Analysis of the questionnaire survey concerning the use of the University of Birmingham Pilot Electronic Short Loan Service: responses from students studying the Managing Organisations module

http://builder.bham.ac.uk

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Executive summary

This report details the responses of a sample of students concerning their use of the University of Birmingham electronic short loan service. The report forms part of the evaluation of the BUILDER pilot electronic short loan service. The pilot service was released in January 1999 as a part of the BUILDER hybrid library project. Access was provided electronically to a selection of journal articles, chapters from textbooks and complete text books that were in high demand. A selection of electronic texts supporting teaching and learning in the School of Medicine, the department of Commerce and the department of Accounting and Finance was provided on the electronic short loan service.

This strand of the evaluation involved the distribution of a questionnaire survey to students studying the Managing Organisations module in the department of Commerce, during one of the lectures in March 1999. The questionnaire survey examined students’ attitudes to, and use of the electronic short loan service. 66 students returned completed questionnaires out of a total of 125 students on the Managing Organisations module.

Many of the students surveyed had used the electronic short loan service, accessing it from a variety of locations. Overall, the evaluation provided positive feedback about the service; for example, satisfaction was expressed concerning the design of the service. Indications are that if the service were expanded in terms of coverage, it would have an even greater potential to support learning at the University of Birmingham.

Key findings

Just under two-thirds of the students surveyed had used the electronic short loan service. No precise pattern exists concerning the number of times that the service had been used, with students mostly reporting accessing the database between one and ten times. Most students preferred to locate relevant texts and print them out for use, although some did take notes from the screen. This choice may be dependent on the availability of printing facilities when accessing the service.

Most students had found out about the electronic short loan service through being told about it by a tutor at the University of Birmingham and, in a few cases, by a member of Information Services staff. Other methods of disseminating information about the existence of the service, such as posters, seemed to be less effective.

Access to the service was gained from a variety of locations including the Main Library, PC clusters located in departments and from home. Computers in the Main Library were most commonly used to access the electronic short loan service. This suggests the service was being used alongside other services that the library provides.

Generally students seem to be satisfied with specific features of the electronic short loan collection, such as, screen design, time taken to find a text and ease of use. The most common rating given in each case was ‘good’, with only a few responses at either of the extremes i.e. poor or excellent.
Nearly half of the students surveyed reported that they had never used the existing printed short loan collection. Of those that had experience of using both the printed and the electronic short loan collection, there was currently slightly more preference for the printed short loan service. Some of the reasons for preferring the print service included:

- Greater coverage - more texts supporting more courses in more departments are available
- No dependence on computer access - a limited number of PCs results in students without access to a PC not being able to access the electronic short loan service
- No need for printing facilities - printed texts are always portable and can be taken away, whereas, without access to appropriate printers the electronic resource does not have this capability and must be read on screen.

Those that preferred the electronic short loan service provided the following reasons for doing so:

- Speed of access - there is no queuing or photocopying involved
- Remote access - students can obtain short loan material remotely without having to visit the library
- Availability - the electronic short loan collection is available at any time, day or night, and unlike the printed resource there are not a limited number of copies.

It is likely, and was suggested by some respondents, that if certain of the issues mentioned above were addressed, more students would prefer the electronic short loan service to the printed service.

**Recommendations**

A number of recommendations for the BUILDER project team and the University of Birmingham emerged from the research. These involve continuing to build upon a new service, which is attractive and beneficial to University of Birmingham students, allowing fast, remote access day and night, to important learning materials. The recommendations to make the electronic short loan become a more valuable service are:

- Provision of more digitised learning materials covering a wider range of topics in more departments. Copyright agreements will need to be organised to make this a reality
- Investigate the scale of provision of computer hardware and software to facilitate access to electronic short loan materials
- Ensure that there is an adequate provision of printing facilities as this greatly enhances the value of the electronic short loan collection as many users prefer to print out relevant texts in favour of reading material on-screen.
1. Introduction

This report analyses the use of the pilot University of Birmingham electronic short loan service by students on the Managing Organisations course in the department of Commerce.

The pilot electronic short loan service was released in January 1999 as part of the BUILDER hybrid library project. During the evaluation period, it provided access electronically to journal articles, chapters from textbooks and complete textbooks that were in high demand, to support teaching and learning. The pilot service was developed in the areas of business and medicine and a limited selection of relevant texts in these fields were made available. The pilot electronic short loan service operated alongside the existing printed short loan service, which was available in the Main Library and in site libraries at the University of Birmingham.

The service provided access to a selection of short loan material via the World Wide Web at http://builder.bham.ac.uk/esl. Access can be gained from PCs which are located off-campus, at home or work, in addition to access via the University of Birmingham campus network. The service is available to staff and students at the University of Birmingham using password authentication. Electronic texts could be read on screen or printed out, provided that the appropriate printing facilities were available.

The service was publicised by the BUILDER project team in a number of ways including posters, fliers and via information provided by tutors and Information Services staff.

The electronic short loan service highlights some of the issues concerning the hybrid library, such as electronic delivery of information, copyright issues, user interface design and ways in which such services are used. As a result, evaluative research was undertaken to analyse the pilot electronic short loan service and to inform the future development of the service.

In March 1999, after two months of the pilot electronic short loan service being in operation, questionnaires were distributed in person to students studying the Managing Organisations module run by Dr Diana Sharpe from the department of Commerce. The questionnaire survey sought to examine student’s attitudes and usage of the pilot electronic short loan service developed by BUILDER. A total of 66 questionnaires were completed, although in some cases not all individual questions were completed. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.
2. Results

The following section presents the results of the questionnaire survey.

2.1 Frequency of use

Students were asked how often they had used the electronic short loan service. As Figure 1 shows, 36% (24) had never used the electronic short loan service. Of the 64% that had used the electronic short loan service, two thirds had used it between one and three times. Only two individuals (3%) had used the service eleven or more times.

![Figure 1. Frequency of use.](image_url)
2.2  Finding out about the electronic short loan service

Respondents were asked how they had initially found out about the electronic short loan service. They had the option of ticking more than one option, if they had heard about the service from more than one source. As Figure 2 shows, the majority of respondents had heard about the service from a tutor. A significant number (17) had heard about the service from a member of Information Services staff. Few respondents had heard about the service through other means.
Figure 2. Finding out about the electronic short loan service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of finding out</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browsing IS website</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browsing University website</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flier</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS staff</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other browsing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3  **Access points to the electronic short loan collection**

Respondents were asked about where they had accessed the electronic short loan collection from. Figure 3 shows that the most common access points were the computers in the Main Library at the University of Birmingham which accounted for 53% of the responses received.
Figure 3. Access points to the electronic short loan service

![Bar chart showing access points to the electronic short loan service. The main library computers have the highest number of users (27), followed by the Strathcona Cluster (8), the other departmental cluster (7), from work (1), home (7), and guild servers (1).]
2.4 Print versus electronic short loan

Respondents were asked whether they had ever used the printed short loan service. As Figure 4 shows, of the 56 responses received to this question, 54% (30) had used the printed short loan service and 46% (26) had not. It is interesting to note that there were more respondents who had not used the printed short loan service (26) than had not used the electronic short loan service (24) as detailed in section 2.1. It would be interesting to compare these figures with a department where short loan items were available only in printed formats.
2.4.1 Preference for printed or electronic short loan

Respondents were asked whether they preferred either the electronic short loan service or the printed service. The 30 respondents who had experience of using both services responded to this question. As shown in Figure 5, 60% (18) expressed a preference for the printed service and 37% (11) expressed a preference for the electronic short loan service. One respondent did not have a distinct preference for either service.

![Figure 5. Preference for electronic or printed short loan](image)

2.4.2 Reasons for preferring one type of service

Respondents were provided with the opportunity, through an open-ended question, to provide reasons for their preference for either service. Examples of the comments are provided below:
Preference for printed short loan collection
Reasons for preferring the printed short loan collection focused on the extent of coverage of the collection, gaining access to computers and ease of reading and portability, e.g.

“Generally easier to access. Only limited references on electronic short loan.”

“Difficult to get on computers.”

“So I can take it away.”

“You can keep it.”

“Easy to read and you can underline the main points.”

“Can read at your own pace.”

One respondent who preferred the printed short loan did so ‘only because there isn’t enough on electronic short loan’. Another respondent who ‘liked both’ services believed that the printed collection took less time to print / photocopy.

Preference for electronic short loan
Reasons for preferring the electronic short loan collection focused on ease of access i.e. being able to access materials at a distance and allowing simultaneous access for multiple users e.g.

“Quicker, no photocopying involved, easier to find stuff, no queuing etc.”

“Can access from home - convenient.”

“More permanent and always available.”

“It is very convenient. Books in short loan can often not be accessed.”

One respondent although preferring the electronic short loan service commented that it provided ‘easier access, but printing in the library takes far too long’.

One respondent, who did not express a preference commented:

“It depends what I’m looking for. I prefer electronic short loan when I don’t want to go to the library.”
2.5  Rating different aspects of the service

Respondents were asked to indicate from a range of choices how they rated the following three distinct aspects of the electronic short loan service:

- Ease of use
- Time taken to find text required
- Screen design

There were 35 responses to each of these questions.

2.5.1 Ease of use

Respondents were asked to choose a response which best reflected their rating of the electronic short loan service in terms of ease of use. As can be seen in Figure 6, 45% of respondents considered the ease of use to be good and 26% considered it to be OK. 17% rated the ease of use as excellent. Only 3% considered the ease of use to be poor.

![Figure 6. Ease of use](image)
2.5.2 Time taken to find text required

Respondents were asked to rate the database in terms of the time taken to find the text required. As Figure 7 shows, the time taken was rated as good by 37% (13) of the respondents. Only 9% (3) rated the time taken to find a particular text as poor.

Figure 7. Time taken to find text

- Excellent (20%)
- Good (37%)
- OK (17%)
- Fair (17%)
- Poor (9%)
2.5.3 Screen design

Respondents were asked to choose a rating for screen design. As Figure 8 shows, 43% (15) rated the screen design as good and 23% (8) rated it as OK. 14% (5) rated the screen design as excellent and 11% (4) and 9% (3) rated it as poor and fair respectively.

![Screen design chart](image.png)
2.6 Use of the service

Respondents were asked to select from a range of options which described best how they used the service; for example, whether they read the text on the screen or printed it out or whether they had found anything relevant to their study. Respondents could make more than one response. Figure 9 shows the responses to this question. Most users (24) had printed out the text, with a few (7) reading the text on the screen and making notes. Two responses were made in cases where the electronic short loan service had been scanned, but nothing relevant was discovered. One respondent had made an additional comment, mentioning that he or she:

“Scanned the text and printed out some of them.”

![Figure 9. Use of the service](image_url)
2.7 Additional comments

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to make additional comments about the electronic short loan service. Twelve respondents provided such comments.

One respondent commented that the service was:

“too slow.”

Some respondents referred to printing problems, e.g:

“It would be easier if there were more computers that you could actually print from. There were plenty you could view from, but it was difficult to print out.”

“When you print you only get one journal page on a sheet.”

“The printed fonts were too small.”

Two respondents referred to the limited coverage of the electronic short loan collection as an important factor in the value of the service to users:

“Should contain all the texts on a reading list then it would be more useful. At the moment limited use.”

“Very few texts compared to what we go through for the course.”

Two respondents had encountered problems with the service:

“It is temperamental and annoying.”

“There are some errors receiving information.”

One respondent viewed the service in a totally positive way, commenting:

“Fantastic idea. Expand, expand, expand!”
3. Conclusions

Just under two-thirds of the students surveyed had used the electronic short loan service. No precise pattern exists concerning the number of times that the service had been used, with students mostly reporting accessing the database between one and ten times. Most students preferred to locate relevant texts and print them out for use, although some did take notes from the screen. This choice may be dependent on the availability of printing facilities when accessing the service.

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- Investigate the scale of provision of computer hardware and software to facilitate access to electronic short loan materials

- Ensure that there is an adequate provision of printing facilities as this greatly enhances the value of the electronic short loan collection as many users prefer to print out relevant texts in favour of reading material on-screen.
Appendix
Electronic Short Loan

Your views about Electronic Short Loan are valuable to us - they will help develop the service for future years and for other departments in the University. Please spend a few minutes answering the following questions.

1. How often have you used Electronic Short Loan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>2-3 times</th>
<th>4-10 times</th>
<th>11 times or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marked</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How did you find out about Electronic Short Loan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor/Lecturer</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Information Services (IS) staff</th>
<th>Browsing the IS Web site</th>
<th>Browsing the University Web site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other browsing</td>
<td>Poster</td>
<td>Flier</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. From where have you accessed Electronic Short Loan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Library computers</th>
<th>Strathcona computer cluster</th>
<th>Another departmental computer cluster</th>
<th>Hall of residence</th>
<th>From place of work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Another Information Services site</td>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: ____________________________________________
4. Have you ever used the printed short loan service in Information Services sites?

Yes ☐ (If ‘Yes’ please go to 4.1) No ☐

4.1 Which do you prefer to use?

Printed short loan ☐ Electronic short loan ☐

Why do you prefer this service?

5. Please rate the following aspects of the Electronic Short Loan by ticking the box which best describes your opinion of each aspect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease of use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time taken to find text you wanted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. How did you use the service? (please tick any scenarios that apply to yourself)

Read the text from the computer screen and took notes ☐

Found the text and printed it out immediately ☐

Scanned the texts available and decided there was nothing relevant ☐

Other: ______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

7. Please make any other comments about Electronic Short Loan which you feel we need to take into account for future development of this service.

Thank you.