

Case Study 5: Building on online LibChat success for successful student and staff Library communications



National
College of
Ireland

Introduction and Context:

One of the main issues facing the Norma Smurfit Library during the Covid-19 pandemic was how to effectively support and maintain communication links with students and staff. One of the resources we had access to was LibChat, which is part of the Springshare suite of online resources.

During the 2020-21 reporting period, we built on the success of LibChat in 2019-20 and introduced enhancements for students. We moved LibChat to live student support on a 6-day week basis. Access hours differ depending on the time of the academic year but are generally from 10 am to 8pm. Over the course of the 2021-22 reporting period, LibChat has since become an essential tool for the library in the support of students and staff accessing services remotely.

Summary of the Initiative:

As reported in the 2019-20 case-study, the LibChat service was introduced in March 2020. It allows users to start an instant chat with us by selecting the small speech bubble icon button on the bottom right of the Library website. The LibChat function also appears on our Discovery search page, and we added it to several of our online subject **LibGuides** to increase exposure. Library users are also able to send their questions anytime to **LibAnswers** via the library's FAQs section

Reference Enquiries

Students soon learned to refer enquiries about online databases and eBooks 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 the first Covid-19 Lockdown in semesters two and three of 2019/20, 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 several years [A-Z Library Resources](#)
- The Library had invested in supporting student learning with a range of Library Subject Guides [NCI Library Online Guides](#)

From September 2020 onwards, the number of queries fluctuated depending on different factors. Unsurprisingly, things got busier closer to exam time and particularly when the library introduced its Click & Collect service in October 2020 (receiving almost 1,200 requests from October 2020 to September 2021). Other unplanned events such as the NCI IT outage in April 2021 led to a high number of queries around this time.

Key Findings and Impact:

During February, March and April 2021, the Library saw an average of 303 LibChats per month. Just beyond the current reporting period (moving into academic year 2021/22), we have observed a drop in the average to 167 chats per month. This is attributable to increased library open-hours (in-person) but also to the reality that students have become more used to and adept at using online resources, therefore requiring less assistance from Library staff.

Of the three main means of communication available to students (LibChat, the LibAnswers FAQ system, and the library email) LibChat accounts for around 84% of queries. The most frequent queries relate to Accessing/finding online resources (39%), followed by eBook availability (14%). Other regular chat queries related to referencing (10%), Login difficulties/error messages (8%), Click & Collect (5%) and Book returns and study space/room bookings (both 4%).

In terms of quality of service, we are proud to report that during the reporting period, 93% of chats were answered within 15 seconds with a further 5% between 15-30 seconds. Only 31 chats were missed, of a total of almost 3,000 received. Of the 502 client ratings left during this time, 457 rated the service as Excellent, 38 Good, four "So-so", and only three users rated LibChat as Bad.

Conclusion:

The Library has upgraded several key digital resources during the 2020-21 reporting period. This has in many ways been because of the Covid-19 crisis but is also due to the feedback loop that LibChat provides: we have become more aware of diverse users' needs of through online LibChat discussions and have been able to adjust services and supports accordingly.

LibChat is now embedded as one of the core services which the Library will continue to offer its users - students and staff - throughout and beyond the Covid environment of physical campus restrictions.