How to focus your limited resources

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Inspired by the last m-libraries conference, we undertook research into our students' needs for mobile services. We gathered 1364 responses from our initial survey, using similar questions to Char Booth's survey of Claremont Colleges Library, California presented at m-libraries 2012. Responses were illuminating and led to follow up focus groups to investigate areas where there were discrepancies between what we thought users wanted and what the survey results stated. The focus groups considered our institutional mobile app (which includes library services) and an app created for roving library staff with iPads, amongst other app ideas; we also looked at live lab initiatives, mobile web gateways, twitter and text services, mobile web, and QR codes. The main themes which emerged from the focus groups were students' desire for mobile services which give quick access to short, sharp, bite-size chunks of highly relevant information, plus our Library users did not want barriers to finding information. Roving, instant messaging services and QR codes (when not appropriately directed) were found by the focus groups to act as barriers to users; Library users want to be empowered by the library with apps, tools or services which allow them to autonomously access information. In response to this data we have developed a mobile services toolkit to meet student needs and are planning a second survey[1] this year to allow us to further compare changes in student needs and preferences in order to tailor our strategy and focus our resources.

Like many libraries, we implemented 'mobile services' without first consulting with our users, and our recent research has demonstrated that library staff ideas about what users want often do not match our users' ideas about the relative importance of different mobile services. We realised that we were just jumping on a mobile services bandwagon – implementing what others were implementing and/or what seemed like a good idea. We have managed to focus our limited time and resource for developing mobile services by regularly getting specific feedback from our users and building services to directly match their needs.

[1] Second set of survey data not yet available but will be available by January 2014