

The M25 Consortium: advocating a success story

Máire Lanigan
Chair of the Advocacy Working Group of
the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries
and Director of Information Services and
Systems, St Mary's College
(University of Surrey)
Tel: 020 8240 4334
E-mail: laniganm@smuc.ac.uk
<http://www.m25lib.ac.uk>

BACKGROUND

The M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries is an organisation open to library and information services within the higher education sector (or to collections of particular relevance to the research community), within and extending beyond the geographic area bounded by the M25.

The raison d'être of the M25 is the belief and commitment to collaboration as a way of building relationships around libraries, users and collections to bring added value to services. Whilst its direct customers are member libraries, indirect customers include students, academics, and researchers of member institutions (and beyond).

PUTTING THE CONSORTIUM ON THE MAP

The M25 Consortium is a membership organisation based on a subscription system. Last year the Advocacy Working Group (AWG) ran a survey to assess the extent to which member libraries and staff working within them were aware of the organisation and its range of services.

The survey was designed to inform and influence the Consortium's future approach to publicising its main activities. We were also able to measure the extent to which the profile had been raised by the AWG, by comparing results to an earlier survey conducted in 2001. 780 staff in member libraries took part (a 44% increase on the 2001 survey response rate).

WHAT OUR MEMBER LIBRARIES TOLD US

- 94% of respondents had heard of the Consortium.
- Both awareness and usage had increased for Continuing Professional Development (through the CPD25 training programme); and Inform25 (simultaneous access to over 150 catalogues)
- Increased awareness of the M25 website in general
- Slight decrease in awareness and usage of access arrangements.
- Decrease in usage of the disaster control planning advice.

THE OUTCOMES

- CPD - the awareness survey confirms a view, widespread within consortium members, that the CPD25 activities are flagship services offering great value for money: 'The range of training courses and the ample opportunity offered to library workers to attend them is extraordinary'.
- Inform25 - qualitative data gives a ringing endorsement to the service. However there is room for improvement in both awareness raising and further guidance to help users get the most from the service. The launch of the inform25.ac.uk domain may go quite some way to addressing the awareness issue.
- Access arrangements – the slight decrease in both awareness and usage may be attributed to the scaling up of the original M25 Access and Borrowing Scheme with others into a national scheme (SCONUL Research Extra). The Consortium can now build on the success story with SCONUL Research Extra and the streamlining of arrangements by which taught students can access the British Library. The M25 Consortium has had a real impact in changing the culture and promoting resilience in access arrangements. As one respondent commented, 'any work which simplifies regional access arrangements is welcome...'.
■ Disaster control planning – the awareness survey highlights the need for greater promotion of this very valuable tool – something the Disaster Management Working Group and the AWG will work on. It is also worth noting that the survey was carried out before the launch of the current re-designed M25 Disaster Control Plan.
- Web service – it is recognised that a lot of the content held within the main business part

of the Consortium's website is not easy to find and a major review of the website is now under way.

VALUE TO MEMBERS

The survey reveals a picture of a mature, thriving, highly regarded consortium with a well used set of services which has had real impact on the delivery of information services to its communities of users. This could be summed up by one of our respondents who said:

'I think that the Consortium does excellent work and feel that we benefit both as an organisation and as individual professionals from its existence.'