

Licensed to fail

HOW LICENSING CAN DECREASE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

EIFL investigates how licensing ended international non-commercial document supply at one of the world's largest research libraries

In January 2012, the British Library, one of the world's largest research libraries, replaced its copyright-based international document supply service with a publisher-approved licensing arrangement, the International Non-Commercial Document supply service, to protect the Library from claims of copyright infringement.

On 1 July 2016, the British Library terminated the service due to a significant decline in requests. Data obtained by EIFL under Freedom of Information requests document the reasons behind the sharp decline in demand and shows that the impact on access to information has been dramatic. The demise of the British Library service illustrates that international document delivery, a vital service in meeting the particular information needs of individual researchers, students and scholars, should be regulated by copyright law, not by licences.

Inter-library document supply is a managed system of resource-sharing between libraries that enables an end user to access specific resources that are not otherwise available to them. Requests are made on a non-commercial basis taking into account any copyright or licensing conditions. International requests are made when the material is not available locally.

“We did try the new British Library service a couple of times when nobody else on earth had what we needed. But because of the enormous increase in prices, we dare not even look at the website anymore.” **Library of the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences**

“In 2012, a patron at Columbia University requested two pages from an early twentieth century literary journal found only at the British Library. Although the Library had the journal, it was not allowed to send the pages. The patron couldn't comprehend the refusal.” **Peter Bae, former Head of Delivery Services, Columbia University**

Quality research requires access to a broad range of research materials. World-class research requires an information infrastructure that supports easy access to international research results. For researchers, lack of access due to copyright or licensing restrictions means missed opportunities and delayed discoveries. For policy-makers, it represents a policy failure.

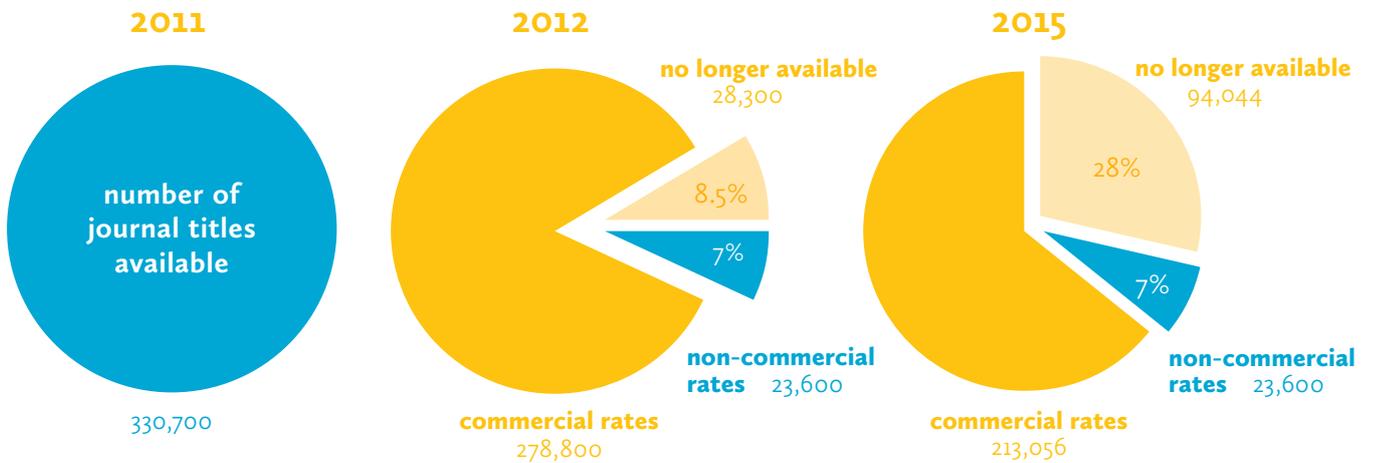
According to the WIPO Study on Copyright Limitations and Exceptions for Libraries and Archives, just 11% of countries have an exception for document supply in their national law, and almost no countries have addressed the issue of cross-border transfer of content.

This is why a copyright exception to support international inter-library document delivery is needed. Now.

For more information www.eifl.net/blogs/how-licensing-can-decrease-access-information

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In December 2011, the British Library ceased its copyright-based international document supply service. It was replaced with a publisher-approved licensing arrangement. The impact on access to knowledge was dramatic...



What happened to the more than 152,000 expected requests in 2012-15?

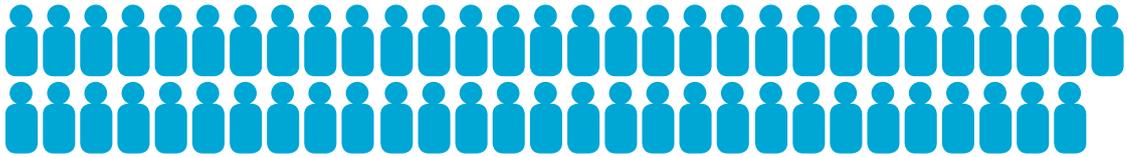


In 2011, under the copyright-based service, no requests for documents were refused on copyright grounds

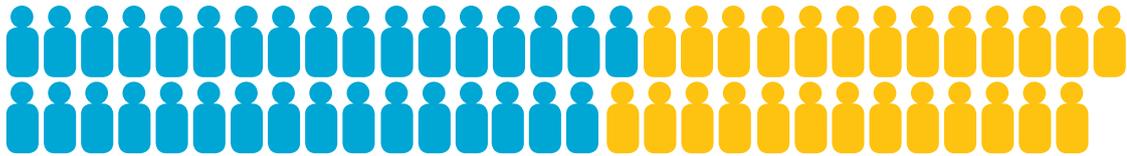


With its multilingual collections covering every subject, the British Library is used by libraries in many countries

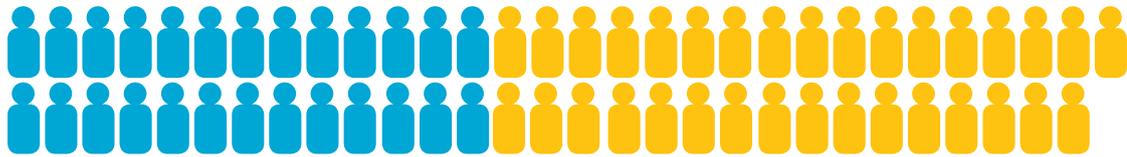
2011 59 countries served



2014 33 countries served 26 fewer countries served

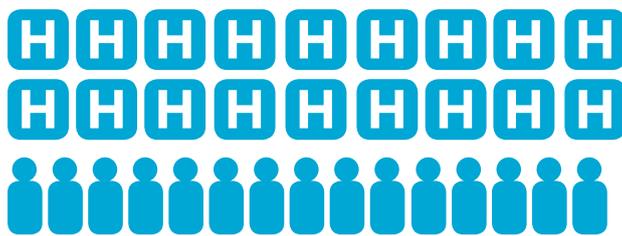


2015 26 countries served 33 fewer countries served

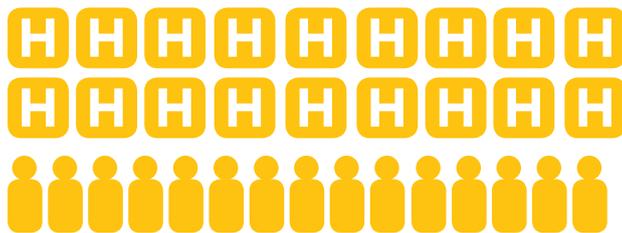


The health-care sector is heavily reliant on access to specialist knowledge

2011 1,775 requests supplied to hospitals in 15 countries



2012 0 requests supplied to hospitals



2013-15 100 requests supplied to hospitals in 4 countries

