
Supporting our academic community through a staff questionnaire –

Library and Learning Services,
University of East London



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Students in our universities are extensively surveyed. Apart from the National Student Survey there is an internal UEL Student Satisfaction Survey together with numerous opportunities for giving feedback. Unusually Library and Learning Services at the University of East London has a history of surveying its academic staff from time to time. We want to know how academic staff are using our various services and their perceptions of us. We want to tell them about planned developments and get their ideas how we can improve services. The survey is a wonderful opportunity to remind the academic community of the value of our experienced team of subject librarians whose job it is to liaise with our schools.

This report is the result of a survey of lecturers in all eight schools of the University of East London. The survey was conducted using a printed questionnaire of 31 questions. It was carried out over a six-month period, from December 2007 to May 2008, when 369 academic staff were interviewed by subject librarians, a response rate of well over 50%.

Of those surveyed, 345 members of staff were interviewed face to face and the rest responded

online. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

METHODOLOGY

The reasons for choosing the face-to-face interview were:

- to meet as many lecturers as possible
- to update lecturers about our services, resources and innovations
- to gather useful feedback with a view to improving services where possible
- to raise our profile amongst our academic community.

This proved a successful strategy because the majority of those interviewed expressed delight in having the opportunity to meet their subject librarian. The subject librarians found it a useful and energising experience to liaise with teaching staff in this way. They felt that the time and effort committed to this project reaped great benefits. There was initial concern that the face-to-face method would inhibit an honest exchange of information, with the lecturers telling us what we wanted to hear rather than giving their honest opinions. This concern proved unfounded.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Formulating the questions took some time and was a real team effort. Initially two of our subject librarians revised an old questionnaire which we had used to carry out the same exercise in 2001. The library management team also had a major input into the design of the questionnaire. We finally agreed on the following key areas:

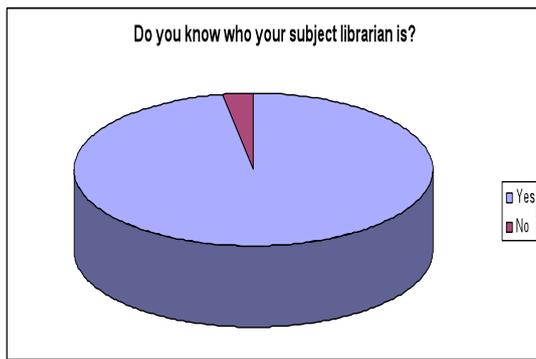
- liaison with our schools and links with our subject librarians
- use of our comprehensive range of electronic journals
- the helpfulness of our enquiry desks and online reference services
- use of our automated self-services
- the value of our welcome sessions and information skills training
- use of our interlibrary loans service and other libraries
- use of the library buildings, spaces and access.

SURVEY FINDINGS

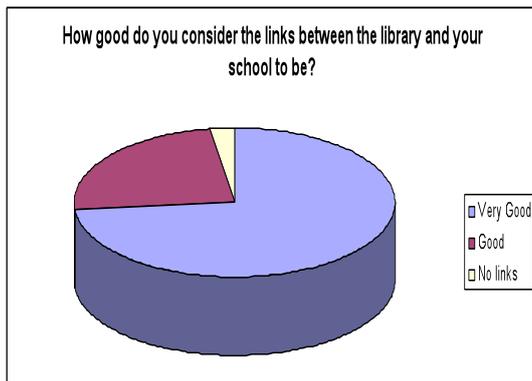
Collating and analysing the questionnaire took some effort and lasted more than three months because it was done manually.

Communication with the library

There were six questions in this section as follows:



- Do you know who your subject librarian is?
- How do you tell the library about your particular library and information needs?
- Do you hear enough about the library and learning services from us?
- Do you know how to recommend books, periodicals and electronic resources for the libraries?
- How good do you consider the links between the library and your school to be?
- What would help improve the links?



The results were as follows:

- 95% of staff knew who their subject librarian was.
- The communication between the library and the schools was deemed to be effective.
- The lecturers welcomed such innovative means of communication as wikis and blogs, which are used by some of the subject librarians.
- Almost all subject librarians were praised for being approachable, helpful, proactive, professional, improving liaison and actively participating in the activity of the school.
- Links with schools were considered to be either very good or good.
- Lecturers communicated important information to the library staff through a variety of ways, especially via their subject librarian by

e-mail or face to face in the library and via various meetings and committees.

- The vast majority of lecturers knew how to recommend resources. Those who said they did not know (5%), were either new or taught on postgraduate programmes and said they didn't deal with reading lists.

Library buildings, space and access

The following questions were addressed in this section:

- Do you know that we have three libraries?
- Are you aware that the library has group and quiet study spaces?
- Do you know the opening hours of the libraries?
- Do you use the self-issue/self-return machines?

These were the results:

- Although the majority of staff interviewed were aware of the existence of our three libraries, a significant minority were unaware.
- The group and quiet study spaces were widely known and appreciated.
- Several complained about noise and some felt there should be more study spaces.
- Although the library's opening hours were appreciated, many only partially knew the opening hours.
- The self-issue and self-return machines were used by the majority of those interviewed; however, 33% did not use them, for a variety of reasons such as the payment of fines at the counter, fear of accumulating fines, preference for human contact or forgetting their PIN. Some used them to return books since that does not require using a PIN.

Library catalogues

- In this section, the following questions were asked:
- How often do you access the library catalogue from your PC?
- Do you use the self-renew/self-reservation facilities online?
- Do you access the library catalogues of other institutions from the library website?

The results were:

- The use of the library catalogue by lecturers varied, depending on the work they were doing. They tended to use the library catalogue more when they were compiling reading lists.

- The majority of staff accessed the online catalogue from their PC monthly.
- Although most of those surveyed used the self-renewal and self-reservation facilities of the online catalogue and found them very useful and convenient, a significant proportion did not.
- The reasons given were: not borrowing books, preferring to come into the library in person, using other specialist libraries, preferring the telephone, not keeping books long enough to renew them, not knowing how to use the service, a distrust of online facilities, having to remember their library number which is not on staff ID cards.
- The lecturers liked the under-due e-mail.
- Most were aware that they could search external catalogues from our library website but just 39% did so while 43% did not and 18% were not aware that they could. One reason given for non-use was that they went straight to the external library catalogue.

Subject resources

The questions in this section were as follows:

- Do you provide your subject librarian with reading lists for all your modules?
- Do you use the off-air recording service for recording programmes for your subject area?

These were the results:

- 66% said that they supplied their subject librarian with reading lists; 17% usually did; and 17% did not.
- Some of the lecturers in our school of computing said that they did not supply lists because they made them available via the university's virtual learning environment (UEL Plus).
- 87% were unaware of the off-air recording service; however, 13% used it sometimes.
- Lecturers who did not use the service said that they would consider using it.

Electronic resources

The following questions were covered in this part:

- Do you use the electronic journals to which the library subscribes?
- If 'Yes', how do you access them?
- In the last year, have you downloaded any electronic articles?
- Do you have an Athens username and password?
- Would you be interested in a familiarisation session with your subject librarian on electronic resources?

- If 'Yes', please indicate the areas in which you are interested.

The results were as follows:

- 74% used the electronic resources whilst 26% did not.
- The majority of those who said 'Yes' accessed the electronic journals in a variety of ways. Most used a combination of the library catalogue, 'Find an e-journal' and online databases.
- Going straight to the online database seemed the preferred option, with 50% using that route; 31% used the library catalogue and 19% preferred searching via 'Find an e-journal'.
- 76% had downloaded articles in the previous year, but 24% had not.
- Almost every lecturer said that they accessed the articles via Athens or the internet and not through the library.
- 68% had an Athens username and password; 29% did not; and 3% were unaware of the service.
- 19% used the subject pages but 81% did not and in most cases were not aware of their existence. The perception was that the subject pages were for the undergraduate students.
- 56% would like a familiarisation session with their subject librarian; 44% said they did not need one, but would welcome a refresher course.
- A few commented that the journals interface needed updating to be more user-friendly.

Induction and information skills training

This section dealt with the following questions:

- Do you consider that the library welcome sessions run for your students by library staff are appropriate to the needs of your students?
- How useful do you feel that the information skills training sessions provided by library staff are for your students' needs?
- Would you be interested in developing links between library assignments and an assessed module?

These were the results:

- 63% considered our welcome sessions appropriate to the needs of their students; 3% said they were not; 27% were not aware of the content; and 7% did not involve library staff in welcome sessions.
- 48% found the information skills training very useful; 19% said it was useful; 1% said

it was not useful; 28% did not know; and 4% did not involve library staff.

- 33% would be willing to develop an assessed library assignment within the skills module; 50% were not; and 17% said there was something already in place.
- 34% would be interested in developing an assignment on UELPlus; 57% were not; and 9% said there was something already in place.
- 15 lecturers in the school of education said the question was not applicable to them.
- 6 lecturers in the school of social sciences were not quite sure.
- 5% let the library know about the needs of their distance learners, while 8% did not and the vast majority (87%) said they did not have any distance learners.
- A lecturer in the school of social sciences suggested putting something tangible in place to support PhD students.
- 68% knew about the European computer driving licence (ECDL), but 32% did not.

A significant number of lecturers interviewed in the schools of architecture and the visual arts and social sciences did not know we offered the ECDL.

Research and scholarly activity

This section had these questions:

- Are you satisfied with the interlibrary loan service?
- Do you visit other libraries to support your research or teaching?
- Are you a member of SCONUL Access?

The results were:

- 67% were satisfied with the interlibrary loan service; 17% were not; 6% were unaware of the service; and 10% were aware but did not use it. Some of those who were satisfied thought the service excellent and indispensable and one lecturer went as far as saying they would quit their job if the service wasn't available. They stressed the importance of the service to the success of specific modules.
- Those who were not satisfied cited a number of reasons, ranging from the service being too slow (to the point of missing grant applications); the restriction of submissions to five at any one time; not being able to submit requests electronically; to problematic notifications. One or two cited previous bad experiences that had put them off the service.
- A few suggested online submission linked to our LMS (Library Management System) and

the need for more money to be spent on the service.

- 64% visited other libraries to support their teaching or research; however, 36% did not.
- 19% were members of the SCONUL Access scheme; 38% were not; and 43% were not aware of the scheme.
- Clearly, lecturers made their own arrangements for visiting other libraries.

Help

81% found the service offered by the library enquiry desks either very helpful or helpful. 19% had had no contact.

Equality and diversity

This section had these questions:

- Are you male or female?
- Do you have students who have particular requirements?

The following were the results:

- 50% of those surveyed were male and 50% were female.
- 57% said they had students with some special needs and 43% did not.
- Those who said 'Yes' identified dyslexia as the biggest disability, closely followed by partial hearing as well as partial sightedness.
- Other disabilities, such as learning difficulties, deafness and blindness, were also mentioned.

DISSEMINATION

We were very pleased to see such high levels of satisfaction amongst our academic staff. In general they were well aware of our services and knew how to use them. Clearly the range of services we offer are relevant to their needs. Staff were pleased to hear about planned developments and more importantly were happy to suggest ways of improving our services. The subject librarians and the management team had an away-day to discuss the findings of the questionnaire. Certain key areas were highlighted to be actioned, as detailed below. The findings were disseminated through various channels such as the schools' boards, programme committees, university and school learning and teaching committees and discussions with lecturers. We also had a feature in the university's online newsletter, which is accessible to all staff. The results also informed our annual service planning round.

ACTIONS AS A RESULT OF THE FEEDBACK

Communication

Ways of improving communication:

- All subject librarians to use blogs as a means of communicating monthly accessions lists, book budgets and other service developments.
- The library's web pages to be further improved.
- Library management to communicate key innovations and developments via a monthly library bulletin or the university e-bulletin.

Library buildings, space and access

- Improve usage and awareness of self-service machines and opening hours.
- Offer training on use of self-service machines.
- Publicise opening hours.
- Introduce telephone and self-service payment of fines.
- Zone more areas for quiet study.
- Expand our enquiry services by introducing a virtual reference service.

Library catalogues

- Offer periodic training on the self-service aspects of the online catalogue.
- Offer training on external resources and publicise services more.

Subject resources: acquisition of reading lists and use of off-air recordings

- Continue to monitor the acquisition of reading lists.
- Gain access to the reading lists available via the VLE UEL Plus
- Publicise the off-air recordings.

Electronic resources

- Run planned one-to-one or group training sessions throughout the year.
- Emphasise that Athens is a means of access to the databases to which UEL subscribes.
- Brand all our databases.
- Explore Shibboleth.

Induction and information skills training

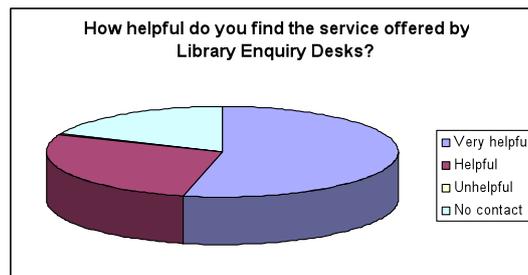
- Deliver classes in smaller groups so that students can have hands-on practice.
- Gradually increase the level of difficulty as some skills develop over time.
- Deliver more sessions on referencing non-book materials as well as general referencing.
- Acquire the PDF version of 'Cite them right'.
- Link training to assessed modules.
- Run sessions for evening students.

- Develop services for distance learners.
- Deliver sessions targeted at PhDs and researchers.

Research and scholarly activity

- Offer online submission and desktop delivery of interlibrary loans.
- Raise awareness of the SCONUL Access scheme.
- Deliver regular Endnote sessions.
- Embed the research support day in the service calendar of events.

Help



- Inform all library staff of the outcome of this questionnaire – and the director to thank staff for their helpfulness.

QUESTIONNAIRE AFTERMATH

We feel that the exercise has been extremely successful in that many of the actions outlined above have been completed. This has also done a great deal to raise the profile of the library and learning services in general and of the subject librarians in particular, leading to a highly effective partnership between the LLS and the schools. From our perspective we feel a wonderful and greater sense of achievement and empowerment. There has been an increase in demand for user education for both students and staff and more involvement in assessed modules. A direct result of the questionnaire was our highly successful research support day, which is now firmly embedded in our service calendar.

Having raised the library's profile in this way, the challenge is to continue improving the service and not to rest on our laurels! You can contact us for more details about the questionnaire.



The members of the team