

The University of Edinburgh

Library Committee

20th April 2010

Agendum 11

Information Services Quality Assurance & Enhancement Report FY08-09

Brief description of the paper

This report summarises some of the enhancements and changes to the services provided by Information Services for students in support of their studies, and to teaching activities in the University, which occurred during 2008/09.

Action requested

For information, and onward transmission if considered appropriate, to College Library Committees

Resource implications

There are resource implications throughout the paper.

Risk Assessment

Although there is no formal risk assessment in the paper, some risk and reputational issues are addressed.

Equality and Diversity

Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? No

Freedom of Information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes

Originator of the paper

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January 2010

Information Services Quality Assurance & Enhancement Report FY08-09

This report summarises some of the enhancements and changes to the services provided by Information Services for students in support of their studies, and to teaching activities in the University, which occurred during 2008/09. Many of these were a direct result of feedback and suggestions from our various user communities. This is not intended to be a general report on all IS services and facilities, which are substantial in number and range. More exactly, this report parallels those from Courses and Programmes in setting out the ways in which feedback about the quality of services is gathered and acted on within a particular financial or academic year. For fuller details of IS services and facilities, please visit the IS website at www.is.ed.ac.uk or for more specific information about services to particular Schools, please consult the relevant Head of College Team, in User Services Division.

1. Service range and assessment of quality

1.1 IS offers approximately 150 individual services to its user communities, in person at 12 sites and online to any location. Many of these services are 'invisible' to the majority of users (eg firewalls, publisher contract negotiations) except when they fail. Although some IS services are uniquely offered in support of research or administration, the majority of our services and facilities are used for teaching and learning in some way and scale. Our user communities are large - ~8000 staff; >30,000 students (inc. OLL); 1000s of 'externals' of various kinds. We have a commensurate range of methods to gather their views – individually through informal or formal comments; in groups through surveys and focus groups; through representatives such as EUSA; from organisational units such as course teams, Schools and Colleges, often through formal consultations. These quality assurance activities take place across the year, sometimes on an IS-wide basis and sometimes in more local and focussed ways.

1.2 In addition to these inward-facing QA activities, we also have long-standing mechanisms for **gathering information about what our peers in UK and worldwide HEIs** are doing with respect to service enhancement and contraction. Some of this information is drawn from formal mechanisms (eg the Libqual survey, the NSS and PGRES); some is semi-formal (eg the Russell Group IT Directors benchmarking meetings, various email discussion lists), and some is informal (eg through personal visits to specific peer HEIs, esp in Russell Group, U21, LERU) and via conference attendance. We share this knowledge internally in our various teams and management.

2. Library opening hours & facilities

2.1 Use of the several Libraries sites and the digital library materials continued to increase over the previous year, and much of this increase is attributable to use by students, partly as numbers rise and also as facilities improve. As a consequence we decided to invest £50k additional funding from our NPRAS allocation into library materials.

2.2 The Main Library once again offered extended semester opening hours from the start of FY08-09 (0830-2400 every night). As a result of discussions with EUSA and PG students, the opening hours for the Main Library were extended during the summer vacation, specifically to support Masters students who write dissertations in this period. Feedback via EUSA has been very positive, both as regards the extended opening and the speed of response to the request. Other library site opening hours have been maintained at the levels of previous years, despite rising costs.

2.3 The Main Library was again opened for two days between Christmas and New Year from 1030-1730hr, self-service only, with just over 400 users during that period.

2.4 The Main Library Redevelopment Project has caused major disruption of the building and its services, with the Ground Floor being closed for much of the 2008/09 session and the Helpdesk as a consequence being relocated to the First Floor. (To our knowledge to date, no student has cited this as a reason for an appeal.) However, during this period, the most heavily-used books were brought together into a new collection (HUB Collection) by the Helpdesk, and it has been very actively used since opening.

2.5 In early summer 2009, the Main Library Ground Floor re-opened with self-service book return at the entrance, renewed emphasis on effective book issue, and the HUB Collection successfully located close to the Helpdesk. The Café provides an interface between social and study activities, and the new

group study 'pods' and soft-furnished areas have been very well-used. (These are the focus of a formal research study this year.)

2.6 The ML Fifth Floor study space, opened the previous year, has proven very popular in 2008-09. It was planned as a very quiet zone and we have been successful in achieving this. During December 2008 we carried out a survey to gather views on the newly opened 5th Floor Study Space. The survey found that 98% of students using the space rated it 'good' or 'excellent', with 76% rating it 'excellent'. A summary of the survey's findings is attached at Appendix 1 as an example of a typical focussed survey that informs our internal decision-making and planning. Overall, the developments in the Main Library have been very well received with one user commenting "it's beautiful and it's ours". The wifi facilities are heavily-used and the lockers have been welcome by students as a secure place for them to leave their laptops whilst out of the room, and will be repeated in other locations as feasible.

2.7 Work continued on other library redevelopments. The KBLLRC Project, designed to improve study facilities at the King's Buildings, incorporating lessons learned from the developments at the Main Library. IS staff have also worked with the design team of the Vet School on the plans for the library at Easter Bush.

3. IT services & facilities

3.1 In response to requests from staff and students to maximise the uptime for vital IT services we have agreed a list of 'highest priority services' with the IT Committee, currently including Blackboard-WebCT, email, MyEd, EUCLID applications, UoE (Polopoly) website. We operated a "watching service" over the winter closure period to check that critical systems were available, to notify users of any problems and intimate when they might expect these to be resolved. So that users are able to check for themselves re service status if they are experiencing problems, we established service status pages (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/services/service-alerts>) with constant monitoring and service quality tracking.

3.2 We had problems in the early part of the year with reliability of some of the IT services, which were particularly difficult for distance education courses where students are entirely reliant on access to their teaching materials and support via IT. Most of this was attributable to higher than anticipated use, which has continued to rise, and during the year new hardware was put in place, with an internal review of how to better ensure resilience in these key services. (The digital library was not originally in this service group but is now included.) An extract from the report which IS prepared for the Risk Management Committee on service availability is shown in Appendix 2.

3.3 We track IT service usage over time (see Appendix 3 for a MyEd example) so that we can pre-plan for rising or decreasing use of services etc. These quality of service discussions take place mainly within IT Committee, including eLearning Committee for elearning-related services, and in College/School/Support Unit committees and equivalents as appropriate.

3.4 IS agrees with the Internal Audit Unit the annual plan for their audits of our services, and these have been helpful in guiding us to weaknesses but also giving us confidence in what we view as strengths. Generally, the audits have been positive. These sit alongside our own internal reviews, and give us a more rounded picture of the robustness of our services, in terms of day-to-day delivery but vital although less obvious to users, of our business continuity planning for various failure scenarios.

4. e-Learning & Skills Development

4.1 e-assessment/e-exams - we are now able to offer students the choice to handwrite or to type their essay-examinations. To enable this, a powered floor has been fitted to one of our main examination venues, Adam House. Students can use their own laptops by downloading and installing software which locks the machine for the duration of the exam. This software prevents use of the internet, access USB sticks or similar. The final script is submitted on the wireless network and decrypted ready for marking on paper.

4.2 The iSkills database is now online making the wide range of courses and self-study materials on offer by IS easier to search and book/obtain. This development complements the ISI service of web-based self-help materials for students in WebCT.

4.3 The Lecture Capture Pilot project aimed primarily to establish whether lecture capture hardware and software could be widely deployed, and to clarify the scale and requirements of any further implementation. The pilot captured 198 events (mostly lectures, but including some seminars and general interest talks). 18 staff from 9 Schools in 2 Colleges delivering 11 courses were involved in the pilot. The experience of those who participated was predominately positive with 73% of staff involved stating they would record lectures again and 90% of students supporting the concept. An analysis of the access to captures shows that the majority of access took place during the end of semester 1 exam revision period. Further details on the feedback from students can be found in Section 2 of the Report, online at: http://www.projects.ed.ac.uk/areas/itservices/media/APS019/Lecture_Capture_Pilot_Report.pdf

In response to suggestions from numerous academic staff to have a location where these video files could be placed for students and externals to find them, late in 2008-09 IS negotiated agreements with YouTube and iTunesU in collaboration with Communications & Marketing.

4.4 Classroom AV services - in response to general feedback over several years about less-than-adequate support for classroom AV, we worked internally on a new staffing structure to increase staff levels by redeployment from microlabs (this work being taken over by the new Helpdesk structure). This came into effect at the very end of 08-09. We also invested £50k additional funding from our NPRAS allocation into AV equipment.

Teaching rooms continue to have AV upgrades, and, in addition to working with Estates and Buildings on the delivery of a number of new build and refurbishment projects for example the level 2 teaching rooms in Appleton Tower, Information Services delivered a number of projects designed to improve the quality of AV facilities in centrally resourced teaching spaces: an ongoing programme of rolling replacement of end of life equipment, the addition of AV display technology into twenty small teaching rooms, and the introduction of a remote monitoring and control system to improve the reliability of AV systems across the campus. A significant action in response to rising demand for use of Personal Response Systems ('clickers') was the replacement of the infra-red System with a radio frequency alternative, enabling clicker to be used in every centrally resourced teaching room equipped with a dedicated PC, and available elsewhere with a portable receiver.

5. Consultations with students

5.1 ASLG – the Academic Services Liaison Group, organised and chaired by EUSA, meets several times each year and promotes discussion of issues of immediate concern to both IS and EUSA, enabling problems to be addressed promptly, and impending or possible service changes to be discussed to avoid misunderstandings. It is a very productive forum, particularly helpful in dealing with building planning related issues. During 2008/09 this group was involved in the development of the study pods which have proven so popular in the Main Library

5.2 Strategic planning meeting with EUSA – each year the IS senior management team holds pre-planning round talks with EUSA (comparable to those with the Colleges and Support Groups) to enable EUSA officials to be aware of the likely major developments (positive and negative) that IS will put forward in its plans, and for EUSA to make IS aware of what changes to facilities and services it would like to see and not see taking place in the coming FY. These are very constructive planning discussions that are of value to both parties.

5.3 EUSA on IS Committees – EUSA have active representation on the Library, IT and e-Learning Committees, and are therefore party to discussions about these areas, in terms of future developments and resolving any problems that have arisen. Where possible we aim to have UG and PG representation, the latter becoming of increasing importance with the steady rise in PGT students.

5.4 Other approaches - We have recognised the limitations to the formal approaches to gathering student views, given the problems for representatives of speaking for a diverse student population, and so we gather information directly from samples of the appropriate student communities through surveys, focus groups and interviews. These have proven to be very useful in giving us more robust and in-depth data. Examples of this approach are in the design of the floors of the refurbished Main Library, the provision of water and vending facilities in microlabs, 24hr opening of facilities, training courses offered and the format in which they are provided, expansion of the MyEd portal facilities. We also initiated discussions with the other direct Student Services and EUSA to assess the best ways to communicate with our multiple student communities which should result in a more joined-up approach to this activity between the services.

6. Consultations with staff, Colleges, Schools & Support Units (incl those with direct student support activities such as Careers, IO)

6.1 We have formal and informal mechanisms to gather the views of our staff user communities. The formal mechanisms are mainly directly with the Units within which staff work (College, Support Group etc) and or as these are represented to us in Committees.

6.2 Library Committee, IT Committee, e-Learning Committee all have College, representation from student and professional communities, and discuss strategic plus major operational matters. They meet 3 times per annum and report to the Knowledge Strategy Committee and onwards to CMG and Court as appropriate.

6.3 IS staff have membership of several College/School committees, both specific to IS service areas (eg CHSS Library Committee) but also at strategic management level (eg CSE). These enable a constant review of major services and facilities and ensure a better alignment between the needs of our main stakeholders and IS activities. This is also evident in the annual College and SG consultations for forward look into the next planning round.

6.4 Outputs from these formal processes are continuous improvement of our services in line with the strategic directions of the Colleges and SGs. The steady increase in PGT students and the changes being made to support these in IS are one example of this joint activity.

6.5 Informal consultation mechanisms are through a combination of: 1:1 conversations with individuals on specific topics; gathering and analysing Helpdesk problems and queries; conversations with convenor/committee or general open meetings of IT Professionals Forum and eLearning Professionals & Practitioners Forum; email & wiki discussions around specific topics, especially projects such as ediary, Next Generation VLE. These 'streams' of informal input are acted upon as part of normal business by the IS Divisions and Teams, or if they are of more significant import, will be discussed in management and senior management meetings. We are aware of the need for better communications back to our user communities about the actions we have taken, or propose to take, as a consequence of this flow of information to us and will continue to work to improve this (eg through our re-designed website).

7. Feedback about IS services from the IS surveys

7.1 In our 2007/08 report we noted that it was our intention to review the IS Survey in an attempt to improve the response rate, and in 2008/09 we used a MyEd channel aimed specifically at students for this purpose. However, the response rate was so low as to be of little value and rather than try a re-run during the exam period, we decided to abandon the 2008/09 IS-wide survey and use the other sources of more focussed information that we had gathered through the year to help us improve service quality. As the data from the IS-wide survey had been stable for some time this was probably not a significant loss of information. The format of the IS-wide survey had been chosen to align with the IS entries in the University Balanced Scorecard, and as that management tool is now seen to be less important, we will take a different approach in 2009/10 to get better and more focussed data in specific service areas where change is needed.

7.2 An example of a focussed survey is one run each year to gather information from students who use the microlabs (most undergrads do) about the quality of the labs and their services, the availability/quality of hardware, software and help, about IT skills training in terms of coverage and formats offered. The 2008-09 survey gathered data from 1000 students and confirmed our understanding of the need for better groupwork facilities (partly addressed now in the ML re-design), the desire for 'catering' (under development with E&B), that help was generally good (important as a baseline as we are re-shaping this activity) and that the majority would be happy to pay by web-based credit card system (under development with the – delayed- smart card).

8. Feedback about IS services from national surveys

8.1 IS routinely monitors the results of national surveys which contain questions about services and facilities in the IS domains, although it must be remembered that not all IT is provided by IS, especially for postgraduate students, and 'library' also has some degree of ambiguity. The IS Quality Enhancement Group (with representation from all areas of IS) is responsible for keeping a watch on these surveys.

8.2 National Student Satisfaction (NSS) survey: has 2 questions about IS areas (although analysis is complicated in some due to the provision of some services by Schools as well as by IS) and Edinburgh performs well in comparison to its peers In January 2007, 82% agreed that the library resources and services were good enough for their needs; in 2008 that figure was 83% and in January 2009, 84%; For IT the percentages were 91% in both 2007 and 2008, dropping slightly to 90% in 2009.

8.3 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey: has 1 library and 1 IT question, and again the IT caveat is very significant here. In 2008 70% of respondents agreed with the 'adequacy' of library and 66% reporting the same level of agreement with 'adequacy' of IT compared to 71% and 67.8% respectively in 2009. Again we have limited understanding of the scores achieved by our peers but are investigating this. The variation of wording in these different surveys makes comparison difficult!

Jeff Haywood

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19 January 2010

APPENDIX 1

Main Library 5th Floor Study Space Survey

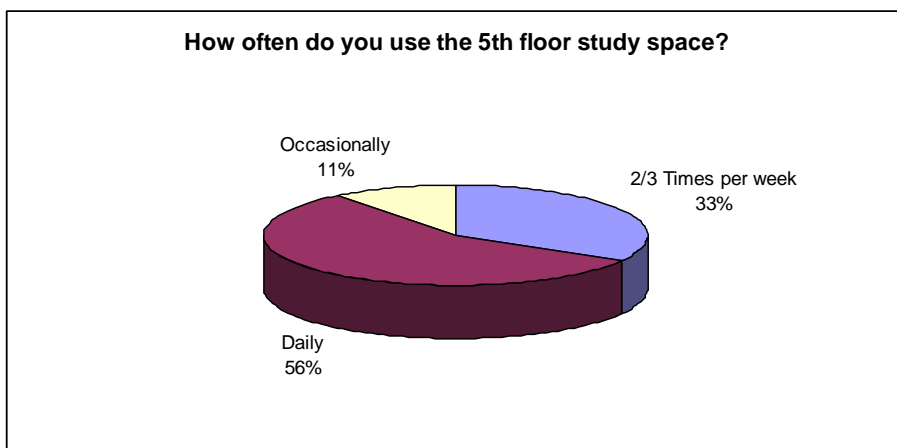
A short survey was undertaken during the busy exam period of December 2008 to assess the impact of the first redeveloped study space to open in the Main Library. The survey was available to complete online and also in a paper version. Copies of the survey were left on the desks in the study space over a 3 day period. All of the 73 completed surveys came from the paper version.

Just under 92% of respondents were University of Edinburgh students the rest of the respondents were staff or visitors.

A summary of the results is provided below.

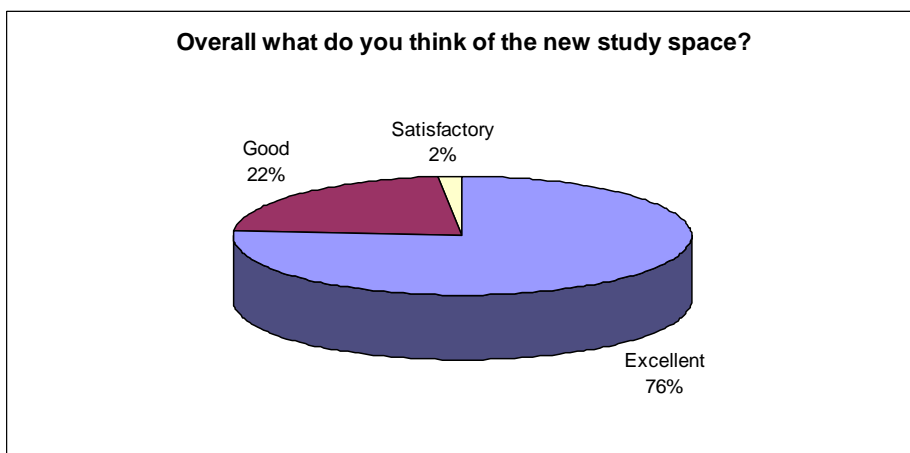
1. Frequency of use

The responses to this question show that 56% of students using the space were doing so on a daily basis. A further 33% were using the space 2 or 3 times a week.



2. General satisfaction

To assess the overall impact of the space we asked a general question to find out what students felt. A very encouraging 98% rated the space as good or excellent.



3. Laptops

In support of a strategic aim of the University to encourage laptop use the new study space is well equipped for laptops. Power is available for students to use and charge their laptops at a density of 1 power point per study space. Data sockets are also available in the same density although the wireless access is proving more popular. At peak around 60 students are using the wireless in the space.

During the survey period 74% of the study space users said that they used their laptop in the space. Some of the comments received are shown below:

“Excellent speed and good to have sockets at every desk.”

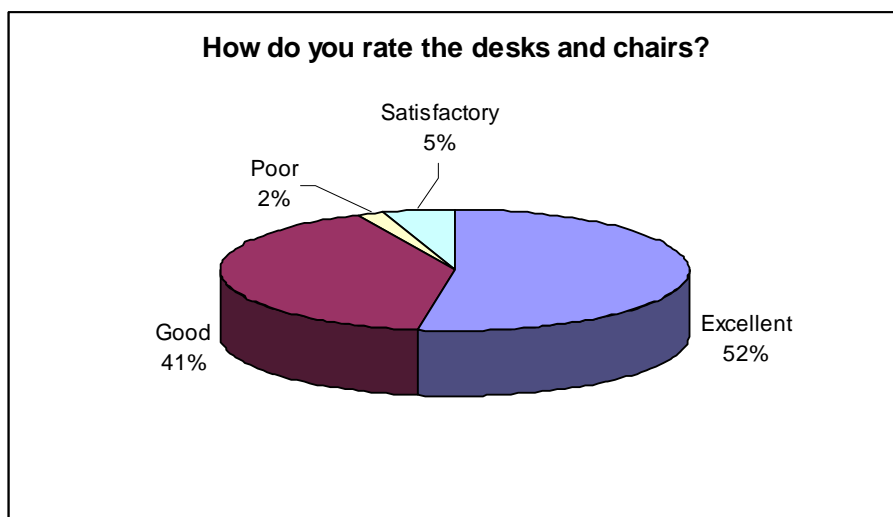
“Very good wireless compared to 4th and other floors good power facilities.”

“Excellent number of power sources always a problem on other floors. Wireless strength is good.”

4. Furniture

The formal desks are larger than those on other floors of the library and have some privacy screening. The larger desks were specified to help increase density as on the undeveloped floors students are likely to leave a space between each other. In the new space they are much more likely to sit next to each other therefore increasing density. The space also includes some single study chairs and a number of the original study carrels both of which are proving popular.

93% rate the desks and chairs as good or excellent.



5. General Comments

The results of the survey were overwhelmingly positive and we will be striving to achieve the same level of satisfaction as the redevelopment continues.

Some general comments:

“A very clean bright study area...can really keep focussed and keep procrastination to a minimum!”

“A good working environment is maintained at all times even when full - well done!”

“Open & bright layout makes it easy to study without distractions large number of seats so generally easy to find

one unlike other parts of library. The new 5th floor has been much appreciated.”

APPENDIX 2

Annual availability of IT services most heavily used by students

Service	Availability %			Comment
	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	
MyEd	99.46	99.95	99.32	
Staff mail service	99.95	99.59	99.81	
Student mail service	99.99	99.70	99.83	
Student admin including online applications	99.76	99.97	99.33	08/09 are Euclid earlier nos are Wisard
University web site	99.85	100.00	99.89	
Virtual Learning Environment (WebCT)	n/a	99.20	99.61	

The availability figures do not include scheduled down time for planned maintenance. 0.1% is less than 9 hours in a year. These data can be found online at:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/about/organisation/applications-division>

APPENDIX 3

MyEd usage during 2006-09

