

Library provision for distance education at Leicester University

by

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Abstract

Evaluates the concept of distance education, and examines the role of library provision within this schema. A case study of Leicester University Education Library, involving a postal questionnaire of distance students and interviews with librarians and course administrators, was conducted.

Identifies lack of institutional guidelines for library provision, and deficiencies in communication and cooperation between faculty and library, as weaknesses in distance education provision at Leicester University. Recommends the production of a policy statement regarding distance education, and the formalising of communication and cooperation in course design and development.

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Chapter 1

Distance Education

1:1 Origins of distance education

Distance education is the term which has gained acceptance to describe the provision of education to off-campus students. Although the term is only of recent provenance, the type of provision it describes has been in place for over 150 years(1).

The early nineteenth century witnessed the establishment of a distance examining system at the University of London, with subsequent models being established at the Royal University of Ireland and the University of St. Andrews(2). Moreover, fresh impetus was given to adult education with the university extension movement. In Scotland, access to higher education was widened with the introduction of greater openness in student admissions.

A contemporaneous and exponential growth occurred world-wide(3), particularly in what was termed correspondence teaching. The University of Chicago established a correspondence system of teaching and examining in the late nineteenth century, and similar systems came to fruition in Sweden, Russia and Britain(4).

This expansion of distance education provision continued throughout the twentieth century, although such provision tended to be administered beyond the province of traditional universities. There was a return to elitism in education, and “openness was continually eroded”(5). Nevertheless, the market continued to grow, and allied with a milieu which encouraged greater equality of opportunity culminated in the creation of the Open University in Britain in 1971, followed by ten others in the decade, such as the German FernUniversität in 1975.

1:2 Distance education and open learning

Distance education describes the whole educational process, incorporating teaching and learning at a distance. In the English-speaking world it includes correspondence study, home study and external studies(6), terms which have become associated with particular milieus and lack universal applicability. This lack of terminological exactitude has also been ascribed to “the outcome of different educational, training and vocational training systems and alternative applications of new technology”(7).

Distance education is often subsumed under the generic term of open learning, but should not be used synonymously. Open learning is concerned with wider issues of access, and flexibility in defining the content of study and the methodology to be employed in teaching and learning.

The Government White Paper on the proposed Open University stated that “enrollment as a student of the university should be open to everyone”(8). Also, content and methodology, as features of open learning, are student-oriented. That is, course objectives and duration, methods of study and assessment are within the realm of student control and not predetermined by educational organisations.

The ideology of openness, however, often conflicts with the practice. Kember and Murphy, in a broad-ranging study of Australian educational practice, found that most distance education courses examined operated closed structures, lacked flexibility and were not student-centred(9).

The ubiquity of the term is a reflection of the influence of the Open University and the philosophical underpinnings of the discipline, which is student-centred. Occasional references are made to the wider concept of open education but both should be considered umbrella terms, which distance education may encroach on or be subsumed within.

1:3 The concept of distance education

1:3:1 Conceptual framework

A number of theories of distance education have been promulgated. As a nascent discipline it has been in a state of flux, being subject to amendment, clarification and revision. A further consideration in assessing the conceptual framework of distance education is that different theoretical approaches, including sociology and communication theory, have been employed in dealing with the subject (10); traditional pedagogy would stress the reintegration of teaching and learning acts at a distance, whereas a sociological study would focus on societal influences on education. A historical perspective would deal mainly with correspondence education, and teaching which was print-based. Also, particular educational backgrounds and locales of research may have influenced theoreticians in the field. As such, many of them reflect local practices and circumstances and lack general applicability.

A confluence has emerged in certain areas of theory, particularly regarding the central position attributed to the separation of teacher and learner. This is considered a defining factor in distinguishing distance education from campus-based education. However, even on this point there are divergences. As such, it is considered necessary to delineate and critically evaluate the major contributions to this field. This will provide a conceptual framework within which the role of libraries in this schema may be examined in chapter 2.

The evolution of theory was given new stimulus by the creation of open universities in the 1970s, and the following decades have produced debates over the clarification of terminology, definitions of the field of study and prescriptive works for educators. Within this field of study, the most influential and frequently cited authorities are Börje Holmberg, Desmond Keegan, Otto Peters, Michael Moore and Randy Garrison.

1:3:2 Börje Holmberg

In his most recent work, Börje Holmberg defines distance education as:

the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students...but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and teaching of a support organization(11)

It is evident that the separation of the learner from the educational organisation is central to Holmberg's definition, as is the role attributed to this organisation. The absence of face-to-face contact results in a diminished role for the teacher, many of whose responsibilities are assumed by the educational organisation.

The separation of learner, in time and space, is characterised by non-contiguous communication(12). Non-contiguous communication is a means of establishing a personal relationship with the learner, which is a necessary prerequisite to motivation and therefore learning.

Holmberg asserts that there are two means of communication employed to resolve any inherent difficulties which are implied by this separation.

Distance education comprises one way traffic by means of printed, broadcast and/or recorded presentations of learning matter and the two-way traffic between students and their supporting organizations. The one-way presentation of learning matter occurs either through self-contained courses or through study guides to

prescribed or recommended reading. Most of the two-way traffic usually occurs in writing, on the telephone or by other media and, usually only or secondly as a supplement, face-to-face.(13)

Holmberg's contention is that these means of communication should be tailored to simulate a "guided didactic conversation"(14), which seeks to interpersonalise the teaching process at a distance. The simulated conversation of one-way traffic involves student interaction with texts, with two-way communication a necessary and real adjunct(15). Both should be produced in accordance with the principles of educational psychology, and be constantly monitored and enhanced.

Student interaction with text stimulates the internalising of the educational process, and learning is considered to be primarily an individual activity. Indeed, Holmberg stresses the individual learner within the schema of distance education. The learner should be allowed freedom, and one goal of distance education is to assist learners in achieving complete autonomy in the learning process. Thus, student autonomy is crucial to successful learning. Furthermore, openness in the organisational structure, whether by allowing self-pacing in completion of assignments or offering open admission, is an encouragement to learner autonomy.

This is a precise definition, but also restrictive. The focus on study guides/self-contained courses, as elements of one-way communication, does not fit well with learner autonomy. Many course administrators require students to extend the scope of their reading, with students utilising independent or mediated bibliographic searches. This is especially necessary where there is greater flexibility in assignment choices. Holmberg offers no solution to this apparent dichotomy regarding openness and learning.

Moreover, despite some measure of approval for the concept of the guided didactic conversation(16), "empirical investigation gave no conclusive evidence" to support it(17). Computer mediated communication may, in the future, provide greater scope for such a conversation to develop as part of the didactic process.

Holmberg also suggests that two-way communication acts as a proxy for face-to-face communication. This fails to take into account the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two types of approach. Non-contiguous communication may be more effective a teaching form than the more traditional face-to face method, since it encourages learner autonomy and control within a structured communication process, allowing for intellectual growth.

The emphasis on printed matter seems to be tied specifically to Holmberg's primary locale of research, which is correspondence education. Furthermore, it does not take into account possible technological advances, such as the wider availability of teleconferencing. This is the focus of much new research, with less emphasis placed on the medium of broadcast, which is viable on a national scale, but not for small organisations.

1:3:3 Desmond Keegan

The work of Desmond Keegan demonstrates a broader conceptualisation of distance education. Keegan's analysis is more comprehensive than the work of Holmberg. Significantly, Keegan deviates from Holmberg's view that interpersonal communication is a determining factor. Rather, Keegan contends, it is the separation of the teaching acts from the learning acts, in time and place, that distinguishes distance education from other forms of education. It should be the responsibility of the educational organisation to reintegrate these acts, a further deviation from Holmberg's theory, and its emphasis on autonomy.

Two-way communication should allow students to be able to initiate dialogue as well as receive it. This may be accomplished through technological media, although the focus is still on print.

The general characteristics of distance education, which are necessary preconditions and necessary consequences of distance education, are delineated:

- the separation of teacher and learner which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing
- the influence of an educational organisation which distinguishes it from private study
- the use of technical media, usually print, to unite teacher and learner and carry the educational content
- the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue
- the possibility of meetings for both didactic and socialisation reasons
- the participation in an industrialised form of education which, if accepted, contains the genus of radical separation of distance education from other forms(18)

The adoption of Peters' view(see 1:3:4) that distance education is a by-product of industrialisation is problematic. It is evident that in large organisations many of the traditional teaching acts, such as the production of learning materials, may be carried out

by the educational organisation rather than by the teacher. However, this focus eliminates any system with a limited target audience.

The actual breadth and comprehensiveness of the characteristics would be difficult to assign to any particular organisation, as the range of educational practice varies considerably. Thus, it is not realistic to imply that teacher-learner separation is a constant throughout all courses. Organisational elements, such as course planning, implementation and evaluation may be carried out at a distance, but others may involve face-to-face contact or a mixture of both means. In some cases, such as mentoring, both forms of provision will be offered.

Finally, Keegan makes a necessary and valuable contribution to the terminology employed in the field of study. This is to differentiate between independent and private study. Keegan argues that independence is not compatible with fixed and inflexible course structures, and that students are engaged in private study. The role of the organisation is crucial, and the contention that “distance education is characterised by the privatisation of institutional learning”(19) is valid. It places emphasis on student engagement in self-directed learning, as many courses encourage a departure from core texts, and the inclusion of student-specific backgrounds.

The role of the organisation should not be overplayed. It may not be all-encompassing, usually being limited to certain stages, with the teacher retaining the more traditional responsibilities of assessment and evaluation. Furthermore, the provision of two-way communication is a valuable tool in the provision of distance education, but is not a necessary prerequisite to it.

1:3:4 Otto Peters

Peters regards distance education as “a typical product of industrial society”(20), viewing it as a product of socio-economic change. This is a descriptive analysis, and contains no prescriptive element.

The emphasis is on the organisational and structural characteristics of distance education. Distance education and the industrial process are said to share the same characteristics. These characteristics include the division of labour, the detachment of producer from consumer, the use of technology for mass production, and the use of scientific methods to monitor the production process(21).

Peters' work with the FernUniversität in Germany(22) would seem to support the use of industrial working methods in large-scale institutions. Nevertheless, smaller organisations operate within the mainstream of traditional educational methods and would not correspond to this industrial model. The example of the University of New England in Australia, which combines on-campus and off-campus education, conforms to the latter type(23).

As a product of societal change, Peters stresses that post-industrial changes will require a radical shift in the provision of distance education. In providing a variation on Holmberg's theory, it is contended that students will have to become more autonomous(24). This as a prerequisite to joining the educational process and, unlike Holmberg, not a means of encouraging learning.

1:3:5 Michael Moore

Moore regards distance education as a distinct field of study, one which belongs to a larger body of instructional methods where "teaching behaviors are separated from learning behaviors"(25). This family of methods is not described, but Moore's work suggests that they include most forms within the umbrella of open education.

Moore considers all education, whether at a distance or face-to-face, to be subject to common pedagogical interactions. These interactions exist between learner and subject, learner and instructor, and learner and learner(26). Communication is the means by which these interactions are successfully integrated into a learning process.

Separation is integral to distance education as it affects the teaching and learning process. Distance, according to Moore, cannot be measured spatially, rather "as a function of individualisation and dialogue"(27). This 'transactional distance' is not fixed, but is a variable, dependent on individualisation, dialogue, and structure. It requires the bridging of psychological and communications barriers.

It is individualised to the extent that a learner can control the flow of information that is received or sent. In common with Peters, this individualisation of the learning process is concomitant with autonomy. Moore's early work stressed that "learner autonomy is heightened by distance"(28), and that more autonomous learners are attracted to more distant methods. A typology of learners, in the mould of Wedemeyer's work(29), was established. The demonstrable traits of autonomous learners are their ability to plan and

organise work and time, and develop analytical and discursive skills(30).

Dialogue depends on the extent of communication available. Dialogue is the preferred term to interaction since it has constructive, synergistic connotations(31). The extent of the dialogue depends on the means of communication employed and the structure of the course taken. Thus, a flexible course which allows for two-way communication by mail or computer is considered more dialogic and effective than a one-way system, such as television instruction, which allows for no teacher-learner dialogue.

The concept of transactional distance is an important contribution to the study of distance education. More complex and integrated communications networks do reduce barriers to dialogue by allowing for more and speedier communication. Access to electronic mail, for example, would allow for effective two-way communication, bridging the gaps of time and space.

The relegation of the concept of autonomy within this schema is particularly appropriate in the context of the dialogic opportunities made available by new communications technology. Furthermore, it would be difficult to justify the anatomisation of a learner type in qualitative terms. Such an analysis would be too general to explain differences in ability, motivation and learning approaches.

1:3:6 Randy Garrison

Garrison offers a realistic approach to the subject. Disregarding any rigid definitions, criteria within which distance education operates are established. The focus is on the transaction between teacher and learner, and the contention that effective two-way communication is necessary for dialogue.

According to Garrison, "the essential process characteristic is the two-way communication between teacher and student which necessitates the use of technology to mediate this interaction"(32). In a departure from Peters, technology is a means of abetting communication, not a form of industrial mass production. He supports this view by arguing that the adoption of the term distance education in favour of correspondence study is a direct result of "technological innovation"(33).

It is contended that the characteristic of non-contiguity does not distinguish distance education from its mainstream counterpart. Garrison asserts that there is no difference

in terms of aims, conduct, students or activities(34).

It is true that education serves many purposes, and that the aims and objectives of students should not vary according to the means by which the education is received. Also, the activities undertaken to comply with an institution's demands will fit the same pattern. However, in terms of conduct and students, distance education does diverge from its mainstream equivalent. Empirical evidence suggests that the student intake is demographically more diverse, with a parity in the number of men and women involved, and an older student profile(35). Furthermore, although the tasks required may be the same, the non-contiguity involved requires a different process for the educational transaction.

1:4 Synthesis of distance education theory

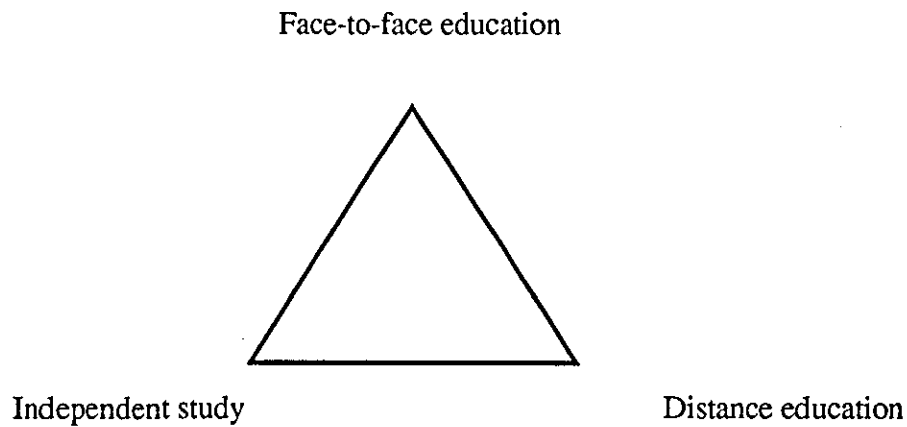
No theory is nomological, it cannot apply to every institution and under all circumstances. The precision of many of the preceding theories is often restrictive, not allowing for the inclusion of new perspectives or models of educational practice.

Theory is valuable, however, in establishing the criteria within which a field of study operates. Terminology may be refined and trends or developments delineated. In the field of distance education, it is clear that distance and the non-contiguity of communication form the generic distinction between it and campus-based education. This separation of learner from teacher does require communication for the greater efficacy of the dialogue, but this may vary in form from one institution to the next.

An important consideration is that many of the theories fall short of acceptance because they do exclude many practical models from their ambit. Distance education may exist along a continuum of face-to-face and open education, with some provision being teacher supported whilst others are closer to independent study.

Bell and Tight provide a useful diagrammatic representation of the different related types of educational provision(36).

Figure 1.



Educational provision exists at none of these extremes, but is to be found at various points within. All existing practice, it is contended, lie within the body of the triangle, “embodying varying elements of the three approaches”(37).

1:5 The future of distance education

As evidenced by conflicting theories of distance education, it is difficult to gain a consensus on present or past educational practices. Analysis of future trends must remain speculative. Past attempts have not proven highly successful(38).

Distance education theory does stress the central role of interaction and communication. Technological developments in communications facilitate an increased scope for interactivity and two-way communication, and suggest that autonomy and independence will attain diminished significance in distance education provision. The growth in trans-national education is being further stimulated by financial and governmental initiatives.

1:5:1 Expansion of distance education

The expansion in higher education in the United Kingdom since the education reforms of the 1980s has resulted in growing numbers of students involved in face-to-face education, and has also acted as a stimulus to distance education. Since its launch the Open University has increased its student intake from twenty four thousand to two hundred and sixteen thousand(39).

New markets have been sought in order to increase finances and alleviate financial

constraints. Large markets are beneficial in that they defray the cost of developing courses, especially in terms of developing educational technology, such as computer software packages. A new and large market exists in Eastern Europe, where the Open University is particularly active. The Open University is expanding in Europe and the Far East as an English language distance education institution. Since 1992, the open University has accepted undergraduates from outside the United Kingdom, with over sixteen thousand students enrolled in 1995(40). It is also developing its postgraduate courses. The main focus of the Open University overseas has been the Open Business School, which comprises most of the forty six study centres outside the United Kingdom(41).

The United Kingdom itself has witnessed a growth in extramural provision, echoing the extension movements of the nineteenth century(42). Vocational courses, particularly in teaching and M.B.A. courses, have provided the main drive in British universities.

The educational environment of distance education, it has been argued, "is not generically different to the mainstream"(43). Organisational differences exist, but it can be argued that the same pedagogical principles apply. Bell and Tight suggest that the enforced expansion of mainstream education is producing a synthesising of approaches, resulting in the "opening up of the learning process"(44).

In terms of the introduction of new technologies, common stimuli and problems exist. Technology itself may encourage a convergence. A study of Australian educational practice revealed that "the effective use of new technologies will generate a momentum of its own towards the convergence of mainstream and distance education in terms of teaching methods"(45). A given example is the Sunraysia project, which linked academic networks for campus-based students, with satellites also allowing access to distance learners.(46)

The same survey, which covered the ten-year period from 1975 to 1985, recorded a doubling of student numbers involved in distance education. This was in response to the need to upgrade qualifications in response to technological change and new demands in the workplace. Distance education provides a convenient form of study, particularly for groups not well catered for by mainstream provision. Those involved in work, or with other commitments, or the disabled, would comprise such groups.

More than 70% of Open University students remain in full-time employment

throughout the duration of their course(47). Furthermore, over 5% of all Open University students are registered disabled, and this figure is rising in excess of the general increase in student numbers(48).

Distance education is attractive to the disabled as it is home-based, and usually incorporates support services. Distance education institutions are also well placed to serve this group as the economies of scale involved are more suited to this form of provision than to mainstream education. Also, it is noted in the study that the changing status of women in society is responsible for much of the growth. Indeed, women have achieved parity in student numbers within the Open University(49), a change which has also occurred in mainstream education.

1:5:2 Technological developments

1:5:2:1 Adoption and choice of media

In a 1977 study by the Open University, alternative media were suggested as useful means of conducting distance education. These media included audio-cassettes, Super 8mm film, telephone teaching, electronic blackboards and personal computers(50).

The author of the study acknowledges that only one of these media has been successfully utilised. Audio-cassettes have, to a great extent, replaced radio as a means of instruction. Furthermore, it is only in recent years that personal computers have become widely accessible.

Audio-cassettes were adopted since they are low-cost, the tools needed to use them are common and cheap, they are easy to produce, cheap and simple to distribute and convenient to use. These criteria need to be satisfied by any new medium. It is axiomatic that "home-based technologies have to be very low-cost and easy to use"(51). Personal computers, the main focus of recent debate, are now becoming increasingly viable in this context.

The overriding criterion, however, should remain the educational effectiveness of any media, and whether or not they supersede existing technologies. Furthermore, they should be compatible with the organisational environment into which they are introduced. This may involve structural changes, in order "to ensure that resources and decision-making powers match the requirements of the new technology"(52).

The telephone is a common domestic technology, and has been much used in distance education. The Open University provides one-to-one tutoring and counselling by telephone, as well as audio-conferencing. The University of Wisconsin Extension, U.S.A., is a rare example of a delivery-based system utilising the telephone(53).

It is a humanising medium, which may be used to complement other media. A disadvantage lies in the fact that it is limited to sound, and its use may be negligible for certain disciplines with a high visual content.

Although certain authors(54) regard the adoption of new technologies as inevitable and necessary prerequisites to improvement in educational provision, others recognise potential problems(55).

Many distance and open education systems are concerned with the issue of access. Technology has the potential of opening up access, but in reality it may increase inequality. Financial constraints may disadvantage certain groups or less developed nations. The cost of constructing national information networks or buying home-based technology may be prohibitive

The concern of technology should be to address the needs and wants of potential users. A technology-led approach may result in expensive and time-consuming developments which meet no real needs and fail to tackle existing problems. A potential problem exists in that new communication technologies are often sponsored by the telecommunications industry and not educators. This shift in the power of organising and disseminating communications and information has far-reaching consequences for educational provision as a whole. Market forces are likely to oblige telecommunications companies to direct their activities to areas of heavy traffic and high revenue, thus leaving rural or less developed areas disenfranchised from information sources.

1:5:2:2 Global information networks

The development of a global communications network, as illustrated by the Internet, is a striking example of the use of technology to bridge distance.

Government initiatives in the United States to create a Global Information Infrastructure recognise the potential of this medium, and also address the issue of access. Developments in Europe are less uniform, with individual nation states deploying

different resources and attaching varied degrees of significance to this development. A similar infrastructure to that envisaged by the Clinton Administration is being constructed in Sweden, and although no such government impetus exists in the United Kingdom, there is an established and growing number of meta-networks. Significantly, cable television operators are targeting the Internet as a source of business.

The major U.K. developments have been fuelled by academic institutions. SuperJANET, the upgraded version of the Joint Academic Network, provides advanced distance education, remote library and database access, instant document delivery and electronic journals.

The Internet itself comprises network sites from individuals and groups, but also from academic, government and commercial organisations. Distance education courses and support material are provided by universities, such as Columbia South University in the U.S.A(56), and by companies, with AT&T a notable example(57).

1:5:2:3 New technologies

Satellites

Satellite technology is used world-wide, particularly in countries with large land masses where the terrestrial telecommunications infrastructure is inadequate. Logistical considerations make this a practical option. In China, "satellite transmission is the kernel of [the] distance university system"(58). European initiatives, such as Olympus and Europace, have not been successful. The former was abandoned and the latter project was relaunched as Europace 2000, an information technology initiative rather than an actual purveyor of courses.

Although satellites may be used to link students to a virtual classroom, there are problems with this medium. It requires students to be tied to a specific place and time in order to participate and it is a system in which they are unable to initiate dialogue. The technology is high-cost, and raises difficulties in the arenas of broadcast regulation, and transnational certification and teaching.

Computer-mediated communication

This form of communication includes electronic-mail, electronic bulletin boards and computer conferencing. Interaction, and the ability to initiate dialogue are two of the main strengths of this medium. Real-time discussion is possible, and the information

which is communicated may be manipulated; that is, it may be stored and retrieved for later use, transferred elsewhere or amended and printed.

Cuskelly and Gregor investigated the use of computer-mediated communication at the University of Central Queensland, and received a positive response from students and teachers. The only problems were lack of access to computers and certain systems difficulties(59). The question of access is important in terms of the continued openness of educational provision. Although the loan or hire of hardware is an option, it is likely that stipulating access to computers as a prerequisite to enrollment on a course is likely to exclude some prospective students. The Open University has 19,700 students on such courses(60), and held its first 'virtual summer school' in 1994.

Electronic publishing

Electronic publishing is an important technological addition to distance education's advantage of economies of scale. Production costs are reduced, and speed is increased. The technology is more flexible, allowing for the updating and supplementing of materials, demand based publishing, and for contracting expertise in from other institutions. Contracting work may have implications for full-time academic staff, and this organisational change may be a potential direction of distance teaching.

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Chapter 2

Distance education and library provision

2:1 Overview of research trends

The expansion in distance education has produced a corresponding growth in the literature on the subject, including discussions of the role of libraries within this schema. Significantly, none of the theories discussed make specific reference to library provision. Libraries are not assigned a role, beyond an assumed one as part of the supporting services of an educational organization. The reliance of the Open University on public and university libraries has deflected the focus of study away from this institution.

The literature in the field reflects this imbalance. A keyword search of the British Education Index produced 755 'hits' for a Boolean combination of 'open learning', or 'distance learning' or 'distance education'. A combined set with a contraction to the stem of 'librar?' produced only 11 'hits'(1).

The frequency and volume of publications have increased dramatically since the creation of open universities world-wide(2). The publications have, to a large extent, eschewed any theoretical considerations, and consist of descriptive and prescriptive analyses of past and current practice. The bulk of recent publications concern themselves with provision in higher education, where "librarians have responded to institutional change"(3).

2:2 Organisational environment of distance education

The organisational environment in which a library operates dictates its policy towards distance education. The type and level of provision is dependent on the educational organization, and the attitudes of course administrators, teachers and librarians.

Research has substantiated the importance of effective communication between the three parties involved in providing educational provision to distance students. A survey examining flexible learning and librarians, concluded that cooperation in the planning and implementation of courses produced more successful educational provision(4).

A collaborative relationship between librarians and teachers may be fostered and sustained by the appointment of a designated librarian, involved in course design and development. The librarian is well placed to provide information on available resources and their potential utilisation, as well as assist in the preparation of work on research skills. In order to fulfil this role effectively, Burje asserts that “an annual timetable of information transfer between librarians and educators is essential”(5). This information transfer would include the names and roles of faculty, the courses offered and their requirements, and details of student intake. This would allow for the planning of resources and the establishment of communications procedures(6).

Burje’s argument is compelling. The supplying of reading lists, for example, would allow librarians to evaluate resource levels and access facilities, and adjust them in accordance with the requirements of the student intake. The size of the student intake affects this evaluative procedure, but remains a difficult value to judge. The provision of reading lists does not guarantee their use or availability, thus necessitating the need for constant monitoring of the library service. The establishment of a system of communication would thus allow for the transfer of information regarding revised projections or new requirements.

The literature on librarian-faculty collaboration and cooperation reveals that such formal structures are rare, but are fruitful in the instances cited(7). Proactive involvement from library professionals, with experience and knowledge of educational practice, is crucial in forming this coalition of skills. In 1989, no British university had a librarian involved in course design and planning(8). The appointment of designated staff, with experience and knowledge of educational issues, is necessary to facilitate the effective provision of a service. The establishment of formal communications procedures between faculty and designated staff creates greater opportunities for student and faculty dialogue and effective use of resources.

The wide discrepancy of practice reflects not only on organisational environments, but also on the attitudes of professional library staff. The education of library professionals, detailed in a study by Kascus, reveals that low priority is accorded the subject of provision for distance education(9). The situation has changed, but not significantly. Negative attitudes of faculty to library provision and the information needs of students create further obstacles to an effective service(10). A repositioning of the library in the context of distance education “as part of the fabric of the educational experience rather than as a service provider”(11) is required for effective distance education provision.

Separate funding would indicate the priority attached to distance education and its status within an organization. It would also allow on-campus provision to continue unaffected, and without such budgetary support this service would suffer. Fisher's study of British universities revealed that half of the respondents who provided a service for distance education did so through extra-mural departments. These services were generally small-scale, and the budgetary allowance covered on-campus and distance education. The remainder had no separate budgetary allowance, "a serious weakness, indicating a low priority"(12). The responses to a question regarding funding, posted to Lis-access, produced no responses indicating a change in the situation regarding separate financial allocation for library provision(13).

2:3 Library provision

2:3:1 Access

A fundamental and critical problem in distance education is providing access to library resources and the means of utilising them. Access and location are related, but the links are more complex in terms of distance education. Access to services and resources, to means of communications, and to support services is complicated by the distance between students and their educational institution. The physical distance between students and their educational institution implies that specific access arrangements need to be arranged. Lessin identifies various methods used, and these include the use of on-campus libraries for all students, the establishment of branch libraries, and the use of other libraries, such as public libraries, to allow distance student access to educational resources(14).

Branch libraries are limited to areas of high student population density, since they require separate staffing, capital investment in land and construction, as well as the duplication of resources. Branch libraries would have "necessary limitations in the size and scope of the collection", which would compare unfavourably with main collections(15). Main site provision provides a central resource collection, but varies according to institution. Determining factors include the size of the distance student cohort, the attitudes of faculty and library, and the level of resources available to support library provision.

Reciprocal arrangements, common among local libraries, may provide access to the distance students of an institution. An investigation of higher education cooperation in a

region, the East Midlands, recommended that the venture “should be explored further in respect of access policy and borrowing facilities”(16). The potential is clear, but the authors asserted that local rather than regional level cooperation would be more cost effective; this consideration dictated that the British Library Document Supply Centre should be the focus of document delivery, although discernible time benefits were evident with regional cooperation(17). Actual problems exist regarding costs, and there are potential problems regarding the accumulation of bureaucracies, and questions over accreditation. Apart from the difficulty of establishing contractual arrangements, the resources available at local institutions may not be able to support the level and breadth of work required of students. Furthermore, rural populations would not have comparable access. The establishment of shared resources requires the construction of an effective communications procedure so that resources are fully utilised. The creation of the Open University resulted in the deployment of resources by public libraries in readiness for potential use by distance students. Projected use, however, far exceeded actual use(18).

Cooperation between universities regarding full-time students is well established, but no such arrangements exist for distance education(19). Kascus and Aguilar argue that organisational dictates may impede such cooperation since “academic institutions may be unwilling to enter such a contractual agreement for fear it might jeopardize its own competitiveness in the recruitment of students”(20). Ad hoc arrangements between institutions do exist, but vary in scale and effectiveness. Concerns over accreditation and responsibility are valid, but may need to be demoted in importance below the key concern of quality service to distance students. Interlending networks have been established by public libraries in separate counties(21), and these may be used as models for university cooperation.

The mainstay of library provision to distance students remains the photocopying of relevant periodical articles and chapters. An important library consideration regarding the provision of such materials is copyright liability and privileges. In the U.K. the Copyright Act of 1988 accords special provision to ‘prescribed libraries’, which include academic libraries(22). These rights, amplified by the Copyright (Librarians and Archivists) (Copying of Copyright materials) Regulations of 1989, entitle prescribed libraries to make copies for other libraries and individuals under the terms of ‘fair dealing’. In order to safeguard the library from any infringements of the Act, a signed declaration accepting liability must be completed by the distance student. Moreover, the recipients “must pay a sum not less than the cost...attributable to its production”(23).

The copying of materials for academic study, and the processing of inter-library loans is thus expedited. CD-ROMs and online databases come within the ambit of fair dealing regulations. The progress of electronic copying and delivery, though providing great advantages over conventional means, may be stymied by copyright considerations. Electronic journals are available, but are subject to the same copyright restrictions as hard copy journals. Campus-Wide Information Services may hold teaching and resource materials, but these are generally accessible on-campus only. Copyright considerations dictate that off-campus access is not feasible, and the incompatibility of many server protocols would block remote access should a security device be incorporated into the system. Furthermore, the posting of course details, such as reading lists and module evaluation procedures, could have implications for intellectual property rights.

Possible solutions include “a form of library protocol to protect materials against unlicensed use and infringement of copyright”, and the development of a system of payment for access(24). These solutions depend on close library cooperation as a prerequisite, and may stimulate greater collaboration in other areas of provision for distance education.

2:3:2 Collection management

The selection and acquisition of materials will reflect the organisational environment of an institution. An environment which encourages library-faculty cooperation will involve both parties in the collection management process. This putative partnership is predicated upon the recognition of the particular skills and knowledge of both educators and librarians. Educators have a greater awareness of the demands of their courses, and librarians of the resources needed to satisfy them.

Core collections provide the mainstay of library support to distance learners, and are a physical demonstration of library responsibility in making resources accessible. Fisher argues that “the main value of a library lies in the service it can supply immediately rather than in the back-up service to which it can give access”(25). Core collections would, to a certain extent, mitigate the effects of competition from on-campus students. Mcelroy argues that there is a correlation between proximity to library resources and library use, and that distance students are at a disadvantage in competing for resources. It is also asserted that certain ‘filters’, such as work or family commitments, act against distance students(26). This is a plausible if unsubstantiated argument. It does not take

into account the support structures which may alleviate difficulties of information delivery. These would include special arrangements and services contained within the document delivery policies for distance students.

Alternative sources, specific to distance learners, may be employed to counterbalance any advantage gained by on-campus students. At the University of Queensland, Australia, the development of a separate collection for the distance student population is determined by the demographics of that group. The collection policy is geared towards providing multiple copies of prescribed reading, with the exception of core texts, which students are obliged to buy(27). This system, Campbell asserts, is dependent on close faculty-library cooperation.

Reading lists form the link between faculty demands, student expectations and library resources. Reading lists need to be assessed as to potential demand, and the library notified of any revisions. It is important that reading lists are provided in advance of course start dates, and that they are differentiated. Differentiation would focus on the relative importance of selected titles and indicate the topics covered and timetable course assignments so that library planning for use would be most effective. Active library participation in the process would involve monitoring usage patterns, a process facilitated by automation systems, and providing feedback to course administrators. This is particularly important, as research has shown that there is “often a wide gap between student and tutor perceptions” of reading lists(28).

The library may adopt a proactive stance by conducting a continual process of current awareness of available resources, thus encouraging cooperation and facilitating speedier transactions. This is a valuable monitoring tool. This procedure is particularly important, as patterns of demand provide libraries with quantitative data which may be used to gauge trends and support arguments for policy change. Such a procedure was adopted at the University of Wyoming, U.S.A., and led to closer faculty-library liaison and a policy of “greater selection before purchase”(29).

Alternatives to print collections, which are expensive to buy and to send by post, include microfiche and online sources. Microfiche copies of serials are made available to distance students at the University of Wyoming(30). This type of provision would be suitable for an organization which operated study centres, where suitable equipment could be housed, but would be impractical for most students. This problem is

accentuated in the case of overseas theses, which are often made available for reference only(31), a provision which is clearly incompatible with the needs of distance students.

Online document sources offer a speedy and cost-effective alternative. Electronic document delivery is an option for libraries and information centres, but the access to equipment and the ability to use them are not evenly distributed amongst the student population. University libraries are able to offer online services, but only 3% of U.K. public libraries have an Internet connection(32).

As argued earlier, the type and extent of library provision is often linked inextricably to funding. It is clear that additional funds need to be provided for library provision for distance education if an adequate service is to be established. Adequate funding is required for collection development. An example of a successful system of provision, based on a synergistic relationship between educators and librarians, is the University of Queensland, Australia. Collection development and management are funded jointly by the library and faculty(33).

2:3:3 Document delivery and information services

It has been established that distance students do not, on the whole, have physical access to the libraries of their educational institution. Access must be facilitated by other means. The postal service allows for small and large documents to be delivered and is a common feature of library provision for distance students. The postal system is transnational, although national boundaries may dictate the effectiveness and efficiency of a system. Postal provision does have impediments, which include the cost of postage, loss of or damage to documents, practical problems in returning documents and time-delays which may cause problems when there is heavy demand(34). Courier services provide guarantees against loss of or damage to documents, and decrease the timescale of transactions, but remain a costly alternative. Restricting resource delivery to core texts raises concerns over the quality of delivery. Book boxes provide an alternative method of resource collection and delivery. A number of related documents on a subject may be incorporated as a single transferrable unit. However, the content of such boxes is determined by academic or library staff, and restricts the possibility of student control. Book boxes also require a great deal of administrative attention, accruing staff and time costs.

A study at Exeter University established the effectiveness of electronic delivery when combined with more traditional services(35). The student cohort did utilise the resources available, but they may be considered an atypical group as they had access to the relevant computer hardware. Electronic resources available include internal and external library catalogues, bibliographic databases, electronic journals, document delivery systems, the Internet, text-based databases and electronic mail(36).

Technology such as electronic mail and telefacsimile can shorten the transactional distance which separates students from educational resources and organisations. Increased use of computers requires provision of online access to distance students, with the possibility of making courseware available to them. Access to electronic mail and telefacsimile allow for increased communication and dialogue, which may be utilised for academic and pastoral purposes. The critical factors of cost and availability determine their use. Although electronic resourcing may be of limited immediate application for the majority of distance students, it does provide a valuable addition to available resources and should be investigated.

2:3:4 User education

A crucial issue in library provision is the significance attached to the development of information skills as part of the educational experience of students. User education addresses this need, although there is no consensus as to the importance attached to it.

User education was often considered a 'marginal' service(37), but this situation has changed. It may be considered marginal in the sense that a simplification of library procedures may reduce its importance, and because course evaluation does not always recognise it as a criterion. However, a shift towards incorporating information skills into the evaluative content of courses necessitates a modicum of understanding and ability within this area. Furthermore, the increasing proliferation and sophistication of bibliographic tools requires user knowledge or a reliance on library knowledge. Dependence on the library will have implications for staff-time resources, and may not result in a satisfactory service(38). Research by Harrop at the University of Sheffield revealed that resources were not fully utilised and this finding is used to support the argument against user education(39). Harrop fails to consider the other possible implications which may include a failure to market the service properly, and the possible underachievement of students.

A common library service for distance education is the provision of bibliographic searches, a service which would not normally be conducted on behalf of on-campus students. A subject of study is defined and the results of a bibliographic search are given to students. This service provides distance students with the relevant information to pursue their studies, but does have negative implications. If distance students are to attain equal status with their on-campus counterparts, equal demands must be made of them. Indeed, George asserts that "the provision of a comprehensive service may have a long-term negative impact"(40). George conceptualises the production of academic work as part of the process of acquiring the skills of independent research, skills which may be of use in long-term education. A reorientation of library services, so that the application of skills is combined with the content of study, would facilitate this goal of independent research. It is recognised that resources and bibliographic tools are inaccessible to most distance students, but George contends that user education should be directed at student influence of this research process(41).

In a broad-ranging theoretical discourse on the subject of information, Athelaide provides an iteration of this argument. Athelaide argues that "all sources of information, including those found in libraries, are linked together...through an ecology of information"(42). This ecology of information requires particular skills for the successful navigation and utilisation of resource collections, skills which may be transferable to all environments. An awareness of the means of storing, presenting, identifying and retrieving information, and of the terminology used in information systems would aid this process.

An implicit recognition of this need is provided by Jolly, who describes library provision at Northern College, Scotland(43). The service is a comprehensive one, including the searching of stock and the use of bibliographic tools in service of student demands. This does not conform to the provision of user education, and the potential problems of this approach are evident. The service is time consuming and users become ever more sophisticated in their demands, and there is the expressed doubt that the service could not cope with a total student uptake(44). Indeed, the establishment of what is essentially a delivery service will encourage reliance on the library and not act as an encouragement to independent study(45). There is a need to articulate the purpose of library provision and the parameters within which staff are willing to operate.

Attempts to reorientate library provision in such terms have focussed on the inclusion of user education within the academic discipline studied(46). Thus, information skills would be integrated into course work, and not be an optional adjunct to it. The effective integration of user education into course requirements would have a two-fold effect. First, student knowledge of the process and application of information would be enhanced, allowing for the more effective use and manipulation of resources in the micro- and macro-environment. Second, the role of libraries would be clarified, and the dialogue between students and librarians should develop in a more systematic and effective manner.

George argues that “the overall educational purpose of autonomy” would be met by such provision(47). This assumption of the goal of autonomy as central to education needs to be contextualised within the prevailing organisational environment and formally established. This requires a formal recognition of its importance by faculty and library.

User education is provided by the majority of libraries for on-campus students(48), but the methods employed would not be suitable for most distance students. A report on user education in university libraries revealed the nature of such provision, which is predominantly face-to-face(49). Such provision increases demands on staff time and the financial resources available to libraries. Furthermore, distance students are precluded from participating by their lack of physical proximity to the educational institution.

Other methods of delivery, particularly guides and computer-based training, need to be tailored to suit distance students, who face possible disenfranchisement from the information system. The traditional objective of library guides is to provide an in-library orientation, both for the physical layout and the services available. For the majority of distance students the library is not a physical entity, and the value of such guides is limited. Library services need to be presented in terms of the needs and wants of its constituent user groups. Distance students need to be informed of their entitlements, any restrictions which apply to their use of services, as well as the established procedures which facilitate their use. Deakin University, Australia, has been the source of substantial investigation on the subject of library provision for distance education. The promotion of its service and its effects have been closely monitored. The development of guides which gave prominent display to contact procedures resulted in a growing demand on services. Communication is considered integral to the service so that there are “minimum impediments to [the] requesting of material”(50).

Library guides, where available, are generally sent to new users. These are produced in different formats and often targeted at specific student groups. Effective user education, however, should be conducted on a continual basis, and incorporated as course requirements, if the skills taught are to be fully utilised and retained(51).

Computer-based training provides a flexible alternative, and has inherent advantages over other formats. Computer-based training “provides self-paced instruction, can be tailored to meet individual needs, [is] available at the student’s convenience, ensures consistency of lesson content and presentation, [and] releases staff for other tasks”(52). Some of these characteristics are shared with other media, and cannot be considered unique to computer-based training. However, the adaptability of the medium is a departure from the norm and is the overriding attribute. This is particularly important in allowing modifications to be made to suit segments of the student population, including distance students. The cost and availability of equipment and the provision of online training, with the implications for equitability of opportunity, remain as disincentives to the wide-scale use of this medium.

2:3:5Marketing and quality management

The concept of marketing is not new to information and library services, although practice has tended to focus on publicity and public relations(53), often to the detriment of other key features. The core marketing concept, that of exchange, may be applied to non-profit organisations as well as to profit-oriented organisations. The needs and wants of users must be clearly defined and satisfied, and this encompasses more than publicity and public relations only.

Thorough and ongoing market research must be carried out in order to identify the service’s actual and potential user base; as there is a danger that a great number of distance students will fail to utilise the services provided. Market research may involve the use of user surveys, studies or a multitude of other means(54), which should be analysed with a view to satisfying the needs and wants of users. Distance learners do have other sources of information upon which to draw, and libraries ought to be aware of these competing sources.

Implementing marketing principles focusses management attention on organisational objectives, the quality of resources available and how they correspond to user needs. Marketing needs to be an ongoing process, in order to highlight patterns of use and

non-use, identify trends and evaluate user satisfaction. Libraries need to be responsive to their environment, at both a macro and micro level. All organisations are subject to change, and libraries must be responsive. In the macro-environment, political and technological changes influence developments. At Liverpool University, the increase in part-time study has prompted the library to extend its opening hours and offer variable loan periods(55). Other changes, such as government policy, may have profound effects on student requirements. The reorientation of Initial Teacher Training in 1992, for example, required students to spend more time supervised in schools, effectively increasing their distance from higher education institutions and necessitating change in the provision of resources(56). Librarians should be prepared to introduce, change or abandon services to fulfil their role in the market

In a climate of increasing financial constraints, the efficiency of a service should be a managerial concern. Above all, however, a service needs to be effective. Library resources need to be fully utilised, and user needs satisfied. Ewing and Hauptmann persuasively argue that this is often not the case(57), and that qualitative analyses may identify such weaknesses, allow for the revision of procedures, and thus raise standards and effectiveness. This repositioning, if properly promoted, will distinguish a library from its competitors.

Promotion, it has been argued, is “the most visible area of marketing”(58). Ideally, it should increase an awareness of the products on offer, and distinguish them from those of competitors. Failure to do this may result in the under-utilisation of resources. In order to achieve long-term success, however, the products must deliver what is offered. A further imperative of advertising is that it consolidate the institutionalisation of a service. Administrative acceptance is implied, which will have an effect on the service’s profile and utilisation, as well as strengthening its position in terms of funding and resourcing.

Marketing should be the concern of all library staff, not only senior management. The effectiveness and efficiency of a service, at all levels, is important in terms of the viability and success of any organization. Libraries exist within a market economy, and cannot be immune from its influence. Educational institutions, especially in an era of financial constraints, would reward immurement with redundancy.

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Chapter 3

Leicester University

3:1 Introduction

A University college was established at Leicester in 1919, but it was not until 1957 that the College gained recognition as a university by the University Grants Committee. The university comprises Faculties of Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences, Engineering, Law, Medicine and Education(1). The total registered students, both home and overseas, amount to 11,460(). Distance students formed a significant part of this total, with 697 registered as home students, and a further 1,406 registered as overseas students(), although the total has now increased to 2,800 overall(2).

3:2 School of Education

The School of Education was created in 1962, an amalgamation of the Department of Education and the Institute of Education. Taught courses, research and distance education courses are offered, with the main focus of the school being initial teacher training and continuing professional development (3).

The main distance education courses offered by the School of Education are the Master of Business Administration in Educational Management (M.B.A.), the certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (T.E.S.O.L.) and the Master of Applied Linguistics. In addition, a Primary Masters (PriMA) will be offered from September 1996.

The M.B.A. course is based at Northampton, and is aimed at practising teachers in schools and colleges. The degree programme consists of a planning unit, five modules, and a long project. The planning unit describes recommended approaches to work, and advises on the use of necessary resources. The modules comprise core units and elective units, which cover both theory and practice, and stress currency of information and specialisation. The long project demands "considerable detail" and its application to a "practical situation"(4). All assignments, including the project, are negotiable; viz., assignment titles are negotiated by students and tutors.

Each M.B.A. student is assigned a tutor, who is the first point of contact. Communication is mainly conducted by post, with telefacsimile, electronic mail and the telephone also used widely. A monthly newsletter is sent to all students, and includes course and administrative information. Course materials are provided to all students. The materials comprise core units produced by a publisher (Pitman's) and in-house material. Elective units are produced in-house, but also include five or six extracts from published sources.

The T.E.S.O.L. and M.A. in Applied Linguistics courses are modular, and the teaching and administrative staff are based in Leicester. Both courses are aimed at "qualified teachers from a range of professional contexts"(5). A planning unit and five modules provide the taught element of the course, with the completion of a 20,000 word dissertation necessary for the M.A. qualification. The T.E.S.O.L. Materials which include reading activities, are produced mainly in-house, and students are expected to buy core texts. Information skills are incorporated as an integral part of each module. Student support is facilitated by various media, and each student is assigned a tutor. Tutor contact is available, with an allocation of one hour per student per module. This contact time is used to cover tutorial work, and does not include administration time.

The PriMA course is modular, comprising five modules for the award of an M.A., with the option of transferring to a Doctorate programme. Each module includes two units and the production of an assignment. The modules include one on Research Methods. The course is designed to be flexible, with start dates at any time and completion of the course in one to five years. Personal tutors are assigned to each student in order to provide academic guidance and pastoral support(6).

3:3 Education Library

The Education Library occupies a site adjacent to the School of Education, but is part of the University Library system. The holdings of the library comprise approximately 80,000 books and 200 periodical titles(7). The library includes an Education Resource Centre, which contains approximately 30,000 items, including books and audio-visual material(8). The Librarian-in-charge has a support staff of three full-time and four part-time non-qualified librarians.

The University Library system has not produced a policy statement regarding library provision to distance students, although guidelines have been introduced by the

Education Library(9) The guidelines outline staff responsibility, student entitlements and the extent of service promotion. A designated co-ordinator for distance students, and an assistant, were appointed from the existing staff to deal with the requirements of distance users. A stipulation that all distance education-related documents and letters would include the names of the designated staff formalised this reorientation of service provision. All distance students are entitled to the following services:

- photocopying of periodical articles and books in stock, in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, at a charge of 15 pence per A4 sheet. Requests, along with a signed copyright declaration, are required in writing, although telephone requests are given consideration in urgent cases
- the completion of a database search form enables students to request the library to undertake searches of accessible CD-ROM and online databases, which include International ERIC, BIDS and OCLC First Search
- an inter-library loan service , free within a limit of requests, for periodical articles but not for books
- access to other higher education libraries may be facilitated by a letter of introduction from the Librarian-in-charge, although no reciprocal arrangements exist.

Distance students based in the United Kingdom are allowed to borrow up to four books at a time. An extended loan period of six weeks allows for in-post time, and the status of the books does not allow for renewal, and requires recall within ten days, if necessary. Overseas students are not eligible for this service. Furthermore, distance students who are able to visit the library are granted equal entitlements to their on-campus counterparts

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Chapter 4

Interviews

4.1 Remit of study

A complementary study of faculty and library perspectives was conducted in order to elucidate the practice of distance education at Leicester, and establish parameters concerning the issues involved and possible future developments.

Objective analysis of the data reveals areas of convergence and divergence in practice and viewpoint, and allows for a comparative framework with student perceptions. An evaluation of library provision for distance education is thus facilitated.

4.2 Methodology

The interview format was chosen to elicit specific information and allow for the elaboration of personal perspectives. The purpose of the research was explained to the interview subjects, and permission was gained to quote freely. Interviews were tape-recorded and analysed from subsequent transcripts. The interviews were semi-structured. A framework of categories and questions was devised (see Appendix 2), but a degree of latitude was allowed for the respondents to convey their experiential perspectives. A structure was established and the interviews were guided in order to produce qualitative data which would sustain comparative analysis with student responses.

The small size of the departments involved and the problem of staff availability precluded a true random sample. Selection of interviewees was based on availability and degree of involvement with distance education. As such, the data should be considered suggestive rather than conclusive.

Subjects were selected from two main groups- course administrators, and librarians. The former group is divided into administrators and teachers of the Master of Business Administration course (M.B.A.), and the advanced certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (T.E.S.O.L.) which leads on to the M.A. in Applied Linguistics. The course planner and administrator of a course under development, the

primary M.A.(PriMA), provided insights into current planning considerations vis-a-vis library provision. The latter group consisted of professional and non-professional librarians at the Education Library, which is the focus of the study, and main site management of Leicester University Library, in order to provide clarification of institution-wide objectives and considerations.

Interview subjects

M.B.A. at Northampton

Mr. Paul Ryan- Lecturer and tutor in educational management

Ms. Marianne Coleman- Lecturer and tutor in educational management

Dr. Mark Lofthouse- Tutor in charge at University Centre at Northampton

T.E.S.O.L. and M.A. Applied Linguistics

Dr. Adrian Stokes- Lecturer in education

Ms. Barbara Thornton- Lecturer in education

Mr. Wasyl Cajkler- Lecturer in education

PriMA

Dr. Roger Merry- Head of new PriMA distance education course, senior lecturer in education

Education Library

Mr. Roy Kirk- Librarian in charge

Ms. Lydia Buckton- Senior library assistant, distance learning coordinator

Ms. Nicky Oram- Library assistant, distance learning assistant

Main site Library

Dr. Tim Hobbs- University Librarian of the University of Leicester

4.3 Interview analysis

4.3.1 Access and resources

General support for the concept of access to library provision for distance education was elicited, but the type of access and the importance attached to it varied greatly. This inconsistency was evident within departments, and may reflect the lack of a clear policy statement or institutional guidelines. A Pro-Vice-Chancellor has been appointed to the

task of producing a policy document, but there are no indications as to its probable content or publication date.

Unlike their on-campus counterparts, distance students are not automatically enrolled as library members, but must register independently. Furthermore, they do not receive a student card, and both these factors suggest that access to university culture and identity is not a priority. Actual access and entitlement were prominent interview issues.

The expressed need for access derived partly from philosophical considerations, but the main impetus was practical and pedagogical. Concerns raised, including entitlement to and equity of provision, derived from personal experiences in dealing with students and was evidenced by the quality of student work. Concern was expressed over actual and potential discrimination, especially regarding the quantity and quality of resources available to overseas students. A correlation was recognised between access to resources and the quality of work submitted, with a notable divide between overseas and home-based students.

No ready solution was suggested, although ad hoc arrangements were employed to ease potential problems. These arrangements included the photocopying and postage of articles on behalf of students, and the relaxation of university submission rules. A submitted piece of work, according to the university, must be marked. The poor quality of many overseas texts, mainly a reflection of limited reading, requires tutors to reclassify such texts as draft copies to be returned to students(1). Administrative delays and added costs result from such practices, which stem from the lack of adequate resources for some overseas students. Long-term solutions are not forthcoming, although future difficulties are anticipated. Openness of access was producing inconsistent levels of revenue(2), and the expansion in the number of students undertaking dissertations threatened to “overwhelm the library”(3).

The T.E.S.O.L. group was divided over the issue of access, with Cajkler and Stokes asserting that distance students did not need access equal to that of their on-campus counterparts and that there was no entitlement per se(4,5). Thornton, who expressed the view that most students would have access to libraries near their home or work, conceded that there had been an estimable increase in the role of the library since the inception of the course and “the central part the library plays for those who do use the library” was evident(6). The crux of this inconsistency lies with attitudes towards student independence and responsibility. Cajkler asserted that it is “the student’s

responsibility to secure access to resources", and that the information skills incorporated into the teaching programme enable them to locate and employ relevant resources(7). Independence was not elucidated as a goal of education but as a necessary requirement because of distance and associated problems. Library input is generated by the inclusion of a library guide, which details student entitlements, and delineates the procedures for accessing materials.

The course materials provided are considered adequate for most students during the advanced certificate stage of their university education. Greater depth of research and wider reading are expected for long assignments and dissertations. The provision of pre-prepared course material distinguishes distance students from their on-campus counterparts, according to Cajkler, and thus diminishes both requirements and entitlements(8).

Greater unanimity of opinion was expressed by the administrators of the M.B.A. course at Northampton. Equitability was posited as a key issue, in terms of student demand and as a factor influencing quality of work. It was evident that library provision had not been a planning consideration and that library cooperation had not been anticipated. Lofthouse asserted that the "role of the library has been disastrously underestimated"(9). Coleman also suggested that equity was important, but asserted that it would be difficult to achieve in practice(10).

The view of the Education Library, as expressed by Kirk, is that distance students are entitled to library provision equal to that received by on-campus students. The increase in student demands is related to the increase in student work on long assignments and dissertations, and will be problematic should student numbers continue to increase and the library continue to receive no financial remuneration for the services provided.

The funding of the library is formulated on an historical basis, and does not consider distance student numbers. The main costing, according to Kirk, is in administrative time, with inter-library loans and postage accounting for actual monetary costs. Financial constraints limit the scope of library provision, including the purchase of additional books alternative means of communication and document delivery, such as telefacsimile.

The main site library at Leicester University offers no equivalent service. Hobbs, University Librarian, recognises that "the University's support services for distance learning students (including library support) are inadequate at present"(11). Equality of

provision is considered a minimum requirement, and there is a recognition of the fact that the problems associated with physical and transactional distance require positive discrimination in favour of distance students. Areas of development are being considered, and these include the appointment of a designated librarian for distance education provision, the establishment of reciprocal arrangements with other higher education libraries, and user education programmes.

Such initiatives, however, depend on the allocation of a separate budgetary allowance for distance education. This financial shortfall, according to Hobbs, is "the nub of the problem"(12). No short term solutions are suggested, and it is probable that university-wide recognition of the problem is required before any institutional changes may be enacted.

4.3.2 Communication and cooperation

Interviews with course administrators confirmed that no formal communication procedure has been established between faculty and library. Communication tends to be informal and irregular, the ad hoc nature a result of an individual's actions rather than administrative imperatives. The proactive role of the library was recognised as the main impetus to library-faculty communication.

PriMA, the course under development, has not involved the library in a participatory role. The librarian in charge is sent the minutes of planning committee meetings, but no formal structure exists to allow for library input or influence. The lack of a collaborative role for the library is also evident for the courses which are currently running. Coleman, of the M.B.A. course, recognises the development of library provision as a response to student needs and not as a product of faculty dictates(13). The tacit suggestion is that the library should assume and maintain a proactive role and that distance students need to exercise their independence by dictating the extent of provision required. The concept of student independence is important in a distance education context, as individual requirements will vary greatly among the student cohort. A demand led policy is advocated, but there is no acknowledgement of the potential problems of such an approach. A demand-led approach would require a student cohort which was knowledgeable about actual and potential library resources and provision and the requirements of their course of study. The lack of clarity amongst faculty staff as to the role and purpose of the library suggests that there is no guarantee of such knowledge.

The library is not formally involved in the planning of the T.E.S.O.L. course, but there is an established contact procedure through the Education Library Advisory Committee. Stokes cited this as a means of developing communication and potential cooperation(14). The committee, however, did not meet in the last academic year and no future meetings have been agreed upon. Participation from all sections of the School of Education is voluntary, and there is a lack of clarity as to the remit and powers of the committee(15).

Informal contact is facilitated by the proximity of the School of Education to the Education Library. Furthermore, the establishment of a local area computer network, allowing the facility of electronic mail, and the remote access of the library catalogue, has increased the number of communications and monitoring channels. Stokes checks library resources by accessing the university's OPAC, and is able to 'telnet' to remote libraries to assess resources on behalf of students(16). This latter practice is illustrative of the lack of an administrative policy regarding library provision for distance education. Access to remote libraries is facilitated by a letter of introduction from the librarian in charge at the education library, and this suggests that resource assessment should be the responsibility of the librarian, and not of individuals within departments.

As argued in chapter 2, information concerning student numbers, course content and timetabling affects the level and effectiveness of library provision. The interview subjects recognised the value of informing the library of enrolment figures, but these were not supplied to the library on a systematic basis. Cajkler recognised this as a potentially problematic omission(17) and concurred with his colleagues that the matter should be addressed.

The nature of the information involved, however, was considered problematic. The M.B.A. course had attracted in the region of 200 students annually, but enrolment figures for the T.E.S.O.L. course were more difficult to predict. Merry conceded that the potential enrolments for the PriMA course were unknown; initial expectations of a large Pacific-Rim market had diminished, and the revised target market constituted mainly home students. The nature of student expectations in the former market would require the operation of a closed system of distance education, with a rigid course structure. The latter market, as the T.E.S.O.L. and M.B.A. experience had shown, would require a more contextual, flexible structure. As a result, the type and quantity of resources could not be accurately gauged.

Lofthouse suggested that student enrolment figures were not the only problem in this respect(18). The modularisation of degree courses allowed for greater student choice but created administrative problems. Student movement within modules and departments was difficult to monitor. Lofthouse argued that an integrated database of distance students should be constructed and made available to all departments and the library(19). The construction of such a database would require extra budgetary allocation and technical support, two factors which preclude its immediate implementation.

The library, according to Kirk, does not receive assignment details or deadline dates. Occasional reading lists are received from the T.E.S.O.L. administrators, but these tend to be undifferentiated. No indications are given of the priority assigned to or the expected demand for these materials. No reading lists are provided by the M.B.A. administrators(20).

Kirk asserts that involvement in planning meetings and input regarding the content of units would lead to a harmonisation of course requirements and library resources. He expressed the "need to know what students are being told in order to respond properly to them"(21). The contention that communication and cooperation from academic staff has been irregular and uneven confirms the views of the course administrators themselves. The proactive stance of the library is a means of encouraging the communication process, but has not been entirely successful. Memoranda circulated to staff generally produce a low response-rate; notification of cutbacks in journal subscription, an important resource for distance students, elicited such a response(22).

4.3.3 Information technology

The issue of Information Technology (I.T.) produced the greatest unanimity of opinion amongst the academic staff of the T.E.S.O.L. course. Stokes argued that no discernible advantage could be gained from constructing web pages, as there was only limited student access to the necessary online hardware and information skills(23). The evidence of a market would be the necessary prerequisite to an expansion of resources made available online. Such an expansion would require an application for funds and technical support staff time, areas of potential difficulty. This view was reiterated by the other T.E.S.O.L. administrators, whose use of I.T. is limited to E-mail communications.

Coleman, of the M.B.A. course, argued that no immediate benefit could be gained from the necessary investment in hardware, training, and time(24). Paramount were the questions of access and copyright. The other administrators of the M.B.A. course reflected on the Open University, its actions and market place. Ryan posited the argument that the lack of an I.T. base could disadvantage Leicester University, since other suppliers of distance education have developed their I.T. resources. The example of the loan of online computers to Teacher Training students by the Open University "shows that they are pushing the boundaries", according to Ryan(25). A developed I.T. base would have two main benefits, both central to distance education theory and practice. First, access to greater resources would be made available to students, and the process of updating and revising these resources would be eased. The key issue, according to Ryan, is lack of finances. Lofthouse concurred that a need was apparent and that financial constraints were the main impediment to the implementation of an integrated I.T. policy. He deviated from Ryan in asserting that the Open university had a slower timetable of course revision than Northampton, five to six years in comparison to eighteen months(26). This, however, may be a reflection of the greater scale and bureaucracy of the Open University, rather than an invalidation of its I.T. policy.

The School of Education does have a presence on the Internet. The School of Education Home Page (27) contains information on course structure and requirements, but does not cover resources or tuition. 'Teaching and Learning Resources', a link of potential value to distance students, is not available off-campus. The library, according to Hobbs, is actively committed to the development of information technology as a resource tool(28). A major expansion of the Campus Wide Information Service is being undertaken, and two pilot projects with Loughborough University in the e-Lib programme aim to increase online resource availability.

The use of E-mail is widespread amongst academic staff within the school of education; its use, however, is not as common as other communications technologies in student contact. Telefacsimile and telephone communication are the main technological means of contact with students. These also provide the main non-postal media for the library. The distance education support staff at the Education Library reported that online communication had increased in volume, but that such communication was problematic. The library has a number of dumb terminals, serving the Online Public Access Catalogue, but only one networked terminal. Furthermore, a lack of experience and skills in employing the E-mail utility acted against its proper utilisation(29,30).

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Chapter 5

Questionnaire

5:1 Remit of study

A study of distance students enrolled at the Education Library of Leicester University was undertaken in order to produce quantitative data regarding the make-up of the student cohort, and establish the role of library provision within their studies.

An evaluation of the present service is implemented, which allows for a review and possible revision of the library role in distance education.

5:2 Methodology

Distance students, by definition, constitute a geographically disparate group. This factor, and the number of students involved, dictated the use of the questionnaire format as the only viable means of conducting research into the library needs of this group. No previous survey of distance students had been conducted at Leicester University, although there are examples in the literature of distance education (1).

There are inherent disadvantages to conducting research by postal questionnaire. There is no facility to clarify or explain questions which might be problematic; financial and time constraints did not allow for a pilot study. Furthermore, postal questionnaires generally produce a low response rate. The guarantee of confidentiality, considered necessary in order to elicit true responses, precluded the use of follow-up surveys for non-respondents. The first problem cannot be wholly resolved, but an anticipation of such problems diminishes their significance. The questions were reviewed by library and academic staff, and a covering letter, explaining the purpose of the research, was included. Design considerations prompted the inclusion of clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire, which were incorporated into the body of the text, along with a glossary of terms used. The problem of low response-rates is more difficult to resolve, and research has concluded that a response rate of less than 40% should be considered to produce suggestive rather than conclusive results(2). Addressed, postage-paid envelopes

were included for U.K. students, but this was impractical for their overseas counterparts.

219 questionnaires were sent, and 97 returned (26 overseas). The actual response-rate for this postal questionnaire was 43%. A combination of open and closed questions was included. The open questions were necessary in order to allow respondents an opportunity to express their views or air personal grievances. The closed questions avoided, where possible, ambiguity or "conditional stimuli"(3). This is a prerequisite to objective analysis. The closed questions included structured lists, where more than one answer was possible, categories, for factors such as age, and ranking questions, used to evaluate significance. Questions were limited to those that could reasonably be answered.

Despite the problems associated with such questionnaires, research has revealed that "it does not appear that mail survey responses are any less accurate than those given by interview, and there is some slight evidence that socially less acceptable responses are more readily elicited by mail questionnaires"(4).

5:3 Questionnaire analysis

Distance student cohort

The respondent distance students conform to the typology established in the theoretical frameworks delineated in chapter 1. The majority of students are older than their on-campus counterparts, with 80% being thirty five years of age or older. Only 17% live within thirty miles of Leicester. An exception to the typology is the inequality of the sexes, with the student cohort being predominantly male(67%).

Access and resource provision

Theories of distance education maintain that a basic characteristic of this system is the separation of the student from the educational environment. This separation is considered the norm, but it cannot be considered an absolute. The first two questions of the questionnaire sought to establish whether this distance had been crossed, in terms of physical access and library use. 56% of home students had visited Leicester University Libraries, and 63% had used the services provided. Unsurprisingly, only 19% of overseas students had visited, and library use was registered at 44%.

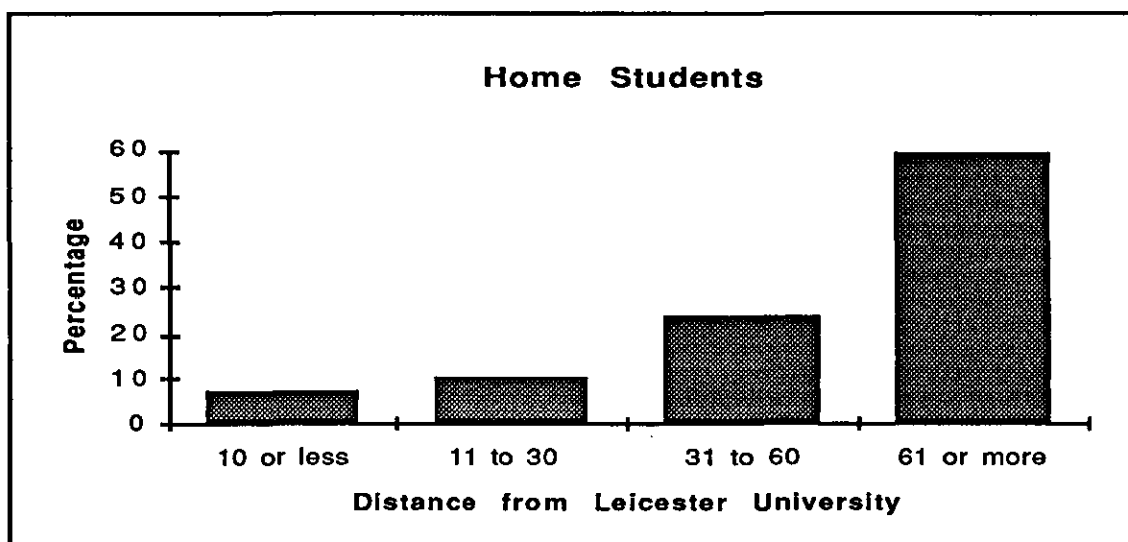


Figure 2. Distance of home students from Leicester.

Communication, it has been established, is the key factor in alleviating problems caused by the separation of student from institution. Such separation may create problems associated with transactional distance, such as alienation and lack of effective pastoral and academic communication. The variety and efficacy of the means of communication may determine the effectiveness of the pedagogical process. An analysis of the two groups involved illustrates that there is a distinct analogy between distance from the educational environment and the type of communication medium employed. The respondents were asked to select the means of communication employed in contacting the Education Library. Distinct differences are evident between home and overseas students, with the former group mainly using the telephone and the latter group preferring the postal service. The cost of international calls is the likely determinant, but this reliance on the postal service does have implications for the quality of service provided. Communication is necessarily slower and subject to the vagaries of international systems. A further difference is the greater use of electronic mail by overseas students, which supports the argument in favour of increasing the library's electronic access points and supporting staff training in information technology.

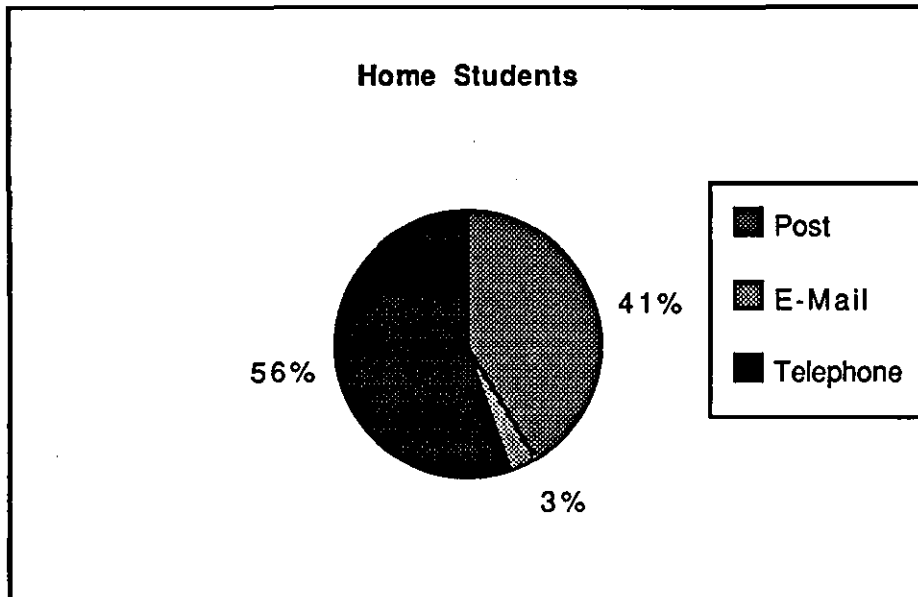


Figure 3. Communication media for home students.

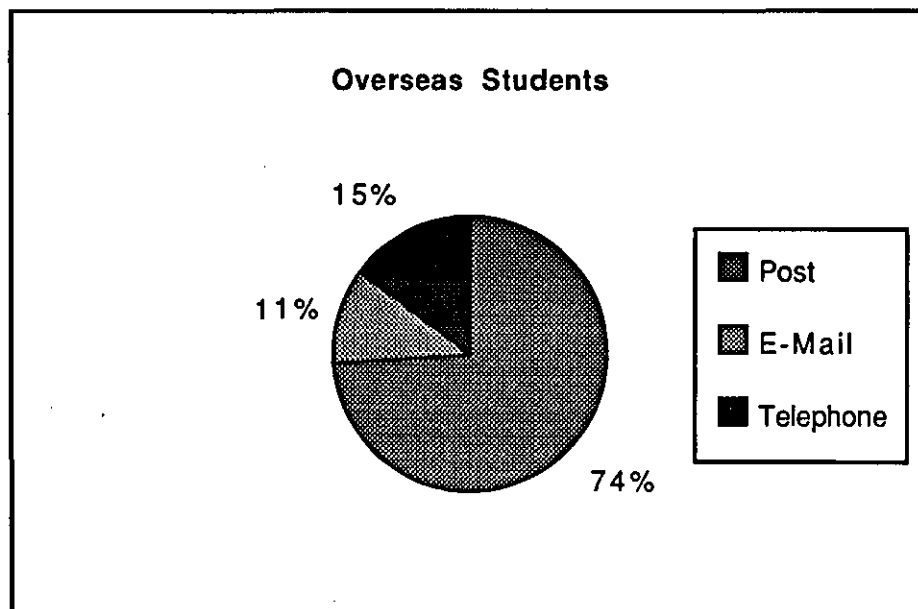


Figure 4. Communication media for overseas students.

Access to libraries other than that at Leicester University would represent the main alternative educational resources for distance students. The results of the survey reveal a disparity between home and overseas students. 68% of home students have

In contrast, 41% of overseas students had such access, and only 37% had used higher education libraries in the course of their studies. This disparity in potential and actual access does support the argument that real inequality of educational opportunity and provision exists between the two groups. It would be within the remit of a more detailed study to establish and clarify actual service use and privileges.

A correlation between access and use was produced, and revealed that 55% of the respondent students had access to alternative higher education libraries and had utilised their resources, and that 39% had neither access to nor had used such resources. The latter figure illustrates that a sizeable minority are dependent on the Education Library, and the former that alternative resources are utilised where available. Greater investigation of the possibilities of reciprocal arrangements would lead to enhanced services within these alternative institutions, and would relieve the increasing burden on Leicester University Libraries.

The level of public library provision is lower for both groups, at 44% for home students and 30% for overseas students. Actual public library use was reported as 26% and 40% respectively. The study did not establish the rur-urban distribution of the students, and it is not known whether this was a determining factor in low public library use. A correlation of public library access and use, which revealed that 53% had no access to public libraries and had not used any in the course of their studies, suggests that this cannot be relied upon as an alternative resource collection. Only 28% had both access to and had used public libraries.

The main source of student information on library provision is the University Library's information pack for distance students. It is the responsibility of the library to send the pack to students on registration with the Education Library. Course administrators also provide students with the same or an amended version. 87% of home students and 78% of overseas students answered that they had received the packs. It is a concern that a fifth of overseas distance students claimed not to have received it. This suggests administrative error, or the possibility suggested by Thornton, that an initial plethora of information at the beginning of courses resulted in an 'overload'(5).

As the main source of information on the library, it is important that the information pack be effective and useful. Respondents were asked to grade the usefulness of the pack, and the positive responses are represented below.

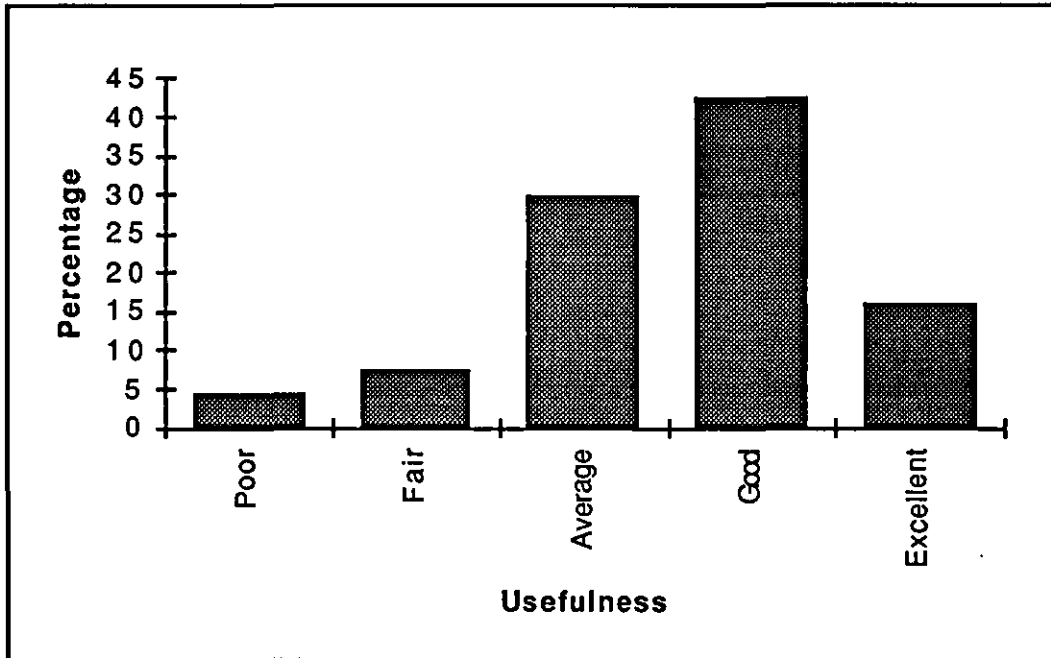


Figure 5. Student evaluation of library information pack.

The proactive stance of the library is illustrated by the designation of a distance learning contact for all students. The contact is the first and most identifiable point of reference in the library for distance students. Accordingly, it was considered important to gauge how effectively this service had been promoted. 74% of home students knew the name of their contact, Lydia Bucktin, with the figure higher for overseas students, at 89%. These figures testify to the success of service promotion.

Service provision for distance students is problematic and uneven in the field of distance education. A question which concerned itself with the required services of distance students rather than the actual ones used, allowed for multiple answers. The selection given represented the common library services provided in higher education institutions. Graphical representation of the required services for both groups is given below.

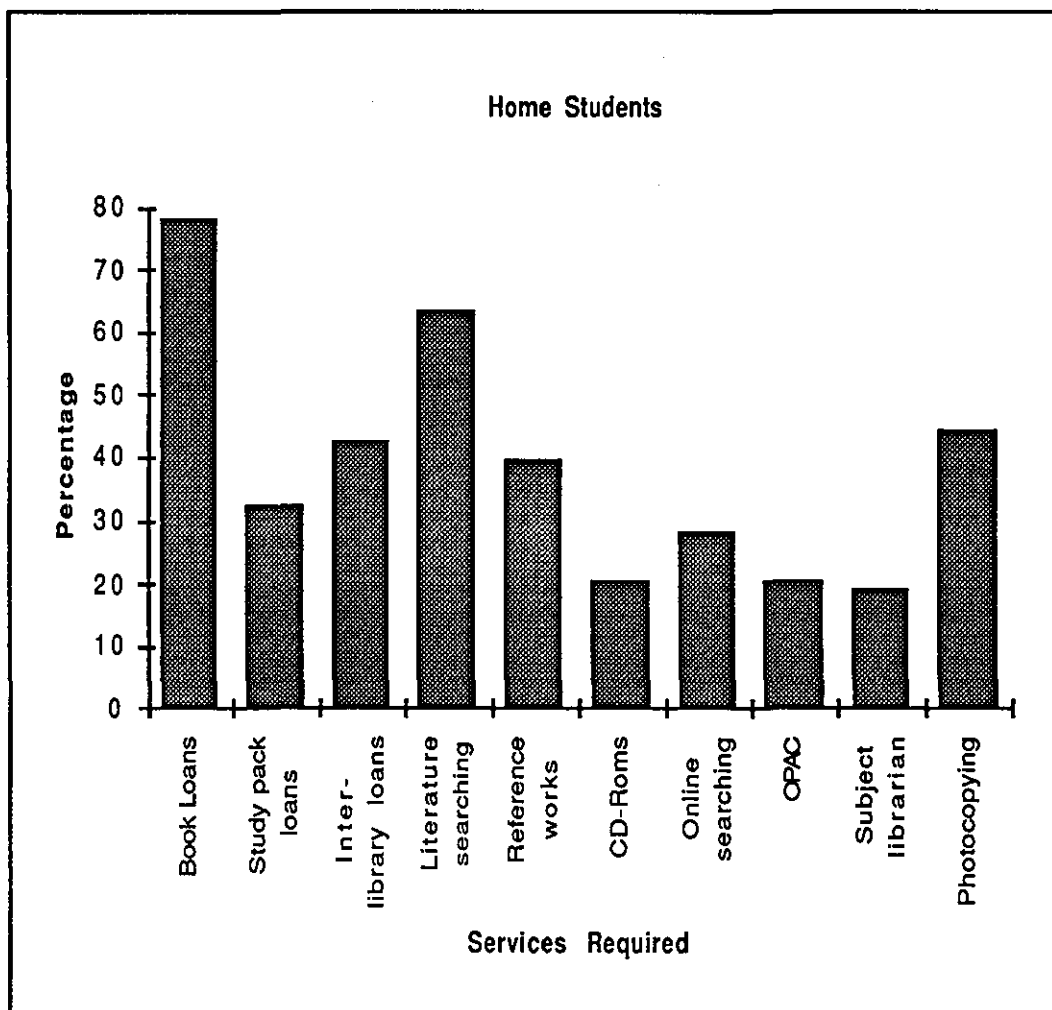


Figure 6. Home student selection of required services

Home students placed great emphasis on book provision, a service to which they are already entitled. Access to literature searching was also considered important, and it is likely that this will increase as the number of students undertaking dissertations increases. Only a fifth required access to a subject librarian, and this may suggest that the students exercise independence in their resource searching or that greater reliance is placed on the support of subject tutors. The evidence of both tutors and librarians supports the latter assertion.

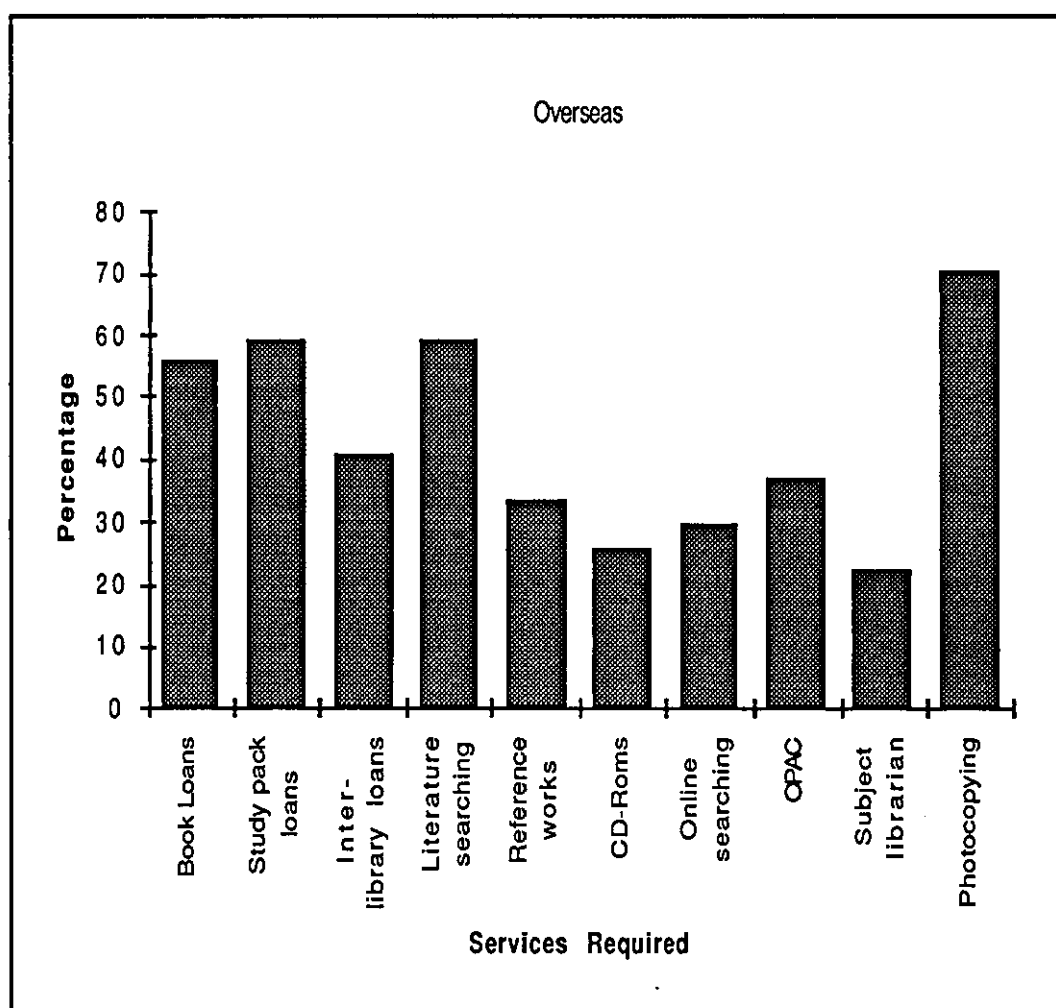


Figure 7. Overseas student selection of required library services.

A further divergence between home and overseas students was revealed by their resource requirements. Although 50% required books, a figure which is lower than that of their U.K. based counterparts, the result may reflect actual practice than actual need. Library guidelines do not allow for book loans overseas. A greater reliance on photocopying and study-pack loans reflects the nature of the bipolar provision of library services to distance students.

The first open question of the survey sought to give respondents the opportunity to suggest any new services which were not currently provided by the library. 30% of respondents answered that new services were required, yet only 13% added their suggestions. This may indicate that the question itself was ineffective. There are

two probable and related weaknesses. First, the only possible answers were an affirmative or a negative; the addition of 'Don't know' would have anticipated the second problem, viz., an assumption of knowledge of the type and scope of provision possible.

The answers given, however, are illuminating. Several revealed a lack of knowledge of current library services, as illustrated by the suggestion by home students that postal book loans and remote access to the library catalogue should be provided. The other suggestions, given below, are indicative of the concerns of the individuals, but the exceptionally small size of the sample negates any wider conclusions.

Suggestions for 'any other services not now provided that [distance students] believe should be' are given below :

- book loans for overseas students
- increased efforts towards interlibrary cooperation
- provision of information on electronic access of library resources
- availability of electronic resources
- opportunity to purchase/order books electronically
- updated Internet information on new library and faculty resources

Information technology

The issue of information technology and its place in the context of distance education was discussed at length by the course administrators. The overall opinion was that the majority of students had neither the access to hardware nor the necessary skills to use information technology.

Access to I.T. resources was unequally divided between the two groups of distance students questioned, with 35% of home students having access to I.T. at home or near their work, whereas the figure for overseas students stands at 52%. The results for actual use of I.T. confirms the views of course administrators that only a small volume of communication is thus mediated. Nevertheless, the previous figures reveal that there is a potential for use. Indeed, a correlation between possession of the necessary hardware and actual accessing of the library electronically reveals that only 6% could answer in the affirmative in both cases, but that a further 34% had unutilised resources available to them.

Actual electronic access to the library was limited to Leicester University's Web site and the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). 6% of home students had accessed the OPAC and only 1% had viewed the Web site. 11% of overseas students had used the OPAC and 4% had accessed the Web site. Current use of I.T. is not significant, but the figures should not be employed indiscriminately to undermine the argument in favour of active involvement in developing the I.T. potential of the library. The current Web site offers an online version of information which is available on hard copy material, supplied to all distance students, and represents an under-utilised resource at present. The overseas students are better resourced and more active than their home counterparts, especially in terms of student-library communication, and this is suggestive of greater potential of such technology over long distances. The incorporation of I.T. skills into the research methodology of course curricula would encourage the utilisation of improved electronic services.

The respondents were asked to rate their I.T. skills on a grade of 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent), in order to show their skill and confidence in relation to I.T.

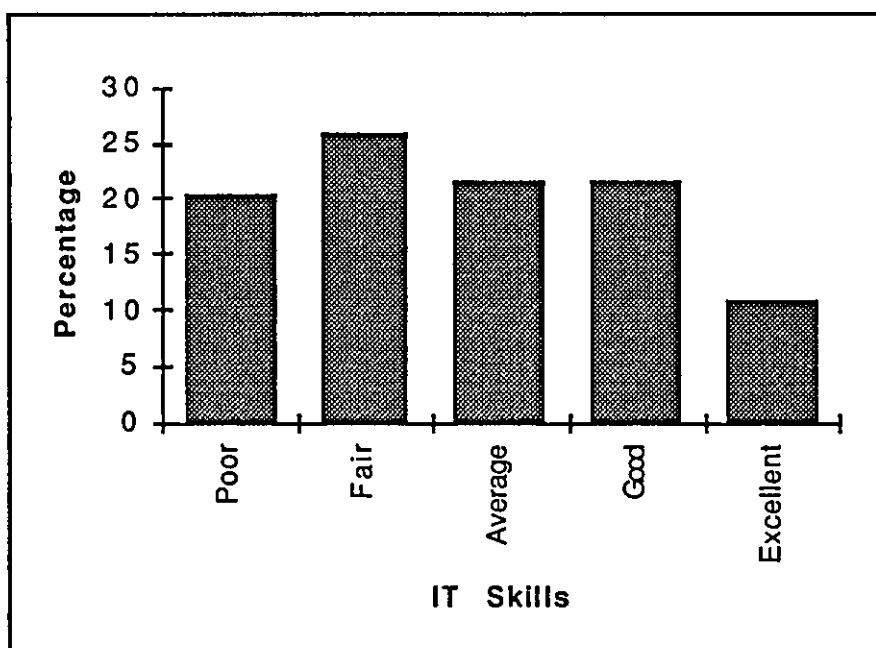


Figure 8. Student rating of I.T. skills

It is evident that only over a third have the necessary skills to effectively utilise I.T. resources, and this could be a focus for future user education and course development.

Library role in distance education

The final section of the questionnaire concerned itself with student perceptions of the role of library provision in their education, and the quality of the Education Library's service. The majority of students expressed the view that prior to the start of their courses they considered a library necessary for their university education. 91% of home students were of this view, and 70% of overseas students agreed. Current perceptions reveal that 96% and 89% of the respective student groups believe a library to be necessary for their course of study.

The subsequent questions sought to gauge user satisfaction with the services and resources provided. Home students have a wider range of available services than overseas students, and this is reflected in the answer as to whether there are 'sufficient library resources available for [distance students] to complete [their] assignments'. 91% of home students were satisfied with the availability of resources, compared to 70% of overseas students. A sizeable majority of overseas distance students, it is confirmed, have difficulty in securing library resources for their course of study. This is a serious factor in considering the future entitlements of this group of students, and it is an area which needs to be addressed by library management

The division between overseas and home students is accentuated in terms of satisfaction with the quality and speed of library service. Overall, 25% of students expressed dissatisfaction with both aspects of the service, whereas 62% were satisfied with both the quality and speed of service. 78% of home students are satisfied with the quality of service, and 74% with the speed of service, whereas the figures for the overseas students stand at 44% and 59% respectively. The differences in entitlements and document delivery times are the likely explanation for this discrepancy. A library viewpoint, as expressed by the University Librarian, that "distance automatically means that [distance students] are disadvantaged by merely 'equal' access"(6) suggests that a commitment to a revision of entitlements is necessary in the case of those students at the greatest distance from Leicester.

The absence of a separate financial allocation for distance education provision in the library budget prompted the final questions of the survey. Students were asked whether they would pay an unspecified additional fee to sustain the present service, and whether they would pay such a fee to improve the service. The majority of

home students would countenance no such fee, with only 40% responding positively to the first option and 40% to the second. Only 33% of overseas students would pay more to sustain the present service, a figure which corresponds to levels of dissatisfaction with this service. A small majority of 52%, however, would agree to paying more for an improved service.

The second open question, which achieved a response rate of 42%, reveals some of the concerns of both groups of distance students. The majority of overseas respondents who expressed their views voiced concern over the lack of electronic resources available. Remote access was regarded as a means of alleviating time-delays caused by postal delivery, and of providing up-to-date materials. Present dependence on postal delivery was considered time-consuming and expensive, a disincentive to library use.

Half of the home students stated that the present service was sufficient or that there were resources closer to their home or work. A repeated grievance was the lack of clearly differentiated reading lists, a concern for course administrators. The renewal of books and the lack of sufficient multiple copies were also issues raised. Furthermore, the processing of copyright disclaimers was regarded as time-consuming.

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5. Interview with Barbara Thornton, Leicester University School of Education, Leicester, 24 June, 1996.
6. Interview with Timothy Hobbs, Leicester University Library, Leicester, 6 September 1996.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Library role

Library provision for distance education at Leicester University has developed in response to student demands. The parameters of provision have been established according to perceived student needs, and within the limits of available resources. Resources, particularly in the Education Library, have been subject to increasing demands from both on-campus and distance students. The research has indicated that student needs are becoming more complex and demanding, and that the speed and quality of service should be improved. Improvement of library provision, however, is dependent on the organisational environment in which the library operates.

The lack of any specific budgetary allocation for distance students indicates an absence of organisational commitment to the needs of these students, and limits the extent of future development. This lack of adequate funding, as evidenced by other case studies and the views of library staff, may have repercussions for the library service as a whole, as additional competition for resources develops. The library service may find its level of provision curtailed, and the fulfilment of a pledge to give equality of access to distance students may be unsustainable. The absence of a University policy determines the continued proactive role of the library in the organisational environment. This stance has succeeded in producing a workable and comprehensive system of provision within imposed limits. Weaknesses and failures may be attributed in part to the of lack formal, concerted cooperation from course administrators. The wide gap between perceptions of administrators and distance students' needs is further illustration of the inadequacy of the present communications system, and this is an area which needs to be addressed urgently.

The increase in distance student numbers at Leicester University and elsewhere is evidence of the increasing significance of this type of educational provision. The maintenance of academic standards is essential to the competitiveness of an institution, and thus it is imperative that distance students experience the same educational process, and are subject to the same academic requirements which apply to their on-campus counterparts. Distance and locality should be recognised as

potential obstacles to the maintenance of academic standards by both course administrators and librarians, and concerted efforts need to be applied in order to overcome any actual or potential disadvantages experienced. The level of library use indicates that the Education Library is a major focal point for distance students, and a resource of crucial importance. A faculty recognition of this role is necessary in order to establish a reorientation of the role of the library in educational provision.

The appointment of a designated librarian at the main site of the University Library would be the first step in providing recognition of the role of library provision in distance education. A designated librarian would provide a focal point for student and staff contact, as illustrated at the Education Library. In conjunction with continuous promotion of library services this designation would support an application for adequate funding, provide a focus for the communications. Information transfer on course requirements, faculty policies and student needs would thus be enhanced. It has been established that an effective library service is dependent on such information.

Entitlement and equity

The distance which separates students from the library creates diverse problems. Restricted communication and reduced access to resources are areas of concern. The views of course administrators, librarians and distance students converge in recognition of the difficulties faced by overseas students. It should be the role of the library to reduce the number of impediments in the information provision process. Impediments identified include a lack of information and information technology skills, and the inadequacy of communications and delivery mechanisms. Course administrators demand academic work of a standard equal to mainstream education. It is axiomatic, therefore, that the issue of equality of opportunity needs to be addressed. The research has revealed a distinct correlation between access to resources and quality of academic work. The lack of equity of opportunity for overseas is an institutional failing of the present system. Ad hoc arrangements to accommodate students are evidence of the need to reevaluate the mechanisms and procedures of the organisation.

An important and under-utilised resource alternative is information technology. I.T. may be developed as an information and resource tool, and as an aid to speedier communication between faculty, library, and students. Current expansion of the Information Gateway provides evidence of the University Library's commitment, but

a clarification of policy from course administrators is required if a coordinated system is to develop. A significant number of distance students do have access to information technology, and this number is likely to increase. An anticipation of demand is necessary in order to sustain a competitive advantage in the educational market, an advantage which may be served by information technology.

Library-faculty cooperation

The role of the library should be a central consideration of course design and development. The evidence of interviews with library staff reveal a potentially dysfunctional level of exclusion within the organisational environment of the School of Education. The lack of any formalised and regular communications procedure dictates the continuing role of the library as a reactive service provider. Proactive involvement in resource development and service provision is stymied by the lack of cooperation and communication. Communication with students may also be improved, as student perception of the level and extent of provision available is problematic. There is a lack of clarity regarding service entitlements, and the statutory regulations which determine library provision, which suggests that student awareness needs to be raised. On-going and thorough education in the information system as part of the educational process would aid clarification of the respective roles of library and faculty in the education of distance students.

Opportunities for students to express views and needs is a prerequisite to the establishment of a tripartite communication system. The integration of such a communications mechanism would allow for an evaluation of student usage patterns, and would be a valuable monitoring tool in course design. The main theories of distance education, it has been established, regard communication as a defining factor in the education of students at a distance. The T.E.S.O.L. course provides a support structure for its students, a structure which has been successful. It may provide a model for nascent courses, but is unlikely to fulfil this role unless intra-faculty communication and experience sharing is increased.

The inactivity of the Education Library Advisory Committee is evidence of the stasis within the School of Education regarding cooperation with the library. The clarification of the role of the committee, and the active involvement of representatives from faculty, library and student bodies would provide the genesis of greater communication and possible collaboration.

User education

The inclusion of research methodology and information skills in the distance education courses at Leicester University is a recognition of the importance of the concept of transferrable educational knowledge. The induction of students into the information system of the library, providing an awareness of the processes involved in resource management and utilisation, will facilitate the acquisition of these key skills. User education should be a shared responsibility, defined by course administrators in conjunction with library staff. The level of library support must be defined and communicated to faculty and students, with all parties in agreement as to their respective responsibilities. The reorientation of the library as part of the educational process requires library awareness of course content and the educational issues involved in course design and implementation. User education allows for the raising of standards and awareness amongst students, and provides an opportunity for librarians and academic to forge a partnership of shared skills and experience.

Recommendations

- Establish a formal communications mechanism involving tripartite representation, viz. library, faculty and distance student cohort
- Produce a library policy statement regarding provision for distance education
- Institutionalise library involvement in course design, development and implementation
- Conduct on-going research into distance student library usage and resource requirements
- Investigate non-registration of distance students
- Develop a responsive service marketing strategy
- Produce an integrated information technology policy
- Create a database of enrolled distance students
- Encourage professional development of library staff

Suggested future research

The research undertaken has evaluated the perceptions of distance students enrolled with the library. As such, it is representative of library users, but must remain silent on most issues concerning non-users. An investigation into this student group would provide a valuable addition to an understanding of the role of library provision at Leicester University.

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International Eric on SilverPlatter (1976-June, 1996)

Appendix 1

Interview questions and topics

Job title-

Course-

Role in course provision-

What materials are provided for distance education students?

Are course materials adequate for educational needs?

Are students expected to read beyond course materials?

Standardized assignments, or flexible?

Aware of materials available at various libraries?

Tally with assignments?

Library informed of forecast enrollments, deadlines, reading lists?

Contact with library during course and in planning stage. Any changes in recent past, planned?

Any budgetary allowance for distance students?

Means of communication with students, formal and informal

Information supplied on library to students

Perceived role of library in student education, on campus and off campus

Distance. students entitled to 'equal access'?

Need for equal access?

Any stress placed on acquiring information skills?

Support extra funding for library?

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for distance students

This questionnaire will help Leicester University evaluate library provision for its distance learners.

Please answer all the questions by circling the appropriate answer, unless otherwise stated.

Confidentiality is guaranteed.

1. Have you ever visited Leicester University Libraries?

Yes

No

2. Have you ever used Leicester University Libraries?

Yes

No

3. How do you keep in contact with the library?

[Please tick \checkmark where appropriate]

Conventional post

☐

Electronic mail

☐

Telephone

☐

4. Do you have access to any higher education libraries near your home/work?

Yes

No

5. If yes, have you ever used any of these libraries?

Yes

No

6. Do you have access to any public libraries which can meet your academic needs?

Yes

No

7. If yes, have you ever used any of these libraries?

Yes

No

8. Do you have a copy of the University Library's information pack for new students?

Yes

No

9. How would you grade its usefulness on a grade of 1(Poor) to 5(Excellent)?

1

2

3

4

5

10. Do you know the name of your distance learning contact?

Yes

No

11. Indicate which of these services you require for your studies

[Please tick \checkmark where appropriate]

Book loans

☐

Study pack loans

☐

Inter-library loans

☐

Literature searching

☐

- 6000

[A glossary of terms was included with the questionnaire]

12. Are there any other services not now provided that you believe should be?

If yes, which _____

13. Do you have information technology at home/work which would enable you to access the library electronically?

Yes	No
-----	----

14. Have you ever accessed the library electronically?

If yes, which of these services have you accessed?
[*Please tick where appropriate*]

- 22

15. How would you rate your information technology skills on a grade of 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent)?

1 2 3 4 5

16. Did you think a library necessary for your course of study?

17. Do you now think a library necessary for your course of study?

18. Are there sufficient library resources available for you to complete your assignments?

Yes No

19. Are you satisfied with the quality of service?
Yes No

20. Are you satisfied with the speed of service?
Yes _____ No _____

21. Would you agree to the payment of an additional fee to sustain the present service?

22. Would you agree to the payment of an additional fee to improve the service?

Yes

No

23. Please make any other comments regarding your use of the library or the services provided

23. Please complete the following:

Age	20 years or younger	<input type="checkbox"/>
	21 to 24	<input type="checkbox"/>
	25 to 30	<input type="checkbox"/>
	31 to 34	<input type="checkbox"/>
	35 or older	<input type="checkbox"/>

Gender	Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>
--------	---------------------------------	-------------------------------

Distance from Leicester	10 miles or less	<input type="checkbox"/>
	11 to 30 miles	<input type="checkbox"/>
	31 to 60 miles	<input type="checkbox"/>
	61 miles or more	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Colour code paper was used to differentiate between 'Home' and 'Overseas' students]

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it to the address given below, no later than July 22nd. Your cooperation is appreciated.

[Address of Leicester University Education Library]

