Learning Services Annual Report

2014-15

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Edge Hill
University

Learning Services Annual Report 2014-15
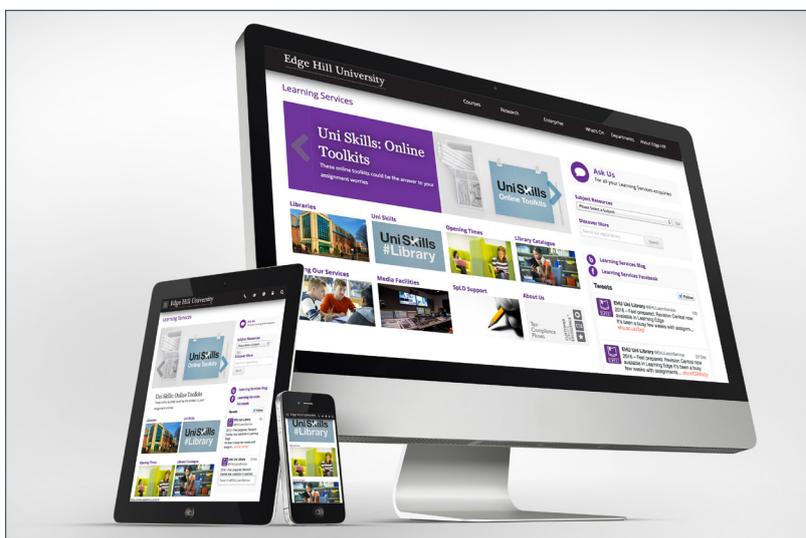
INTRODUCTION

Learning Services is the largest central academic support department within Edge Hill University and has a diverse staffing base which covers a wide range of professional teams and services.

The departmental mission is to 'support learning and to develop a responsive learning environment for all, through services and facilities, research and development, information and support'.

The Service incorporates the management of libraries and associated information provision, IT user support, technology enhanced learning, media services, academic skills development and support for students with specific learning difficulties.
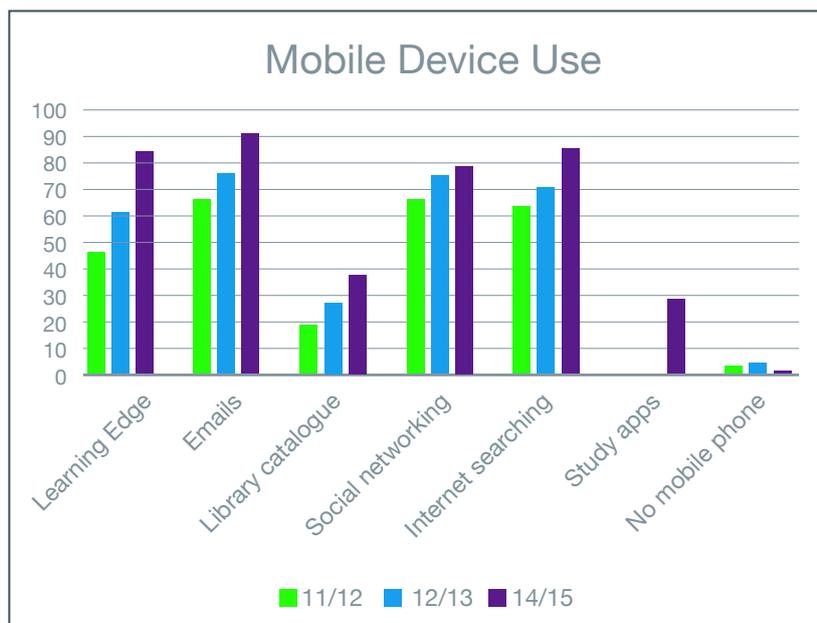
This annual report will focus on the increasing range of virtual services and facilities available to all users. The rationale for this departure from the more traditional approach to an annual report can be explained by the noticeable increase in importance placed on these services by our users, as evidenced by the NSS and local surveys; the growing expectation that transactions (procedural; financial) will be managed virtually and that services and facilities can be customised to meet personal requirements.

This does not detract from the parallel expectation of high quality effective face to face services and support which is equally in demand as illustrated by the number of enquiries successfully dealt with by our 'Ask ' desk staff and many unsolicited comments by students on the quality of the support received.

CURRENT INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT:
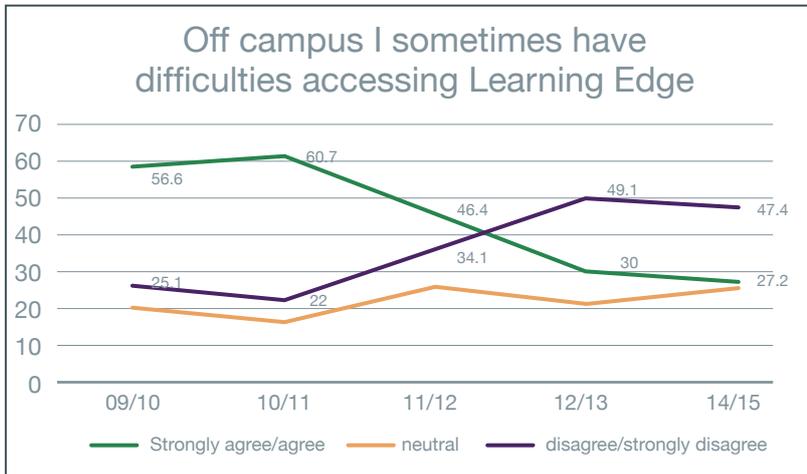## The student view

In 2014 we ran our 6th student eLearning survey. This exercise, which is now run bi-annually, aims to capture student use of learning and teaching technologies; their own use of technology and devices, and choice of study space. It serves to highlight preferences and trends over time, providing us with useful intelligence to steer future developments. It serves as the context for many of our decisions and provides an evidence base which would be hard to obtain using other methods. The latest survey attracted almost 800 responses and while the quantitative data is useful, there is considerable value in the open comments which provide more detailed insights into the interactions students have with our systems and services.

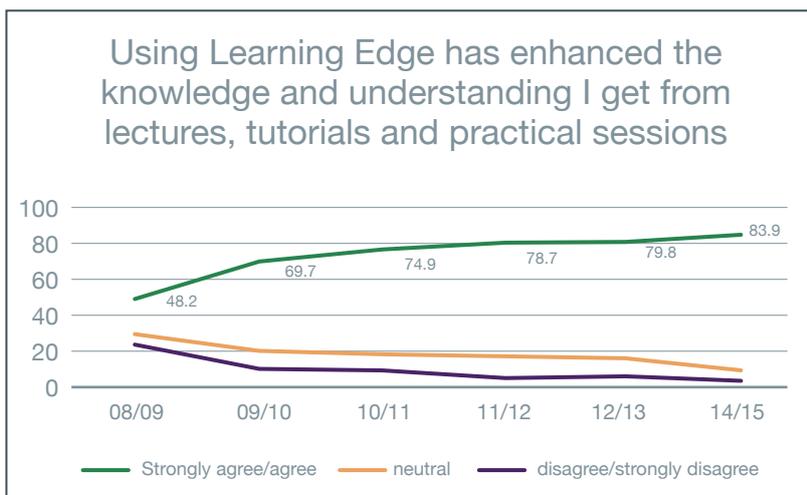**There were 3 trends which highlighted important feedback:**

Mobile Device Use

1.

Mobile device use to support study is increasing incrementally

Off campus I sometimes have difficulties accessing Learning Edge

Strongly agree/agree — neutral — disagree/strongly disagree

2.

Accessing Learning Edge on and off-campus is a much-improved experience. Although some issues still arise the trend is positive

Using Learning Edge has enhanced the knowledge and understanding I get from lectures, tutorials and practical sessions

Strongly agree/agree — neutral — disagree/strongly disagree

3.

Learning Edge is essential and is increasingly viewed as core to the quality of students' learning experiences

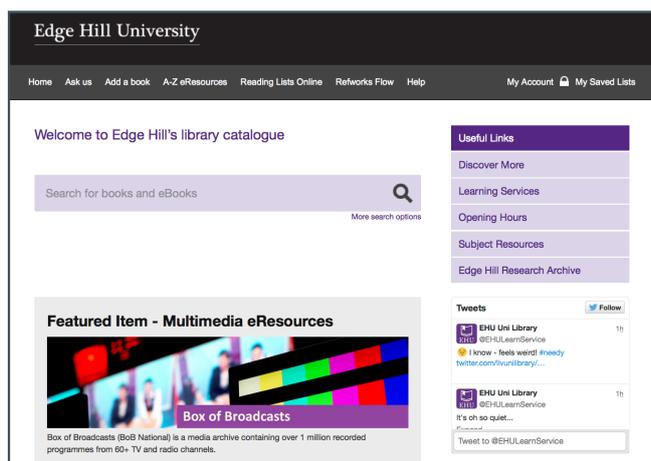*For further reading an executive summary of the latest student survey is also appended to this report.*

Implementation of a new Library management system

The new library management system deploying Capita's Chorus went live on the 1st June 2015. The implementation project ran over 9 months and involved seven separate parallel integration projects feeding into the core system build. The capability of the new system to provide extensions to the core software to support interoperability with other internal and external systems was a primary objective of the overall project.

Numerous integrations have been achieved as tangible outcomes of the project. The potential efficiency gains from these integrations will be assessed against some key criteria during the next academic year. We hope to see reduction in time spent processing transactions, improved use of our collections and a more seamless service delivered across all user groups.

The implementation of the new Library management system absorbed considerable staff time at a senior level, but the attention which was given to the initial scoping of the system, the rigour applied to the tender and selection process, coupled with a detailed specification led to the appointment of suppliers who were clear about our priorities and expectations. This systematic approach minimised the impact of the inevitable disruption and assisted the communications across multiple suppliers and internal stakeholders. The result has been a seamless transition to a new system with the majority of students and staff voicing positive comments.

The core system now integrates with:

VLE – Access through Blackboard to 'My Account', online library e-payments and the library catalogue search box.

Rebus reading list software – an online reading list tool which includes real time look up availability to the library catalogue

Account creation – the core system pulls student and staff attributes directly from Quercus and Active Directory and uses network credentials to provide single sign in to authenticate user access to e-resources via EZYProxy

Smartcard integration – self issue Kiosks now operate using the Smartcard (Papercut) identifier contained within the UNICARD
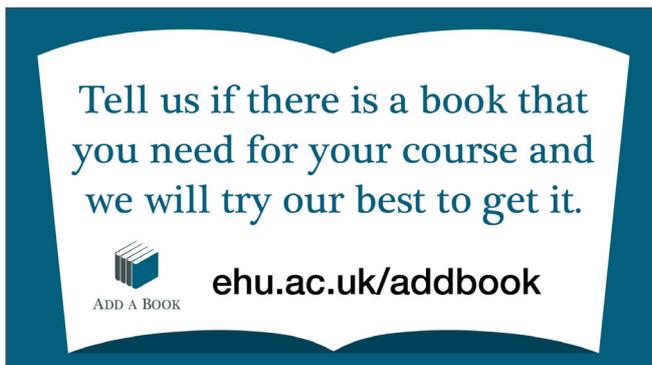
eFinancials – completed invoice data is automatically transferred into the finance system for payment

ePayments – library fines ePayment module (WPM) has been enhanced from previous version.

Personalising services - student choice

In an effort to improve the discoverability of our services and resources, we have consolidated all the various options for requesting materials within the new library catalogue so that they are provided from a single consistent interface. These include: add a book request service, inter-library loan service, and links to reading list software and referencing software.

The popularity of our 'Add a book' service continues to grow and usage of these titles is competitive with other more traditional methods of book selection, an indication perhaps of raised expectations of digital services, prompt delivery and personal notification.

Tell us if there is a book that you need for your course and we will try our best to get it.

ADD A BOOK

ehu.ac.uk/addbook

Another significant service offer which has been made possible by the new system is the introduction of auto-renewals. This aims to ensure the circulation of stock is more responsive so that popular texts circulate more quickly where there is high demand and this is in turn linked to a fairer fines policy which we will be able to introduce from September 2015. Again, this is an example of where the technology has enabled the enhancement of our service offer and reduces the need for students to unnecessarily return items, unless requested by another student.

Student's choice...

Don't miss your chance to add to our library's collection of eBooks.

It's simple... you choose from a selection of eBooks worth £¾ million and we buy!

library.edgehill.ac.uk

465 titles
ordered through 'Add a book'

484 eBooks
ordered through patron driven requests during 2014-15

Library Loans:
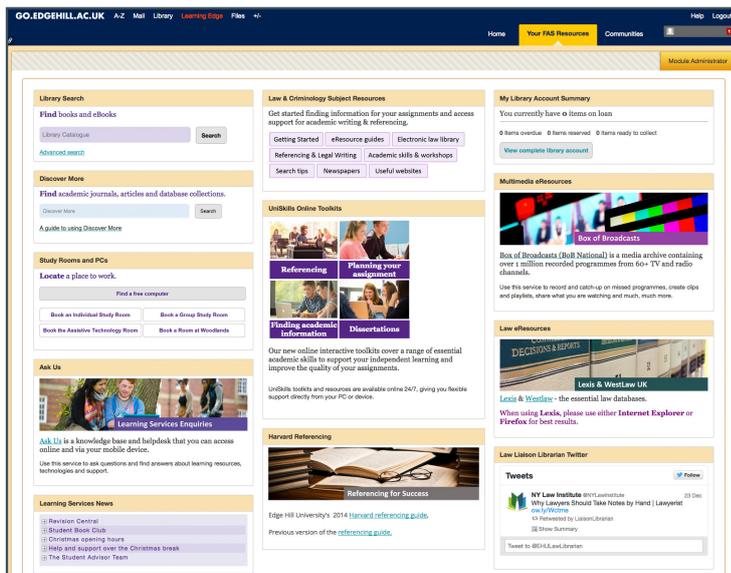*4 key improvements*

Auto Renew

2 wk

2 week loans

Fairer Fines

Access via Learning edge

Extending the content base in Learning Edge (Blackboard)

Usage statistics for Blackboard Learn confirm its place as core to the success of the students' learning experiences. It is important that access to learning resources is made as visible and easily accessible as possible; based on feedback from students the learning resources tab has been further developed to deliver a more tailored environment for students to complement their course content. This is an iterative process and as the product develops and data can be more effectively used to personalise the environment for individual students, this will be reflected in how we present content.

Over 16,000
visits in October 2014

Over 9,000 visits
using the Blackboard
Mobile app in October 2014

SERVICES: Going virtual

Virtual communication tools (student support)

Informed by student demand and the need to extend choice, a variety of virtual support tools are available providing users with options suited to their personal preferences. The preferred option for 'virtual' contact remains the telephone, followed by email. Our resolution rate continues to be over 98% at first point of contact (without referral) which may provide an insight into the enduring popularity of these services.

To complement these more traditional approaches, the introduction of a virtual knowledge base comprising FAQs generated in partnership with students has provided a useful and increasingly well used resource to provide answers to technical or procedural enquiries.

A software upgrade enabled the introduction of a complementary searchable staff knowledge base for our help desk staff which works on the same principles as the customer facing knowledge base. A core set of FAQs are regularly updated and readily accessible by staff working on physical and virtual service points which in turn helps maintain our high resolution rate and quality customer service.

8,440
telephone enquiries to our central 'helpdesk'

5,500
email enquiries during 2014-15

54.85%
find the answer within the 'Ask Us' knowledge base

Virtual communication tools (student support)

Our use of social media to provide bespoke 1-1 support for students is primarily delivered through our online chat service. An extension to this service providing out of hours support during weekdays and weekends was introduced in October 2014. This development was achieved with support from the Northern Collaboration (a consortium of 26 universities in the North of England) and OCLC an American library services supplier. The service is staffed by OCLC employees who have access to a knowledge base which is regularly refined and updated in response to the range of enquiries received from our users.

Recognising that students' study preferences vary, this service is designed to complement the extension to the physical opening of the library to 24/7 and a small but significant number of students prefer to use this option to make enquiries and raise issues. It is expected that this service will grow in popularity as students discover the attraction of an instant response at a time and place of their choosing.

926
Live Chats in total

222
Live Chats were answered 'out of hours' between Oct 2014 and Jul 2015.

Virtual communication tools (marketing)

Raising awareness of the range of resources and support available is key to the visibility of the Service. The approach we have taken has evolved over time to become increasingly strategic, recognising that how messages are relayed is an important determinant of student perception of our services and support. Tied into the academic life cycle, plasma screens are used across campus to promote key activities. At the beginning of the academic year orientation activities, such as physical and virtual introductions to buildings and systems are highlighted; academic support is promoted in advance of assignment submission dates and well-being sessions are available before assessment and exam periods.

Screens are also used to promote events which the Service runs. Alongside events associated with the regular academic year, the Service runs other events linked to national or international celebrations and awards.

Twitter is also increasing used to promote activities direct to students; followers of our feed hover around 1,400 but as our feed features in a panel on the BlackBoard landing page and the Learning Services website, students have ready access to our tweets. We are also experiencing a small but growing use of twitter as a two way communication tool with students posing questions. We also receive a number of unsolicited comments in response to a significant event or issue. The majority tend to be complementary, but we are also seeing use of twitter to highlight particular issues e.g. noise which requires immediate attention.

Blogging has also become an established route to promoting our services and as a means of providing students with more detailed information in a timely fashion. During 2014-15, blogs were also used to showcase good practice from either a student or staff perspective.

This example, from the 'Best of TEL' series, written by a student is an excellent illustration of the difference judicious use of technology can make to the learning experience. This student's blog powerfully illustrates the positive effect that technology can have.

"On a personal note the webinar sessions were most helpful, the experience I was having with distance learning was very abstract and the webinar made it a concrete tangible process which brought about a change in my state of mind that yes I was on the right track, yes other people were feeling the same way and yes there was somebody there (David) to reaffirm I wasn't going mad."
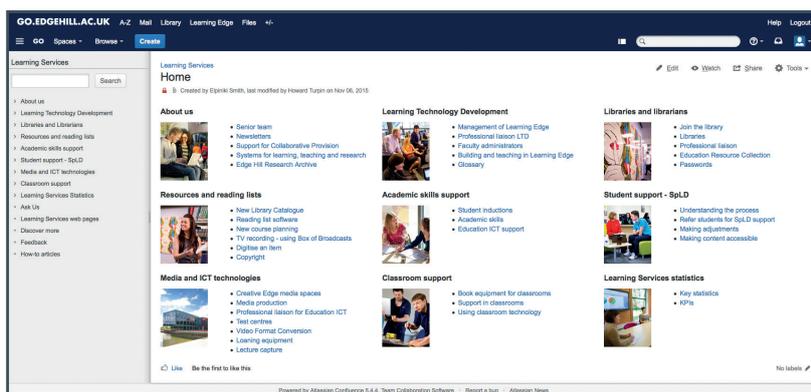
Amy Wells:

Praise the lord that @edgehill library is 24/7 for 3 weeks #MassiveLifeSaver

This is a series of blog posts that showcases exemplary Technology Enhanced Learning practices taking place at Edge Hill.

Virtual support for academic staff

Access to information about Learning Services is principally available on its wiki; regularly updated it is the 'go to' place for academic staff and researchers who need to understand a process, for example using Turnitin or for more general advice and information. This is however a static resource and many staff prefer a greater level of interaction and 'expert' assistance. In response to this, individual enquiries are more closely monitored and when patterns or repeat issues are noted, action is prompted. As many of the issues relate to use of Learning Edge or classroom technologies it is often the learning technologists who identify solutions and work with colleagues on their implementation.

LTD received 1,224 direct support enquiries from faculties

LTD delivered 15 bespoke staff development sessions to 102 attendees

LTD delivered 72 Digital Practitioner staff development sessions to 301 attendees
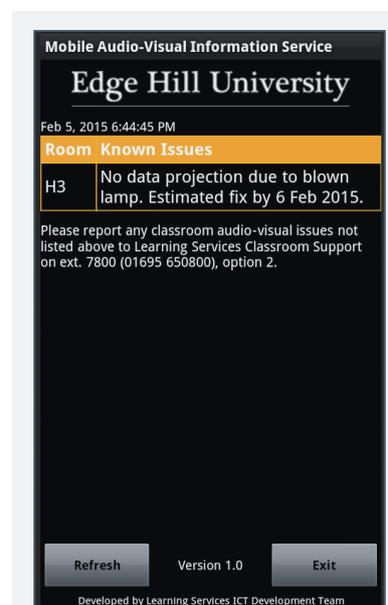
FACILITIES: Using smart technology

In October 2014 a smart phone was introduced for staff roving around the library spaces. This has enabled us to introduce a 'text noise' service and as a result staff are able to respond to reported incidents of noise in a timely manner. The rover also began to use a tablet device to provide help and support on the go and at point of need rather than having to seek out a networked PC. The tablet hosts many of the software packages needed by staff to respond to a wide range of enquiries, offering students a more immediate and comprehensive service.

To assist academic colleagues, we have introduced a new Mobile Audio-Visual Information Service (MAVIS). MAVIS provides staff with information about known technical issues in classrooms and is available via an Android app or via our web page for other devices.

Although our aim is to always resolve a problem when the classroom support service is called, in a small number of cases this may not be possible. MAVIS provides real time notifications for staff of ongoing issues affecting the technical AV functionality of rooms so that, if necessary alternative options can be prepared in advance.

You can find links to the MAVIS app and web page in the Classroom Support section of the Learning Services wiki.
https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/ls/Support+in+classrooms

The MAVIS app

EVALUATION: an essential activity

Usability: navigating Learning Edge

Evaluation is often conducted in partnership with target user groups to ensure that we deliver what they expect and need. As our largest user population are students we conduct evaluations with the aim of measuring our impact and effort against student ease of access and usability, as appropriate. During early summer 2015 a small observational user experience (UX) study with 1st year students was undertaken to develop our understanding of the usability and utility of Learning Edge. Six students were observed as they navigated the online environment looking for basic course information and resources (e.g. timetables, announcements, course handbooks, library resources). Although a small sample that data collected provided a test bed for further evaluation.

Summary of key findings
These are based on where and how improvements to Learning Edge could be made to enhance the user experience:

Effectiveness
Baseline information and resources that students need are generally available to them (with the exception of tutor contact details which are currently a recommendation), but are sometimes inconsistently located. More work could be done to improve the organisation of content and to explore what students regard as unnecessary and what is missing.

★★★★☆

4/5 Effectiveness

Efficiency
Students are able to comfortably navigate Learning Edge and find it easy to accomplish basic tasks. However, whilst students rarely get lost, often they do not look in the right place the first time. More work could be done to raise awareness of the types of information and resources available and to help users find what they are looking for more quickly. The organisation of some content/links could also be modified to reduce the number of clicks required to gain access.

★★★☆☆

3/5 Efficiency

Satisfaction
Student satisfaction levels appear to be fairly neutral. Positive comments suggest they are generally happy with the information provided and their ability to use the system, but some dissatisfaction related to finding library resources and assignment information was noted. More work to improve aspects of effectiveness and efficiency could enhance overall satisfaction.

★★★☆☆

3/5 Satisfaction

Albeit a small evidence base this does offer an insight into what students' find problematic and where our team of specialist learning technologist should focus conversations with academic colleagues developing content for the VLE.

1-1 Feedback

We also make extensive use of the university's online survey tool and in 2014 we used this to evaluate the effectiveness of 1-1 support delivered to students with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) or seeking intensive academic support. Broadly speaking this measured student satisfaction but we also sought to gather qualitative feedback on any changes students felt they had made to their practices after the session, or sessions.

Verbatim comments included:

- *My planning of assignments is better. This is reflected in my marks as they are getting better.*
- *It helped me write in a more reflective and analytical manner*
- *It has helped me back up my observations with theories and quotes and has enabled me to analyse more critically*
- *I felt I was really listened to and she helped me identify the real issues I was having and how to improve my writing. The critique was positive and helpful.*

And the quantitative feedback signalled high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the support received with over 86% of all respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement.

86%
satisfied with the quality of the 1-1 support received

Digital and virtual developments featured significantly during 2014-15 and will continue to evolve in response to curriculum changes and student expectations. Developments in this field were noted for their innovation, most significantly the Blackboard Catalyst award for staff development which, *'honours those who use Blackboard solutions to support and enhance faculty and professional development skills to provide a better organization-wide learning experience'*. This award was based on the content and delivery of the Delivering Digital Excellence (DDE) staff development programme which delivers training on a variety of topics that aim to raise awareness and confidence in using technology in teaching and learning. The syllabus of events is organised around four key strands: The Digital Classroom, The Digital Office, The Digital Practitioner, and The Digital Researcher all aimed at upskilling staff to feel confident in their use of technology.

Two other major achievements which require noting are the transition to a new library management system which was achieved with minimum disruption and the introduction of our out of hours online chat services which is notable for its success as a collaborative venture with partner institutions from the North of England.

And finally, 2014 was the year when Learning Services was shortlisted for the THES award for 'outstanding contribution to leadership development' for its approach to supporting staff to further develop their professional and transferable skills and competencies, informed by the Association of University Administrators (AUA) CPD framework.

These achievements illustrate the priority staff place on continuously seeking new approaches and developments to improve services, processes and facilities for all users and to ensure that we are keeping pace with student expectations and demand.

DDE Staff development programme

- *The Digital Classroom*
- *The Digital Office*
- *The Digital Practitioner*
- *The Digital Researcher*

New Library management system

2014 THE AWARDS SHORTLISTED
OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Shortlisted for THES award

APPENDIX 1: Essential statistics

Staffing figures		
Learning Services staff	Jan '15	144

	2014/15
Print and eResources budget	£1,236,000

	2013/14	2014/15
Total Issues	210,130	201,943
eBook accesses	2,170,293	2,508,476
Full text downloads	759,493	781,559
Number of visits to Learning Services Libraries	555,123	550,768

Resources	August '15
Number of items in stock	264,326
Number of eJournals	44,076
Number of eBooks	133,879

The Student eLearning Survey was introduced in December 2008 as a means of exploring the learner perspective of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) at Edge Hill University (EHU). It seemed timely in 2013/14 to take a gap year and thereafter make the survey biennial. This year's report is informed by the findings of the 2014/15 survey and identifies and examines trends and system performance where there are direct comparisons to past surveys. The intention is to improve the student experience through a better understanding of what makes a good experience of TEL, and more importantly, what does not. It also provides an indicator of the extent to which the institutional VLE, Learning Edge, is integral to the learning experience of Edge Hill students.

This year's findings are based on a sample of 798 students and shed light on a number of topics:

Access to technology
Students are increasingly likely to own a range of internet-enabled devices of which the most common are laptop and smartphone, with over have now owning a tablet. They frequently bring at least two devices onto campus and connect them all onto campus WIFI whilst they are here. They access Learning Edge on their phones, particularly for accessing announcements and notifications, but also course content. This has implications for the network infrastructure, technical and learner support, and VLE course design and requires our continual monitoring using enquiry management systems and formal and informal University feedback mechanisms.

Trend analysis from 2008/09 to the present
The five trends identified and discussed in this section are pleasingly positive with noticeable improvements in all categories. Student difficulties accessing Learning Edge have reduced year-on-year since 2008/09, with the greatest improvement being seen in the experience of those accessing Learning Edge from off-campus.
Whilst the on-campus access experience has also continued to improve, it is at a slower rate. In other sections students describe issues with Learning Edge being unavailable or slow to upload/download files. With the majority of students accessing Learning Edge and various study apps on their smartphones and tablets as well as personal laptops both on and off campus, we need to focus on (i) investigating the permutations of student-owned devices – operating systems, browsers, (ii) how students use Learning Edge e.g. the signposts and pathways to the system, and (iii) where and when on-campus access is difficult.

Negative features of Learning Edge
The overall message emerging from student comments is that they resent having to spend unnecessary time trying to access slow systems or locate course material. Too much or not enough information can be a problem as is information aimed at others and deemed irrelevant. As Learning Edge has grown in use, it is increasingly being described as complicated or confusing, particularly to new users.

Students generally bring at least two internet-enabled devices onto campus

Positive trends from 2008/09 to the present identified

Students unhappy with the speed of the systems

The review and updating of the institutional 'Baseline' Framework for Learning Edge in 2015 has addressed many of the issues identified around consistency of student experience across programmes of study but there is still work to be done in embedding it into everyday practice.

What makes an 'ideal' learning environment
It is interesting to note that many of the tools and technologies that students would like to see in an 'ideal' VLE or for wider use in learning and teaching can be found in EHU's current VLE. This suggests that we need to better understand why these are not being used by staff as well as students – are they 'invisible', 'clunky' or difficult to use?

Some of the student ideas have been achieved with the introduction of new systems or tools for 2014/15. This includes a new library management system that integrates with Learning Edge to allow the user access to their library account. A reading list management software was introduced at the same time and this too is being made available to students via the My Library tab in Learning Edge.

It would seem that students would appreciate having access to recordings of lectures and again, the 2015/16 academic year has seen the introduction of a 12 month pilot of lecture capture software, Panopto that should satisfy this demand.

With regard to laptop loans, a successful case has been made for the Library to purchase of 30 additional laptops, and for these to be housed in self-service storage/charging units. These will be available during the second semester 2015/16.

The category of tools to support students in organizing and planning their study activity is an interesting one. Whilst there is VLE functionality that has potential in this area, there are many mobile apps that provide this support and are perceived to be of value to students. There is a Learning Services project in operation that is gathering, evaluating and disseminating apps that will be of benefit to students.

Whilst the look and feel of Learning Edge is much improved since it was first introduced to EHU, the many comments about it being at times 'confusing', 'jumbled', 'overwhelming' have been noted. We need to look at Learning Edge through our students eyes more often to better understand whether their comments relate to the course content or the system structure which frames it.

Finally, sometimes in surveys what is not mentioned is of interest. In this case, it was the almost total absence of any reference to Facebook (apart from a couple of negative comments). It was particularly striking in comparison to positive feedback about it in the 2013/14 survey as a tool to support instant messaging, group work and peer support. Such is the transient nature of technology.
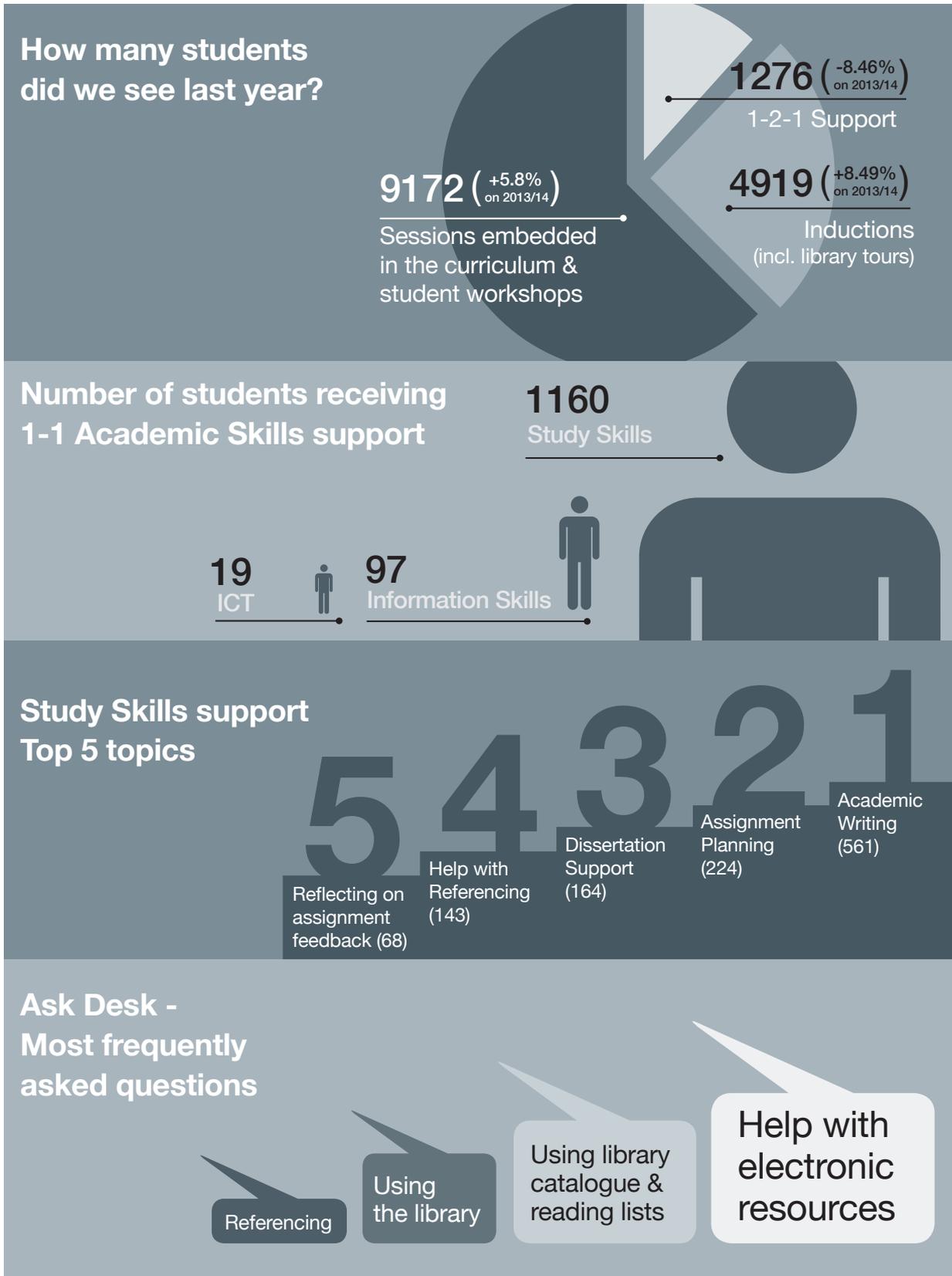
A need to address the look and feel of Learning Edge

The full report is available at:
www.eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/9894

How many students did we see last year?

1276 (-8.46% on 2013/14)
1-2-1 Support

9172 (+5.8% on 2013/14)
Sessions embedded in the curriculum & student workshops

4919 (+8.49% on 2013/14)
Inductions (incl. library tours)

Number of students receiving 1-1 Academic Skills support

1160
Study Skills

19
ICT

97
Information Skills

Study Skills support Top 5 topics

5 Reflecting on assignment feedback (68)

4 Help with Referencing (143)

3 Dissertation Support (164)

2 Assignment Planning (224)

1 Academic Writing (561)

Ask Desk - Most frequently asked questions

Referencing

Using the library

Using library catalogue & reading lists

Help with electronic resources