CAPE HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARY NETWORK (CHELiN)

CHELIN MEMBERS
COVID-19 EXPERIENCE
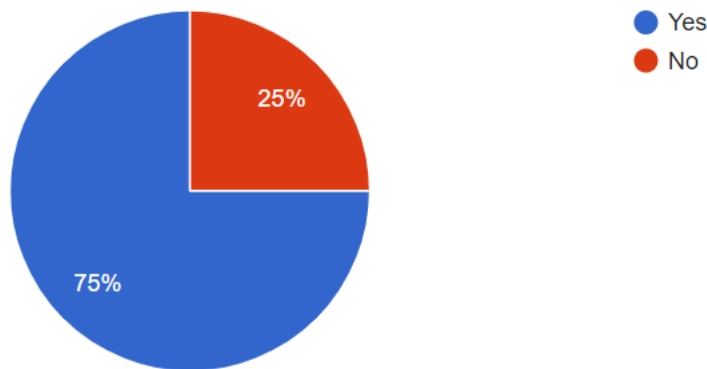
Contents

1. BACKGROUND

The impact of the national lockdown has precipitated the introduction of online/remote teaching and learning by universities and academic libraries have migrated to virtual services in support of the continued teaching, learning and research endeavours.

This survey provides an overview of the effect on services and support during this time across the four universities of the Western Cape.

The survey was distributed online to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch and University of the Western Cape using Google Forms. Responses were received from all the universities.

2. BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS

Only one library indicated that it did not have any prior Business Continuity Plan in place.

When asked to describe the nature of the Business Continuity Plan, one library indicated that the plan had been drawn up in response to student protest action and ensured continuous access to information resources and digital content.
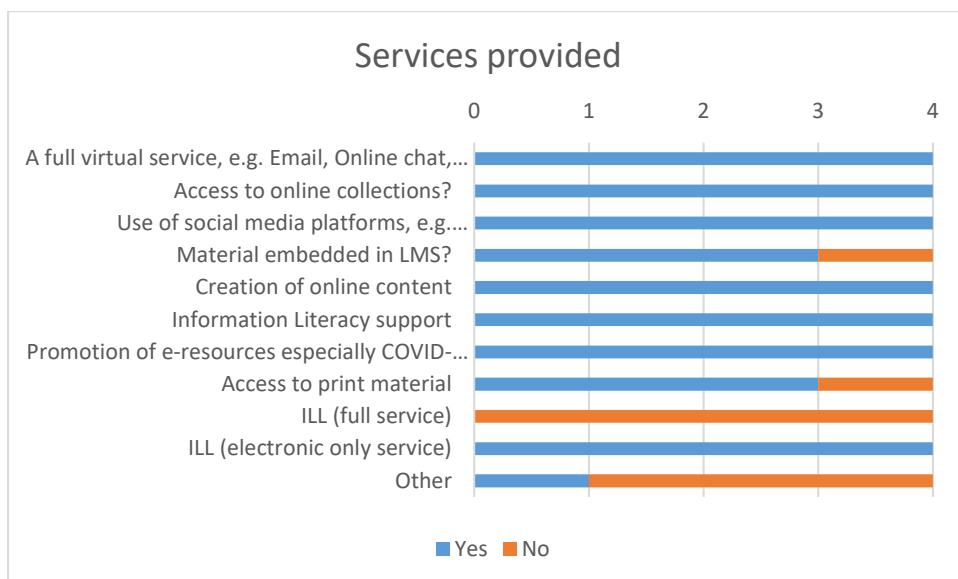
A second library stated that online information literacy training modules were designed and available and that selected staff were issued with laptops to enable off campus support to faculties. Communication platforms such social media and Blackboard were available to communicate with staff and students respectively.

The third library indicated that the Business Continuity Plan served as a guide or checklist in case of emergencies and ensured the availability of essential information and services.

Three institutions indicated that Business Continuity Plans were library specific (however, two indicated that these depended on support from the university) and one indicated they were institutional.

3. SERVICES

Each library indicated which services were provided during the pandemic.

Services provided

	0	1	2	3	4

Yes ■ **No** ■

Services (top to bottom):
- A full virtual service, e.g. Email, Online chat,…
- Access to online collections?
- Use of social media platforms, e.g.…
- Material embedded in LMS?
- Creation of online content
- Information Literacy support
- Promotion of e-resources especially COVID-…
- Access to print material
- ILL (full service)
- ILL (electronic only service)
- Other

Libraries had different approaches to service provision during this time. One library developed teams to support online services, with specialist queries redirected to faculty teams. At one library print material was needed and study packs were sent to students using the postal service and sections of books were scanned to assist students with access. Another library listed its available services on its website.

Libraries indicated that certain services would be discontinued when full service resumes. These include: scan and email service, delivery of loans off campus, online only inter-library loans and free access to COVID19 resources.

3.1 Promotion of services and innovative ways of reaching clients

Most libraries indicated they promoted their services using webpages and university wide communication systems such as email. Three institutions used social media platforms and one indicated that Blackboard was used.

New or innovated ways libraries are reaching clients rely mainly on technology and include using MS Teams or Zoom to conduct training and reference interviews, LibCal appointment scheduler (integrated with MS Teams), WhatsApp for communication and as a teaching tool and social media.

3.2 Training

The most popular platform for training during this period has been Teams with 3 of the 4 libraries using this platform. Training includes traditional generic training already supported, e.g. Savvy Series and information literacy modules as well as additional training modules created on request to meet specific needs. One institution indicated that training was done using webinars and dissemination of videos via YouTube. In some cases, training was done in collaboration with other departments within the university.

The approach to training of staff differed from library to library. Two libraries concentrated on specific areas for staff development, one being the collecting of data via systematic, rapid and scoping reviews as an alternate source for soliciting data and another the development of online lessons based on learning experiences using the OUP online course (Teaching online). One library indicated that while the library supported generic university staff training, individual training as requested and Library Research Week sessions; library staff received regular but informal training between staff members and within teams. One library indicated that selected staff were trained to

provide online support (e.g. Ask US platform) and that all library staff were encouraged to attend online webinars; and all university staff had to attend COVID19 training sessions before being allowed back on campus.

4. VISIBILITY OF THE LIBRARY

All four libraries indicated that they were included in the online Teaching and Learning discussions and communiques at the university. Three institutions indicated that the library is represented on various Teaching and Learning Committees at the university and are therefore aware of and included in Teaching and Learning plans.

All libraries felt that the visibility of the library has been increased. Examples in support of this statement include: library online answering service has been so successful the platform will be used by other sections in the university, e.g. to support students looking to enrol, plans for more online information literacy modules so that students can complete these independently, library seen as the most used entity to support learning (from university survey), requests for assistance with buying data to access e-resources and access issues, increased popularity of e-books and urgent purchasing of e-textbooks. However, the need for the library as a space, access to its PCs and its physical resources were also highlighted.

All libraries felt that they had supported teaching and learning during lockdown. While two libraries felt that there may be changes in library strategy going forward, one indicated it was too soon to say as the online services still needed to be assessed and evaluated and the other was currently busy with strategic planning. The remaining two libraries felt that some changes were here to stay, e.g. flexible training methodologies including online training and the embedding of these within the Learner Management System and online consultations with staff and students.

5. MOVING TO POST LOCKDOWN SERVICES

Two libraries opened in July (6th and 27th) while another opened on 2 November and the remaining library has no firm decision on reopening. Two of the open libraries indicated that either staff are operating on a roster system or that only staff needed to complete the academic year are on campus.

All libraries indicated that protocols are in place to allow for the return of staff and students. Three institutions indicated that staff without comorbidities and under 60 years of age had returned to campus, but were working on a rotational basis.

All libraries have sanitation protocols in place, with spaces and equipment being cleaned regularly during the day (twice a day at one library and at another at the end of each day as well as during the day). One library indicated that sanitizing stations were available throughout the library. The number of cleaning staff was increased at one library.

5.1 Access to spaces and collections

Social distancing has been implemented at all libraries with spaces having been reconfigured with reduced seating in some areas and the number of students allowed access restricted. Some libraries have closed areas such as meeting and study rooms, group study rooms, training rooms and computer areas. One library indicated that certain levels were closed under lockdown levels 3 and 2, but have been opened under lockdown level 1. One library indicated that areas close to the physical collection were closed. Three libraries allow limited access to computers (one only with a booking request) and one allows limited use of photocopy facilities.

Access to physical collections has been closed at three libraries. Although items may be borrowed, only library staff have access to the collections. They collect the requested items and send them to the stipulated collection points. At one library faculty librarians accompany users to the shelves to collect material.

All libraries support online reference services with only one library allowing face-to-face appointments. All training is done online only.

5.2 Circulation

Each library deals with circulating materials differently. While most items are retrieved upon request, some libraries arrange for pick-up and returns at appointed times while others send the materials to collection points. For one library the collection point may be on or off campus, while for another it is at the entrance to the campus. The collection points are also used for receiving returned items. One library indicated that staff do not handle returned books. Students read out the barcode for retuning the book on the system and books are boxed for 3 days before being repacked on shelves. Two libraries quarantine returned books for 3 days and one for 5 days. Two libraries encourage the use of book drops. At one library a fumigation company retrieves books from the book drops. After the items are cleaned and fumigated they are returned to the library and shelved.

6. CONCLUSION

Focus remains on providing training and reference support services online and ensuring access to and development of online collections.

Even with students being allowed on campus, physical library access is limited and access to the physical collection is mainly through a request system. While some library staff are on campus, they are working on a rotational basis. Libraries have implemented protocols around sanitization and social distancing to protect staff and users.