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UAP: ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS TO INFORMATION IN THE BIOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL LIBRARIES

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Abstract: The philosophy behind UAP can be applied to all disciplines as the concept of universal availability is non-exclusive. Document delivery is one, although not the only, way to achieve UAP goals. Costs and system design are important but there are real barriers in the legal, political and technological fields. Much work needs to be done to improve professional attitudes to cooperation which is at the heart of document delivery.

Information is a product which knows no borders. The intention of this paper is to examine how access to information can be achieved in the context of Universal Availability of Publications through document delivery systems. Information takes many forms other than publications but this paper will concentrate on published documents at that is the remit for the UAP Programme Access can be achieved by purchase, exchange, gift or reference, all of which are relevant to the Programme's objectives, but interlibrary loan an document delivery will from the focus on this occasion.

Although the name of the Programme is self-explanatory in one sense, nevertheless it is necessary to take a careful look at what the Programme is trying to achieve in concrete terms. The Programme is concerned only with published material, so other types of literature are excluded from its remit. Essentially the tenets of the Programme are that it should be possible to make available.

any published document
any person in
any place at
any time in
any form necessary for that user to read the document

Because of its very wide scope the Programme touches on almost all aspects of

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library and information science including collection management, cataloguing, reader services, interlibrary loan, staff training and legal and political issues.

The philosophy behind the Programme is relevant to all branches of knowledge, all types of library and all categories of published document. However, each of these groups demonstrates particular problems with which the Programme is concerned and the subject field of biology and medicine is no exception. Information knows no boundaries and is essentially an international commodity. Therefore the UAP Programme is also international in scope. With the rapid growth of electronic publishing in various forms this international facet of information becomes even more transparent. A researcher can call up a text without even knowing where the original file was created. Therefore the whole chain of production, storage, distribution and use is international in character and all schemes to provide for the needs of users must take this element into account when they are being designed and funded. It is all very well having a basic aim such as worldwide availability but the problems which need to be overcome to achieve this must be faced realistically. It must be accepted that there are many such problems and not all of them are within the scope of the library profession to find solutions.

a) Costs

Document delivery is complex operation and many of the processes involved are often misunderstood and inadequately calculated¹. Although they may be fairly small in the context of a large library budget, and even less significant within a major pharmaceutical company, they can be prohibitive for small organisations or those with limited or no funds. In the case of international transactions the lack of hard currency for many libraries in developing countries is a real inhibitor to the flow of information.

b) The system - or lack of it

The various models for national interlending have been described in detail by the Programme several years ago². Although the models are designed for national and also international application, they can equally be used to design systems for subject-specialist libraries such as biological or medical libraries and, indeed, this has been done in some countries. The basic models are: centralised, on one central collection; limited decentralisation using a few major libraries, usually specialist ones; planned decentralisation, using a number of large libraries in a network; and unplanned decentralisation - the worst of all scenarios. Whichever systems is chosen, the most important thing is to have system of some kind!

c) Inadequate information on what is available

Bibliographic control and availability are inseparable concepts. Control means just that, not just listing everything in sight. Control really means being able to

identify a document and locate it. So the use of union catalogues as well as good bibliographies is essential. The biological/medical world is well equipped with both of these in many areas but there will be room for improvement both geographically and by specialist topic.

d) Political barriers

Political barriers are one of the most difficult for the library and information profession to live with as they contradict so much of what we have always stood for - freedom of information. This is a major problem between countries. As barriers in one part of the world come down, others seem to be erected with alarming rapidity. However, the political world, in its widest sense, is one of considerable importance for the application of UAP principles to biology and medicine. Intellectual priority, commercial confidentiality and ethical issues can all be areas where access to documents can cause problems. Some researchers may not wish their papers to be made readily available to others in the same field, - a common problem with high level technical research, yet this is one of the risks of publishing. Nevertheless, some authors try to restrict circulation of their papers. Commercial confidentiality is not just a matter of keeping what the company has discovered a secret: it can be as much to do with making sure nobody knows what documents the company wants to acquire. Careful analysis of document delivery requests could, and can, throw considerable light on the areas in which research is taking place. The third area, ethical consideration, is obviously important for topics such as genetic research, birth control, and other more complex issues. There is a real danger here of censorship in terms of libraries either being prohibited from requesting some documents or supplying particular institutions.

e) Legal constraints

Copyright is probably the most serious problem and this will become more acute as new forms of transmission are introduced. The likelihood of being able to supply copies of documents without either the permission of the copyright owner or payment of fees would appear to be dwindling as owners develop mechanisms for controlling access.

f) Technological barriers

Technology brings a variety of problems. Incompatibility of systems and software is one obvious difficulty and a lot of work has been done in standardisation for message structures to facilitate message transfer. A lot of work is being done by the IFLA Programme for Universal Dataflow and Telecommunication (UDT)³ on this issue. Another speaker will tell you more about work on Open System Interconnection (OSI).

g) Professional attitudes

Networks, systems, collections, bibliographies - these can all contribute to a good and efficient document delivery service but the essential element has to be professional attitudes to resources sharing of this kind. Although some librarians are quite enlightened, others still adopt a rather "I've got it so I'll keep it attitude". Resource sharing means just that - everyone putting something in to get something out. Nevertheless it must be accepted that document delivery really does make demands on the supplying library in terms of actual measurable resources. Naturally this is a different issue when commercial document suppliers are used but the majority of document delivery is still handled by one library for another.

h) User ignorance

What point in having a document delivery system if it is not used? In the end, the only reason we establish complex systems for document delivery (or anything else) is to serve the reader. So our primary task must be to educate the reader to know what is possible. This is often one of our worst failings.

So what does the UAP Programme do to improve matters? The IFLA Programme for UAP cannot, of itself, produce any real changes. All it can do is provide guidance and stimulus to the library community worldwide to improve the situation as far as possible. To this end the Programme has produced a number of documents which have had, and continue to have, a significant influence on thinking in this area. Amongst the more important contributions are:

The provision of an international interlibrary loan and document delivery form which is accepted in many libraries in the majority of countries.

The preparation of an internationally agreed code of practice for international interlibrary loan⁴.

A similar national code of practice which provides models on which national systems can be based. This includes a national standard system for collecting interlibrary loan statistics⁵.

Publication of a *Guide to centres of international lending and copying*⁶. This lists most countries of the world with contact points for international interlibrary loan, describes the national system and lists charges and conditions.

Proposals made to Unesco and the Conference of Directors of National Libraries for a voucher scheme to ease the problems of payment for international transactions⁷.

The publication of a model handbook for training staff in interlibrary loan⁸, setting up and managing interlibrary loan procedures and a critical analysis of the work involved to improve work flows.

The preparation of training modules for interlibrary loan⁹ which can be used in any environment from library school, through major general libraries to small remote locations where distance learning is the only method of instruction.

The preparation of performance measures for interlibrary loan and document delivery systems which can be used as criteria for evaluating any system¹⁰.

The Programme has also sought to extent understanding of the problems in this area by encouraging debate about them through organising several conferences on an international basis, publishing the papers^{11,12,13} and speaking and teaching at many others.

Although UAP is a philosophy, it is also a concept which can expressed in real actions and achieve improvements which can be measured. As technology changes, world markets develop and the gap between those who have information and those who need it grows, so will the importance of UAP. With changing political patterns in the world the need for wide access to information will become crucial. Many of the problems and issues outlined are the ones which UAP will need to address. With limited resources such issues as electronic publishing, standard methods of document delivery and payment, wider availability of information on holdings and greater awareness of the importance of availability in political and economic circles will be its major foci.

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