Reading lists – pitching it right!

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An overview

Every year Durham University library approaches academic staff who teach on taught modules in departments and asks them to submit a copy of their reading list, with the resources that they intend to recommend to students. Although the library aims to make these items more accessible by making lists of the resources available to students online and ensuring that the library has access to sufficient copies of core texts, response to the request for lists is not as good as it could be, so we decided to see if there was something we could do to combat this.

Alongside an overhaul of the reading-list process, a promotional campaign was planned to run from the end of May 2010 until the end of January 2011. The aim was to target both academics and students in order to promote taught-course provision and to improve the library's records management of these activities.

THE CURRENT PROCESS

The procedure for acquiring and processing reading lists at Durham University library has been developed and improved over the course of the last few years. By March 2010 we had:

- a formalised, regular process for the submission of lists
- an in-house process for checking and applying a purchasing model to all taught-course material
- electronic copies of lists available both via the library web pages and embedded in each module on the virtual learning environment (Blackboard)
- a process for scanning, digitising and deep-linking to appropriate taught-course resources.

We also needed to better *quantify* the work we do for taught courses. Transparency has never been more pertinent. Simply citing the numbers of reading lists received as a percentage of total modules was misleading in the context of defining the totality of the work undertaken to support taught courses. In 2009/10 we reported receiving 63% of undergraduate lists. However, this didn't take account of:

- digitisation requests for taught courses
- standalone book orders for taught courses
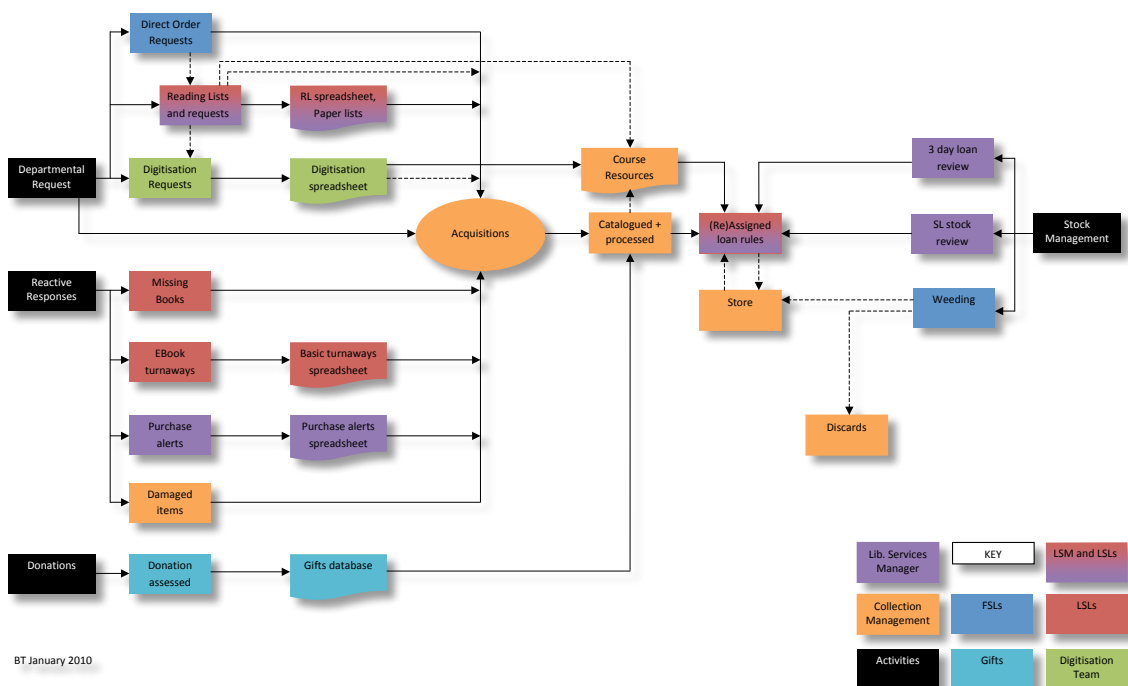- occasions when we had altered materials' loan categories at lecturers' requests.

The 'percentage of reading lists received' figure' only provides partial feedback – we wanted to be able to demonstrate how the library does a lot more than that for taught courses. We readdressed how we recorded statistics and outlined a strategy for further improving our provision of support. Figure 1 illustrates the existing arrangement.
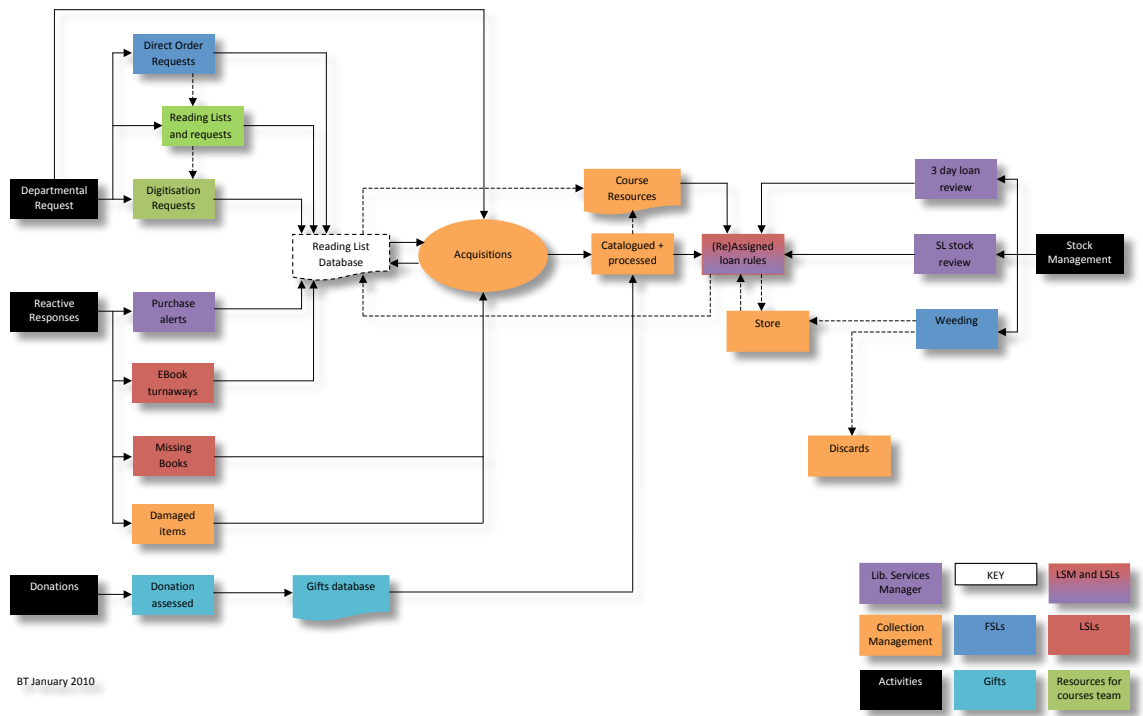
THE REVISED PROCESS

A small team – made up of the authors of this article – would coordinate the support for taught courses. No additional staff would be available to help with the processes and some staff training would be necessary. The amalgamation of the 'digitisation requests' and 'reading lists' mailboxes would ensure a central contact point and as simple a process as possible for the end-user. Web pages were to be re written. At the centre of the new process, a database would hold information on *all* the support provided specifically for taught modules. This information was previously partially recorded in a number of places and rarely cross-referenced. Not only would this be able to provide evidence of how we support taught modules, but it would help us to target modules that we currently receive little information about, thus supporting what should be the primary aim of any university library – providing the appropriate materials in appropriate quantities.

Given this, we felt our biggest challenge was one of advocacy. Could we increase the usage of the online reading lists that we have worked hard to

Current Resources Management Processes – Fig 1

BT January 2010

Figure labels: Direct Order Requests; Reading Lists and requests; Departmental Request; Digitisation Requests; Reading List Database; Acquisitions; Course Resources; Catalogued + processed; (Re)Assigned loan rules; 3 day loan review; SL stock review; Stock Management; Reactive Responses; Purchase alerts; EBook turnaways; Store; Weeding; Missing Books; Damaged items; Discards; Donations; Donation assessed; Gifts database

KEY: Lib. Services Manager; LSM and LSLs; Collection Management; FSLs; LSLs; Activities; Gifts; Resources for courses team

produce? Could we communicate to academic staff who are reluctant to engage with the process the fact that working with the library has benefits?

PROMOTING THE MODEL

The plans to revise the process were initially taken to the library's senior management team (LSMT) for approval, and before finalising the process we discussed the recommended changes with key library colleagues, taking on board the comments and suggestions they had. The new 'Resources for courses' strategy gained support from the acquisitions, academic support and bibliographic services teams, so we were confident that all significant colleagues had been consulted.

At university level, a small working group had been created to look at the reading-list process, focusing on improving departmental submission of lists in a timely matter. A member of the 'Resources for courses' team was invited onto this working group and has been able to inform the group members of the changes made this academic year, thus giving us the opportunity to publicise what we are doing with reading lists at a higher level. To further promote the improvements we have made to the course-resources process across the university, we had an article published this summer in *Dialogue*, the university's news magazine.[1]

The revised arrangement would, we hoped, lead to a greater understanding *for all* of what the

library provides for every taught module, with less duplication of effort between digitisation and reading-list work. It would be a further opportunity for cross-team working, with transparent records of quantifiable work. It would offer an opportunity to target specific departments and modules and for renewed attempts at advocacy, with less confusion for university staff over both whom to contact and what we do. Figure 2 Illustrates the revised arrangement.

THE MARKETING CAMPAIGN

In a move away from previous methods, we wanted a different aspect to the advocacy strategy and focused on what the library could do to help. To ensure the campaign was memorable we decided to create a range of images and themes that users could easily identify as part of it and that could be used subsequently on e-mails, posters, computer screensavers, plasma screens and the website, to tie together what we were trying to achieve. We emphasised that once the lists were received the onus would be on the library to do the leg work in making sure resources matched what was being recommended on courses, firmly embedding library services with student satisfaction, a key priority for all academics.

Digitisation
Under the CLA (Copyright Licensing Agency) licence a scanning service is offered by the library and scans are made available via the VLE for particular courses. In addition, the digitisation

team has provided deep links to journal articles to which we have an electronic subscription. We were conscious that take-up for digitisation requests – although they are already popular – could be promoted further and could be integrated into the summer reading-list process. The digitisation service would then be promoted in the course-resources campaign, along with reading lists, with e-mails, flyers, posters and screensavers, highlighting that these digital resources would be integrated into the online reading lists and providing one location for all course resources.

Contacts

An up-to-date contacts list was created by gathering information from liaison librarians and digitisation service correspondence; this was essential before the campaign could begin so that we could target the relevant people in each department. As part of this process, we also identified primary and secondary contacts, in case we needed to chase individuals for recommended resources. As we were creating a new database for recording each step of the course-resources process, briefings and training were arranged for all the library assistants involved in the reading-list processing at all campuses. This was positively received because we could clearly explain the rationale for change and show the benefits it would have in their work and for the university as a whole.

The campaign

Your Library needs you

The marketing campaign began with initial posters entitled 'Your Library needs you' and 'Digitised Materials: are your students satisfied?' being sent to the primary library contact, along with a covering note on university-headed paper to ensure it was received as an official university campaign.[2] This was supplemented with an e-mail a week later headed 'Ensure student satisfaction – get your reading list in on time', with the flyers for 'Your Library needs you!' and 'Digitised materials' attached.

To ensure that we had reached as much of our audience as possible, a news item ran on the library website[3] and a plasma-screen marketing campaign aimed at academics began in June, to run until the end of July, with the same images from the posters and flyers.

Although the service aimed to simplify the process for academics and to highlight the benefits of submitting lists in time, with the appeal of

ensuring student satisfaction, we were prepared to chase those who did not send out their recommendations! At the end of July a 'Time is running out!' poster was sent to the secondary library contact, along with covering note on university-headed paper for all departments that had still not submitted their reading lists.

Time is running out

This was again supplemented with an e-mail to identify specifically which modules we were yet to receive reading lists for. Once again, to reach as wide an audience a possible a further news item was posted on the library website entitled 'Time is running out!' and a plasma-screen marketing campaign continued for academics throughout August and September.[4]

STILL TO COME

After all the work to get recommended reading lists in from academics, what we had noticed in the past was that students did not know what we had been doing on their behalf. So by September of 2010 we are planning to start the second phase of the marketing strategy with the launch of a new web page for students, informing them that 'It's a piece of cake ... to find your reading lists online.' This will be supplemented with a news item on the library website[5] and an e-mail to all students with the tag line 'Still lost? Finding your reading list online is a piece of cake!'. To reinforce the message, screensavers for students will go on PCs and on the plasma screens, and will be alternated throughout Michaelmas term. Themes will include

It's a piece of cake...

'It's a piece of cake'; 'Lost?', 'Discover'; 'Core reading' and 'Stumped'.

The total success of the exercise has yet to be evaluated. As of 1 August 2010, we had received twice as many reading lists as at the same point in 2009. The concerted efforts of the 'Resources for courses' team and a university-wide endorsement of the importance of the process have given a renewed focus to this library activity and have reinforced the value-added potential of the library to support any taught course.

For more details see: http://www.dur.ac.uk/library/course_resources/

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4 Referee image (and cake image below)
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