

Survey of Loughborough University Library users' perceptions of levels of quality and customer care from Circulation Desk, Support Services desk and Levels 1, 2 and 3 enquiry desks

Introduction

Despite the proliferation of electronic services, a major feature of a University Library are the services based around personal interaction between users and the library staff. Libraries have a responsibility to ensure these services show appropriate levels of customer care and that the information given to users is useful and at the right level. This focus on customer care will taken on a heightened profile in the U.K. higher education sector with the imminent introduction of 'top-up' fees. Library users are likely to have a very clear perception of their expectations of the quality of services they require from the Library.

For these reasons, Loughborough University Library decided the annual user survey for 2004/ 2005 academic year would focus on the quality of both and customer care and information provided by the Circulation Desk, Support Services desk and Levels 1, 2 and 3 Enquiry Desks.

Methodology

The purpose of the survey was to gather a broad understanding of how users perceive the service they receive at the various Desks. It would focus specifically on perceptions of the customer care they receive and the level/ information provided. This was seen as being more valuable than a detailed analysis of the different user groups' various perceptions. There had to be a level of pragmatism as the period for data collection was short.

Consideration was also given to the pressure students are under. The questionnaire was therefore concise (See Appendix 1) and designed to take no more than 5 minutes to complete. It was developed by Matt Cunningham, Lizzy Gadd, Peter Lund and Graham Walton.

Table 1 Response return for Library desks

Service point	No. of returned questionnaires
Level 3	96
Level 2	45
Level1	42
Circulation Desk	151
Support Services Desk	32
Total	366

Distribution was done personally by Library staff at the various service points. The intention was to achieve 150 completed responses from each of the Circulation Desk and the Enquiry Desk (Level 3) and 50 responses for the Enquiry Desks on Levels 2 and Levels 1 respectively. The actual response level is shown in Table 1. Even though the figure of 500 was not reached, the number of completed form (366) makes the survey findings valid.

There were some limitations to the data collection. The major constraint on this survey was the limited time period for data collection. Survey forms had to be completed in April and May. This was to ensure there were no encroachments on exam preparation time. With the form being handed out by Library staff, there could have been a level of bias as Library staff could select who (and how not to) give the form to. This observation can be countered by the fact that it was completed anonymously and confidentially.

Results

The initial questions focused on the extent to which users perceived the service they received as being friendly/ helpful (Table 2) and the extent to which they perceived the information as being useful (Table 3).

Table 2: responses regarding the levels of helpfulness and friendliness

	Not sure	Agree	Agree strongly	No answer	Total
Level 3	0	24	71	1	96
Level 2	1	13	31	0	45
Level 1	0		36	0	42
Circulation Desk	2	59	90	0	151
Support Services Desk	0	4	28	0	32
% and total	3	106 (29%)	256 (69.9%)	1	366

Table 3: responses regarding the usefulness of the information received from the desks

	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Agree strongly	Total
Level 3	0	1	26	67	94
Level 2	1	2	15	27	45
Level 1	0	2	7	33	42
Circulation Desk	0	5	77	68	150
Support Services Desk	0	1	7	24	32
% and total	1	11 (3%)	132 (36%)	219 (60%)	363

Table 4 shows the results relating to how users perceived the level of information they received. The questionnaire included the opportunity to make qualitative judgements on the quality of customer care/ information. These have been categorised and included in Appendix 2.

Table 4: responses regarding the level of information received from the desks

	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Agree strongly	Total
Level 3	0	0	27	68	94
Level 2	0	3	14	28	45
Level 1	0	0	7	35	42
Circulation Desk	1	7	76	65	150
Support Services Desk	0	0	7	25	32
% and total	1	10	131 (36%)	221 (60%)	363

There were other questions relating to the future possible use of web chat to support students. This data will be reviewed elsewhere in the Library.

Discussion

Having a user population where 99% agree or strongly agree that the Library staff are friendly and helpful is a major achievement. This is a significant finding in that it confirms the Library resources invested face-to-face services are very much valued. The level of user satisfaction with the usefulness and level of information provided is also high. Correlation is provided by the qualitative statements made by user (Appendix 2). Both the survey figures and the qualitative responses show that users feel all front-line desks provide friendly and helpful services. The qualitative data enforces the value that users place on receiving a service that demonstrates both these characteristics.

In terms of how the survey can inform future Library developments, the broad approach limits its application. For example, it is impossible to say how perceptions vary across different user groups. The survey does not point to major changes needed in Library staff training programmes or the need for service changes to cope with unsatisfied needs. A value that emerges in the qualitative study is the importance users attach to a speedy service.

Conclusion

The wider University should take re-assurance that the Library is providing a quality personal service that the customer values. The challenge is for the University Library to continue to ensure that this user perception is maintained. It is interesting to note that the speedy, personal nature of the services is also much appreciated by the Library user. It is also important that Library staff are recognised for the positive findings from this survey. The following recommendations are made:

1. Consideration should be given in future service development to how the high level of customer satisfaction in face to face services with Library staff is maintained
2. Library staff should be informed about the positive outcomes of the survey and thanked for their contributions
3. It is important that the University is also made aware of the survey outcomes
4. Electronic services being developed by the Library should consider how they can incorporate features of 'friendliness' and 'helpfulness'
5. Customer care training is mandatory in the Library. It is appropriate for this still to be the case
6. This report should be considered by the relevant individual sections of the Library. Special attention should be given to suggestions in Appendix 2

Acknowledgements: Most importantly, Library staff involved in distributing the questionnaire are thanked for their contribution. The input from Jeff Brown, Peter Lund and Matt Cunningham on the direction and guidance they provided for this study is also appreciated. Lizzie Gadd's direction in questionnaire design was invaluable. Kelly Friend should also be mentioned for her excellent work in analysing the questionnaire returns.

Graham Walton

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Appendix 1 Questionnaire

How did we do?

We're trying to improve our Library information desk services.
 1 Based on the enquiry we've just dealt with, can you answer the following questions?

	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Agree strongly
The member of library staff was helpful and friendly				
The information I received was useful				
The response I got was pitched at the right level for me				

2 The best thing about the Library information desk(s) is:

3 The one area to improve on the Library information desk(s) is:

4 A future service we may develop is a web-based online chat service where you could ask a librarian a question. Would you use it?:

[] Yes in the day
 [] Yes in the evening
 [] No

5 Any other comments about Library information desk(s)?

Thank you very much for completing this survey. To be entered into a draw for £20 free print credits, please write your email address below:

Appendix 2 Qualitative responses from the survey

Circulation Desk

Q2. The best thing about the desk is:

Efficiency: Quick and efficient/ Efficiency/ Accessible, more than one staff/ Its location/ It's great/ Excellent service/ Very efficient service

Friendly: Friendly staff/ Staff are all friendly/ Always friendly staff and speedy service Friendly and helpful/friendly and quick service/Friendliness/ Get books out – ask questions. Efficient. When the staff are friendly it's very nice, as can ask questions/ Friendly staff/Friendly staff/ Staff was helpful and friendly/ Friendly, approachable and chatty staff, always willing to help./ Friendly staff – approachable. Friendly staff/ friendly/ Helpful and friendly/ Efficient once you get to the desk/ Friendly and patient/ Nice and friendly staff/ Efficient and friendly

Helpfulness: Helpfulness/ Helpful/ Willingness to help/ Helpful./ Very efficient and helpful/ They are always available, friendly, helpful/ On time and kindly helpful /Helpful/ Helpful and friendly staff/Helpful./Helpful and friendly staff /Help is always at hand, friendly, and always willing to help – efficient/ Helpful staff/ Quick and effective – helpful./ Someone is always available and ready to help, and if they can't help you, they will always try and find someone who can./They are usually willing to help./ The staff member was quick and helpful /Smiley helpful staff./ Very helpful /Polite, courteous and willing to help./The friendliness and location/Helpfulness/ Help when you need it, and book collection/ Helpful staff Helpfulness/ Helpful/ Very helpful/Willing to help/ Staff are always helpful and friendly/ The staff are always helpful/ Helpful when needed/ They handle staff nicely/ It is helpful/Always willing to help/ Helpful staff/ Help received/ They are happy to help/ Fantastic staff are always friendly and helpful./Very helpful, thank you

Personal touch: Can ask questions (which can't do at the machines /It means you can get books out when self-service machines don't like cards (too many stickers apparently/Very kind/ Face to face contact with staff/ Smile/ Good communication/ There are a few very friendly women who are very pleasant, especially when I am stressed, which is often the case!/ Please keep the face-to-face contact – there is nothing that matches this service/. People are better than computers – employ a further member of staff on the front desk, rather than implement the system/ I prefer to take/return books at the desk as opposed to self service and dropping books into a box. Also, staff have been helpful in tracking books down

Speed of service: Fast, nearly no queues/Quick and good service/ Quick and efficient, helpful and friendly/ Short queues, plenty of knowledgeable staff./ Quick/ It never takes very long. /Quick service and helpful at all times./Quick service./ Fast service/ Very organised and quick/ Normally a very small queue because they turn people around quickly. /Not too much queuing/ Promptness of service and information/ Usually quick and easy service Quick and helpful/ Usually very quick service/ Quick and easy/ Quick drop-off for books/ Prompt service/ Quick/ The consistently positive and helpful way my queries are addressed/ Always get help if you need/ Quick, accurate help/Offer information and always available to help/ Very helpful, polite/ Quick, efficient, friendly, hard working – awesome/ Well staffed/ Fast and efficient/ Quick service/ Quick and friendly/ Quick, helpful, know their stuff/ Quick to use/ Quick and friendly Quick, easy, no hassle/ Quick (when got through queue)

Quality of staff: They always know what they are doing/ Nice staff – very pretty/ Able to help with any queries/ Considerate

Un-related: Keep it nice and the same/ You can get your books out here/ Useful information a question away/ Help and advice about locating books etc./ The evening staff/ It works. They help you when you have an enquiry/ When a member of staff is willing to help/ The books/ Ask questions/ Get information/ Available on levels so very useful/ They hold books for you/ Good service/ Easy to use/ It's easy/ Ease of use/ Its easy Helps me to know about the library/ No improvements needed – keep up the good work! / The self service machines are very good/ An email when short loan books are late would be good/ New books and serials will give us more chance to know the new technology

Q3. The one area to improve on the desk is:

Queues: Queue/ Queues can sometimes be too long – maybe a third computer terminal/ The long line/ Try to avoid the long queue/ Time waiting/ Keep thinking of ways to reduce queuing (there is only so much that can be done)/ Sometimes queue is too long/ Reduce waiting times during busy periods/ Sometimes there's a long queue because someone asks a more

complicated query Remove the 'maze' of dividing during quiet periods (queuing system)/Queues spilling out and getting in the way as you come in the building (think I'm being a bit picky here)/ Queues (although these have been improved with self service)/ The queues/ Queues at busy times/ Queues at peak times More help when there is a queue/ Have a dedicated librarian for longer queries, or suggest they go to the information desk/ Too busy sometimes/

Interpersonal: A smile goes a long way. Sometimes they are very unfriendly even though I make an effort to be cheerful and polite/ Sometimes the staff can be rude for no reason. They often act like it is a pain to serve us students/ Some staff are not so friendly

Number of staff: Maybe an additional person to issue books at busy times/More staff/ More staff – have to queue most of the time/ More staff at busy periods/ Number of staff during busy periods/ Maybe more librarians at busy times, to avoid queuing/ More people on the desk/ Probably more staff to open 24 hours/ Move evening staff to daytime/ More staff/ Maybe more than two staff when busy/ More staff More staff/ More staff on at peak times/ To have more staff on the issuing desk, especially in the mornings/ More people at busy times/ More people at the desk to improve quick issuing of books/ Number of assistants – sometimes it's busy/ More staff/ More staff/ More staff

Physical area: . Décor / lighting/ More signs, or help in using self checkouts to keep queues short/ More staff to reduce queues/ More librarians at peak times/ Bigger desk area to put books down on – bit cramped as each computer is very close to each other.

Self service issue: Staff seem sometimes annoyed that students don't use the self-service/ The self service machines/ During busier hours when queues form, to ensure that there are enough staff and encourage students to use the electronic check-out service/ More computers/ Maybe another station for busy times like exams/Computer service/ Self service should be closer to the desk as when there is a queue, some people don't think of using it

Unrelated: Let us photocopy books on hold/ Somewhere to put journals when you have finished with them/ Maybe have 'holds' on a separate desk, as it can slow down overall process/ Staff should inform students of overdue charges immediately, instead of leaving it. I have returned books directly to the desk and not been told they were overdue, hence I did not know that money was owed/ Better shielding of the information students should know/ Be allowed to take more books out./ Catalogue of information so an easy question can be answered when all staff are tied up/ Could be able to open longer than usual?/ Efficiency/ Online renewal/ Short loan area/ Provide more OPAC stuff/ The phones in the office behind the desk are very loud and be distracting when working at the computers/ It would be good to have a photocopier in the short loan section so you don't have to take out the books just to get them photocopied/ With internet links in the study carrels will be helpful/ Some books are in a very 'used' state – it would be nice if there would be a possibility to describe the state. Once I was asked to pay for damage that was already existing when I borrowed the book/ Need clearer means of telling if a book is current or not/ Organise more lunchtime courses in specific areas, such as refworks and e-journals databases

Level 1 Information Desk

Q2. The best thing about the desk is:

Accessibility: Position/ Always there for me, friendly and very helpful/ Easily accessible/ Informative, helpful and easily accessed/ Always someone there/ Quick service and location/ Easily accessible/ The convenient location and helpful service/

Helpfulness Helpful staff/ Very helpful, knowledgeable staff / Helpful staff/ Very helpful/ Very helpful – will help me with any problem/ The help I received

The assistant was extremely happy to help, regardless of the information being on the floor above/ The lady that helped me with my enquiry was friendly, and went out of her way to find the book I was looking for. Helpful and friendly assistant/ The librarian very helpful/ Helpful/ Staff helpful and friendly, and even did great follow-up work

Friendliness: Friendly/ Friendly service/ Very friendly / Friendly nature of librarian – very approachable./ Friendly staff/Smiling.

Un-related: They always find the book I'm looking for/ I was helped to find Mintel/ I was taken through the problem step-by-step so it was very clear/It can provide information on where to find books./ Quick response and being able to get desired information./ Great help, efficient service./ You're doing great!

Every time I need help they are ready to help me./Face to face contact/communication is much clearer./Helpful, but did not find book required./Easy to find and look for – great./ Overall very useful./ Quiet and nice corner for reading the books

Level 2

Q3. The one area to improve on the desk is:

Staffing levels: More people./There's not always someone there./There should be a person sitting there until 10pm because when we need help after sic, there is no-one here, and we have to come all the way back to Level 3./One member of staff may not be enough.

Un-related: Have more information on the internet services provided by the Library i.e. leaflets./More books relating to my area./ Could one or two more computers be arranged on this level?/ There should be computers in some or all study carrels, so that individuals can study with books and computers if in need./It is a bit 'stuffy' – perhaps more air con?

Q2. The best thing about the desk is:

Accessibility: Find it easily/ As you walk in – perfect/ Easily accessible – the only desk I go to/ Its location/ Location/ Position of it/ Location

Helpfulness: They were very helpful/ Helpfulness/ Helpful/ They do help a lot/ Very kind and quick to help/They're always helpful/ They are always willing to help/ That the member of staff was very helpful. Helpful and approachable staff The lady was very helpful and actually showed me where the journals were/Very helpful/ Very helpful staff/ Always willing to help/ The staff are helpful and willing to help/ The staff are helpful and also gave me correct information and showed me the location of books/ Staff are helpful, friendly and always willing to spare their time/ Helpful/ Always happy to help and give further assistance/ Extremely helpful and knowledgeable, very polite and understanding/ Very helpful / When I couldn't find books I asked at the desk and they were helpful

Friendliness: Always friendly and willing to help – excellent service/ Friendly staff.

Friendliness/ Very friendly and helpful/ Friendly staff and helpful/ Friendly/ Friendly and helpful /Efficient friendly staff

Un-related:I can book a study carrel when I could not find a working pc, and they helped me find books/ Not busy/ Excellent response to our enquiries Efficient All good/ I found the information I needed./ Staff / Thank you very much for all the help – congrats on excellent service

Q3. The one area to improve on the desk is:

Staffing levels : More than one person – but that's just me being impatient/ Have 2 people working there./Another member of staff to help – so that when one is helping a student there is always someone left to help others at the desk./ Make sure there are always staff there, because sometimes when I need help I can't find anyone./ Sometimes have to wait a long time, but very rarely./ Possibly more staff./ More staff/ Make sure there are staff after 6pm.

Un-related: Provide more services, such as help with photocopying or computers/ Please put a list of reservations of the group study rooms by the side of the desk/ The second floor needs to be signposted better i.e. difference between journals and books/ People using the library make a lot of noise and eat & drink, use their phones which should not happen in the library/ More computers./ Staff organising the books can be very noisy when they put the books on shelves. I cannot work early mornings when they are there – I suggest that they should be careful with the noise they make. The books do need to be in order./ Need more computers, there are not enough.

Level 3 Information Desk

Q2. The best thing about the desk is:

Accessibility: Close to the entrance./Convenient/Easy to use/ Easily accessible with friendly staff/Ease of location and quickness./Convenience and generally no queues/It's right in your face, where you need it/ Its there when you enter the Library. /They are always available and someone is always ready to help Approachable, accessible/ Very accessible/ Location. Location./Near the entrance/ Really easy to see, and nice location/ Its visibility.

Friendliness: Friendly services./The friendly people/ Friendly service Friendly staff The staff are always courteous and friendly/Always friendly, helpful staffFriendly serviceFriendly

manner of staff. Friendly staff who are willing to help/ Friendly, willing to help./ Always take the time to explain things and they are friendly/ The enquiries are dealt with in a friendly manner – there is always someone there to sort out queries for you/ Very helpful and friendly./ Friendly and helpful. Helpful & friendly staff who are patient and don't mind you asking basic questions, and don't make you feel daft for asking them./ Good service – easier, and friendly people./ Friendly, relevant information as and when required/ Always very helpful and friendly/ Steve and X staff member have the right attitude – I have always thought they are approachable and helpful/ Very helpful, thank you a lot, you saved me a lot of time/ Everyone has always been very helpful and offered extra advice to supplement the original question – much appreciated.

Helpfulness: Helpful/ Always helpful and can answer my queries/ Always someone there, can help with most things/ They are helpful/ Very helpful – phoned and passed me on to someone else with more experience/ knowledge in my area of search./ They help you / Helpful information regarding searching for information/ Quick and helpful – excellent guidance to use library resources./ Helpful staff / Always willing to help no matter how small the task may be/ Helpful, very efficient / Willing to help when students have questions, no matter how random the problem/ Very helpful/ The staff are truly helpful and also very open and friendly/ This is the first time I have visited the Library, but I find the staff very helpful. / Library staff, especially X and Y staff members, were very understanding and patient with me. They were supportive and understanding to my condition as a dyslexic student. / Willing to help/ Helpful with a range of different questions

Personal element : Asking a real person about things/ Easier to speak to someone face-to-face when you have a problem – usually always someone on the desk who is willing to help.

Quality of staff: Efficiency and availability always good/ Always staffed with knowledgeable people/ Knowledge of range of facilities/ Great attitude/ Willingness of staff to deal with 'stupid' questions / Friendly nature and knowledge of staff. / Someone is always available/ Friendly service, assistant very willing to help./ Always ready to help, and professional staff./ Efficient./ Don't lose the things that are good about it, by trying to improve it unnecessarily/ I am pleased that the library offers this service. At other libraries I have visited there is not always the same level of advice on offer. It is reassuring that there is always a professional member of staff at hand. Thanks./ Excellent, quick service/ All experiences during my 2 years here have been positive./ Very good service./ Good work./ Great.

Quick services: Plenty of staff/ There is always someone to ask about the library without getting in the queue for issues/. Immediate access to helpful staff/ General help about passwords etc../ Don't have to queue very often/ Quick information & response/ People are easy to access – not busy/ waiting time is short/ There is always a member of staff available to help; students don't have to wait long./ Quick response time./ Queues usually not too long, so quick service/ Quick answer and getting correct information/. Very efficient and quick

Reliability: / There is always someone there to ask or make an enquiry/ They can help with so many enquiries and there is always someone there/ Help is always available Always people there to help / In general the information desk is quite efficient. Nevertheless the environment of being friendly and helpful is such that you never hesitate to ask anything in spite of how small the enquiry is.

Q3. The one area to improve on the desk is:

Documentation: Literature on the Library./ Idiots guide, hints & tips for searching on the computer./ Leaflets about library services/ Might be a good idea to have a poster that informs the students about the kinds of help they can get. Also, could have a Chinese-speaker (a student?) to help some students whose English isn't 100%.

Staffing levels: More staff during busy periods/ There isn't always someone available/ More staff in the evenings/ Number of people/ Have more people to speed up time/ Number of staff in busy hours./ Number of staff is low at peak times/ Sometimes staff on the information desk is not enough, therefore need to wait a long time to get the information./ Sometimes on one person there (vacation response)

Lack of awareness: I think a lot of students don't realise that the information desk is there for them and the service it provides

Physical environment: Better lighting – for all the Library – day light bulbs/ It's a bit dark! / More defined queuing system when it is busy/ Make it more visible, maybe more help signs.

Quality of staffing: The level of help given often differs depending on the member of staff consulted, therefore consistency./ I personally think that people from different educational

backgrounds should be there, like sports, engineering, etc. which would help students in a better manner for telling you things like journals, articles etc.

Un-related comments : Show what staff can help you with/The females./Library staff (Z staff member) is good./I have got all the information I want./I feel very free to ask questions/. You know where to go to receive help/It was informative. Get information required /Printer credit addition/. It was there /The information was written down for me/It's quiet and well managed./ Relating to the carrels: I find that after I booked a carrel, I can't leave anything in it to go and find a book, or go to the toilet. I don't understand what is a carrel for when this happens. To me a carrel is a place where I can bring my laptop to and do some research and straight away document it. I need security therefore I need a key for it./They could have more females

Serials, new books and media desk

Q2. The best thing about the desk is:

Accessibility: There's always someone there to help/ Everything in one place/ It's close at hand/ There is someone to help us/ Availability to help/All the information is readily available

Helpfulness: Very helpful, and nice & efficient/Extremely helpful, she found what we were looking for which we would never have been able to find ourselves./Very helpful Helpful, polite, smiles/They all smile (through gritted teeth!!)/Helpful staff/ Efficiency and helpfulness/Always willing to lend a hand/ Very helpful/ Very helpful/ Plenty of staff all willing to help.

Quality of staff: The staff were brilliant – double checked everything and solved the problem./ Very knowledgeable about microfiche/Cooperative and informative /Very helpful staff who obviously knew what they were talking about

Speed: Rapid answer/ Plenty of staff so didn't have to wait long.

Un-related: Great variety of academic serials/ I appreciate being able to access historical archives i.e. the Times 1852Access to unusual articles not found elsewhere, great opportunities for valuable research.

Q3. The one area to improve on the desk is:

Accessibility: More accessible/ Referencing could be more user-friendly (I'm an outside student)/ More accessible – not really ever sure if it is for the students./The point of contact with users could be improved. The current desk behind a door in a corridor is a bit un-inviting.

Serials: To have the serials on the shelf Publish a list of serials that are known to be unavailable e.g. out for binding etc. on the web./ To offer more varieties of serials, especially those of other countries, America, France, Germany etc/ Short 1-2 day loan for serials/ Would be nice to know a borrowing system for serials could be introduced.

Un-related: Search facility/ Arranged according to the date./List for students to check which volumes are out for binding.