
SCONUL Transparency Event

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In 1998 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) set up a transparency and accountability review programme as a means to enable the higher education funding bodies to meet their responsibilities to report to government in a transparent and accountable way on the use of the funds provided from the public purse for the sector as a whole. The top-level approach adopted by most universities at the time concentrated on direct research and on teaching and learning. Whilst it has been acceptable to provide an institutional view, there appears to be an increasing move to obtain more 'granularity', with library services being of interest in relation to research and teaching.

Objectives of this SCONUL workshop were:

- To obtain a clearer understanding of the drivers relating to the financial reporting management required by higher education institutions
- To examine ways of identifying how much services cost and the value that these services provide for the institution
- To raise awareness, through case studies, of the requirement for the identification of and value in consistent gathering of management information
- In the workshop experience, to identify the skills issues required by senior and middle library managers to enable them to respond to the changes in higher education funding dynamics as part of developing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training.

Various speakers pursued these themes:

TRAC and FEC (Full Economic Costing): background, implications and current situation

John Newton,
Deputy Director of Finance, Cardiff University

John provided an informative background analysis of HEFCE transparency requirements particularly pertinent to library and information services, alerting the group to a new reporting requirement for 2008 that particularly asks for library-specific data. Less than 10% of the audience were aware of this forthcoming requirement or had been notified by their finance department that data would be required. A key element for HEFCE's transparent approach to accounting (TRAC) is to establish and maintain direct liaison links with the library over the interpretation of data. It was noted that libraries are extremely good at collecting statistics about their activities; however, the output tends to be geared to a peer audience. The information required by Finance departments for transparency will require a level of reworking existing data and new data-collection elements. Each institutional library will undoubtedly have unique parameters and it is essential that these are clearly identified and that transparency drivers and data requirements are adjusted accordingly. For example Cardiff has numerous 'branch' libraries in its schools and this has a direct impact on the data-collection techniques that can be agreed and on the final interpretation of the data. The use of 'research status' can help libraries recover estates and indirect costs from funding. Librarians will need to consider using a variant template of the TRAC academic timesheet to enable them to capture staff activity and assign costs accordingly. The area of e-resources data capture, interpretation and relevance is presenting new challenges and as libraries shift between hard copy and e-format these will need to be addressed.

Information Services – University of Reading JCPG good practice case study

Roger Jones, Senior Project Officer and Project Manager, Reading University

The case study from the University of Reading's joint costing and pricing steering group (JCPG) provided an insight into the type and complexity of data that could be used as part of any transparency submission. The presentation highlighted the importance of drilling down information to specific departmental level in order to clarify and validate data dips/spikes. A key point identified was that the institutional landscape constantly

changed and therefore drivers and data-capture techniques need to be reviewed regularly. It was accepted that the use of the 'Other' category for cost assignment had been frequently used for the case study; however, it was noted this was now proving detrimental for true TRAC reporting and would have to be revisited.

Transparency – costing, pricing, data source information etc.

Lorraine Cooper, The Larian Consultancy Limited

This session provided a very practical approach to helping managers identify cost elements and raised the question of whether libraries need to have staff on their payroll who have accountancy skills to help service heads of department financially manage their organisations effectively. The ability to identify and apply costing techniques provided department heads with reasoned justification against which they could then request an increase or realignment of resources. Costing techniques such as activity costing and zero-based budgeting provide the opportunity for them to identify resources devoted to critical service provision. These techniques can also clarify the rationale that declares these services to be essential, challenge their quality threshold and help establish threshold resource margins for different levels of service.

From costing to value and impact: the potential of the SCONUL VAMP programme

Stephen Town, Director of Knowledge Services, Cranfield University

An overview of SCONUL's value added and impact measurement programme (VAMP) indicated how the work with transparency had clear connections to stage 2 of the project. The redesign of the website provided the opportunity to post and raise awareness of the need for libraries to demonstrate their value. The data-collection techniques potentially identified for transparency were an example of shared information that could be hosted by the VAMP website for quick and easy retrieval.

So what are the key points we should take away from all this?

- Libraries need to be more aware and proactive in identifying new and/or non-traditional data requirements – it takes time to identify, analyse and collect meaningful data.

- Drivers are linked transparency and the business environment. Libraries are not financially insignificant in this environment.
- Data-collection requirements are becoming more specific and linked to key institutional business elements – research, teaching, enterprise and so on. This will require libraries to re-examine their existing data collection with this in mind.
- The data libraries have traditionally collected that are of value, such as the SCONUL return, require reviewing and reworking to meet the needs of financial and other non-traditional library stakeholders.
- The move to use of e-resources will require new data-collection techniques:
 - o The role that suppliers will need to contribute to support data extraction needs to be clarified.
 - o Changes in access technologies will need to encompass data-collection and extraction requirements.
- Data collection and analysis can be powerful tools in establishing the viability of activity and services levels to meet key institutional objectives.
- Employee profiles and the skills requirements to support library activities are broadening beyond those provided through traditional library-education programmes and now include:
 - o marketing
 - o financial/accounting
 - o business analysis.