
Library Services roadshow

Taking 'the library' to the students

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INTRODUCTION

Library Services at the University of Birmingham offers an extensive range of resources, services and facilities to support students and staff with their learning and research needs. The available support is marketed in numerous ways and many students receive library induction and / or tailored information literacy sessions. However, some students are still unaware of the range of ways that Library Services can help them with their studies.

In order to increase student awareness of library support available, a 'Library Services roadshow' event was piloted. The roadshow would allow Library Services to set up a stall in one of the university's schools and take 'the library' to the students.

THE PILOT

The Birmingham Business School was chosen for the pilot because of its large cohort of students (approaching 4,000) and the wide variety of journal, company / financial, market research, statistics and newspaper databases that are available, and are needed, for students to be successful in completing a degree in this subject area.

Subject support¹ from Library Services for the Birmingham Business School (which covers accounting and finance, economics, management and marketing) is good, with 1.5 full-time equivalent subject librarians assigned to the School and induction and / or information literacy sessions embedded in the majority of the undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate programmes. Many students receive additional one-to-one support from Library Services throughout the academic year via the subject librarians and / or staff in the recently formed Academic Skills Centre.²

Location

Although the university operates a centrally-booked system for lecture space, meaning that students from any course may be located anywhere across the campus, a significant amount of Business School teaching still takes place within the School building; this building has a large, airy atrium space next to its lecture theatre and seminar rooms, making it a prominent and ideal space for such an event.

Timing

The roadshow took place mid-way through the second semester, to coincide with the first year undergraduate transition review³ (a period in which first-year undergraduate students' progress is reviewed to ensure that they are engaging with their transition to higher education and are aware of the support, resources and opportunities available) as well as the third-year undergraduate and taught postgraduate dissertation seasons.

The event ran for just over three hours, beginning at 10:45am. The day was chosen as one when a maximum number of students were physically located in the School, a number of large cohorts being taught in the School's lecture theatre and main seminar rooms. Peak traffic to the stall was expected between ten-to and ten-past each hour, between which times lectures finished and new ones began.

The stall

The stall consisted of a large table spread with a Library Services tablecloth and was flanked by a Library Services pop-up banner that promoted general information about the service. Two key documents were produced: 'Key sources of information for the Birmingham Business School' and 'Tips for researching and writing an assignment or extended essay'. The former detailed a few sentences on each of 17 key electronic databases for Business School students. The latter gave

information on getting started when looking for literature, data and referencing, as well as providing information about subject advisers and the Academic Skills Centre. Further Library Services generic leaflets about support from the Academic Skills Centre, the events timetable for transition review and details of the Great Read at Birmingham Conference were also used on the stall.

Prior to the event, the companies providing the databases being promoted on the 'Key sources of information for the Birmingham Business School' leaflet were approached. They were informed of the event and asked if they would like to donate any promotional material for display on the stall. Many of them responded positively and kindly provided an array of attractive promotional material (leaflets, pens, pencils, notebooks, post-it notes, USB sticks, etc.).

Whilst it was hoped that an eye-catching stall would be sufficient to attract students to visit the stall, there was also a short survey with a £10 Amazon voucher prize draw, along with a selection of chocolates.

The final element of the stall was three members of staff from Library Services: the two subject advisers for the School and a writing skills adviser from the Academic Skills Centre. All three were present throughout roadshow. They had access to two iPads to help with answering queries.



Fig. 1 The Library Services roadshow: set up in the atrium of the Business School and ready for business

Cost

Besides the time cost of the three Library Services members of staff, thirty minutes of the Facilities Team's time in transporting the equipment between the library and the Business School, and photocopying costs, the only other cost to Library Services of the roadshow was the £10 Amazon voucher and £9 for chocolates.

IMPACT

It was estimated that during the period of the roadshow, 110 students engaged with the Library Services staff, with more students picking up the literature and promotional material. Peak times were, as expected, the ten minutes either side of each hour, with a steady flow of interest in the periods in between.

Interactions with students ranged from giving out information and contact details, answering specific queries, recommending relevant resources for specific topics and / or programmes of study, demonstrating how to use FindIt@Bham (the library's Resource Discovery Service) and individual resources as well as promoting relevant training sessions.

As well as students, members of School staff were aware of the presence of the Library Services roadshow, which helped further raise the visibility and profile of Library Services.



Fig. 2 Students visiting the roadshow

THE SURVEY

The survey proved effective in three ways: firstly it encouraged students to come and talk to the staff at the stall, secondly it provided useful information about who visited the stall and thirdly it provided a gauge on current awareness amongst students about some of the support available to them. In total 85 responses to the survey were received.

The survey revealed that most students who visited the stall were first-year undergraduates (UG1) or taught postgraduates (PGT) from either the Accounting and Finance or Management departments. There were few visits from postgraduate

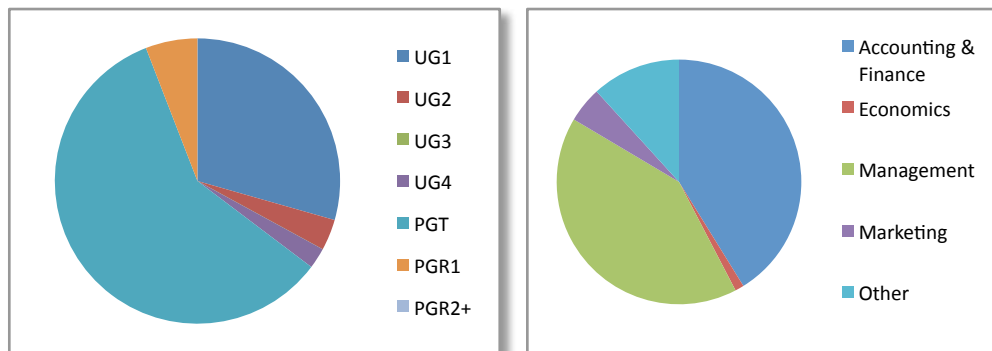


Fig. 3 Level of study and department of survey respondents

researchers (PGRs) or undergraduates in other years of study, and representation from those in the Economics and Marketing departments was also low (see Fig. 3).

Survey participants were asked whether or not they knew that Library Services had (a) a subject adviser for the Business School and (b) an Academic Skills Centre. Fig. 4 shows that just under two-thirds of respondents knew that these services were available from Library Services, although there was a slightly greater uncertainty of how a subject adviser could help compared with the Academic Skills Centre. Despite the amount of instruction that Library Services provides to students in the Business School, it is a cause for concern that over one third of respondents were unaware of these services.

first-year undergraduates and taught postgraduates. It can be seen that, whilst awareness of subject advisers is greater amongst undergraduates than taught postgraduates, over a third of first-year undergraduates who were aware were unsure how subject advisers can help. Almost 90% of first-year undergraduates were aware of the Academic Skills Centre, which is very encouraging, given that undergraduates are the cohort that the Academic Skills Centre is designed to support.

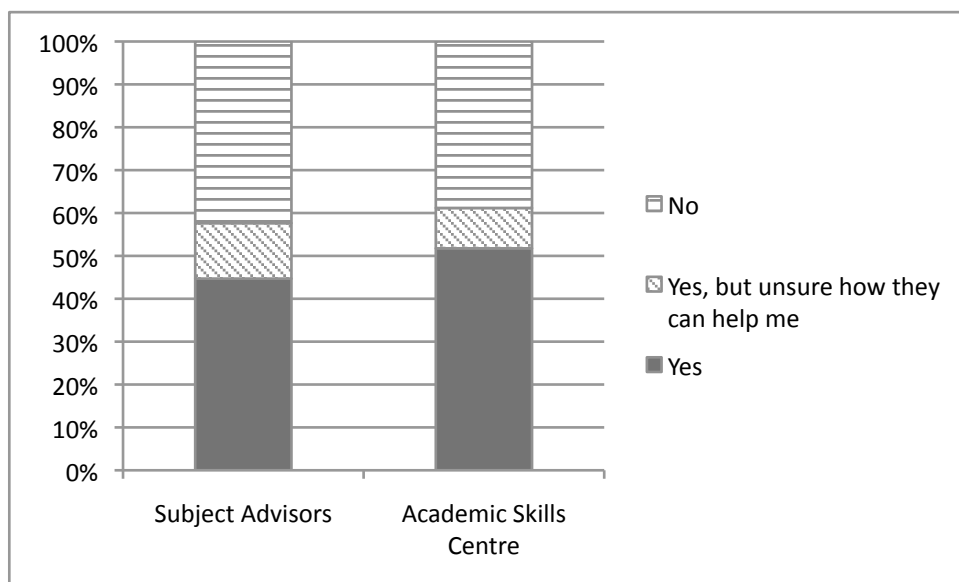


Fig. 4 Level of awareness of subject advisers for the Business School and the Academic Skills Centre: Before today, did you know that Library Services has (a) a subject adviser for the Birmingham Business School and (b) an Academic Skills Centre?

Fig. 5 analyses further by looking at awareness amongst the two biggest cohorts of respondents:

Before today, did you know that Library Services has (a) a subject adviser for the Birmingham Business School and (b) an Academic Skills Centre?	Subject Advisers		Academic Skills Centre	
	UG1	PGT	UG1	PGT
Yes	40%	42%	80%	38%
Yes, but unsure how they can help me	24%	10%	12%	52%
No	36%	48%	8%	10%

Fig. 5 Level of awareness about subject advisers and the Academic Skills Centre amongst first-year undergraduates and taught postgraduates

When asked about the databases that respondents had used, the business journal databases (the solid shaded databases in Fig. 6) were the most utilised. This is perhaps unsurprising given that these resources are relevant to all parts of the School. The company databases: Datastream and Thomson ONE Banker (purple vertical shading) and marketing databases: MarketLine, Mintel and Passport (green horizontal shading) were all used by more than ten of the respondents.

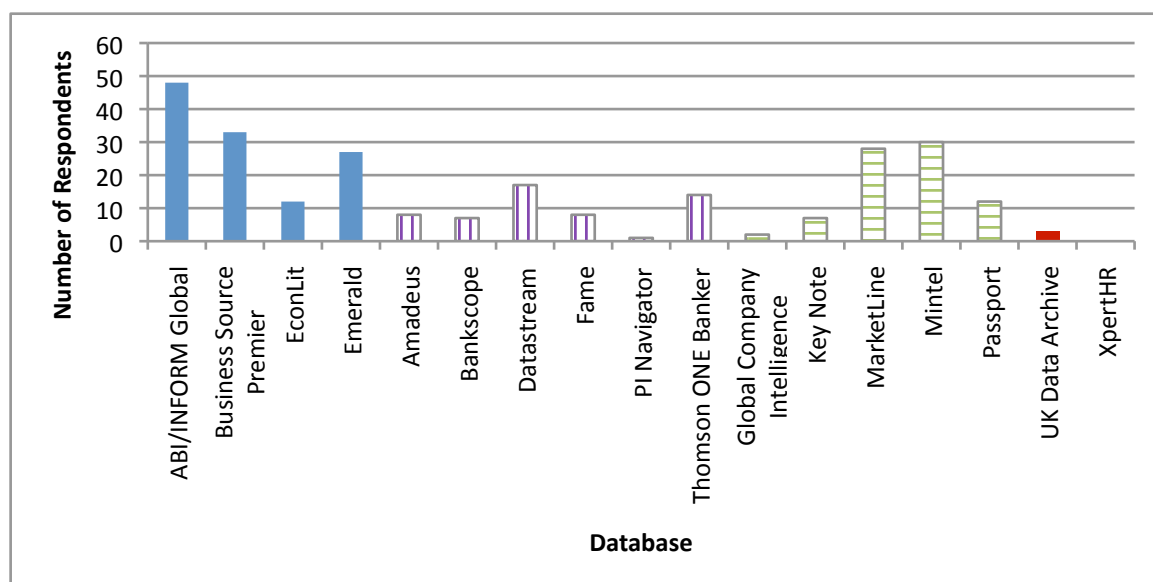


Fig. 6 Number of respondents who had used each of 17 business-related databases

The low number of respondents having used some of the databases gives some concern. In these cases, further analysis of usage statistics, and additional promotion of these resources, will be useful.

The final question from the survey was a free-text question asking respondents: 'What one thing could Library Services do to help you more with your learning and / or research?' Thirty-nine suggestions were received; they can largely be grouped into the following four categories. For each category, a brief summary of the themes that

emerged is presented (although the frequency of comment on each theme was low, typically one or two students per comment, with just one student per comment in the 'other' category):

- *books*: more eBooks, more recent editions, core reading list books, longer loan periods, help with finding books, a wider range of books
- *skills and training*: academic writing skills (including structuring), referencing support,

effective search techniques, more seminars, more skills sessions for final-year students

- *online resources*: help with FindIt@Bham, more information about business databases, more help with using the databases, more resources, more relevant resources
- *other*: access to past dissertations, print copies of journals, improved awareness of services to students, technical help, qualitative analysis, a repository for staff articles

It is hard to interpret these results in a statistically significant way, but continued support in raising awareness of the resources, as well as help in using them, is important throughout programmes of study, as is the provision of more generic

academic skills training. The importance of an accessible, up-to-date, relevant book collection is also emphasised.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the pilot roadshow event was very successful and allowed Library Services staff to engage with a lot of students who may not otherwise have visited the library for help and / or contacted a subject specialist or the Academic Skills Centre.

From an institutional point of view, the authors would recommend further roadshow events in the Business School and in other areas (either at School or college level). Whilst there is some time implication in preparing for and delivering such an event and a small cost involved in running it, we feel that this is a relatively small investment for the potential gain in increasing visibility of the service. Roadshow events could be run in each subject area more than once per year, with of the particular emphasis depending on when in the academic year the event(s) is run.

For anyone wishing to trial a similar roadshow event we would make the following recommendations:

- Consider the key messages to convey and the cohort(s) of students that the service wishes to target.
- Use timetabling information to help assess when and where to locate a stall.
- Tailor information to the cohort being targeted.
- An attractive stall, relevant promotional material, chocolates and survey (with small incentive) are all useful in attracting students to the stall and provide a useful 'ice-breaker' to engage with the students.
- A survey allows the service to learn something from the students.
- Having one or more tablet devices on the stall provides an easy way to answer some queries.

REFERENCES

1. University of Birmingham (2014). Subject Support. Available at <http://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/SubjectSupport> [Accessed 21 March, 2014].
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3. University of Birmingham (2014). Transition Review Information. Available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/transitionreview/index.aspx> [Accessed 21 March, 2014].