

Student engagement in the support and information zone (SIZ)

Quirky surveys – Father SIZmas



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A new service dawns

In 2012 we opened the door to the University of Chichester's new Student Support service, the Support and Information Zone (SIZ). This was a bold and innovative step to provide a 'one-stop shop' for many front-line services including library, IT, reception, academic registry as well as bookings for the student counsellors and welfare team. Our staff of thirty SIZ advisers was drawn from all these departments to provide a comprehensive knowledge base and ensure information exchange within the team. We had all spent the previous three months following a rigorous training programme rolled out by each of the supporting teams that we would be representing. We launched in January with our SIZ team covering the telephones (all university calls are routed through SIZ), offices and front desks in excited anticipation.

So how did we do?

Well, we thought we did rather well. But of course our perception is not what matters. To measure our performance we need to ask our customers. And to engage with our customers we have to try to understand exactly who they are.

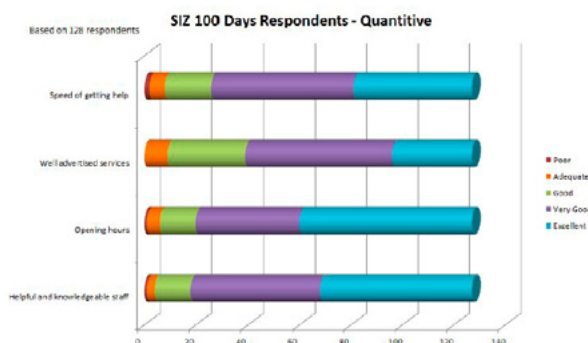
We identified three broad groups – students, staff and members of the public. Of course these can be further refined to identify full-time, part-time, mature, distance learners, international, department, academic, professional services, associates and visitors, including VIPs, Governors, local businesses / schools or members of the public. In April, three months after our launch, we held an initial survey, which we imaginatively called the 'SIZ 100 Day Survey'.

We asked users

- How do you mostly use the SIZ? (multiple-choice answers)
- How would you rate the following aspects of service in the SIZ (1–5, 5 being excellent)
 - helpful and knowledgeable staff?
 - opening hours?
 - well-advertised services?
- In three words what does the SIZ mean to you?
- What could we do better? Any other comments.

The results were published in a poster (see fig. 1).

Results of our '100 days of service' survey (128 respondents)



Speed of getting help We have introduced a queue management system to fast-track certain requests and procedures. Separate channels can be implemented at key times of the year, such as open days, student interviews and auditions.

Well-advertised services We have introduced social media pages and created a comprehensive SIZ guide in collaboration with supporting departments. This was distributed to all new students during induction week. Additionally a slide show is displayed in the foyer area of both LRCs advertising the SIZ services and university events.

Opening hours We have extended opening hours until midnight at busy exam times and are currently surveying students to see if they agree this is the best use of the extra resources.

Helpful and knowledgeable staff We have a continuous training programme in place for all the SIZ team and work closely with our partner departments to review and update procedures. As a team initiative we are working towards a Customer Services award.

Fig. 1 Results of '100 days of service' survey

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Other means of feedback

We followed this up with another survey in December, looking at extended opening, and with a mystery shopping exercise in March. In addition, we have two feedback boxes on both front counters and an online feedback button. We attend student forums and programme boards, hold a SIZ user group and encourage our own SIZ staff to record feedback / suggestions in an online tool available to all advisers. This also includes anecdotal feedback, possibly overheard, which could be useful in evaluating what we do.


We encourage each of the SIZ advisers to establish a role as a Key Contact with our supporting departments to continue to develop our understanding of these departments, encourage regular communication, share knowledge and foster positive working relationships. We are also active on Facebook and Twitter.

At Christmas 2013 we hit on the idea of Father SIZmas. This was a light-hearted and festive way to launch a survey at a time that didn't conflict with the NSS. We are lucky enough to have a new purpose-built building at Bognor Regis Campus and a recently refurbished learning resource centre (LRC) at Bishop Otter Campus, so our festively decorated Xmas post boxes looked rather jolly next to the Christmas tree. We designed our forms in such a way as to find out not only what extra service our customers might like from us but also how much awareness there was of two recently introduced services: card payment facilities and the launch of social media.

The post boxes were in place for two weeks before Christmas in each LRC and Santa promised to pick one lucky letter out of his sack and award £10.00 worth of printing credit to the recipient.

Dear Father SIZmas,

Please ask the SIZ team if they can try and provide :



.....

.....

Did you know that we now offer Debit & Credit Card payment facilities?:	Yes / No Please Circle
Did you know that we have a SIZ Twitter Account and Facebook page?	Yes / No Please Circle

From :

Student Number :

Father SIZmas will pull out one letter out of his sack after the 24th December on each campus to receive a £10 print credit .

Fig. 2 Letter to Father SIZmas 2014

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Results

As a direct result of feedback from all our surveys we have made the following improvements and enhancements to our service:

- twenty laptops at both campuses available for loan
- online self-booking system for students to book study booths or pcs
- extended hours (midnight closing) increased by three weeks
- queue-minders to fast-track advice and information at peak times
- laptop locks available for loan and a security campaign launched for awareness
- improved wi-fi on both campuses
- dedicated emergency line direct to SIZ for all members of the university
- specialised training for the team in sensitive issues from our counselling teams
- ATM cash machines in each LRC
- introduction of stationery for sale

Before we launched SIZ we held an all-staff awayday where we all agreed that excellent customer service would be our key driver and the cornerstone of our vision; we remain committed to this.

The scope of the services that we deliver is broad and the service is constantly evolving to meet changing needs. We in the Support and Information Zone will continue to be as creative and proactive as we can to ensure we are capturing feedback every step of the way.

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