

ISD: Library Report for Student Experience Committee – April 2015

Library activity – key statistics – August to March

- Footfall into the Library building so far this academic year, for the period 1 Aug to 31 Mar, has reduced by 7% from 1,015,438 in 2013-14 to 945,208 in 2014-15. However over the same period there has only been a decrease of 2.7% in the actual occupancy of the Library building, from an average headcount of 650 to 632 based on the sample days. This may be due in part to the 4.7% decrease in overall student headcount figures for the university and also to the increased use of the Union building as a place for social learning. To some extent a reduction is welcome in terms of reducing complaints about overcrowding.
- On the headcount days in semester 2, there were an average of 15 people using the new Postgraduate Research (PGR) study room each afternoon giving an occupancy rate of around 40%. However on other days, the room can be up to 66% full which is more in line with expectations.
- Occupancy of the new PGT study room has been higher with an average of 38 people using the room each afternoon on the sample days – an occupancy rate of 70%. However we have had feedback at times about the space being completely full.
- Library loans have fallen 14% compared with the same period last year from 424,651 to 362,800 for the period 1 Aug to 31 Mar. These figures must be considered in the light of greater availability and use of e-books and digitised resources which account for the vast proportion of library expenditure per annum.

Postgraduate study rooms

We have generally had positive feedback about these new rooms but there also remain some misunderstandings around their intended use. To help to address these consistently we have produced a set of FAQs which can be found at <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/library/study-space/pg/faqs> and reproduced as Appendix A to this report.

Library Systems improvements

In Summer 2014 the Library launched a revised website as part of the new portal. The library pages are some of the most actively used elements of the portal as the library increasingly offers its services and resources via online formats. In response to feedback, we have recently refined the search box allowing quick selection of books, articles and all types of resource. In April, staff and students will have direct access to their library account information from a new preview box on the library homepage including a route to quickly renew books on loan.

Further changes planned for the summer include a replacement service for the Metalib system that currently provides access to library databases.

Exams: approaches to food and drink and desk blocking

We have reviewed the feedback that we receive from students about food and drink in the library. Many of the responses are requesting additional areas for eating and being able to have hot drinks in lidded cups. This reflects the current reality - whilst we ask students to only eat snacks on floor 0, in practice many students eat elsewhere.

We have, therefore, decided to trial an expansion of the area where cold snacks can be consumed to include floor 1. This provides a greater variety of study spaces than just floor 0. Importantly, it would also allow Library staff to manage "food free" floors more rigorously. We can re-direct students to the additional space when they need to snack.

We are also trialing an expansion of the areas where hot drinks in lidded cups can be consumed to include all floors. We'll be launching a new range of signage to alert students to this change at the beginning of the assessment period.

This will be a trial, starting at the assessment period and will be reviewed in liaison with the Library forum.

During the assessment period, there is a significant increase in students needing access to study spaces in the library. We will be working with students in the building to ensure that there is fair access to study spaces. We will be letting students know about other study spaces on campus; reminding students who have left belongings to "save spaces" about fair access for other students, and freeing up spaces by moving unattended belongings which have been left for a considerable time. We will do this by using flyers to note unattended belongings; where belongings have been unattended for considerable time two members of staff will carefully remove them to a box sited next to the desk. This will make the study space available for another student, and will ensure that the returning student can easily move their belongings to an alternative desk.

Archive of Contemporary Writing

With support from the Foyle Foundation and Doris Lessing Estate, the Library and HUM are working together to enhance the literary and contemporary writing aspects of the UEA Archive with a view to providing more material of interest to UEA undergraduates and researchers. A news release about this initiative is imminent.

Library unplanned closure – Thursday 9th April

The Library unfortunately had to close at very short notice from 8pm on Thursday 9th April due to unplanned staff absence. The 24/7 opening of the Library building operates on minimal staffing levels with just 2 members of staff being on duty from 7pm to midnight and again from midnight until 8:30am. Until now, the Library has been operating 24/7, 365 for over 3 years, since January 2012, without needing to close at short notice. This has largely been down to the flexibility of the staff concerned and their willingness to volunteer, often at very short notice, to cover any planned or unplanned staff absences. Following this incident we have put in some additional managerial arrangements and we will also be investigating other possible approaches to make the service more robust.

Library building

Lighting in the main stairwell and the stairwell at the western end of the building has been replaced with new energy efficient lighting. We continue to work with Estates to improve the environment in the entrance areas and are working closely with them to resolve ongoing issues with radiators and

toilets to ensure these problems are fixed in a timely way and with minimum disruption to Library users.

Times Higher Survey

UEA once again achieved the 2nd highest score for our Library provision, but due to the 'crowding' at the top, our ranking has dropped slightly from 3rd to 5th. We will be looking closely at some of our competitor institutions, particularly, Surrey, Bangor, York and Brunel all of whom achieved a significant (>10) increase in their Library rankings. Investigation of initiatives these institutions may have undertaken in the past year will help inform any business cases we might make and also ideas for our Plan of Work for 2015-16.

Nicholas Lewis, Library Director 16th April 2015

Appendix A

Postgraduate Study Space FAQs

Q: ENV PGT students really like this study area and prefer to work here than other IT areas in the library as the PCs are faster, keyboards are better and chairs more comfortable! As a result, this space is often full when the PGR space is not- could the Library allow PGT students to use the PGR space when the PGT area gets crowded?

A: When we consulted with the postgraduate community it was acknowledged that PGTs and PGRs often have quite different needs. PGRs asked for undisturbed study space with power for portable devices over and above the provision of fixed PCs. Hence there are only 5 PCs in the PGR room and these are deliberately placed away from the other study desks to minimise disturbance. By contrast, the PGT usage tends to be more intensive, often for writing dissertations or extended essays. Hence we provided as many PCs as we could in that space whilst again providing some balance in terms of quiet space to read. The point about needing more silent spaces for PC use is well made and we will factor it into future redevelopments where possible, perhaps if funding can be found for refurbishing the IT areas.

Q: The new PGT space is very busy but the new PGR space doesn't look like it's being heavily used. Can the space be opened up so PGTs can have more study space?

This is frustrating but often there are other high quality spaces available across the Library. Based on experiences at other universities, we anticipated that usage for the PGR would be less intense than for the PGT side. Though not always the case, PGRs are often working for a sustained period with fewer deadlines, whereas PGTs are often working in more intense bursts. If the PGR room was too crowded we think it would put PGRs off actually using it. If we were to open it to PGTs as well, we think it would again fill up immediately and we would be back to the same space problem but then without any space for PGRs! Such a scenario is not what we were funded to provide nor what the postgraduate community as a whole requested.

Q: I don't like having to renew the locker every 7 days, (even though possible online), and so could you review the need for locker keys to be set to 7 day loan as I am not convinced that they are all being used currently. Q: Every time I need a locker for study

room in PGT there are never any available but there are always plenty of lockers available in PGR. I wonder if this supply-demand issue could be rectified somehow?

The usage of lockers in both spaces has been high and we estimated that the 7 day loan would be the best possible balance between supply (duration of loan) and demand. Occasionally there are more available in the PGR room but we would prefer to keep it that way so that PGRs are not put off from using the space. As an alternative, we have since moved all our other locker provision to the same 7 day system to help improve availability although obviously there will never be enough for every PG students. The lockers are primarily for use when studying in the Library, not just a general bookable locker for university-wide use.

Q: In past years you had 16 monthly carrels available for PGRs? Why has this changed?

A: We realise some PGRs preferred individual study rooms but with up to 1,500 PGR students at UEA, in practice only a very few students were actually getting access to these 16 rooms. The new room provides access for 39 people with 60 lockers.

When rooms were bookable for one month, the number of perpetually disappointed PGR students on waiting lists for the study carrels completely outnumbered the number of students who benefitted from them. Our regular checks also recorded that occupancy was actually quite low, with rooms more often than not empty or being used as storage. That is why we have now provided so many new large lockers in the PGR room to meet that known need more effectively.

If you prefer individual study carrels, these can still be booked via the Library Helpdesk, albeit only on a part-day basis (with options to book consecutively).

Q: Why could you not have increased the number of individual study rooms?

A: This would have required an extension to the Main Library which is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future. In addition, if we had provided more, we know the same problems would still have emerged concerning under-occupancy and use for storage rather than study. With so many students, we need to make best use of the spaces available.

Q: I don't find the open plan layout as helpful as a single study room.

A: We realise this is a compromise situation. The Library has never been in a position to provide a permanent study space or office for each postgraduate student. What we offer is designed to be just part of a wider university-wide drive to try to meet the needs for high quality study space for PGRs across the university. What is different about our offering is that it is 24/7, with security presence in the building at night, and with convenient access to library stock. The one week duration of our locker loans, with options to renew, reflects the fact that we expect PGRs to use these facilities occasionally, for a few days or weeks, rather than to move in permanently!

Q: Why did you layout the space like this?

A: We consulted with the GSA and Students' Union and other representatives from the PGR community on the layout, as well as the Dean of Students for accessibility options. Based on

feedback we have tried to provide a variety of spaces with large desks and sufficient privacy to be able to work without distraction, but also without feeling oppressive. We hope that the open nature of the room and the inspiring views will help create an atmosphere conducive to research. As requested we have provided power and additional lights to each table and provided a minimal number of fixed PCs (which have quiet keyboards) to help keep this space as quiet as possible.

We also visited other universities including Queen Mary (University of London) and Leicester University, both of which had dedicated spaces for PGR students. It is still unusual to find such dedicated provision in universities but you have been telling us for some time that our previous provision was inadequate.

Having said all this, whilst we know many will be happy with the new facilities, we acknowledge they may not suit everyone. Please do feedback any comments you may have and we'll try to take them into account.