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# Research support at Liverpool John Moores University



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A new research support area was opened in October 2004 on the top floor of the Avril Roberts Learning Resource Centre. This building contains learning materials in science, engineering, maths, computing science, health and social sciences and is close to one of the large student halls of residence. The new area was created as the first stage in our plans to reconfigure the space in the three learning resource centres in response to changing student needs, including a move towards personalisation of service facilities to meet the needs of specific user groups.



Liverpool John Moores is known for its high quality teaching, particularly for courses that have a strong element of work-based learning.

The number of taught postgraduate students is increasing rapidly and many students are part-time. The university also has a vibrant and developing research culture and the highly rated centres in sports science, astrophysics, history, engineering and English language and literature attract both taught and research postgraduate students. In the LIBQUAL+ survey carried out in 2003, general satisfaction rates with Learning and Information Services were high but postgraduate students expressed lower satisfaction rates with the facilities at the learning resource centres and access to specialist subject help.



To respond to the survey findings we decided to create a dedicated research support area in a section of the learning resource centre containing the end of the alphabetical run of print journals. The top floor was already designated a quiet study area and had wireless network access, making it the most suitable for the kind of facility we envisaged. Eight bays of shelving had to be removed completely to create sufficient space. This was achieved by completely weeding out around 200 metres of print abstracts and journals now available electronically. Most of this stock was discarded, though some journal runs were relegated to remote store. The disposal was carried out in consultation with academic staff and the volumes were removed in closed skips for recycling.

While the stock moves were being planned, we discussed what we were trying to achieve with the creation of the new area, contacted several libraries where we knew there had been recent developments and surveyed the literature on academic library buildings. Our main objective was to create a quiet, comfortable study area with good IT facilities and easy access to subject help which looked different from the other areas of

the learning resource centre and would appeal to postgraduate students. We decided to purchase larger desks than usual and group them in islands of three, separated by screens. Furniture with a light ash finish and blue accent colours was chosen to give a modern, open-plan office feel. Two local furniture supply companies were asked to draw up plans and provide costings. The successful design provided 21 large desks in seven groups. Twelve of the desks have networked PCs and 9 have power points for personal equipment. Desks can be used for ICT use or simply spreading out a large number of books and papers.

Wireless network access is available at all the study places as part of our general move to wireless provision in all the learning resource centres. The finished area is light and bright, looks more professional than academic and benefits from attractive views over the city centre.

Priority for the study places is given to postgraduate students and academic staff, who can book in advance for a two or four-hour slot up to a week in advance. Other students may use the un-booked spaces on the understanding that they must behave appropriately and give up the space if asked to do so by staff. The area is supported from a nearby advice point where users can ask for help and book an appointment with the appropriate subject information officer for more detailed advice. This desk stays open until 7pm Monday – Thursday to give part-time students more opportunity to speak to the subject staff. Statistics are taken four times a day to provide information on who is using the area, the number of bookings, and whether users prefer the spaces with PCs or wireless access.

When we publicised the new facility to staff and students there was a very positive response, particularly from the academic staff in the Research and Graduate School. Bookings are increasing as users become aware of the new facility and the evidence so far is that the main objectives have been achieved. The positioning, layout and furniture do seem to contribute to a quiet atmosphere and staff are near enough to be accessible without appearing to supervise. The cost of developing the area was relatively modest, most of which was spent on additional cabling and the new furniture. A similar facility is planned for the other city centre learning resource centre, Aldham Roberts, in 2005.