

Evaluating Awareness of Information Resources at Partner Colleges of the University of Teesside

This paper reports on our experience of evaluating the role of University of Teesside's Library & Information Services (L&IS) in supporting University students based at 7 local partner colleges, including a specialist art college. The arrangement with partner colleges is an important one for the University (QAA, 2001, paras 25-30)

In L&IS's Mission, Value and Aims statement (University of Teesside, 2005a), one of our stated aims is: "high quality services which are well used and support the needs of students and staff". We wished to ensure that this aim was achieved for students whose experience of HE may be significantly different from that of students based on-campus.

While University students and staff at partner colleges are expected to use their college libraries for their basic course texts, journals and essential background reading, they are also entitled to become full borrowers at the University Learning Resource Centre (LRC), as a supplement to the service available from the college libraries.

The arrangement at the specialist local art college, Cleveland College of Art and Design (CCAD) is of particular note. The Learning Resources Reciprocal Agreement dates from the 1970's; the scheme now includes access to electronic resources. In the most recent QAA subject review in art and design, the co-operative arrangements were praised: "The combined library and learning centre resources, supported by the College and the University, provide an impressive overall level of service to students and staff" (QAA, 2000)

Literature

A survey of the literature suggested several areas for exploration:

Equality of Experience

Academic franchising has been in place in many institutions since the early 1990s (Arnold, 2002). Initially there were concerns about library provision for such courses, and whether or not information needs could be met through the resources of a smaller college library (Goodall, 1994, 1996; Goodall and Brophy, 1997; Rawlinson, Frost and Walsh, 1996). More recently, universities such as De Montfort have expressed more confidence that the stability of the collaborations between the university and the partner colleges have meant that problems have now been largely worked through (Arnold, 2002).

Role of Internet

In the early days of the Internet, it was felt that internet access would not compensate for students studying in FE colleges not having easy access to University level resources (Rawlinson, Frost and Walsh, 1996). It will be interesting to consider if this is still the case.

Role of Other Libraries

The Libraries Access Sunderland scheme has been shown to have positive benefits in terms of enhanced support for lifelong learning (Curry and Hall, 2000). Other studies have found that respondents are more likely to use public libraries than other academic libraries (Crawford, 2002, Hull, 2000 and Mynott et al, 2001).

Distance

The geographic location of a library and its customers is an important issue, but little has been written on the *critical* distance between the two. Library visits by a sample of professionals using special libraries was found by Griffiths and King (1993) to drop off significantly as time spent travelling increases.

Research Questions

After considering the literature, we decided to investigate whether students based at partner colleges found their access to the University LRC appropriate. We were particularly interested in answers to the following:

Did the students use the (physical) University LRC?

If not, what were the reasons for their lack of use? Were these reasons beyond our control?

If not, what other sources have they used instead, as a supplement to their college libraries?

Study 1

This questionnaire study in February 2003 considered the experience of students on HE programmes at Cleveland College of Art and Design (CCAD). It followed on from a pilot study which discovered that usage of the University LRC by students from the College was lower than that of public libraries. (Porritt, 2001).

Sample

The total population of HE students at CCAD in 2002/3 was 432 students. There were 248 completed questionnaires returned, with an overall response rate of 57%.

Demographics

Sex: 67 males (27%) and 181 females (73%).

Age: The majority of respondents (55%) were in the range 18-21. 24% were 22-30; 10% 31-40; 41-50 7%; 51-65 3% and 65+ 0.8%.

Mode of study: 89% were full-time; 10% part-time.

Employment: The majority (58%) were not employed, with 32% employed between 1 and 18 hours, and 10% employed more than 18 hours.

PC ownership: 75% had access to a PC where they lived, with 76% of these respondents having access to the internet. Overall, 58% of the sample had access to the internet where they lived

Methods

The method of data collection was a questionnaire. Qualitative data has been gathered from open-ended questions. Testing of the data was restricted to non-parametric tests: frequencies, cross-tabulations and chi square.

Findings

Did they use the University LRC?

Overall 32% (78) of respondents use the LRC, with 68% (169) not.

Association with Other Factors

Table I: Distance, Programme and Site

Programme	Site based at	Distance to University LRC	% use University LRC	Overall % of users of University LRC by site
BA Fine Art	Burlam Road	1.7 miles	49%	44%
BA Photography	Burlam Road	1.7 miles	35%	44%
BA Entertainment Crafts	Hartlepool	9 miles	33%	28%
HND Fashion	Green Lane	2 miles	25%	18%
BA Textiles	Hartlepool	9 miles	24%	28%
HND Media	Green Lane	2 miles	20%	18%
HND Graphics	Green Lane	2 miles	10%	18%

The relationship between the student's site and use of the University LRC was found to be statistically significant (Pearson Chi Square: $df=3$; $p=0.0001$). This was closely related to the student's programme, as Fine Art and Photography are both taught at Burlam Road, which is the

closest site to the University. Those on degree programmes are more likely to use the University LRC, with the slight exception of BA Textiles.

Year of study

The relationship between year of study and use of the University library was found to be statistically significant (Pearson Chi Square: df=6; p=0.0001), with 3rd years more likely to use the University LRC.

Induction

- 170 (68%) had attended a formal induction session at the University LRC
- 77 (31%) had not

Only 10 of the 78 respondents who stated that they *used* the University LRC had *not* attended an induction.

The association between attendance at induction and the subsequent use of the University LRC was found to be statistically significant (Pearson Chi Square: df=2; p=0.0001)

Table II: Reasons for not using University LRC (203 respondents)

Reason	Number
Distance to travel	46
Needs met by CCAD LRC	39
Need to use University LRC not felt	26
Individual predicts use of University LRC	24
Negative reasons	20
Enrolment problems	16
Time	10
Local libraries used in preference to University LRC	9
Inconvenience	6
Parking	5
Unsure of location of University LRC	2

Distance to travel

39 of the 46 responses in this category came from Hartlepool-based students demonstrating the problem of travel for students, as many of these students live north of the town, increasing the distance to Teesside.

- "It's an hour away on the bus!"*
"Too far to travel from Newcastle"

Needs met by CCAD LRC

39 responses fall into this category.

- "All the books and equipment I have needed so far I have used at CCAD"*
"...it's easy to stay in college and find what I need"

Need not felt / Individual predicts use

There were 26 responses in the category of need not felt.

- "I feel that I don't need to"*

Responses were often qualified, and so the division between this category and the category for predicted use (24 responses) is not clear cut.

- "Haven't needed to yet. Will for dissertation."*

A cross tabulation of responses with year of study reveals a decline in this sentiment as students progress through their programme.

- "Not got round to it, but will use in future"*

14 of the responses combined *not felt the need and predict I will use it in future.*

Negative reasons

Some of the reasons given for not using the University LRC were negative (20 responses):

"Worry of having to pay fines"

"Scared to"

Use of public libraries

Overall, 241 respondents answered this question, with 163 (66%) using other libraries. This is about twice the number of respondents using the University LRC. 54 respondents used both the University LRC and other libraries.

90 of the 163 respondents used other libraries to extend the range of resources that they had access to.

"To get a range of books- can't find everything I need at CCAD"

"Looking at as many resources as possible"

Both of the LRCs at CCAD are specialised art and design libraries and do not have an extensive general book stock. It is interesting that the choice for general materials was a public library rather than the University LRC.

51 (31%) used their local public library for convenience/location.

"It's close to home"

"York College. Doing a course there so it's convenient and they have other selections"

Location is clearly highly important. It can be seen that some students do not perceive the value of a visit to the University LRC *above* that of a public library.

Summary

Key findings of this survey were:

- The location of libraries is of great importance.
- 72% of those with home internet access did not use the *physical* University LRC.
- Attendance at induction influences whether the University LRC is used.
- Year of study and University LRC use are associated
- Local libraries were used in preference to the University library

Study 2

A second questionnaire survey in November-December 2003 investigated the perceptions of students at 4 different colleges: Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland. In order to achieve the widest possible sample, we asked college staff to distribute the questionnaires. This method gave us the opportunity of collecting data from a difficult to reach population. 314 questionnaires were returned. It was difficult to measure the response rate because of the changing nature of the user population.

Demographics of the sample

Sex: Respondents were 50% male and 50% female.

Age: The most common age of respondents was in the range 31-40 years. The age range of the sample was 18-21 years 23%; 22-30 years 20%; 31-40 years 27%; 41-50 years 21%; 51-65 years 7%, and 0.3% over 65 years.

College: 96 respondents were from Hartlepool, 16 from Redcar and Cleveland, 17 from Bishop Auckland and 184 from Darlington.

Mode of study: 86% were part-time; 14% full-time.

Employment: 88% of the respondents were employed above 18 hours per week; 6% employed less than 18 hours per week, and 5% not employed.

PC ownership: 92% of respondents had access to a home PC, with 84% having home internet access.

Findings

Did they use the University LRC?

The option to use the University was felt to be important by 37% of respondents. But 74% of those who agreed with the statement did not actually use the University LRC.

Moreover, only 9% of surveyed students said that they used the University LRC, compared with 58% who said they used their college LRC.

Association with other factors:

Induction & use of University LRC. For this sample the relationship between induction and use of the University LRC was found to be statistically significant (Pearson Chi Square: df=4; p=0.000)

College based at: Most are Darlington students, which is actually further away than Hartlepool or Redcar

Table III: Programme and Use of University LRC

Programme	College	Distance to University LRC	% of sample use University LRC	Overall % of users of University LRC by college
DMS	Hartlepool	9	14%	5%
UCPD IT	Hartlepool	9	10%	5%
CMI Strategic Management	Darlington	15	21%	10%
BA English	Darlington	15	83%	10%
CMI Management Diploma Level 4	Darlington	15	3%	10%
UCAPD Basic Skills	Darlington	15	9%	10%
HND Hospitality Management	Darlington	15	21%	10%
HND Journalism	Darlington	15	15%	10%
FdA Early Years	Darlington	15	16%	10%
FdA Early Years	Redcar	9	19%	19%

It was not possible to discern any association with the subject studied in this small sample of students.

Year of study: Unlike in Study 1, later years of study are less likely to use the University LRC. Findings show that more first year students visit the LRC than other years of study.

Table IV: Reasons for lack of use of University LRC (212 respondents)

Reason	Number
Distance	71
Lack of identification with the University	40
Not aware of entitlement	36
Time	26
No need	19
Local libraries used	4

Distance was the most common response, given by 71 (33%) of the respondents.

Table V: College and Distance Response

College	Distance in miles	No of respondents	% of sample from that college
Hartlepool	9	19	20%
Redcar	9	5	31%
Bishop Auckland	23	7	41%
Darlington	15	40	22%

"My course is in Darlington so I'm never in Boro to use it"

40 (19%) responses indicated a **lack of identification** with the University:

"I do not go there for learning, just get bills from there"

"I don't feel like I am a student there because I lecture at Darlington"

36 (17%) respondents were **not aware** of their entitlement.

"Did not know it was available"

Time was a factor mentioned by 26 (12%) respondents:

"Work commitments - not enough time"

19 (9%) respondents felt that they **did not need to use** the University LRC:

"Have purchased relevant books and use the internet at home"

What else did they use instead?

The question *"If you don't use libraries, which other information resources do you use?"* was answered by 162 respondents.

The most frequent response was use of the internet (145 respondents, 90% of those who answered this question)

"I have access to PC at work and home"

28 (17%) of the respondents had access to appropriate information resources in their workplaces.

"Work based sources: information that cannot be gained at college"

"Have access to learning resources at employers"

32 (20%) purchased their own books.

Use of public libraries

Although only 5 respondents gave the use of other local libraries as a reason why they hadn't used the University LRC, local public libraries were used by 47% of respondents in connection with their studies, presumably as a supplement to academic library use.

Summary

The key findings of this study were:

- the lack of use of the University LRC
- high reliance on and availability of internet access.

Study 3

Staff interviews

A further source of data was semi-structured interviews with 7 librarians at partner colleges and with 19 University L&IS staff. The staff also responded to a list of attitudes statements on particular issues.

Findings

Did the students use the University LRC?

Staff placed a higher value on access to the University LRC than the students did - 88% either agreed or totally agreed with "I'm sure that the university LRC is a very valuable resource for partnership students". However, since they knew that the interviewers were from the University, they may not have felt free to give a more critical response.

Staff found it very difficult to answer whether the students accessed the University LRC. University staff had very little experience of knowingly dealing with partnership students:

*"I could never say that I know for definite I've dealt with a partnership student"
"I may well have dealt with them without knowing who they were"
"I only see them at induction, if I'm honest. I seldom see them afterwards. I don't know whether they actually use the place, or if they ever return"*

Lack of identification was also an issue for several of the college librarians, as the college library cards did not indicate the student's course. Moreover, some librarians were uncertain which programmes were franchised:

"I don't know which are the Teesside courses"

Reasons for lack of use of the University LRC

This lack of experience meant that staff were reluctant to identify student issues:

"I don't feel that I have a knowledge of them, of what they're like to judge that properly"

Distance

Both University LRC and college library staff questioned whether students would make the effort to travel to use the University LRC.

"Many students are from Hartlepool, or the area surrounding it, and so using the University of Teesside LRC is not convenient for them."

"Students based at Bishop Auckland wouldn't trek back and forth to Middlesbrough."

Induction

Students' induction to university resources was dependent upon their tutor's keenness:

"It's tended to be done ad-hoc and it's just the lecturers contacting"

"The lecturers contact me and say I want to bring some fabrication and welding students say, or some chemical engineering students over. And if possible ...It is very ad hoc though"

Size of LRC

Several college librarians felt that students welcomed a less impersonal library:

"I see the students on a day-to-day basis"

"On a one-to-one basis the LRC staff help the students a lot more as it is a smaller environment."

Unclear role of University LRC

Staff were not always clear on what the University LRC's back-up role meant:

"I think there are areas of uncertainty as to exactly what we would expect the college to provide in terms of learning resources. What we're providing as a back-up and what are the essential elements?"

"There isn't a clear line to say that you should do this and we should do that".

What else do they use instead?

Staff felt that it was the off-campus services which should be promoted with the partnership students:

"It'll need to be stressed the things they can get externally. So they don't feel that just because they live too far away to come in that means we're of no use to them."

Conclusions

Overall, students did not use the University LRC. However, usage was linked to induction. Emphasising the benefit of using the University LRC may increase usage.

The main reason for the lack of use was distance to travel which was a key factor for both questionnaire surveys, regardless of the mode of study, employment status and age of the respondents. It also featured in Study 3. The relationship between the geographic location of a library and its customers may seem obvious, but it appears that even relatively small distances can form a barrier.

Time was found to be less of a factor in Study 1 where the students were full-time and not employed, and more of a factor in Study 2 where students were part-time and employed.

Lack of awareness of entitlement featured as a factor in Study 2, but not with Study 1. This could be because there is a more established arrangement in place with CCAD, indicating there is scope for awareness raising with the other partner colleges.

The students used the internet as an alternative to their college libraries. They also used public libraries.

Implications

The studies indicate that many students will not wish to visit a University LRC but would be able to access resources off-campus. At Teesside, since the surveys, this recognition led to an expansion of web-based provision including a new section of the University L&IS web site aimed particularly at partnership students, incorporating a detailed factsheet and tutorials for electronic resources (University of Teesside, 2005b and 2005c).

An increased use of off-campus electronic resources also has implications for staff training and support. At Teesside, this resulted in a staff development day for college librarians in which they were introduced to University-funded online databases. Positive comments were received: *"I feel we are now working 'as a team'"*.

There is also the need to monitor usage of these electronic resources.

The confirmed link between induction and use of a University LRC demonstrates the importance of improving the induction process.

There is scope for further research into the usage of public libraries by HE students.

References

Arnold, K. (2002) The partnership experience: De Montfort University and its Associate Libraries network. *SCONUL Newsletter* 27 Winter pp 49-54.

Crawford, J. (2002) Public Preferences. *Scottish Libraries* 17 (5) pp10-12.

Goodall, D. (1996) Academic franchising: some pointers for improving practice. *Library Management* 17 (4), pp 4-9.

Goodall, D. and Brophy, P. (1997) A comparable experience? Library support for Franchised Courses in Higher Education. British Library Research and Innovation Report 33. British Library Research and Innovation Centre.

Goodall, D. (1994) Franchised courses in higher education. *Library Management* 15 (2), pp 27-33.

Griffiths, J. and King, D. (1993) Special libraries: increasing the information edge. Special Libraries Association.

Hall, L. and Curry, S. (2000) The SAILS Project: a working guide to cross- sectoral co-operation, supporting lifelong learning and staff development. Library and Information Commission Research Report 36. Library and Information Commission.

Hull, B. (2000) Barriers discouraging access to libraries as agents of lifelong learning. Library and Information Commission Research Report 31. Library and Information Commission.

Mynott, G. et al. (2000) People flows: an investigation of the cross-use of publicly funded libraries. Research findings. University of Central England.

Porritt, F. (2001) The Learning Resources Reciprocal Agreement. *SCONUL Newsletter* 23, pp 29-33.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2001) Quality Audit Report: University of Teesside. August 2001.

URL: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/teesside/teesside.asp>

[Accessed 02.08.05]

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2000) Subject Review Report: University of Teesside: Art and Design.

URL: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/subjectLevel/q317_00.pdf

[Accessed 02.08.05]

Rawlinson, S; Frost, D and Walsh, K. (1996) The FE/HE interface: a UK perspective. A report to the CVCP. Report 316. The Institute for Employment Studies.

University of Teesside. Library & Information Services (2005a) Mission, Values and Aims. (Factsheet 0)

URL: <http://www.tees.ac.uk/lis/howeare/factsheets/fs0.pdf>

[Accessed 02.08.05]

University of Teesside. Library & Information Services (2005b) Resources for Partnership Students.

URL: <http://www.tees.ac.uk/lis/partnership>

[Accessed 02.08.05]

University of Teesside. Library & Information Services (2005c) Services for Students at Partner Colleges. (Factsheet 17)

<http://www.tees.ac.uk/depts/lis/howeare/factsheets/fs17.pdf>

[Accessed 02.08.05]