

The Illusory Holy Grail

Comprehensive mixed-methodology assessment is no better than using a single method; A case-study on the 21st-Century Science Library

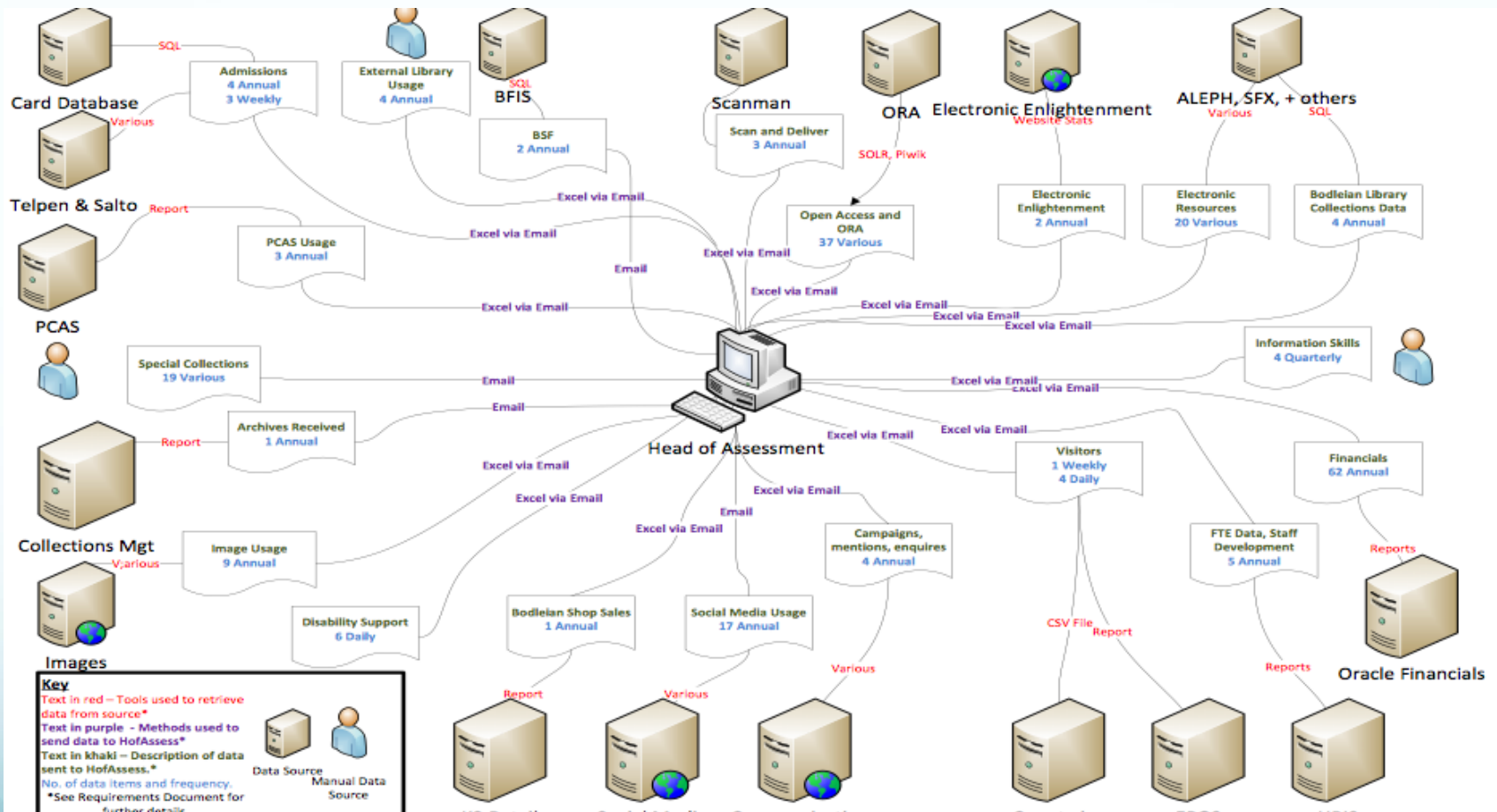
Research question

- In a 21st Century research-intensive university, is there a need for a physical library to support science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine teaching, learning and research?
- Results:
 - Answer to the research question (yes)
 - Reflection on the different methodologies used to answer the question

Background to the research

- Philanthropic funding to undertake research into “The 21st Century Library”
 - Future physical library needs at University of Oxford
- Bequest to redevelop Radcliffe Science Library
- Review of Library funding model
“We don’t need a physical science library – undergraduates study in College; everyone else uses only online resources in their office/lab”

Assessment at the Bodleian



Money can't buy you love ...

- Entry data and headcount
- Free-text LibQual+ comments
- Literature review
- Survey
- Focus groups
- UX



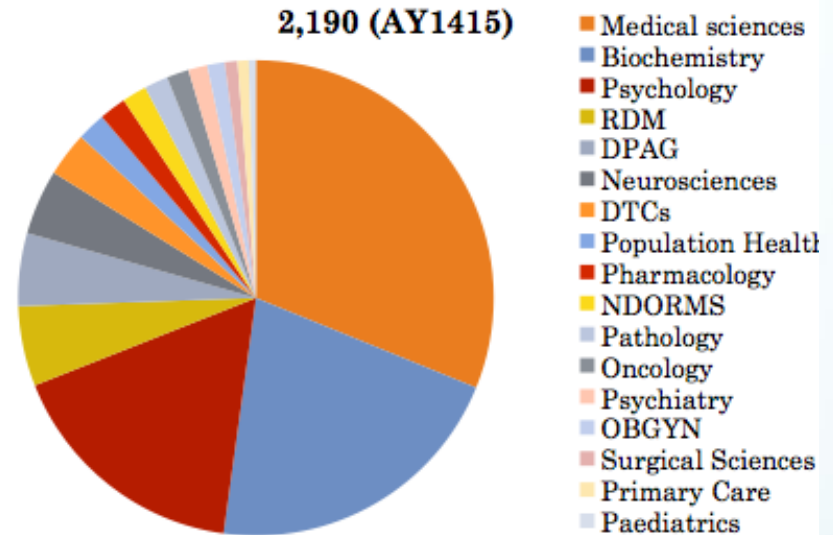
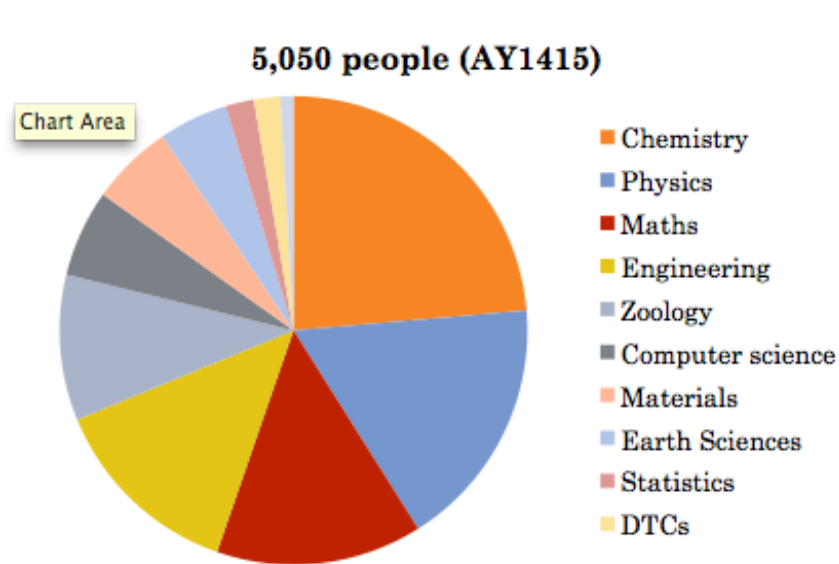
Entry & headcount data

- Analysis of gate entry (swipe card) data
 - By-product of access control system
- Existing data, re-analysed
- Headcount data collected on 24 occasion per year (2 x day; 2 x week; 2 x term) for SCONUL Annual Library Statistics

Results – Entry data

MSD USE THE RSL

MPLS USE THE RSL



- 69% of users of the RSL are from the MPLS and MS Divisions.
- 80% of the science student cohort use the RSL each year
- 96% of the science student cohort use the RSL during their programme
- 10% of student users each Academic Year never visit again

Headcount

11:30	15:00
63	99
63	80
61	92
41	44
80	84
38	43
105	121

LibQUAL+ comments

- 2012 survey
- Existing data, re-analysed

Results

- Dislike the basement – lack of natural light
- Uncomfortable (too hot upstairs; too cold in basement; hard chairs)
- Not enough seats
- Not enough copies of textbooks
- Better copying / scanning / printing

Literature review

- Literature review:
 - Evolving library spaces
 - Future science research practices
 - Future science teaching practices
- Design review
 - New & recently renovated libraries

Results

- Physical library and librarians perceived as decreasing importance in research support
- Peers important to researchers for current awareness – FOMO
- Physical books still play a large part in teaching
- Increasing amounts of inter-disciplinary / cross-disciplinary / cross-institutional research
- Future challenges Research Data Management, knowledge management, Open Access.
- Physical science libraries not dying out – investment in new buildings

Survey

- “Let’s Talk about the Radcliffe Science Library”
- Online survey of members of the Mathematical, Physical & Life Sciences (MPLS) and Medical Sciences (MSD) Divisions
- Qs: Frequency of use; purpose of use; likes & dislikes
- Distributed by email via departmental administrators
- 368 returns

Results

- 68% of students who use the RSL do so as a study space:
 - 31% as a destination study space (93% PGT)
 - 37% to borrow books, but also as a study space
- 21% students who use the RSL do so only to borrow books.
- One-time users visit for an information skills class; a print journal (can't get online); a rare book.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Books	22%	55%	77%
Studying	78%	45%	23%

- Hate the basement “Dungeon” – cramped and cold
- Confusing layout
- Nowhere to eat own food / buy food & drink / relax
- Not enough textbooks

Focus groups

- Focus groups with 31 students from MPLS and MSD
- Recruited via email (via departmental administrators), posters in departments, and via departmental weekly newsletters.
 - Self-selecting
 - Voucher
 - Lunchtime – pizza
- 6 pseudo-focus groups with academic staff at Departmental meetings.

Results

- Students need a physical science library:
 - Room has distractions
 - College library not right environment
 - Noisy
 - Social – distracting
 - Too busy
 - Humanities-focussed
 - College not have books
 - Too old
 - Not enough copies
 - College too far from department to ‘pop in’

- Students use both physical and online resources:
 - Textbooks (prefer physical to ebooks)
 - E-journal articles
 - Referencing software
 - Subject-specific resources:
 - Course notes (Computer Science)
 - Grey literature (zoology)
 - Anatomical models (medicine)
 - Printing & scanning
 - Librarians – help locate & use literature
 - Large / dual screens

- Students want the RSL to:
 - Be quiet
 - Be welcoming
 - Be comfortable (temperature, light, ventilation, ergonomic furniture, water, nice toilets)
 - Have desks appropriate for work (large desks usually; small individual desks for revision)
 - Have excellent IT
 - Facilitate working alongside peers – companionable silence
 - Enable them to stay all day (café, lockers, lounge)
 - Be accessible (wheelchair use; standing desks)

UX

- How people actually behave in a space and their emotional response to the space
- Anthropological techniques:
 - Observation (14 periods over 8 locations)
 - Journey mapping
 - Touchstone tours
 - Love letters / break-up letters
 - Interviews – structured and unstructured
- Conducted by another university library as part of a reciprocal project.

Results

- Work silently – both alone and in groups
- Use laptops and paper which spread across tables
- Feel safe in the space
- Social spaces little used – need better catering
- Wayfinding and locating basic facilities a challenge
- Hate the basement
- Traffic through other floors disruptive, but like space and light
- Not enough books

Conclusions (1)

- In a 21st Century research-intensive university, is there a need for a physical library to support science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine teaching, learning and research?

YES

Conclusions (2)

- Survey OR Focus Groups OR UX = same understanding
- Quantitative data added additional context
- Literature review inform question design

BUT ...

Letter writing exercise



“I’ve not found you to be an inviting host beyond your stately exterior”

“when I go to the bathroom it feels confusing as if I’m doing it for the very first time”

“The Abbot’s Kitchen corner is truly awful – I don’t really want to be eating my sandwich lurking next to the toilets”

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- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHFXG3r_0B8

Thank you

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