

Awards & Standards - Case Study

Oxford Brookes University Learning Resources

About the organization

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| Organisation: | Oxford Brookes University |
| Department: | Directorate of Learning Resources |
| Size: | 123 employees |
| Industry Sector: | Higher Education |

Oxford Brookes University's Directorate of Learning Resources (LR) encompasses the Library and the Media Workshop. It supports and enables learning both physically and virtually across the whole university for 18,000 students.

The University comprises 4 Faculties covering a wide range of subjects, at foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels. A significant proportion of students study part time. The University Library operates on three main sites. The largest library is on the Headington Campus and covers a wide range of disciplines. A new library and teaching building (the John Henry Brookes Building) is under construction on the main campus and is scheduled for phased occupation from September 2013, with the Headington Library relocating during the Christmas vacation. When this happens, it will replace the existing Headington Library, and all stock, staff and services will move to the new building. The Wheatley Library supports Business and Technology, and the Harcourt Hill Library supports Education, Philosophy and Religion.

Why choose the Customer First standard?

Oxford Brookes has long been involved in the Investors in People (IiP) award, becoming one of the first universities, as a whole, to be awarded the IiP Gold standard award. In 2011, the University decided to also work towards an award in customer care, particularly focussing on those services that will be located within the flagship John Henry Brookes Building. Of the various options available, Customer First was felt to be the most suitable and adaptable to the University's needs. Customer First provides a recognised framework for assessment and development that focuses on customer, or in the case of universities, student needs. To achieve accreditation, services have to be compliant across 30 different areas which include relationship management, communication and staff development.

Implementation

LR, Academic Management Office, Sports and OBIS (Oxford Brookes Information Solutions) Service Desk team were the four sections chosen to take part to pilot the process. The process will be reviewed once all pilot areas have completed the award and it is anticipated that ultimately all parts of the University will work to this award as with IIP.

There was an initial visit from a Customer First assessor, acting as a consultant to Brookes, who produced a report highlighting areas for development and suggestions for continuous improvement. A number of workshops to provide practical support to the four pilot services were held centrally and these encouraged the sharing of good practice across the participating areas.

LR work towards the standard began in January 2012. The LR Staff Development Group (LRSDG) was tasked to work on assessing library services against the standard's criteria. The group was made up of representatives from each of the library sites and Media Workshop. The overall aim was to evaluate customer services and to improve the student experience.

Preparation included assessing services against the standard and continuous reviewing of processes in the customer journey.

The formal assessment of LR took place over 3 days in mid-2012 when 10 people from various levels and sites were interviewed each day. There are three possible outcomes from assessments i.e. compliance (where all criteria have been met and the award is given for 2 years), partial compliance (where areas of improvement are suggested in the assessor's report with reassessment six months' later) and non-compliance (i.e. failure, which means starting the assessment process again from the beginning).

Involvement

There was a commitment of staff time to work towards the standard and the LRSDG met monthly to plan and review the criteria and its documentation. The LRSDG Chair, Claire Jeffery, coordinated and prepared the submission documentation for the Customer First assessment. For LR, the submission process as a whole took approximately one year.

What were the benefits?

The Customer First award demonstrates LR's achievements in customer care and provides a mechanism for ensuring that processes enhance the student experience. At the same time that LR was working towards gaining the standard it was emerging from a de-convergence process and was working on defining its future vision and strategy as a new directorate. The Customer First process certainly helped to sharpen the focus of this work and provided invaluable pointers to help progress towards the development of the LR strategy.

Customer First Assessor highlighted:

LR staff as "welcoming, friendly, keen to be supportive and genuinely committed".

"The commitment to do the best job they can identified in the assessment report of August 2012 did lead to the team embracing the development areas and full compliance with the Customer First Standard has been achieved. Congratulations."