

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF PATRON-DRIVEN EBOOKS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the University introduced a patron-driven model of renting and/or purchasing ebooks.

With this model students can:

- Download or read online ebooks that have already been purchased
- Rent ebooks which have not been purchased for one week; the library paying the cost of the purchase
- Trigger the purchase of ebooks, either actively by placing a request, or passively by being one of a number of renters

THE PROJECT

The aim of the action research was to explore the student usage and experience of the service, in order to make recommendations for improvement.

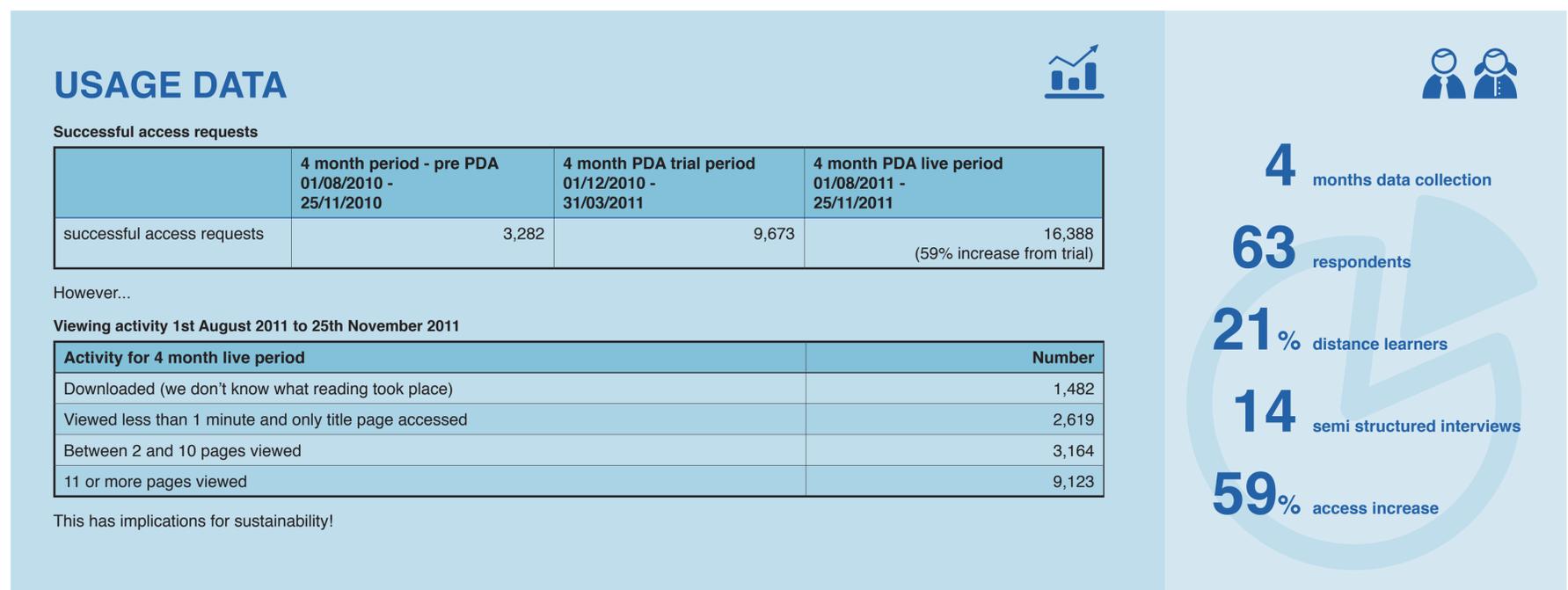
Action research objectives:

- Investigate how many and in what ways, students have engaged with ebooks/PDA
- To explore the student experience of using the patron-driven service
- To realise the impact of the patron-driven service
- To make recommendations to enhance the service

METHODOLOGY

- Usage data (1st August - 16th December 2011)
- Online survey (63 respondents, largely from Business, Social Sciences and Education. 21% distance learners)
- Semi-structured interview (14 interviewees)

The population sample incorporated a cross-section of the student body to ensure representation from a range of learner types, including different levels and modes of learning (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate and distance).



RESULTS

Results: Awareness

The research highlighted a lack of awareness around the patron-driven service.

- 64% of students have neither discovered or actively engaged with patron-driven ebooks
- 11% of the above have not used ebooks at all

Of the 36% of students who had used the service, the majority recognised the options below and felt confident they understood them. However, we found that both 'Download' and 'Read online' functions were often misunderstood



Less than half the students were able to say they had seen these options before. 'Request rental' was a clear source of confusion – leaving many to think they had to pay for the service.



Results: Issues

A third of students who had used the patron-driven service experienced problems. They reported being confused about the interface and frustrated with technical/functional issues and loan lengths.

Results: Impact on learning

Students could not really comment on whether the patron-driven element of the service had impacted positively on their learning as they had nothing to compare it to. However, all users of patron-driven ebooks stated that ebooks were 'important' or 'very important' to their learning. In particular, distance learners appreciated the benefits that online access brings.



“They are a fantastic idea and very helpful to me. I do not live on campus.”

“I would have difficulty, if this service was not available to me.”

“I would love to see some more History ones which are ebooked”



“Too many as much of a problem than not enough”

“Loan lengths render the system basically useless”

CONCLUSIONS

- The majority of students who have used ebooks feel they made a positive contribution to their learning
- Students like the idea of patron-driven ebooks but are worried about being overwhelmed by choice
- Distance learners are more likely to use the service
- 63% of students have not yet engaged with the patron-driven ebooks
- There is a lack of awareness around the service - students want more information

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Profile the collection before the patron-driven service is switched on again
- If possible, make changes to the interface to make it more intuitive and user-friendly
- Encourage use of the '5 minute preview'
- Provide more guidance on how to use both the standard 'owned' ebooks and the patron-driven service via Dawsonera
- Market the service
- Primo...

Acknowledgements

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