

# A fresh start for LIS promotion

## Planning and evaluating our freshers fair experience



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Last year saw the learning and information services (LIS) team at Chester take on the freshers fair. The department had never been involved with the fair before so this was a new opportunity to engage with the students and promote our services. We hope that our insights and reflections will help to pave the way for our future at the fair and encourage others who are considering a similar challenge.

### Student induction at Chester

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Historically, the first chance for interaction between Chester undergraduates and library staff has been on the very first day of freshers week. All first-year students were ushered through an induction schedule introducing them to LIS and other support departments. They would watch a short video summarising library and IT services and log on to a computer in order to familiarise themselves with essential online tools such as email, timetables and the library catalogue.

Heading in to 2014 it was decided that it was time for a change. The majority of processes students were previously expected to complete under our guidance would now be done online, with videos and information fed to them via the pre-arrival website and university mobile app. This posed a dilemma in that LIS staff would no longer get this opportunity to meet and interact with the students so early on. Although we see many students during library inductions and tours, these are not always requested by academic departments and are often arranged later in the term. There were concerns about the impact this might have on the helpdesk and other front-facing services; all students use our online services (e.g. email and the Moodle virtual learning environment), but we felt that it was imperative for them to see the department as approachable and personable.

### The freshers fair

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We turned to the freshers fair – without ‘induction Monday’, this seemed the perfect opportunity to reach out to students and showcase our services. This was no small challenge; we are a large and wide-ranging department, providing an integrated library and IT service at a number of sites of varying sizes across the north west of England. A working party of nine staff, representing a range of job roles and sites, was put together and a list of objectives was formed:

- to represent LIS as a whole (including two fundamental IT elements: the university’s managed Internet access and mobile application)
- to be approachable, engaging and relevant
- to gain feedback to inform future years at the fair.

### Learning from others

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As this was something of a pilot project we wanted to learn from the experience of others. Members of the working party contacted other institutions for advice and we gained some amazingly helpful insights and practical guidance. This advice gave us somewhere to begin and came down to four main points:

- **Have a presence** – the main aim is to be a friendly face. Just being there shows that we are engaged with the whole student experience.
- **Be proactive** – to create a positive engaging experience it is essential to be interactive, motivated and enthusiastic. In order to maintain enthusiasm, the stall was covered on a rota basis by staff volunteers.
- **Keep things simple** – students are bombarded with information at the fair and there is a limited amount of time to spend with them, so interactions

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and printed materials need to be kept simple, short and sweet.

- **Provide freebies** – to have any chance of being successful, goodies and giveaways are a must. Students attending the fair expect freebies and there is strong competition for their attention. With a limited budget we knew this would be a tough challenge!

### The plans

It was decided early on that we wanted to create a large mock-up of a mobile device to showcase the university app. A presentation was created using the free online software Prezi (<https://prezi.com/6zg6dntsdnam/uoc-mobile-app/>) and was displayed on a framed plasma screen. This provided a unique way to demonstrate the features of the app and create visual appeal.

The appearance of the app ties in with our departmental branding, which inspired the rest of our designs. We started sourcing freebies, looking to our in-house graphics team and print unit in order to keep costs down. With their help we designed a range of items that we put together into an 'info-pack' for students, including:

- library guides
- a 'beer mat' featuring a QR code to the LIS website
- notepads
- a short quiz
- flyers for our 'shelfie' competition
- plastic card wallets



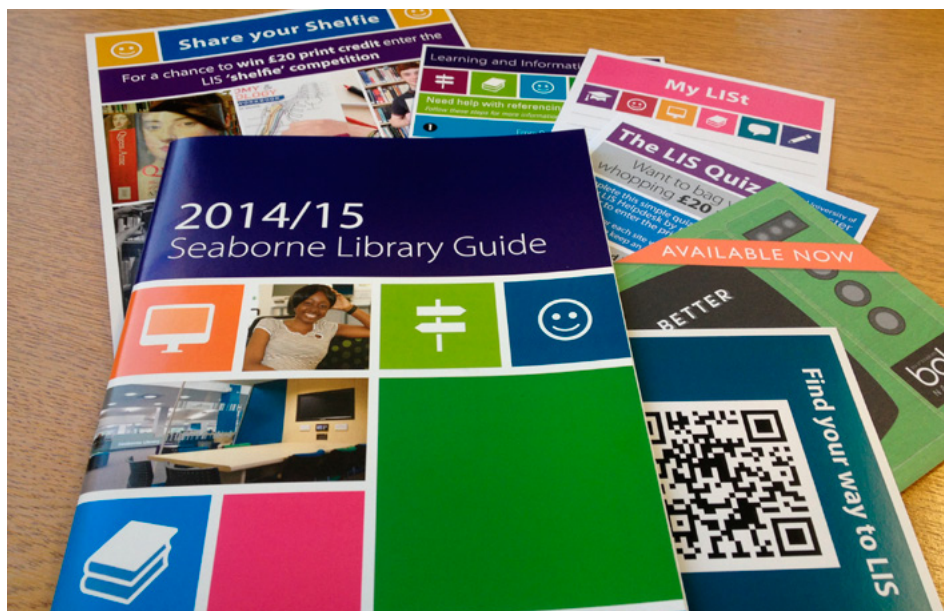
Card wallets

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Info-packs

Our students' union emphasised the importance of freebies in drawing the crowds, and advice from other institutions gave us an idea of what type of items would be most successful in getting student attention. With this in mind we contacted our suppliers for useful items to give away, which resulted in a weird and wonderful assortment including stationery, postcards and even some umbrellas.

Along with the quiz, the shelfie competition was aimed at drawing students into the library by challenging them to find a book, then take and submit a 'shelfie' photograph to be entered into a prize draw. Our definition of a shelfie was kept very loose to encourage participation. Inspired by images of book blending we found on Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/sthlibraries/book-cover-blending/> [accessed 23 June 2014]) we took some shelfies of our own; these were used to create promotional posters and flyers. We anticipated a range of entries including photographs of books on shelves, book blends and straightforward selfies in the library. We set up a designated email address to receive student submissions.

<b>Share your Shelfie</b>	<b>Share your Shelfie</b>
<p>For a chance to win £20 print credit enter the LIS 'shelfie' competition</p>	<p>For a chance to win £20 print credit enter the LIS 'shelfie' competition</p> <p><b>What do I need to do?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Go to a university library and find a library catalogue PC or Mac. (hint: follow signs to the books or ask a member of staff)</li> <li>2. Type in a subject (What are you studying? Combined student? Just pick one)</li> <li>3. Pick a title you think sounds interesting and click on it</li> <li>4. Make a note of the 'shelved at number'</li> <li>5. Use the library guides dotted around to locate the number on the shelves.</li> <li>6. Pull out your book and strike a pose – you can be as creative as you like!</li> <li>7. Email your photo, along with your student number and the subject you searched for to: shelfie@chester.ac.uk</li> </ol> <p>We'll display some of the best pictures on our plasma screens across campus.</p> <p><b>Entry deadline: midnight on Friday 10th October.</b> The winner for each site will be notified by email following the closing date.</p>
<p>Please respect other library users when taking your shelfie, particularly in quiet and silent study areas.</p> <p>Email your: photo, student number and the subject you searched for to: shelfie@chester.ac.uk</p>	<p>Email your: photo, student number and the subject you searched for to: shelfie@chester.ac.uk</p>
<p>Learning and Information Services</p>	<p>Learning and Information Services</p>

Shelfie competition flyers

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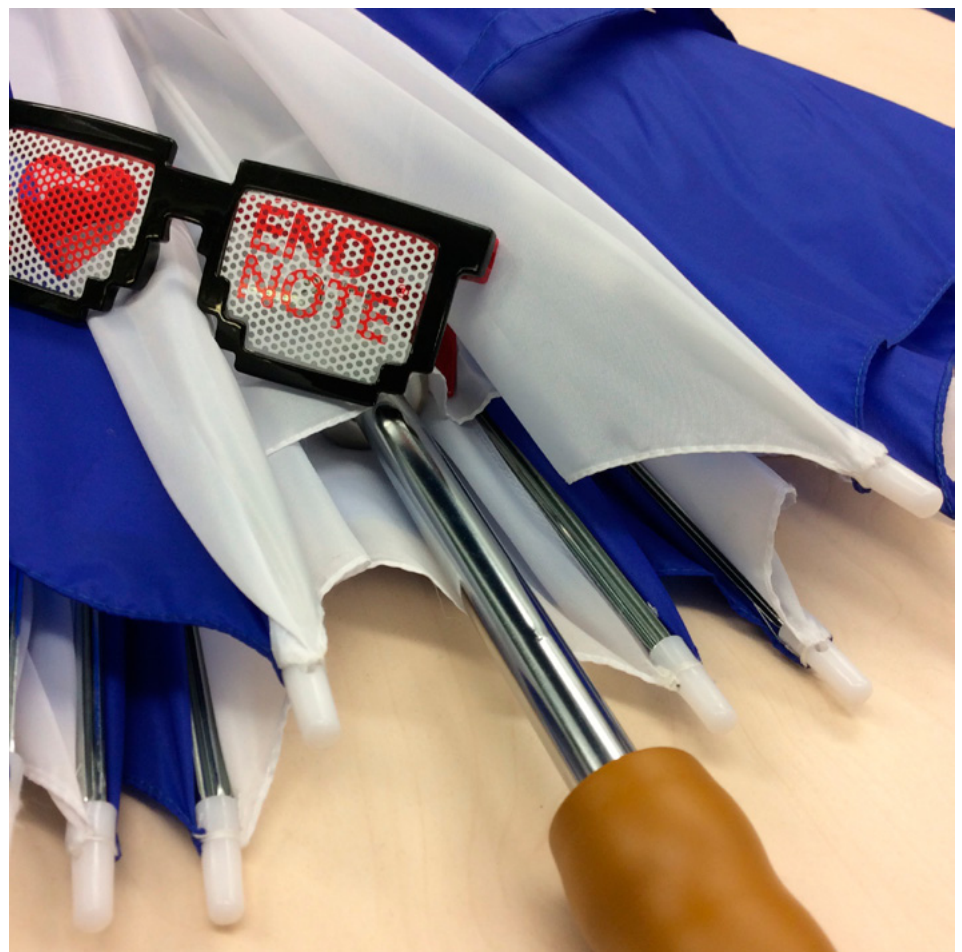
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Once our final plans had been drawn up the staff on the stall were briefed for the event, ensuring that the vision for the day was clear and shared by all.

### The big day

The stall at the main Chester campus was located in a tepee constructed specially for freshers week outside the student union building – this placed us with other internal support departments from the university, and at the opposite side of the campus from the main fair where external and commercial groups were based. At the Warrington campus, the event was smaller, with fewer student numbers expected, and all stalls were located in the sports hall.

We used bunting, freebies and flyers to create a bright appealing stand at both locations and the mobile app display made a distinctive focal point – no one else had anything so high-tech. All visitors were given an info-pack, free pen and the chance to select a prize at random from a grab box of freebies. It was brilliant to see each team come up with their own creative ideas around the more unusual items, awarding prizes through spontaneous mini competitions and quizzes.



*Stall freebies*

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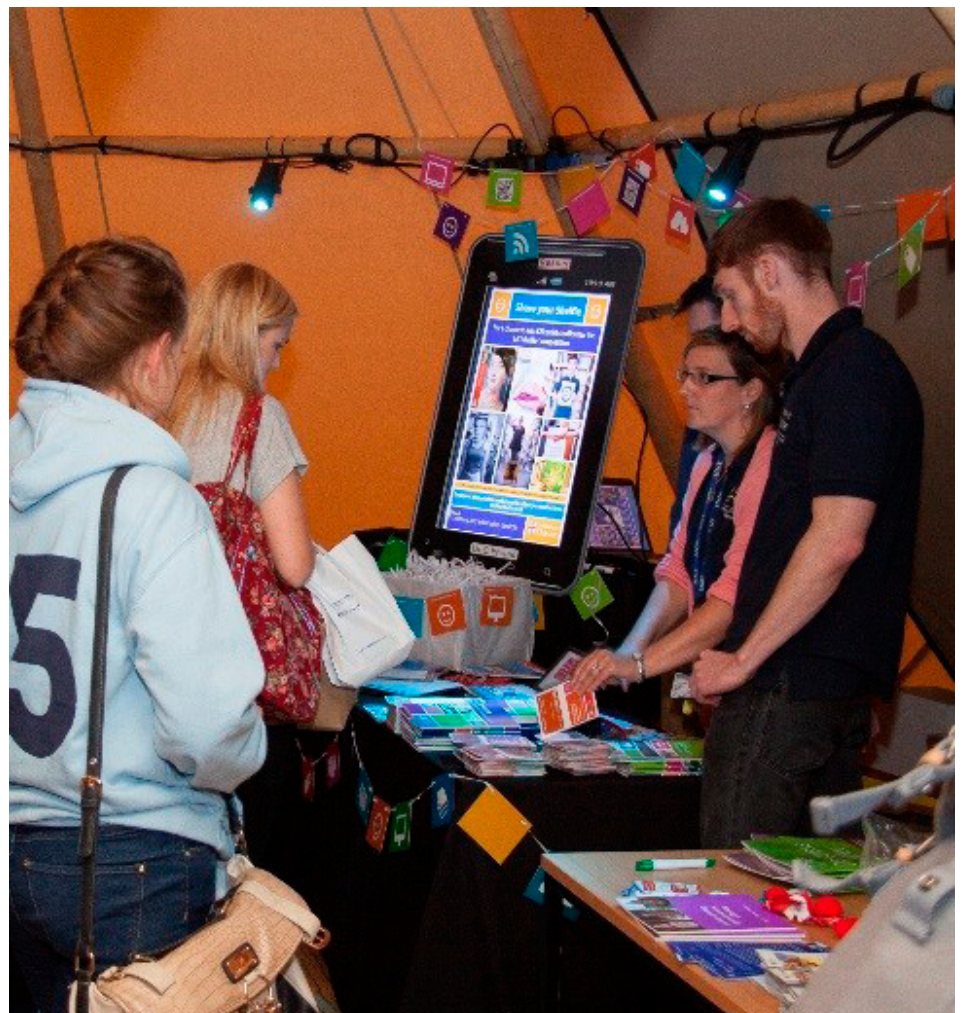


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Stall at Warrington campus



Stall in Chester Campus tepee

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*Volunteer at the Chester stall*

### Evaluation

The day itself seemed to operate smoothly, and this was largely due to our preparation and planning. Relying on staff who had volunteered for this job turned out to be crucial to our success – they were enthusiastic, engaging and resourceful. Following the event we asked them for feedback on their experience and received very encouraging responses. They enjoyed the informal interactions and felt that this type of event was important for establishing a positive relationship between the students and the department.

To gain an idea of the number of students we interacted with on the day, we calculated the number of info-packs that had been handed out. As our core giveaway this was the most reliable measure. Based on our initial expectations the numbers were slightly disappointing. At the Chester campus, we felt this was partly because we hadn't been based in the main fair amongst the commercial stalls and saw fewer students in the smaller tepee.

The data from the QR code and competitions proved less reliable, with responses dependent on student participation in follow-up activities. The quiz had the highest response rate and we saw students from all year groups entering, which may have been a result of its visibility at library helpdesks. Whilst this type of competition was effective for engaging students, it didn't quite fit into the context of the fair. Sadly, the selfie competition, which was a popular idea amongst colleagues, didn't really work. On reflection we feel that the competition was limited by the fact that the department doesn't use social media; an email address simply doesn't have the immediacy and social appeal of Twitter or Facebook. However, we had a positive response to the idea from the students' union, and with a few modifications and better promotion we can see it has potential for success.

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### Lessons learned and the future of the freshers fair

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In evaluating our success we came up with some key observations for future events:

- **Communication and teamwork** are vital for success. Contact with other universities was critical and we were dependent on internal links with our graphics team and print unit, not to mention the collaboration between the working party and the stall volunteers. In future we hope to make use of the support of the students' union earlier on, particularly with ideas such as the shelfie competition.
- **Promotion** of our services doesn't have to be limited to a single day or event. We approached the event with an expectation that 'the people will come', and therefore hadn't considered actively promoting our presence at the fair.
- **Freebies** were important to make the stall appealing and attractive. It was good to have a mixture of useful items, and a few novelty freebies helped to build hype and attention e.g. umbrellas, EndNote sunglasses.
- **Measuring impact.** In order to inform planning for future events, it is useful to have a reliable means of calculating how many students are seen on the day. A single core giveaway gives an accurate and measurable figure to record and compare year on year.
- **Know your audience and context.** As this was our first fair we kept the plans broad and inclusive. We now know there's more scope for tailoring our approach to the two particular sites to take account of the different characters of the venues (e.g. the volume of students, amount of space, number and type of stalls and noise levels).

### Conclusion

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In retrospect, we can see that whilst we had set out to keep this event simple, we were rather ambitious in some of our plans. In some ways this was unavoidable, as our greatest limitation was our inexperience.

Overall our first year at the fair was a success. Although we have yet to finalise our plans for freshers fair 2015 we're hoping to return. There is much anticipation and enthusiasm amongst the team and we're keen to build on our ideas for a greater impact. The freshers fair is a significant landmark in the student experience so we need to be a part of it. For our department this was a big step towards a different style of promotion and it presents a unique opportunity for early, informal and positive interaction with students.

### References

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St Helens Libraries, 2014. Book cover blending [online] [accessed 23 June 2014]. Available from: <https://www.pinterest.com/sthlibraries/book-cover-blending/>

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