

# How do we compare?

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

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# Background

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- 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)

# The Royal Agricultural College



# RAC profile

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- 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

# Preparation for Review (1)

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**LISU** (Library and Information Statistics Unit)

Director at the time Dr J Eric Davies

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/lis/lisu/>

- Collects, analyses, interprets and publishes statistical information for libraries
- Acts as a consultancy service
- Undertakes specific research projects

# Preparation for Review (2)

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- 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

# Key findings

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## 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)

# More findings

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## 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.*



# Library Services Action Plan (1)

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- Lists 13 LISU recommendations
- Examines each one
- Sets goals
  - S** - specific
  - M** - manageable
  - A** - achievable
  - R** - realistic
  - T** – time-limited

# Library Services Action Plan (2)

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## Recommendation:

- Review opening hours

## Action:

- ✓ Opening hours reviewed and extended

## Recommendation:

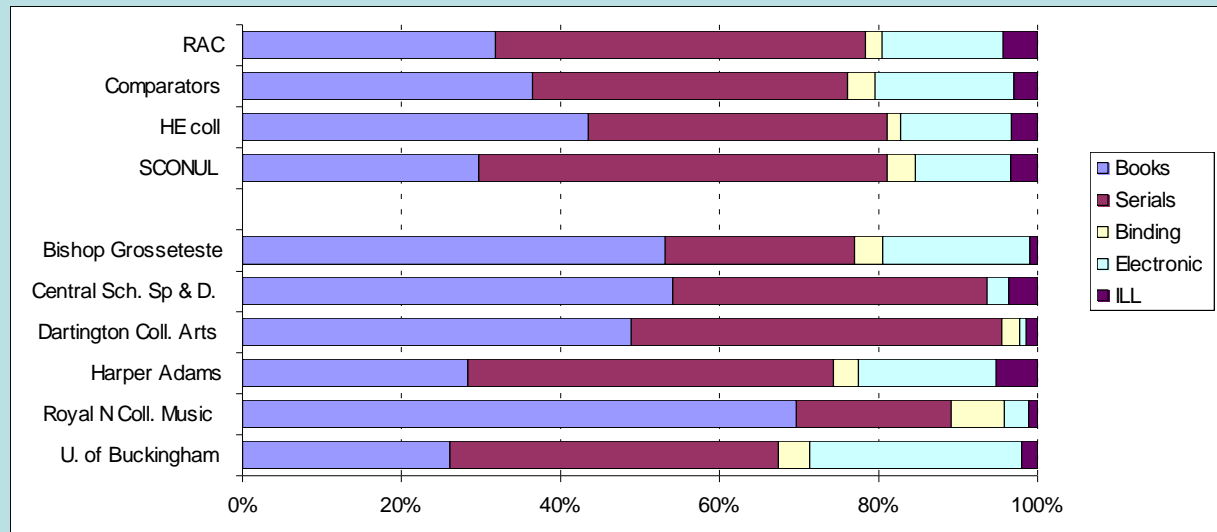
- Review expenditure on information resources especially serials

## 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)

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## **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

# Library Services Action Plan (4)

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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/>

# Benefits of the Review

(part-achieved and part-aspirational)

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- 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

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- 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

# Looking ahead...

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- 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?



# Analysing data (if you have time!)

A snapshot of derived SCONUL statistics, prepared by LISU

| 52                            |                                |                    |                                |                          |                                 |                              |                            |                       |                    |                       |                    |                          |                      |                         |                         |                       |                      |                       |                     |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| LIBRARY PROVISION & USE       |                                |                    |                                |                          |                                 |                              |                            |                       |                    | STOCK - PROVISION     |                    |                          |                      |                         | STOCK - EXPENDITURE (£) |                       |                      |                       |                     |
| Gross floor area per FTE user | Gross floor area per FTE stud. | FTE users per seat | Seat hours per wk per FTE user | Average % seats occupied | Users in lib. per 100 FTE stud. | Ann. study hrs per FTE stud. | Annual visits per FTE user | FTE students per seat | Books per FTE user | Books per FTE student | Rep- lish'n't rate | Serials/ 100 FTE student | Add'n's per FTE user | Add'n's per FTE student | Info. per FTE user      | Info. per FTE student | Book per FTE student | Perl. per FTE student | ILL per FTE student |
| 1b/3h A1                      | 1b/3b A2                       | 3h/1e A3           | 1e/3h A4                       | 4b/1e% A5                | 4b/3b% A6                       | 1e*52/3b A7                  | 4a/3h A8                   | 3b/1e A9              | 2a/3h B1           | 2a/3b B2              | 2c/2a% B3          | 2d/3b% B4                | 2c/3h B5             | 2c/3b B6                | 7m/3h B7                | 7m/3b B8              | 7a/3b B9             | 7b/3b B10             | 7i/3b B11           |
| 1.1                           | 1.5                            | 7.3                | 10.5                           | 28                       | 5.2                             | 728                          | 78                         | 5.4                   | 79                 | 105                   | 1.0                | 70                       | 0.8                  | 1.0                     | 123                     | 164                   | 24                   | 108                   | 2                   |
| 1.1                           | 1.4                            | 7.2                | 10.4                           | 31                       | 5.4                             | 670                          | 86                         | 5.8                   | 32                 | 40                    | 2.9                | 118                      | 0.9                  | 1.2                     | 77                      | 95                    | 29                   | 26                    | 3                   |
| 1.0                           | 1.3                            | 8.9                | 7.9                            | 28                       | 4.1                             | 534                          | 68                         | 6.8                   | 74                 | 97                    | 2.3                | 42                       | 1.7                  | 2.3                     | 107                     | 140                   | 33                   | 81                    | 1                   |
| 0.3                           | 0.3                            | 20.1               | 4.9                            | 24                       | 1.3                             | 281                          | 37                         | 18.3                  | 18                 | 20                    | 4.4                | 29                       | 0.8                  | 0.9                     | 46                      | 51                    | 19                   | 17                    | 1                   |
| 0.6                           | 0.8                            | 11.3               | 5.8                            | 32                       | 3.6                             | 382                          | 44                         | 8.8                   | 31                 | 40                    | 2.3                | 63                       | 0.7                  | 0.9                     | 95                      | 122                   | 35                   | 65                    | 1                   |
| 0.4                           | 0.9                            | 13.5               | 5.0                            | 20                       | 2.9                             | 510                          | 44                         | 6.9                   | 57                 | 112                   | 2.6                | 101                      | 1.5                  | 2.9                     | 76                      | 149                   | 24                   | 92                    | 2                   |
| 0.3                           | 0.3                            | 20.3               | 3.8                            | 40                       | 2.2                             | 222                          | 45                         | 18.3                  | 28                 | 31                    | 3.2                | 109                      | 0.9                  | 1.0                     | 45                      | 50                    | 21                   | 16                    | 3                   |
| 0.7                           | 0.8                            | 12.0               | 13.3                           | 61                       | 6.1                             | 843                          | 111                        | 9.9                   | 42                 | 52                    | 1.8                | 73                       | 0.8                  | 0.9                     | 113                     | 138                   | 19                   | 95                    | 3                   |
| 0.8                           | 1.2                            | 9.5                | 6.2                            |                          |                                 | 473                          | 48                         | 6.5                   | 50                 | 74                    | 2.5                | 47                       | 1.3                  | 1.9                     | 94                      | 137                   | 23                   | 85                    | 11                  |
| 0.3                           | 0.4                            | 27.3               | 3.0                            | 36                       | 1.7                             | 201                          | 34                         | 21.1                  | 40                 | 52                    | 3.0                | 42                       | 1.2                  | 1.5                     | 68                      | 88                    | 27                   | 42                    | 2                   |
| 0.7                           | 0.9                            | 6.8                | 11.4                           | 29                       | 5.5                             | 780                          | 51                         | 5.2                   | 89                 | 117                   | 0.9                | 57                       | 0.8                  | 1.1                     | 108                     | 142                   | 25                   | 76                    | 1                   |
| 0.7                           | 0.8                            | 7.8                | 8.5                            |                          |                                 | 522                          |                            | 6.7                   | 91                 | 107                   | 3.6                | 20                       | 3.3                  | 3.9                     | 61                      | 72                    | 35                   | 20                    | 4                   |
| 0.5                           | 0.6                            | 6.2                | 10.8                           | 26                       | 4.7                             | 636                          | 105                        | 5.5                   | 28                 | 32                    | 5.6                | 139                      | 1.6                  | 1.8                     | 94                      | 107                   | 47                   | 35                    | 2                   |
| 0.9                           | 1.0                            | 14.1               | 4.1                            | 75                       | 5.9                             | 237                          | 105                        | 12.6                  | 22                 | 24                    | 2.7                | 13                       | 0.6                  | 0.7                     | 43                      | 48                    | 18                   | 11                    | 2                   |
| 0.4                           | 0.4                            | 13.0               | 6.4                            | 47                       | 4.0                             | 372                          | 76                         | 11.6                  | 17                 | 20                    | 3.1                | 33                       | 0.5                  | 0.6                     | 76                      | 85                    | 22                   | 36                    | 3                   |
| 0.8                           | 0.9                            | 9.9                | 9.9                            | 20                       | 2.4                             | 627                          | 73                         | 8.1                   | 55                 | 67                    | 1.7                | 84                       | 0.9                  | 1.1                     | 114                     | 139                   | 27                   | 74                    | 14                  |
| 0.6                           | 0.7                            | 12.2               | 5.5                            | 32                       | 3.1                             | 342                          | 60                         | 10.2                  | 31                 | 37                    | 4.6                | 65                       | 1.4                  | 1.7                     | 57                      | 68                    | 30                   | 26                    | 2                   |
| 0.6                           | 0.8                            | 8.7                | 7.8                            | 19                       | 3.0                             | 548                          | 74                         | 6.4                   | 66                 | 90                    | 1.3                | 60                       | 0.8                  | 1.1                     | 116                     | 158                   | 24                   | 126                   | 2                   |
| 0.6                           | 0.7                            | 10.9               | 6.6                            | 36                       | 3.8                             | 399                          | 49                         | 9.4                   | 29                 | 34                    | 3.9                | 103                      | 1.1                  | 1.3                     | 105                     | 122                   | 33                   | 66                    | 1                   |
| 1.0                           | 1.1                            | 8.4                | 5.7                            | 20                       | 2.7                             | 339                          | 8                          | 7.4                   | 23                 | 26                    | 5.5                | 30                       | 1.3                  | 1.4                     | 59                      | 67                    | 16                   | 29                    | 0                   |
| 1.6                           | 2.1                            | 4.5                | 19.5                           | 6                        | 1.8                             | 1,341                        |                            | 3.4                   | 99                 | 130                   | 2.4                | 3,339                    | 2.4                  | 3.1                     | 184                     | 243                   | 52                   | 121                   | 2                   |
| 0.3                           | 0.4                            | 18.9               | 3.5                            | 52                       | 3.1                             | 203                          | 52                         | 16.8                  | 26                 | 29                    | 7.5                | 117                      | 1.9                  | 2.2                     | 46                      | 52                    | 18                   | 17                    | 3                   |
| 0.8                           | 1.0                            | 8.0                | 10.4                           | 30                       | 4.9                             | 703                          | 87                         | 6.2                   | 46                 | 60                    | 2.9                | 63                       | 1.4                  | 1.8                     | 122                     | 158                   | 27                   | 117                   | 4                   |
| 0.3                           | 0.3                            | 13.0               | 4.5                            | 69                       | 6.0                             | 265                          | 92                         | 11.5                  | 35                 | 39                    | 2.7                | 13                       | 0.9                  | 1.1                     | 68                      | 77                    | 25                   | 29                    | 1                   |
| 0.5                           | 0.6                            | 12.2               | 11.5                           | 28                       | 2.6                             | 677                          | 46                         | 10.7                  | 28                 | 32                    | 5.0                | 13                       | 1.4                  | 1.6                     | 53                      | 60                    | 13                   | 32                    | 1                   |

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(SCONUL 2004)

# References

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Thank you for listening!

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