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Charging for external users

J. Adam Edwards

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Library sectors covered by research

Academic

Reasons for carrying out the survey

Central School of Speech and Drama runs the International Centre for Voice (ICV). The ICV wish to offer library borrowing as part of the full membership fee. CSSD library is happy to agree, as it will receive extra books funded by the ICV. ICV looked at competitor organisations and feel that a fee of around £40.00 would be viable. This is less than our current Alumni rate for external membership, so, in order not to give an unfair advantage to the graduates from our MA Voice Studies course that would qualify to join ICV, we proposed reducing our fee to match. Like most of the responses to this survey, our current fee had been derived by looking at what other libraries charged. Our Deputy Principal asked for calculations to show what the Library costs are as evidence to show the auditors. The School is quite happy for the price to be a loss leader if this can be justified.

How the research was carried out (including lists to which any survey was posted):

Emails were sent to both lis-sconul and lis-link asking for formulae used elsewhere.

Questions asked

Has anyone worked out a costing for external membership rather than looking at other libraries charges and coming up with a similar figure?

Number of responses

Several from libraries who simply match what other nearby libraries do. One formula came from the University of Bath.

Results & conclusions

University of Bath responded to my email as follows:

We find that on average external usage rates track full-time on-site undergraduate student usage rates at around 25%. We know that our current funding is about £350 per FTE u/g student, so use this as a very crude yardstick in considering the level of external fees. Of course, there are enormous differences according to level of study and subject, but some of these are likely to be subsumed within your fixed costs to provide a service for your own users. But I would give you a completely different figure if you asked me to quote for a per capita ticket for a drug company's researchers using this Library, obviously.

The real consideration is are you charging to encourage or deter take up? The level of fee should be set accordingly.

Howard Nicholson

This idea prompted me to look at the numbers of different borrowers we have and the borrowing use of the library. Given that we need a simple measure of library use and given that the use is likely to involve staff time in helping an unfamiliar user, my formula is:

(Library budget inc. staff and materials /
Number of issues) x Mean issues per external
user

For CSSD this is £111,704 / 44071 = £2.53 per
issue x (119/5) = 23.8

This gives a membership fee of £60.21 per
annum.

Clearly basing the calculation purely on issues is very simplistic, but at least gives a basic model. Other suggestions are welcomed.

How the results affected the practice in your library

We changed the External Membership rates to:

- £40.00 inc. VAT for Alumni and ICV members and
- £100.00 inc. VAT for other externals

Is a full report available?

No. However, the author can be contacted via email: a.edwards@cssd.ac.uk