

**24/7 opening at Loughborough University Library in 2006/ 2007: levels/
nature of use and the student perspective**

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Executive summary

In the 2006/ 2007 academic year, Loughborough University Library piloted 24/7 opening between the 16th January and the 9th February 2007 and between the 7th May and the 22nd June 2007. Data was gathered from a range of sources to establish both the nature of use over the 24/7 opening and also how it was received by students. Regular head counts were completed identifying how many people were in the Library overnight. A short questionnaire with 351 responses was completed by people who used the Library during the extended opening.

The Library was busiest at midnight and the numbers gradually decreased during the night. The highest number of people recorded in the Library was just under 350. There was a higher level of use generally during the second period of 24/7. The main reason for people using the Library overnight was to have access to quiet study. A range of other services were also used including book borrowing and PC access. Students felt the Library was effective in providing an environment that supported study and where distractions were at a minimum. The majority of people spent between 1 and 3 hours in the Library overnight but some were in the building for over 6 hours at any one time.

General comments focused on difficulties encountered when using the Library 24/7, the need to increase the 24/7 opening beyond the revision and examination period and the value in the Library being open overnight. During the 2007/ 2008 academic year, the Library will repeat 24/7 opening over the same periods. This increase in opening has been so well received and popular that the Library will have to decide to what extent 24/7 should be extended throughout the rest of the academic terms.

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1. Introduction

In recent years there has been some indication that 24/7 opening at Loughborough University Library would be valued by students. Suggestions were made by users about extended opening hours and at University open days similar enquiries were made. 24/7 opening was also being provided in other East Midlands University Libraries. It was therefore decided to pilot 24/7 opening over the revision and exam periods in the 2006/ 2007 academic year. The Library was open 24/7 between the following dates:

- 16th January to the 9th February 2007
- 7th May to the 22nd June 2007

A private security company was used to staff the Library and no Library staff were available overnight. Various self service systems were in place to allow students to borrow/ return books and also use the photocopiers and printers. Several evaluation activities were undertaken to assess the nature of use made by students over the 24/7 extended opening. This report brings together the evidence to inform how the University Library takes forward 24/7 opening in the future.

2. Methodology

Various approaches were used to gather data. This included the data automatically generated from the gate counts of people entering the building in the 24/7 extended opening hours period and recording the number of books borrowed over night. Alongside this, regular head counts were recorded of people in the building at different times. A short survey (adapted from one used at Nottingham University Library) was also administered. This (Appendix 1, p. 4) ascertained when people came into the building, when they left it, why they used the Library over the extended opening and also their comments on the experience. There were a total of 351 returned questionnaires over the two extended opening periods. The data used in this report comes from the head counts and the survey.

3. Results

3.1 Numbers of students in the Library (Appendix 2, p. 5): For both time periods, the Library was busiest at midnight and the numbers gradually decreased during the night. There was no time during the extended opening when there were no students in the Library. There were generally more people in the Library during the second 24/7 opening period. The highest number recorded in the Library at any one time during the extended opening was just under 350.

3.2 Use made of various Library services and resources (Appendix 3, p. 6): There were very similar patterns in the services and resources used over the two 24/7 periods. The most heavily used service was quiet study space which is not surprising with it being the examination periods. Students also required access to other services and resources at the same time. On both occasions the demand for access to books was about the same as access to

PCs. This would indicate that at revision times, students do not just a physical space, they need access to resources as well.

3.3 Number of various Library services and resources used (Appendix 4, p. 7): Most students came in to use 1 or 2 services/ resources but others accessed over 6 services when in the building. If students just required access to a PC, then there would be an argument for only opening Level 3 of the Library. With the need for a range of resources and services, all three Levels therefore need to be accessible.

3.4 Length of visit to Library during extended 24/7 opening (Appendix 5, p. 8): The majority of students used the Library for between 1 and 3 hours on a visit. This length of visit underlines the importance of providing a comfortable environment with adequate heating, seating and refreshments.

3.5 Reasons identified by students for choosing to use the Library: Students were asked their reasons for using the Library other than accessing quiet study space, books, journals, PCs, photocopiers and other people. What emerges strongly from students' replies is that the Library is ideal for supplying an environment that supports study where there are limited distractions. The provision of printing facilities and refreshments is also significant. For some people, using the Library for their academic work is preferable overnight than it is during the day.

- *I work better in the evening/middle of night*
- *Nice place to work in an open study area*
- *Getting help from friends when needed, we can discuss.*

3.6 Students' comments on extended 24/7 opening: The comments from students can be divided into three categories: difficulties experienced, the need to extend 24/7 opening and general positive observations. Not having Library staff around meant that there was no back-up when the various self-service features did not function. The difficulties in accessing Library PCs by students were also replicated overnight. Some students also indicated they could not always find enough seating spaces. There were also many comments received about the need to extend the Library 24/7 opening beyond the exam and revision periods. The highest numbers of comments focussed on how positive students were about the Library being open 24/7.

- *It's really useful having 24 hr access to the library – I hope you consider this full time, or at least extend the opening hours, especially over the weekend*
- *Would like to see this service continued – maybe with some library staff on hand*
- *Thanks a billion for your services, I wish the Library was open 24 hours all year*
- *Very glad the library is open 24/7, it is very helpful to us night owls of Loughborough!*
- *24/7 is helpful as I can avoid congestion during the day*
- *Think having the Library open 24 hours is very helpful, it's quieter at night*

- *Having the library open 24/7 has helped my revision hugely*
- *24 hour access to the library definitely helps as you can work any time you need*

4. Conclusion

The 24/7 extended opening trial at Loughborough University has been very successful. The processes and systems established were effective and resulted in students encountering few problems. The major problem was ensuring the Library was tidy and clean. Various steps were taken to successfully ensure the Library was kept tidier in May and June 2007 than it was in January and February 2007.

As a pilot, it provided the evidence that the Library should be open for 24/7 over the 2007/ 2008 exam and revision periods. This will take place on the following dates:

- 14th January– 8th February 2008
- 5th May – 20th June 2008

It is likely that the extended opening hours will be present in future academic years. The challenge facing the Library is establishing whether 24/7 should be extended during other periods in term time.

Students were asked to indicate whether using the Library over night was a good or bad experience. Out of the 351 responses, 350 indicated that it was a good experience. This gives a clear message that the Library opening 24/7 is valued and appreciated by its student user community. The one person who found it a bad experience attributed this to the unavailability of a PC.

Appendix 1 Questionnaire used to gather feedback from students on 24/7 use

**24/ 7 Library opening: January – February 2007
Please help us plan future improvements to our service**

1. What time did you come in?

Before 10 pm	10-11	11-12	12-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8.30 am
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2. What time do you plan to leave?

Before 10 pm	10-11	11-12	12-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5
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5-6	6-7	7-8	After 8am
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3. Why did you use the library at this time? Please tick all that apply

Quiet study space	
Access to books	
Access to journals	
Access to PC	
Access to photocopiers	
To be around other people	
Other (please specify)	

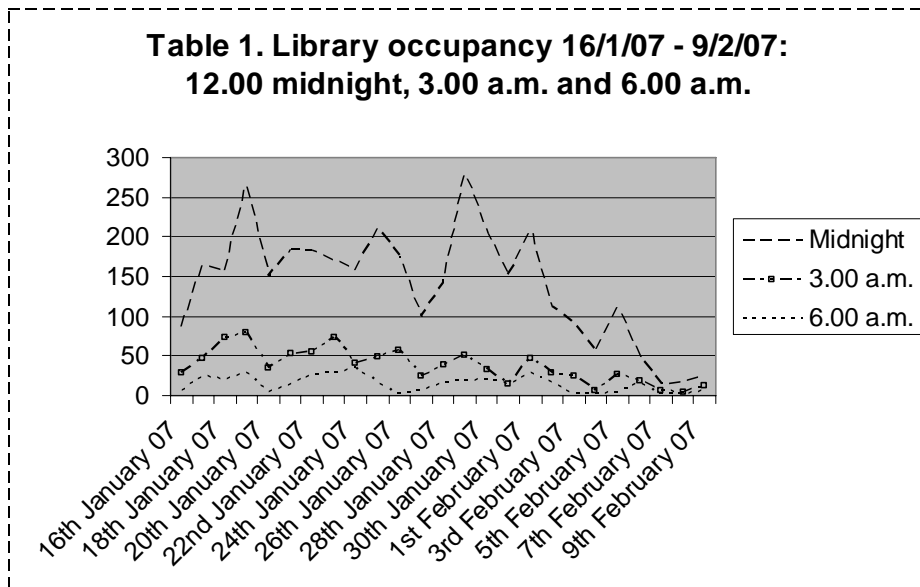
4. Have you found using the library at this time a good or bad experience?

Good	Bad
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5. Please comment on your experience

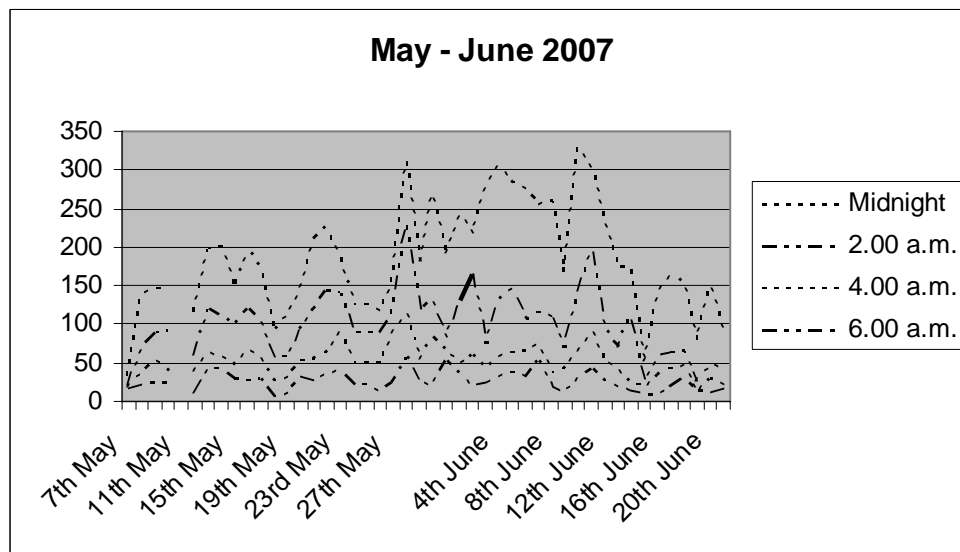
Appendix 2 Library occupancy during 24/7 extended opening

**Table 1. Library occupancy 16/1/07 - 9/2/07:
12.00 midnight, 3.00 a.m. and 6.00 a.m.**

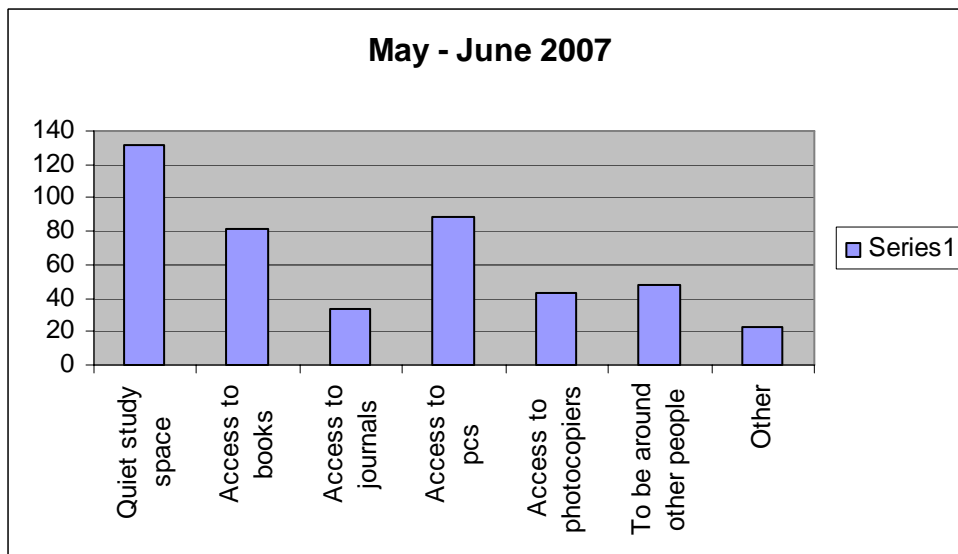
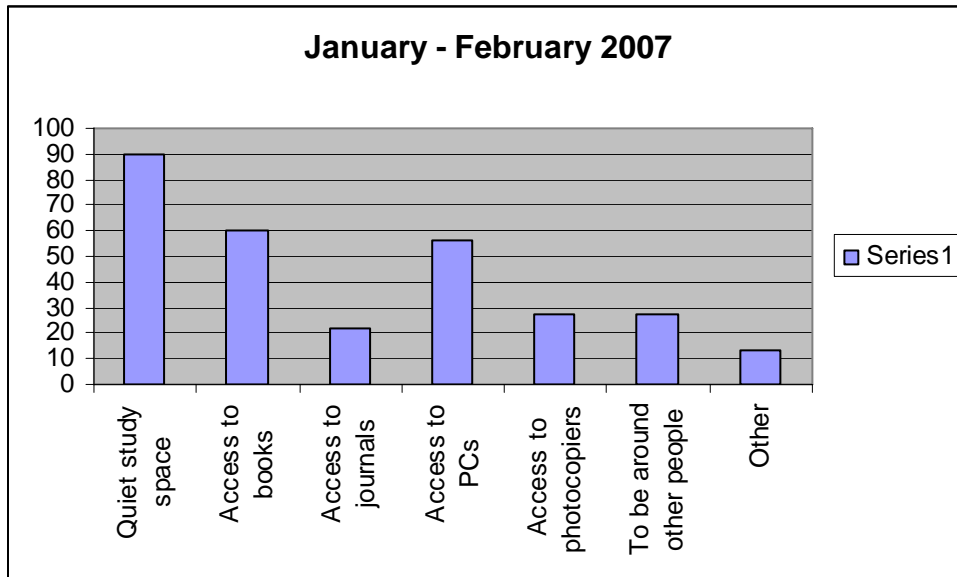


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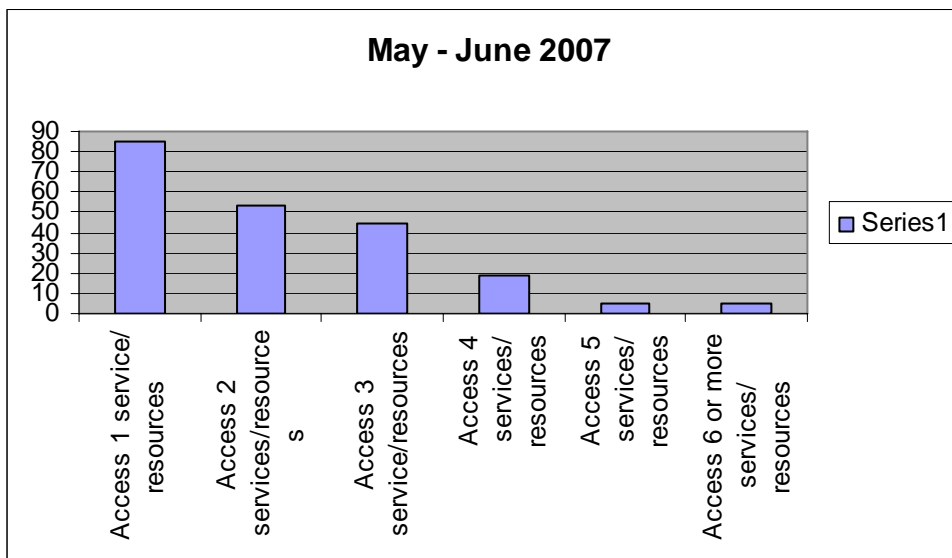
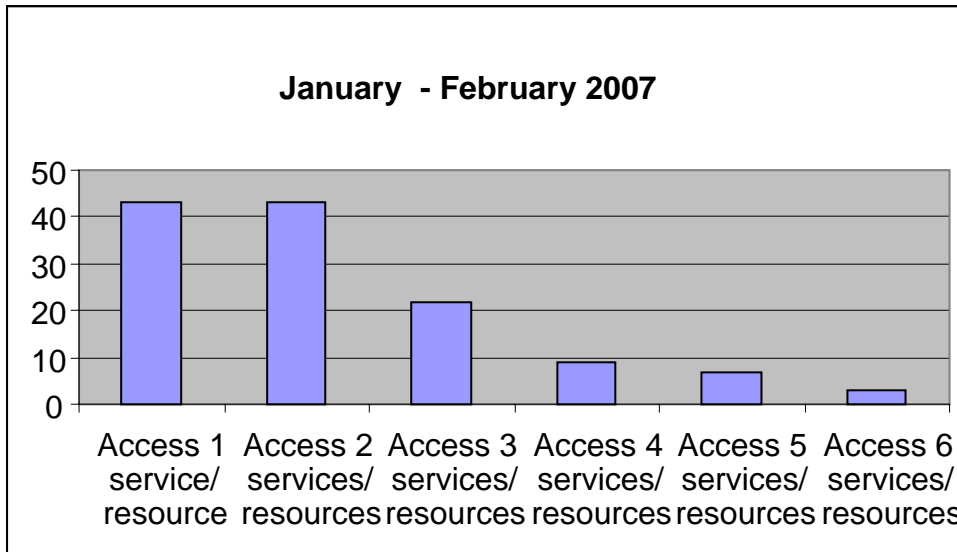
May - June 2007



Appendix 3: Use made of various Library services and resources during extended 24/7 opening



Appendix 4: Number of various Library services and resources used during extended 24/7 opening



Appendix 5: Length of visit to Library during extended 24/7 opening

