

LIS: Investigations

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Much has been written about measuring library performance. Statistical summaries of inputs and outputs of library activities abound and annual reports regularly record the contribution libraries make to their organisations and society at large. In recent times, as funding to libraries has contracted and costs have soared, demands for accountability have become more pressing. Libraries have adopted many strategies from the business environment to substantiate the contributions they make, ranging from the balanced scorecard approach to the use of external standards and awards. Benchmarking and use of total quality management techniques have become commonplace. Various stakeholder perspectives are sought and a number of measurement tools used with many emphasising the customer's point of view.

Broady-Preston and Lobo examine the use and relevance of external standards in determining the value and impact of academic library services, focusing on a quality standard developed in the United Kingdom, the Customer Service Excellence Standard (www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com). The standard is a rigorous formal mechanism which measures service satisfaction emphasising areas identified through research as priorities for customers such as delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. Broady-Preston's and Lobo's work outlines the standard itself, reviews briefly some approaches to demonstrating quality, value,

and customer satisfaction, and uses a case study approach to evaluate the impact on staff morale and customer experience of the attainment by a university library service of the Customer Service Excellence Standard.

The summary of approaches to the determination of user satisfaction provided in the article is useful, including mention of the regularly held Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries (most recent is the 9th www.york.ac.uk/conferences/northumbria). The emphasis on continuing improvement of library services in a tough and challenging economic environment is highlighted, providing a reminder that time is not on our side. The paramount importance of defining value from a customer perspective is reinforced throughout. The complexity of defining value is also referred to – the value of a service, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. The link between services marketing and performance measurement is established and alternative measurement tools like Libqual+ (www.libqual.org/home) are also mentioned.

This study does not attempt to generalise from its results but the rigorous approach using documentary evidence, semi-structured interviews and customer online questionnaires ensures that findings could be transferred to a similar context. Attainment of an external award like the Customer Service Excellence award has a predominantly positive impact on the service reputation and status, service delivery and standards, staff morale and customer experience within a

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Broady-Preston, Judith and Lobo, Alison. 2011. "Measuring the quality, value and impact of academic libraries: the role of external standards" *Performance Measurement and Metrics* vol.12 no.2 pp.122-135

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library. Credibility of the service is enhanced and members of the library staff are reminded of their central and crucial role in service delivery. The focus on service improvement is linked to strategic goals and aspirations.

Accreditation by any library to external standards is not the sole answer to measuring performance or understanding the value and impact of library services but it does send a message to all stakeholders, communicating an estimate of worth, and making a contribution to improving customer experiences and service delivery. Application of the U.K. Customer Service Excellence framework would be useful in the Australian environment and in any type of library. It constitutes a driver for continuous service improvement, skills development, customer engagement, and an independent valuation of achievement.

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