regional interlending used to maximise collection coverage (Gillet & Schopfel, 2007).

Various strategies have been applied to the issue of costing ILL. The CONARLS IRU Cost Scheme can be applied to any interlending transaction between participating libraries (assuming no superseding other agreement) and fixes the cost of a single loan at £6 (TCR, 2015). This standardisation stands in fixed contrast to the plethora of regional and sub-regional pricing models and reciprocal arrangements that make up the interlending landscape, and which sometimes confront the user seeking to make a request (Goldner & Birch, 2012). One point of common ground for virtually all these schemes is that at least some (and often all) of these transaction costs are passed on to the library user requesting the loan (McGrath, 2011). While some observers argue that the imposition of these charges is restrictive at best, and elitist at worst (Tague & Wolfe, 1998), others appear to view patron charges as an inevitable element of the ILL system (Potts, 2008).

Strategic consideration has also been given to the types of material available through ILL. Froud & Robinson (2011) argue that “back stock, reserve, and out of print materials is a key unique selling point in the public library offer,” and it is typically a need for this specialist content that drives ILL. Some libraries seeking to cope with reduced numbers of specialist ILL staff, or even none at all, have introduced restrictions on certain types of material – one example being new print editions (FIL 2013).

2.3 Value for money

Value for money studies of ILL are rare (McGrath, 2013), and as such it is difficult to gauge the extent to which interlending schemes are perceived to offer value for money to participating libraries. There are perhaps several reasons why such studies are lacking in the literature. At a practical level Pernot et al. (2007) note that even traditional methods of determining the costs of ILL can be problematic, although they also suggest that utilising a Time-Driven Activity-Based Costing approach can yield useful. Perhaps more significant is the moral or philosophical justification frequently given for maintaining interlending services (see section 2.2). The implication of this argument is that “value” is an intangible commodity, which naturally resists attempts to measure quantitatively.
Different approaches to this issue have been taken. One means of circumventing the problem is to consider how other proposed or hypothetical models of ILL delivery might be costed, which serves to highlight potential economic inefficiencies in the current system. This approach is used by Potts (2008), who suggests that implementing a national online system for unmediated user access and requests, combined with home delivery, might save £1.5million per year across the sector. An alternative means of dealing with the moral argument is to reject the premise. As we have seen, Robinson (1983) and White (1987), argue that interlending serves only a tiny minority of users at a very great cost, and is therefore elitist and unfair. The natural extension of this argument is that almost any cost is too great, but this perhaps does little to inform thinking about the value of ILL in today’s climate.

Other researchers and practitioners have attempted to make the counter case – that ILL does, or at least could, save money for library services. Kohl & Sanville (2006) argue that shared technical and discovery systems, along with coordinated acquisitions policies, might lead to improved efficiency:

“a consortial environment allows librarians to deliver in practice what was formerly only a theoretical hope—a reliably working virtual collection offering a huge range of resources in an improved cost-benefit environment.” (Kohl & Sanville, 2006: 398)

Their argument also highlights the cost-savings associated with centralised or distributed book storage, and they further suggest that consortia interlending reduces the need for ad hoc purchases. This latter point is echoed by Goldner & Birch (2012), who note that contrary to a common perception that purchasing is cheaper than borrowing, many books requested through ILL are obscure or rare, and as such command high purchase prices even on Amazon.

A final approach is to make some attempt to measure the value of ILL services of users. This has been done in general terms for all library services (e.g. Niteki & Abels, 2013), and Little & Leon (2015) report a study on the value of ILL services to users of three US libraries, including one public library. They find that access to extensive global collections was the main value perceived by public library users, 82% of whom rated ILL services as “very important”. While useful evidence for advocates of ILL, the study’s finding do not offer much assistance to attempts to calculate value for money in financial terms.

2.4 The user perspective

There are few studies which seek to investigate user perspectives on ILL. This is somewhat surprising given the observation that “from the user perspective, the ILL/DD system in the early twenty-first century is complex and fragmented” (Missingham & Moreno, 2005: 26). In light of this Potts (2008) has argued that there is a pressing need to determine levels of public interest in and engagement with
ILL. Published research into user perspectives of interlending have tended to focus on the academic domain. Findings here suggest that the size of the local library is a key factor in ILL uptake use, with users of larger libraries less likely to make such requests (Henderson, 200). It has also been suggested that perceived inconvenience of the service can limit use, and that costs to users can limit use (Perrault and Arseneau, 1995). Finally it has also been shown that user awareness of library services in general and ILL in particular are closely linked to use (George et al., 2006; Sridhar, 1994). Walton (2008) found that speed of delivery was considered the most important measure of ILL service quality. Porat & Fine (2008) also attempt to characterise users and non-users of interlibrary document supply at a US academic library, their most notable finding being that non-users of the service were likely to believe that their information needs were met entirely by documents sourced from the web.

A number of authors have attempted to identify Gillet & Schopfel (2007) present what appears to be a comprehensive list of customer needs for ILL in the science, technology and medicine market:

- A customer-centred service
- The whole range of information
- Valuable information
- Simple discovery
- Simple ordering
- Timeliness
- Legal compliance
- Control
- Usability
- Reasonable pricing

While is unclear how this list has been derived, it does represent a valuable attempt to apply an end-user focus to service planning and implementation, albeit in a non-public library context. Perhaps of more relevance is similar work conducted by the British library regarding requirements for the BL document supply service. Appleyard (2015) acknowledges that different users have different needs, and reports market research undertaken to establish requirements for commercial and non-commercial users. Findings indicate that certain requirements – for example access to OA content alongside paid-for material, and access to digital content – are common to both sectors. Non-commercial users were also found to require unmediated access, and support for mobile usage.

Some studies of user satisfaction with public library ILL have been conducted. Little & Leon (2015) conducted a comparative study of users of three US services, including the NY public library. They found that delivery speed, ease of access and resource quality were the most important factors identified by users. They also note that a consequence of better understanding user needs and
perceptions is the potential to improve and better target marketing and awareness campaigns relating to ILL. Herbet (2005) conducted a study of public perceptions of service quality for Canadian public libraries’ ILL services. Based on the SERVQUAL framework, this study used an innovative approach in which volunteer library customers recorded their expectations for and actual perception of service quality. Library transaction data was also utilised. Overall, expectations were found to exceed actual performance, and the reliability of the service was seen as both the most important and lowest scoring measure. Herbert also identified a potential discrepancy between library measures of performance such as fill rate and turnaround time, and customer quality assessments, suggesting that further empirical work be conducted to assess “the gap between management perceptions and customer experience of interlibrary loan” (2005: 19).

It is also important to recognise the rapidly changing information-seeking environment within which ILL exists. As has been noted, most people do not use libraries at all (Connaway, 2013). It should be noted however that a large overlap has been found between users who regularly use the internet, and those who use the library (Vakkari, 2012). This echoes earlier findings by d’Elia et al. (2002), who conducted a large-scale telephone survey of US library users, finding that 40% of respondents used both internet and public library resources. It is notable that two of the highest rated characteristics of public libraries found by d’Elia et al. are of direct relevance to ILL; that libraries are cheap (or free), and that they can provide paper copies of requested items. These factors are both threatened by trends in ILL towards customer charges and digital content.

There is a common belief that many information seekers’ increasing exposure to the web has shifting the expectations of those also use libraries (Connaway, 2013). Users expect resources either to be available online or delivered quickly (FIL, 2013), and for library search and discovery tools to offer the same functionality that they encounter elsewhere on the web (Appleyard, 2015, Fast & Campbell, 2004). It has also been suggested that users increasingly believe that information is freely available, leading to often unrealistic expectations of delivery speed and ILL fees (FIL, 2013). We also note that Google is often the first and only tool used for information seeking tasks (Connaway et al. 2011), and that users expect any and all potential sources of information to be accessible this way. Therefore for users engaged in these searches to be exposed to local library content requires that those holdings to be indexed and surfaced by Google (Froud & Robinson, 2011; Sanville, 2007, Dempsey, 2006).

2.5 Systems

The complexities resulting from the number and variety of interlending schemes have had a significant impact on the requirements for the systems designed to support ILL. As noted by Breeding (2013a), a document request may flow through a number of systems during the course of its fulfilment – from local and regional systems to national and even international. While Library management
systems come with modules offering some level of support for ILL workflows, interoperability remains a significant challenge for systems librarians and LMS providers (Gavel 2015). Goldner & Birch (2012) note that many larger scale systems are effectively “closed” – i.e. they are not accessible by other national or international systems. Overcoming this issue may require the revision of the ISO ILL protocols, which many believe to be difficult to implement and unsuited to the new web environment (Breeding, 2013b). The emergence of digital content has further complicated matters. Aside from the fact that records of electronic resources in union catalogues are frequently incomplete (Goldner & Birch 2012), libraries also face the challenge of delivering that content to the user (Hosburgh & Okamoto 2010). Problems that arise here relate to the use of proprietary publisher and aggregator platforms for the delivery of electronic content (Litsey & Ketner, 2013), and the variety of formats in which ebooks in particular are delivered (Xu & Moreno, 2014).

Systems are also required to mitigate issues relating to discovery, primarily the ways in which librarians processing ILL requests find which libraries hold the requested item, and determine which of those that do they should engage with first. These issues have been mitigated a great deal by the implementation of UnityUK, which not only allows its subscribers to search the collections of the 300 plus participating libraries, but also integrates fee management and ILL management (Birch, 2008).

A natural and widely demanded next step is the incorporation of functionality exposing aggregated library collections to the public. An interesting perspective is offered by McGrath (2011), who suggests that the decline in ILL rates in the UK and France may counterintuitively be a consequence of the success of their centralised document supply centres (VLDCS and INIST respectively). As he puts it:

“Customers have relied on systems developed to interact with BLDSC and INIST. They have not invested in a range of ILL tools that make the user experience of ILL virtually indistinguishable from accessing library owned material”

This stands in contrast with other nations (for example the US) where the decentralised structure of document supply has allowed consortia the flexibility to develop systems with far fewer interoperability requirements, and which can as a consequence be more easily tailored to user needs and expectations (Mak, 2011).

From a practical perspective a number of authors have discussed information architecture issues relating to public union catalogues, particularly the relative strengths and weaknesses of distributed and centralized models (Cousins, 1999; Hider, 2004). In addition, there exist a number of case studies detailing the technical and organisation requirements behind establishing new or improved union catalogues (Alam & Pandey, 2012; Larsen, 2007; Burnhill & Law, 2005; Mittal, 2011; Boston et al., 2005). In the UK, future developments are likely to be centred on the FABLibraries system, which
leverages the WorldCat database to provide a form of publically accessible union catalogue of participating public library holdings. The system also including a “Find in a library” function allowing users to determine libraries close to them that hold the item and click through to their catalogue (Froud & Robinson 2011).

A natural next step in the evolution of FABLibraries is to facilitate direct user reservation requests. While some regional systems support this unmediated request functionality (e.g. Cat Cymru, SELMS), integrating a public union catalogue with library circulation systems on a national scale poses significant challenges, although work is apparently underway to achieve this.

2.6 Impact of the digital environment

As might be expected there has been a great deal of attention paid in the literature to the ways in which the digital revolution has impacted and will impact interlending. There has long been a belief among some in the library community that the increasing prevalence and effectiveness of online discovery systems will aid physical resource discovery (see for example Martin, 1983), and that this will in turn increase demand for ILL as library users are better able to connect with material held beyond the walls of their local library (Goldner & Birch 2012). This in turn makes possible visions for interlending that disintermediate the physical library completely by delivering requested items direct to users’ homes (e.g. Potts, 2008). Levein (2011) describes a “spectrum of possibilities” relating to the extent to which virtual (i.e. online) services combine with or supersede physical services. At the far end of this spectrum lies the virtual library, which exists only as a web presence without physical form.

As with many fields, the emergence of new technology led to a shift from paper-based to IT-based systems underpinning the provision of IILL. While this has undoubtedly streamlined workflows and increased efficiency, it has also introduced challenges for librarians. Posner (2014) suggests that understanding and capitalising on the interoperability if ILL-related systems is one such challenge, as is the need for librarians to become knowledgeable about the supporting software. Systems must also be adapted to facilitate the request and delivery of ILL through mobile devices, and integrate freely available resources into collections (de Jong & Nance, 2014; Sanville 2007). Further problems emerge for librarians in attempting to navigate complex licensing terms, particularly the restriction associated with sharing and distributing material (Goldner & Birch 2012; Percy, 2013; Posner 2012). As has been noted, matters are complicated by the imposition of different restrictions for various types of users (Appleyard, 2015). It should be noted here that British copyright law has recently changed, the implications of which have been helpfully summarised by Cornish (2015). While there is still no explicit legal provision for ILL, the legislation does in practice deal with interlibrary supply, and introduces simpler processes the (e.g. the electronic submission of declaration forms), thereby
reducing librarians’ workloads. The new regulations also maintain that existing contracts and licenses cannot be overridden by publisher conditions, and no longer make it a condition that the requester be charged a fee.

Another phenomenon inextricably linked to growth of digital document availability and consumption is open access (OA). Many observers have expressed the belief that the rise of OA will inevitably limit the need for ILL (Posner, 2014), and some empirical studies have supported this position (e.g. (Koyama et al., 2011; Corthouts et al., 2011). Others however disagree. Schöpfel (2014) has argued that these studies incorrectly attribute decreasing ILL rates to OA, and with McGrath (2014) posits three reasons why ILL will remain relevant even as open access grows. While OA material may be free to access, it is not always available for commercial use, limiting users engaged in corporate or R&D tasks. The status of OA material may also be uncertain, with users unsure of the rights associated with its use. Finally a significant proportion of repository content may be restricted to certain users (e.g. on-campus access). Schöpfel also identifies two approaches libraries have adopted to integrate OA material into their document supply offers. The horizontal approach sees OA added a secondary service, separate to the existing ILL service, while the vertical approach sees open access material directly connected to the core document delivery services, with ILL requests filled with OA material. On this latter point, Johnson (2011) notes that in practice OA material only rarely satisfies ILL requests.

Another form of digital content of particular relevance to ILL is the ebook. In general the lending of ebooks has been found to be complex, and hindered by the range of publishing formats (Weible and Sullivan, 2012), and the use of proprietary systems that do not meet the needs of users who are unable to download content to their favoured device (Neujahr, 2011). There are also differences globally between academic and public library models. Academic libraries typically offer multi-user simultaneous access, with titles acquired by user demand. Public libraries operate a more tradition print model, with access for one user at a time and perpetual access (Xu & Moreno, 2014). From an ILL perspective it has been observed that “there is no comprehensive way to borrow or lend ebooks via the traditional interlibrary loan framework” (Litsey & Ketner, 2013: 120). A recent survey has found that most libraries cannot or will not include ebooks in ILL offerings (FIL, 2012), and although there have been examples of ebook lending through consortia, licensing restrictions mostly do not allow sharing beyond this level (Xu & Moreno, 2014). This has prompted some observers to call for the library community to work towards creative solutions, including the creation of a global ebook platform (Litsey & Ketner, 2013).

A final point to note about the evolving digital environment is the impact it has had on the range and scope of services that might be seen as competition to libraries and their ILL services. Public libraries in particular cannot compete with corporate giants such as Amazon, Google, and Netflix. As Levien
(2011) notes, a single Kindle can connect to more e-books than a user would find in most large libraries, while Amazon will deliver print items at low prices in days. These competitors also offer sophisticated recommendation systems that research shows are attractive to users (Wakeling et al., 2014).

2.7 Models of cooperation

2.7.1 General points

Models of cooperation reported in the research literature are mostly those found in academic libraries, with much written on one particular model; OhioLink (see Kohl, 1998 and Sanville, 2007). There are some reports of public library schemes in academic journals with further information about these schemes in publicity material found on library websites. The authors of a number of the reports are also representatives of the schemes (see Hansen, 2003; Thorhauge, 2010). In general, public library models of cooperation belong to one of three types: national schemes (for example Danish Libraries), regional schemes (for example OhioSearch) and thematic schemes (for example MusicPal).

There is also little literature on how academic libraries cooperate with public libraries. Related to this, with the United States an exception, there is a dearth of literature that reports on how academic libraries engage with local communities (Dunne, 2009). From an examination of library websites and through personal contacts Dunne is able to identify three means of engagement: libraries that provide access to collections, joint use libraries (libraries from different sectors share physical space), and libraries promoting lifelong learning.

2.7.2 Denmark

The Danish Agency for Libraries and Media have an impressive vision for public libraries of providing end-users with free access to items in the Danish national catalogue, including digital materials. This vision comes against a backdrop of changing public library usage and a challenging economic and political environment (Erlandsen, 2011; Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010; Hansen, 2003).

The rationale for building a national catalogue was to reduce cost by producing a single catalogue, to aggregate collections that could lead to increased discovery and usage, and to allow for national marketing campaigns. The national catalogue was launched in October 2001 and the building of a national digital library is one of the three core visions of the 2010 parliamentary report, the other two being a rethink of the physical library space and the building of partnerships with other sectors such as Education, Culture and Health (Thorhauge, 2010).

Key features:
The launch of the national catalogue led to an immediate increase in ILL and increased usage of public libraries (Hansen, 2003). More recent figures show that the majority of loans are for physical rather than digital resources. There has been a decrease in the lending of physical resources but at the same time an increase in the use of digital resources, with a 16% rise in the period between 2011 and 2012 alone (Thorhauge, 2010; Model Program, 2012).

The Danish model has been much lauded outside of Denmark, for example

"Perhaps the most important insight into the factors that affect ILL is provided by Denmark. As an editor I have tried to promote the effectiveness of ILL in satisfying the demand for wider reading material by the general population by publishing articles from Denmark that describe in detail its successes. In bald terms, a country of 4.5 million people generates two million ILL requests a year! This is principally because any Danish citizen can order any item in the Danish national catalogue from anywhere, to be delivered anywhere – all free to the citizen." (McGrath, 2011: 62)

2.7.3 Ohio

There are two regional resource sharing schemes in operation in Ohio. (1) SearchOhio, established in 2006, a consortium of 28 public libraries (Westerville Public Library, 2015a & 2015b). (2) OhioLink, first mooted in 1987, a state-funded consortium of 6 public/research universities, 23 community/technical colleges, 52 independent colleges and the State Library of Ohio. OhioLink is one of the first US attempts at a state-wide online library system (Ohio Library and Information Network, 2015). It is unclear from the literature how the two services integrate but there are arrangements for resource sharing between the two schemes.

Key features:

- OhioLink
  - Central catalogue accessed via library websites
  - User-initiated, un-mediated
- Catalogue open to all but access restricted to library scheme members
- Free to end user
- All member libraries run same ILS system.
- Commercial delivery system to any participating library

**OhioSearch**
- Central catalogue accessed via library websites
- User-initiated, un-mediated
- Free to end user
- Commercial delivery system to any participating library

The success of SearchOhio is perhaps best summed up in this statement: “Last year alone, SearchOhio libraries shared over 675,000 items, registering among the most highly used interlibrary loan systems in the United States.” (Barlow, 2014).

### 2.7.4 MusicPal

MusicPal, piloted summer 2009 and launched March 2010, is a resource sharing scheme operating across the island of Ireland. Members include 16 public libraries, 10 higher education, 3 conservatoire and 6 special libraries. MusicPal is one of the three schemes (the other two are regional schemes: CorkPal and MidlandsPal) in the Pathways to Learning project. Now run under the aegis of CONUL (Consortium of National and University Libraries), Pathways to Learning was originally conceived under COLICO (Committee on Library Co-operation in Ireland, dissolved 2012) an advisory body established to facilitate resource sharing between Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, n.d.; Library Association of Ireland, 2012 & 2013).

**Key features**

- Cross-border
- Gives end-user physical access to member libraries
- Printed materials may be consulted
- Restrictions may apply to digital material
3. STAGE ONE: SURVEY

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Instrument development

The development of questions for the survey was guided by both the original objectives of the project, and themes that were found to emerge from a review of the relevant literature. This resulted in a total of six question categories:

- About you
- Current levels of provision
- Rationale and strategies
- Value for money
- Library users and the digital environment
- The future of interlending

While it was hoped that the survey would generate a rich data set, consideration was also paid to ensuring that the process of completing the questionnaire was not prohibitively long. As such a decision was taken to limit the survey to 30 questions. Drafts of the questions were reviewed several times by Robert Gent and Lynn Hodgkins of TCR, and their feedback used to refine the instrument. A combination of multiple choice, likert-scale type and open ended questions were utilised, and a full copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 1. The questions are also included in the presentation of results in section 3.2.

The survey was created using Limesurvey². The survey proper was prefaced with an information page, as required by University of Sheffield Ethics procedures, which can be found in Appendix 2, and respondents were required to click a check-box to indicate their consent to participate. A pilot study ran from 9th – 24th February 2015, and was distributed to TCR contacts in Libraries and Information East Midlands (LIEM), which generated eight responses. Feedback from respondents resulted in the removal of one question relating to local archives, and some minor wording changes to improve clarity. It also revealed the standard time taken to complete the survey (15 minutes). Since there were no significant changes to the survey, results from the pilot study are included in the final analysis.

3.1.2 Distribution

The survey proper was distributed by email to SCL members on 11th March 2015, and ran until 5th May 2015. The invitation asked that the survey be completed “at a sufficiently senior level” to address

² https://www.limesurvey.org/
“policy and strategy considerations”. Representatives of 179 geographic regions were included on the distribution list. 21 completed responses were received. Including the pilot study, a total of 29 responses from Survey 1 were received. This represents a response rate of 16.2%

A second survey was distributed via the UnityUK mailing list, inviting any interested parties to participate. The only changes to the survey were the removal of the question about governance plans, and the introduction of “Don’t know” options to questions that less senior staff members might not be able to answer. This survey ran from 1st – 19th May 2015, and 48 complete responses were received. Of these respondents, 10 identified as belonging to academic organisations, and 2 to NHS organisations. The responses of these participants were excluded from the final analysis, leaving 36 valid responses.

A summary of the survey distribution and responses can be found in Table 1.

### Table 1: Responses to Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Distribution List</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>LIEM Contacts</td>
<td>09 to 24/02/2015</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 1</td>
<td>SCR</td>
<td>11/03 to 05/05/2015</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2</td>
<td>UnityUK</td>
<td>01 to 19/05/2015</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.1.3 Analysis

All responses were exported to the SPSS statistical analysis tool. This was used to produce descriptive statistics and crosstabulations. The chi-square test was used to identify statistically significant differences between respondent groups. Responses to open ended questions were subjected to an iterative coding process to establish key themes.
3.2 Results

3.2.1 About you

Q1 - Does your service have staff with dedicated responsibility for interlending services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant differences were observed in responses to this question between the two surveys. This is however unsurprising, since the respondents from the UnityUK list are to an extent self-selecting (staff whose dedicated responsibility is interlending would seem to be more likely to complete an interlending survey). Among the senior management, the services represented in our survey show a relatively even split between those with dedicated staff and those without. Responses to all other survey questions from SCL respondents were analysed to determine whether results differed between these two groups (i.e. with dedicated staff and without), but no significant differences were observed.

Q2 - Which forms of governance for libraries is your Authority considering for the future? (select all that apply) (only asked in Survey 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Governance</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholly managed and delivered by the local authority</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed and delivered through joint arrangements / merger with other authorities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial outsourcing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsourcing to a non-profit body</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of a staff-led mutual society</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community led and managed branch libraries</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Almost half (48%, n=14) of respondents admitted considering at least one form of governance other than local authority management. Of the 11 respondents considering community managed libraries, 9 (82%) were also considering at least one other non-local authority governance solution.

### 3.2.2 Current levels of provision

**Q3 - Which interlending schemes is your service participating in?**

Given the relatively low response rates, and the methods of survey distribution, it is questionable whether the responses to these questions are representative of general participation levels in the various schemes, particularly with regards to UnityUK and CONARLS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UnityUK</th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not participate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use very rarely</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use occasionally</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a moderate amount</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use often</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use very often</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of respondents (75.4%, n=49) use UnityUK “Often” or “Very often”. Unsurprisingly, the responses to the survey distributed to the UnityUK mailing list show very high levels of use.
A large and statistically significant disparity between the results of the two surveys was observed in the rates of participation in the CONARLS scheme, with SCL respondents far less likely to represent services that participate in the scheme ($p<.005$).

### Regional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not participate</td>
<td>5 17.2%</td>
<td>13 36.1%</td>
<td>18 27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use very rarely</td>
<td>1 3.4%</td>
<td>2 5.6%</td>
<td>3 4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use occasionally</td>
<td>3 10.3%</td>
<td>3 8.3%</td>
<td>6 9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a moderate amount</td>
<td>5 17.2%</td>
<td>1 2.8%</td>
<td>6 9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use often</td>
<td>6 20.7%</td>
<td>5 13.9%</td>
<td>11 16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use very often</td>
<td>9 31.0%</td>
<td>12 33.3%</td>
<td>21 32.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A majority of respondents (72.2%, n=47) state that their organisation participates in a regional scheme, with around half (49.2%, n=32) using the scheme “Often” or “Very often”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-regional</th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not participate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use very rarely</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use occasionally</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a moderate amount</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use often</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use very often</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Involvement with sub-regional schemes was found to be slightly lower, with around half participating (49.8%, n=32), and around a third (31.3%, n=21) using the scheme “Often” or “Very often”.

Figure 2 summarises results on the basis of whether respondents’ services participate in the different types of scheme at all.

Figure 2: Participation rates for the four types of scheme
Q4 - Are you actively involved in the development of any new schemes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For both surveys, the majority of respondents said they were not actively involved in the development of any new interlending schemes. Results were significantly different between the surveys ($X^2 (1, N=65) = 5.363, p<.05$), with respondents from the UnityUK List less likely to be exploring new schemes. It seems likely however that the development of new interlending schemes would be driven at a management level, and it is therefore possible that responses from the UnityUK list do not accurately reflect engagement in developing new schemes.

Q4a - Are you actively involved in the development of any new schemes? FREE TEXT

6 Respondents added free text comments relating to the development of new schemes. Three of these described newly developed or developing schemes operating via a shared LMS:

“We have developed a lending consortium with a neighbouring library service through a shared Library Management System ... Other neighbouring authorities have expressed interest in joining this.” (Respondent 69).

“By summer 2015 will share a LMS with [other areas] - at some point we will look at interlending using the shared LMS (2016 or 2017).” (R75)

“Interlending between [city consortium] member authorities via shared LMS” (R52).

The remaining comments described plans to explore the potential of joint working with other authorities (R2), and expanding an existing regional scheme to cover a greater area (R50). Finally one respondent described how interlending is subcontracted:

“All our interlending activity (outside of our own sub regional consortium arrangements) is subcontracted to another Authority as part of an SLA for the provision to us of all matters associated with Bibliographic services.” (R53)
Q5 - What other types of scheme would you be interested in participating in? (optional free text)

There were only five responses to this question. One response explicitly stated that any new scheme would only be valuable if it covered the costs of the staff and resources required to it., while other responses focused on digital/electronic delivery (“Digital interlending would be of interest if suppliers would allow” (R50); “Electronic document supply” (R70)). One respondent suggested a “shared reserve store, possibly sub regional within/alongside SELMS, though benefits might be minor” (R49). The final comment suggested copying the US reciprocal lending model (R55).

Q6 - Is your service a net borrower or lender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=30*)</th>
<th>Combined (n=59*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Lender</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Borrower</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excludes 6 UnityUK List respondents who answered "don’t know"

No significant differences were observed between SCL and UnityUK list responses. In general respondents were more likely to represent services that were net lenders.
3.2.3  Rationale and strategies

Q7 - How important are the following factors as underlying reasons for providing interlending services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responsibility to serve community</th>
<th>User Demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SCL List (n=29)</td>
<td>UnityUK List (n=36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately important</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Responsibility to serve the community” and “User demand” were clearly seen by respondents as the primary factors driving the provision of interlending services. All but three respondents saw these
factors as at least “Slightly Important”, with the vast majority rating them as “Very or Extremely important.”

### Competing with commercial services (e.g. Amazon)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly important</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately important</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, “Competing with commercial services” was seen as the least important factor, with almost half of all respondents (49.2%, n=32) rating it “not at all important”. No SCL respondents rated the factor as very or extremely important, while six UnityUK respondents did so. While the overall differences between list responses are not statistically significant, the results do clearly suggest that senior management, even more so than library staff, do not see a role for interlending as a means of challenging commercial suppliers.
“Economics of collection development” was generally viewed as a moderately important justification for interlending. It is noticeable that only two SCL respondents rated the factor as not at all important, suggesting that many services see interlending as a means of coping with the challenges of collection development in hard economic times.

The final factor, “Facilitating access to items in the long tail”, was the only one to show statistically significant differences in the responses from the two lists ($p<.05$). Respondents from the UnityUK list generally viewed this factor as more important than those from the SCL list.
In summary, Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents from each mailing list who viewed each factor as either “Very” or “Extremely Important”. Aggregated this way, results suggest that meeting user demand and the responsibility to serve the community represent the core reasons for providing interlending services, with facilitating access to niche items seen by library staff in particular as almost as important. The economics of collection development appears to be a significant but secondary consideration, whilst competing with commercial services generally seen as non or only slightly important.

![Figure 3: % of respondents from each mailing list viewing factors as "Very Important" or "Extremely Important" underlying reasons for offering interlending services](image)

**Figure 3**: % of respondents from each mailing list viewing factors as "Very Important" or "Extremely Important" underlying reasons for offering interlending services

**Q8 - Do you currently include, or plan to include links to freely available resources (e.g. through Project Gutenberg or the Hathi Trust) in the library catalogue?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently include</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to include</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No plan to include</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statistically significant differences were found in the responses to this question from the two distribution lists ($X^2 (2, N=65) = 9.167, p<.05$). While there is some difference in the number of respondents whose services currently include freely available resources in the catalogue, the most striking difference is the small number of UnityUK respondents whose services are planning to include such links. It is possible that this is a consequence of UnityUK respondents not being party to planning decisions.

**Q9 - Do existing schemes in which you participate accommodate direct user requests?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UnityUK (n=51)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONARLS (n=41)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional (n=40)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subregional (n=33)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. “Do not participate” responses have been excluded from this table

Responses to this question suggest a large majority of interlending schemes do not currently support direct patron requests. It is notable that subregional schemes appear by far the most likely type of scheme to do so.

**Q10 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the view that user driven interlending represents the future of interlending services?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over half of all respondents, and a large majority (72.4%, n=21) of senior management respondents agreed that a user driven service represented the future of interlending. Only a small number of respondents actively disagreed with the statement, while just under half (41.7%, n=15) of UnityUK respondents remained neutral.

Q11 - To what extent are collection development decisions in your service influenced by interlending opportunities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=29)</th>
<th></th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=36)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall it appears that interlending opportunities have only a small influence on collection development decisions for most services. Almost half (47.2%, n=17) of UnityUK respondents reported that interlending opportunities were not a factor at all, although we might question the extent to which some respondents from that list are aware of the factors influencing collection development decisions.
### 3.2.4 Value for money

**Q12 - To what extent do the interlending schemes you participate in offer value for money to libraries?**

* “Don’t know” and “Do not participate” responses are not included in the following tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=27)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=27)</th>
<th>Combined (n=56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very poor</strong></td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>7 24.1%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>7 12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate</strong></td>
<td>14 48.3%</td>
<td>10 37.0%</td>
<td>24 42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very good</strong></td>
<td>4 13.8%</td>
<td>12 44.4%</td>
<td>16 28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>4 13.8%</td>
<td>5 18.5%</td>
<td>9 16.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost half of all respondents (44.7%, n=25) perceive UnityUK offering very good or excellent value for money. It should be noted however that this is primarily a result of UnityUK list respondents’ high ratings. In contrast about a quarter (24.1%, n=7) of SCL respondents rated the service as offering poor value for money.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CONARLS SCL List (n=21)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=21)</th>
<th>Combined (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very poor</strong></td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>4 19.0%</td>
<td>1 4.8%</td>
<td>5 11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate</strong></td>
<td>13 61.9%</td>
<td>9 42.9%</td>
<td>22 52.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very good</strong></td>
<td>3 14.3%</td>
<td>7 33.3%</td>
<td>10 23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>1 4.8%</td>
<td>4 19.0%</td>
<td>5 11.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONARLS was rated similarly, with only a slightly lower number of participants (35.7%, n=15) selecting very good or excellent value for money.

Answers to question 12 were crosstabulated with responses to question 6 (“Is your service a net borrower or lender?”). In all but one case, no significant differences were found between respondents who represent net borrower or net lender services, the exception being users of CONARLS. As shown below, net lenders who participate in CONARLS saw the service as offering significantly poorer value for money than net borrowers ($p<0.005$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONARLS – Value for money ratings by net lender/borrower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net lender (n=24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional and subregional schemes were found to be more often perceived as offering very good or excellent value for money. While it should be remembered that these categories represent a large number of individual schemes, it is nonetheless interesting to note that almost a quarter of all respondents, and a third of SCL respondents, answered that their subregional scheme offered excellent value for money.
### Regional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=24)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=14)</th>
<th>Combined (n=38)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Subregional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCL List (n=19)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=29)</th>
<th>Combined (n=48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4 summarises the perceived value for money of each type of scheme. Overall it appears that interlending is rarely seen as poor value for money, with regional and subregional schemes more likely to offer very good or excellent cost-effectiveness.
Q13 - How can the value for money of interlending schemes be demonstrated?

Responses to this free-text question fell broadly into three categories. A number of respondents suggested methods for assessing value for money relating to costs and usage rates:

“Would have to be a cost analysis against every item requested by borrowers to see if purchasing would be cheaper - however many items are not possible to purchase.” (R35)

“Dividing any subscription by items supplied and comparing cost with other cost schemes.” (R36)

“Probably only through a structured study, although ad-hoc price comparisons for out of print materials can be useful.” (R70)

“Statistical collections of data outlining cost and usage can demonstrate this. it would be important to consider the whole cost of the service. It might be useful to consider benchmarking across the region against national trends.” (R77)

Others identified customer satisfaction as the most important factor, with some explicitly noting that cost alone is not an appropriate measure of value:

“Increased customer satisfaction as a result of supplying reservations that we would not be in a position to buy (i.e. too expensive, Out of print etc).” (R51)
“By how much customers value the availability of the service - cost per loan doesn't provide the full picture as this is there to fulfil the needs of a minority.” (R63)

“The cost of borrowing is justified for the customer satisfaction it brings.” (R21)

Several other responses highlighted efficiency as a key factor, particularly the time staff spend discovering, requesting and delivering items:

“By the efficient and prompt supply of items.” (R38)

“Assuming the decision to undertake an interlending service has been made, the scheme offers value for money because of the efficiency of fulfilling requests without the need for staff time spent searching catalogues etc.” (R50)

“How quickly the request can be fulfilled with minimal staff involvement except overseeing and monitoring requests.” (R41)

“Staff time, one transaction to find a request” (R2)

Two further responses merit mention here. One SCL respondent questioned the whole notion of applying a concept like value for money to interlending:

“I think this is a meaningless question. Interlending is never good value for money as it is a very expensive customised service. It is valuable and valued but not good value for money in the economic sense.” (R57)

Another senior manager took a different approach, and whilst offering an answer to the question also posited a pessimistic (or pragmatic?) view of the rationale behind interlending:

“Tough. Anecdotal satisfaction when a purposive borrower accesses a hard to reach item. However, given the failure of all library requests services for over 50 years, why are we bothering putting resources into serving a tiny proportion of users?” (R49)
Q14 - In general, are library-to-library interlending charges appropriate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers (n=29)</th>
<th>UnityUK List (n=29*)</th>
<th>Combined (n=58*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too little</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About right</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excludes 7 respondents who answered “Don’t know”

A majority of respondents (63.8%, n=37) indicated that interlending charges are appropriate, with the remainder more likely to see them as too much (29.3%, n=17) than too little (6.9%, n=4).

Q15 - What delivery, collection or access options do you currently offer, or plan to offer, to users?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery Method</th>
<th>Currently offer</th>
<th>Plan to offer</th>
<th>No plan to offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivered to local library</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect from lending library</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Access to material</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home delivery</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sending the requested item to the patron’s local library was by far the most widespread method offered to users, with 87.7% (n=57) of respondents saying their service either offered this, or was planning to do so. Over half of respondents (52.3%, n=34) said their service offered both delivery to the local library, and collection from the lending library. Offering digital access to material was found to be the most common planned option, with 9.6% of respondents (and 14.3% of SCL respondents) stating that their service was planning this. 40% of respondents (n=26) said their service
currently offered only one of these four options, with delivery to local library being by far the most common sole option (73.1%, n=19).

Q16 - How important are the following factors to the future of interlending in the digital age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/7 access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No differences were observed between responses from SCL and UnityUK lists. It is interesting to note that most respondents found all the specified factors to be important to the future of interlending, with a similar distribution of answers for each factor. No single factor is clearly seen as most important. The responses perhaps suggest that managers and staff understand that interlending must adapt in the same way as other library services to meet user demands for fast, centralised online access and delivery.
Q17 – What measures does your service take to reduce the costs of interlending?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined*</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Print on demand</td>
<td>Digital document supply</td>
<td>Brokering deals direct with other services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently utilise</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to utilise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No plan to utilise</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents who answered “Don’t know” are excluded from the table

No differences were observed between responses from SCL and UnityUK lists. Results suggest that print on demand is used relatively rarely. Brokering deals directly with other services is slightly more common, with just over a quarter (26.0%, n=13) of all respondents saying their service either does this, or is planning to do so. Digital document supply represents the most popular form of cost reduction, with exactly half of respondents indicating that they offer or plan to offer this service.
3.2.5 The future of interlending

Q18 - How do you see the future of interlending in your organisation, in the context of wider procurement and resource-sharing strategies, user needs and budget constraints?

This open ended question was answered by 62% of all respondents (n=40), and by 86% of SCL respondents (n=25). While responses naturally varied in scope and detail, several clear themes emerged.

Around a quarter of respondents contextualised their answer by describing a decline in current rates of interlending. While explanations for this decline varied, the most commonly given reason was the increased availability of online resources (e.g. “Interlending has decreased in recent years possibly because of better access to material on the Internet” – R71). Others suggested that a lack of user awareness of the service was to blame:

_We offer interlending but ILL is falling as it is not really promoted. Unless a customer is aware of the service, they will never know it is an option and due to this I can see the service declining._ (R30)

Several respondents also mentioned the cost to library users as prohibitive factor:

_Raising the cost of ILLs results in a reduction of take up which sharply goes down and then recovers, but never to the previous level._ (R47)

_The rising cost to our customers of these services is currently limiting the requests that are made._ (R1)

Two respondents also described shifts in strategy towards acquisition rather than ILL:

_Use of interlending (in both directions) has decreased over recent years. This has been down to a number of factors including the fact that we have been able to purchase items from a wider range of sources. This has increased the likelihood of us being able to purchase a copy for our collection rather than go for inter-library loan. Where possible and appropriate, this is preferential to both ourselves and the customer._ (R69)

_I see it continuing to decline. Amazon is becoming the swiftest and most cost effective means of securing stock for our customers._ (R74)

Other respondents described how the decline in ILL requests, coupled with spending cuts, had led to reductions in ILL staffing:

_Interlending from outside the LLC is in decline and no longer really justifies the cost of the annual UnityUK subscription. Service review currently in progress which may lead to reduction or removal of posts with dedicated interlending duties._ (R52)

_Budget reductions have taken away our dedicated ILL staff. This is now part of the Operations._ (R65)
Around a quarter of respondents to this question saw a bleak future for interlending. Pressure on library budgets was by far the most frequently cited reason respondents gave for believing interlending to be in a terminal decline. For some the operational cost of schemes was the key factor, while other saw the fall in acquisitions budgets as most crucial:

*I don't see it as having much of a future at all. ... In these times of austerity I will not be at all surprised if the ILL system is withdrawn as no longer being cost effective and the basic fiction requests that make up Books4U will be all that we offer.* (R21)

*Given the budget cuts for public libraries and the ability to buy cheap second hand books on the internet, I feel that there will be less interlibrary loan requests except for very specialist subjects. Without the money to support the staff and other ILL costs, the experienced staff sourcing these requests may not be available. ILL is unlikely to continue in anything like its current form.* (R41)

*As library budgets are reduced, less specialised material is likely to be bought, affecting the range and availability of this material. This is the material that people request through ILL, so it may be we get to a point where libraries just don’t hold it.* (R54)

*For niche and more esoteric material, given the costs involved we are likely to stop this service due to budget reductions.* (R50)

Coping with the costs of administering interlending was mentioned by many respondents, most of whom described how these costs would be transferred to the user:

*We may need to increase the charges that we pass on to customers to better reflect the actual cost of inter library loans to the Authority.* (R51)

*The interlending service is now serving an increasingly limited and specialist usership and as a public library service it is becoming increasingly difficult the subsidising of interlending. For this reason we are moving towards a full cost recovery model of customer charges for the service.* (R69)

*We have to be realistic and take into account cuts to book budgets. In light of this I can see Interlending costs been passed to the customer with none or little subsidy.* (72)

*For niche and more esoteric material, given the costs involved we are likely to either stop this service due to budget reductions or be required to pass on most or all of the costs of providing this service.* (R50)

A note of caution was given by one respondent, who suggested that this approach might limit accessibility to library services:

*Ideally borrowers would cover most (if not all) of the costs but the level of charges makes that impossible if we are to retain access for the whole community.* (R60)
Two respondents suggested balancing borrowing and lending rates as an alternative means of managing costs of delivering ILL:

We would hope to neutralise our costs by lending/borrowing in equal measures. Increasing our lending could be achieved by building a reputation as an Authority that deals with inter library loans requests in a timely and efficient manner. (R53)

We hope ILL will be largely paid for by the items that we as a service loan out to other institutions. (R24)

In stark contrast, a significant number of respondents saw a positive future for ILL, or at least a strong imperative to continue offering the service. Primarily this was because of a perceived duty to meet the needs of library users:

We would still wish to offer an interlending service otherwise there will be a whole raft of material that will otherwise be unavailable to our customers. (R55)

Interlending is a niche service but invaluable for people who want access to rare or out of print material. That won't go away. (R57)

As a valuable part of the collection development policy. See it as part of the service however it is delivered in the future. (R63)

Interlending is a very small part of the service activity, but we feel it is important for us to be able to deliver our mission of enabling access to knowledge. (R70)

Interlending is a valuable service but it is very low volume and does not play a significant role in our planning - budgetary or otherwise. (R71)

If we did not have interlending we would find it difficult to fulfill the Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 and provide 'a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons...’ (R68)

In addition to this public service argument, a number of respondents also highlighted the potential economic advantages of interlending, which they saw as particularly relevant to the current funding environment. In contrast to other respondents, these replies emphasised the potential for resource sharing to minimise the impact of budget cuts:

UK wide Interlending is an important service to offer in the light of budgetary restrictions in our service. Our stock has been, and will continue to be, reduced with the loss of our Central Reserve stock and merging services. (R1)

We will look to satisfy requests for more popular material through sub-regional lending, meeting savings requirements through the sharing of resources. We are beginning to look again at defining areas of stock responsibility in different authorities. (R50)
We would want to take advantage of any schemes that allow us to share resources, or to keep costs down. Budget for ILL will need to be looked at alongside the whole resources budget, and the impact of any reductions on that. (R55)

In [English town] we will always have a need for interlending as we are only a small authority and cannot afford to buy expensive or obscure titles. Despite budget constraints interlending should still be a vital part of the library service if we don’t want to be seen as merely a purveyor of bestsellers. (R68)

The ability to offer a cost effective interlending facility across the region should enable authorities to make the best cost effective use of a diminishing stock resource across the area. (R77)

Q19 - How do you see the future of ILL in the context of the wider digital agenda?

Just under half of all respondents (48%, n=31) answered this open ended question, with the vast majority acknowledging the significant impact the increased availability of digital content is likely to have on interlending. As one librarian put it, “digital interlending is undoubtedly the future of interlibrary lending for the foreseeable future” (R38). Respondents identified three key ways in which the digital agenda might prove to facilitate ILL provision. Digital delivery might serve to reduce the cost of the service, both to libraries and users:

As more items become available in digital format, this can only be a good thing for the end user, allowing both cheaper access to information. (R24)

This should reduce costs by eliminating postage etc. (R1)

Supply of digital materials should be the default position to reduce costs and build a more flexible national materials resource which can be more freely and cheaply accessed. (R70)

Digitisation was also seen as a means of increasing the availability of once inaccessible material, and to resources beyond books:

As more material is digitised I would hope to see greater accessibility to material previously unavailable to customers. (R1)

In regards to periodicals and thesis, i can see the use of digital formats will be greatly increased. (R30)

I think there is a place for it, especially for items which we would prefer not to lend or are too fragile. (R65)

Finally advances in the digital infrastructure were seen as a means of improving the speed and efficiency of ILL requests and delivery:
More seamless online requests would be a good development. It is obvious that providing requested documents in digital form is something we will need to provide but the charging and funding model will need to be carefully planned. (R60)

Supply times will be faster and request will be made directly from the digital platform. (R72)

Robust online ILL functionality would rapidly speed up the process for customers. (R74)

I would like to think that we will be able to process online payment for resources and consequently be able to offer digital delivery of items to customer's desktops. (R47)

It was notable that other respondents who identified these factors did so less positively. A number of replies mentioned their users’ preference for physical resources, and attendant difficulties with electronic discovery and consumption:

I have suggested digital access to readers but they prefer hard copy. (R2)

However, there will always be those customers who don’t have access or know how to use a computer and their preference will always be for the hard copy. (R30)

For public libraries there will be less impact than there will be for academic and specialist libraries as our customers still want hard copy. (R55)

Things are leaning to the digital in 5 years or so (many people still not up to speed with digital, this will change). (R59)

What is not discussed is the general public need for help to discover resources in the digital format (R75)

Other issues were identified with the availability of digital content itself. Two respondents stated that the most commonly requested items were unavailable electronically:

Most of the items wanted are not currently available digitally in our experience. Universities will use digital assets, but public libraries are usually looking for out of print books. (R57)

For the foreseeable future there will be significant demand for printed material as there is still a lot that is not digitally available. (R71)

Others acknowledged the increasing availability of e-resources, but saw this as contributing to an ongoing decline in the need for ILL:

More resources available in digital format means that information which was previously only found in specialist publications via ILL requests is now readily available on the internet on specialised sites. Thus reducing the number of ILL requests and frequently any Public Library input. (R41)

We would hope that more institutions will make more material available digitally and online, reducing the need for interlending services and mediation of requests. (R50)
In my opinion the requirement for interlending will continue to decline as the availability of digital content increases. (R52)

Greater availability of digital material without the need to broker access to it via library services will create a further decline in demand for access via us. (R53)

The most commonly identified issue relating to digital content concerned licensing and access arrangements. While recognising the increasing amount of digital content, a number of commenters expressed confusion or concern over the potential cost and complexity of licensing and copyright arrangements:

The more popular digital material, e.g. magazines, e-books and e-audiobooks are currently restricted by licensing agreements that would not allow inter-lending. These materials are also on multiple platforms that require separate subscriptions to access the material. (R54)

Open Access and changes in copyright legislation will help to some extent, but a major pinchpoint is still the willingness of publishers to let public libraries access book content electronically. The interlending of eBooks for example seems pretty unattainable in the current UK context. (R63)

This rather depends on publisher restrictions on what they are willing to make available to library services. If they made more available, so would we. (R74)

Hopefully as items become available in digital format access to these items will be readily available - what is the unknown is whether this will incur charges. (R75)

Several respondents also identified systems and infrastructure concerns as factors that might limit the positive benefits of the digital agenda. These comments related both to IT capabilities and digitisation facilities:

Our IT/Internet here is rubbish so they would have to sort that out before they think about wider digital agenda. (R26)

However the infrastructure to be able to digitise would need to be in place first. (R65)

Finally, addressing the issue of e-content discovery, several respondents discussed the need for aggregated catalogues to facilitate access to the new wealth of digital material, and systems to facilitate interlending in the digital landscape:

Until we can implement a full Discovery solution in public libraries (which relies on having an industry-approved single authentication method as per academic libraries e.g. Shibboleth) allowing for concurrent searching of OPAC, ebook and online subscriptions content, and access to digital content is more widely available and easy to access for libraries then ILL of print resources is still hugely important. (R63)

We need to build a more flexible national materials resource which can be more freely and cheaply accessed. (R70)
A national public library union catalogue might address some of these issues and interlending could still play a part in library services. (R72)
4. STAGE TWO: INTERVIEWS

4.1 Methodology

The aim of the interview phase was to generate detailed comments from ILL practitioners, service managers and informed commentators regarding current interlending schemes and the future of the service.

4.1.1 Participants

Three methods were used to recruit participants. Respondents to the Stage One survey were invited to participate in the interviews, and offered a chance to enter an email address to indicate their willingness to take part. This resulted in the recruitment of seven interviewees. Ten additional participants were recruited through word of mouth recommendations by other participants or interested parties, and a further three from responses to the LIS PUB survey invitation. All participants work in the public library sector, with the exception of P16, who works for a University. A list of all twenty participants, their job titles and geographical region can be found in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Recruited via</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>Head of Service: Delivery</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 South West</td>
<td>Library Resources Manager</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>County Libraries and Heritage Manager</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Wales</td>
<td>Bibliographic Services Librarian</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 East Midlands</td>
<td>Stock Services Manager</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 East Midlands</td>
<td>Senior Culture &amp; Leisure Manager</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>Collections and Reader Development Manager</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 South East</td>
<td>Inter-Library Loans Supervisor</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 South West</td>
<td>Libraries Development Officer</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 East of England</td>
<td>Stock and Distribution Manager</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 South West</td>
<td>Library Operations? manager</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 North West</td>
<td>Reader Services Support Officer</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 South East</td>
<td>Stock Manager</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 South East</td>
<td>Service and Strategy Manager</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 North West</td>
<td>Interlending Librarian</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 North West</td>
<td>Library service Manager</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 South West</td>
<td>Head of Collection Access and Space</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 London</td>
<td>ICT Manager</td>
<td>LIS PUB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 South West</td>
<td>Head of Libraries</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 South East</td>
<td>Chairman of Town Library</td>
<td>LIS PUB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 London</td>
<td>ILL and Reservations Librarian</td>
<td>LIS PUB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2 Interview questions

The interview questions were developed with input from TCR, and sought to engage interviewees on a range of issues relating to interlending that emerged from the review of the relevant literature. Preliminary analysis of the first six interviews revealed some potential gaps in that led to the redevelopment of the questions for participant 7-20. Initial questions for participants 1-6 can be found in Appendix 3. The refined question set consisted of six question areas, with follow-up questions for some areas. Two additional questions were asked if there was time available.

Table 3: Refined Interview Questions

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Can you describe any consortia interlending schemes that your service participates in?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What was the rationale / strategic thinking for developing the consortia scheme(s)?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Would you like to see development of other ILL schemes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Will/do shared Library Management Systems change/provide opportunities for interlending?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How does the wider resource-sharing agenda complement other strategies such as joint procurement?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared systems / joint procurement - are these arrangements broadening the range of material acquired?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How do you see the potential of digital services in the future to improve both resource discovery and delivery?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What opportunities are there for ILL?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Is it important to have a national catalogue? Please explain why you think that…</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Should there be more national infrastructure provided by UnityUK to support interlending?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How do you see the future of interlending in your organisation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Will the increase in community-run libraries have an impact on interlending?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What do you think the impact would be if all interlending services were suspended?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How can/should value for money be demonstrated (1)to the patron (2) to budget holders?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Are there any partnerships / plans to partner with HE libraries?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Interview process

Interviews were scheduled over email, and conducted by phone. Audio recordings were made of the interviews using the Call Graph software. Prior to each interview participants were emailed an information sheet detailing the aims of the project, and specifying the restrictions and safeguards that would be placed on any data collected (see Appendix 4). Consent was obtained through the return of a signed form, or verbally at the start of each interview.
4.1.4 Analysis

Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed and uploaded to NVIVO qualitative analysis software. A form of thematic analysis was used to iteratively generate a codebook based on the themes to emerge from the literature review, augmented with codes that were grounded in the date. Once the codebook was completed all transcripts were coded, allowing the full dataset to be analysed thematically.

4.2 Current ILL provision

4.2.1 Schemes

In addition to UnityUK, a total of nine regional and sub-regional consortia interlending schemes were described by interviewees, as well as several thematic schemes. A striking feature of the interviews was the complexity of many of these schemes, and the difficulties some interviewees encountered when trying to explain in detail how they operated:

*We don’t charge libraries for the loans. But different authorities will charge their patrons different amounts. But the libraries who loan between each other don’t charge for the actual loan of the items.*

*Q: but you would for postage?*

*Some do, some don’t. There are three different types of membership. One, you don’t charge postage at all. Another one charges postage if they are charged postage, and the third one charges postage to everybody. (laughter). Yes, it is quite complicated. We are a number two person, so we charge postage to people who charge us postage. (I10)*

The nine schemes described in detail were as follows:

- BOOKS4YOU
- Co-East (legacy)
- Libraries West
- LIEM
- Linc y Gogledd
- NWLIP
- SELMS
- SINTO
- SWRLS

4.2.1.1 BOOKS4YOU

One interviewee represented an authority that is part of the BOOKS4YOU scheme. They described the scheme as follows:
South East Wales has an interlending scheme which we call Books4you, which runs from Swansea across to the English borders and includes all libraries along that bit of the M4 corridor. We have a piece of software that has been going on for, gosh, how long has Books4you been going, 7 or 8 years at least. And it is very efficient and very popular. There is an all Wales catalogue. We’ve had one for ages. So there is a union catalogue upon which it is based. And the union catalogue has got selection. So you can just select the Books4you libraries … To narrow it down, you can then look things up, find out where they are. And then you can either email or phone the relevant libraries. They will look on the shelf to see if it is there. If it is there you fill in a form, there’s a little database, you fill in the information, print out a label, and we have a delivery van that comes round to all the libraries twice a week and off they go. And there are hundreds. We are a relatively small service. We’ve only got 9 libraries and we probably average 50 books per delivery.” (I2)

BOOKS4YOU represents an evolution of the Gateway scheme developed in the 1990s, which utilised government funding to establish a union catalogue for the library authorities that were once part of the Gwent region. This union catalogue formed the basis of development of the new scheme, which is perceived to be efficient and quick:

“So the union catalogue was already available and we got funding to be able to develop the software and develop the service. So initially most of the van delivery costs was paid for by Conarl (?) and that sort of sliding scale going down. So we are now paying much more of the delivery costs but it’s still working out, oh, something like, I cannot remember, its pence to a book, borrowed. And because the front desk staff are doing it, and you are talking directly to the library who can go and look on the shelf immediately, and respond immediately, it’s very quick.” (I2)

The scheme is also viewed as cost effective, particularly in comparison to nation or British library borrowing:

“You think OK somebody wants to read this book but nobody else is going to want to read it afterwards so I am not spending 10 pounds on that. Whereas you are looking at less than a pound to borrow it through Books4you.” (I2)

Overall the scheme is considered a success by the interviewee, who suggested that it was popular with users and provided a valuable service:

“The undoubted success is its popularity. It satisfies lots of hard to get reservations in a way that just would not get satisfied another way because people would probably not be prepared to pay a ILL charge for some of the books they are getting.” (I2)

4.2.1.2 Co-East

One interviewee spoke of still utilising the now defunct CO-EAST interlending scheme, which represented a consortium of south-eastern counties:
“Way back in the midst of time there were a few counties that were members. Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Cambridge, Norfolk, I can’t remember if Suffolk was in it as well. I think they were. And we did try to connect our catalogues together but that actually never worked but we all agreed that if we borrowed from any of the COEAST members we wouldn’t charge for an interlibrary loan fee. And we actually still do that now. So although I request things via Unity from Essex, Cambridge etc, we don’t actually charge each other for an interlibrary loan fee.” (I8)

While no longer still officially active, there appears to be an implicit understanding that the principles of the consortium should be maintained:

“And although COEAST itself no longer exists, it stopped existing a long time ago, it was just kind of an unspoken agreement between the ex-members of COEAST that we were quite happy to carry on lending amongst ourselves for free.”

Although there is no library to library fee, the library user is still charged an interlending fee:

“We still charge our public though, we still charge them the fee for an interlibrary loan because as far as they are concerned they are having an interlibrary loan from Essex. But Essex don’t charge us as there is no BL charge attached to the loan at all.” (I8)

4.2.1.3 Libraries West

Two interviewees referred to the Libraries West consortium. One described how their membership allowed for full interlending among members, with users able to access this shared collection via shared catalogue:

“We’ve got a well-structured and long standing consortium agreement which means that all the stock, in all those authorities is accessible throughout the network of those libraries. So it is a fully integrated interlending scheme. The members of the public can access it themselves directly through the catalogue and can place reservations for any item on the single catalogue that we all share.” (I9)

The size and stock coverage of the consortium was seen as a major advantage:

“We’ve got three large libraries in the Libraries West consortium. Bristol City, Bath Central here and Taunton. They are both large libraries with large collections. So they have quite a lot of specialist stuff and then overall in the consortium we’ve got over 100 libraries. So the actual stock is over 2 million items. So it is quite a big collection this to start with. And then obviously after that we go out more regionally.” (I9)

Another interviewee spoke of how their authority was just about to join the consortium, and the rationale behind the decision:

“Our library management system was out of contract and rather than renew it and go out on our own we looked round to see what else is going on. We decided, the timing was opportune,
we decided to join the Libraries West consortium. And that is just about to happen now with a new LMS and that will give us ... an opportunity to borrow stock from those 7 authorities possibly before using the national interlibrary loan service.” (I15)

This same interviewee also described provisions relating to net lending or borrowing as an attractive element of the scheme:

“For people who are net lenders rather than net borrowers there is a scheme to compensate them financially as well.” (I15)

4.2.1.4 Libraries and Information East Midlands (LIEM)

Three interviewees mentioned their libraries being part of the LIEM organisation, with one additional participant saying that they were planning to join. An agreement between members means no library to library charges for interlending:

“We have an agreement within the East Midlands that there is no cost involved in [ILL] in terms of on per transaction basis. People do pay into LIEM and there is an annual fee. There aren’t charges, so if I loan something to Nottinghamshire they don’t pay a charge and we don’t make any reciprocal charges so it is relatively low cost for us in terms of, as long as the volumes don’t drop too low.” (I6)

Interlending of this type is invisible to the library user, and administered through UnityUK:

“Users don’t actually know it exists. We use it behind the scenes. When somebody puts in an interlibrary loan we will just go on to UnityUK to source it. And obviously we do are requests lists and we put the region i.e. those who will supply it free of charge, we put those first to save our costs.” (I10)

While there is no per transaction fee between libraries, they do charge the customer to cover other associated costs:

“We don’t charge between libraries .... We charge the customer, because obviously there is charges involved, but we don’t charge one another.” (I5)

“It went up in April to £7.50, which I think is one of the highest charges.” (I10)

Interviewees were generally positive about the scheme. One issue that was mentioned related to reporting:

“Well I guess some of the issue is I think over time some oversight has been lost in terms of what the detail of what actually LIEM achieves is so we don’t as far as I’m aware see any metrics in terms of what the volumes are across the region ... I think that kind of visibility has been a little bit lacking.” (I6)
4.2.1.5 Linc y Gogledd

One interviewee described membership of the Linc y Gogledd scheme. They described how the scheme was initiated by a University library:

“Well, initially it was an approach by Bangor university. Who I think were trying to, now I’m not quite sure exactly of the politics of the thing, I think they were trying to prove to the powers at be, whoever they were, at their end, they were contributing to the community. And that they were reaching out into the community.” (I4)

In addition to a number of Welsh public libraries, the consortium also includes academic and special libraries:

“Two universities, Bangor and Glyndawr, and then there is the FE colleges, and at one point there were three different bodies but they have basically all swallowed each other up ... We email each other and have reciprocal interlending rights. There are various special libraries that are part of Linc y Gogledd but they don’t borrow in quite the same way ... They borrow some but they are not very big members of Linc y Gogledd.” (I4)

As the scheme has grown, the benefits for public libraries have principally related to reciprocal borrowing and an easing of stock pressure:

“Initially it was mostly students using it but it expanded over the years and that is how it includes the other public authorities in North Wales as well because there is much more reciprocal borrowing between us. Which means of course there is less pressure on individual authorities and also makes up for the fact that some of them don’t have any reserve stock.” (I4)

The interviewee also described how members of a smaller consortium (Talnet) operate a policy of not charging readers a fee for interlibrary loans:

“if we can’t source something from within Linc y Gogledd then we go within Wales because the 3 counties in Talnet don’t charge their readers if they can source an interlibrary loan within Wales, which not all authorities do I understand.” (I4)

4.2.1.6 North West Libraries Interlending Partnership (NWLIP)

Two participants described their libraries membership of the NWLIP scheme, describing cooperation on interlending as well as training and discussion aspects:

“Basically all the libraries in the northwest subscribe to NWLIP. They basically have an agreement in place where we don’t charge each other for lending between authorities. We also get together at group training and for discussing best practice and current topics on interlending.” (I12)

The consortium includes public and academic libraries, although numbers for the latter group have been falling:
“To be honest it is a mixture, it is public and university libraries. I think it is predominantly public libraries but we do but there are two or three universities involved as well. But I know a couple of University libraries in recent years have not resubscribed to NWLIP.” (I12)

Advantages aside from reciprocal lending appear to be related to the power of the consortia to manage suppliers and standardise processes:

“Frequently we have problems with our couriers, for instance, we all use the same courier company. We have more clout as a group rather than us all complaining individually. It also means we are all working consistently because we implement the same working practices, generally speaking.” (12)

There is variation with in the scheme regarding charges to customers, and also to the charging of postage fees between libraries.

4.2.1.7 South East Library Management System (SELMS)

Two interviewees were members of the SELMS consortium. Membership of the consortium is based on an annual fee paid by each authority (I20), and all members of the consortium use a common LMS (Civica), with new members required to switch to the system:

“We are members of SELMS consortium, a group of 10 authorities linked by a shared LMS, that’s CIVICA. A group of libraries who all used CIVICA set it up, but now it’s sometimes the other way round where people get CIVICA so they can join the consortium.” (I20)

An interviewee also stated that their membership of the consortium was at least partly motivated by the chance to avoid a long and difficult tendering process for a new LMS:

“we had to renew our LMS – we had TALIS before and it was a question of two different systems. SO that meant a long tendering process. Partly to shorten the length of time to do the tendering, we joined SELMS - if we joined SELMS and CIVICA we wouldn’t have to do it.” (I20)

The consortium operates a shared catalogue, with users able to reserve items from any participating libraries for a fixed price and without librarian mediation:

“If we can’t find something and they can’t find something in our catalogue, they can just click a link that takes them in to the SELMS database and they can see shelf level access to all the SELMS members, and they can reserve an item as though they are reserving one of our own books. It’s a higher cost, for our own reservations we charge 60p, if they apply to one of our SELMS members it’s £3. But it means they can do it directly.” (I8)

No preference is given to the users of a particular library for stock in that library, which the interviewee recognised could cause some issues:
“Readers can put reservations in with any authority, and then it works in turn. So if we get a new book, even if there are members of our library waiting for it, if someone from somewhere else has made a reservation we have to send it straight off to them. It can be a bit depressing when a new book flies straight out the door.” (I20)

4.2.1.8 Information Partnership for South Yorkshire and north Derbyshire (SINTO)

One participant described a now defunct consortium which operated an interlending scheme:

“We were a member when SINTO existed, the Sheffield Interchange something or other or whatever it was, and basically we had our own interlibrary loan scheme which operated alongside BL and we did use to offer free interlibrary loans across the members.” (I7)

The consortium included public, university and commercial libraries:

“It did include both universities, both Sheffield universities, Derbyshire, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster. It was mainly South Yorkshire. South Yorkshire and Derbyshire because that was the region SINTO covered ... there were commercial libraries involved as well at one time.” (I7)

The interviewee explained that interlending was only one aspect of the consortium’s services, which also included training and walk-ion access at academic libraries. They also described the reasons for the scheme’s demise:

“As time has gone on the universities dropped out, they wanted to start charging. I think Doncaster were charging. It still technically runs at the moment. But for preference we would always have borrowed from one of those members before going to Conarls.” (I7)

This demise was perceived by the interviewee as contributing to a decline in rates of ILL provision.

“At one point we used to interlibrary loan items quite generously. If somebody reserved a title on the catalogue that then turned out to be missing we would interlibrary loan it for free to the borrower. Our budget didn’t allow us to carry that on. It was a very short lived time.” (I7)

4.2.1.9 South West Regional Library Service (SWRLS)

Three interviewees, including the University librarian, represented libraries participating in the SWRLS scheme. The scheme was summarised as follows:

“It is the library services in the South West, the public library services but also some FE but a larger number of HE and you pay a subscription and for that I believe you are interlending within that system is free. You still pay your postage and transportation or whatever you have to do to get books or items around. If you do more lending than borrowing you get a credit against your fee so it costs you a bit less the next year.” (I11)

The involvement of HE institutions was seen as the scheme’s unique selling point by one participant (I13). There is a union catalogue of member libraries (although not a shared LMS), and a credit
system ensures that net lending libraries receive fee reductions in following years as compensation (I13). Although the scheme incurs no library to library costs, one participant stated that library users were charged for ILL requests, although this was a flat fee regardless of where the ILL is fulfilled:

“We charge library users to have interlibrary loans so in [County] a request from our own stock is 85p. Unless it is a junior item in which case it is free. If we don’t have the item and choose not to purchase it, there is a further fee, which … is around about £3.70 I think. That usually doesn’t cover our costs when you take into account if it is outside SWIRLS there’ll be a CONARLS form, or more than one CONARLS form, or a BL form. And there is obviously always the postage so it is kind of a way of not covering costs but contributing to them.” (I11)

One interviewee noted that SWRLS offers the most cost-effective way of providing an interlending service, especially in comparison to British Library loans (I13). The University interviewee gave an idea current demand for the service within their library:

“So we provide somewhere in the region of 12 to 15 items a month. And we probably get back between 0 and 1.” (16)

4.2.1.10 Thematic schemes

Seven interviewees described either formal or informal schemes to facilitate the lending of specialist material. These were most often related to musical scores. An example of informal approach to sourcing this material was given by one interviewee:

“If you get into orchestral pieces or large choral performances or things like that you literally need tens of scores to enable performance to take place and rarely can we secure those sorts of numbers within the county so we try to borrow from other neighbouring authorities, and we’ve got a member of staff here who spends a lot of time trying to sort through all these … We work with neighbouring authorities and she has built up a network of contacts and has a good knowledge of who has got what and where she can get hold of things, and uses that knowledge.” (I3)

More formal music schemes were commonly described as operating on a subscription basis, with libraries subscribing to a service offered by a particular central library with a specialist collection:

“We pay a subscription so that we are entitled to borrow music from the music library in Plymouth. So they have got a big collection there and they let anyone borrow it, well subscription members.” (I9)

“There is a Plymouth music service which actually is under the umbrella of SWIRLS because there are a number of important music libraries in the south west, but there is an extra charge for this service.” (I13)
4.2.1.11 UnityUK

It was a notable that interviewees differed in whether they included UnityUK in their answer to the first interview question (“Can you describe any consortia interlending schemes that your service participates in?”). Almost all interviewees stated at some point during the interview that their libraries participated in the scheme, which may in part be due to the participant recruitment methods employed. Several participants said they had found the number of members to be in decline:

“I used to think most of the public libraries in Wales, but now it is probably only half of it, are members of UnityUK.” (I4)

The service was generally viewed positively, with interviewees in particular describing the extent to which membership had increased the exposure of their collection, and eased administrative and procedural burdens:

“I have to say our view changed since we managed to get resources onto Unity. It’s changed dramatically in that we are now a net lender rather than a borrower. I always knew that would be the case because we’ve got fairly eclectic over the years mix of stock. For now the schemes that are currently running mean that we actually are in profit.” (I7)

“UnityUK ... manages all the financial side and you can build a request in a few seconds really and it takes all the leg work out of it.” (I12)

“Basically Unity do a very good job. When they first, I’ve been in interlending for a very long time. When they first started off doing what they are currently doing the system they used wasn’t nearly as good as the current one and it has been modified significantly in use by input from the organising bodies for interlending in the UK. And so Unity has been shaped by its users, in its current format.” (I2)

UnityUK is also used for discovery and administration for a number of regional schemes:

“With the adoption of more people using UnityUK, I think most people are on the same database and to a certain extent that is the main thing. Getting access to the information to make searching for interlibrary loans as efficient as possible.” (I10)

“We use UnityUK as the communications tool to interlend books ... When we use UnityUK we prioritise those libraries in the consortium first.” (I5)

“We order our interlending through UnityUK, so even if it doesn’t appear on UnityUK as an item, if I know it is somewhere else I will request it through Unity and sometimes I’ll get it. We do get items back that way even though it is not on their database.” (I14)

The scheme was frequently mentioned as a starting point for future developments in interlending (see section 4.9).
4.2.2 Impact of funding cuts

Several interviewees spoke of the importance of interlending as a means of mitigating budget cuts, and these will be discussed in detail in section 4.3. This section will instead focus on the negative effects of budgetary pressures on interlending. Some interviewees spoke in grim terms of the effects of funding cuts, and of the uncertainty and complications they have caused:

“I don’t know if you are aware of how bad things are down in the south, the south east because Newport are basically no longer doing interlibrary loans nor are Cardiff public. Lots of public libraries, Gwent moved out of it as well. They are a trust now. So things are a bit, how shall I put it, chaotic.” (I4)

Cuts have naturally affected acquisitions too, which some participants see as threatening ILL (I17, I4, I12). An alternative argument advanced by several interviewees was that impoverished authorities were being forced to rely more on interlending for the types of current publications (such as popular new fiction titles) which traditionally would not be considered typical ILL items. One interviewee even illustrated the positive perspective of ILL in this regard:

You know everybody’s stock is limited and with the budgets being reduced your stock is reduced and this is a good way of opening up a wider collection to our members and it is offering an enhanced service at a lower cost. (I14)

The crucial point however is that larger or richer libraries can eventually find themselves subsidising these poorer services, leading to disgruntlement and dissatisfaction with interlending in general. This situation was described in detail by one interviewee in relation to historic issues with interlending in London:

“In the past, a lot of interlending fell into disrepute to some extent because, for example, our neighbouring borough Hackney was very impoverished and we’d be getting lots of requests for fairly current stock ... The amount we gave out and the amount we got in was roughly a balance, but the richer boroughs like Westminster and the bigger boroughs such as Enfield and Barnet and Bromley and Bexley on the periphery of London were being sucked on and they were becoming net lenders. Their authorities, the members, the politicians were saying why are we lending out fairly current stock?” (I17)

Similar tension between net lenders and net borrowers within a consortium was described several times:

“If everybody... is kind of putting in about the same amount then everyone benefits but otherwise if you feel your books are flying off elsewhere because you are effectively funding people who are buying fewer books that is a concern so I think that would be an issue.” (I11)

“As a librarian I shouldn’t have a problem with it. But actually as an officer my customers council tax is paying for other services ... It does have to balance.” (I11)

The issue however is further complicated by the variations in library to library fees, meaning that in some cases it is perceived as preferable to be a net lender:
“I think in the short term it is the problem of budgets that fund interlending. That is why we are quite keen to try and become a net lender rather than a net borrower as that will offset our costs.” (I12).

These complexities illustrate the nuanced politics of consortium relationships that were described in detail by one interviewee:

“It is very difficult to convey the nuances when you sit on the project board of [a consortium]. There was something about “we will work together but ... are you going to make us work very hard and you are going to ride on the back of us ... So it is a lot about relationship development and you know all that kind of those nuances behind these things.” [Interviewee anonymised]

Another common observation relating to funding issues was that the increasing financial hardship of libraries was leading to an increasing need for costs to be passed on to users of the service:

“Increasingly we are probably not in a position to subsidise [ILL].” (I10)

“Our costs are at least staying the same or even going up, and budgets are going down. And we like many counties have not traditionally covered the costs of our interlending from the user and it is now becoming extremely hard to justify a charge that is massively subsidising what people get and I’m afraid we have to, we are still charging £3 to £4 for a request but the cost is much higher than that. But if our politicians knew that we would be very very encouraged to do cost recovery and pass on the costs to our customer.” (I18)

“[Budget cuts] could mean that we charged the actual cost of the ILL form and the delivery costs. But it could be extended even further to also include the costs of the overheads of running an ILL service. Costs such as staffing and subscription to OCLC etc. Given increasing budget pressures these costs are more likely to be looked at.” (I10)

Some respondents were clearly angry at price rises being implemented:

“We do charge virtually a cost covering charge, but finance put an extra 20p on each year to cover inflation, which doesn’t mean anything to us in the scheme of things. The more you charge the fewer people will use it. It’s a joke. If it was half the price we would get a lot more people using the service.” (I20)

For balance it should be noted that one interviewee took a different perspective, and argued that charges could be justified to users of ILL:

“If you interlend we push the charge up enormously to try and recover some of the charges that we have to pay cash for. There was an outcry from users but there was only a small number of users regularly using the interlending process. But it was pointed out to them this is not money we are making money on we are not even recovering the full cost but we are saying if you want to borrow this, this is the cash it costs us and we want something back for it. I’ve got 20 interlending loan requests and that will be £3 something a request and that is £60 please: “what, what”. Well yes, this is money we are spending from the public purse for you. And that is money that would not be available to buy 6 books for our own shelves.” (I17)
A final key consequence of funding cuts relates to staffing. Several interviewees noted the decline both in staffing numbers and expertise, with one observing that library management were increasingly disconnected from library work itself:

“Things like staff cuts are eating away at the service.” (I14)

“Another thing having an impact is the fact – no offence – that library services are using less well trained and qualified people to do the work. It means that they don’t take automatic steps when things go wrong.” (I19)

“As time goes on there are fewer trained staff in local authorities who have any idea. Myself and my colleague are the only other person in the borough who has heard of the combined regions. These are historical – people just haven’t heard of them anymore … Senior staff increasingly have no idea about library work. They don’t use it they don’t have that experience anymore.” (I20)

4.3 Rationale
4.3.1 For interlending

The most commonly given reasons for offering an interlending service related to the duty of libraries to help their users access the material they need. While it may be going too far to say this was always perceived as a moral requirement, many interviewees felt that this represented a core part of the library offering, and a means of best serving their users:

“We recognise that [ILL] is a key part of our offer. In so far as the acts, the 1964 public libraries act is enforced, then obviously interlending is covered there in making available a range of items. It definitely extends the offer we can make to our public, our customers. And I think it will continue to do so.” (I11)

“We are determined to carry on with it, of course, because it provides a wider choice to our customers than we could ever hope to provide on our own resources.” (I4)

“We are here to supply the customers with the items they want or they need. And if we turn round and say “no you can’t” that is just disastrous.” (I15)

One interviewee also felt this argument was a powerful way of selling the importance of the scheme to senior stakeholders:

“Although it might not be imperative it is something we would always want to offer as part of our public service. And you know that is what our library managers have taken forward is that it is a worthwhile service. It helps us provide good customer service because we are giving our borrowers what they want, rather than turning them away saying we don’t do that anymore. So the value is definitely in the customer service. That’s what we keep telling them [library managers] and they have not knocked it on the head yet.” (I12)

A related argument was the importance of interlending as a means of broadening collections, and
limiting demands on acquisitions budgets:

“There’s always going to be a need for ILL in the sense that we are never ever going to be in the position where you can buy every single item your borrowers request. I mean physically it is impossible. It is out of print or whatever. Or it is not a good idea, it is not a good use of your resources to buy books that are only going to be used by one person.” (14)

“we haven’t got a central library so [ILL] enables us to link up potentially with authorities that do have a central library and therefore possibly bigger stock resources. (19)

“It just widens the pool enormously for a lot of small authorities. You have a facility to get hold of books which you may not have in your own reserve or you don’t have a reserve at all because you’ve got no space and you can’t afford to buy.” (2)

This point related to another response, which described how interlending could support strategies for maintaining stock coverage of rare and expensive items, and storing last copies:

“The one thing that used to happen and I think no-one ever stopped it officially was that different services, library services, would look after a different part of Dewey or the alphabet for fiction. So theoretically around the country somebody kept a last copy of all the fiction books written by someone whose author name began with W. If someone kept a particular stretch of Dewey, so theoretically across the country we all work together to make sure that most things were kept. So not everybody had to keep the same things, and they’d be available through ILL. . My feeling is that has fallen by the wayside. Not officially but just by default really.” (111)

“The point of interlending is to get stuff that is very expensive perhaps special collections, fiction and non-fiction. Those things only a few people should buy. If there is something special in the old days in the joint fiction reserve it would be in that borough. Nobody wants to buy something that is sitting there.” (17)

One interviewee also felt that offering ILL was crucial to continuing relationships with HE institutions, who might otherwise feel that they were being exploited:

“I can see that if public libraries stop doing interlending then the academic sector would be less willing to work with us because they would see that we were basically trying to shift the burden onto their more specialist resources.” (113)

Interlending was therefore perceived as providing a mechanism for ensuring access for all to the widest possible range of material. This in turn serves to limit the expenditure necessary for each authority:

“I’ve never done, but we should do a costings to show how much we save by interlending. What we borrow from the various institutes around the country there is no way that we could afford, or even want to purchase, because that is giving everybody access, like I said before, to the full sort of country as a library.” (16)
Two participants suggested that it was time to reconsider some fundamental principles of ILL. For one interviewee, this meant potentially applying value judgements to the item being requested:

"We are going to re-look at our rationale for what we borrow because we will virtually borrow anything for anybody if it is available to borrow from another library if we don’t have it in stock. Where I think that some of the stuff that we borrow, you might on an intellectual level question why are we borrowing it." (I5)

More generally, it was argued that the rationale for interlending should be revaluated in the context of the modern information environment:

"What is the purpose of interlending in the 21st century library service against the backdrop of changing community needs? ... The ways that people learn and gain knowledge have changed massively. So that is not to say there isn’t a role for interlending but I think it should start from first principles around what it is there to do in that changing climate. If we say we just have to fight for interlending I think we are just missing the point. It may well have a place in that set up but we have to start with a clean sheet.” (I18)

4.3.2 For consortia

The interviewees gave a range of motivations and rationales for joining and maintaining consortia. These were neatly summarised by one interviewee:

"The ongoing raison d’etre is cost saving and also improved customer service really.” (I9)

For many participants, consortia do offer a means of improving service quality whilst reducing costs. Given the context of the interviews, participants stressed the benefits and appeal of cheaper interlending:

“One of the main things is that our interlibrary loans are free. That was a key thing when we joined [the consortium] because obviously if not we would have to pay the CONARLS forms. We don’t actually have to pay anything. And so obviously we go within the region first wherever we can because there is no charge.” (I10)

“Well in terms of value for money[for consortia interlending] it costs, I cannot remember what it costed out at last. It was under a pound for a loan, including all the van costs and what not ... if you actually costed interlibrary loans out, when I was doing interlibrary loans about 20 years ago somebody did do a costing exercise and at that time it worked out at 15 pounds an item.(I2)

Several participants spoke in relatively general terms about consortia encouraging cooperation and sharing beyond simply interlending:

“My expectation is that it would have been around fostering cooperation, understanding and trying to do things more cheaply.” (I11)
“At its core it was always about facilitating access to interlending but also information sharing on a wider scale.” (I6)

“It also means we are all working consistently because we implement the same working practices, generally speaking.” (I2)

Economies of scale were also mentioned by several participants. These were to be found in a range of areas, including stock purchasing and system procurement:

“… purchase stock collectively in terms of setting up contracts. We have single contracts for the provision of the stock, and we have single contracts for the library management system.” (I9)

“The obvious one is economies of scale. One library authority procuring a library management system is really old hat, and you just wouldn’t do it, if your authority would allow you. Because financially it is just rubbish … you know that the Sieghart review is looking to rationalise. So obviously there is a direction of travel that says coming together with other authorities to do certain things is a good way forward.” (I15)

The issue of LMS procurement was also a crucial factor in joining or founding consortia:

“Partly to shorten the length of time to do the tendering, we joined SELMS - if we joined SELMS and CIVICA we wouldn’t have to do it.” (I20)

“I would never have dreamt going out and getting an LMS on my own. I would have looked around and I could have joined, as I say, either the SELMS consortium, the London Libraries consortium, I would have approached a number of consortium, before I even started thinking about, oh ok, what other kind of strategic partnerships can I create.” (I15)

“[Nearby authority] have just gone out to tender, we are waiting eagerly for the results, for an LMS that would bring in colleagues from Poole and Dorset as well. They’ve joined in with Libraries West procurement. So we are waiting to see what the results of that would be because if … they have chosen a supplier that is going to be the same as other people have got in the region like our self, and Gloucestershire, and Swindon, then it does mean that it is going to be easy to be able to link more widely.” (I13)

The ability to address problems from a group perspective manifested in other service areas too:

“Frequently we have problems with our couriers, for instance, we all use the same courier company. We have more clout as a group. Rather than us all complaining individually.” (I12)

A commonly identified benefit or regional or sub-regional consortia also related to book deliver and transport models. In particular several schemes were described that utilise a van delivery network, thereby saving on expensive postage costs (I15, I10, I4). This delivery strategy was also found by one interviewee to encourage expansion of the consortium to ensure unbroken geographical coverage:

“Geographically it means that we can, if it is a coast-to-coast offer with Dorset joining, geographically it means it is easier to move the stock around because we could possibly look to renegotiate van contracts for example. Because if you’ve got each authority border
touching each other that means you can have the nearest library in that authority, to the previous authority if you like, acting as drop off points.” (115)

This stands in contrast to the views of another participant, who suggested that for a service operating on a very small scale, expansion might drive up costs:

“Because we are virtually next door to Suffolk our transport vans go about 8 miles away to one of our libraries, so we just send a van over the border to New Market once a week. But then if we expanded and it was a wider geographical area it becomes more costly.” (110)

While cost-effective, one participant acknowledged the logistical challenges of this approach, and the potentially slower delivery times:

“The fact that we have to depend on interlocking van systems means that things aren’t delivered maybe as quickly as they could be. By post you could probably send something 2 days couldn’t you, Holyhead to Wrexham. It might take more than a week depending on what day of the week it is. ... You can’t have one van going all the way round North Wales, all the different locations, quite apart from who would finance it. But also the problem is if one of those vans is not running for whatever reason there could be a van breaking down, sickness, leave, no cover whatever, you know. Plus you’ve got to factor in public holidays. Our van doesn’t run on bank holidays. Nor at weekends.” (14)

Several interviewees also mentioned the training benefits offered by consortia, as well as forums to share and develop best practice:

“Another benefit of that is all the participation at various meetings and training activities that we get included in. There are various sub-groups that we get invited to.” (110)

“We also get together at group training and for discussing best practice and current topics on interlending.” (112)

“It’s grown in terms of what it actually delivers so now it does a lot of work on training, development and support for smaller libraries.” (16)

“Well the existence of the consortium it benefits us in terms of staff skills as well. And knowledge sharing. We’ve got joint training programmes and workshops and joint working groups across the consortium.” (19)

Finally one interviewee noted the potential for consortia to undertake advocacy work, and raise awareness of the service to potential external partners:

“It has a role of advocacy for the work that the partners do. And also in our strategic plan it is looking at a wider scope as well for its aims. And part of that is showing the value for money for membership, but also working with other partners outside the public and academic libraries. Seeing how we can link in with partners such as the BBC, the Arts Council, the role by JISC and other partners like that.” (113)
4.4 Value for money

Interviewees were asked directly about how value for money could be demonstrated for interlending. Almost all interviewees perceived this as a challenge, both because of the way in which the value judgements of key stakeholders in the process would differ, and because of the difficulty of applying cost judgements to a service several felt libraries had a duty to provide:

“Value for money, that is a pejorative thing. A question based on either the user or the authority.” (I17)

One interviewee described how these competing perspectives complicated decision making regarding ILL. They described how factors beyond price sometimes influence ILL delivery decisions:

*But that is part of quite a complex decision making process that we would go through. So for example if we had to wait three weeks for a SWRLS copy to become available we probably would go elsewhere. Because there is also the speed element of getting an interlibrary loan for somebody.”* (11)

There was also a sense that the value of full ILL was difficult to benchmark, since it is a one of a kind service:

“Once you get up to things like Unity and the British Library is a Rolls Royce service. It is an incomparable service because that is the only way you are going to get hold of many of these books because they are not available anywhere else.” (I2)

4.4.1 For Users

Many interviewees saw interlending as offering value to money for library users:

“To the end user who wants it it is extremely good value for money.” (I17)

One participant took a broad view of the question, emphasising that being able to secure items that were unobtainable through any other method offered value in and of itself regardless of the cost:

“If it is something that we absolutely cannot get from anywhere else and that person is reliant on it to do their research or it’s something they are passionately interested in that may help to move on society if you like in some way, then whatever the cost is that’s kind of of value to that patron.” (I7)

Although many participants acknowledge that the cost to customers has risen, they argued that the subsidised nature of the fees meant that users were still receiving value for money:

“I don’t think the general public realise how much it costs to interlend and what we actually offer them. Trying to think, I’ve got to remember our charges now. But we now charge them, it’s the basic charge is 80p to borrow a book and we charge them an additional £4 if we go outside the county which is very cheap compared to other authorities but we still get our fair
share of complaints about people saying that it is very expensive ... I mean you are offering people, you know, access to, not just the national picture but also international picture.” (I5)

Following on from this, one interviewee suggested that more work was needed to communicate the value of ILL to those being charged:

“I seem to remember Gloucestershire years ago had some promotional element which was “more books than Amazon” because you do have access to more books than Amazon. We never promote in that way. We don’t. I don’t know how many different titles there are, as opposed to copies, I don’t know how many different titles there are in UK public libraries. I don’t really need to know. But from a public promotions point of view, Wiltshire has got, what 700,000 items but we can get access to 20 million. You know, probably way more than that, I’m sure. Could be quite useful.” (11)

Better promotion of the service was also mentioned by another participant, who also cautioned that promotion should only happen when the service itself was robust enough to cope with any increased demand:

“I think one of the first things would be to improve the public profile. However the service needs to be improved, because if you raise the profile and encourage people to use it then you don’t meet their expectations then they are not going to carry on using it.” (I19)

This idea of educating the public was echoed in the comments of one further interviewee, who described how the perspectives of users towards fees could be changed if the associated costs were explained:

“The fact that the interlibrary loan fee we actually charge ... initially people object to paying extra money for getting a book that they feel we should have. When it is explained to them the actual costs of an interlibrary loan a lot of people are seeing it as a very good service. And very cost effective because they are paying a fraction of what it actually costs to obtain an item. So I think they say well that’s expensive but cost effective for them.” (I8)

It must be noted that several interviewees disagreed with this perspective. For these participants, current ILL fees meant that the service no longer provides good value when compared to other potential means of customers sourcing an item:

“What a lot of our customers do if we haven’t got it they will simply go on Amazon and buy it for pence and get it delivered for a couple of pounds. Whereas the normal start of the [ILL] fee we have is about £5.” (I3)

“For the customers that are paying an amount for the service it is going to need to be more competitive with other ways of getting information. It’s increasingly, well it’s probably much easier, in the first instance for anybody doing research or educational stuff now, wouldn’t necessarily think to go to the library for an interlibrary loan system.” (I1)

Another interviewee felt that ILL didn’t represent value for money as the fees themselves were higher than required simply to cover costs:
We pay £1.50 [library to library fee] but have to charge the customer £6.30 for the privilege of using the service which I feel is a backward step considering we have all the technology around that we didn’t have in the past, we’d be writing letter and posting thing, now we have all this technology to reach across the country and do things very quickly but I can’t do it because there are very few people willing to pay £6.” (I20)

4.4.2 For funders

4.4.2.1 Interlending

Many interviewees discussed the extent to which interlending was seen to provide value for money for libraries, and by extension to the funders of libraries. As one interviewee put it:

“To local authorities it is an overhead on their costs. Operationally and in terms of stock management. It’s about cost benefit possibly.” (I17)

A number of participants explained that although this was an interesting question, it was not one they had been asked to address by senior management (although some felt this was likely to change):

“I suspect the issue is that it just goes under the radar. I’m not aware that any of our elected members have ever questioned it. Perhaps they don’t really know that it happens.” (I11)

“Budget holders don’t tend to ask.” (I3)

“It is not the kind of thing I’m getting challenged about. Not at the moment. So I don’t get the kind of day to day pressures from my senior managers or cabinet members saying why are we spending all this money on ILL because the money is relatively small. But I think as long as it is small and it is seen to be effective and I can make a case for that, which I think I can, then it is not one of the sort of: It’s not an easy hit to take the money out of it because we feel that it is an important part of the service and it is not something that is so cost intensive that it would raise those kind of questions. But I’m sure as people drill down over the next few years and budgets get ever tighter it is one of those things that will be looked at ever more closely. That again is one of those things we want to try and get ahead of.” (I6)

Some interviewees felt that current schemes did not offer value for money to libraries. It is interesting to note that one participant acknowledged that thinking pragmatically about the cost of services ran counter to the instinct of some librarians:

“I think that unless you are recovering full costs I think it is very difficult to demonstrate value for money, if the council is subsidising an individual transaction by more than £10 which some are. That wouldn’t stand up to scrutiny for value for money would it. I think where people aren’t recovering the full costs of the service councils are having to withdraw so many serviced that are fundamental to people’s lives that it would seem to be politically (un?) acceptable to do that. However much professionally we find that difficult I think.” (18)

[Discussing a music subscription lending service] ”I think thinking from a service perspective it is one that is difficult to sustain because of the amount of labour that it takes. Literally I’ve got a member of staff who is spending an awful lot of time serving 200 groups across the
county. The majority of those are reading groups as opposed to music and drama. But that is pretty much what she does. Which is costing the service, I don’t know, 30-35 thousand pounds a year and we’ve got a series of £25 subscriptions coming in so it is being subsidised by the authority at the moment.” (I3)

Participants also noted some difficulties establishing value for money, principally because of accounting structures, or because of the time required to conduct a rigorous analysis:

“Technically the £3 are being paid for a SELMS reservation, but that money doesn’t get balanced out against any form of the service. When we were borrowing and lending on unity it was £1.50 in £150 out you could see it balancing out or not. You had your own set up.” (I20)

“I think clearly we can do some sort of very basic assessments in terms of the subscriptions versus the cost of the transactions that we know that we are undertaking. And you can compare those against the cost of BL, ILL, and obviously trying to source the material and then you can put some kind of notional costs in terms of the staff time that would be involved in doing that versus a system that already exists. I haven’t got time to do that kind of analysis.” (I6)

Comparing interlending costs to other methods of document supply was mentioned several times, most often with regard to the British Library. British Library costs were commonly seen as very high:

“The British Library rate is about £12 something now. Which is one of the reasons why we don’t go to the British Library quite frankly, compared to when it was only about £4 ... it has gone down from about 50% down to about 1%.” (I4)

“[We] borrow quite often from the States because it can sometimes work out being cheaper to borrow from the States than the British Library, believe it or not.” (I5)

“We very rarely [use the] British Library. I say that purely because of the time it takes and the money it costs.” (I3)

Interestingly the Higher Education interviewee had an alternative opinion on this:

“If you are comparing the British Library to using one of these other services it is really quite tricky because we’ve automated the British Library requests to a certain degree. You know trying to factor in all those staff costs. And compare. It is quite difficult to do that, I think.” (I16)

Other interviewees saw ways in which interlending could in general be shown to provide value for money to libraries, primarily in terms of saving acquisitions costs and balancing borrowing costs:

“There are two things here. One, is what we borrow from the various institutes around the country there is no way that we could afford, or even want to purchase, because that is giving everybody access, like I said before, to the full sort of country as a library. The other side is what we are currently doing so we can off-set some of our charges is we recently reviewed our store and we are doing a retrospective cataloguing. We’ve got a lot of stuff in store that
Finally two participants believed that there were persuasive reasons to approach the question of value for money from a national perspective, be that in analysing national rates of lending or creating proper benchmarks against which to determine value:

“They information that I have got available is probably only for Wiltshire in terms of items lent and received. And income and expenditure and that kind of thing. .... At the back of my mind, is there a value to having this type of awareness nationally? Which I don’t think is there. .... Perhaps more statistics? That sounds awful. Not more statistics. More targeted figures about national volumes and so on.” (I11)

“We’ve got to have quite a robust and shared methodology for putting together that cost because local authorities across the piece where experience has shown where we’ve tried to compare cost of all sorts of services in the past, always fall foul of the fact that different authorities have different costing regimes and they will interpret their costs in a different way. So we have to have a very clear agreed method of how we can put cost onto interlibrary loan system. That applies obviously for benchmarking, as well so. I think we’ve got to dig into those issues before we can properly express value for money.” (I1)

4.4.2.2 Consortia

Several interviewees expanded the question to include the question of establishing value for money of consortia membership. This was principally done by comparing interlending costs within schemes to external ILL costs, and purchase costs:

“Well in terms of value for money it costs, I cannot remember what it costed out at last. It was under a pound for a loan, including all the van costs and what not. With the best will in the world I couldn’t buy that on Amazon. Because even with the penny ones you have to pay 2.80 pound for postage. So it is half the cost of the cheapest Amazon book assuming that I could get hold of it on Amazon. It is also extremely quick. Because if it is on the shelf of the lending library, we’ve got it within a week. So whereas interlibrary loans, if you actually costed interlibrary loans out. When I was doing interlibrary loans about 20 years ago somebody did do a costing exercise and at that time it worked out at 15 pounds an item.” (I2)

“Well the value is simply that you’ve got, that you can source material which are at least free to the authority ... Otherwise you would have to pay £6 for an interlibrary loan. Inside Linc y Gogledd you don’t pay that £6 so that is a saving to the budget holder.” (I4)

“Getting it through SWRLS is the economic way compared to other providers like the British Library.” (I13)

Others, with operational roles within consortia, described a need for consortia to focus more on demonstrating value to their members:
“Well I guess some of the issue is I think over time some oversight has been lost in terms of what the detail of what actually LIEM achieves is so we don’t as far as I’m aware see any metrics in terms of what the volumes are across the region. We don’t really, I’m obviously aware on a limited basis of what we are doing as a local authority but I don’t really know what kind of transactions are happening across the rest of the authorities that participate and they were obviously (something) public library, university libraries, FE, HE and that kind of stuff. So I really don’t know very much about that. I think that kind of visibility has been a little bit lacking. Probably because everyone is so busy. So it is not something that I wake up in the middle of the night and think Oh my god. How many transactions have been going through? But at the same time it would be useful to have that kind of information to hand. But that is something that we are looking at. Trying to strengthen in the future. And as I think I mentioned before we are looking at a larger review of what LIEM does and how it works. So I’m sure that is one of the things that will be looked at.” (I6)

“There is a role there for the … trustees, to make sure that value for money is always at the forefront of people’s minds. And see what they get from the scheme and why they should continue to pay their subscription … We know that everyone is very strapped for budgets.” 13

4.5 The digital environment

Most interviewees recognised the changing modes of information discovery and consumption prompted by the emergence of digital resources and access. One interviewee provided a neat summary of the effects of the digital environment and the challenges for libraries:

“I think the thing to bear in mind now is we are in to a … shifting environment where the methods by which people access and find information are always changing, and what the library service has to do to survive in this area of work is whatever it is we do provide has to have added value. So I think how we present our services digitally in the future is going to be very important. What you want to replicate for the user who might be using a mobile device or a computer is the library experience. Twenty years ago you would walk into a central reference library to find out information or do some research or hunt down something that you wanted to get hold of, you’ve almost got to try and find ways of replicating that from a mobile device. So that is going to raise lots of challenges for library authorities.” (I1)

This response clarifies the two principle challenges of the digital environment for libraries; the systems to facilitate discovery of material, and the means of presenting that materially electronically.

4.5.1 Digital content

Provision of digital content was seen as a crucial requirement for public libraries if they are to meet the evolving needs and expectations of library users:

“I think as people become more IT literate they will expect it to be provided to them in a digital format rather than a hard copy format.” 5
“I think the fact that you’ve got that obviously 24/7 access to e-books for example, is going to mean that people can read things to suit them. And we’ve got people who are partially sighted and so on, and again it makes, the accessibility is very much a key thing for us.” (I1)

It should also be mentioned that a small minority of interviewees emphasised the importance of not overstating the potential for digital material, with one somewhat despondent about the apparently inexorable march towards e-resources:

“There are more and more materials going online digitally, although often the range is more limited than people realise.” (I19)

“With a bit of luck I won’t see the complete transformation of the library service into a bank of servers whirring a way.” (I4)

It was notable that very few participants mentioned open access material, with the exception being related to the scanning of copyright free material for universal access:

“So what I’d really like to see us moving forward is not just once you’ve scanned the item and put it in the digital domain that it doesn’t just stay on a server of the individual authorities that have to trigger the request and it should be opened up and available for people, obviously for out of copyright stuff, it should be easy to do, like Project Guttenberg. That stuff should be there for our customers, for the world to be able to use.” (I6)

Open access certainly did not emerge from the interviews either as a significant challenge or potential benefit to public libraries and interlending. This is to some extent surprising, especially given the extent to which the licensing issues were perceived to be the major factor impeding delivery of e-content:

“It is the licensing that is the problem. There are increasingly so many different licensing aspects of it. What I mean at the moment is there are e-books. There is e-audio. There is traditional online databases. And some of the traditional online databases are accessed within the library only. Some you can access remotely. So there is a whole range of issues. And licensing issues and different access modes. It is quite confusing I think for the user. We have audio, and some of it we have unlimited use so 12 people could be listening to the same book, but some of it from the same supplier only one person can actually listen to the book at a time. And for the end user that is very complicated so I think there is quite a way to go to try and work out all the issues about digital access.” (I10)

Licensing issues that are challenging for individual libraries become apparently insurmountable in the context of interlending digital material:

“It’s very difficult with digital services especially with interlending. Being a public authority our public, and yes we’ve got people who use e-books and we have our own e-book service but at the moment there is no e-book lending within interlibrary loans and I can’t see how it would work to be honest. The permissions that are involved I can’t see how that would work in interlending.” (I8)
“In the sense of interlending with the electronic resources, it doesn’t. Simply because you have the digital rights management wrapped around these products. And these suppliers who are selling the stuff are very, they know very carefully what they’ve got. Unless they want to start negotiating you will find that most of these suppliers are not prepared to negotiate.” (I15)

“How do users authenticate using our local databases out to the e-provider? We are just about to try and get our e-resources published in our catalogue. Now do we then publish that out into a global national catalogue? And suddenly Askews are getting requests from Doncaster to borrow a copy from Islington?” (I17)

“We don’t share any online content within SELMS, all individually purchased through each authority. I don’t think local authorities are set up to work this one out. Maybe they should be, might be something we could benefit from, not sure how it would work with firewalls and so on. We must be well behind universities and colleges on this one.” (I20)

Additional problems lie in the purchasing processes for digital content. Several interviewees described the reluctance of publishers to provide e-books to public libraries, and the challenge of overcoming those difficulties. The impact of these restrictions on customer expectations was also discussed:

“You’ve also got publishers that really don’t want public libraries to have e-books anyway. So despite all their best efforts and the pilots that are run it is only lip service … To be honest with you it is messy and all we can do is do the best that we can. There are initiatives going on in some of the American library authorities, where they themselves have created their own e-book product, but who the hell in England has got that kind of capacity and money?” (I14)

“Trying to explain to users with e-books in particular why we can’t give them access to the new lot of the range of new titles is very confusing for them and I don’t think they really understand the position we are in.” (I10)

Some cause for optimism was noted by one interviewee, who described the potential involvement of JISC in developing e-content agreements with publishers:

“I also think in terms of electronic resources we are going to be reliant on people like JISC who have got the academic sector, they do this brilliantly in terms of the students, and I think JISC are partnering up with the public library service through the Arts Council so I think in terms of pricing and so on it is going to be a product that will be available to us.” (I15)

Another interviewee noted that the format and presentation of e-content was beyond the control of libraries, something that was viewed negatively:

“I think we are very reliant, in terms of electronic resources, in terms of how they are presented to us as a customer. Because obviously I’m not creating the electronic resource, I am buying packages and they are coming into the system whether they are (something) e-books or Britannica Online and I’m buying these packages of things so I have no real say over how they are presented to my customers.” (I15)
As well as reluctance to sell to public libraries in general, e-publishers were also perceived by one interviewee as being slow to enter into consortia purchasing agreements:

“There has not been a rush by the e-book providers to consortium for various reasons, so there is that aspect to it as well.” (I13)

This was contradicted by another interviewee, who offered some limited optimism about potential saving being made through consortia arrangements with suppliers:

“I don’t know if other consortia have done it but we’ve not really grasped yet the economies from purchasing a consortia license. From what limited conversations I’ve had with suppliers, I think there is some scope for savings if they only would save on things like the admin on maintaining our subscriptions in whatever way. So I think that will develop. But I’m not sure how much in the way of savings we will make and whether it could almost be more making it simpler for the end user to understand.” (I10)

4.5.2 Systems

4.5.2.1 Connectedness and interoperability:

From a systems perspective, several participants saw a need for more streamline and connected services to fully exploit the potential of connected services. To illustrate how limited the adoption of technology has been within some library workflows, one interviewee described the process when a library user is unable to find an item they are looking for:

“They’ll fill out a paper. First thing check the catalogue that we haven’t got it. We might have it but it is not catalogued on the system ... And then that request will get passed through from the branch. On paper, we can’t do it online. ... then passed to the stock unit who will then search OCLC, and then go through the OCLC process to find a copy there. And they will feed back to the branch who will feed back to the user. Lots of paper and archaic processes and faxing, with other bits along the way. Long winded and tedious, it’s stone age basically.” (I17)

One potential solution suggested by two participants was to better connect UnityUk with individual library ILL systems:

“It would be handy if the library management system and UnityUK, which is the system we use for building rotas to send round the requests for interlibrary loans, were connected somehow. But I think there is groundwork going on at the moment to get that off the ground but I think that is a long way in the future.” (I12)

Another interviewee suggested that interoperability between various proprietary systems was the key solution, although the mechanism and practicalities of achieving this was not clearly addressed:
“We would like to expand on the interoperability of systems, make them less clunky. Our ideal would be that there could be interoperability, whether that is through open source software or software actually developed by main suppliers where you can actually link whatever systems people are operating. Rather than actually having the same one. Not go through difficult bridging software.” (13)

As described in section 4.2.1, a number of participants described interlending schemes which incorporated or leveraged off union catalogues.

### 4.5.2.2 Shared LMS

Several interviewees described participating in consortia based around a shared LMS. The benefits of this system were clearly described by several participants:

> “When it works it is wonderful. Most of the time it does work fine. But it does offer so much more information and more resources for our public. You know to be able to go on and search our catalogue and then if it is not available with just one click of the button you search all the other SELMS members that are involved in the consortium its brilliant and to get the information at the shelf level is what we want and that is what the public wants.” (I8)

Others described imminent plans to implement this functionality:

> “It is semi-shared in the sense that we all share the same bibliographic records. But obviously you can only see your own libraries holdings. But I think there is scope in the future to develop that to a universal system. But I think that is a long way off in the future... I think the end result would be that it would be a universal catalogue. Say a Trafford borrower could see that Salford has this book and they could place a reservation on it. As I say I think that is years off.” (I12)

> “What it will do hopefully enable a shared catalogue across I think 7 of the 9 east midlands authorities, and we will be using the same computer system to loan and return books, and also potentially to catalog, so it will be one big catalogue. I’m not sure if that will be the capability right from the word go but certainly through consortium purchase it opens up a variety of regional possibilities and to transfer stock around the country / across the region.” (11)

> “We are part of the library consortium for the LMS and we are joining with Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Leicester and Rutland. The long term aim is that our borrowers will see an East Midlands catalogue. If they are in Glossop in Derbyshire, they can then borrow something from deepest Leicestershire in the south if that is the only copy. Where the problem arises is we want to ensure that something popular doesn’t, you know like the latest Nigella, doesn’t come from deepest Leicestershire to satisfy a request in Glossop.” (I5)

In practice these shared systems essentially facilitate user self-service for interlending:

> “It’s a different form of interlending. In that yes, there is more self-service so the users can place their own reservation ... So whereas an interlibrary loan is a speculative request ie they
are filling in a blank form because they can’t find the title whereas with the shared LMS – what happens is you search our catalogue first for instance, and the link you can click through and look in both catalogues.” (I10)

“Borrowers can sit at home and put it straight on the system and I’ll pick it up, so that element is quite quick. When I order the book, it comes straight to me in bib services and then I send it on to the branch.” (I12)

This in turn led several participants to wonder whether the resulting situation could be described as interlending:

“Increased cooperation, sharing of things like an LMS, and bibliographic services might blur the edges of what is an ILL and what is an internal reservation.” (I4)

Other participants noted the potential benefits of shared LMS arrangements, but described practical or strategic reasons for not entering into shared LMS arrangements, or maximising their functionality:

“We’ve got a LMS but not a shared one. I think the issue there is that everybody’s contract ends at different times. You know, certainly within the Yorkshire region because we are in a book consortium, one of the things that has come up is whether or not we could all use the same LMS but you know somebody might have a year to run, somebody might have something else.” (I7)

“I think Libraries West is extending to 6 or 7 members this year. So that is nearly half the region. I’m not sure they will all use it cooperatively. Some of them might just piggy back on the procurement.” (I11)

“Our Prism catalogue isn’t merged with other Prism catalogues for Capita London customers. But that could be the case.” (I17)

4.5.2.3 National catalogue

Most interviewees were generally supportive of the idea of a national catalogue. The consensus opinion was summed up neatly by one participant:

“I think that the opportunities are huge and the difficulties are huge, but I think broadly yes.” (I11)

This view was contrasted by some interviewees, who felt that the practical difficulties outweighed the potential benefits:

“I think it is important to some librarians who would love to feel there is a national catalogue. I think in terms of consumers, our experience is they tend to work on a more local service basis, and I’m not sure how useful that would be. I can see from a theoretical pure library purist point of view. My background is in museums and the same has been said of museums since 1888, that a national catalogue would be a wonderful thing. But the logistics of actually creating it, probably would outweigh the benefits it would bring.” (I3)
Many interviewees did however see the potential befits to users of a single discovery tool, which in turn would aid the exposure of individual library stock. This was neatly illustrated by the HE participant’s experiences with WorldCat:

“Because we have provided our data to Worldcat and Suncat. We know that people have contacted us because they have seen the information on Worldcat so it probably has taken it out to a broad audience.” (16)

However several participants noted that offering improved discoverability to users has consequences for their expectations of the service they will receive:

“It’s better from my point of view, in that it exposes what’s there. So it makes it visible but then it becomes discredited because then the user says what do I do about it. The authorities will say go back to your home borough ... It is smoke and mirrors really. It is presented as something, we are doing this thing, we are doing this for you, interlending is great. But the reality when the customer hits it is somewhat different.” (13)

This point was echoed by a number of other participants. The lack of fulfilment functionality was seen by these interviewees as a highly significant weakness of any system that sought solely to aggregate records, with several participants describing past attempts at union catalogues which had proved unsuccessful for this reason:

“The principle was that you would search for something and the search would go out and it was hosted by Axial ... and oh yes you have got it and it is in borough x and the user would say “how do I get to that” and the answer was “go to authority x and ask them to lend it to you”. It didn’t provide fulfilment.” (17)

“I think it just compounds people’s dissatisfaction if they find something that they are dying to get hold of and then they can’t get hold of it so it is not just having the catalogue it is having the supply as well. I know it is very challenging for people.” (18)

“In that context the single national catalogue which could be useful, it is then what system sits underneath it so people can access that material because it is no good finding the thing that you want if the access policies that sit underneath mean that is impossible to get hold of it.” (14)

There was however one dissenting voice:

“I’m not saying to request from because I think they always need staff intervention in requesting, because I know some of the things the public ask for you need the staff to intervene.” (18)

Further potential issues with the development of a national catalogue related to the accuracy, currency or completeness of the bibliographic records within the catalogue. These points were often illustrated with reference to other union catalogues that participants have been involved with:
“There is encore of course. The music database. But I think that is not being kept up to date by a number of authorities.” (I10)

“I think if anything the key to the success is having accurate holdings in their catalogue. But that really is down to the subscribers to make sure they’ve up-to-date catalogue holdings.” (I12)

“Actually we’re still getting technical issues with uploading our own information ... we thought we’d got it all sussed and then what it was uploading was looking at ISBNs which is fair enough, but the real gold on people’s catalogues is not always the ISBNs, it’s the things, we call them control numbers, where there isn’t an ISBN for that item, so we make our own control number, and that’s the real gold, where other people in the national network want to know about. They are the items that they want to borrow. They are the items that are unique or nearly unique to our authority so what you should load up is the full mark record but it takes quite a time to get to that level.” (I5)

These points are linked closely to the technical challenges identified by other interviewees:

“I think the ability to know what is where easily and then how to get hold of it could be important and useful. But it is very dependent on how that is made available to people in a very easy way. And I think that all the attempts to do it so far have been really stymied by the technicalities of it and the lack of ease of use for the end user. So I think yes, yes definitely in principle. But in practice it has been very challenging. (18)

How do you archive the stuff from effectively a hidden web ... But how do you get that? How do you create a national catalogue?” (I17)

The issue with usability is neatly illustrated by the description by one interviewee of difficulties encountered with the using the Welsh Libraries “Find a Book” search tool:

“Find A Book is dreadful. I dread to think what the general public make of it, when you can click onto Amazon and find it in seconds. What they make of FindABook because they search it ... they give you a long list of locations which jump and you have to click on jump. and Jump goes through a portal into an individual catalogue. 9 times out of 10 the portal is not properly set up so it is not searching the search term you want to search. Including ISBNs. Or the link is down for a technical reason. I don’t like it.” (I4)

4.5.2.4 FABLibraries

It was somewhat surprising that FABLibraries was mentioned by only a small number of interviewees, given that it represents a fledgling national catalogue. Of the three interviewees to bring up the system, one identified an issue with a lack of awareness from library users:

“I don’t think it is particularly well publicised to most users. They don’t know what it is. But when I’m looking to trace things for whatever reason I quite often click on there to do some searches to see who has got copies of it. I find it quite useful but I don’t think it has really reached the general public it is more the people who are working in libraries that know about it, I think.” (I10)
Other participants broadly welcomed its development, and believed it was a valuable discovery tool, but felt that without universal coverage and additional functionality for users to fulfil loan requests it was not addressing the key requirements of a national catalogue:

“The problem is of course you can go on to FAB libraries but it is at one remove from Unity, and it doesn’t have everybody on there. But it is, if you are looking for something obscure, an out of print book or something else, it is useful to have that facility.” (I2)

4.6 Community run libraries

Some suggested that the impact of community run libraries on interlending would depend upon the relationship between the community run library and the local library:

“Depends on the community run library. I’m not up to speed on this one. For example, do they have access to the catalogue for the borough in which they work? Are they actually an independent standalone organisation with their own catalogue manual or no catalogue altogether? Do the volunteers know what they are doing? Are they trained by the local authority staff, and do they act, and I use the phrase loosely, as a parasite? A limpet on the side of authority. What is the community library other than a book drop? Or if you want something go to the local authority library which might be just down the road or it might be 40 or 50 miles away. Depending on the shape of the county. Scotland could be even further. Jury is out on that one. What will the community libraries be? We’ve not got any here yet.” (I17)

4.6.1 Increase or decrease in requests

Most of those who commented felt it would lead to a decline in the number of requests (n=13), but this view was not unanimous.

4.6.1.1 Decrease

One reason why community run libraries will lead to a decrease in interlending is that volunteers will not have the necessary skills:

“I don’t want to be disparaging to volunteers obviously, but it can be quite a complex matter locating and arranging interlibrary loans.” (I13)

Another interviewee suggested that this will result in users not being informed about the service:

“I suspect there are two sets of people who interloan. One are savvy, and they know we can do it, they know what they want and they know to say they want to interlibrary loan this but they will still come through to the council website, an email or ring a branch library. There are those who don’t really know this is a facility that we offer and where before they might have had a conversation with some staff where staff would have said “oh actually did you
Another possible reason for a decrease in interlending is if community run libraries are run as separate services. Lack of infrastructure would make it difficult for community run libraries to request interlibrary loans:

“No, they wouldn’t be able to. They don’t have the infrastructure to be able to do that. Because they are standalone community libraries and not part of the statutory library service”. (115)

Local libraries may be reluctant to lend stock to community run libraries, firstly because the stock has been bought for their library users and secondly because of concerns over guardianship:

“It is one thing lending to your user and another thing borrowing it and handing it to a library that is not affiliated to you but run by the community.” (111)

“And also the guardianship about the stock. There is no way we could either provide guardianship, making sure that stuff came back, or bear the cost of providing that service. We would force them to come into the static libraries to access that service”. (115)

Lending libraries also appear reluctant at times to bear the cost of providing interlending services to community run libraries:

“there is also something else that would come in there as well in terms of the cost to us of providing that service to them outside of the statutory library service” (115)

4.6.1.2 Increase

Two reasons were given for an increase in interlending as a result of community run libraries. Firstly, because volunteers will be less knowledgeable unnecessary interlending requests may be made, and secondly, if there is less stock in the community run libraries there may be a need for more interlending:

“we have an online requests system, and I can see that because there isn’t necessarily the experienced staff in some of the community run libraries to help the customer look something up. I think it could see an increase in the requests coming in. Whether they go on to being interlibrary loans of SELMS I don’t know we would have to gauge that but I can see that it could increase. And because the smaller libraries won’t have the stock that the bigger libraries do, I can see the number of requests we receive here, I can see the number of requests increasing on our online system. But as I say whether that translates into more interlibrary loans I don’t know. I’m not sure.” (18)

“I suppose the increase in community run libraries is hand in hand with the increase in library budgets decreasing. So that is completely associated with that. And therefore library budgets decreasing means that less money is being spent on library stock. Therefore library collections probably are becoming less broad and deep. And therefore customers have got to
go elsewhere potentially for specific items. I suppose. But I don’t think I’ve noticed evidence of that happening yet.” (I9)

4.7 HE involvement in ILL

Interlending arrangements with academic libraries were discussed at two points in the interview: firstly, when interviewees were asked to describe consortia. Secondly when asked if there were partnerships with, or plans to partner with, HE/FE libraries.

Main themes:

- ways in which academic resources are accessed,
- the benefits for both sectors,
- and the barriers.

4.7.1 Types of access

Library customers are able to gain access to academic material through local / consortia interlending partnerships, local walk-in access arrangements, and recently through online services such as Access to Research.

4.7.1.1 Interlending partnerships

The interlending partnerships discussed were either local and / or consortia (which were largely regional).

“There’s a thing in the East Midlands called LIEM (Libraries and Information East Midlands) and that is a sort of very loose consortium of libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, colleges of further education” (I1)

“and its unique selling point I suppose is that it is both public libraries and academic libraries and we have SWIRL members who are both from HE and FE.” (I13)

“We have a sort of unofficial arrangement with the Hertfordshire University and the colleges” (I8)

The extent of the partnerships between public libraries and local academic libraries was found to vary:

“I know some library service have a very good relationship with their local university. Like Gloucestershire for example has a really good relationship with UWE and they do all sorts of things together. But there aren’t that many good relationships, very extensive relationships between HE and public library services. But there probably should.” (I18)

In some cases interlibrary loans are preferred to local arrangements:

“We have access through interlibrary loans mostly to a huge amount of stock in the universities and colleges around the country. People tend to go that route and they are happier to pay £4.60 which is what we charge for interlibrary loans ... because we tend to
find that when we have approached colleges and universities locally to borrow an item, we can get the items but we are often told that we can only have it for a week or two. Which is absolutely no use to our borrowers at all. They want something they can take home and borrow for a decent amount of time”. (I8)

Some library services have found that academic libraries have dropped out of prior arrangements:

“I know a couple in recent years have not resubscribed to NEWLIP” (I12)

“As time has gone on the universities have dropped out; they wanted to start charging” (I7)

4.7.1.2 Walk-in access

In addition to interlending agreements, in some areas library customers can also access materials via walk-in access:

“Anybody who is a member of Linc y Gogledd or is a member of one of the partners of the Linc y Gogledd scheme can get a readers ticket from Bangor and use Bangor University library” (I4)

However walk-in access is not available in all regions, and gaining access has become increasingly difficult:

“You physically can’t get into university without student access controls. Before you could virtually just walk in. Walk up to the library. “I’m local, can I borrow something?” I don’t think you can get past the security desk [now].”

4.7.1.3 Online access

Some public libraries have also recently been offering customers online access to academic materials through the Access to Research scheme, but take up has been slow so far:

“we are doing some work at the moment within SCL around the Access to Research journals initiative ... which at the moment has had very low take up which is disappointing” (I18)

Access to the vast range of academic content, and especially e-content, was seen as an attractive reason to seek HE interlending partnerships:

“Given there’s a large lacuna in the range of public library book stock I can only see that made up in the current financial environment by digital content, which might be available through much closer cooperation with the libraries that form part of COPAC.” (I20)
4.7.2 The benefits

4.7.2.1 Benefits to the academic library

The extent to which academic libraries are thought to benefit from interlending with public libraries varies. The one academic librarian interviewed suggested that it is primarily the public libraries that are benefitting:

“we very much see it as a service that we are providing to public libraries.” (I16)

Even if they receive requests from students that could be fulfilled by public libraries their preferred route is to use the British Library because the processes involved are simpler, even if the cost of the actual loan is greater:

“in terms of the automated nature of what we've got set up with the British Library that is quite effective for us. So we have taken out a lot of the human intervention in that kind of process”. (I16)

However, not all public libraries viewed this as a one way process:

“it was originally a two-way relationship between us and the University of Bangor” and “it is a mutual system” (I4)

It is also recognised that university libraries can benefit under the community engagement agenda:

“So from a university perspective one of the things we are obviously keen on is supporting the local community and engaging with the local community” (I16)

“I think they were trying to prove to the powers at be, whoever they were at their end, they were contributing to the community. And that they were reaching out into the community.” (I4)

This appears to be particularly the case where students and or potential students are part of the local community:

“The rationale behind them was that their students are scattered over most of Gwyneth. Anyway not just Bangor, and it would be a good idea if their students could use a public library to borrow books from. [So as not] to have to trek all the want got Bangor to get their books” (I4)

An important point noted by several interviewees is that increasingly for some academic libraries students live locally:

“Particularly these days with the financial pressures, students are more likely to be staying home rather than going away” (I4)

“Quite a lot of our students are more from the region” (I16)
However, partnerships can be difficult in local communities where younger members are less likely to attend any, or a specific, university:

“If you’ve got universities in your catchment area and you’ve got communities that are low achievers, there has to be something in there about universities stepping out from behind their ivory walls to try and actually create that incentive or that drive in younger people to get into the university. But here the universities have got no interest to doing it whatsoever.” … Even when I go into the universities there is not enough interest or drive. I’ll work with the local communities and get some of those young people thinking about going to university. It is a doable thing. Maybe because it is not their university they’ll go to, there is just a no. I’ve never come across such an apathetic bunch to be honest with you. Really disappointing. I’m sitting there, with all these communities, full of all these young people, traveller families and all the rest of it, and the university on my doorstep who don’t seem to care one jot whether those people go to university or not.” (I15)

**4.7.2.2 Benefits to public libraries**

Public libraries benefit by being able to provide their customers with a wider range of resources

“I find the partnerships really useful especially for our borrowers because they hold items that we do not hold in the public library and ever likely to hold. And also the sort of things they borrow are very expensive and not things that we are ever likely to be buying as a public library authority as they are just not going to generate the issues that we need them to generate. So they do benefit our borrowers hugely. So being able to borrow things from universities or college libraries is just great. It gives our borrowers access to stuff that they wouldn’t otherwise get”. (I14)

Librarians themselves also benefit from consortia partnerships with academic libraries

“It enables us to have a regional discussion which involves the sector rather than just public libraries” (I13)

**4.7.2.3 Mutual benefits**

Both public libraries and academic libraries may benefit when both hold specialist collections:

“Bangor have a very good collection of Welsh language material which supplements and complements the Welsh language material which the 3 counties already have, so it made sense” (I4)

This is not necessarily straightforward however:

“It is a fiction collection in Hallam. That is sort of 1940s onwards and we have worked quite closely with them because they’ve got a lot of material than is in our out of print store. Projects like that work, and they do allow members of the public to come in and look at that resource. They won’t let people borrow it but we may well have a lending copy in our resource as well … there is a conflict of interest really” (I7)
4.7.3 Barriers

Licensing was thought to be a major barrier by a number of interviewees (I11, I13, I4). In addition, although some public libraries have attempted to integrate services with academic libraries they are still perceived and operate as separate services.

“We have explored it locally with our local university, Lincoln, and potentially looked at a physical relocation of our central library with their own library but during the course of those explorations it became fairly apparent that the audience needs were somewhat different and whilst they might be physically housed in the same building, they would probably need to be on different floors for customer benefit and use” (I3)

“We’ve got one library inside an HE building. ... In terms of integrating with their services the answer is zero. It is in their building. We use their facilities. York did this ... but in terms of integrating our stock with the HE sector, no. Not that I’m aware of, and there is no management pressure to do that. ... So no the answer is these are separate silos, I’m afraid. A silo mentality.” (I17)

Another barrier for academic libraries lending to public libraries, is that the priority for academic library is to provide stock to students.

“and even the stuff they are buying in hard copy they have got to think twice about interlending because students will say I have paid my fees so why have you given that to a library loan service elsewhere” and “I don’t think we are really planning much change. I think in fact any change would come from the university side as they protect their stock for fee paying students” (I11)

4.8 Library customers

4.8.1 Who is requesting ILL and what for

Only a small number of library customers are reported as using interlending services (I10, I12, I14, I17), and there are both regular users and one-off users (I10).

Summarising all responses, interlending is used by:

- private researchers (I1, I4, I5, I6, I12, I13, I14, I15)
- students (I5, I14, I15)
- a general audience within consortia interlending schemes (I1, I2, I13)
- musicians (I5)
- those with a specialist hobby (I11)
- those conducting family history research (I14)
- long distance workers (I14)
- authors (I15)
- people reading their way through an author (I4)
- People over 65 (I12)
• middle class intellectuals (I15)

For materials that are:

• Hard to find, rare and unique materials (I1, I6, I10, I20)
• Out of print (I10, I6, I19)
• foreign language (I11)
• general interest (I5)

4.8.2 Relationship between cost and use of ILL

Several interviewees suggested that library users only request material that they are happy to pay for (I4, I6), and are turning or have already turned to Amazon, Google and Abe Books because of the cost of ILL and speed of delivery (I1, I3, I10, I12, I17, I20).

Given that consortia interlending schemes tend to levy lower patron charges it is perhaps not surprising that some interviewees said that the consortia interlending schemes benefitted a general audience (I1, I2, I13) whereas other interviewees tended to suggest that interlending was used by niche and specialist audiences.

One interviewee stated that there is greater use of interlending when the service is free:

“there is a little bit according to the charges we place. So for children it is free to place a reservation. So obviously that encourages a lot more reservations to come from children under 16” (I9)

4.8.3 Digital services and digital environment

There were conflicting views regarding how much public library users are making use of digital services. Interviewees also commented on how the digital environment has influenced user perceptions, and how the digital environment means that library users are now, and will be increasingly able to, access library services from home.

4.8.3.1 User requirements of digital services

With regard to the current demand for digital supply of documents, two authorities felt that library users are not requesting digital items:

“But really digital side of things doesn’t affect us, unfortunately. I would love to because there is so much. So many resources out there that we could use and than I can see and that I’ve heard about but it is not something that we are asked for and I don’t think many public libraries are these days” (I8). See also I2.
Another two believe that library users do expect documents to be available digitally:

“all of our customers are absolutely geared up to expect that we can do electronic supply ... the assumption is that we will transact that digitally to get it to them” (I6). See also 111.

A further interviewee suggested that library users will in the future expect interlibrary loans to be delivered digitally:

“I think as people become more IT literate they will expect it to be provided to them in a digital format rather than a hard copy format if we are having to borrow externally” (I5)

One authority felt that the availability of digital material may reduce the amount of interlending but that there will still be a demand for physical resources:

“the competing methods and means for people to get hold of information digitally will obviously have an impact on the interlending function. ... still be the need for people to get physical resources from around the country” (I1)

There may also be a link to the library user base where those using interlending may not want documents supplied digitally, and those who want documents supplied digitally are using alternative sources:

“Most are over 60 who use interlending. A lot of people as well will just simply get things from Amazon. You know, younger borrowers. They’ve been brought up in the digital age and they are getting kindles ...” (I12)

4.8.3.2 User perceptions and expectations of digital environment

Library users are now locating items on the Internet but they do not understand why libraries cannot make all items available (I10, I4, I6):

“there is a lack of understanding about if that material is available on a digital infrastructure why people can’t access it” (I6)

They also do not understand why there are different pricing structures:

“Because of the way the Internet works now the public don’t care where something comes from. And they don’t see any difference that getting it from Hertfordshire or borrowing it from Essex or borrowing it from Alabama. For them, they just want the book. A lot of them they don’t see why they should pay extra for different services” (I8)

Library users can request material and receive digital material outside of the physical library environment (I4, I5) which serves to meet expectations regarding speed of delivery:

“people want things delivered quickly, ideally they will want it direct or as directly as possible” (I11) see also (I15)
4.9 The future of interlending

4.9.1 Impact of the economic environment

It is unsurprising that for almost all interviewees, views on the future of interlending were tied inextricably to the current economic climate. Some interviews addressed the question from a practical and relatively short term perspective relating to costs and charges. Their opinion was that rising costs would lead to rising charges, which in turn might cause a decline in demand:

[What is the future of interlending?] “I don’t know. I think we have to look at our costs. Potentially I think the price could increase. So that people will think twice about actually requesting.” (I1)

“I think it is tricky if I’m honest. I think that the demand is going down. And our costs are at least staying the same or even going up.” (I8)

“A lot more library services have moved towards full cost recovery model and some have stopped interlending altogether. I think some have withdrawn from that completely. I do think there is an issue about, not just for us, but for all library services, and the cost effectiveness of that service. And the reluctance of the end user to pay for this service.” (I8)

Two other interviewees identified the impact of falling acquisitions budgets. They argued that this would have consequences for the availability of specialist items in the future, as well as making it difficult for borrowers to identify libraries with the inclination or ability to fulfil requests:

“I can see that interlending is going to start facing a problem. Because the more book funds that are under pressure, the less slightly different stuff that we are purchasing, the less they will be available to request in 3, 4, 5, 10 years.” (I11)

“We are determined to carry on with it to provide that choice but it becomes more and more a budget pressure. But we are also mindful that as all libraries start reducing, or continue to reduce their stock budgets then the amount of stock that people have to lend, or indeed at some point the willingness to lend, may well reduce so there is a looming problem there.” (I13)

It was also argued that the scale of the financial crisis means that services even more fundamental to the library offer than interlending are under threat. This in turn implies that support for interlending would be difficult to justify if it was at the expense of these other services:

“They are so challenging for load of authorities around how they spend their monies that actually it is not at the forefront of things most head of library services would fight for in order to retain, if I’m honest. There are lots of other things that are more challenging and many more people would fight for first. But that is not to say that there isn’t a desire and professional interest in supporting those people that use it.” (I18)

Another interviewee foresaw a decline as a consequence of the wider availability of digital material and alternative sources for print material:
“I see it as a declining area definitely ... There is more digital stuff around. There’s less need to get, libraries are not the only places where you can get hold of out of print material. It is much easier to find it online now and buy it, reasonably priced copies that you can keep for yourself. That second hand book market is so big and developing ... So a student coming to the end of their course they don’t just carry their books home in a cardboard box anymore, they put it on Amazon and sell it back out to the next batch of students ... Libraries play a part in the whole picture, they would just end up becoming much more specialised.” (I9)

Several participants saw a bleak future for interlending, with some identifying services that were at risk or doomed:

[Referring to musical interlending scheme] “I think it is vulnerable. We have redefined our service in the light of having to say something like 35% of our operating budget. We decided what our statutory responsibilities are and that isn’t part of our statutory responsibilities. The authority at the moment is minded to go above and beyond what it has to do from a statutory point of view but it is facing massive financial challenges. At the moment it has to save 120 million pounds a year on what it is currently spending, and that is on top of having already saved something like 150 million pounds in the past 5 years, and then therefore anything that is not statutory is vulnerable.” (I3)

“It depends whether the nettle is grasped really. I mean it is one of those things where it will continue to diminish in terms of the paper service that is being used and I can see that within 3 to 4 years, if the demands carry on the way they are or the trends that they are, I won’t be able to justify my budget for it.” (I6)

“Dying. Dying. That is my personal comment. But basically I would like to see it go away. If they could politically get away with not doing it they would.” (I17)

Others disagreed with this assessment. It was notable that in some (but not all) cases this view seemed to be based on a belief that the principles of interlending were considered too important to be allowed to disappear, rather than an assessment of the functional value of the service:

“I think it will always be there still. I can’t see it ever disappearing. I hope not.” (I8)

“I read somewhere that one authority was thinking about [scrapping ILL]. I don’t know again if it was one of those Aunt Sally ideas. But I read somewhere and thought Oh my god. You do read these things and think is that really true. And it was a county! I personally think it is a core part of what we do here.” (I11)

“Personally I don’t think that would get rid of ILL as such, but I do see a time when my post is no longer titled that. If I left they would rejig it and give responsibility a day a week to other people. It’s not something going up. It’ll be stable at best.” (I20)

“The more expensive interlending schemes, I don’t think they are going to fail immediately but I don’t know what is going to happen in 10 years. You know, as far as I can see at the moment our system is not under threat but I have no idea what will happen in the long term.” (I2)
4.9.2 Visions for the future

As well as their views on the immediate future of interlending services, interviewees were also asked to speculate about the need for alternative schemes to meet the resource sharing requirements of tomorrow’s libraries, and what those schemes might look like. Three interviewees observed that their current schemes were operating effectively enough that there was no need for creation of alternatives:

“I think in terms of how it runs now I don’t sense that we have a lot of frustration about trying to find items or get them so that would suggest we’ve not identified a gap. If that makes sense. I know that we get stuff internationally. I know that we are able to get journals. And it seems to be quite speedy. So we did quite well in our stats of how quickly we get items ... That would suggest that it is working quite well.” (I11)

“I don’t know if there is scope in the future to perhaps adapting NWLIP even if it meant not providing as much as it does now because everyone is so mindful of the costs. But I don’t think anyone is thinking of a new interlending scheme if that makes sense.” (I12)

“While I’m here, while Kevin is here, it is done here. We are still members of UnityUK. The system with all its faults is still working.” (I4)

Other interviewees suggested that expanding the CONARLS membership, and otherwise standardising nation provision, would have a positive impact on interlending:

“Well, it would be quite nice if, you know there’s CONARLS, which is like for the whole of the country, and people who are involved in that, it works quite well. The thing that I find is more difficult now is because a lot of places, especially universities have started charging the British Library rate for loans. Which is very expensive, and so that limits the people we are now borrowing items from. So if more people were still in the Conarls scheme it would benefit us greatly.” (I14)

“Because of the way the Internet works now the public don’t care where something comes from. And they don’t see any difference that getting it from Hertfordshire or borrowing it from Essex or borrowing it from Alabama. For them, they just want the book. A lot of them they don’t see why they should pay extra for different services and I just think it’s, I mean this is purely my feeling, I think it is something we would want to offer. Obviously things cost so it is not something that I think will happen. But I think in the UK we could extend things like the COEAST, the CONARLS to more members.” (I8)

As described in section 4.5.2.3, many users saw the potential of a national catalogue with reservation functionality as being of great benefit, although technically problematic. While this itself represents a vision of the future for interlending, one participant saw this as the approach needed to take the field forward:

*It becomes almost self-serve rather than interlending. Not that that bothers me. I don’t mean that in a protective sense ... as far as the customer is concerned, if they can get to it straightaway, brilliant. As far as we are concerned actually great. That is how the world needs to move I think.* (I1)
Another interviewee expanded on this idea to present a scenario for how an ideal library system incorporating might operate:

“Let’s go back to first principles … The objective for me is that in the same way the user can go on to our system, or consortium if it is a consortium, and say you’ve got an item, I want to borrow that. But if you go onto a system, our system or through a national portal, say there is a copy of that in authority or organisation x, we have lending rights, press the button, it goes off. Staff at the remote end where the stock actually sits say we want that it is actually there. Because as we know stuff that should be on the shelves sometimes isn’t, it can’t be found and is no longer available. Status is all updated, the same way reservations work. The finances are worked out. Yes it will be transmitted to your local branch in 10 working days and you borrow it. If there are restrictions, it is coming from the BL and … it is in the library reference use only. Those conditions are made clear to the user before the user presses accept. If the user does it themselves it is seamless. Staff and stock library services have no real input other than to authorise what we’re notifying in the first place. A seamless process that is no different to reservations. There may be more charges or more restrictions on what you can get. End to end processing and let the systems do the work. That is the grail.” (I17)

It was also suggested that a catalyst for change was needed, with one interviewee observing that OCLC were well positioned to play a significant role in reshaping interlending towards the self-service model:

“The problem is the way interlibrary loans have been done for so long with the British Library setting the rules and the costs and the standards. And I think it really needs a large company like OCLC who run Unity to take that on because it does seem to me that British Library are backing off from public libraries. And the support they used to give us because there is so much now that we cannot borrow from British Library and the British Library do seem to be going more towards electronic delivery of documents. Whereas we find that public libraries and public library members are still requesting books rather than electronic documents and I know universities are much more into the electronic side of things than the public are. And I think it needs a big organisation like OCLC to take on something, to expand the system we have so that they can take control of the charging …. I think they have the technology and they can link to shelf level in most authorities because they have our urls, they know what our catalogue is like and I think it could take a lot of development but I think that is something they could do. And work with the libraries to offer that sort of shelf level access.” (I8)

It was also argued at length that the future of interlending lies in the provision of solely digital content:

“Frankly, I do think that we are quite stuck in the past as a sector. I find it difficult to believe that we are still transacting bundles of paper around at this stage and something that I’ve argued for in the past, I’ve not been successful but you know we are a very small voice in a small region is that we should be looking at moving to purely electronic document supply. So if a request comes in for a book and it is not available the host library should have the systems in place to scan it and send it electronically so that a) you are preserving that item because if it is that rare it is likely to be fairly unavailable. If it is not a state where you can’t
scan it, you shouldn’t be interlibrary loaning it anyway.... Google are doing it. The British Library are doing it on a limited level. It should be the default assumption. All document supply should be digital and if the customer at the other end requires it on a paper basis, that’s fine. The receiving library can print it off and make it available in that format, or load it on to an electronic device and loan that electronic device. But really the transaction costs are carried in pieces of paper and are just ridiculous. And particularly when you’ve got waiting lists for numbers of books it seems daft. Why are you rolling an item around and putting 5 or 6 people on a queue behind it when you can scan it once and satisfy everybody. I’m sorry, that’s on my high horse. I do think that it is something that if there is going to be any future to interlibrary loan system there has got to be a fundamental rethink of how that works. It’s just my opinion but that is where I am coming from.” (16)

A final perspective was offered by another participant, who argued that a radical rethink of the library’s role was required:

“There are lots of ways that libraries can support information and knowledge and people’s demands are actually and how they access that are have changed and interlending isn’t the only way. Engage with MOOCs for example. There are lots of ways libraries can develop their skills and their knowledge that weren’t there in the past. And interlending is just one part of a much bigger picture.” (118)
5. DISCUSSION

In attempting to make sense of the vast amount of data collected during the course of this project it quickly became apparent that participants offered contradictory or conflicting perspectives on many aspects of interlending. This section first discusses these contradictions, before addressing areas of consensus.

5.1 Contrasting and Contradictory Results

5.1.1 Use of interlending terminology

While it may seem a relatively minor point, it was noticeable that the terminology relating to resource sharing was not used consistently by participants in the research. This was particularly evidenced in the different applications of the terms “interlending” and “interlibrary loan”. For the majority of participants participating in regional schemes, sharing between members of the consortium was considered interlending, while ILL related to transactions with non-consortia members. There were however exceptions to this rule; one interviewee referred to both types of transaction as ‘ILL’. Other participants in contrast appeared to use the terms interchangeably. Another group, generally those participating in shared LMS consortia with self-service reservation offers to users, typically did not term this activity either interlending or ILL, but rather a “reservation”. While this issue may at first seem trivial, it does have implications for our understanding of perspectives on resource sharing. Take for example one comment made by a survey respondent: “We offer interlending but ILL is falling as it is not really promoted.” It is not clear from this sentence whether the terms interlending and ILL are being used interchangeably, or if the respondent is carefully distinguishing between different types of resource sharing (for example consortium vs. CONARLS lending). The differing interpretations significantly affect meaning.

An explanation for these varying applications may lie in the extent to which participants identify with certain aspects of the fulfilment process. Do the terms principally distinguish the activity of staff (whose processes would differ depending on the mode of request fulfilment), or the finances (which would distinguish between free or low cost regional lending and higher priced CONARLS or BL lending) or geography (stock supplied by consortia members being sourced more locally)? It seems likely that the established vocabulary of resource sharing has not been consistently adapted to the modern landscape of interlending. In light of the complexities surrounding many other elements of the interlending debate, we suggest that establishing a consistent lexicon may be a valuable first step in facilitating communication within the field.
5.1.2 How schemes operate

Even a cursory analysis of the various descriptions of national, regional and sub-regional schemes reveals significant variation in all aspects of service delivery. These include the transfer of stock (post vs. van), library to library fees (free vs. nominal vs. cost price), mediation (self-service vs. librarian instigated), patron fee (free vs. subsidised vs. full recovery), and systems used (shared LMS vs. union catalogue vs. independent systems). The range and nature of these variables have a number of implications for our ability to construct a coherent picture of the state of interlending, and for future developments in the field.

Firstly, they greatly impact perceptions of the value for money offered by individual schemes. Authorities were found to have different frames of reference against which to gauge cost-effectiveness, and while participants often seemed to be aware of the models employed by other consortia, there was little reference to formal analysis of the success or otherwise of individual schemes. This appears to be in large part due to the lack of a benchmarking framework against which the effectiveness and value of schemes can be judged. Value for money is instead most commonly calculated in reference to national schemes such as CONARLS (which is not necessarily a like-for-like comparison), or without any fixed point of comparison at all.

Secondly, they significantly affect the ease with which models of best practice can be effectively shared. This point relates closely to a broader question regarding the predicing conditions of scheme creation and development. By this we mean the extent to which schemes are designed to build on or exploit existing local or regional conditions, practices, and shared infrastructure, or instead as a means of implementing independently identified models of best practice. Our analysis suggests that most schemes are likely to fall into the former camp, which means the best practice to be shared relates not necessarily to the specifics of the scheme, but the ways in which the potential for cooperation was identified and maximised.

Thirdly, the range of schemes available to some libraries for fulfilling a request often results in users being confronted with a confusing range of prices, delivery options and lead-times. As several participants noted, this is increasingly damaging to perceptions of the library service in an information environment that is offering users ever more convenient and simplified means of accessing content. Finally, the range of existing schemes serves to greatly complicate attempts to conceive and implement national solutions to interlending. With interlending thoroughly embedded in shared systems and workflows, many of which are neither scalable nor replicable, any attempt to develop new unified approaches at a national level is contingent on overcoming the practical difficulties of persuading authorities to abandon wholesale their customised regional schemes.
5.1.3 The moral imperative

Opinion among our participants was divided over the extent to which public libraries operated under a moral imperative to offer interlending. We generally observed three broad perspectives on this issue. Some identified strongly with the moral argument, and viewed the provision of interlending as the realisation of a duty to meet any and all needs of library users in line with the spirit of the 1964 Act. For these participants, questions relating to the future of interlending focus not on the existence of the service, but its scope and operational capacity. A larger group shared this perspective in principle, but were more pragmatic about the likelihood of interlending being sustained in a harsh economic environment. A final group might be characterised as rejecting entirely the notion of a moral imperative to offer interlending, and instead question whether it is possible to justify the time and resources expended delivering an expensive service benefiting a small and declining number of users.

A natural question of great significance to the future of interlending is the extent to which any one of these viewpoints represents a majority opinion at an appropriately senior level. We also note that interlending is founded on the principles of cooperation. If different authorities approach the issue of interlending from diametrically opposed positions this is likely to have a significant impact on the ability of public libraries to work together to share resources. A question worthy of further study is whether smaller, more local schemes are successful not only because of shared infrastructure, but because of shared values.

5.1.4 Impact of the digital environment

While all participants in the research acknowledged that the new digital environment had affected modes of information access and consumption, there were clear differences of opinion regarding the extent to which e-content represents a future opportunity or interlending, or is instead a catalyst for its decline. It seems clear that there are significant challenges relating to the provision of e-content that need to be addressed, particularly the licensing of e-books, integration of open access content, and the access to and functionality of publisher e-content platforms. However the extent to which these issues are likely to affect interlending is disputed. Some see such barriers as essentially insurmountable, and that the future rationale for interlending lies in its capacity to deliver print copies in an increasingly digital world, while others believe the widespread availability of digital content will terminally reduce demand for interlending. A third group advocates the embracing of digital document delivery as a means of preserving interlending by reducing costs and better meeting user expectations. These views are clearly related to disagreements over whether public library users expect and want digital content, or instead still prefer print copies. Differences in opinion here are no doubt influenced by the differing demographics and needs of library users in different service areas, and as such generalisations are problematic. Developing a digital strategy for interlending would therefore seem to require two
complementary facets; a comprehensive analysis of the perspectives of library users towards digital content, and a thorough study of the technical challenges associated with the digital publishing and licensing landscape. An issue related to the second of these points is the degree to which technological advances will facilitate increased interoperability between the constituent systems of the interlending process. While the value of this is not disputed, opinions vary as to the feasibility of such developments.

5.1.5 Interlending, collections and shrinking budgets

One of the starkest contradictions to emerge from this research was the difference between participants who see interlending as a means of coping with reduced budgets, and those for whom the reduced budgets themselves represent a threat to interlending services. Complications in this area arise from the fact that different schemes have different library to library charges. In most cases schemes were found to cost net lenders money, and several consortia agreements include arrangements to compensate for this. In a few instances, however, it was seen as preferable to be a net borrower. This view was based either on the pricing structure of library to library charges, or the calculation that the savings in acquisitions costs outweigh interlending costs. In both cases there was clear evidence from this study of tensions between net lenders and net borrowers within schemes. Far from being trivial, these tensions were found to have contributed to the collapse of consortia arrangements in the past, and evidence suggests that the politics of consortia management and expansion are often centred on this issue. It was also noted that consortia that cooperate very closely (for example through a shared reservation system) feel the effects of borrowing and lending imbalances most clearly. Lenders in such schemes perceive it as being unfair that their stock is subsidising the collections of other libraries.

A further and related contradiction comes in the view that interlending is an effective means of coping with reduced book stocks, and saves the expense of purchasing specialist items. Several participants pointed out that this was unsustainable; interlending relies on libraries buying rare and specialist material, since if they don’t then there is no longer the opportunity for other libraries to borrow it. There would seem to be a clear risk here that a widespread reliance on interlending rather than collection development might fatally reduce the collective offering.

There appear to be no clear solution to these issues. Assuming that a perfect equilibrium is impossible, there will always be net lenders and net borrowers. The best that can be hoped for is that tensions are clearly and appropriately addressed at a consortia level, and compensation schemes for authorities disadvantaged financially by interlending clearly help in this regard.
5.1.6 Local efficiency vs. economies of scale

Although a formal evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of the various interlending schemes was beyond the scope of this project, results indicate that national schemes were in general perceived to offer poorer value for money. Results from the survey indicate that sub-regional schemes were most likely to offer the best value, while several interview participants described wider regional schemes as being cost-effective, and preferable to national schemes. One notable contradiction arising from these results is that when asked to describe visions of future interlending schemes, participants most commonly spoke of potential national solutions. A frequently cited reason for this was the power of economies of scale, which was also commonly offered as a reason for expanding existing regional and sub-regional schemes. This leads naturally to a key question: if economies of scale are perceived as so important to cost-effectiveness, why do smaller schemes tend to offer the best value for money? The evidence from this study suggests three reasons for this. Firstly that the transport and delivery of interloaned material is perhaps the key cost associated with interlending, and that smaller schemes are best able to develop cost-effective van based solutions to this issue that avoid postage costs. These solutions however were often viewed as hard to scale. Secondly, it appears that smaller schemes are more likely to involve closer cooperation, and be more central to the operations of participating libraries. Finally, regional and subregional consortia were perceived to offer benefits beyond simply the provision of interlending, including training and the sharing of best practices. The challenge therefore seems to be how best to capitalise on potential economies of scale that larger schemes might offer, whilst retaining the economic and cultural advantages offered by smaller schemes.

5.2 Areas of Consensus

5.2.1 Declining rates

While the scope of the report did not allow for a thorough quantitative analysis of rates of interlending, the results do suggest overwhelmingly that rates are declining. While some regional schemes were perceived to be successes, and some consortia are expanding, there was no clear evidence that interlending rates were rising even within those schemes. We are therefore comfortable describing the declining rates of interlending as a national trend.

A number of complementary factors emerged as potential causes of this decline. Many interview participants felt that public awareness of interlending services was low, and that it was predominantly utilised by older library users. The relatively high cost of some ILL schemes was seen as a deterrent, and the variety of schemes and prices on offer was perceived as confusing for typical library users. The increasing availability of digital content and the relative ease with which it can be found on the
web were also seen to contribute to the decline, as was the increasing convenience, breadth of offering and cost-effectiveness of e-commerce services such as Amazon. It is important to note that the root cause for some of these factors might reasonably be traced back to library budget cuts: the inability to subsidise interlending costs leads to increased user charges; the need to engage with low cost regional schemes leads to a confusing variety of delivery options being presented to users; longer delivery times caused by cost savings make speedy Amazon delivery more attractive. While there is no doubt some credibility to claims that demand for interlending is changing in a digital age, the clear danger is that declining rates will be interpreted solely as a fall in public demand for interlending in general terms, rather than as reflective of use of an increasingly expensive, complex and limited service. A better understanding of user needs and requirements for interlending in the digital age might help stave off a vicious cycle of service cuts leading to lower demand, which in turn leads inevitably to more cuts.

5.2.2 E-content is a problem

As discussed in section 5.1.4, while opinions varied on the overall impact of the digital environment there was near unanimous agreement that the sharing of e-content was highly problematic. These problems are due in part to more general issues with acquiring e-content, with publishers sometimes perceived as being reluctant to offer e-books to public libraries, and consortia purchasing difficult or not properly explored. Library managers also appear unsure how best to deliver this content to their users. From an interlending perspective there was a widespread view that licensing and technical issues make the sharing of e-resources extremely difficult. It was notable that this study revealed very little evidence of a strong desire to address this issue. While one participant spoke hopefully of JISC’s involvement in future work in this area, most participants seemed resigned to being unable to compete with the HE and commercial sectors.

5.2.3 HE involvement adds value

The results of this study indicate that there is a clear perceived benefit to entering into consortia schemes that include one or more HE institutions. Three principle reasons for this emerged. Firstly it was apparent that the HE field were viewed as having a great deal of expertise in the area of e-content acquisition and delivery. This was seen as an advantage both in terms of making e-content available to public library users, and utilising the experience of HE libraries to improve and develop public library offerings related to digital material. Secondly, there appeared to be a consensus that many users of ILL were seeking specialist academic material. It was therefore considered a clear advantage to have preferential agreements with HE libraries who were likely to stock such material. Finally it was suggested that the involvement of HE institutions in a consortia offered a unique selling point for prospective new members, meaning that consortia with HE members were more likely to grow. It
must be noted however that the general trend appeared to be towards HE institutions withdrawing from consortia. Their motivations for joining consortia were not fully explored in this study, but it was suggested that it may in part be due to social and community concerns. In practice it appears as though the demand on their resources made by public library consortia interlending schemes became unsustainable. Given the undoubted benefits for public libraries of engagement with the HE sector, we suggest that work should be done to better understand HE motivations and dissatisfactions with public library interlending schemes.

### 5.2.4 Lack of awareness of services

Many participants in this research spoke of a lack of public awareness about interlending. Even if aware of the service in general, users were also perceived to be confused by the variety of ILL schemes being offered, and the associated costs and delivery arrangements. This study also presents some evidence that educating library users about the costs and mechanisms of ILL leads to increased customer satisfaction, and a greater willingness to pay associated ILL charges. In considering these results, it is important to note that this study did not directly engage with library users themselves. The evidence collected therefore represents the views of library staff and managers, and is to an extent anecdotal. Nonetheless, it appears likely that some libraries are failing to adequately “sell” interlending to their users. The variety of interlending schemes utilised by libraries, and the different rationales for its provision, have perhaps contributed to the lack of a coherent message to be communicated to users. While we strongly advocate further research in this area that engages directly with library users, we suggest that the public library community might be well served collaborating on a unified approach to the marketing of interlending to users.

### 5.2.5 Potential for a national catalogue

Discussion of the future of interlending and potential developments in resource sharing frequently centred on the development of a national catalogue. Most participants saw some value in a system with national coverage, but only if some key criteria for system coverage and functionality were met. More specifically the general view appeared to be that any future national catalogue system should have universal coverage, and incorporate unmediated user reservation functionality. Essentially the vision that emerged was of a national system operating in the same way as existing regional shared LMS schemes such as SELMS. Our research suggests that any system without this full functionality would be of only limited value.

It is beyond the scope of this report to draw firm conclusions about the feasibility of such a system. We do however note a range of significant barriers to its development and implementation. As this
report has shown, there currently exist a huge number of varied approaches to interlending, each with their own processes, systems, rationales and plans for the future. There is therefore a great deal of capital, both human and organisational, invested in the status quo. In addition there is the fact that many regional schemes are perceived to be successful, and in general are seen to offer better value for money than existing national schemes. Were public libraries approaching this question with a blank slate, the development of national system would be considerably less problematic. As it is, obtaining buy-in from the whole public library community, as would undoubtedly be required, represents a significant challenge.

Another major barrier is technical. Assuming the implementation of a single shared LMS across all UK public libraries is impossible, we are left with a system that would need to be interoperable with a range of local and regional catalogues, as well as incorporating the current background functionality of UnityUK and reservation functionality of an LMS. Such a system would then need to be complemented by a standardised set of work-flows managing the provision of interlending that themselves would need to be compatible with the varying levels of staffing and expertise found across different regions and individual authorities.

A number of key questions must therefore be addressed. Can a cost-effectiveness model of national interlending be developed, and if so can local authorities be persuaded that it will work as planned? Can the technical issues of system functionality and interoperability be overcome? Is there sufficient public demand for such a scheme, and if implemented can current issues with public awareness of interlending be addressed? Attempting to answer these questions will require significant investment in research, education and advocacy. Given the scale of the challenges, we suggest that considerable thought be given regarding the extent to which such investment is appropriate at a time when so many other aspects of the public library service are under threat.
6. RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that this study has thrown light on some key issues at a local, regional and national level, and we present the following recommendations for consideration. The first of these relate specifically to further research or enquiry in order to inform future decision-making regarding interlending and resource-sharing, and the second are recommendations to those involved in planning and delivering such services.

6.1 Recommendations for Further Research

1. To conduct a user study to understand the needs and perspective of those utilising the service (and those not), to ensure that staff perceptions are accurate

2. To investigate and compare e-content licensing models (state of the art, future plans, publisher perspective etc.)

3. To identify synergies between HE and public library sectors and, specifically, the motivation of HE stakeholders to participate in regional and national consortia

4. To conduct cost-benefit analysis of local and regional schemes, and to develop benchmarking tools for wider dissemination and use.

6.2 Recommendations for Stakeholders

5. To establish a consistent terminology for interlending that is used in discussions in order to promote coherence in policy-making and service delivery

6. To develop unified marketing tools, material and strategies for libraries keen to promote interlending, emphasising the value of the service to library users

7. To develop further marketing tools for use by managers and senior stakeholders to lobby other organisations (e.g. other local authorities, HE providers) and national organisations (CILIP, SCL) to gain their support for developing a more unified approach

8. To identify action that needs to be taken regarding licensing e-content, possibly including an education program and liaison with publishers, followed by implementation of the identified actions

9. To establish an inter-consortia forum for sharing best practice – perhaps facilitated by the FiL or TCR, or alternatively discussed in a free-standing summit

10. To review the current relationship with other sectors, particularly the higher education sector, with a view to developing possible synergies

11. To coordinate discussion regarding the feasibility of a universal, national catalogue with reservation functionality, and specifically, to determine whether further investment is justified.
REFERENCES


7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1: Interlending Survey (Service Heads)

About you

2 Your name: *

3 Your job title: *

4 What are your areas of strategic responsibility? *

5 What organisation do you represent? *

6 Does your service have staff with dedicated responsibility for interlending services? *
   Yes   No

7 Which forms of governance for libraries is your Authority considering for the future?
   Please choose all that apply:
   • Wholly managed and delivered by the local authority
   • Managed and delivered through joint arrangements / merger with another local authority/ies
   • Commercial outsourcing
   • Outsourcing to a non-profit body - Trust, Independent Provident Society etc.
   • Creation of a staff-led mutual society
   • Community led and managed branch libraries
   • Other:

Current levels of Provision

8 Which interlending schemes is your service participating in? *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Do not participate</th>
<th>Use very rarely</th>
<th>Use occasionally</th>
<th>Use a moderate amount</th>
<th>Use often</th>
<th>Use very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UnityUK</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Are you actively involved in the development of any new schemes?

Yes  No

Please use the comment box if you would like to expand on your answer.

10 Is your service a net borrower or lender? *

Net lender       Net borrower       Neutral

11 What other types of scheme would you be interested in participating in?

Please write your answer here:

Rationale and Strategies

12 How important are the following factors as underlying reasons for providing interlending services? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility to serve community</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User demand</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing with</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
commercial services (e.g. Amazon)

Economics of collection development

Facilitating access to items in the long tail (i.e. connecting users with specialist or niche items)

13 Do you currently include, or plan to include links to freely available resources (e.g. through Project Gutenberg or the Hathi Trust) in the library catalogue?

Currently include Plan to include No plans to include

Make a comment on your choice here:

14 Do existing schemes in which you participate accommodate direct user requests (rather than library-to-library requests on behalf of users)? *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Do not participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UnityUK</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONARLS</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the view that user driven interlending represents the future of interlending services? *
16 To what extent are collection development decisions in your service influenced by interlending opportunities? *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Value for Money

17 To what extent do the interlending schemes you participate in offer value for money to libraries? * 

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Do not Participate</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Moderately good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UnityUK</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONARLS</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 How can the value for money of interlending schemes be demonstrated? 

Please write your answer here:

19 In general, are library-to-library interlending charges appropriate? * 

Too much          Too little         About right

20 Based on your knowledge of other service areas, are there any alternative business or funding models that might offer better value for money? 

Please write your answer here:

Library Users and the Digital Environment

21 What delivery or collection options do you currently offer, or plan to offer, to users? * 

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently offer</th>
<th>Plan to offer</th>
<th>No plans to offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home delivery</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivered to local library</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect from lending library</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 Do you offer, or plan to offer, digital access to material requested through interlibrary loan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently offer</th>
<th>Plan to offer</th>
<th>No plans to offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Make a comment on your choice here:

23 How important are the following factors to the future of interlending in the digital age? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24/7 access to library services on the web</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service delivery speed</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Access to digital material

A national public library union catalogue

24 What measures does your service take to reduce the costs of interlending? *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently utilise</th>
<th>Plan to utilise</th>
<th>No plans to utilise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print on demand</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital document supply</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokering deals direct with other services</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final thoughts

25 How do you see the future of interlending in your organisation, in the context of wider procurement and resource-sharing strategies, user needs and budget constraints?

Please write your answer here:
26 How do you see the future of ILL in the context of the wider digital agenda?

Please write your answer here:

27 For the second phase of this research project we hope to conduct interviews (either face-to-face or by telephone) with senior management to discuss the issues covered in this survey in more detail. If you would be willing to participate in these interviews, please enter your email address below.

Please write your answer here:
7.2 Appendix 2: Interlending Survey Information Page

Introduction
This survey forms part of a research project aiming to establish the current levels of provision of inter-library loan services in public libraries in the UK, and explore opportunities created by the digital environment for resource discovery and resource sharing. We also hope to identify possible future models for cooperation and resource sharing with other public library networks, and with the Higher Education sector.

Who will be participating?
We are inviting all Heads of Service and/or an appropriate senior manager to participate in a national survey of public library services. The objectives of this survey are as follows:

a) To establish the current levels of provision of ILL services in public libraries
b) To investigate library managers' views of the role of the digital environment in resource discovery and resource sharing
c) To investigate existing models of cooperation and resource sharing, with a view to identifying good practice.

What will you be asked to do?
We ask that you complete the following survey, which we hope will take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

What are the potential risks of participating?
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life. The survey is only concerned with professional matters.

What data will we collect?
The responses to survey questions.

What will we do with the data?
Survey data will be transcribed and analysed by the research team, and will be used to write a published report and journal article(s)/ conference paper(s). It will be stored during the lifetime of the project on secure University servers and other password-protected devices (such as the PCs of the researchers). It will be retained on secure University servers and used for other analyses. The data will be shared in an anonymized form with the funder [The Combined Regions Management Board].

Will my participation be confidential?
Survey responses will be anonymized. In any reporting of results material such as quotations will be carefully filtered to exclude material that identifies individuals or the organisations in which they are based.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**
The results of this research will be in a written report for the funder [specify] and it will also be written up in journal papers and conference presentations. A summary of the results (fully anonymized) will be made available to all participants via the University of Sheffield website.
7.3 Appendix 3 – Interview questions for participants 1-6

1. Can you describe any consortia interlending schemes that your service participates in?
   [If more than one scheme described, then split following questions for each scheme]
   
2. What was the rationale / strategic thinking for developing the scheme? What are the local issues / conditions that lead to the development of this scheme? Why are schemes mostly regional (if this is the case)? Is this ideal or is this practical?

3. Who are the audience of the scheme? Has this scheme been designed with particular audiences in mind? Are there particular audiences who benefit most from this scheme? (niche, general public, students and school children)
   
4. What material is included in the scheme? Has this scheme been designed with particular material in mind? (rare, archival, popular)

5. What do you consider the successes of the scheme?
   
6. What do you consider to have been least successful aspects of the scheme?

7. How can/should value for money be demonstrated (1) to the patron (2) to budget holders?

8. How do you see the future of ILL in the context of the wider digital agenda? What is the impact of the digital environment on library services' plans, either as it affects (1) the library service itself or (2) the behaviour and requirements of service users?

9. Are there any partnerships / plans to partner with HE libraries?

10. Is it important to have a national catalogue? If it is important, should there be a national infrastructure such as that provided by UnityUK to handle the mechanics of interlending - requesting, circulating, reporting, fee management etc.

11. How do you see the future of interlending in your organisation?
7.4 Appendix 4 – Interview participant Information Sheet

Introduction
The aim of this research project is to establish the current levels of provision of inter-library loan services in public libraries in the UK, and explore opportunities created by the digital environment for resource discovery and resource sharing. We also hope to identify possible future models for cooperation and resource sharing with other public library networks, and with the Higher Education sector.

This project consists of two phases. In the first phase we invited all Heads of Service and/or an appropriate senior manager to participate in a national survey of public library services. In the second phase we are conducting interviews with senior management to discuss issues covered in the survey in more detail.

Who will be participating?
Those who completed the national survey and who also expressed a willingness to participate in these interviews.

What will you be asked to do?
We ask that you to take part in a telephone interview, which we hope will take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

What are the potential risks of participating?
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life. The interview is only concerned with professional matters.

What data will we collect?
The responses to interview questions.

What will we do with the data?
Interview data will be transcribed and analysed by the research team, and will be used to write a published report and journal article(s)/ conference paper(s). It will be stored during the lifetime of the project on secure University servers and other password-protected devices (such as the PCs of the researchers). It will be retained on secure University servers and used for other analyses. The data will be shared in an anonymized form with the funder [The Combined Regions Management Board].

Will my participation be confidential?
Interview responses will be anonymized. In any reporting of results material such as quotations will be carefully filtered to exclude material that identifies individuals or the organisations in which they are based.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of this research will be in a written report for the funder [The Combined Regions Management Board] and it will also be written up in journal papers and conference presentations. A summary of the results (fully anonymized) will be made available to all participants via the University of Sheffield website.