The student voice is a powerful reason to act and Library and Learning Services at Kingston University has run an annual user survey since 2004. At the time the directorate had just been restructured and expanded to provide a more robust and enhanced service to the university. The service fitted the needs of a growing post 1992 university but the directorate still needed to know more about the students they were supporting and gather some forecasting data. Plus a previous survey in 2001 had given us an appetite to do more work in this area. At this stage the NSS (National Student Survey)[i] was not in existence and the student voice was not as prominent in the Higher Education sector, so there were limited other avenues to acquire this information. Therefore a decision was taken to establish an annual library user survey with our students.

Methodologies

Different methodologies were investigated and we considered whether using a survey that would allow us to benchmark against comparator universities, such as LibQUAL+,[ii] would be advantageous. However, it was felt that having a survey that could be personalised would provide richer data and give us the opportunity to theme sections. This would allow for more detail to be discovered about a particular area which had been identified as a key priority for the service. It was important that we capture both quantitative and qualitative data as part of the survey as this would enhance the variety of the data. Hearing the students' own words is a very powerful message as it can articulate trends which are shown in the quantitative data as well as giving students the freedom to express their own ideas. These ideas may have been previously unknown to the directorate. These factors continue to be an important rationale for the survey thirteen years on.

Initially the directorate used Priority Research Ltd[iii], an external company who were very experienced in survey design. Over time, we took more responsibility for the survey which allowed us to develop library staff's skills in setting questions, running focus groups and one-two-one interviews. This gave us increased resilience and ensured library staff became more experienced in this increasingly developing area. In addition, it was also financially advantageous to the directorate. In 2010-2011, we introduced SurveyMonkey[iv]and this allowed us more opportunity to cross tabulate and interrogate the data. We introduced opportunities for free text comments in the questionnaire allowing the students to articulate their priorities for the future. This generated much more qualitative data than had previously been possible but had the advantage of students being able to supply a much wider range of priority areas. However, it did lead to significant numbers of "More Computers" and "More Books" comments. These comments are useful for articulating an area of concern but lack detail. One method used to combat this was to ask them to categorise their comment first, into book, space, computer etc, and so encouraging them to write a more detailed comment. This worked a little better but we still have comments of "more". Following university guidance in 2016-2017, the survey has moved to Bristol Survey Online[v].

Design

There have been 124 different questions used in the survey over the past thirteen years but some key questions have been included year on year. These key questions are kept static to enable trends to be evaluated over time. It also enables questions to be used as KPIs for the directorate, for example one of our KPIs is 'Overall, the LRC (Learning Resources Centre) provides a good service'. Thirteen

years of data for this question has seen the percentage rise from 72% to 94%, which allows the directorate to demonstrate to the university that the service improvements and developments are positively impacting the student experience.
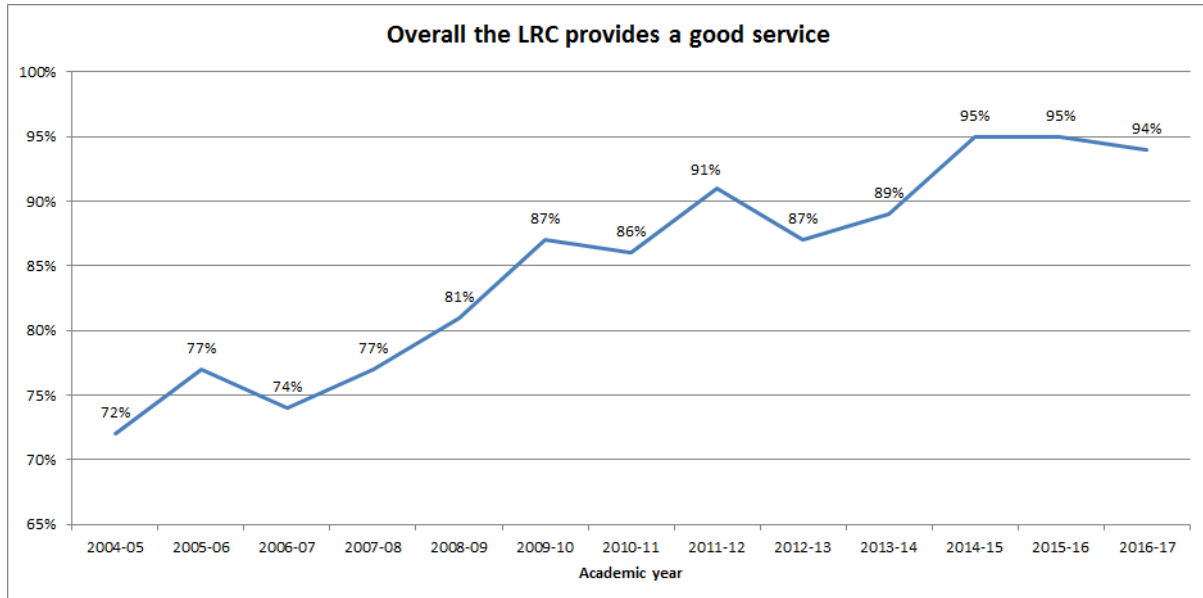

Figure x.1 Thirteen years of data for LRCs providing a good service

Preference for the format of a book has been measured for the last nine years and for the majority of this period the preference for a print book has remained around 60%. However, underneath this headline figure there were significant differences at subject level. In 2015-2016, in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, 74% of the students would chose a print book compared to 51% in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing. In the current year, 2016-2017, we have seen a change with the headline figure moving to 42% choosing the print book and 38% choosing the e-book which may indicate we have reached a tipping point in students' preferences. If the following year's survey replicates these figures, this will have a demonstrable impact on our developing collection management policies.

Themes have been an important part of the survey and examples have included use of e-books, communication methods and use of computers. By having the capacity for four to five detailed questions on a topic, we are able to understand the theme in depth.

We aim to have around 10% of the student population complete the survey, which is approximately 1800 students. Although 10% is only a small proportion of overall student numbers, it is felt that this gives a large enough response rate to provide meaningful and worthwhile data. We track responses to the survey whilst it is running for both subject and campus to ensure a proportional distribution. For subjects and campuses with low response rates, we focus more additional marketing and promotion.

Marketing

Encouraging students to fill in any survey is challenging and the chocolate incentive has always worked well. For many years this was a bag of Maltesers, a firm favourite amongst some library staff. However, as with changing university priorities so chocolates have changed and rather than a small Maltesers an individually wrapped Heroes or Celebration now suffices. Alongside this there has always been a prize draw which previously was for an iPad mini but this year it was an £100 Amazon voucher. Anecdotally, it is felt that the prize draw is not a major motivator in completing the survey and that students are genuinely willing to give their feedback once approached.

What is more significant even than chocolate and the prize draw, is the library staff who actively encourage students to fill in the survey at stands in the libraries and the helpdesks. The survey stand moves between campuses LRCs and alters for the needs of the specific campus. The university has four campus LRCs, two larger and two smaller ones. For the two larger LRCs the stand is erected in the LRCs foyer. Staff use tablets to ask students to complete the survey as they move in and out of the LRCs. Originally the stands had been staffed by a cross section of library staff but on evaluation, using LRC assistants has proved more effective. The LRC assistants are also students at the university and this peer to peer relationship works well. At the smaller sites, there is less movement of students in and out of the LRCs as they are the social hub of the sites so we are more flexible in how we approach the students to complete the survey. The library staff also have a more personal relationship with the students, which aids the likelihood of the students completing the survey.

In addition to promotion within the LRCs, we also put posters up in academic buildings, student offices and the Student Union. Information is added to the VLE (virtual learning environment), intranet and on the plasma screens across the university. Student reps are contacted via email and academic staff are also contacted to promote it. Instragram[vi], Facebook[vii], Blogs[viii] and Twitter[ix] are also utilised. It is not certain how effective these measures are in encouraging students to complete the survey but 15% of survey responses are submitted after the LRC promotion is completed so we know they are having some impact. More evaluation work is needed in this area.

Figure x.2 Example of publicity for the LRC User Survey

Analysis

The survey is analysed at university level as well as faculty and department level and using multiple demographics. Reports are produced and highlighted at both university and faculty Learning and Teaching committees and shared at departmental student meetings. Actions from all the survey reports are pulled into a directorate action plan as well as departmental and faculty action plans. The directorate Student Voice Action Plan is an amalgamation of the survey actions as well as actions from the NSS and other feedback mechanisms. This has proved to be effective following previous separate plans and feeds directly into the directorate's planning document.

Every September, the directorate produces a 'We Listened' leaflet which highlights the main results and actions from the previous academic year completing our feedback loop. Using individual student comments, we explain how the action plan has addressed their needs. This is provided on plasma screens across the university, on the intranet and in hard copy, which are taken to student meetings. This method of feedback is now used commonly across the university in a 'you said we did' format as we were seen as providing best practice in this area by the university.

The survey data was invaluable in gaining the CSE (Customer Services Excellence)[x] award and continues to be in retaining it. The survey demonstrates our commitment to understanding our customers' desires, wants and needs and our customer segmentations. Understanding our customer segmentations also allows us to assist the university in its work on the student voice and experience. One such example for the future is the initiative regarding the BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) attainment gap, we have nine years' worth of data on BME students which we can contribute to this initiative.

Challenges

There are a number of challenges with the survey including encouraging non-users of the LRCs to complete it. We have tried several techniques to increase this number including taking the survey stand out of the LRCs, doing one-two-one interviews outside the main lecture theatres, working with the student reps and the Student Union, links within the VLE and this year within the university mobile app. These techniques have so far been limited in their impact. Another challenge is that we have to be careful in the planning of the survey to ensure that it is at a different time to the NSS to avoid the embargo period. The survey has been held at various times throughout the year but experience has shown that November to January is the most optimal time. Frequent comments from students that the survey is too long (thirty-five questions in 2016-2017) is a challenge but it has proved difficult to reduce the size due to directorate requirements for certain pieces of data and the need for trend analysis. To help reduce the size, we have run smaller focused questionnaires or focus groups for key customer groups, for example postgraduates and assistive technology users. We have also recently introduced ethnographic studies to complement the survey. These have included usability testing, observation, journal mapping and touchstone tours.

With the NSS, level four and a level five university survey, over surveying and survey fatigue is a challenge. However, the university supports us in running our own annual survey due to the richness of the data provided. This data also supports other directorates, in particular IT due to the closeness of the services, but also academic faculties who learn more about their students' interaction with academic sources. The longevity and maturity of the survey supports our case with the university, as we have a strong reputation for making changes to our services and resources based on the results. The survey has informed numerous developments and improvements made by the directorate including twenty-four hour opening, library design and layout, laptop loans, collection development and the forthcoming landmark building incorporating a new library at the Penrhyn Road Campus.

Future changes

Of interest is that we generally score higher in our own survey satisfaction questions than the NSS question. Further investigation is needed for why this occurs, for 2016-2017 the NSS Question 19's

wording has been matched in our survey. This will allow analysis to be completed on different demographics and year of study.

Conclusion

The survey throughout its history has informed the directorate of the way forward for its departmental plans and priorities. It has proved time and time again a useful vehicle for articulating reasons for change, improving and developing services and when appropriate for bidding for increased funding. It has also enabled the directorate to consider other methods of collecting data about our students, for example customer journal mapping, as we understand the benefits of the student voice. The directorate is seen as an example of good practice by the university for our proactive approach and our commitment to instigating change based on our findings. Our knowledge of our student population has increased significantly over this period and the student voice is now embedded into our methods of working.

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[i] NSS - http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/
[ii] LibQUAL+ - https://www.libqual.org/home
[iii] Priority Research Ltd - http://www.priority-research.com/
[iv] SurveyMonkey - https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk
[v] Bristol Online Survey - https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/
[vi] Instragram - https://www.instagram.com/ku_lrcs/
[vii] Facebook - https://en-gb.facebook.com/KULRCs/
[viii] Blogs - https://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/seclibrary/
[ix] Twitter - https://twitter.com/ku_lrcs?lang=en
[x] CSE - http://www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com/