# 24 X 7: The Sunderland Experience

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*The slides of this paper can be found at: http://www.zhbluzern.ch/LIBER-LAG/PP_LAG_04/Friday/J_Archer/Presentation_Mar04.pdf*

## INTRODUCTION

The University of Sunderland is committed to widening participation. This means we attract a wide range of students from the non-traditional higher education sector, and an increasing population of international students. The need to support and develop these students' study skills is important and the libraries are seen as central to the strategy in providing both quality learning environments and resources. We are aware of factors such as almost 90% of our students also have part time jobs; increasingly our students can be based in a partner college or are distance learners. Our commitment to learners should be proactive, in providing a quality-learning environment when they need it regardless of their personal life styles and commitments. The need to provide flexible access is vital and was an important planning factor when looking at our service provision and developing the buildings. Libraries also have an important role in supporting student recruitment and retention. To be customer focused we need to recognise students' pastoral needs where they affect their learning needs, and in the case of international students this may include making provision for real time contact with their families. Meanwhile the University is developing a two-campus profile, having been for many years spread throughout the city. The libraries are seen as focus points for study places, print and electronic resources.

## PROVIDING FLEXIBLE ACCESS TO LIBRARY FACILITIES

In Easter 2000 a 24-hour computer suite, comprising just 13 computers, was transferred to The Murray Library from a School of the University. This proved to be very successful and both usage and user feedback indicated more facilities would be welcome. In offering a fully comprehensive 24 x 7 library service we would not only be meeting demand, but supporting student recruitment and retention and leading the way among the Universities in the North East region.

Research into this type of provision began in 2001, including visits to and discussions with other Universities (Bath, Hertfordshire and Sheffield Hallam) who operated 24-hour access to library facilities. It was identified that this type of provision is both popular (usage figures high) and an aid to student recruitment (feedback from open days). Discussions were held with representatives from the University's Estates department (building projects and security) and Health & Safety Advisers. In August 2001 I presented a paper to the Director of Information Services. The proposal was accepted and the implementation process begun.

To operate this facility in a safe and supportive environment we needed to consider how the building would meet the needs of a 24-hour operation. The Murray Library is an open plan building covering three floors, containing bookstock, study places, computer clusters and multi media equipment. We wished the users to access all these facilities, but not to be able to access restricted collections and staff work places.

## STAFFING FOR SECURITY, HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES

Security and health & safety issues were important in the planning, and close co-operation between Information Services (Library) and Estates was essential. Health & Safety Advisers helped with the risk assessment and gave advice regarding personal security issues. The identification of an access control point

was needed and the entrance foyer to the building, as it was located prior to the library security barriers and could easily be staffed, was chosen. A reception desk was designed and installed with the security control office located behind it. Staff can observe the CCTV monitors in the security control office, while still being alert to incoming users. CCTV cameras were installed on all three floors of the library to allow security staff to monitor the building without the need to patrol (the building). 24-hour users enter the building through the Disability entrance, next to the main doors, into the foyer, thus allowing all users to access the building. In addition to CCTV cameras infra red beams were installed in areas that we wished to restrict access to, such as the open staff area behind the library counter. Users report to the reception desk where they prove their identity and sign in. This meets security and health & safety needs as we have a list of names of people within the building at any point time. The building costs totalled approximately £60,000 including CCTV cameras and monitors (£32,000), new automatic sliding doors to the library (£5,000), alterations to fire doors, modifications to intruder alarms, signage and the new reception desk.

During the overnight period The Murray Library is staffed with appropriately trained security personnel. Staffing was a major issue to consider and we looked both at our circumstances and practices elsewhere. Issues considered were whether to staff or not, how many staff if yes, and whether to use our own security staff or agency staff. There are advantages and disadvantages to both, especially regarding services we could offer and the crossover period. Our final choice was single staffing with University security staff. This decision was influenced by human resource, economic and trades union issues. As a result we empty the library at the end of the 'normal' service and security sweep the building before allowing users to enter the 24-hour service. Users have either used the early bird signing in procedure and submit a 24-hour pass for the day or sign in as they arrive during the 24-hour service period. The security staff is First Aid and security trained but also receive library training in order to provide a quality support role. They perform basic functions such as refilling the photocopier machines and have sufficient knowledge of the service to give basic advice to users. Another staff cost is increased cleaning requirements. To maintain a quality environment it is essential to have the building cleaned daily and certain areas twice daily.

## THE 24-HOUR LIBRARY SERVICE FOR AUTHORIZED USERS

What services would we offer and to whom? The provision would offer not only computing facilities but access to print, audio and electronic resources, photocopying and an attractive learning environment, with plans to offer self service issue and returns in the future. After much discussion with Health & Safety advisers and colleagues at Sheffield Hallam University, we opted to allow any registered student or member of staff of the University of Sunderland to have right of access. In the future we may consider a wider audience. (but for present we have continued with this group of users).

We monitor services through an annual 24-hour Library Service User Survey (Appendix) in addition to informal feedback via security and library staff regarding user groups and service provision. It is an extremely popular service for our international students, many of whom live at the halls of residence near The Murray Library. In addition to using the resources for academic purposes they can maintain contact with their families and friends via the Internet in real time.

While in response to the growing number of enquiries in November 2002 we held a joint one-day conference with Sheffield Hallam University and Liverpool John Moores University on 24-hour library services, which was attended by more than 45 UK university representatives. The 24-hour society is now a serious consideration for academic libraries, virtual or otherwise.

In December 2001 we commenced a one-year pilot at The Murray Library and the 24-hour library service has never looked back and continues to develop and expand. The usage has increased steadily and it is especially popular during examinations and when assignments are due to be handed in. The success of this service has led the University of Sunderland to expand the service to the St Peter's Library and introduce self-service circulation.

## WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Murray library. http://www.library.sunderland.ac.uk/site-az/library-services/site-libraries/murray-library/

University of Sunderland. http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/