

Case Study 4: Norma Smurfit Library Libchat Service



National
College of
Ireland

Introduction and Context:

One of the main issues facing the Norma Smurfit Library was how to effectively support and maintain communication links with students and staff in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards. One of the resources we had access to was LibChat - part of the Springshare suite of online resources. LibChat software/facility was purchased as part of the Springshare products in 2019, in the main for the LibAnswers facility which the library used to manage a database of FAQ's for students/staff. We had started to look at the services we could offer via LibChat and had a test system in place. However, once Covid-19 Lockdown 1 occurred in March 2020, we moved LibChat to live student support and have done so ever since mainly on a 6 day per week basis, access hours differ depending on the time of the academic year - generally from 10am to 8pm. LibChat has since become an essential tool for the library in the support of students and staff accessing the services remotely.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

Communications Tools

To enhance communications, a library working group was setup on MS Teams by the Deputy Librarian, which became the main communication tool within the library staff team. Weekly library staff meetings were also held to canvass staff on how they were coping with working remotely, check on workflows and to discuss issues as they came up. Training on MS Teams was also delivered by the Application Support Analyst in NCI's IT Department. This was extremely useful in giving the library staff practical information on how to use MS Teams, and highlighted additional functionality such as the Shift App, which can be used for scheduling the IFSC Library timetable and for LibChat (virtual platform support).

Reference Enquiries

A comprehensive suite of online database and eBook platforms was already in place prelockdown, which certainly helped the initial transition to a fully online service. Students and staff were able to remotely browse databases and borrow eBooks, as they would always have done on campus. Students soon referred enquiries through LibChat or via library email, as if they were approaching the circulation desk in the Library. A noticeable drop in reference enquiries per day was seen throughout Lockdown 1, which was attributed to a range of factors including:

- The students were relying on resources they had already acquired from the library before lockdown
- They were relying on lecture notes/information from lecturers during lockdown via Moodle
- The Library had an established online presence in place and the move to largely digital footprint has been underway for a number of years [A-Z Library Resources](#) • The Library had invested in supporting student learning with a range of Library Subject Guides [NCI Library Online Guides](#)

LibChat

The LibChat service was introduced in March 2020. It allows users to start an instant chat with us by selecting the 'Ask us a question' button on the right of our [website](#), or when using our online resources a 'Do you need help?' pop-up box will appear. Library users are also able to send their questions anytime to LibAnswers via the library's FAQs section.

We received the greatest number of queries in April 2020, reaching 270 queries, followed by May 2020 with 208 queries received. The highest number of weekly queries we received was 83, during the week from April 20th to 26th. The most frequent queries related to eBooks (28%), followed by eJournals and articles (17%). Non-specified resources 15%; Referencing queries 9%; queries related to physical books/opening hours 8%; technical issues 10% and internal library team chats 2%.

Conclusion:

LibChat is now embedded as one of the core services which the Library will continue to offer to its users - students and staff - throughout and beyond the COVID environment. The ability to maximise and utilise existing tools such as the LibChat Software and MS Teams has been valuable in the ability to pivot communications internally and with users to a fully online environment. Library staff will continue to communicate via MS Teams in the main for library staff meetings, and Shift App via MS Teams will be used for Library Staff Scheduling, both for IFSC Library timetable and for LibChat (virtual platform support).

As a consequence of the Crisis and the different needs of users identified through LibChat discussions, the Library has upgraded a number of key digital resources. Business Source Complete was upgraded to Business Source Ultimate, which gave access to additional resources as well as the Harvard Extended Licence (which includes full access to Harvard top 500 articles). The Library has also subscribed to the newspaper database - International Newsstream - with print copies of newspapers cancelled.