

READERS' COMMENTS ON THE NATIONAL LIBRARY'S ASIAN REFERENCE SERVICES, 1998

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Introduction

In 1998 the National Library of Australia commissioned a study to update the demographic profile of users of the Library's reading rooms, to gather data on the experiences of these users when utilising the reference services, and to gather information on users' anticipated future reference needs. Overall the results of the survey were very positive, particularly for staff performance.

This report looks in greater detail at the results for the Asian Collections Reading Room of the October 1998 survey. There are 74 completed responses by readers who visited Asian Collections during October 1998 or who posted replies subsequently. Most of these readers were using East Asian (Chinese, Japanese and Korean language) materials or Southeast Asian (particularly Thai and Indonesian) resources.

Replies to questions

1. *During the last twelve months, please estimate how frequently you have used any of the reading rooms of the National Library of Australia*

The highest response was 21 (29%) for "every two to three weeks". Eleven (15%) responded "more than once per week" and, similarly, 11 (15%) replied "every 1 to 3 months". One respondent did not give an answer to the question.

2. *Which of the following reading rooms have you used within the last 12 months?*

In addition to the Asian Collections Reading Room, 36 respondents (49%) had used the Main Reading Room and 19 (26%) the Newspaper/Microform Reading Room. Figures for other reading rooms were much lower.

3. *Please indicate which other libraries you have used in the last 12 months*

Forty five respondents (61%) had used the Australian National University Library and 27 (36%) the ACT Library Service. Figures for other categories were much lower.

4. *Approximately what time did you arrive at the Library today?*

Of the 59 respondents who answered this question 14 (25%) had arrived between 10 and 11 am, while 13 (22%) had arrived between 3 and 4 pm. Only 1 respondent had arrived after 4 pm.

5. *Please tick which day it is today*

Sixty one respondents answered this question. Monday was the most ticked day with 17 and Thursday the least with 7. These results are not necessarily very significant.

6. *How long do you normally stay in the Reading Rooms?*

Of 66 who answered 43 (65%) stayed from 2 to 4 hours.

7. *How would you rate your satisfaction with the opening hours of the Asian Collections Reading Room ?*

Of 69 who answered this question 35 (51%) rated it high or very high; 23 (33%) as fair and 11 (16%) as low.

8. *Please indicate the things you did during your visit today*

Thirty seven (50%) used materials on open display; 34 (46%) worked on materials from the requested from the collections; 32 (43%) used the catalogues and 27 (36%) obtained help from staff. Only 3 used the CD-ROM network and 2 used the Internet.

9. *To what extent do you feel that you know about the range of the National Library's reference services?*

Of the 70 who replied to this 38 (54%) said they needed to know more and 32 (46%) said they knew enough.

10. *How satisfied are you with the availability of information at the National Library regarding your subject area?*

Of 70 who replied 62 (89%) were satisfied or very satisfied while 8 (11%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

11. *In general do you find the Library's online public access catalogue easy or difficult to use?*

Of 73 who replied 42 (57%) found it easy or very easy; 13 (18%) found it difficult or very difficult and 18 (25%) do not use the catalogue.

12. Do you find the Library's Internet facilities easy or difficult to use?

Of 71 respondents 26 (37%) found them easy or very easy; 11 (15%) found them difficult or very difficult and 34 (48%) do not use them.

13. In general do you find the Library's CD-ROM network easy or difficult to use?

Of 69 respondents 12 (17%) found it easy or very easy; 7 (10%) found it difficult while 50 (73%) do not use it.

14. In general do you find using the databases (such as HYPERLINK <mailto:DIALOG@CARL> - DIALOG @ CARL) provided by the Library easy or difficult to use?

Of 69 respondents 13 (19%) found them easy or very easy; 4 (6%) found them difficult (no responses for "very difficult") and 52 (75%) do not use them.

15. The Library aims to deliver collection material to you within 30 minutes. How satisfied are you with this service standard?

Of 64 respondents 55 (86%) were satisfied or very satisfied; and 9 (14%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

16. When books are stored off-site the Library aims to deliver those items to you within two hours. How satisfied are you with this service standard?

Of 61 respondents 48 (79%) were satisfied or very satisfied while 13 (21%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

17. When manuscripts are stored off-site the Library aims to deliver those items to you within 24 hours. How satisfied are you with this service standard?

Of 53 respondents 45 (85%) were satisfied or very satisfied while 8 (15%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

18. How satisfied are you with the 4-book limit when retrieving books?

Of 57 respondents 39 (67%) were satisfied or very satisfied while 19 (33%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

19. How satisfied are you with the workspace areas provided in the Asian Collections Reading Room?

19 (a) Adequate working space to research in

Of 66 respondents 58 (88%) were satisfied and 8 (12%) dissatisfied.

19(b) *Comfort of seating provided*

Of 68 respondents 62 (91%) were satisfied and 6 (9%) were dissatisfied.

19(c) *Provision of a quiet working area*

Of 64 respondents 60 (94%) were satisfied and 4 (6%) were dissatisfied.

19(d) *Overall suitability for conducting research*

Of 62 respondents 57 (92%) were satisfied and 5 (8%) were dissatisfied.

20. *In general how satisfied are you with your interaction with reference staff in the Asian Collections Reading Room?*

Of 69 who replied 66 (96%) were satisfied or very satisfied. Three respondents (4%) indicated they were "very dissatisfied" but as all their other answers indicated a high level of satisfaction there is some doubt about this response.

21. *Please rate the Asian Collections Reading Room's staff with regard to the following characteristics, based on your experience with them*

The lowest rating for any part of Question 21 was average, with no poor or very poor ratings.

21(a) *Ability to understand my research needs*

Of 67 who responded 55 (82%) rated this good or very good, while 12 (18%) rated it average.

21(b) *Speed and proficiency in helping with a query*

Of 67 who replied 57 (85%) rated this as good or very good; while 10 (15%) rated it as average.

21(c) *Level of courtesy*

Of 67 who replied 59 (88%) rated this as good or very good and 8 (12%) rated it average.

21(d) *Ability to explain the Library's systems and resources*

Of 69 who replied 59 (86%) rated this as good or very good and 10 (14%) as average.

21(e) *Ability to guide me to alternate sources of information when needed*

Of 66 who replied 54 (82%) rated this good or very good and 12 (18%) as average.

21(f) *Friendliness and approachability*

Of 70 who replied 66 (94%) rated this as good or very good and 4 (6%) as average.

21(g) *Consistency of customer service provided by different staff members*

Of 66 who replied 56 (85%) rated this good or very good and 10(15%) as average.

21(h) *Reliability, accuracy and appropriateness of the information or advice provided*

Of 68 who replied 59 (87%) rated this good or very good and 9 (13%) as average.

22. *Referring to the staff characteristics listed in Q21 please list the three most important characteristics in the order of their importance to you*

Adding up the characteristics voted as one of the top three most important to users, speed and proficiency received 33 votes; ability to understand research needs 32 votes; offering alternative sources 29 votes and friendliness 27 votes. Consistency of service received only 4 votes and was rated last.

23. *The reference librarian in the Asian Collections Reading Room aims to assist you immediately when the desk is quiet and within 3-4 minutes if it is busy. Have you had to wait longer than this for assistance in the Asian Collections Reading Room?*

Of 65 who replied 56 (86%) said no and 9 (14%) said yes.

24. *Is the Library's goal of serving readers within 3-4 minutes a satisfactory standard?*

All 64 who replied to this question said yes.

25. *Overall how satisfied are you with the services provided in the Asian Collections Reading Room?*

Of 67 responses 65 (97%) were satisfied or very satisfied and 2 (3%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

26. *[Individual comments are being assessed separately]*

27. *What is the best way for the Library to inform you of its range of reference services?*

Thirty respondents ticked leaflets or handouts, 28 the Library's website; 16 signs and 6 meetings with readers.

28. *What is your age group?*

Seventy one answered this question, of whom 19 (27%) were in the 26-35 age group, 16 (23%) 46-55 and 14 (20%) were 36-45. There were also 11 (15%) under 26 and a further 11 (15%) over 55.

29. *What is the postcode of the town or suburb in which you usually live?*

Of 66 who responded 53 (80%) were from the ACT. There were from 1 to 4 respondents from each of the Australian states.

30. *What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?*

Of 68 respondents 59 (87%) had a degree or diploma. 23 (34%) had a doctoral or post-doctoral degree; 22 (32%) a post graduate degree or diploma and 14 (21%) a degree or diploma.

31. *Which of the following best describes the main purpose of your visit to the Library?*

All 74 answered this question. Twenty two (30%) were doing research for a publication; 21 (28%) were doing private research; 19 (26%) were doing research for a university course and 8 (11%) were doing work-related research.

32. *Are you male or female?*

Of 68 respondents 43 (63%) were male and 25 (37%) female.

Conclusions

The findings were very positive. They were consistent with the overall results of the survey for the Library as a whole with some variations.

Snapshot of Respondents (Questions 28-31)

As with the Library as a whole there was a relatively even spread of age groups though with 69% between 26 and 55 there were fewer users under 26 and over 55 than for the Library in general. Eighty percent of respondents were from the ACT. Asian Collections respondents had a high education level with 87% having at least a degree or diploma. The main purpose of visits to the Library was similar to other areas of the Library though with research for a publication as the most frequent response (30%). Unlike the relatively even breakdown along gender lines for the Library in general, 63% of Asian Collections respondents were male and 37% female.

Library Use (Questions 1-8)

Seventy percent of respondents use the Library at least once every three months. Asian Collection respondents also make considerable use of the Main and Newspaper Reading Rooms. Sixty one percent have used the ANU Library and 27% the ACT Library Service in the last year. Satisfaction levels with opening hours for the Asian Collections Reading Room were not as high as for reading rooms as a whole with only 51% rating this as high or very high.

Service Issues (Questions 9-14)

Fifty four percent of respondents wanted to know more about the services available (a similar figure to that for the Library as whole). Eighty nine percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of information on their subject area. The numbers of Asian Collections respondents who do not use the catalogue (25%), the Internet facilities (48%) and the CD-ROM network (73%) are a little higher than for the Library as a whole.

Service Standards (Questions 15-19)

A number of the questions in this section relate mainly to use of materials in areas other than Asian Collections such as off-site storage. Satisfaction levels were quite high but with sizeable minorities not satisfied. In particular 33% of respondents were not satisfied with the four book limit when retrieving books. While the great majority of users were satisfied with the workspaces provided in Asian Collections 12% were concerned about the adequacy of the area for research.

National Library Staff Performance (Questions 20-25)

The satisfaction level for interaction with Asian Collections staff was extremely high with 96% satisfied or very satisfied. On specific characteristics the lowest rating given was average with no ratings of poor or very poor. Ratings varied from 82% good or very good for ability to understand research needs and ability to guide to alternate sources up to 94% good or very good for friendliness. Respondents rated speed and efficiency; understanding research needs; offering alternative sources and friendliness as the most important to them. Ninety-seven percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the services of the Asian Collections Reading Room overall.

Future Services (Questions 26-27)

A number of specific comments and suggestions relating to particular collections were received. These are being addressed separately. Respondents mainly favoured leaflets and the Library's website for informing them of services.