

RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS IN THE LIBRARY

ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL READING MATERIAL

INTRODUCTION

1

The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) is "directed towards support for innovation in higher education institutions"¹. One of the four key funding areas in Cycle 1 was to enhance teaching and learning.

The John Paul II Library, National University of Ireland Maynooth, put in a successful bid in May 2006 under this theme to establish an "appropriate and innovative service" that would "address and manage student expectations"² around the provision of essential reading material for each student when required, including distance and part-time learners. This poster will outline this project, evaluate progress and explore its future development.

¹ Strategic Innovation Fund, Higher Education Authority, Dublin, 2006. <http://www.hei.ie/sif> - accessed 10 August 2008.
² Neill, Agnes, Online proposal - reading strategy for students, 16 May 2006 (internal document).

PROJECT OUTLINE

2

SCOPE - This involved outlining the issues, identifying stakeholders, their needs and expectations, defining the aim, objectives and expected outcomes. This first step was crucial in giving structure and direction to the planning and implementation stages.

PLAN - A Project Manager was appointed for one year in August 2007 and began by preparing a detailed project plan.



IMPLEMENTATION - This involved identifying core text material, sourcing it electronically and if not available electronically, seeking copyright permission to digitise it. Students can access material via the library catalogue or if access is restricted to the students of a specific module, via the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Moodle.

EVALUATION - Overall, feedback has been very positive. Usage reports are showing a high level of use at all times of the day and night, including Christmas Day! In addition to improving access to core text material, students also have greater flexibility in how they choose to use the material. For example, students can use the Library's facilities to download material to MP3 players. More qualitative feedback needs to be gathered before the project concludes.

OUTCOMES

3



227 CORE TEXT ITEMS AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY

"It ties in well with the culture and expectations of our talented and tech savvy iPod generation students." (Mr Tom Mulvey, Department of Business and Law) "Easy and open access to essential readings...will provide students with a greater range of readings and of ways to get access to them." (Professor Sean Ó Riain, Department of Sociology)



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

4

While the evaluation of this project to date has been very encouraging, how it develops as an integrated library service will be determined by more qualitative feedback from students and academic staff. The findings of a number of recent research projects^{1,2,3} provide useful indicators:

- The additional features of electronic textbooks will play a vital role in enhancing and adding value to the service but students may need time to adjust
- Part-time students are more likely to use electronic core texts than full-time students thus indicating the value of the service to the ever increasing numbers of off-campus students
- The trend in libraries to only maintain electronic versions of textbooks is likely to place extra demands on the campus IT infrastructure

- Students will have more opportunity to personalize their core texts as e-book collections are now being marketed as e-content collections that include book chapters, journal articles, encyclopedia articles, sheet music, maps, and audio-books
- As current expectations are addressed, new expectations will emerge. For example, students may expect the Library to provide e-book readers.

CONCLUSION - Answering the question - "is this project worthwhile?", the response is very definitely "yes". It is succeeding in achieving its aim and objectives and ultimately addressing the needs of the students and fulfilling expected outcomes. Furthermore, it has the potential to develop into a key and valuable service for the foreseeable future.

¹ JISC national e-books laboratory project: first user survey (June 2006). <http://www.library.ox.ac.uk/e-books-ox> - accessed 4 August 2008.
² Nicholas, David, Paul Huntington and Ian Rowlands, "E-books: how are users responding?", Library and Information Update, November 2007, 6(11), pp 29-31
³ Shepherd, James A., Jodi L. Grace and Erika J. Koch, "Evaluating the electronic textbook: is it time to disperse with the paper text?", Teaching of Psychology, 2008, 35(1), pp 2-5