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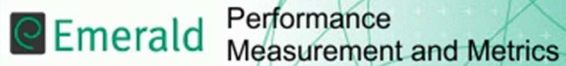
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Demonstrating Value in Research Libraries: the Shared Service Standards Initiative

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Paper: Northumbria Conference**Abstract:**

In 2014, the RLUK Consortium (Research Libraries UK) developed a shared set of customer-focused Service Standards to be adopted and used by all University Library members. This was the first time that such an approach had been taken across Research Libraries in the UK. The driver for this initiative was to enable the libraries to develop more comprehensive, shared quality indicators which would enable them to demonstrate their value, especially in times of austerity when budgets might be under threat. The paper will set out the approach taken to the development of shared Service Standards and ensuring the engagement and buy-in of the RLUK membership.

Background:

In 2014, the RLUK Consortium (Research Libraries UK) undertook an initiative to develop and implement a shared set of customer-focused Service Standards with the intention that these could be adopted and used by all University Library members. This was the first time that such an approach had been taken across Research Libraries in the UK. The driver for this initiative was to enable the libraries to develop more comprehensive, shared quality indicators which would enable them to demonstrate their value, especially in times of austerity when budgets might be under threat. This paper sets out the approach taken to the development of shared Service Standards, including an evaluation of the first year of data collection, and approaches taken to ensuring the engagement and buy-in of the RLUK membership.

Notwithstanding the SCONUL Annual Statistics exercise, this is the first time in the UK that a collaborative approach to the development of Service Standards has been attempted for a group of research libraries. The initiative also demonstrates the increased commitment amongst research libraries to the fundamental principles surrounding excellent customer service – in particular the need to demonstrate service quality and proactively identify gaps in services so that these can be addressed, and services can be improved on a continual basis.

Approach:

The Service Standards initiative was initially conceived and developed as a strategic RLUK project, within a thematic area on 'collaboration to reduce costs and improve quality'. This thematic area was established to review and share approaches to 'leaner' working across the membership, during a time of general budget constraints across the higher education sector. A working group was established to lead on activities, and a number of areas were identified, including a sharing of experience workshop on process reviews, and an initiative to share work on developing performance indicators.

Initially it was considered that a collaborative approach to developing quality and performance indicators and service standards would reduce duplication of effort across members and save staff time in establishing mechanisms for collection of performance data. In addition it was agreed that there would be potential for a shared set of measures or standards to be used for benchmarking

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3 purposes and to enable libraries to demonstrate their value to their institutions, or to make the case
4 for increased investment.
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6 A Working Group was established in 2013 to explore the concept further and to develop
7 recommendations. The Group commenced with a survey of institutions to establish the range of
8 measures currently collected. Although few members responded at this stage, the survey yielded
9 over 70 measures currently in use across RLUK institutions, with a large amount of overlap in the
10 measures in use. At this stage it was decided to limit the initiative to 'customer-facing measures' in
11 order to place some manageable parameters around the initiative. The decision to adopt a focus on
12 customer-facing measures was a reflection of the recognition that many RLUK members were
13 working towards (or had already achieved) accreditation under the UK Customer Service Excellence
14 initiative (a UK Cabinet Office Standard widely used across the Public Sector). It was felt that the
15 initiative could assist with these aspirations and provide a direct and immediate benefit to those
16 institutions pursuing the accreditation, whilst also demonstrating a commitment to sharing best
17 practice and reducing duplication of effort.
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22 The use of the term 'service standards' was adopted at this stage to enable a clearer focus on
23 measures which could be shared across institutions. The term 'Key Performance Indicators' was
24 problematic, because these are usually linked to organisational strategy, which would be difficult
25 with a set of standards being shared across institutions.
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28 Of the 70+ measures identified, there was significant similarity or overlap in nearly 50, indicating
29 that these would be the most applicable to other RLUK members. By further focusing on the core
30 undergraduate user group, and the core activities which should be common to all institutions, we
31 identified a set of 10 service standards which could potentially be shared and used for benchmarking
32 purposes.
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35 These were reduced further down to 8 standards following further discussion with RLUK Board. The
36 two standards which were dropped at this stage related to accuracy of shelving and a target to
37 obtain 100% of reading lists. Feedback indicated that both of these would be very difficult to
38 achieve as elements of the workflow are outside of the control of any library service. For example,
39 with reading lists, the library is heavily reliant on the academic School, or individual academics, to
40 provide the lists to the library, and it can be very difficult to accurately identify the total number of
41 reading lists available within an institution. Shelving accuracy can be affected by users re-shelving
42 their own books having consulted them for reference purposes within the library.
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47 Some other areas for standards were also considered but not pursued, due to elements being
48 outside of the control of the library. These included standards relating to IT – for example, system
49 up-time. This was considered problematic because many IT systems may be externally hosted or
50 managed outside of the library service. Research support was also considered, and discounted, due
51 to the variation in services offered across institutions, which would not facilitate measurement.
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54 **Findings and Implications:**
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The initiative established 8 customer-facing Service Standards which were agreed as being applicable to all of the University Library members of RLUK. The standards are listed below:

1. We will achieve at least a 90% satisfaction rating in the National Student Survey question 16 (the Library question).
2. We will be open for at least 99% of our advertised service opening hours, during semester or term time.
3. We will acknowledge all feedback, complaints and enquiries within 1 working day (where contact details are provided) and will provide an initial response within 3 working days.
4. We will achieve at least 90% satisfaction with responses to enquiries, feedback and complaints.
5. We will ensure that at least 90% of returned books are available to customers within 24 hours.
6. For reading lists submitted by the advertised deadline, we will ensure that at least 90% of books are on the shelves/online resources available to consult within 4 weeks (for items which are available to purchase).
7. We will process at least 90% of inter-library loan requests within 3 working days of receiving the request.
8. We will achieve at least 90% rating on our timetabled teaching sessions and organised drop-in clinics on the following question: "Do you think what you've learned on the session today will be useful to you in the future?"

These include a range of quality indicators focused on services rated as important to our largest customer group – undergraduate students. The RLUK Board were asked to endorse the proposed 8 measures, which they did in May 2014. It was noted that whilst many of the targets were challenging, at 90% plus, some of the institutions surveyed were already meeting these, where they already had similar standards and targets in place.

Following agreement of the standards; the group asked University Librarians from each institution to nominate a local co-ordinator who we could liaise with to commence data collection. It was agreed that data collection would start from the beginning of the 2014/15 academic year: August 2014. It was also agreed that, this being the first year, we would set an interim data collection point at the end of January 2015, so that we could check that all institutions were collecting data and flag any early issues with data collection. A data collection template was devised using Google Docs, and all institutions were asked to populate this with their data. Guidance on how to collect the data for the measures was also issued and a mailing list was set up to enable communication and sharing of experience.

Conclusions:

All University Libraries in RLUK signed up to the initiative and nominated a contact to collect the data and report it to RLUK.

The interim data collection point at the end of January 2015, resulted in a submission of some data from 76% of the participating institutions. Of those who did not submit, the majority stated that

they hoped to make the July 2015 deadline, with only three institutions not providing any kind of response.

The interim data submission yielded the following responses:

Question	Highest Score	Lowest Score	RLUK Mean
<i>Question 1: We will achieve at least a 90% satisfaction rating on Question 16 in the National Student Survey</i>	97%	83%	90%
<i>Question 2: We will be open for at least 99% of our advertised staff service opening hours during semester or term time</i>	100%	99.9%	100%
<i>Question 3: We will acknowledge all feedback, enquiries and complaints within 1 working day (where contact details are provided) and will provide an initial response within 3 working days</i>	100%	55%	92%
<i>Question 4: We will achieve at least 90% satisfaction with responses to feedback, enquiries and complaints</i>	100%	88%	89%
<i>Question 5: We will ensure that at least 90% of returned books are available to customers within 24 hours</i>	100%	43%	88%
<i>Question 6: For reading lists submitted by the advertised deadline, we will ensure that at least 90% of the books are on the shelves/online resources available to consult within 4 weeks (for items available to purchase)</i>	95%	13%	75%
<i>Question 7: We will process at least 90% of inter-library loan requests within 3 working days of receiving the request.</i>	100%	85%	96%
<i>Question 8: We will achieve at least 90% satisfaction on our timetabled teaching sessions and organised drop-in clinics on the following question: "Do you think what you've learned in the session today will be useful to you in the future?"</i>	100%	83%	89%

It's interesting to note that there is significant variation in the responses. Some institutions are easily meeting and exceeding the targets, whereas others are reporting much lower scores. This is an interim set of data so it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions at this stage. However, it has become clear that there is some variability in the way that institutions are collecting the data, which may be resulting in inaccurate reporting in some cases.

Following collection of the interim data, RLUK organised a workshop for institutional contacts, in order to review the process so far. The workshop was intended to fulfil the following aims:

- Update institutional contacts with the progress made with the Service Standards so far
- Review the first year of data collection

- Propose any changes to the service standards, for approval by RLUK Board
- Explore opportunities for collaboration around Service Standards development, especially around the potential for sharing experience and collaboration with the Customer Services Group UK benchmarking initiative.

The workshop was well attended and there was a high level of engagement from participants, as well as from representatives from the Customer Services Group UK (an informal network of customer services librarians).

The workshop established that the initiative was not currently well understood within institutions, and provided a good opportunity to raise awareness of the purpose of the exercise and what was intended to be done with the data in order to build a shared understanding of what we were trying to achieve.

The consensus within the group was that there should be less emphasis placed on targets and more on benchmarking. It was felt that this would achieve greater buy-in at institutional level, and that benchmarks would be more effective when used with University senior managers. A number of suggestions were made for amending the wording of the standards to reflect this, and it was suggested that it would also be useful to collect some case studies on how the data is being used by individual institutions in practice. The data should be presented in future as quartiles, with the top quartile potentially being used to set an 'RLUK Kitemark'.

As a result of these discussions, RLUK Board agreed to amend the service standards for year 2, and a new set of standards have now been agreed:

1. What percentage did you achieve on Question 16 (Library Question) in the National Student Survey?
2. What percentage of your advertised staff service opening hours were you open?
3. What percentage of feedback, enquiries and complaints were provided with an initial response within 3 working days?
4. What percentage of your customers who responded reported that they were satisfied with how their feedback, complaint or enquiry was dealt with?
5. What percentage of returned books were available to the customers within 24 hours?
6. What percentage of books/online resources were available for use in the library (on the shelves) within 4 weeks of ordering?
 - a. Print books
 - b. Online resources
7. What percentage of interlibrary loan requests were processed within 3 working days?
8. What percentage of surveyed respondents at timetabled teaching sessions and organised drop-in consultations agreed with the following statement:
"As a result of today's session, do you have greater confidence in <using library and information resources (amend according to topic)> ? (Yes/No)"
9. What percentage uptime did you record for your main Discovery/Library Catalogue system?

Data collection against these revised standards will commence in 2015/16.

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3 It was agreed that the institutional contacts would be provided with access to the full data, once
4 collected, but that this would not be shared beyond those participating institutions at this point.
5 RLUK is committed to making the data openly available, potentially as a kind of quality 'kite-mark'
6 for research libraries, and as a starting point it has been agreed that the RLUK mean score for each
7 standard will be published, together with an anonymised range of responses. We hope to move
8 towards full transparency once we have ensured consistency of approach to the data collection.
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11 A number of RLUK members have also successfully used the Service Standards in developing their
12 own fuller set of measures at a local level, and have been successful in using these as evidence for
13 the Customer Service Excellence accreditation.
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