



Effective decision making for academic library opening hours: Summary Report

by

Dr Clare Ravenwood and Dr Derek Stephens

Centre for Information Management

Loughborough University

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sbe/research/centres/cim/>

Executive Summary

This is a summary report of research performed by Dr Derek Stephens and Dr Clare Ravenwood from the Centre for Information Management at Loughborough University, on decision making on opening hours in academic libraries in the UK. A survey was conducted of UK Higher Education institutions, of which sixty responded.

The findings indicate that twenty four hour opening is used in particular to provide access to IT facilities and a safe place for students to study. The majority of the libraries that responded vary their opening hours throughout the academic year, although there were a wide variety of patterns, and most review their opening hours every year. Many have some form of extended opening hours, including 24 hour access, especially during exam periods.

Decisions on opening hours are taken in the main by senior library managers but input from a range of stakeholders was indicated. There are multiple sources of pressure on decision making, but the most important are those which relate to costs; management information, indicating the importance of gathering it; a political need to be seen to support students as much as possible to benefit both the library and the institution; and to fulfil the actual needs and demands of undergraduates in particular.

Further analysis of the results from the survey is required and this will be published at a later date.

Contents

Executive Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. Current opening hours.....	1
3. Attitudes.....	2
4. Reasons for 24 hour opening.....	3
5. Influential factors in decision making	4
6. Conclusions	5
Appendix 1 List of participating institutions.....	7
Appendix 2 Survey and responses.....	9
Table 1 Reasons for 24 hour opening.....	3
Table 2 Highest ranked factors in decision making	4
Table 3 Participating institutions	7

Contact: Dr Clare Ravenwood
j.c.f.ravenwood@lboro.ac.uk

1. Introduction

There are many complex and contradictory pressures on academic libraries which affect decisions by senior managers to provide access to library buildings for staff and students beyond 'normal' office style opening hours. These pressures and the process of decision making in UK academic libraries have up to now been little examined, an omission which this project aims to address.

This report provides a brief overview of the results from an online survey compiled by Dr Derek Stephens and Dr Clare Ravenwood from the Centre for Information Management (CIM) at Loughborough University. The survey of UK academic libraries focused on assessing the form of the influences on decision making, specifically asking questions about who makes the decisions, potential reasons for 24 hour opening and the influential factors that are taken into account when decisions are made. Respondents were also asked to comment further on the questions and their own answers. The response rate to the request to take part in the survey was very positive, with sixty academic libraries represented, thus including the views of a broad range of institutions from across the UK and Ireland. We are very grateful to those who took the time to complete the survey.

This report will provide initial comment on the results, with a view to a further more in depth analysis to be published later in the literature. A full list of participating institutions can be found in appendix 1. The survey itself along with the raw quantitative results for each question is in appendix 2.

2. Current opening hours

Current opening hours are varied, with many different patterns in evidence. From those that supplied the information, which was almost all respondents, only nine had 24/7 opening all or most of the year. Many more (24) have partial 24/7 opening for part of the year, in particular during exam times, or during terms or semesters. Virtually all of those not opening 24/7 all year round had shorter opening hours during university holidays, especially between June and September. Many of those institutions who mentioned having more than one library have separate opening hours for each library; this often seems to depend on size. Opening hours at the weekend usually vary from during the week, indicating that many libraries focus on providing longer access during the 'working week'.

Unsurprisingly senior library managers were the most likely to be involved in decisions about opening hours, often as part of a team. Input from buildings management, university management and security was also indicated. Some respondents were at pains to point out that students were involved in decision making, though usually this seems to be indirectly, although a few mentioned including them directly in discussions.

Alongside the evidence sources mentioned in question 5, where every institution mentioned gathering evidence to support their decisions, other sources of evidence were identified. Changes to timetables, evidence from internal student surveys or discussion groups, or from library staff were all cited. The majority of libraries reviewed their opening hours, with 76.4% reviewing them in the last year, and often on a continuous or at least on a regular basis. The five that reported not reviewing their hours said the reason for this was because they were satisfied with them as they are. Reviews were overwhelmingly prompted by feedback from students, although pressure from budgets, benchmarking against other universities, prompts from senior university figures and changes to the university calendar or strategy were all mentioned.

3. Attitudes

Questions 7 to 10 focused on what the respondents felt about opening hours and 24/7 opening. All but one of the respondents felt that library opening hours are of strategic importance. The decision was felt to be complex by 48.3%, whilst conversely 43.3% felt that it was not. Those that did not agree that it is a complex decision in the main explained this by saying that because of student pressure or directives from senior University staff the decision was straightforward, although acquiring the appropriate funding was not.

Many reasons for added complexity in decision making were mentioned in terms of extra factors to be taken into consideration, which echo responses to later questions. Extra factors that increase complexity include:

- having more than one library to consider
- consistency in opening hours across sites seems to be desirable, but not always possible
- high demand from students for 24 hour opening without corresponding occupancy levels
 - students are seen as liking the principle of 24/7 without commitment to use facilities in this way
- the library as a place, or space, where students can use the library as an escape from noisy living spaces

- the needs of international students, though the reasons for this are not always made clear
- concern for the welfare of students
- the PR benefit of longer opening hours.

4. Reasons for 24 hour opening

By comparing the means from question 11 (a-i) it is possible to rank the suggested reasons for opening 24 hours in order of importance, with the lowest mean indicating the highest ranking due to the way the questions were constructed. These are shown in table 1:

Table 1 Reasons for 24 hour opening

Factor	Mean	rank	N=
Allowing access to ICT facilities	1.4	1	60
Provides access to a quiet environment	1.5	=2	60
The hours fit in with students' other work-life commitments	1.5	=2	60
Provides access to a safe environment	1.6	4	60
Allowing access to books and other printed material	1.8	5	60
Enhances library marketing	2.6	=6	60
Gives students somewhere to meet	2.8	8	60
Provides access to library staff support	3.0	9	60
Access to catering facilities	2.6	=6	60

The relative importance of these reasons may reflect the perception of the role of the library in the life of the (undergraduate) student as a safe, quiet place to access learning resources. Examination of the comments for this section where respondents were invited to give other reasons for 24 hour opening is also revealing. In addition to reiterations of (international) student need and provision of a quiet safe environment, the comments focus on two further themes: competitive advantage and comparison to other institutions, and maximising investment in library buildings and resources. These indicate that there is a strong 'political' aspect to 24 hour opening; the desire to maximise investment helps to justify investment to the university. The library is unsurprisingly seen as part of the university offering, which creates an opportunity to

position the library at the heart of the student experience and demonstrate its importance to university managers. The library can impress parents and students by being seen to be addressing student demands proactively and to a greater extent than other comparable institutions.

5. Influential factors in decision making

The top ten highest ranked factors are shown in table 2:

Table 2 Highest ranked factors in decision making

Factor	Mean	Rank	N=
Demand from undergraduates	1.3	=1	60
Exam revision periods	1.3	=1	58
Maintaining appropriate opening hours across multiple site libraries	1.5	3	41
Demand from student union	1.6	=4	60
National Student Survey performance	1.6	=4	60
Expectations from full fees (the student experience)	1.6	=4	58
Cost constraints/budget	1.7	=7	60
Library as safe place	1.7	=7	60
Providing security staff for the library	1.8	9	60
Demand from postgraduates	1.9	=10	60
Estimated or actual 'take up' figures / evidence of use / management information	1.9	=10	60
The library as part of the university offering (i.e. Viewing the institution holistically)	1.9	=10	60
Security of users to and from the library	1.9	=10	58

The importance of these factors echoes the reasons for added complexity in decision making given in section 3. As is immediately clear, the most important concern is for undergraduates and satisfying their needs and this was emphasised in the comments given in this section. Two thirds of respondents indicated in question 2 that they were responsible for more than one library, and it seems likely that it is these that consider maintaining appropriate opening hours across

multiple sites to be an important factor in decision making. Security is also very important, both security of users and in providing security staff; many comments explained that security is provided through external security companies or campus security. This also in part explains the finding that staff work life balance is only ranked =23 (along with 'physical characteristics of the library building'), as staff contracts have in the main not been changed but extra staff, often non-library or non-library professional, are employed during unsocial hours instead. The other lowest ranked factors are:

Table 3 Lowest ranked factors in decision making

Factor	Mean	Rank	N=
Availability of transport to and from the library	2.8	25	57
Limiting carbon footprint / environmental concerns	2.9	26	60
Demand from academics	3.1	=27	60
Potential for inappropriate use of the library	3.1	=27	59
Preparing students for future working hours	3.6	29	59

Comments included the recognition that although the 'green' agenda has been important, and some libraries are making improvements to buildings for example to contribute towards this, the expectations of students must be considered first.

Question 20 asked if there were other factors not include in previous questions which affected decision making. These emphasised many of the factors previously identified, such as costs, student well being and the availability of the library in relation to the availability of other campus facilities.

6. Conclusions

Decisions on library opening hours touch on many aspects of the role of the library, fulfilling student expectations and positioning the library at the heart of the university in the perception of university management, students and their parents. The focus is very much on satisfying undergraduate students and there is a growing recognition of the importance of international students. Decision making can be complicated by a number of factors, such as having multiple libraries in one institution, but the majority of libraries are providing some form of extended opening to satisfy the demands from undergraduates. These demands are clearly felt through multiple channels.

Further analysis of the responses will be undertaken and at least one academic paper based on this data will be forthcoming.






Appendix 1 List of participating institutions

Table 3 Participating institutions







Anglia Ruskin University
Arts University Bournemouth
Bath Spa University
Birkbeck, University of London
Bishop Grosseteste University
Brunel
Cardiff Metropolitan University
Cardiff University
De Montfort University
Durham University
Falmouth University
Glasgow Caledonian University
Heriot Watt University
Kingston University
Leeds College of Art
Liverpool Hope University
Liverpool John Moores University
London Metropolitan University
London School of Economics and Political Science
Loughborough University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Middlesex
National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Newcastle University
Plymouth University
Robert Gordon University
Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance
Royal Agricultural University
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
Royal Holloway University of London
Southampton Solent
The University of Lincoln
University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Buckingham
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chichester
University of Cumbria
University of Derby
University of East Anglia








University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of Greenwich
University of Huddersfield
University of Leeds
University of Liverpool
University of Reading
University of Roehampton
University of Salford
University of Southampton
University of St Mark & St John
University of Strathclyde
University of Sussex
University of the West of Scotland
University of Ulster
University of Warwick
University of Westminster
University of Wolverhampton
University of York







Appendix 2 Survey and responses

Number of respondents: 60			
2. How many libraries does your institution have?			
1:		33.3%	20
2:		15.0%	9
3:		23.3%	14
4:		13.3%	8
5 or more:		15.0%	9














Section 2: Current opening hours

3. What are the current opening hours for your library (or libraries)?			
4. Who was involved in deciding these opening hours (if known)?			
A library committee:		n/a	19
A senior library manager:		n/a	52
Facilities or buildings management:		n/a	16
Security:		n/a	15
Senior university managers:		n/a	28
Other (please specify):		n/a	22



















5. What evidence do you gather in order to inform the decision making on your library opening hours?			
Ad-hoc feedback from users:		n/a	50
Benchmarking against other universities:		n/a	44
Feedback from the Student Union:		n/a	52
Occupancy figures:		n/a	46
The National Student Survey:		n/a	39
User surveys:		n/a	47
Evidence not gathered:		n/a	0
Other (please specify):		n/a	22


















6. Are the opening hours of your library (libraries) reviewed?			
Yes:		91.7%	55
No:		8.3%	5
6.a. How often are the opening hours of your library (libraries) reviewed?			
In the last year:		76.4%	42
More than one year but less than two:		7.3%	4
Over two years:		3.6%	2
Other (please specify):		12.7%	7
6.b. What prompts a review of the opening hours of your library (libraries)?			
6.c. Why are the opening hours of your library (libraries) not reviewed?			

Section 3: Attitudes




















7. In the digital age library opening hours are of little strategic importance.			
Strongly disagree:		63.3%	38
Disagree:		35.0%	21
Neither agree nor disagree:		1.7%	1
Agree:		0.0%	0
Strongly agree:		0.0%	0
8. It is a complex process to decide library opening hours.			
Strongly disagree:		13.3%	8
Disagree:		30.0%	18
Neither agree nor disagree:		8.3%	5
Agree:		35.0%	21
Strongly agree:		13.3%	8
9. There is pressure to have the university library (libraries) open 24/7 all year round.			
Strongly disagree:		1.7%	1
Disagree:		18.3%	11
Neither agree nor disagree:		6.7%	4
Agree:		48.3%	29
Strongly agree:		25.0%	15
10. Please add any comments you would like to make about these statements.			






















Section 4: 24 hour opening
























11. The following reasons have been suggested for having extended library opening hours (including 24 hour opening). How important do you think they are?			
11.a. Access to catering facilities – Importance			
Very important:		3.3%	2
Important:		15.0%	9
Moderately important:		26.7%	16
Of low importance:		20.0%	12
Unimportant:		13.3%	8
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		21.7%	13
11.b. Allowing access to books and other printed resources – Importance			
Very important:		38.3%	23
Important:		45.0%	27
Moderately important:		16.7%	10
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.c. Allowing access to ICT facilities – Importance			
Very important:		65.0%	39
Important:		30.0%	18
Moderately important:		5.0%	3
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.d. Enhances library marketing – Importance			
Very important:		6.7%	4
Important:		43.3%	26
Moderately important:		36.7%	22
Of low importance:		13.3%	8
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.e. Gives students somewhere to meet – Importance			
Very important:		6.7%	4
Important:		40.0%	24



























Moderately important:		33.3%	20
Of low importance:		11.7%	7
Unimportant:		8.3%	5
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.f. Provides access to library staff support – Importance			
Very important:		5.0%	3
Important:		18.3%	11
Moderately important:		50.0%	30
Of low importance:		21.7%	13
Unimportant:		5.0%	3
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.g. Provides access to a quiet environment – Importance			
Very important:		56.7%	34
Important:		40.0%	24
Moderately important:		3.3%	2
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.h. Provides access to a safe environment – Importance			
Very important:		51.7%	31
Important:		41.7%	25
Moderately important:		6.7%	4
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
11.i. The hours fit in with students' other work-life commitments – Importance			
Very important:		61.7%	37
Important:		26.7%	16
Moderately important:		11.7%	7
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
12. Are there any other reasons for opening university libraries for 24 hours a day that you think are important?			

























Section 5: Influential factors



















13. How important are the influencing factors below, which relate to users, in deciding opening hours in your library (libraries)?			
13.a. Demand from academic staff – Importance of factor			
Very important:		5.0%	3
Important:		25.0%	15
Moderately important:		31.7%	19
Of low importance:		33.3%	20
Unimportant:		5.0%	3
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
13.b. Demand from postgraduates – Importance of factor			
Very important:		38.3%	23
Important:		38.3%	23
Moderately important:		16.7%	10
Of low importance:		6.7%	4
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
13.c. Demand from researchers – Importance of factor			
Very important:		15.0%	9
Important:		36.7%	22
Moderately important:		25.0%	15
Of low importance:		21.7%	13
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		1.7%	1
13.d. Demand from undergraduates – Importance of factor			
Very important:		75.0%	45
Important:		23.3%	14
Moderately important:		1.7%	1
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
13.e. Demand from the student union – Importance of factor			
Very important:		48.3%	29
Important:		45.0%	27












Moderately important:		6.7%	4
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
13.f. Exam revision periods – Importance of factor			
Very important:		73.3%	44
Important:		20.0%	12
Moderately important:		1.7%	1
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		3.3%	2
13.g. Expectations from full fees (the student experience) – Importance of factor			
Very important:		45.0%	27
Important:		40.0%	24
Moderately important:		10.0%	6
Of low importance:		1.7%	1
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		3.3%	2
13.h. Preparing students for future working hours – Importance of factor			
Very important:		0.0%	0
Important:		11.7%	7
Moderately important:		26.7%	16
Of low importance:		45.0%	27
Unimportant:		15.0%	9
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		1.7%	1
13.i. Work-life balance for library users – Importance of factor			
Very important:		15.0%	9
Important:		36.7%	22
Moderately important:		31.7%	19
Of low importance:		15.0%	9
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
14. Are there any comments you would like to make about these factors?			

15. How important are the influencing factors below, which relate to library operations, in deciding opening hours in your library (libraries)?			
15.a. Cleaning the library – Importance of factor			
Very important:		25.0%	15
Important:		35.0%	21
Moderately important:		21.7%	13
Of low importance:		10.0%	6
Unimportant:		8.3%	5
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
15.b. Cost constraints/budget – Importance of factor			
Very important:		51.7%	31
Important:		38.3%	23
Moderately important:		3.3%	2
Of low importance:		3.3%	2
Unimportant:		3.3%	2
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
15.c. Effective library marketing -- Importance of factor			
Very important:		10.0%	6
Important:		36.7%	22
Moderately important:		43.3%	26
Of low importance:		8.3%	5
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
15.d. Providing standard patterns of opening – Importance of factor			
Very important:		20.0%	12
Important:		51.7%	31
Moderately important:		21.7%	13
Of low importance:		5.0%	3
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
15.e. Estimated or actual 'take up' figures/ evidence of use/ Management Information -- Importance of factor			
Very important:		43.3%	26
Important:		31.7%	19
Moderately important:		21.7%	13

Of low importance:		3.3%	2
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
15.f. Maintaining appropriate opening across multiple site libraries – Importance of factor			
Very important:		18.3%	11
Important:		28.3%	17
Moderately important:		13.3%	8
Of low importance:		5.0%	3
Unimportant:		3.3%	2
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		31.7%	19
15.g. Physical characteristics of the library building – Importance of factor			
Very important:		13.3%	8
Important:		36.7%	22
Moderately important:		26.7%	16
Of low importance:		10.0%	6
Unimportant:		10.0%	6
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		3.3%	2
15.h. Potential for inappropriate use of the library – Importance of factor			
Very important:		11.7%	7
Important:		13.3%	8
Moderately important:		31.7%	19
Of low importance:		28.3%	17
Unimportant:		13.3%	8
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		1.7%	1
15.i. Providing security staff for the library – Importance of factor			
Very important:		46.7%	28
Important:		30.0%	18
Moderately important:		11.7%	7
Of low importance:		6.7%	4
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		3.3%	2
15.j. The library as a 'safe' place – Importance of factor			
Very important:		41.7%	25

Important:		48.3%	29
Moderately important:		8.3%	5
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
15.k. Work-life balance for library staff -- Importance of factor			
Very important:		10.0%	6
Important:		28.3%	17
Moderately important:		38.3%	23
Of low importance:		16.7%	10
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		5.0%	3
16. Are there any comments you would like to make about these factors?			
17. How important are the influencing factors below, which relate to the institution, in deciding opening hours in your library (libraries)?			
17.a. Availability of transport to and from the library -- Importance of factor			
Very important:		8.3%	5
Important:		35.0%	21
Moderately important:		23.3%	14
Of low importance:		13.3%	8
Unimportant:		15.0%	9
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		5.0%	3
17.b. Demand from university management -- Importance of factor			
Very important:		26.7%	16
Important:		46.7%	28
Moderately important:		18.3%	11
Of low importance:		6.7%	4
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
17.c. Effective university marketing -- Importance of factor			
Very important:		10.0%	6
Important:		48.3%	29
Moderately important:		30.0%	18
Of low importance:		11.7%	7

Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
17.d. National Student Survey performance – Importance of factor			
Very important:		51.7%	31
Important:		40.0%	24
Moderately important:		8.3%	5
Of low importance:		0.0%	0
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
17.e. Security of the campus – Importance of factor			
Very important:		28.3%	17
Important:		43.3%	26
Moderately important:		21.7%	13
Of low importance:		6.7%	4
Unimportant:		0.0%	0
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
17.f. Security of users to and from the library – Importance of factor			
Very important:		35.0%	21
Important:		38.3%	23
Moderately important:		18.3%	11
Of low importance:		3.3%	2
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		3.3%	2
17.g. The library as part of the university offering (i.e. viewing the institution holistically) – Importance of factor			
Very important:		36.7%	22
Important:		45.0%	27
Moderately important:		13.3%	8
Of low importance:		3.3%	2
Unimportant:		1.7%	1
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
18. Are there any comments you would like to make about these factors?			
19. How important are the influencing factors below, which relate to the wider societal context, in deciding opening hours in your library (libraries)?			

19.a. Limiting carbon footprint/environmental concerns – Importance of factor			
Very important:		6.7%	4
Important:		26.7%	16
Moderately important:		38.3%	23
Of low importance:		23.3%	14
Unimportant:		5.0%	3
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		0.0%	0
19.b. The 24 hour culture – Importance of factor			
Very important:		18.3%	11
Important:		40.0%	24
Moderately important:		25.0%	15
Of low importance:		11.7%	7
Unimportant:		3.3%	2
Irrelevant to my library (libraries):		1.7%	1

20. Are there any comments you would like to make about these factors?

21. Are there any other factors which you think are important when considering library opening hours that have not been mentioned?