



EIFL Copyright and Libraries Programme

EIFL Information Note Inter-library Document Supply

'Just as no library can be self-sufficient in meeting all the information needs of its users, so no country can be self-sufficient'. International Resource Sharing and Document Delivery: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure, IFLA

What is inter-library document supply?

Inter-library document supply (ILDS) or 'document delivery' is a managed system of cooperation between libraries that enables an individual end user to access specific resources that are not otherwise available to them.

Examples of resources include books and book chapters, journals and journal articles, conference proceedings, dissertations and technical reports. They may be published or unpublished; in-print or out-of-print; in any format such as paper, microform or electronic.

The item can be returnable, such as a printed book (this is known as inter-library loan), or it can be non-returnable e.g. a copy of an article.

Inter-library requests are made on a non-commercial basis taking into account any copyright or licensing conditions. International requests are made when the item is not available nationally.

Inter-library document supply is a well established service provided by libraries in every country. While systems of administration and ways of requesting and receiving the material have evolved with technology, the fundamental purpose remains the same – to serve the information needs of library users.

Why is inter-library document supply important?

No institution, no matter how well resourced, has every item a person using the library might need. While each library has a collection development policy to support the teaching and research activities of the institution or to meet local community needs, people often need other resources that the library doesn't have or that are out of scope for the library's collection. This material is obtained through the system of inter-library document supply.

Imagine the alternative: end users would be limited to the resources in libraries they could visit, or to which they are personally affiliated.



Quality research and scholarship requires access to a wide range of research and scholarly materials. For research libraries in particular, document supply is an essential service that enables researchers to continue their research and teaching.

New opportunities for search and resource discovery enabled by the internet, as well as international projects and multidisciplinary collaborations, are driving demand for access to materials held in other libraries, including in other countries.

“In the US, 95% of information requests can be satisfied locally. For the other 5% that must be got internationally, the value of the material to US scholars is very high. That one piece of information from Zimbabwe or Uzbekistan can be hugely significant for the researcher.” Peter Bae, Circulation Services Director, Princeton University Library

How does inter-library document supply work?

The process usually starts when the individual student or researcher ascertains that the item they are looking for is not available in their ‘home library’. Their ‘home library’ is the library of the institution to which they are affiliated such as a university, college or local public library.

The user requests their library obtain it for them by completing a form with the details of the item, etc. The form may include a declaration stating that the request complies with copyright law. In some cases, a processing or a copyright fee may have to be paid.

Then the search for the item begins. If it is not available from another library within the national library network, the search may be broadened to libraries outside the country. Once located, the supply library provides the requesting library with the item, that is sent on to the individual who asked for it.

It is provided to the end user subject to terms and conditions of the service such as copyright, licensing or other usage conditions e.g. a book borrowed from another library might be for reference only, delivery of an article might be on paper or electronically.

Larger university or research libraries may employ dedicated inter-library document supply librarians.

Automated library systems contain a special inter-library loans module to manage process, and to keep track of requests. In some systems, an item that is



requested more than a certain number of times, and is therefore in high demand by library users, can be set to automatically trigger a purchase request in the acquisitions module.

Examples of document delivery services in two major research libraries:

Bodleian Libraries University of Oxford (UK) Interlibrary loans and document supply - <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/using/ill>

Princeton University Library (US). Interlibrary Loan (ILL) - <https://library.princeton.edu/services/interlibrary-services>

How does copyright law affect document supply?

Document supply can involve several activities regulated by copyright law. For example, the making of a copy is an act of reproduction. The sending of a copy to another library (and on to the end user) may involve the right of distribution for paper copies or the right of communication to the public for electronic documents. The sending and receiving of documents by libraries in different countries may involve export/import provisions.

According to the WIPO Study on Copyright Limitations and Exceptions for Libraries and Archives¹, just 11% of countries have a specific exception for document supply in their national law, and almost no countries have addressed the issue of cross-border transfer of content².

EIFL has documented many examples of inter-library requests denied due to copyright or licensing restrictions, even for material that is long out of print and not available elsewhere in the country.

That is why EIFL and our partners are advocating at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) – the main body that sets international copyright policy - for a copyright exception to support international inter-library document delivery.

While publisher initiatives to license the direct delivery of journal articles to end users through pay-per-view and article rental models can be helpful, for

¹ http://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=306216

² Important note: in addition to a specific exception, document supply may be permitted in other ways e.g. through a flexible exception such as fair use/fair dealing, case law, or related law. For example, U.S. libraries routinely engage in cross-border document delivery under both fair use and the specific exception for document delivery by libraries, 17 USC 108(d).



example, for those not affiliated to an academic library, for many others, the cost, method of payment or mode of access may not be suitable.

Importantly, a publisher can license only the material for which they hold the rights. There must be a legal way to access the vast quantities of other material in libraries and archives for which no licence is available.

A copyright exception for cross-border inter-library document supply is necessary as the backbone for efficient access to resources in other libraries for education and research.

Further reading

Association of Research Libraries. Report of the Task Force on International Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Practices (2011)

<http://publications.arl.org/rli275>

EIFL Core library exceptions checklist. Does your copyright law support library activities and services? (2016)

<http://www.eifl.net/news/rate-my-copyright-law-how-well-does-your-law-support-libraries>

IFLA. International Resource Sharing and Document Delivery: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure (2009)

<http://www.ifla.org/publications/international-resource-sharing-and-document-delivery-principles-and-guidelines-for-proc>

The internet is global - but copyright exceptions stop at the border. Why we need an international treaty for cross-border access to knowledge (2016)

<http://www.eifl.net/news/new-resource-cross-border-access-knowledge>

Licensed to fail. How licensing ended 'established and respected' international document supply service (2016)

<http://www.eifl.net/blogs/licensed-fail>

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