

Conference Paper: Exploring library support for Researcher needs in an academic context. Clark, J; Rainier, B; Lamond, H.

About this paper

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Exploring library support for researcher needs in an academic context

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Abstract

The international reputation of a university is heavily based on the quality and influence of its research and hence the competence of its researchers. To provide support and enable the research community, an university library needs to have a good understanding of their current needs, and insight into areas for future support. To gain this information, a survey of Massey University researchers was undertaken by the Library in 2014. The survey instrument was based on the Research Libraries UK (RLUK) Re-skilling for Research report and used a ranking scale response to statements of current and potential areas of support through the stages of the research life cycle. The data was further analysed according to respondents' faculties and their career stages to highlight specific areas that needed to be addressed.

Traditional academic library services, such as strategies for keeping up with published research and managing literature search results, rated highly desirable across all faculties and career stages. Researchers rated assistance to maximize the visibility of their own research and help in understanding the potential of emerging information technologies, in order to achieve the former, as highly desirable. Support with data management, curation and preservation, however, did not feature highly.

The survey responses provide us with data to inform our Library strategic planning in terms of research support, but will also enable us to design appropriate professional development for librarians in order to better support the research community.

Background

The international reputation of a university is heavily based on the quality and influence of its research and hence the competence of its researchers. More recently research has become a strategic priority for universities internationally as it impacts not only on its reputation but on its funding. In New Zealand the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) is the primary source of research related government funding with its aim being to reward and encourage research excellence.

Traditionally academic library research support has included collecting, maintaining and providing access to research and academic material as well as providing training and assistance in the use of subscribed databases and online resources. The Massey University Library has, for a number of years, run a series of training sessions specifically aimed at the research community and covering topics such as bibliometrics, publishing and subject current awareness.

The needs of researchers are complex and in order to develop a research support strategy for the Massey University Library we needed to understand what researchers need from us now and be able to project confidently into the next five years (Brewerton, 2012; Mamtara, 2013). In doing so, the Library is maximising its contribution to Massey University's research goals, which are to promote the highest standards of research and scholarship (Massey University, 2014) and hence its PBRF ranking.

Method

A literature search was conducted to ascertain if previous studies had been undertaken and to see if there was a survey instrument we could reuse. The framework of the Research Libraries UK (RLUK) report into re-skilling subject librarians for research (Auckland, 2012) was selected as a basis for developing our survey. The questions in our survey (see Appendix 1) were based on the research life cycle outlined in the RLUK report.

Demographic information relating to respondents' faculty and self-identified stage of career was captured at the beginning of the survey, followed by 21 questions pertaining to the research life cycle. For each of the 21 questions, respondents selected whether the areas of support were 'highly desirable', 'useful', 'unnecessary' or 'don't know'. Space was also provided in the survey for free text comments. In the introduction to the survey the respondents were informed that the results would be shared with the University's research office.

QualtricsTM software was used for the online data collection and the invitation was distributed by email to all Massey University researchers.

Observations & Findings

A total of 122 responses were received which is a response rate of 12.3%. This would appear to be below the average for a survey (Nulty, 2008; Shih & Fan, 2008) but the potential nonresponse bias was deemed to be low (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2000). Responses were

received from all faculty of Massey University: Business, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health, Sciences, and Creative Arts.

Services rated as 'highly desirable' and 'useful'

When the results for 'highly desirable' and 'useful' were combined, the top five results across all faculties and stages of career were:

1. Help with strategies to maximise my research's visibility in databases and search engines
2. Help with identifying funding sources
3. Advice on measuring impact of publications and research (e.g. bibliometrics)
4. Assistance with understanding the potential of emerging information technologies
5. Help with strategies for keeping up with new research being published in your area and managing literature search results

These highly rated areas closely resemble current library support provided to researchers by way of workshops and one-on-one consultations with subject librarians. Strategies for finding new research and managing search results, and advice on bibliometrics, have been part of our traditional services for some time. Maximising researchers' visibility and understanding emerging technologies, however, has been developed by the Library more recently. The exception in the list above is 'help with identifying funding sources' which has never been part of the Library's remit. It is, however, clearly something that our researchers want help with and we will share this with the University's research office for their consideration.

Services rated as 'unnecessary'

The services that were deemed 'unnecessary' by the highest percentage of respondents were:

1. Dedicated library space for use by researchers
2. Help with preservation of research data and project records during the research process
3. Help with managing long documents in Microsoft Word™
4. Help with developing a data management plan
5. Help with file management and version control.

The least interest expressed was for dedicated library space; we could surmise this is due to researchers preferring proximity to their colleagues and that much of the library's resources are available electronically. The reasons IT-related skills, such as long documents and file management, were rated as so unnecessary is perhaps due to support researchers receive within their departments or confidence in their own skillset. It may be useful to work with the University's IT services (ITS) on broadening the level of service provided for both referencing and word processing software.

As seen in the list above, the management of research data was also deemed as unnecessary, however this is probably more a reflection of the current tertiary environment where the publishing, archiving and curation of research data in New Zealand is not as developed as many other research activities (Corrall, Kennan, & Afzal, 2013). On the other hand, as seen in the top 5, there was support needed with emerging information technologies. It is possible

to see the two as related. Consideration will be given to working with ITS and the research office on a research data management policy and repository, and then some awareness raising in these areas. Several respondents indicated that this was “done by my school” so an overall investigation at an institutional level would most likely be useful as a start.

Stage of career

To ascertain if there were distinct support needs at different stages in a researcher’s career the data was cross-tabulated by five career stages: Masterate Student, Doctoral Student, Early Career Researcher, Mid-Career Researcher, and Senior Researcher.

While the sample of Masterate students was small it was not surprising that they need support with significant parts of the research process. Doctoral students were shown to have a more specific set of needs, closely aligned with current awareness of research in their field, publishing strategies and information data management. The Doctoral Students differ from Early Career Researchers in still finding help with search strategies useful.

Early Career Researchers show some interest in open access (OA) publishing. Among more experienced researchers OA publishing is associated with the Gold model where authors themselves pay to make the article open access, and therefore interest is low. There is significant work to be done at an institutional level to address this perception and promote Green OA by encouraging self-archiving in Massey’s own institutional repository.

Middle and Senior Researchers showed an interest in support with identifying research gaps and new areas of research to explore. The Library could usefully work with the University’s research office on developing content and support strategies.

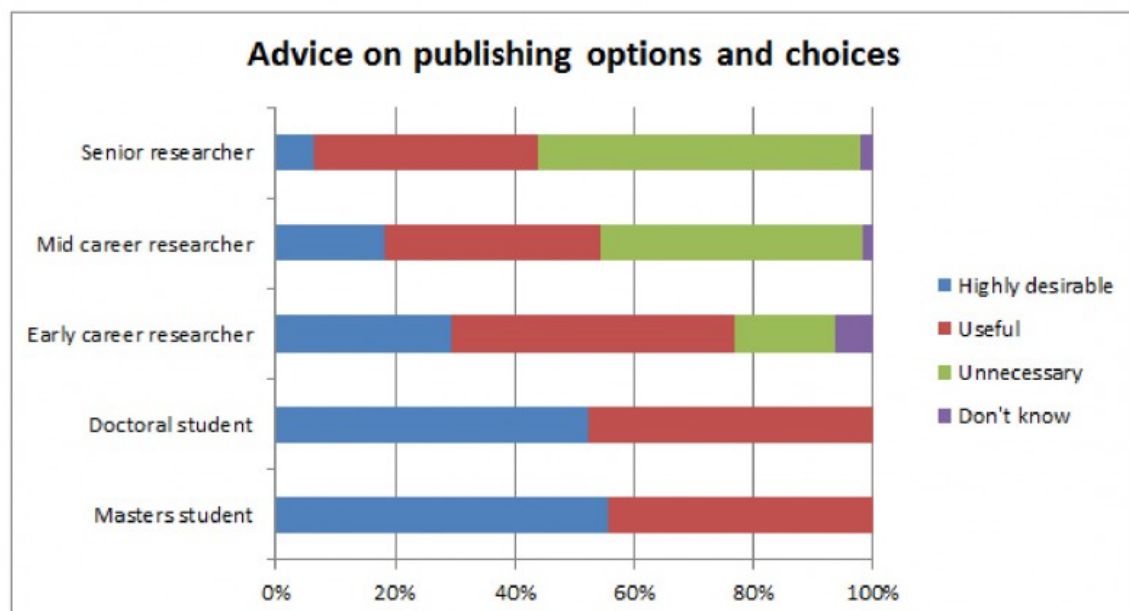


Figure 1.

Overall, as the career of the researcher progresses, the responses indicated a pattern of reduced need for support. For example, Masterate students expressed the greatest need for advice on publishing options and choices as opposed to the Senior Researchers, as seen in Figure 1. This pattern was also observed in the help needed with developing effective search strategies, help with bibliographic management, understanding and abiding by university research data protocols and policies, and advice on the ethical use of information.

Faculty

On the whole there were distinct faculty differences across most of the services we were asking them to consider. In particular the faculty of Sciences' respondents rated few services as 'highly desirable' in support of their research, compared with the other faculties.

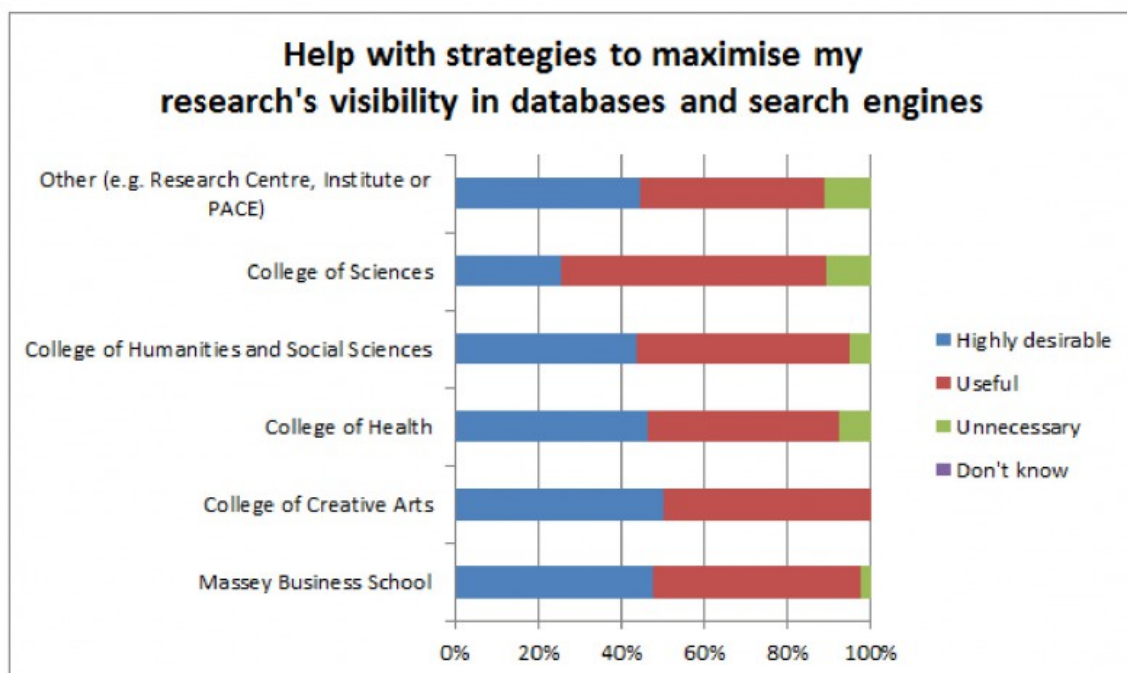


Figure 2.

Across the faculties, help with strategies for maximising visibility of their research in databases and search engines was rated as 'highly desirable' or 'useful' by the vast majority of respondents (Figure 2). This service was the only one of the twenty-one in the survey that did not elicit any 'don't know' responses.

General Observations

In asking our researchers questions based on the Re-skilling for Research (2012) report's stages of the research lifecycle, the Massey Library was seeking to look beyond our traditional services and explore how we could support the research community into the future. However, from the respondents' free text comments, we could see they were still concerned that the library should continue to focus on providing access to research

publications – both through more subscriptions, purchasing, and in easing the access to electronic resources. Our survey did not include a collections related category. It is interesting that these comments refer to what can be considered a traditional library service and therefore reflect the researchers' perception of the role of an academic library. There was a risk that some questions would not be seen by respondents as relating to the work of the library, and this was borne out from their comments. For example, the highest number of comments came under the "new research, developing proposals, and identifying funding opportunities" section of the survey – not likely to be a library service area. In the survey's introduction, the respondents were asked to answer according to their needs regardless of which part of the university would provide the service. The data would however provide valuable information for some of our stakeholders. The University's research office had early been identified as a key stakeholder and consulted on the project, and the results would be shared with them.

Conclusion

Massey University Library undertook this survey in order to better understand the researchers and to further our contribution to the University's strategic goals in research. Much of what we are already providing in terms of access to information, assistance, training and workshops is what the researchers indicated they want. These services should continue to be developed and delivered in as many formats as possible to provide greatest reach. However our investigation has also provided us with evidence of what researchers consider highly desirable services to support their work. The Library will use this to inform our planning now and over the next few years, in particular:

- a framework for library services to support researchers
- professional development for subject librarians
- a closer working relationship with the University's research office

As our findings and observations are considered, the use of focus groups will be employed to further explore those areas of support that are gaining momentum in the academic library sector. Despite being considered unnecessary by many of the researchers, data management, curation and preservation will be included, to determine what the actual reality is and how this matches with other institutions and the wider data movement. Data management as an institutional issue is quite new and fast-changing, and it is important that we continue to gather information (Corrall, Kennan & Afzal, 2013).

A shift can be seen in the academic context of libraries, as emphasised by the Re-skilling for research report, which requires subject librarians to move beyond traditional services such as information discovery and management, to one in which they play a much greater part in the research process. Professional development opportunities will be important "to be able to fully deliver this new role subject librarians need to have the skills and knowledge to perform expertly and with confidence" (Auckland, 2012, p5).

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Appendix 1

Survey Instrument

Research Needs Analysis Survey

*If you are an academic staff member involved in research (either as an academic or enrolled as a student) we invite you to complete this survey, which should take approximately 10 minutes. It is designed to assist Massey University Library with planning services for research staff in the short to medium term. We will also share the results with Research and Enterprise, who have been consulted about this research. Your responses are anonymous. We are looking at each stage of the research cycle, so some of the questions may not align with what the Library currently does. As you consider your responses please focus on your needs, rather than thinking about how the services would be delivered, or which part of the University would deliver them. We cannot guarantee that we will be providing all of the services mentioned in the survey. However it is important that we gain a better understanding of what you need support with, in your capacity as a researcher. Thank you for your participation,
Massey University Library*

Demographic Information

College or Research Centre

- ☐ Massey Business School
 - ☐ College of Creative Arts
 - ☐ College of Health
 - ☐ College of Humanities and Social Sciences
 - ☐ College of Sciences
 - ☐ Other (e.g. Research Centre, Institute or PACE) - Please specify
-

Career at Massey How long have you been a researcher at Massey? (Answer to the nearest year)

Stage of career

- ☐ Masters student
- ☐ Doctoral student
- ☐ Early career researcher
- ☐ Mid career researcher
- ☐ Senior researcher

What services would be useful in support of your research?

New research, developing proposals and identifying funding opportunities

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Help with identifying funding sources | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Access to a register of Massey research in progress | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with identifying research opportunities and gaps in your field | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with new research, developing proposal and identifying funding opportunities?

Seeking new information

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Help with developing effective search strategies for literature searches | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having librarians undertake literature searches on your behalf as part of the research team | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with seeking new information?

Information Management

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Help with file management and version control | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with bibliographic management and associated software (such as EndNote) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with strategies for keeping up with new research being published in your area, and managing literature search results | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with managing Long Documents in Microsoft Word™ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with information management?

Research data discovery, management, curation and preservation

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Help with developing a data management plan (e.g. where data will be stored and formats) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with preservation of research data, and project records during the research process | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with understanding and abiding by Massey University research data protocols and policies | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with research data discovery, management, curation and preservation?

Online sharing, discussion and collaboration

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Help with using social media and online scholarly networks to promote and share your research, raise your researcher profile, etc. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with online sharing, discussion and collaboration?

Writing up and dissemination

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Advice on publishing options and choices | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with making my research outputs 'open access' | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help with strategies to maximise my research's visibility in databases and search engines | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with writing up and dissemination?

Copyright and other statutory requirements

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Assistance with understanding copyright agreements made with publishers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Advice on issues on the ethical use of information such as copyright, intellectual property and plagiarism relating to your research | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with copyright and other statutory requirements?

Quality assessment and measuring impact

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Advice on measuring impact of publications and research (e.g. bibliometrics) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with quality assessment and measuring impact?

Emerging technology

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Assistance with understanding the potential of emerging information technologies | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other help, advice or support with emerging technology?

Space and facilities

| | Highly desirable | Useful | Unnecessary | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Dedicated library space for use by researchers (staff and postgraduate students) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other space or facilities suggestions?

General comments or suggestions about your support needs as a researcher: