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# Interlending and document supply in the NHS: a North West case study

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to report on the interlending and document supply activity across the North West of England carried out by health libraries in the National Health Service (NHS). NHS libraries provide a service to NHS staff and students on clinical placement and provide access to the latest published evidence contained in specialist periodicals and textbooks.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were analysed over an extended period from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2015. These data are provided annually in the form of a statistical return and are collated regionally. Data were obtained by all library services for both document supply activity and inter-library loans.

**Findings** – During the period of the analysis, there has been a significant drop in activity for both document supply and inter-library loans. In 2005/2006, there were 45,147 articles supplied via document delivery networks, this had fallen to 8,642 in 2014/2015. Similarly, in 2005/2006, there were 5,627 inter-library loans supplied, this has also fallen to 3,732 in 2014/2015.

**Originality/value** – The observed drop in document supply and inter-library loans across the NHS North West occurred during the time of significant change in how NHS staff and students access the latest evidence. In 2005/2006, many NHS libraries were still investing in print journals and textbooks. Over the past 10 years, there has been a substantial increase in access to consortia purchased online journals in addition to a growth in the availability of open access content.

**Keywords** Trends, NHS, Document delivery, Resource sharing, Collaboration, Interlibrary lending

**Paper type** Case study

## Introduction

The National Health Service (NHS) in England provides free at the point of access healthcare to the population it serves, and is one of the largest employers in the world with a staff of over 1.6 million (NHS Choices, 2015). NHS library services provide access to information resources to NHS staff and students from Higher Education on clinical placement whilst training. NHS libraries are funded via a variety of income streams provided by Health Education England and topped up by local trust funding. These library services allow staff and students to access information to support education, training and evidence-based practice.

In the North West of England, NHS libraries come from a number of geographic regions based on previous NHS organisational boundaries. The areas covered include Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside and the Wirral, and for the purpose of this study, the Isle of Man. NHS and healthcare libraries from associated higher education partners can join The Library and Information for Health Network North West (LIHNN, 2015). LIHNN is a self-governing group of collaborative libraries and

works in partnership with the Health Care Libraries Unit (HCLU). HCLU's role is to lead, coordinate, develop and monitor North West NHS library and knowledge services. The unit is funded by Health Education North West.

NHS libraries spend a large amount of their non-pay budget purchasing specialist periodicals and textbooks to support the subject disciplines covering medicine, nursing and allied health. In 2005, these were predominantly print collections, but over the past ten years, there has been a move to purchasing online content both via consortia and local purchasing strategies.

## LIHNN – interlending and document supply

LIHNN is an organisation that fosters collaboration and mutual support across its network. One of the core activities of LIHNN is a collaborative interlending and document supply function that allows members to share resources across the region. All members of LIHNN have the option as part of their membership fee to take part in this scheme by allowing their collections to be submitted to the NHS North West Collaborative OPAC (NW OPAC) for textbooks and the LIHNN Union List of Journals.

The LIHNN Interlending and Document Supply Group is a coordinating committee that oversees the administration and regulation of matters concerning interlending and document supply such as copyright, the NW OPAC, the Union List, the email LIST SERV and the LIHNN Interlending and Document Supply Protocol which sets out rules and basic

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principles. The Protocol is an operational framework to which the members agree to adhere.

The NHS NW OPAC is a tool for interlending and sharing. The OPAC is available to access via the Internet ([www.nwhealthlibraries.nhs.uk/folio/](http://www.nwhealthlibraries.nhs.uk/folio/)) and is powered by OLIB provided by OCLC (UK) Ltd. The catalogue does not hold live dynamic data but is a repository of searchable holdings supplied twice per annum by each member service. Members can query the OPAC to ascertain which libraries hold the relevant copies and decide whether an interlending application can be made or progress to the next useful source such as the British Library.

The LIHNN Union List of Journals is a database hosted by Wirral Informatics Service, an NHS service provider. The database is accessible via the Internet but unlike the NW OPAC, the Union List database requires a username and password to gain access. Usernames are administered at library service level and one password is given to each member library. The database contains journals holding data provided by members, these data can be updated as and when required. Data quality and integrity is controlled by a Union List Editor who checks all uploaded data for consistency and conformity to the authority file.

The main difference between the OPAC and the Union List database is the ability of the requesting library to initiate a request from the database search results. The request comes from the database provider service in the form of an email output. A copy of the request is sent to both the supplying library and the requesting library and the database moderator. A further advantage of the database is to keep quantifiable data of how often the facility is used. Since June 2009, there have been over 17,000 requests made via the Union List requesting facility.

### From local consortia to the British Library

NHS libraries are associated with the strategic aims and objectives of their local organisations. Mainly, these organisations can be grouped into some broad categories and subject areas:

- acute hospitals such as District General Hospitals and Teaching Hospitals;
- specialist tertiary hospitals such as Children's Hospitals and Cancer Hospitals;
- mental health organisations;
- primary and community care organisations; and
- commissioning and management organisations.

As a result of this diversity of service, NHS Libraries can have quite different journal and textbook collections. NHS Libraries also have membership of a number of schemes that can be regional, cross regional and national. The North West LIHNN is an example of a regional membership scheme. There are also cross-regional schemes such as the Nursing Union List of Journals (NULJ) and the Psychiatric Libraries Collaborative Scheme (PLCS). Libraries may also be members of the British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC), The British Medical Association (BMA) and The Royal Society of Medicine (RSM).

A typical request for an article to be supplied by document supply will undergo a consistent checking protocol which will usually begin with the local regional scheme operated by LIHNN and progress through subject or institutional sources until supplied. Any requests that are not supplied by any of the membership schemes will eventually be requested from the BLDSC service.

## Methodology and data analysis

Data gathered in the North West of England by the HCLU as part of the annual statistical return were analysed over a 10-year period from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2015. NHS libraries are required by Health Education England to produce a return each year for the period beginning 1 April until 31 March the following year. This April to March reporting period is aligned to the NHS financial budgetary year in which funding for library services is allocated.

The annual statistical return gathers a wide range of finance and activity data including data on staffing budgets, income, expenditure, collection development, circulation figures, and interlending and document supply activity. Section 7 gathers data on interlending activity. This section is broken down into three sub-sections.

Section 7 – loans received from other libraries (non-photocopies):

7.1 Loans from libraries in local document delivery networks.

7.2 Loans received from the British Library.

7.3 Loans received from other libraries.

Textbook loans from other LIHNN libraries will be recorded in Question 7.1, and loans from libraries outside of NHS North West, including members from NULJ, PLCS, the BMA and the RSM, will be recorded in Question 7.3.

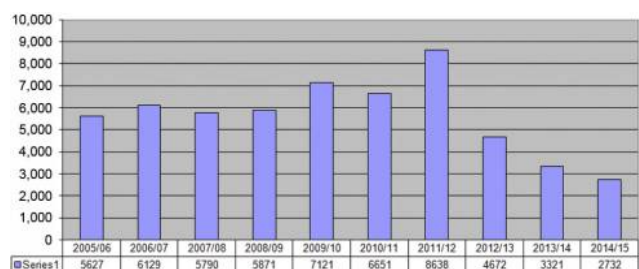
Inter-library loans supplied to NHS libraries in the North West of England reached a peak of 8,638 in 2011/2012 after the establishment of the North West OPAC service. However, there has since been a sharp decline in inter-library loans requested by member libraries over the past three years to a 10-year low of 2,732 loans in 2014/2015.

As the main and most cost-effective means of supplying loans between LIHNN member libraries, the interlending trends over the past 10 years mirror the profile seen in Figure 1. Contained within the overall figure of 8,638 loans in 2011/2012 were 7,371 loans supplied by other LIHNN libraries (Figure 2).

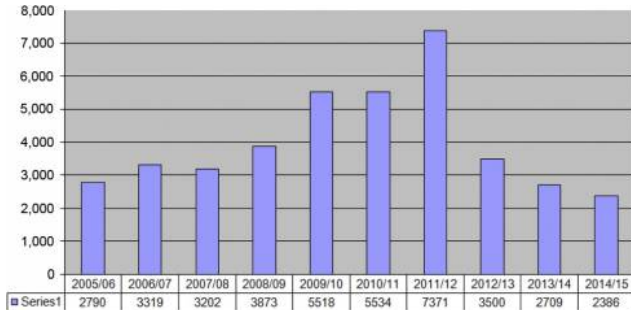
Figure 3 shows a profile that differs from Figures 1 and 2. Loans supplied by the British Library have been in steady decline over the 10-year period; we analysed the data dropping from 2045 in 2005/2006 to a low of 179 loans in 2014/2015.

Section 8 of the annual statistical return gathers data about document delivery activity. For the purpose of the return document delivery means the requesting and supply of photocopies, either in paper or electronic format, from a similar set of suppliers as we saw in Section 7.

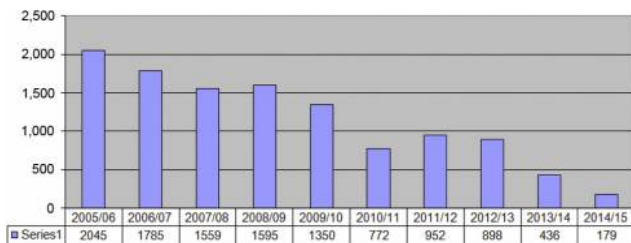
Figure 1 NHS North West interlending trends 2005-2015



**Figure 2** Inter-library loans supplied within LIHNN 2005/2006-2014/2015



**Figure 3** Inter-library loans supplied by the British Library 2005/2006-2014/2015



Section 8 – copies of articles supplied by other libraries:

8.1 Copies from libraries in local document delivery networks.

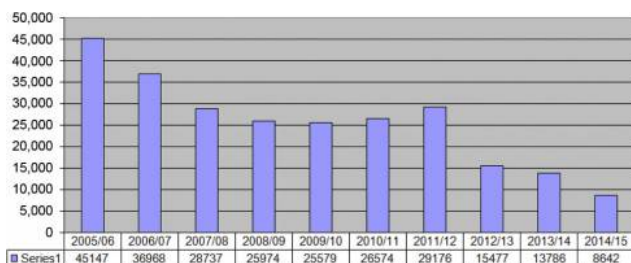
8.2 Copies received from the British library.

8.3 Copies received from other libraries (Figure 4).

When we analyse the document supply activity, we see a steady decline in the number of documents requested and supplied to LIHNN libraries. In 2005/2006, there were 45,157 articles supplied, this has dropped year on year to a low of 8,642 in 2014/2015. The only year that showed a slight increase from the previous year was 2011/2012 (Figure 5).

Similar to Figure 2, the most cost-effective method of obtaining photocopies of articles is within the LIHNN network. In 2005/2006, LIHNN libraries supplied 36,809 articles; this represented 81.5 per cent of all articles supplied that year. By 2014/2015, LIHNN libraries supplied 4,379 which represented only 50.6 per cent of the 8,642 articles requested across the region.

**Figure 4** North West document supply trends 2005/2006-2014/2015



**Figure 5** Documents supplied within LIHNN 2005/2006-2014/2015

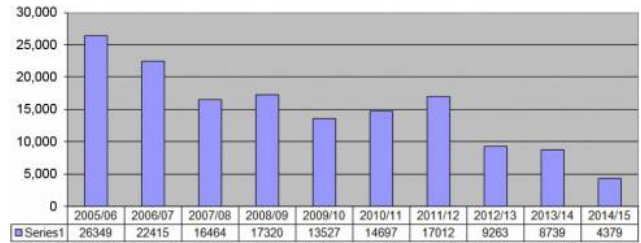


Figure 6 shows the number of documents being supplied by the British Library falling from 11,183 in 2005/2006 to a 10-year low of 1,255 in 2014/2015.

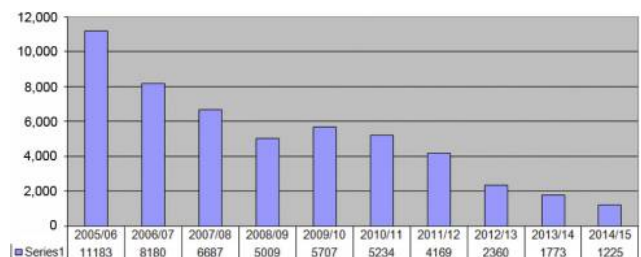
### Discussion/value

This paper continues the analysis from a case study in the NHS North West (Glover *et al.*, 2008) that first identified the downwards trend in interlending and document supply activity in the NHS. In this longer analysis, we need to consider a number of factors that may be contributing to the fall in interlending activity across member LIHNN libraries. These range from increased online access to eJournals and eBooks; the rising cost pressures on NHS budgets; the effect of open-access initiatives in Science, Technical and Medical publishing; and the rise in the popularity of point-of-care tools such as DynaMed and UpToDate.

The cost of an inter-library loan or document supply request has been established by most NHS library services; however, other than a study of access to orthopaedic journals (Tahim *et al.*, 2012), there has been little research published to establish a relationship between price and demand.

In the NHS, there has been a move towards collaborative purchasing at national, regional and local level of full-text collections. This has been partly driven by the need to achieve greater discounts through consortia purchasing power (England, 2013), and the need for the NHS to provide a “core content” offer for all NHS staff (Health Education England, 2014). The “core” offer includes a number of Abstracting and Indexing (A&I) databases, some of which are full text such as EBSCO’s Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health. These are supplemented by two journal collections, one from the BMJ Publishing Group and the other from ProQuest. The ProQuest Hospital Collection contains over 4,500 full-text journals (ProQuest, 2015). These journals are linked to the

**Figure 6** Documents supplied by the British Library 2005/2006-2014/2015





A&I databases via the WorldShare OCLC resource sharing product. These national consortia are topped up regionally and locally when NHS libraries purchase bundles of online journals from publishers and aggregators.

Access to open-access content in medical and biomedical sciences has resulted in a vast number of articles being made available to library patrons (Albert, 2006). In PubMed alone, the National Library of Medicine's access to Medline, there are now over 5 million free full-text articles ([www.pubmed.gov](http://www.pubmed.gov)) from a variety of access models including Green and Gold Open Access, free journal content and content made available post-embargo (Bjork *et al.*, 2009; Baich, 2012).

Taken together, NHS libraries now have access to a much larger knowledge base of articles when the consortia purchased content is added to the open-access articles. This increased access to content has been made more discoverable by database linking to full text using Open URL resolvers and the emergence of "Discovery" services such as EBSCO's Discovery Service (Calvert, 2015) and ProQuest's Summon (Silton, 2014).

Evidence-based practice in healthcare requires the clinicians to keep up-to-date with a large volume of data published in a variety of formats (Storie and Campbell, 2012). Point-of-care products have emerged onto the market that synthesise the primary research literature and provide an up-to-date evidence-based summary (Addison *et al.*, 2013). These point-of-care resources such as UpToDate produced by Wolters-Kluwer Health, and DynaMed, produced by EBSCO Information Services, are designed to enable the clinician to make a clinical decision without the need to request and read the primary published material be it from a journal article or textbook.

## Conclusion

In summary, interlending and document supply activity is falling and continues to fall as shown in the activity statistics reported by NHS library services in the North West of England. There are a variety of possible causes of this observed reduction in demand for the need to obtain information from other libraries. The improved access to online journals via consortia purchased collections and open access are identified as two major influences in the decline of demand for such services, although there has been little research conducted across NHS library services to examine the influence of cost/price on demand.

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## Further reading

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