

A comparative trend analysis of academic library performance measurement in the United Kingdom

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What is performance measurement?

“Evaluation is the process of identifying and collecting data about specific services or activities, establishing criteria by which their success can be measured, and determining the quality of the service or activity - the degree to which it accomplishes stated goals and objectives... [it] is a decision-making tool that is intended to assist library staff in allocating necessary resources to those activities and services”

(Hernon, Dugan & Matthews, 2014, p. 2-3)

Why is it important to libraries?

- Increased accountability for expenditure;
- The emergence of evidence-based practice;
- The importance of benchmarking and best practice; and
- Increased expectation of transparency in services.

(Brophy, 2006, p. 3)

Also:

- Pressure to demonstrate value to both institution and users;
- Ensuring customer satisfaction;
- Evidence for programmatic accreditation;
- Continuing to remain relevant in the digital era.

(Hernon et. al., 2014; J. S. Town, 2011; Pintozzi, 2014; White, 2014)

Background to the study

- Difficult to gain an overall picture of activities
- [2008 SCONUL Library Performance Measurement Survey](#) (adapted from ARL model)
 - 43% response rate
- Results:
 - average 10.6 methods per institution, with statistics most popular
 - organisation usually by either a team or committee, or individuals on an ad hoc basis who then pool results
 - variety of distribution methods depending on the audience
 - changes to opening hours, improvements to website design and IT facilities as most popular outcomes
 - 51% lacked training and professional development opportunities
 - general positivity about the 'culture of assessment' but lack of resources and support again highlighted
 - 53% had assessment plan; 79% of strategies included commitment to PM

Methodology



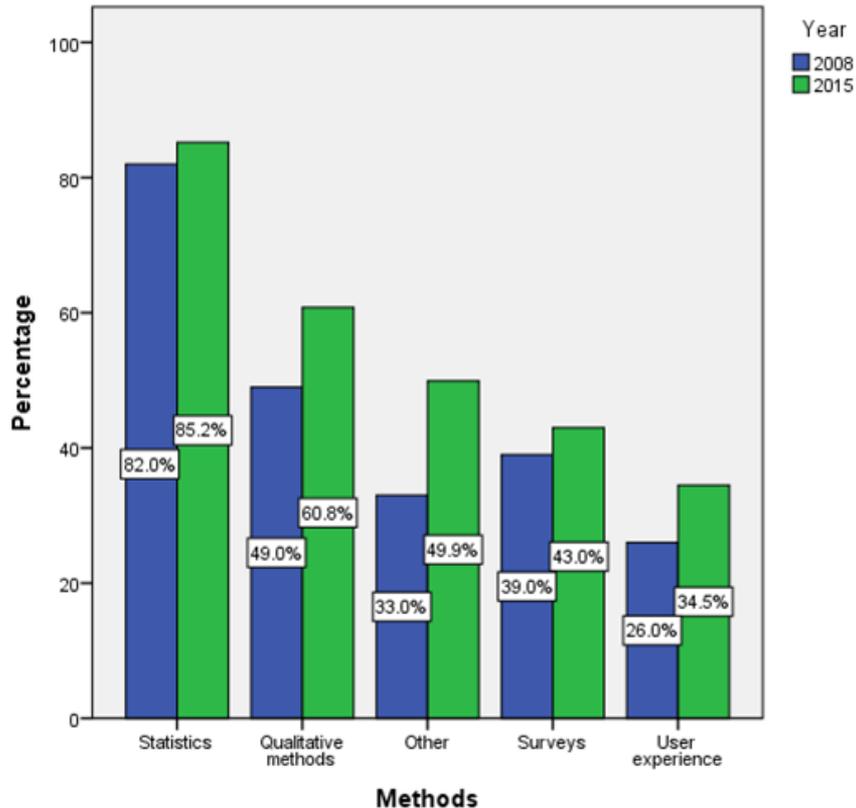
- Undertaken in collaboration with the SCOUNL Performance Quality and Strategy Group
- Adapted and revised 2008 survey to reflect current issues and trends within academic librarianship
- Distributed as an electronic questionnaire to the SCOUNL-DIRECTORS email list in June 2015
- 13 working days allowed for completion
- 36 complete responses out of 177 institutions = 20.3% response rate
- Lower response rate than original (43%), so basic trends can be identified but conclusions need further testing to be valid

Results and discussion

- Performance measurement activities
- Organisational structure
- Performance measurement results
- Performance measurement outcomes
- Strategy
- Professional development
- ‘Culture of Assessment’ at the library

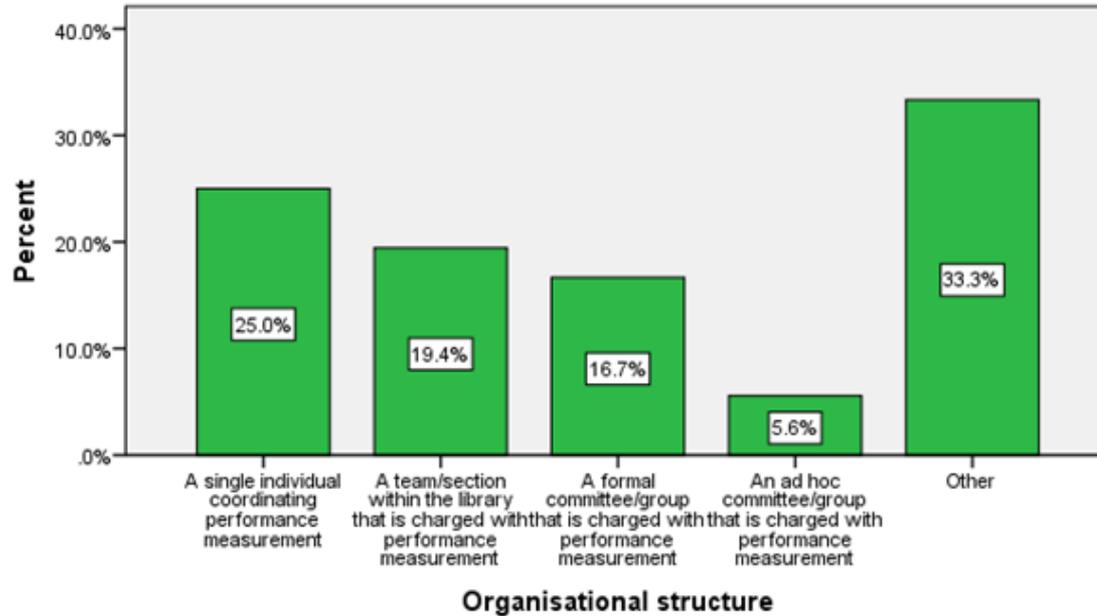


Performance measurement activities



- Q5: average methods used = 14.9
- Statistics still most popular
- Increase in qualitative methods, especially user experience (UX)
- Preference moving away from library surveys towards institution-wide surveys e.g. NSS
- Facilities as most increased area measured, reflecting emphasis on learning-centric spaces
- Motivations vary, but most popular choices show emphasis on user satisfaction and feedback

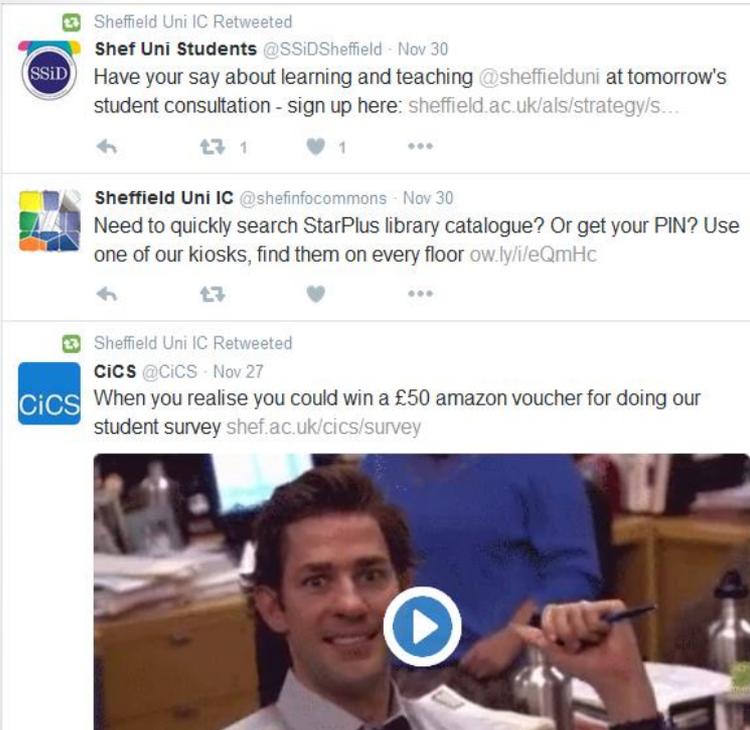
Organisational structure



Question 8: Who has primary responsibility for coordinating and/or planning your library's PM activities?

- Similar results to the previous survey
- 10% swing away from 'ad hoc committee' towards 'team/section'
- Comments suggest that PM has become more embedded within institutional culture
- Variety of structures implies no 'one size fits all' solution to organisation
- Collaboration increased by 22.5% from 58% to 80.5%

Performance measurement results



- Average no. of methods used per institution: 11.5
- Most popular methods of distribution overall: website (15.4%) and social media (13.3%)
- To library staff: library newsletters (100%) and email announcements (96.2%)
- To the institution: campus newsletters (95.6%) and infographics (93.1%)
- To the public: website (82.8%) and social media (64.2%)
- General swing towards sharing more information with the public in more interactive ways - proving value

Performance measurement outcomes

Themes	2008 (N=62)		2015 (N=36)		Difference (%)
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Content	21	33.9%	17	47.2%	+ 13.3%
Environment	26	41.9%	22	61.1%	+ 19.2%
Opening hours	31	50%	12	33.3%	- 16.7%
Services	45	72.6%	41	114%	+ 41.4%
Staffing	14	22.6%	5	13.9%	- 8.7%
Other	15	24.2%	5	13.9%	- 10.3%

- Q15: 13% increase in total responses
- Emphasis on: changes to circulation policies (e.g. no fines); PDA; IT services (e.g. usability); and investment in buildings and resources
- Both surveys show that PM can help to increase investment in the library
- Majority of areas directly influenced by user feedback

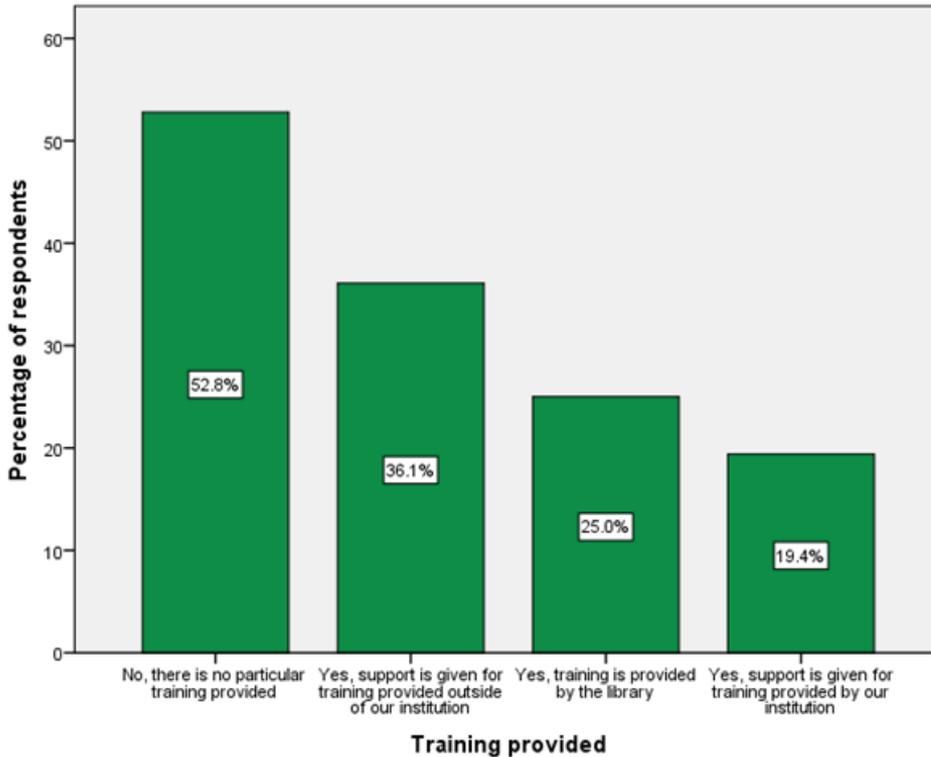
Strategy

	2008 (N=62)		2015 (N=35)		Difference
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Yes	49	79%	27	77.1%	-1.9%
No	13	21%	8	22.9%	+1.9%

Question 16: Does your library strategy include a specific commitment to performance measurement and evaluation activities?

- No change since 2008 implies stagnation
- Institutional embeddedness - commitment may not have to be enshrined in documentation if it is part of the organisational culture

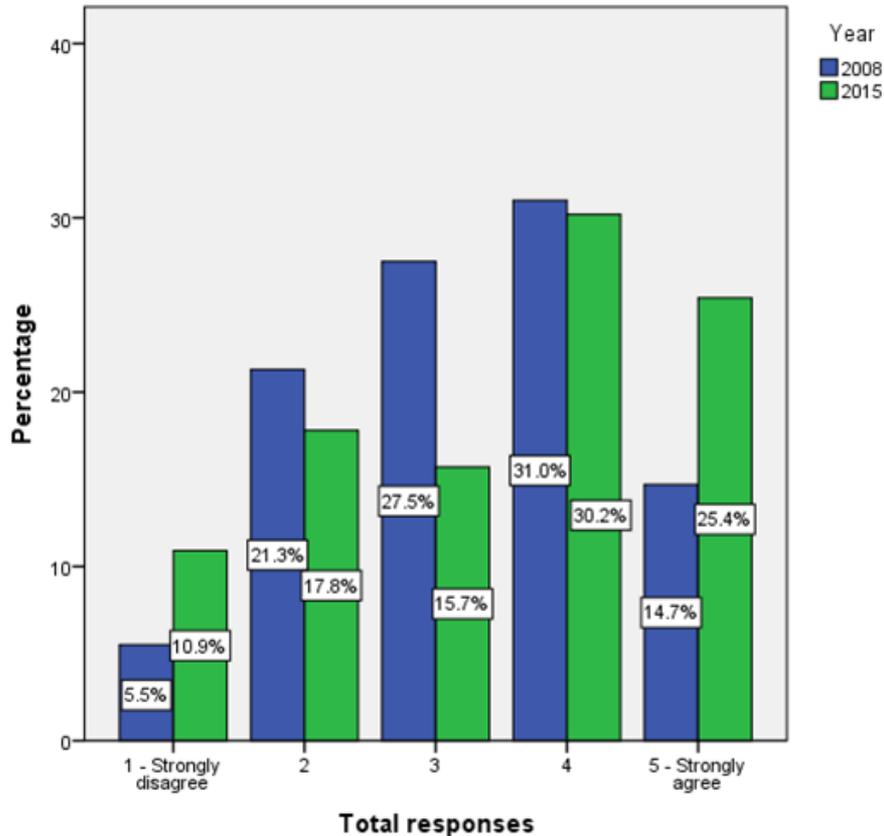
Professional development



- Continued neglect of training and development opportunities
- Highest quantity of training in: effective social media and blogs (22.2%), basic statistics (16.7%) and ethnographic techniques (13.9%)
- Data analysis, data literacy and training on specific tools identified as needed
- Vital that staff understand PM in order to use it most efficiently to demonstrate value
- Cutting training budgets = false economy

Question 17: Does your library provide training on performance measurement for library staff?

'Culture of Assessment' at the library



- Q21: increase in positive responses (4-5 on the scale) but no corresponding decrease in negative responses (1-2)
- 77.8% agreed that results were used to improve their library
- 77.2% agreed that PM is a library priority
- Low medians (2.00) for questions on support and development
- 50% of libraries stated they have no performance measurement plan (47% in 2008)

Conclusions

- Overall, performance measurement is in a more mature state than 2008
- Libraries are:
 - using more diverse techniques to assess activities and using the results to directly improve services
 - anticipating user feedback by proactively involving users in service provision from the planning stages
 - developing infrastructure that includes performance measurement as a priority
 - driving decision-making by considering user's needs as paramount

However...

- Support for PM training and development is needed - national guidelines or checklist supported by organisation such as SCOUNL
- All libraries should look to align their aims and objectives with that of their institution so PM can be more effectively targeted and prove value more easily
- Collaboration is key:
 - with users, to ensure facilities best meet their needs and expectations
 - with other departments, to embed PM in the culture and allow more meaningful measures of library impact to be explored
 - with other libraries, to push the discipline forward and ensure that PM becomes a mainstream concern, rather than the preserve of the few

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Questions?

