

**THE STAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO THE CONSTRUCTION
OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

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ABSTRACT

Reports on a project which aimed to design a set of user performance measures, using the stakeholder method, which could be used in British academic libraries to improve customer services. A questionnaire consisting of 91 performance measures, each of which had to be graded on a scale of 1 to 7, was distributed to 15 participating institutions. The results were collated and analysed, showing the rankings of measures by total stakeholders and by individual groups. Similarities and differences between groups were identified and the principal characteristics of each described. A comparison between pre- and post-1992 universities was also made. Based on the resulting priorities, questionnaires were suggested for user surveys which would yield qualitative information on library services. General issues generated by the project are discussed, and also comparisons made with recent reports on academic library evaluation.

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Introduction

The stakeholder project originated as part of the continuing programme of interest and activity in qualitative, user orientated evaluation at Glasgow Caledonian University. This study of the stakeholder approach was inspired by the work of Cullen and Calvert (1995) in New Zealand. They submitted a questionnaire listing 99 performance issues to representatives of six key stakeholder groups (people with an interest or stake in the library) and invited them to rate the performance issues on a scale of 1-5 according to their own point of view. Following a pilot study at Glasgow Caledonian University, a successful application for funding was made to BLRIC. The project began in July 1995 and concluded in November 1996.

Aims and objectives

The **aim** of the research project was to design a set of user chosen performance measures, using the stakeholder method, which can be used in British academic libraries to improve customer service

The **detailed objectives** were:

- To identify the following:
 - a set of user (stakeholder) chosen performance measures, using the questionnaire method
 - a small number of generally applicable “parsimonious” measures
 - an appropriate number of meaningful stakeholder groups
 - performance measures appropriate to particular stakeholder groups

- To design semi-standardised questionnaire skeletons for the following
 - general use
 - specific categories of users

To allow academic library managers to concentrate their attention on an independently validated set of measures

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 91 items, organised in four categories:

- Assistance from library staff
- Provision of study space and equipment
- Access to materials and equipment
- Management and administration

Although it could be argued that an element of bias would be introduced by categorising questions, since respondents might think that a measure was important because of its position and mark it accordingly, this can be balanced against the fact that the questionnaire was designed in a way that made it easy to answer, with the more complicated issues and those less relevant to all users being placed last. In the process of designing the questionnaire, categorisation assisted in identifying duplicated or overlapping items and also gaps in coverage. **(Figure 1)**

Selection of Stakeholders

The list of stakeholders, decided upon in conjunction with the 15 participating libraries was:

1. Part-time undergraduate
2. Full-time undergraduate
3. Part-time postgraduate (taught)
4. Full-time postgraduate (taught)
5. Postgraduate (research)
6. Research staff
7. Academic staff (teaching)
8. Library staff (other than senior staff)
9. Senior library staff
10. Members of university senior management team

Sample Design and Sample Sizes

It was decided to identify samples from small populations using a census, and for large populations using Krejcie and Morgan's table (1970), which gives suggested sample sizes for different population sizes. These samples were then doubled to allow for non-returns. Any further increase in sample size was impractical from the point of view of the participating institutions, since they were limited in the number of questionnaires they could handle. Most completed questionnaires were returned by the end of February 1996 and all were in by the end of April.

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Most questionnaires were distributed by internal mail or through lecturers and returned through a combination of internal mail and collection boxes. Several universities used the Royal Mail to contact students and they were supplied with pre-paid envelopes to encourage returns.

In the end 33,797 questionnaires were distributed of which 6724 (20%) were returned. Of these, 4193 (62%) of the returns were fully completed and could be used to calculate the overall rankings.

The actual numbers returned by the various stakeholding groups were:

Part-time undergraduates	438
Full-time undergraduates	1899
Part-time postgraduates (taught)	417
Full-time postgraduates (taught)	600
Postgraduates (research)	576
Research staff	502
Academic staff	1613
Other library staff	420
Senior library staff	132
Management	88
Other	39

Results

Although the imbalance of response numbers in each stakeholder category renders it impossible to make direct links between their respective rankings of performance issues, it is possible, by scanning the rankings (**Figure 2**) derived from the total responses, to make some general remarks about high and low priorities. In the following account, the numbers referring to the ranking of issues are allied to the percentage of all stakeholders rating the issue as “very important”.

The demand for availability of materials was reflected in the high priority given to *Provision of multiple copies of items in high use* (1: 60.79%), the *Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue* (5: 54.38%), *Availability of materials on the shelf* (9: 51.56%), *Speed & accuracy of re-shelving of materials* (15: 46.46%) and *Length of queues / time taken to be served* (38: 34.94%). On the other hand, the *State of repair of stock* (74: 19.29%) was not a high priority, suggesting that savings on binding would be possible. Other questions of accessibility and costs were important, such as *Match of open hours to user needs* (10: 50.78%), *Cost of photocopying* (11: 48.39%), *Amount of regular maintenance of equipment* (12: 47.58%) *Provision of adequate number of photocopies* (16: 46.12%) and *Extent to which services are free* (17: 45.72%). This last item conflicted with the low rating given to *Equitable and effective sanctions policy* (68: 21.04%).

Staffing issues directly related to user satisfaction were rated highly: *Overall user satisfaction* (2: 60.15%), *Staff helpfulness* (3: 58.55%), *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* (6: 52.25%) and *Expertise of enquiry desk staff* (22: 43.45%). However, other staffing issues, such as the *Level of staff training and development* (60: 24.23%), *Counter staff expertise* (75: 19.15%) and *Availability of subject specialists* (48: 31.84%) were much more lowly rated. Also less important were *Extent of involvement of user groups in decision making* (76: 18.65%) *Regular communication with user groups* (59: 24.99%), *Openness of management procedures* (69: 20.70%) and *Feedback to users who request items for purchase* (72: 19.84%), although *Extent to which users are made aware of services available* was rated quite highly (28: 38.42%). *Amount of user education* had a similar ranking (26: 38.85%). Importance was given to some management issues, such as *Competence of library management* (7: 51.87%) and *Total amount of library budget* (8: 51.63%).

IT issues generated a variety of interest. The most important networking issues were *Access to library catalogues / CD-ROMs / internal databases via networks throughout the campus* (14: 46.48%) and *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (37: 35.85%). The OPAC was the most important electronic service, with a high rating given to *Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue* (5: 54.38%). *Ease of use of public catalogues* (35: 36.42%) was placed slightly higher than *Provision of personal computers for general use* (50: 30.93%).

In general, it can be noted that service issues predominated in those ranked up to 60 and that resource issues did not feature highly in the bottom 30 rankings, apart from *Provision of audio-visual equipment* (82: 14.81%).

The problem with using overall results to decide which questions are important and unimportant in evaluating library services is that with a ratio of 8:1 of library users to service providers, the views of the latter tend to be overshadowed by the former. For example, 43% of service providers rate question 6 (*Expertise of the issue desk / counter staff*) as “very important”, a rating given by only 16% of library users. In the overall results, this averages out as a 19% rating as “very important”, which could not be regarded as a true reflection of opinion. It was, therefore, more appropriate to split the overall results into those for library users and service providers. There were 4 issues which had a difference of less than 1% in the higher rankings given by providers as compared with users: *Division of materials budget expenditure between books and periodicals*, *Proportion of staff professionally qualified*, *Cost per item (books) added to stock* and *Speed of acquisition of new material*. The same difference of under 1% applies to 4 issues ranked lower by providers: *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM*, *Adequacy of seat numbers*, *Provision of audio-visual equipment* and *Extent of involvement of user groups in decision making*. It is noticeable that these middle-ranking issues are evenly balanced between management and service issues. The larger percentage differences show that in general, the providers rated higher by at least 10% the management issues related to budgeting, cost efficiency, cost effectiveness and staffing matters, such as *Proportion of library budget spent on staff*, *Expertise of enquiry desk staff when needed*, *Cost*

effectiveness of library and *Openness of management procedures*. The issues they rated lower by at least 10% were service issues, such as borrowing and library stock, exemplified by *Flexibility of loan periods*, *Number of items borrowable at one time*, *Adequacy of library collection compared to other institutions* and *Quietness of study environment*. This division is even more obvious in the higher rankings, by at least 20%, which providers gave to: *Expertise of issue desk/counter staff*, *Ease of use of public catalogues*, *Competence of library management* and *Level of staff training and development*. They gave lower ratings by at least 20% to 2 cost issues: *Cost of photocopying* and *Extent to which services are free*.

Stakeholding Groups' Preferences

It was possible to identify the issues of special importance to each group of stakeholders. In the following account, the percentage of respondents who considered an issue to be “very important” is given in brackets.

Part-Time Undergraduates

This group attached importance to staff, especially enquiry desk and information related staff: *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* (57.84%), *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* (50.52%), *Expertise of enquiry desk staff* (40.07%) and *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users* (34.15%) This last received the highest of the users' rating. Availability, time and environment issues were rated highly: *Match of open*

hours to user needs (53.66%), *Speed & accuracy of re-shelving of materials* (45.30%), *Availability of sought material on shelf* (47.04)%, *Provision of multiple copies of items in high use* (63.76%) and *Quietness of study environment* (44.60%). However, *Length of queues / time taken to be served* (32.75%) was less important. Among the education and guidance issues, they ranked the *Amount of user education* (40.77%) higher than did any other user group.

An issue which was rated only slightly higher than by full-time undergraduates (26.80%), was *Reciprocal access to other university libraries* (29.27%). *Number of items borrowable at one time* (35.19%) and *Flexibility of loan periods* (39.72%) were near the full-time undergraduates' rating of 37.19% and 39.53% respectively

Low ratings were given to IT issues. *Provision of personal computers for general use* was lower than might be expected (29.27%), with *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* lower (20.21%) and *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM* even lower (18.12%).

There was not much interest in feedback or involvement. *Regular communication with user groups* was rated at 23.69% and *Extent of involvement of user groups in decision making* at 15.68%.

The overall picture was of a vulnerable group with limited time and skills, in need of special consideration.

Full-time Undergraduates

The main issue for this group was the *Provision of multiple copies of items in high use* (73.79%), a concern which can be linked to availability issues such as the *Availability of sought material on shelf* (60.89%), *Speed & accuracy of re-shelving of materials* (50.08%) and *Range of types of materials* (49.66%). The *Provision of audio- visual equipment*, however had a low rating at 18.09%. These students regarded the OPAC as the most important electronic service, being interested in the *Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue* (54.02%) and *Availability of library catalogues throughout the library* (44.14%), although the *Ease of use of public catalogues* rated lower at 32.83%. Although their rating of *Provision of personal computers for general use* (50.17%) was higher than for any other group, their commitment to IT was not very high, with *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM* being rated at 26.13% and *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* at 34.17%.

Match of open hours to user needs (50.42%) and *Quietness of study environment* (52.85%) were both highly rated. The question of *Length of queues / time taken to be served* (38.11%) was more lowly ranked, but photocopying services were highly rated, with *Provision of adequate number of photocopies* at 53.77% and *Amount of regular maintenance of equipment* at 52.26%. Although *Extent to which users are made aware of services available* was rated quite highly at 40.12%, communication and

involvement issues were less important, with *Regular communication with user groups* at 22.03% and *Extent of involvement of user groups in decision making* at 19.35%.

Some cost issues were important, with the *Extent to which services are free* at 56.70% and the *Cost of photocopying* at 65.58%, but *Equitable and effective sanctions policy* was ranked lowly at 19.35%.

The importance of staff was shown in the rankings given to *Overall user satisfaction* (60.97%), *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* (55.11%), *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* (47.32%) and *Expertise of enquiry desk staff* (38.86%)

Part-time Postgraduates (Taught)

The most important issue for this group was *Provision of multiple copies of items in high use available* (63.22%), with *Match of open hours to user needs* (58.24%) being ranked slightly higher than by any other student groups. Like part-time undergraduates, they were also interested in staff issues, such as *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* (60.15%), *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* (49.81%) and *Expertise of enquiry desk staff* (44.44%). This group felt the need for guidance, placing *Number and quality of signs for direction / guidance* (39.46%), *Amount of user education* (39.08%) and

Arrangement of library collection (36.78%) quite highly, although a lower ranking was given to *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users* (25.29%)

High rankings were given to availability and cost issues, such as *Availability of sought material on shelf* (49.81%), *Speed & accuracy of re-shelving of materials* (48.66%), *Cost of photocopying* (46.36%) and *Extent to which services are free* (44.83%).

Lower rankings were given to IT issues such as *Provision of personal computers for general use* (26.82%), *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (22.61%) and *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM* (26.05%).

Full-time Postgraduates (Taught)

As with part-time postgraduates, the most important issue was *Provision of multiple copies of items in high use* (66.40%). Staff were also important, with high rankings given to *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* (55.83%), *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* (49.05%) and *Enquiry staff expertise* (40.92%).

Other issues which were highly ranked were connected with availability: *Match of open hours to user needs* (52.30%), *Availability of sought material on shelf* (50.68%), *Speed & accuracy of re-shelving of materials* (48.78%) and *Range of types of materials* (47.15%). Photocopying and cost issues also rated highly: *Cost of photocopying* (59.35%), *Provision of adequate number of photocopiers* (49.86%) *Extent to which services are free* (46.07%) and *Amount of regular maintenance of equipment* (51.49%).

Some guidance and training issues were quite highly ranked with *Extent to which users are made aware of services available* (37.67%), *Number and quality of signs for direction / guidance* (37.67%) and *Amount of user education* (35.50%), but lower ranking was given to *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users* (27.37%). IT issues were rated within a small range of percentages, with *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (35.23%) and *Provision of personal computers for general use* (34.42%) quite high but *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM* relatively low (27.10%).

Postgraduates (Research)

Although few of these students will be members of a cohesive group, they still rated highly *Provision of multiple copies of items in high use* (57.75%). Their main concern was access to materials, important issues being *Proportion of materials catalogued* (63.10%), *Speed of provision of items through inter-library loans* (59.72%), *Proportion of items wanted by user finally obtained* (49.86%), *Availability of library catalogues throughout the library* (47.61%) and *Reciprocal access to other university libraries* (45.92%). They were also concerned with staff: *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* (55.77%) and *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* (54.65%) were highly placed, although *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users* (34.93%) less so. Possibly because they had already used libraries as undergraduates, they rated guidance type issues quite lowly, with *Amount of user education* at 35.77% and *Number and quality of signs for direction / guidance* at 39.2%. There were concerns about *Cost of*

photocopying (52.68%) and *Extent to which services are free* (47.61%). Some IT issues were rated highly, such as *Access to library catalogues/CD-ROMs/ internal databases via networks throughout the campus* (60.85%), and also *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (49.01%), but lower priority was given to *Provision of personal computers for general use* (30.99%), perhaps because they had easier access to computers within their departments. It would seem that, of all users, research-based postgraduates lead in user-orientated issues. However, it is noticeable that management concerns are becoming more important, with high ratings given to *Total library budget as proportion of university expenditure* (46.48%), *Flexibility of library budget to respond to new subject areas* (45.63%) and *Competence of library management* (45.63%)

Research Staff

It is interesting to compare this group's ratings with those given to some issues by postgraduate research students. As with postgraduate researchers, administration and management issues now received a higher rating, with interest being shown in *Competence of library management*, (51.10%) and *Total amount of library budget* (48.53%) compared with postgraduates researchers at 45.63% and 47.32% respectively. *Expertise of enquiry desk staff* (44.49%) almost exactly matched the postgraduate researchers'

rating of 44.79%. *Reciprocal access to other university libraries* (42.65%) and *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (43.75%) rated slightly lower than postgraduate research students' placing at 45.92% and 49.01%.. However, research staff were less concerned with *Speed of provision of items through inter-library loans*, (44.85%), compared with postgraduate research students at 59.72%. This was the only group to rate highly *Amount of time journals are out of circulation for binding*, at 40.81%, again contrasted with postgraduate research students' ranking at 35.49%. Research staff rated lowly *Provision of personal computers for general use* (17.28%), probably because they, like research students, had easier access to this facility in their departments.

Academic Staff

Here there was a mixture of academic, research and management concerns, with less similarity to research staff priorities than might be expected. Increasing bureaucratic duties may explain the fact that the top concern was *Total amount of library budget* (63.02%), other important issues being the *Competence of library management* (53.82%), *Total library budget as proportion of university expenditure* (53.41%) and *Flexibility of library budget to respond to new subject areas* (49.69%). Also highly rated were *Speed of provision of items through inter-library loans* (42.77%), *Reciprocal access to other university libraries* (39.05%) and *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (41.74%). *Amount of user education* (40.39%) was also important, possibly for the benefit of their students rather than themselves, but low priority was given to

Counter staff expertise (15.91%), Provision of personal computers for general use (15.70%) and Provision of group study rooms (12.40%).

Other Library Staff

This group rated itself as most important, with *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* ranked at 76.07%. They attached importance to things which made their job easier, such as *Competence of library management (74.43%) Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed (62.62%), Ease of use of public catalogues (61.31%), Availability of library catalogues throughout the library (55.08%), Provision of multiple copies of items in high use (51.48%), Amount of user education (48.20%).* Also highly ranked was *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users (46.89%),* as were *Level of staff training and development (44.92%), Level of library staff workload (42.62%)* and *Extent to which users are made aware of services available (47.21%)* *Regular communication with user groups* was placed fairly highly at 39.67%, but some other user issues were relatively lowly placed: *Cost of photocopying (24.59%), Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus (21.97%), Provision of personal computers for general use (21.31%) and Provision of group study rooms (17.70%).* Another IT issue which was quite lowly rated was *CD-ROMs serials indexes available (23.61%)*

Senior Library Staff

This group attached a lot of importance to OPAC issues, such as *Ease of use of public catalogues* (74.19%), *Availability of library catalogues throughout the library* (72.04%), *Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue* (66.67%) and *Access to library catalogues / CD-ROMs/ internal databases via networks throughout the campus* (56.99%) Although *Overall user satisfaction* was also of first importance (74.19%), and *Regular communication with user groups* ranked at 55.91%, it was noticeable that some more specific user orientated issues which might have a bearing on this had a lower ranking: *Extent to which services are free* (21.51%), *Feedback to users who request items for purchase* (19.35%), *Cost of photocopying* (19.35%) and *Extent of involvement of user groups in decision making* (18.28%). *Quietness of study environment* (27.96%) had a lower rating for senior library staff than it did for users and, together with Management respondents (44.83%), senior library staff gave a lower rating than other groups to *Provision for disabled users* (48.39%). Ratings of IT issues were variable: *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (54.84%), *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM* (43.01%) and *Provision of personal computers for general use* (25.81%).

These priorities seemed to suggest that senior library staff are more linked with management than they are with users and so the popular belief that librarians identify primarily with users is not necessarily true.

Management

The main concerns for this group related to bureaucratic and management issues linked to staff performance and user satisfaction, with *Competence of library management* (68.97%) being rated the most highly and *Helpfulness, courtesy of staff* (67.24%), *Overall user satisfaction* (65.52%) and *Match of open hours to user needs* (65.59%) also considered important. High rankings were given to financially-based management issues, such as *Total amount of library budget* (58.62%), *Flexibility of library budget to respond to new subject areas* (50.00%), *Total library budget as proportion of university expenditure* (44.83%) and *Cost efficiency of library* (39.66%). Some administrative items were also a concern: *Speed & accuracy of re-shelving of materials* (43.10%), *Adequacy of seat numbers* (41.38%), *Quietness of study environment* (39.66%) and *Length of queues / time taken to be served* (34.48%). Some IT issues were highly placed, such as *Access to remote databases via networks throughout the campus* (41.38%) and *Catalogue networked within campus* (44.83%), although there was less interest in *Availability of periodical indexes on CD-ROM* (24.14%) and *Provision of personal computers for general use* (22.41%)

Comments

This analysis of stakeholders' distinct concerns demonstrated that each group had its own agenda, no doubt related to special characteristics, such as student poverty or the increasing involvement of academic staff in administrative work. There was, however, a tendency for

each group to look upwards to the next group in the academic scale, most notably in the overlap between the interests of some researchers (both postgraduates and staff) and academic staff, and also in the higher ratings given by senior library staff to some management matters than to some user orientated issues. This has implications for the evaluation of library services, since it would be inadvisable to treat all users as a homogenous group and their varying concerns must be taken into account in surveys of users and providers.

Nevertheless, by looking at the priorities attached to the suggested performance issues by stakeholders, whether as one group, as the two basic groupings of providers and users, or as individual groups, it is possible to identify some general issues and some problems which universities would require to consider, taking into account the characteristics of their own constituencies. For example:

- Users do not seem to be very interested in involvement and feedback issues, although they rate *Extent to which users are made aware of services available* highly. If the university is interested in involving users in decision making, rather than just making them aware of what has been decided, it would need to look at the mechanisms which would encourage them to be involved in future planning.
- The above point may be allied to the apparently low interest in internal library management and also to the low value placed on the mission statement approach.

Both *Number and quality of written management policies* and *Use of planning procedures (long and short term)* received low ratings.

- Relevant and adequate *Match of open hours to user needs* is important to everyone, including university managers.
- Computers for general use are important to undergraduate students although not to groups at postgraduate level and above. Should they be included in library provision or should teaching departments take more cognisance of this requirement?
- Planning of library accommodation could be influenced by the low rating given to *Provision of group study rooms*, *Provision of carrels* and *Proximity of refreshment service during library open hours* as well, of course, by university-wide decisions about the provision of computers for general use.
- Because of its generally low ranking, there may be a case for reducing audio-visual provision.
- Since all student groups rate the availability of multiple copies very highly, there could be implications for the supply of electronic textbooks. On the other hand, some user groups, particularly undergraduates and postgraduates on taught courses, do not appear to be interested in IT applications, and the idea of the Virtual Library may not be attractive to them.

- The provision of multiple copies, together with IT issues and cost issues constitute possible areas of conflict, not only between providers and users, but also amongst identifiable groups. Consideration would also have to be given to the high rating for *Extent to which services are free* and the fairly low rating for *Equitable and effective sanctions policy*.
- If users are to be charged for some services, should this be planned and formalised, so that those who attach importance to this possibility are fully aware of the underlying cost?
- There is a need to invest more time and effort in user education and information services for part-time students
- Some contradictions relating to staffing arose in the analysis of the questionnaires. There was a high ranking for *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* but a low rating for *Counter staff expertise, Levels of staff training* and *Proportion of qualified staff*, and a relatively low ranking for *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users*. Therefore, should subject specialists be withdrawn from lower level work, with a concentration on breadth rather than depth of enquiry service, and should lower level information training and orientation also be done at Assistant Librarian and Library Assistant level? Would this free subject specialists to concentrate more on part-time students and higher level work? On the other hand, it is questionable whether participants understood the difference between

enquiry staff and subject specialists, and they were not necessarily knowledgeable about the skills required by counter staff.

- When viewing the table dealing with rankings for all stakeholders, it is noticeable that some issues which are traditionally regarded as important by librarians were rated lowly. Therefore, librarians would require to use their professional judgement when making decisions about issues to be included in surveys of individual stakeholder groups.

6 Expertise of issue desk / counter staff (19.15%)

7 Proportion of staff professionally qualified (13.31%)

8 Level of staff training and development (24.23%)

9 Level of library staff workload (24.04%)

16 Provision of group study rooms (20.15%)

17 Provision of personal study rooms (e.g. carrels) (20.46%)

47 Proportion of stock restricted to short loan (23.13%)

60 Availability of printed periodicals indexes (22.44%)

64 Equitable and effective sanctions policy (e.g. fines)(21.04%)

Comparison of Pre/Post 1992 Universities

The project partners were a mix of universities dating in their present form from before and after 1992, when many polytechnics were given university status.

<u>Pre-1992</u>	<u>Post-1992</u>
Aberdeen	Abertay
Cardiff	Central England
Cranfield	Central Lancashire
Glasgow	Coventry
Keele	Glasgow Caledonian
Newcastle	Luton
Strathclyde	Paisley
	Sunderland

The results obtained from the questionnaires can be used to compare the principal concerns of the older and newer universities. Seventy one issues were rated higher by the post-1992 universities and 20 issues were rated higher by the pre-1992 universities. The difference between the two groups is small, ranging from +13.78% to -16.37%. Eight issues were rated “very important” by more than 50% of them:

- 2 Helpfulness, courtesy of staff
- 4 Availability of desk staff when needed
- 18 Provision made for disabled users
- 31 Match of open hours to user needs

- 42 Provision of multiple copies of items in high use
- 56 Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue
- 65 Overall user satisfaction
- 70 Competence of library management

The most striking differences relate to the service providers, with the post-1992 universities rating 82 issues higher. **(Figure 3)**

Nearly one-quarter (22.78%) of service providers in post-1992 universities rated the provision of group study rooms more highly, perhaps because their teaching is more geared towards group and project work rather than to traditional large-scale lecturing. It is interesting, however, to see that since 11.16% fewer service providers in post-1992 universities rate remote database access as very important, IT issues are not necessarily more to the fore in the newer institutions.

Seventeen of the 26 issues rated higher by at least 10% of service providers in the post-1992 universities relate directly to user services:

- 1 Number of library staff per Full-time Equivalent student
- 3 Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users
- 4 Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed

- 6 Expertise of issue desk / counter staff
- 12 Physical suitability of building
- 15 Quietness of study environment
- 16 Provision of group study rooms
- 17 Provision of personal study rooms (e.g. carrels)
- 18 Provision made for disabled users
- 21 Provision of audio-visual equipment
- 25 Number of seats per Full-time Equivalent student
- 26 Adequacy of seat numbers
- 34 Range of types of material
- 36 Extent to which users are made aware of services available
- 60 Availability of printed periodical indexes
- 63 Length of queues / time taken to be served
- 87 Library expenditure per Full-time Equivalent student

The others issues rated higher by at least 10% are management (principally budget) issues,

Figure 4 sets out the difference between percentage rankings for users in the two groups of universities. Users in the post-1992 universities rated 67 issues higher and those in pre-1992 universities rated 24 higher. Again, the difference between the two groups is quite small, ranging from +12.63% to -8.38%.

It can be noted that, although the differences are not so marked, the two issues ranked higher by more than 10% of users in post-1992 universities were also user-orientated:

16 Provision of group study rooms

34 Range of types of material

Questionnaire Skeletons

One objective of this study was to design semi-standardised questionnaire skeletons which could be employed as a reliable method of surveying satisfaction with library services. It was found that the important issues identified by all subgroups were mainly covered in the “overall” library users results. The exception was the research users’ preferences because of the relatively small size of this group as compared with the others. Although there is not sufficient difference to justify a questionnaire for each stakeholder group, it became apparent that separate surveys for users, providers and research/academic staff would be desirable, making a total of four questionnaires (**Figures 5 to 8**). The principle followed for each questionnaire was to discard issues which received a rating of less than 25% and to include those which received a rating of more than 40%, although some amalgamation of issues was made.

General Issues Generated by the Research

Several general issues generated by the project deserve further consideration.

- The participating institutions were self-selected, presumably by librarians who were interested in the concept and thought that there might be some useful outcomes. Would the results have been different if the group had been larger / smaller/ different?
- As noted previously, the stakeholder groups varied in size, which is to be expected, since students and users in general outnumber the library and management staff within any university. However, are the perceptions of users more important than those of others for this reason, i.e. does size outweigh experience?
- Does the involvement of users help providers to make meaningful decisions? It could add to the providers own perceptions of good library service and extend their knowledge of user needs, but how much weight should be given to this exercise? The users involved are also self-selected to some extent because they made a positive decision to complete the questionnaire. Would the opinions of non-responders have made a difference?
- Is it a good thing to pre-identify measures? Would differences have been more pronounced if there had been a more open choice?

- How much were respondents influenced by the service offered by their own library? If they were not familiar with a particular service, they might not have realised the possible benefit of a particular service nor understood the implications of the appropriate performance measure. There was a tendency to choose positive ranking for measures. Was this because respondents thought that the inclusion of a measure in the list guaranteed its value?
- As noted before, there was a tendency for each stakeholder group to look upwards towards the next group, this being a particularly noticeable characteristic of researchers (both postgraduate and staff) and also of senior library staff, who were highly interested in management matters, such as budgeting. This would require to be considered when compiling survey questions.

Comparison with Recent Reports

Quality and self-evaluation have been prominent topics in academic libraries in recent years, generating a number of reports relating to academic library effectiveness. Five reports which suggested performance indicators were compared with the indicators included in the Glasgow Caledonian University project. These were the Follett Report (1993), the Effective Academic Library (1995), SCONUL Working Papers on Service Level Agreements (1994), and documents published by the ISO (1998) and IFLA.(1996). **Figure 9** displays the comparison, demonstrating where Glasgow Caledonian University

indicators coincide with those suggested in each report. In this table, the indicators printed in bold type represent those considered “very important” by more than 40% of all stakeholders. It is noticeable that there is complete overlap with the Follett Report recommendations, and it could be suggested that reference to the Glasgow study’s data analysis would augment these by helping a library to identify the principal concerns of stakeholding groups. Since the emphasis in the Effective Academic Library is on traditional input measures, a direct comparison is not feasible, but, once more, reference to the respondents’ rankings of the Glasgow measures may assist in prioritising evaluation strategies.

The ISO document is intended to apply to libraries in general and recognises that there are many different types of libraries which have unique characteristics, different settings and different user groups. In the context of the Glasgow Caledonian University study, therefore, it must be realised that specific references to university-level libraries are not included. The ISO document states that it “presents a set of performance indicators that have been thoroughly tested by widespread use in libraries or by explicit testing by researchers and subsequent documentation in the literature” It is noted, however, that “there are some library activities and services for which, during the development of this standard, there was a general lack of tested and well-documented indicators.” For this reason, performance indicators were not specified for all services, activities and uses of the resources of the library. Those omitted include user education, promotion of the service, and availability and use of human resources. Electronic services are also poorly represented. The emphasis is

on quantitative issues, with suggested methodologies for producing management information given in some detail.

Possible indicators were also omitted if they did not fulfil the criteria of containing informative content which provides information for decision making, of reliability, of validity, of appropriateness, practicality and comparability between libraries. It is worth noting that the indicator titles are not always obviously descriptive of the issues they cover, and a thorough reading of the document is necessary to understand all the implications. Bearing in mind both this last point and also the generalised nature of the document, it is possible to compare the suggested indicators with the Glasgow Caledonian University list of issues. This shows that the use of the surveys suggested as a result of the Glasgow Caledonian University study would assist librarians to collect the data necessary for the ISO indicators. Reference to the results of this study would also aid ISO in gathering information about tested indicators, particularly in those areas specifically mentioned as omitted through lack of evidence..

The IFLA guidelines were drawn up by a working group of the IFLA Section of University Libraries and other General Research Libraries. Its criteria are:

- To concentrate on academic libraries (according to the section)
- To include primarily indicators that would be applicable in all countries (developing as well as developed)

- To take care that the indicators would be applicable to all types of academic libraries, whether big or small, automated or not, with free access or closed stacks
- To measure effectiveness, not efficiency (cost-effectiveness)
- To concentrate on user-orientated indicators (that excludes for example indicators for collection preservation)
- To include “overall” indicators (for example, user satisfaction with whole library) as well as indicators for separate activities

It is emphasised that the indicators should be easy to use, even by those without mathematical or statistical knowledge, and most of them can be suited to data being split up in regard to types of users or subject areas of the collection. An original list of about 30 indicators was narrowed down to 17, although it is recognised that new ones might be added in the future. The comparison with the Glasgow Caledonian University indicators shows that the claims in the IFLA document are met, but it is noteworthy that there is little reference to study space and equipment, to special services, such as short-loan collections, to budget issues and also, except in passing, to staffing issues, although many of these could have an impact on user satisfaction.

The SCONUL Service Level Agreements is a collection of documents from 7 English universities. The introduction states that “Service Level Agreements are part of the move towards quality and accountability in public services and emphasise the importance of the ‘internal’ consumer. They are usually form of ‘contract’ between two departments or sections within the same organisation.” Fourteen reasons for the drawing up of Service Level Agreements are listed, some of which are less applicable in the context of this project. For example, it is suggested that Service Level Agreements may include details of refunds / compensations if things do not go to plan. Several of them are appropriate in this study. For example, Service Level Agreements:

- identify the provider and the customer of the service
- specify the nature of the service provided
- specify the level of the service provided - frequency, coverage, timescales, etc.
- can be an indicator of quality
- make expectations explicit
- help promote the service
- assist communication

Some of the Service Level Agreements included in the document are statements of existing policy and descriptions of services available, with caveats about provision. Others, in addition, set standards for the library, with mechanisms whereby they can be monitored. As an example, Leeds Metropolitan University Library Service Level Agreement sets out its

desired standards in a form which allows comparison with the Glasgow Caledonian University measures. There is not a complete match between the two documents, but the comparative chart demonstrates that stakeholder surveys could yield useful information for evaluating the service.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is considered a useful tool for measuring quality within for-profit organisations, offering a method of identifying gaps in performance and aiding better management practice. It consists of systematically identifying best practice within the appropriate field of operation and striving to improve performance, at least to that standard and, if possible, beyond it. Some not-for-profit organisations, including libraries, are now interested in benchmarking as a technique for performance measurement, a trend which is acknowledged in the IFLA guidelines, which aim “to offer tools for the evaluation process that, by using them in an identical way, allow historical comparisons within the library and even comparisons between libraries”. To that end, each performance indicator in the IFLA document explains under what circumstances benchmarking with other libraries would be possible, although it is emphasised that a comparison between libraries can only be made if they have a similar mission and structure and the indicators are used in the same (or nearly the same) circumstances.

As with for-profit organisations, libraries face the difficulty of acquiring comparable data, identifying partners which can offer useful comparisons, and finding sufficient resources in

terms of time and staff to carry out the exercise. At the moment, too, there is no general consensus on either a valid range of benchmarks or methods of collecting and using relevant data. While the Glasgow Caledonian University study cannot offer solutions to these problems, its results suggest that agreed performance indicators, generated by carefully planned surveys, could be a useful tool. The project also demonstrates that partnerships, or networks, could be a viable way of comparing performance, although there would require to be more detailed information on the various frameworks of operation.

Each library participating in the research project eventually received a comparison of their responses and the total responses collected by the research. As an example, the Glasgow Caledonian University comparison is included as **Figures 10 and 11**. From **Figure 10** it can be seen that there were 11 issues rated “very important” by over 50% of respondents in Glasgow Caledonian University alone as well as by all respondents combined:

- 2 Helpfulness, courtesy of staff
- 4 Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed
- 18 Provision made for disabled users
- 22 Provision of adequate number of photocopiers
- 31 Match of open hours to user needs
- 42 Provision of multiple copies of items in high use
- 44 Availability of sought material on shelf
- 56 Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue
- 65 Overall user satisfaction

70 Competence of library management

78 Total amount of library budget

Additionally, 3 issues were rated “very important” by over 50% of Glasgow Caledonian University respondents and by over 40% of all respondents combined:

23 Cost of photocopying

26 Adequacy of seat numbers

43 Speed and accuracy of re-shelving of materials

Figure 11 demonstrates that three issues were rated “very important” by a greater number (10% more) of respondents at Glasgow Caledonian University than overall. This indicates that at Glasgow Caledonian University the issues of seating and re-shelving are of greater concern than in universities in general. Conversely, respondents at Glasgow Caledonian University seemed less concerned with access to remote databases. Obviously, these show symptoms of a possible problem, such as lack of shelving, not the causes.

Comparisons of this kind would not, in themselves, give accurate benchmarks but, given additional information about partners in an agreed network, they would be a useful component of the exercise.

Conclusions

A particular value of the project was the inclusion of a large number of respondents, thus allowing identification of the characteristics of stakeholders and of the influence these have on different groups' requirements for library services. Each group was large enough to allow some consensus on different concerns to be reached, so that the user-orientated approach to performance measurement was supported. When considering individual stakeholder groups, it became clear that for many users there is still a "them and us" attitude in place, with library staff and university management on one side and users on the other. There is a tendency for each group to look upwards towards the next one, so that, for example, management issues become more important to researchers and to senior library staff.

Of the 91 issues included in the questionnaire, 18 were rated as "very important" by at least 40% of the combined stakeholders and could be regarded as the key performance issues:

- 2 Helpfulness, courtesy of staff
- 4 Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed
- 5 Expertise of enquiry desk staff
- 18 Provision made for disabled users
- 24 Amount of regular maintenance of equipment
- 26 Adequacy of seat numbers
- 31 Match of open hours to user needs

- 42 Provision of multiple copies of items in high use
- 43 Speed and accuracy of re-shelving of materials
- 44 Availability of sought material on the shelf
- 56 Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue
- 57 Availability of library catalogues throughout the library
- 58 Access to library catalogues / CD-ROMs / Internal databases via
networks throughout the campus
- 65 Overall user satisfaction
- 70 Competence of library management
- 78 Total amount of library budget
- 79 Total amount of library budget as proportion of university
expenditure
- 80 Flexibility of library budget to respond to new subject areas

- The above preferences show that there is more interest in direct user services and the ability of library management to deliver them than in involvement and feedback issues. If the university is interested in involving users in decision making, rather than just making them aware of what has been decided, it would need to look at mechanisms which would encourage them to be involved in future planning. This point may be allied to the apparently low interest in internal library management and also to the low value placed on the mission statement approach. Both *Number and quality of written management policies* and *Use of planning procedures (long and short term)* received low ratings. Users are more motivated by the provision of hard information

about services than by the possibility of involvement in strategic planning, a fact which has particular implications for the planning of user education and the identification of relevant publicity material relating to library services.

- It was not possible to identify an objectively validated method of recognising the most important and least important issues. The figures of 40% of respondents' highly placed preferences and 25% for low preferences which were used as cut-off points were reached by studying the tables of rankings and making a subjective judgement.
- Planning of library accommodation could be influenced by the low rating given to *Provision of group study rooms*, *Provision of carrels* and *Proximity of refreshment service during library open hours* as well, of course, by university-wide decisions about the provision of computers for general use. These issues are usually the outcome of the teaching methods favoured by the university, and regular evaluation of this requirement would need to be undertaken.
- Because of its generally low ranking, there may be a case for reducing audio-visual provision. This would have implications for purchase and maintenance of equipment and for appropriate staffing.
- Since all student groups rate the availability of multiple copies very highly, there could be implications for the supply of electronic textbooks. On the other hand, some user groups, particularly undergraduates and postgraduates on taught courses, do not appear

to be interested in IT applications, and the idea of the Virtual Library may not be attractive to them. This attitude may require to be addressed if full advantage is to be taken of developments in this field. However, it is evident that attitudes to IT issues vary from one university to another and from one stakeholder group to another and each institution would be advised to study this issue in more depth.

- The provision of multiple copies, together with IT issues and cost issues constitute possible areas of conflict, not only between providers and users, but also amongst identifiable groups. Consideration would also have to be given to the rating for *Extent to which services are free*, which was highly rated by users but lower by service providers, and to the fairly low rating for *Equitable and effective sanctions policy*. The possibility of charging for some services, such as photocopying, microform copying and inter-library loans would have to be considered in the light of users' concern for the availability of free services. It is possible that a substantial public relations exercise would be needed to justify extra charges and encourage acceptance of them
- There is a need to invest more time and effort in user education and information services for part-time undergraduates, whose access to the library is limited by time constraints and, often, poor information-seeking skills.
- Some contradictions relating to staffing arose in the analysis of the questionnaires. There was a high ranking for *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* but a low rating for *Counter staff expertise*, *Levels of staff training* and *Proportion of*

qualified staff, and a relatively low ranking for *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users*. It is questionable whether participants understood the difference between enquiry staff and subject specialists, and they were not necessarily knowledgeable about the skills required by counter staff, the depth of knowledge acquired by subject specialists or the need for staff training. It would seem necessary to give more information to users about the skills, expertise and training of library staff, so that they could make more appropriate judgements about the level of assistance they require.

- The comparison with current performance measurement documents demonstrates that in some instances, notably the recommendations of the Follett Report, the stakeholder approach to performance measurement would yield helpful information which would support the report's aims. The Effective Academic Library is orientated towards traditional input measures and is particularly weak on staffing and electronic issues. The ISO document omits some library activities and services for which no tested indicators were available, principally in the area of direct user services. The IFLA indicators also omit references to some aspects, such as space, equipment, budgets and staffing. Use of these documents would be enhanced by qualitative data provided through stakeholder surveys.
- The response to the call for participation in the project suggests that there is a limited number of institutions interested in performance research and that interest principally lies with the newer universities. However, the possibility of co-operation within a network

of institutions and of creating standardised survey questionnaires has been demonstrated by the methodology of the stakeholder approach. It is suggested that this would be a valuable technique to employ in benchmarking.

- Consideration of the research carried out by Cullen and Calvert in New Zealand points to the prospect of valid international comparative studies, given a reasonable match of aims and administrative framework within the institutions being compared.

The methodology chosen for this project shows what can realistically be achieved with modest research resources, and the results demonstrate that it would be a valid component of plans for a library's evaluation programme.

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