

External access to Edinburgh University Library

In order to address the University's widening access agenda, the Library has been examining ways in which access can be increased for those external to the University. This issue was last examined by the Registers Sub-Committee in 2001-2002. Since then, however, a number of factors have changed, and these are now being brought to the attention of Library Committee. The full report written by Registers Sub-Committee is available at <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/about/registers.pdf> This report highlights the already high use of EUL by external users. At the moment, the Library permits almost anyone to join the Library, but charges for access, whether this be borrowing or consultation use, except where special circumstances prevail.

The University as a whole is now more interested in ensuring that it widens access. The Library can contribute to this agenda by permitting access to a wider range of external users than previously. This will also help with the University's agenda on continuing professional development and distance education. At the same time it is clear that external funding bodies will look more sympathetically on organisations which permit wider access to their resources. SCURL (the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries) is looking to develop its own proposals, which are likely to find favour with bodies such as SHEFC, while some project proposals are tied to making their output more widely available.

While the Library wishes to contribute where it can to the widening access agenda, it is clear that any sudden increase in access would be deleterious to the service provided to the staff and students of the University. What the Library wishes to propose is a programme of looking at different groups in detail to examine ways in which access to the Library may be extended to external groups (this may not always mean physical access), the benefits to the University community, and the costs and resource requirements of extending access to each group. Groups which may be considered particularly important are:

- local schoolchildren, where increasing access may bring benefits to the University of increasing local recruitment;
- extending electronic access to the local research community, where licenses can be negotiated to include this group;
- and groups where reciprocal access may benefit University of Edinburgh users.

As work is carried out on each group, this will be brought to Library Committee for their advice. This paper is intended both to set out this policy, and to bring 2 particular reciprocal schemes, which the Library now proposes to join, to the attention of the Committee.

SCONUL Research Extra

This is a UK wide reciprocal scheme, just being set up, which will enable researchers travelling to other institutions to have borrowing privileges in the institution they are visiting. About 50% of SCONUL membership, including about 50% of Curl or Russell Group libraries, have expressed interest in joining the scheme. Of those libraries which have actually committed to join the scheme, Glasgow, Napier, RGU, RSAMD, Stirling are in Scotland. This scheme does not normally allow access to IT facilities in the guest institution. Users of the scheme must be registered with their home library, be in possession of a current library card, and be in good standing with their home library. There are a number of detailed operating principles to which users of the scheme must adhere.

It is known that the Research Support Libraries Group, which is due to report in April 2003, is in favour of this scheme. Indeed it is likely that the current "Access" arrangements whereby universities get funded for permitting access to researchers from other institutions is likely to be extended with extra funding available to those who extend borrowing privileges through this scheme. Organisations

who do not join this new scheme could lose out doubly, because there is likely to be a new “census” of users to indicate which libraries should receive the continued access funding. This is important to Edinburgh University Library, because we currently receive an annual payment of £175k through this source.

The benefits here are primarily to researchers in Edinburgh, who will be able to use other research libraries; but there are also benefits to the Library, in the receipt of continued or enhanced access funding. It is proposed to join this scheme as soon as possible.

UK Libraries Plus

UK Libraries Plus is a co-operative venture between higher education libraries. It enables part-time, distance, and placement students to borrow material from other libraries. In addition, there is a provision for full-time students and for staff to use other libraries on a reference only basis. The host library may restrict the range of materials that can be borrowed (e.g. audio-visual or short loan material). UK Libraries Plus does not normally allow access to computer facilities: this includes access to electronic journals and databases to which the host library subscribes. All HE libraries operate on the basis that the home library should provide training in the use of library services. There is a set of detailed operating principles to which users of the scheme must adhere.

Eleven Scottish institutions are already in membership of UKLP. This is clearly riskier for the University of Edinburgh than SCONUL Research Extra, because there is less clear benefit to the University, because there are perhaps fewer part-time, distance education and placement students at Edinburgh than at some other universities. There is concern about the use which students from other local HEIs (all of whom are already members) would make of Edinburgh University Library, and that EUL would be the net provider of service. These HEIs have been contacted, and it seems likely that they will limit the use of Edinburgh University Library by their students because each potential user of the scheme will have to approach their home library to have their application form validated, and each user who uses EUL rather than their home library will reduce their case for resource allocation within their own organisation.

There are issues to do with the sites which visiting students might want to use. Only the Main Library and the Law Library have access controls, but it is likely that visiting students would primarily wish to use the Main Library—they can, of course, already use the other non-controlled libraries at the moment without any challenge. Both schemes may encourage greater use of the Science Libraries, which currently have very little use by external users. Participation in this scheme would gain credit in political terms—but there are costs in the higher use of EUL by others.

The University of Leeds provides us with a case study from an institution similar to Edinburgh. They joined the scheme in September 2002, and in the 10-week period after this they registered 17 part-time students from other universities as borrowers and 19 full-time students as reference readers; while they authorised 73 University of Leeds users to join other libraries as borrowers, and 35 as reference-only. These numbers are not huge, and could be absorbed by Edinburgh University Library.

It is proposed that we join UKLP for one year in the first instance (academic year 2003-2004) and monitor use, both incoming and outgoing; before making a final decision. Monitoring would include an analysis of use by the local HEIs in particular. It is proposed to join this scheme from August 2003.

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