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# University College Chester: the impact of investment in electronic resources

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## Introduction

In recent years Learning Resources at University College Chester has invested heavily in electronic resources. Through involvement in the IMPACT project, Learning Resources sought:

- to measure the impact of electronic information services on learning, teaching and research
- to produce “impact indicators” to evaluate the “usefulness” of electronic resources
- to increase the perceived value of electronic resources within the user community.

## Importance of the topic for Learning Resources at University College Chester

Learning Resources saw the IMPACT project as a way of discovering and evaluating how students and staff viewed electronic resources and the impact of such resources on teaching and learning. The project also allowed Learning Resources to re-evaluate its role in information literacy by discovering the extent to which

information literacy skills are already included within the content of programmes and to look at ways to further embed these into the curriculum.

## Application of the IMPACT Implementation Methodology

### What the service was trying to achieve

By exploring the impact of electronic resources, Learning Resources sought to develop measures to demonstrate their value, to promote their use, to justify increased spending on such resources, to show the impact of library staff working collaboratively with academics to add electronic resource links to the VLE, and to promote information literacy.

## Success Criteria

### 1. *Increase the perceived value of electronic resources*

This involved examining value for money obtained through use of the electronic resources budget and analysing the use of electronic resources by staff and students through a count of references to these resources in reading lists, and a sample of dissertations.

### 2. *Increase the collaboration with academic staff*

This involved counting the number of links to free and purchased electronic resources (electronic journals, databases, and websites) in 2 sets of 100 randomly selected module learning spaces within the VLE over 3 semesters. At the same time, staffing changes allowed an increase in the number of library staff collaborating with academic staff to add such resources to the VLE.

### 3. *Improve user skills to access electronic resources*

The aims were to improve user education for electronic resources, and to ascertain how many of the randomly selected 200 modules named information literacy as an explicit learning outcome.

### **Impact Measures Identified on which Evidence was Collected**

- Use of electronic resources
- Registration for ATHENS accounts
- Attendance at electronic resources user education sessions
- Library expenditure on electronic resources
- Number of librarians working with academics to add material to the VLE
- Number of electronic resources available in the VLE
- Citation of electronic resources in reading lists and dissertation bibliographies
- Library skills questionnaire

### **Methods Used**

Learning Resources already collected monthly statistics on the use of electronic resources. Statistics were also kept on the number of students attending user education sessions, the number of user education guides taken, and the number of people registering for ATHENS accounts. Library expenditure on electronic resources and the cost per search for each electronic resource was calculated.

The 2 sets of 100 modules selected covered a variety of subjects and levels. For each module the number of electronic resources on the reading list and the number of free and paid for electronic resources links from the module learning space were counted. A note was also made if the module's learning outcomes made any reference to information literacy skills. It was possible to collect this data for one set of 100 modules for semester 1 in both 2003/04 and 2004/05. For the second set of 100 modules data collection has only taken place in semester 2, 2003/04.

The number of electronic resources cited in a 20% sample of 2003/04 and 2004/05 dissertation bibliographies was counted.

Over 200 students completed a self assessment questionnaire before their first library induction session. The questionnaire asked students to self-assess a range of their own skills in using the library (e.g. finding a book using the catalogue) using a grading system from 1 to 5. The same questionnaire was sent to the same

students at the start of semester 2 so that any changes in skill level could be noted. Semi-structured interviews were held with selected students to further analyse any differences in scores.

Having had over 200 questionnaires completed for the first self assessment of library skills it was unfortunate that only ten of the second batch were returned which made it difficult to compare the two samples. Clearly, if this methodology is to be repeated, stronger attempts will need to be made to ensure a higher response rate.

### **Significant Results**

The usage of electronic resources between June 2003 and May 2004 generally increased. Understandably there were falls in usage in December and January (over the Christmas vacation) and peaks in October and March, coinciding with the start of the academic year and assignment due dates. The most popular electronic resources were Science Direct, Emerald Full Text, and Blackwell Synergy's collection of electronic journals – all multi-subject resources. Although these databases were amongst the most expensive electronic resources subscribed to, because they had a high number of usage 'hits' their cost per search was cheaper than less expensive resources such as Digimap or GroveArt. The number of ATHENS accounts created also peaked in October with a smaller peak in March.

The number of electronic resources (primarily journals available in both print and electronic formats) cited in reading lists was disappointing low with a few exceptions.

When analysing the number of electronic resources linked from the VLE module learning space of the sample 100 modules it was noticeable that the departments with the largest number of linked electronic resources were those who had been working with a librarian to develop this area through links made in the eLibrary section of the module learning space. Preliminary indications from the comparisons between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 indicate that

this trend has continued. Detailed statistical analysis of the data collected for the 2 sets of 100 modules is being undertaken, following the ending of semester 1 2004-2005. This will confirm or otherwise these initial impressions from the data, and also indicate if there are any significant differences between subjects and grades in citation of electronic resources in dissertation bibliographies

The pre-induction questionnaires distributed to students indicated that the majority of students felt confident in using the library although most admitted that they did not feel confident in using the library catalogue to find a book or journal. In contrast, most felt confident in using the internet to help them with their studies.

A disappointingly small number of the 2 sets of 100 sample modules contained an explicit reference to information literacy in the learning outcomes. Learning Resources staff now seek to encourage academics to include information literacy in learning outcomes when appropriate, through active participation in programme planning teams and validation events.

### **How the Results have been used**

The initial coarse statistical analysis of the 2 sets of 100 module learning spaces lends weight to the view that having librarians working with academic staff to add links to electronic resources to these spaces is important in the marketing and increased usage of these electronic resources and in providing additional relevant support to students. This information has been used to illustrate the value of Learning Resources's work in this area and as evidence to support bids for increased staffing.

The financial cost per search and statistics on the use of individual electronic resources has allowed Learning Resources to identify lesser-used resources and either to promote their use or to cease subscribing.

In recognition of the important role of ATHENS passwords and the complexity perceived by students involved in getting a password, from

September 2005, students will be issued with an ATHENS password at induction at the same time as the college network user name and password at induction.

An internal audit of Learning Resources is due to take place in 2006 and the results of this project will be used as evidence of the important and growing role of electronic resources provided by the department, and of the ability of Learning Resources to collect and analyse its management information for effective service development.

### **What was Learnt from Participation?**

Participation in this project forced the team involved to collect statistics and collate information that would not otherwise have been brought together. This has given Learning Resources a portfolio of evidence which can be used to inform management decisions within the library and also as evidence of effectiveness for senior college management.

A member of library staff was able to use some of the data collected in the project in her Masters dissertation in Information & Library Management at Liverpool John Moores University. A questionnaire sent to academic staff as part of the dissertation allowed Learning Resources to gain feedback on how academic staff viewed information literacy and the role of librarians in teaching this skill.

The IMPACT project has enabled the project group to develop their own skills in areas such as research methods, team working, and strategic planning, and such generic skills can be utilised in normal operations and future special projects.