How do we compare?

the experience of benchmarking a smaller University College Library in the UK Higher Education sector

Theano Manoli
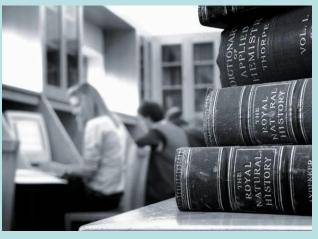*theano.manoli@rac.ac.uk*

Royal
Agricultural
College

Background

- 2004 – RAC benchmarking exercise and evaluative review

- Appropriate and effective investment?

- Need to compare itself with other HE institutions

- Subject to scrutiny

- Member of SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries)

Royal
Agricultural
College

The Royal Agricultural College

Royal
Agricultural
College

RAC profile

- 1845 - first agricultural college in the English speaking world

- 1979 - female students first admitted

- 2001 - became HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) funded

- 2004 – 600 students when review conducted

- 2007 - 820 students and rising, from 30 different countries

- Specialises in agriculture and the land-based industries

Royal
Agricultural
College

Preparation for Review (1)

LISU (Library and Information Statistics Unit)

Director at the time Dr J Eric Davies

http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ls/lisu/

- Collects, analyses, interprets and publishes statistical information for libraries

- Acts as a consultancy service

- Undertakes specific research projects

Preparation for Review (2)

- Meetings (LISU Director, Senior Management, Human Resource Manager, Head of Library Services and Deputy Librarian)

Agreed Methodology:

- comparative benchmarking
- exploring service policy and strategy
- resource utilisation
- processes and procedures
- user perspectives

Data Collection

- SCONUL statistics
- questionnaire to academic staff via e-mail,
- on-site discussions with key members of RAC and library staff
- telephone and e-mail communication

Royal
Agricultural
College

Key findings

PROS
- service judged to be good by many users
- staff committed to providing good service
- operational aspects were sound
- information sources adequate with evidence of investment in e-resources
- serials provision good

(LISU 2004: 2)

CONS
- staffing provision, especially at senior level
- ability to meet demand for longer opening hours
- ability to afford cost of the service
- conflict between aspirations of the service and the institution's financial resources

(LISU 2004: 3)

Royal
Agricultural
College

More findings

13 Recommendations for the Library, including:

- *explore ways of gathering performance **evidence** commensurate with the resources available.*

- *explore systematic ways of acquiring user views as economically as possible.*

- *gather **evidence** systematically regarding the demand for, and usage of, the service during 'off peak' hours to establish optimal level to be provided.*

- *review spending on information sources / materials and in particular it assess the demand for current serials systematically and routinely.*

- *undertake a thorough review of the performance **evidence** needed to plan and deliver services with a view to identifying a limited range of data that it can gather and use as economically as possible.*

- *The RAC should support the Library in its endeavour to focus on service priorities through an **evidence** based approach by recognising that appropriate resources need to be directed to this endeavour.*

Royal
Agricultural
College

Library Services Action Plan (1)

- Lists 13 LISU recommendations

- Examines each one

- Sets goals
  - **S** - specific
  - **M** - manageable
  - **A** - achievable
  - **R** - realistic
  - **T** – time-limited

Royal
Agricultural
College

Library Services Action Plan (2)

Recommendation:

- Review opening hours

Action:

- ✓ Opening hours reviewed and extended

Recommendation:
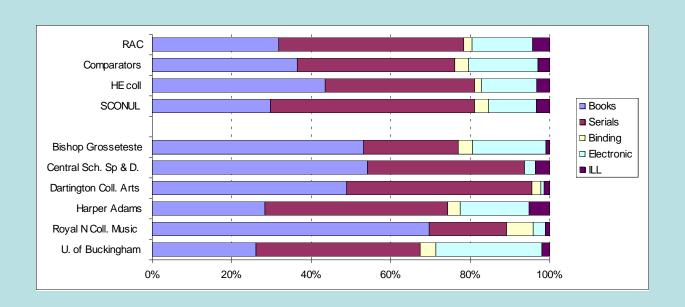
- Review expenditure on information resources especially serials

Action:

- ✓ Create and implement **Collection Management Policy** for serials

Example table from LISU Review

Breakdown of total expenditure on information provision 2001-02

(LISU 2004: 27)

Library Services Action Plan (3)

Adoption of a more evidence-based approach to management

Action Plan identifies three specifics:

1. Set a realistic series of service level agreements
2. Produce an annual report
3. Undertake brief but systematic surveys of users on an annual basis

Royal Agricultural College

Library Services Action Plan (4)

E-inform (also known as Libra) by Priority Research – an online tool that enables users to run their own surveys

http://priority-research.com/einform/

Royal Agricultural College

Benefits of the Review
(part-achieved and part-aspirational)

- More efficient and effective processes
- Improved responsiveness to users' needs
- Increased utilization of resources
- Accelerated change management
- Improved levels of management support
- Better strategic direction, more 'in tune' with the parent institution's strategy
- Quality Assurance
- Better proof of value

Drawbacks

- Limited benchmarking data
- Uniqueness of RAC and difficulty in identifying exact comparators
- Limited response to the small-scale survey of academic staff
- Not much student feedback
- Setting unrealistic timescales in Action Plan

Royal
Agricultural
College

Looking ahead…

- Use SCONUL / LISU statistics to our advantage
- Online user survey in spring term 2009
- Produce our first Annual Report
- Develop evidence based 'mindset'
- Staff training
- Perhaps another Review in future?

Royal Agricultural College

Analysing data (if you have time!)

A snapshot of derived SCONUL statistics, prepared by LISU

(SCONUL 2004)

Royal Agricultural College

References

LISU (2004) *Benchmarking and evaluative review of the library and information service at RAC Cirencester.* LISU

RAC Library Services (2006) *Library Services action plan, formulated in response to recommendations in LISU benchmarking and evaluative review carried out in 2004.* RAC Library

SCONUL (2005) *SCONUL annual library statistics 2003-04: derived statistics [online – members access only]* SCONUL Available from: http://www.sconul.ac.uk/statistics/ [Date accessed: 09/09/08]

Royal
Agricultural
College

Thank you for listening!

theano.manoli@rac.ac.uk

www.rac.ac.uk/library