

LibQUAL+® and the “Library as Place” at the University of Glasgow

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In 2001 Chris Bailey, then Acting Director of Library Services at the University of Glasgow wrote:

This year the University has been celebrating the five hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its foundation in 1451. The foundation coincided with the invention of printing by moveable type—a major contribution to the subsequent transformation of European culture and society. We now find ourselves, at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the coming of the digital information era, with a revolution in information provision and access no less significant.¹

In the midst of this digital revolution it was obvious that traditional statistical data collection, which focused on inputs, circulation, expenditures, etc., are no longer sufficient to define the library’s evolving role in the 21st Century. As these measures alone no longer describe the library’s function or measure service quality, we began to investigate other performance assessment tools beyond the biennial user satisfaction survey, focus groups, targeted surveys and observational studies previously used to assess library services and identify user needs.

Self-administered internal surveys, though valuable, from design through to analysis are expensive.² We had moved to a web-based survey by 1996, thus reducing the costs of printing and distribution, but were continuing to input data, which is a very time-consuming task. In addition, these surveys offered no facility to compare our performance with peer institutions.

With the increasing demand, internally and externally, to demonstrate that the library was delivering services that were responsive, efficient, progressive, accountable and in line with the university’s strategic priorities, the capacity to

benchmark services and facilities that were not quantifiable was becoming essential. This article describes the library's journey in using LibQUAL+® and LibQUAL+ Lite® as instruments to strengthen the use of data in strategic decision making for services and programs.

The LibQUAL+® Journey

In 2003 Glasgow University Library became a participant in LibQUAL+® as part of the Society of College, National, and University Libraries (SCONUL) consortium and since then we have participated annually, with the exception of 2007. The results have been published on the library website, presented as papers to the University's Library Committee, and used by Customer Services staff for service assessment and planning each year.

The 2003 LibQUAL+® results revealed that users perceived the provision of information resources, and access to these resources, to be far from adequate. This was especially true of postgraduates and staff members who recorded five and three (respectively) negative Service Adequacy Gap scores (SAGS)³ in the Information Control dimension (then Access to Information & Personal Control). Surprisingly, only postgraduates recorded negative SAGS in the Library as Place dimension. However, the low perception scores indicated that the environment was not a "quiet haven for study." The environment was uninspiring, uncomfortable, uninviting, and lacked sufficient group study facilities. The comments from the "comments box" mirrored the scores from other core questions: inadequate e-journal provision, difficulty accessing e-resources, and difficulty navigating the website. Comments on staff covered both negative and positive aspects with the comments about the physical environment and facilities ranging from bad to abysmal. Although the results confirmed what we already suspected, benchmarking with the consortium and peers revealed that we were not alone. There were other libraries in the same position.

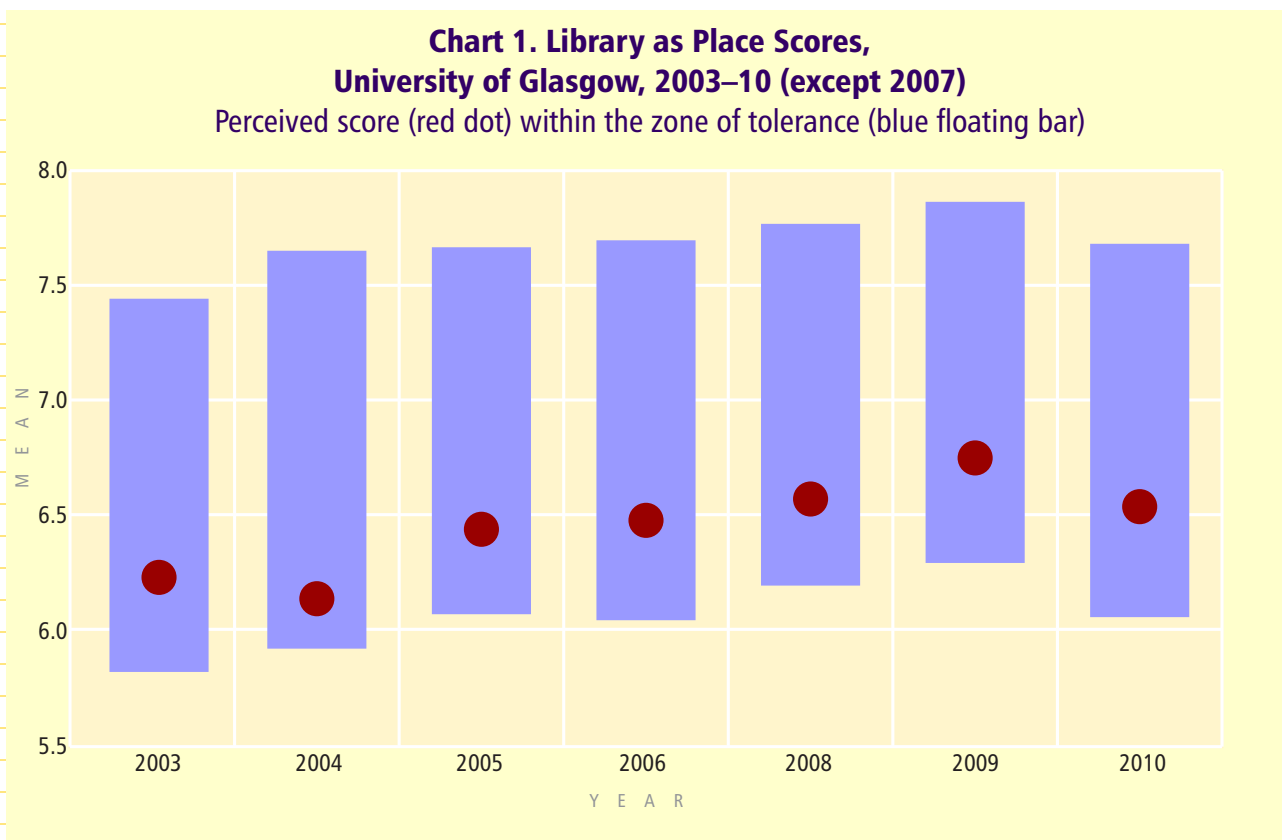
Library as Place

The University Library decided to focus on improving the Library as Place and began implementing a number of changes to the physical space of the library. In 2004, the refurbishment program, which had come to a standstill in 2002, was reinstated beginning with Levels 6 and 7 of the original 1968 building. The improvement process that the library developed was incremental because of the limited capital resources available each year. There was initially a concern about

how incremental changes would affect the ratings by faculty and students, if they would only see small steps of improvement. We were encouraged by the experiences of others. In particular, Eric Ackermann, commented:

First, as published literature demonstrates, dramatic changes to a library's physical spaces such as extensive remodeling yield dramatic, immediate increases in user satisfaction. By extension we anticipate that the incremental changes that we can afford to implement will yield modest gains in user satisfaction over time.⁴

The experience of annual capital investments in the library building and facilities over the last six years verifies this statement (see Chart 1).⁵



In spring 2004 the perceived service level scores on the Library as Place dropped, while the zone of tolerance moved up the scale, i.e., both minimum and desired service level scores increased and the comments on the building reached new depths. However, there was a positive outcome. The LibQUAL+® results played a significant role in highlighting the need for capital investment in the library's physical environment and facilities. Users repeatedly described the

building as horrid, depressing, cold, and gray. Action had to be taken if the university was to maintain its reputation and continue to attract and retain students and staff of the highest caliber.

In the summer of 2004, the refurbishment program was reinstated beginning with Levels 6 and 7 of the original 1968 building and was quite comprehensive. Changes included new air-conditioning, energy-efficient lighting, wireless technology, audio-visual alarm systems, and new carpets and furniture. Banquette seating for group activities was installed and toilet facilities for the disabled were created on each level. Reaction to the refurbishment was instantly positive and was reflected in the qualitative and quantitative LibQUAL+® results in 2005. This comment from a postgraduate from the Faculty of Arts is one example:

The refurbished levels are fantastic. A comfortable environment conducive to study is very important, and it's great... Couches on Level 9 would be a great idea for us literature students and our novels.

Encouraged and enabled by the positive reactions, the library was able to secure continued annual capital investment from the university for similar projects until all 11 levels of the original 1968 building had been refurbished by 2006. This included the requested couches and the creation of Research Rooms for postgraduates, staff, and visiting academics. In 2006, Glasgow University Library was a winner of the British Building Improvement Project awarded by the Institute of Maintenance and Building Management.

Other significant efforts have continued since 2006 resulting in the recognition of the importance of the library in the student learning experience based on several campus and international surveys.⁶ In 2007, other space needs were addressed by presenting a business case linking investment in e-journal backfiles with the release of space within the building. The goal was to create additional work places and technology access. By removing shelving and volumes of print stock, the library added more seating in an open access area, group study rooms, and IT training suites. In addition, a relaxation and refreshment area named the "Rest and Be Thoughtful" was opened. The furniture in the open access area was chosen for its flexibility and mobility.⁷

The most dramatic, innovative, and responsive refurbishment to date was the transformation of the Level 3 annex into a relaxed, informal learning café. The facilities include study booths for groups working on projects, round

meeting pods providing sheltered space for discussions, three accessible study rooms for disabled users, and a café with comfortable sofa-style seating. A spiral staircase leads up to more sofas and the "Rest and Be Thoughtful." The reaction to this refurbishment has been overwhelmingly positive. It is described by staff and students with superlatives such as "absolutely brilliant," "fabulous," "fantastic," and "a stroke of genius!"

LibQUAL+® Lite Experience

The effects of running the shorter LibQUAL+® Lite protocol on response rates and item scoring are well documented by Martha Kyrillidou, Colleen Cook, and Bruce Thompson⁸ among others, which inspired the library to implement LibQUAL+® Lite at 100% in 2010. The goal was to reduce the burden on all respondents and increase the response rate. The results were positive in several ways:

- By choosing LibQUAL+® Lite, the median completion time for each survey dropped from 8 minutes 43 seconds to 5 minutes 23 seconds—saving 3 minutes 20 seconds and requiring fewer responses by every participant.
- Based on Kyrillidou's research, "Typically about half of the people who view the survey tend to submit a complete version of the survey."⁹ Opting for 100% LibQUAL+® Lite increased the number of completed valid surveys at Glasgow from 10% to 46%. By the end of the first day 1,020 valid surveys had been submitted.

LibQUAL+® Lite

LibQUAL+® Lite is a short form of the LibQUAL+® survey launched in 2010. It uses item-sampling methods to:

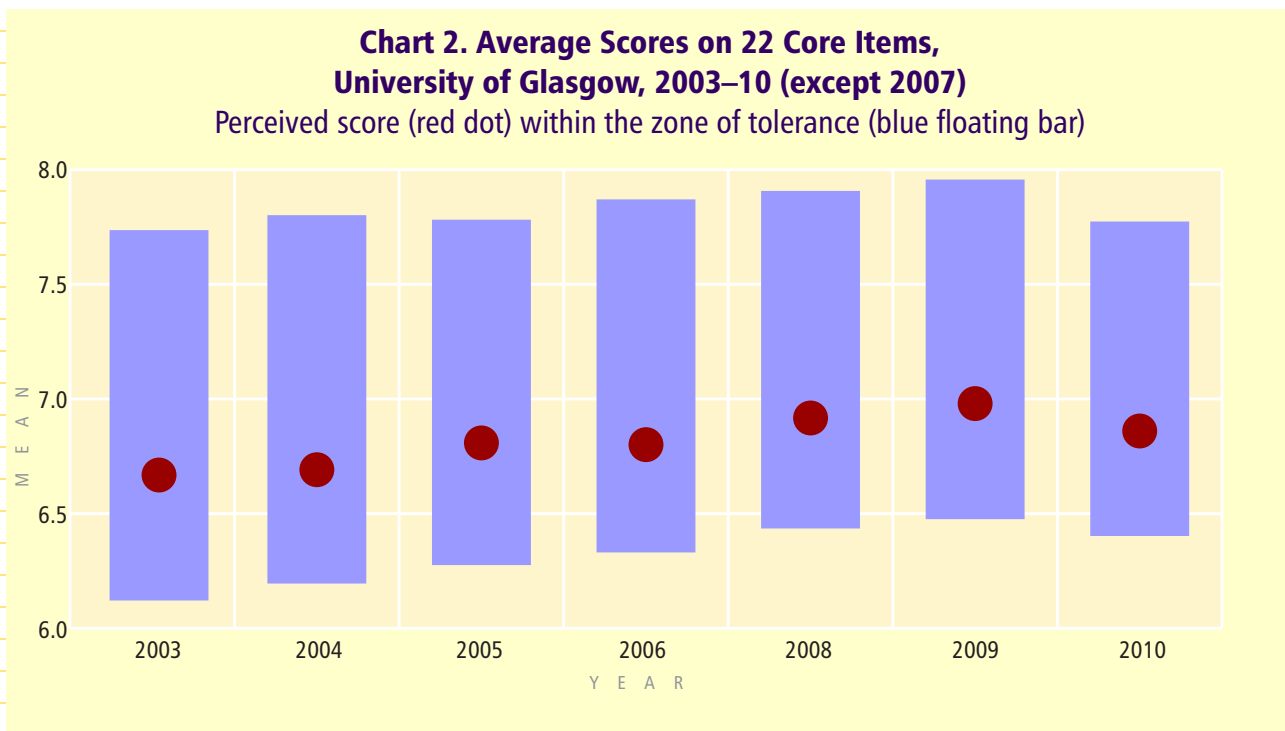
- gather data on all 22 LibQUAL+® core items; while
- each individual participant responds to only a subset of items.

As a consequence, survey response times are roughly cut in half, while the library still receives data on every survey question.

For more information about LibQUAL+® Lite, see http://libqual.org/about/about_lq/LQ_lite/.

When the University of Glasgow LibQUAL+® Lite survey closed, 2,508 valid surveys had been received with a higher response rate (9.8%) than previous iterations, and equally important, a representative sample was achieved.

The potential drawback to using LibQUAL+® Lite is that the scores may not be directly comparable to traditional LibQUAL+® scores. As expected, the 22 core average scores were lower than those achieved using the full protocol (see Chart 2). This pattern was repeated for the Library as Place and Information Control dimensions. Although this is not statistically relevant, the perception is that despite major investment in the physical environment, facilities, and the provision of information resources, users' perception of the quality of these services has fallen. There was little effect on Affect of Service average scores; the desired service level was identical to 2009, while the minimum acceptable and the perceived scores increased, meaning both the Service Adequacy and the Service Superior Gaps narrowed.



The most noticeable effect of using 100% LibQUAL+® Lite was highlighting the benchmarking with the SCONUL consortium. When the 2010 average scores were benchmarked with the SCONUL consortium and five other Russell Group libraries, it became apparent that the playing field was not level, or as Bruce Thompson would say, we were not "comparing apples to apples." Glasgow University was the only library in the group that implemented 100% LibQUAL+® Lite in 2010.

In addition, the library has begun to incorporate the LibQUAL+® Lite ratings with the Balanced Scorecard and has created metrics and targets for future administrations of the Balanced Scorecard. The library's 2009–10 Balanced Scorecard has identified a number performance indicators based on LibQUAL+® scores. These indicators will be used as benchmarks within the library as well as against the SCONUL consortium scores.

LibQUAL+® Lite Qualitative Data

The volume of qualitative data harvested from users' comments was unaffected by using the LibQUAL+® Lite protocol in 2010. As in previous years, 43% of respondents (1,070) made in excess of 1,600 distinct comments. This is very good news as the qualitative data is often more persuasive in decision making as it provides information that is easier to understand than numerical score ratings. It identifies problems and provides the context to understand issues.

Conclusion

In the current economic climate, the ability of libraries to demonstrate that the services they provide are accessible, effective, efficient, progressive, and responsive is unavoidable and absolutely necessary. Over the last seven years, LibQUAL+®, together with other national and international survey instruments and local assessment tools, has been a major factor in this library's success in increasing and improving access to information resources within a physical environment that is comfortable, inspiring, inviting, and a secure place of work for the students and staff of the university. For the future, there is confidence that LibQUAL+® Lite will be a necessary tool for the library's continued development of services that are designed to meet users' needs and expectations.

¹ Chris Bailey, *University of Glasgow Annual Report 2001* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2002).

² Steve Hiller, "Another Tool in the Assessment Toolbox: Integrating LibQUAL+® into the University of Washington Libraries Assessment Program," in *Libraries Act on Their LibQUAL+® Findings: From Data to Action*, eds. Fred M. Heath, Martha Kyrillidou, and Consuella Askew (New York: Haworth Press, 2004): 127.

³ A Service Adequacy Gap score is calculated by subtracting the minimum score from the perceived score on any given question for each user. In general, a Service Adequacy Gap score is an indicator of the extent to which the library is meeting the minimum expectations of users. A negative Service Adequacy Gap score indicates that the users' perceived level of service quality is below their minimum level of service quality. For a fuller understanding of the LibQUAL+® scales and graphs, see the online tutorial on "LibQUAL+® Tools," http://libqual.org/about/about_survey/tools/.

⁴ Eric Ackermann, "LibQUAL+® and the Evolution of 'Library as Place' at Radford University, 2002–2008," in *Building Effective, Sustainable, Practical Assessment: Proceedings of the 2008 Library Assessment Conference, Seattle, Washington, August 4–7, 2008*, eds. Steve Hiller, Kristina Justh, Martha Kyrillidou, and Jim Self (Washington DC: ARL, 2009): 43–49, <http://libraryassessment.org/bm~doc/proceedings-lac-2008.pdf>.

⁵ Charts 1 and 2 show floating bar charts where the blue box defines the "zone of tolerance"—the

distance between minimum and desired expectations—and the red dot represents the library's performance on the service quality rating scale. For a detailed explanation of how to read LibQUAL+® charts and graphs, see the online tutorial on "LibQUAL+® Tools," http://libqual.org/about/about_survey/tools/.

- ⁶ The surveys reporting positive results about the library came from a variety of sources: the University of Glasgow's First-year Student Experience Questionnaire, LibQUAL+®, the National Student Survey, the Times Higher Education (THE) Student Experience poll, and the International Student Barometer.
- ⁷ All of the necessary technology was installed, allowing the open access area to be used for conferences, seminars, etc. and in May 2010 it hosted the LibQUAL+® European Workshop, "LibQUAL+® and Beyond."
- ⁸ Martha Kyrillidou, "Item Sampling in Service Quality Assessment Surveys to Improve Response Rates and Reduce Respondent Burden: The 'LibQUAL+® Lite' Randomized Control Trial (RCT)" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009), https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/14570/Kyrillidou_Martha.pdf?sequence=3; Bruce Thompson, Martha Kyrillidou, and Colleen Cook, "Item Sampling in Service Quality Assessment Surveys to Improve Response Rates and Reduce Respondent Burden the 'LibQUAL+® Lite' Example," *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 10, no. 1 (2009): 6–16.
- ⁹ Kyrillidou, 2009.

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<http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/rli/archive/rli271.shtml>.