BYOD! We don’t think so……

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This paper and presentation were brought about by workshop sessions with the Students Union at the University of Chichester and the University of Portsmouth, examining the question “*In a fee-based environment, what will students be expecting from library and information services, learning spaces and learner support?*” The paper is broken down into ‘University Perceptions’, and ‘Student Perceptions’, and the consequences of these differing perceptions are discussed.

University Perceptions

Since the publication of the BL/JISC report *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future* (JISC, 2008) there has been a sector-wide move away from a “Computer Labs” model of IT provision to ubiquitous Wi-fi, laptops in classrooms, and Apps for mobile devices. The report provided a snapshot of the mind-set of students in Higher Education at the time of publication. This so-called ‘Google Generation’ (students born after 1993) are seen as ‘format agnostic’ (in that they just want the information that they require in any format) and have little interest in the ‘containers’ that provide the context and wrapping for information `nuggets’. It was identified that this cohort of students have shifted decisively to digital forms of communication, preferring typing to handwriting, messaging to talking on the phone, and using their mobile devices to access information, rather than the university model of desktop personal computers. The Google Generation are believed to be impatient and have zero tolerance for delay - information and entertainment needs must be fulfilled immediately.

Perceptions about the mind-set of our students have been mirrored by developments in technological access to information, in that students now have access to the web through mobile devices such as the iPhone, iPad, smart phones, and tablet computers. This availability of ‘personalised’ mobile technologies, combined with the attributes outlined above, has led to the rise of BYOD as a possible ‘solution’ to perceived student information needs.

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is ‘*the policy of bringing personally owned mobile devices to [school, college, Uni] and using those devices to access [institutional] resources, as well as personal applications and data. The terms Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) or Bring Your Own Behaviour (BYOB) are also used, because they express a broader phenomenon, which not only covers the hardware device(s), but also the software used on the device*’ (Wikipedia, 2012). BYOD is also seen as the answer to technological change, in that rather than constantly trying to cope with the flood of new devices being used by students, universities should make their services and systems available across a range of platforms, ‘format agnostic’, so that the students can use their own mobile technologies to access the information that they require. This BYOD culture also meshes with the ‘Information Commons’ pedagogical model, moving away from a didactic form of instruction, towards a more collaborative paradigm, opening up a world of ‘Social Learning’ rather than sitting in IT Labs, creating ‘Independent Learners’, the information that you want, when you want it, on your own device!

Student Perception

Student perceptions were gleaned from a One-Day workshop run in the Summer of 2011 by a consortium of South Coast Universities with input from their Student Unions. The introduction of the new fees regime (whereby the funding of Universities is now provided directly by the students, rather than through government provided core allocations) was seen as having a profound effect on student expectations of library services. Presentations by the SU painted a very different technological expectation to that understood by most universities since the JISC report. The relationship between the student and the institution is now perceived as a consumer, rather than a partner, interaction. Students stated ‘*We are paying you £8,500 a year for our degree*!’ ‘*Why are there not 200 copies of a book if there are 200 students on the course?*’ ‘*We want people to talk to, rather than machines, we want info[rmation] given to us*’ (Bowman, 2012). Rather than being (or wanting to be) the ‘independent learners’ that universities have been encouraging, these students demand ‘value-for-money’ on their investment in a degree.

Rather than wanting (or needing) to use their own devices to access the information needed for their studies, students stated that ‘*We don’t want to read small screens, we don’t want to have to carry laptops around, we don’t want to have to look for stuff, [we] hate reading online*’. The student expectation was for a desktop machine for every student, where they want it, when they want it, along with help to find materials, as the perception was that [students] can waste time trying to find [information] themselves. This ‘consumer’ orientation also flavoured students’ perceptions of the kind of service that should be provided by the University, in that students could not understand why universities don’t ‘*just tell us what we need to know?*’, this links in with the strong student perception that they are paying for the ‘end-product’ of a good degree, which should include everything that they need to acquire this while they are at University, ‘*a first class library service, free printing, and real books on the shelves, all course materials (stationery etc.) supplied for every student, quiet zones for when we want to be quiet and noisy areas for when we want to be noisy, along with 24 hour opening- ‘Everywhere else does it*’ (Bowman, 2012).

The JISC report (JISC, 2008) noted the perception that ‘*young people have unsophisticated mental maps of what the internet is, often failing to appreciate that it is a collection of networked resources from different providers, as a result, the search engine, be that Yahoo or Google, becomes the primary brand that they associate with the internet’*. Students in the workshops re-enforced this perception by requiring ‘*access to all of the info without having to move. No more than 3 clicks away – accessibility [seen as] key for all online information*’. Student perceptions of this consumer relationship centred around having ‘*as many retakes as are needed to pass, and our degree (that we have paid for) at the end’.*

Conclusion

Universities have been moving away from ‘computer lab’ provision of information technology access since the JISC report in 2008. With the increased availability of personal mobile devices, and the increased costs of providing IT equipment, BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) is seen as a viable way forward for ‘student-centred’ provision of IT services in future. However, student perceptions and expectations as expressed through workshops run during 2011 have posited a very different ‘student centred’ IT landscape. The new fees regime (introduced in 2012) has changed the student/university relationship from one of mutual partnership, to a consumer/producer status. Students do not want to use their own devices to access information. They expect their universities to provide access through institutional IT equipment that the students have ‘paid for’ through their fees. There is also an expectation that all library and IT services that the students will use while at University should be provided free of charge. There is a strong student perception that they should be ‘given’ the degrees that they have ‘paid for’, rather than having to become the ‘independent learners’ that universities have been encouraging. The new fees regime does not provide any additional income for the universities, but has vastly raised the expectations of the students, who see it as ‘*a right to use whatever they want, whenever they want it (at no extra cost)*’. The perception (and strong assertion) coming from the SU was that students will require everything to be provided for them because they have paid for it.

In essence, students will want everything they have always wanted…

BUT MORE!

Bibliography

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