

# Editorial

Steve Rose

Chair, Editorial Team

SCONUL Focus

[steve.rose@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:steve.rose@bcu.ac.uk)

Welcome to SCONUL *Focus* issue 64. 'The consumer culture' may best sum up the topics addressed in this issue. Using the term consumer to describe users of our services doesn't resonate easily with all. But maybe it is just a question of semantics, as we cannot deny that our users have become much more vocal as consumers of our services. There are a number of drivers. Changes in the business model of funding higher education has shifted the position of students from being passive recipients of services to being active consumers who are very conscious of the fact that they are paying for their education. The importance of the National Student Survey (NSS) in comparing, year by year, student satisfaction with our services and in positioning each of us in league tables as our services are benchmarked cannot be denied. Neither can we ignore the reality of the financial pressures that higher education organisations face. Students may wrongly assume we are awash with money, based on the individual fees being paid, which creates enhanced and sometimes unrealistic expectations. However, the need to demonstrate value and impact has never been greater, so striving to maximise the satisfaction of all of our stakeholders is key to this agenda.

So how do we rise to the challenges?

Some of the articles look at how specific techniques, methodologies and toolkits have been used to gain greater insight into our customers and their requirements. Customer Service Excellence (CSE) is a service improvement tool that many higher education libraries and related services are adopting. This issue features two articles describing how the libraries of the University of York and Queen's University Belfast have risen to the challenge of undertaking CSE accreditation, focusing on some of the benefits to have been realised from this approach. The article from SOAS describes how a number of tools have been used to elicit a greater understanding of customer needs. The authors from the University of Chichester show how the use of snap focus groups has helped identify ways in which the user experience for students on the Foundation Degree in Teaching and Learning Support may be improved, and another article from the same institution describes how user surveys have provided insights into the new one-stop shop student support service. The authors from the University of Leicester describe how they have applied change methodologies by working with their institution's Change and Improvement Team. An article looking at the design and application of a strategic market research project at the University of Manchester, which aims to enhance the understanding of customers' expectations and perceptions, is included in this issue. The introduction of relationship marketing at Newcastle University has involved the inclusion of customers in all stages of the development and review of services, as opposed to viewing marketing and promotional activities as being primarily concerned with telling them about the services that the library provides.

Nevertheless, the deployment of effective promotion strategies is an important ingredient of the whole customer experience, given that we often hear that students do not know what is on offer. In that regard, the article from the University of Chester describes the library's recent involvement in the annual freshers' fair.

Some of the articles in this issue focus on specific services and consider how an understanding of user behaviour and needs can help refine them. For example, at the University of Northampton a survey has been conducted to determine how academics use reading lists as resource procurement tools in order to enhance ordering processes, whilst at UCL (University College London) the authors describe how an investigation of user requirements has driven the move towards a new focus on self-service facilities.

An important aspect of an effective consumer-orientated culture is to ensure that all customers are treated equally and can expect a consistently high

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standard of service. The article from the University of the Arts London shows how a review was conducted to work towards offering a consistent academic support service to all students across six constituent colleges, describing the changes and gains that have been made.

In order to understand the needs of our customers, consistency and equality does not always mean that one size fits all. Therefore some articles in the issue focus on particular user groups. Two articles put the spotlight on international students. At Newcastle University the use of a board game to provide in-depth induction for international students is described, whilst the article from New York University Shanghai features the building and convening of an international advisory board for, and including, international students. Research students are the focus of the article from De Montfort University which describes the development of a blended learning approach to literature searching training.

How do we actually involve students in service improvements? As well as the article on relationship marketing from Newcastle University, described above, this issue features an article from the London College of Communication, University of the Arts, where students from BA spatial design course were directly involved in service improvement through a project brief to redesign part of the library's group working area. At Liverpool John Moores University a student diary mapping exercise, and a follow-up study, has been used as one way of gaining student insight to inform the planned development of the new flagship library.

It is important that, as we come to understand the needs of our customers, we think beyond the provision of library services and consider the potential for contributing to wider university strategies and agendas. The authors from City University, London, describe the work of the Library Employability Group, which was established to explore how Library Services can assist students in developing employability skills. The article from Wiley presents the findings of a literature review, commissioned by SCONUL's User Experience and Success Strategy Group, on current practice in the development of employability skills. The review produced a number of key messages for information professionals, which are outlined in the article.

Hopefully, the range of articles included in this issue will offer useful food for thought for others who are seeking to identify and develop best practice in placing our customers and their expectations at the heart of service development and delivery.

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