

## Case Study

# Library Services Roadshow: Taking 'The Library' to the Students

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## Abstract

In February 2014, Library Services piloted a 'Library Services Roadshow' in the Birmingham Business School. The 3-hour event, which saw Library Services set up a temporary, staffed, stall in the School, aimed to increase awareness of the many ways that Library Services can support the School's students. This case study provides details on the pilot event, its impact and results from a survey conducted during the event along with some recommendations for anyone wishing to trial a similar event.

## Introduction

Library Services at the University of Birmingham offers an extensive range of resources, services and facilities to support students and staff with their learning and research needs. The available support is marketed in numerous ways and many students receive library induction and/or tailored academic and research skills sessions from Subject Advisors (University of Birmingham, 2014a) and/or the Academic Skills Centre (University of Birmingham, 2014b). However, there are still students unaware of the range of ways that Library Services can help them with their studies.

In order to increase student awareness of library support available, a 'Library Services Roadshow' event was piloted. The roadshow would allow Library Services to set-up a stall in one of the University's Schools and take 'the Library' to the students.

## The pilot

The Birmingham Business School was chosen for the pilot due to its large cohort of students and the wide variety of journal, company/financial, market research, statistics and newspaper databases that are available, and are needed, for students to successfully complete a degree in this subject area.

## Location

University House was chosen as the location as a significant amount of the School's teaching takes place within this building. The School building also has a large, airy, atrium space located next to its lecture theatre and seminar rooms, making it a prominent and ideal space for such an event.

## Timing

The 3-hour roadshow event took place mid-way through the second semester. This time was chosen to coincide with the first year undergraduate Transition Review (University of Birmingham, 2014c) as well as the third year undergraduate and taught postgraduate dissertation sessions. The day was chosen as one which optimised the number of students who were timetabled to be in the School.

## The stall

The stall consisted of a Library Services branded table, flanked by a pop-up banner promoting general information about the service. Relevant Library Services leaflets were used on the stall as well as two key documents produced for the event: '*Key Sources of Information for the*

*Birmingham Business School*' and '*Tips for researching and writing an assignment or extended essay*'. The former document provided brief details on 17 key business electronic databases. The latter gave information on getting started with finding business literature, data and referencing as well as provided information about Subject Advisors and the Academic Skills Centre.

Prior to the event, the companies providing the databases being promoted on the '*Key Sources of Information for the Birmingham Business School*' leaflet were approached. They were informed of the event and asked if they would like to donate any promotional material for display on the stall. Many of the suppliers responded positively to the initiative and kindly provided an array of attractive promotional material (leaflets, pens, pencils, notebooks, post-it notes, USB sticks, etc.).

Whilst it was hoped that an eye-catching stall would attract students to visit the stall, a short survey with a £10 Amazon voucher prize draw was also used, along with a selection of chocolates.

The final element to the stall was three members of staff from Library Services: the two Subject Advisors for the School and a Writing Skills Advisor from the Academic Skills Centre. All three members of staff were present on the stall for the duration of the roadshow. The staff had access to two iPads in order to help with answering queries.

Figure 1 shows the roadshow stall, set-up in the atrium area of the Birmingham Business School.



Figure 1: The Library Services Roadshow: Set-up and open for business.

## Impact

It was estimated that during the period of the roadshow, 110 students engaged with the Library Services staff, with more students picking up the literature produced and supplier promotional material. Peak times were the ten minutes either side of each hour, as lectures finished and new ones began, with a steady flow of interest in the periods in between.

Interactions with students ranged from giving out information and contact details, answering specific queries, recommending relevant

resources for specific topics and/or programmes of study, demonstrating how to use FindIt@Bham (the gateway to library resources) and individual resources as well as promoting relevant training sessions. Figure 2 shows students visiting the roadshow.



Figure 2: Students visiting the roadshow.

### The survey

The survey proved effective in three ways: firstly it encouraged students to come and talk to the staff at the stall, secondly it provided useful information about who visited the stall and thirdly, it provided a gauge on current awareness amongst students about some of the support available to them. In total 85 responses to the survey were received.

The survey revealed that most students who visited the stall were 1st year undergraduates or taught postgraduates from either the Accounting and Finance or Management departments.

Survey participants were asked whether or not they knew that Library Services had (i) a Subject Advisor for the Business School (every School has their own 'named' Subject Advisor) and (ii) an Academic Skills Centre. Table 1 shows awareness amongst the two biggest cohorts of respondents: First year undergraduates and taught postgraduates. It can be seen that, whilst awareness is slightly greater for subject advisors amongst undergraduates than taught postgraduates, over a third of first year undergraduates who are aware are unsure how subject advisors can help. Almost 90% of first year undergraduates are aware of the Academic Skills Centre which is very encouraging given that undergraduates are the cohort that the Academic Skills Centre is designed to support.

**Before today, did you know that Library Services has (a) a Subject Advisor for the Birmingham Business School, (b) an Academic Skills Centre?**

	Subject Advisors		Academic Skills Centre	
	UG1	PGT	UG1	PGT
Yes	40%	42%	80%	38%
Yes, but unsure how they can help me	24%	10%	12%	52%
No	36%	48%	8%	10%

Table 1: Level of awareness amongst first year undergraduates and taught postgraduates of Subject Advisors and the Academic Skills Centre.

When asked about the databases that respondents had used, the business journal databases were the most utilised. This is perhaps unsurprising given that these resources are relevant to all parts of the School. Low use was identified for some of the other databases, for example some of the company/financial and market research databases, which is of some concern. In these cases, further analysis of usage statistics will be useful along with additional promotion of these resources.

The final question from the survey was a free-text question asking respondents: *'What one thing could Library Services do to help you more with your learning and/or research?'* Thirty-nine suggestions were received, all of which could be classified into one of four themes: Books, Skills and Training, Online Resources and Other. There was insufficient data to interpret these results in a statistically significant way, but the continued support in raising awareness of, as well as help in using, the resources is important throughout programmes of study as is the provision of more generic academic skills training. The importance of an accessible, up-to-date, relevant book collection is also emphasised.

### Summary and recommendations

In summary, the pilot roadshow event was very successful and provided Library Services staff with an opportunity to engage with a lot of students in a short space of time, some of whom may not otherwise have visited the Library for help and/or contacted a library subject specialist or the Academic Skills Centre.

Library Services are keen to build on the success of this roadshow type event in the future. Whilst there are both time and cost implications in preparing for, and delivering, such an event, it is felt that this is a relatively small investment for the potential gain in increasing awareness and visibility of the service.

For anyone wishing to trial a similar roadshow event we would recommend:

- Consider the key messages to convey and the cohort(s) of students to target.
- Use timetabling information to help assess when and where to locate a stall.
- Tailor information to the cohort being targeted.
- An attractive stall, relevant promotional material, chocolates and survey (with small incentive) are all useful in encouraging student engagement.
- A survey allows the service to learn something from the students.
- Having one or more tablet devices on the stall provides an easy way to answer some queries.

### References

University of Birmingham (2014a) Subject Support. [Online] University of Birmingham. Available at <http://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/SubjectSupport> (Accessed 14 July 2014).

University of Birmingham (2014b) Academic Skills Centre (ASC). [Online] University of Birmingham. Available at <http://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/asc> (Accessed 14 July 2014).

University of Birmingham (2014c) Transition Review Information. [Online] University of Birmingham. Available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/transitionreview/index.aspx> (Accessed 14 July 2014).