Nancy Booker turns 100

It's not a certificate from the Queen... but when ALIA Fellow Nancy Booker turned 100 recently, ALIA helped her celebrate.

Nancy was instrumental in establishing the School and Children's Committee of the Library Association of Australia, and campaigned for specialist training for children's librarians. The Nancy Booker Honour Lecture is given biennially through CYSS (NSW).

Digital reference: key performance indicators

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The move from traditional reference services to a broader range of service options, including electronic resources and virtual chat, has given university libraries the opportunity to assess the wide range of tasks performed by their reference librarians. At present, the reference statistics collected for CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians) are reported as a single figure. There is no breakdown and therefore no analysis or history is available to determine trends, use and relative significance of the different delivery forms. The University Librarians in the State of New South Wales (UNISON) commissioned the UNISON Reference & Information Services Interest Group (RISIG) to investigate suitable measures to assess the performance of digital reference services.
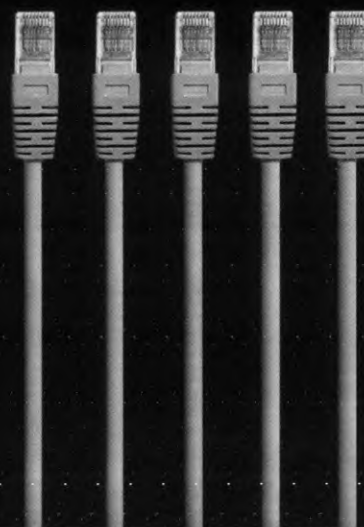
Following a pilot study, a survey was distributed to all NSW university libraries in July 2005. The survey provides a snapshot of the digital reference services of each library, including staffing levels; type and style of digital reference training; level and type of usage by client groups; and client satisfaction with the service received.

The survey gives an overview of the digital reference environment in UNISON libraries: all provide e-mail reference services, 73 per cent provide online chat services, 56 per cent of all enquiries are classified as 'Reference' and 75 per cent of chat enquiries are completed within 10 minutes. 45 per cent of libraries aim to meet a one-day turnaround time for e-mail enquiries, which 99 per cent achieve. 81 per cent provide training and digital reference accounts for 5 per cent of all reference activities in NSW university libraries.

RSIG will continue to develop benchmarks against which services can be measured, but the service definitions and information collected will need to be standardised more fully across the sector. With the development of standardised statistical collection processes, forms and category definitions, we have the potential not only to measure the value of digital reference services within an organisation, but also to provide a basis for the benchmarking of digital reference activities.

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