

The M25 Consortium: a continuing success story
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A report for the M25 Steering Group on the 2004 Awareness Survey.

Background: What is the M25 Consortium?

The M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries is an organisation open to library or information services within the HE (or to collections of particular relevance to the research community), within and extending beyond the geographic area bounded by the M25. It is a membership organisation based on a subscription system.

There are library consortium in other regions but the M25 is the largest of its kind and, as the awareness survey shows, can truly demonstrate that it is a success story.

The raison d'être of the M25 is the belief and commitment to collaboration as a way of building relationships around libraries, users and collections to bring added value to services. Whilst its direct customers are member libraries, indirect customers include students, academic and researchers of member institutions (and beyond).

In short the M25 is committed to:

- Developing a regional agenda (working locally within a national framework)
- Sharing resources and good practice
- Being innovative
- Giving value for money to its members and their communities
- Developing a service agenda promoting:
 - Resource discovery
 - Access
 - Mutual support
 - Collaboration and Partnership
 - Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Putting the M25 Consortium on the map

In May 2004 the M25 Advocacy Working Group (AWG) ran a survey to assess the extent to which staff working in member libraries were aware of the organisation and its range of services. Its aim was to gauge the level of awareness and usage of the Consortium and its activities, and so inform and influence the Consortium's future approach to publicising its main activities.

The 2004 survey built on the findings of an earlier survey carried out in February 2001 and gives a measure of the extent to which the Consortium's profile has been raised.

Response Rate

There was a 44% increase in response rate between the two surveys (with numbers of respondents growing from 543 to 780). The survey produced quantitative and qualitative data and targeted staff working in member libraries and, where appropriate, IT staff where members operate within converged services.

Key Findings

For some example comments from survey responses, please see Appendix 1.

1. Increased awareness, usage and participation

There was increased awareness, usage or participation in:

- Continuing Professional Development
- Inform25 - with usage showing a nearly two fold increase on the 2001 figure (Further data on this trend will be available once the current usage statistics development is completed.)

2. Increased awareness

Whilst there was increased awareness of the M25 website there was actually a small reduction in its usage overall. Given the growth in significance of web delivered information and increase access to computing this result is a little surprising. This has encouraged the Steering Group to move forward with its proposed major review and overhaul of the web site.

3. Access Schemes

Slight decrease in awareness and usage of access arrangements. Arguably this may be attributed to the scaling up of the original M25 Access and Borrowing Scheme with others into a national scheme (SCONUL Research Extra).

4. Disaster control planning

The plan provides a comprehensive template for assisting information services in prevention activities and planned responses to disaster management situations. The template maximising the likelihood of business continuity in the adverse circumstances of a disaster.

The survey was carried out before the launch of the re-designed M25 Disaster Control Plan so it is perhaps not to surprising that levels of use of the template had had decreased slightly during the period under review.

The re-launch should boost levels of usage. The AWG considered why take has not been as great as anticipated. The group believe this may in part be attributable to increased aware at institutional level to need to plan to mitigate risk to business continuity. In some cases institutions may have put in place institution-wide approaches to Disaster Management and Business Continuity.

What should be made of all this?

CPD - the awareness survey confirms a view, widespread within consortium members, that the CPD activities are flagship services offering great value for money. Keep up the good work is very much the message here.

Inform25 - qualitative data gives an endorsement to the service. Whilst indicating higher levels of satisfaction with Inform25 some frustrations were identified suggesting there may be scope to improve further guidance to users in getting the most from the service.

The launch of the inform25.ac.uk domain may go a long way to addressing this issue.

Access arrangements - a success story with SRX and the streamlining of arrangements by which taught students can access the British Library. At a practical level there is great appreciation of the rolling of schemes together where this has proved possible.

The M25 Consortium has had a real impact in changing the culture and promoting resilience in access arrangements. As one respondent commented, "Any work which simplifies regional access arrangements is welcome...".

Disaster control planning - the awareness survey points to greater promotion of this very valuable tool. The is something the Disaster Management Working Group and the AWG will work on to get the message out there.

Web service – it is recognised that a lot of the content held within the main business part of the Consortium's website is not easy to find and a major review of the website is now under underway.

Overall Evaluation

The survey reveals a picture of a mature, thriving, highly regarded consortium with a well used set of services which has had real impact on the delivery of information services to its communities of users.

Appendix 1 Selected comments from survey responses

What staff in the member libraries think of the range of services, qualitative comments:

Inform 25

"Inform25 is a really valuable resource to us."

"I am not sure if it has the amount of public awareness it merits, particularly among students."

Continuing Professional Development and Training

"My colleagues and I have enjoyed the benefits of CPD25 membership, and greatly value the training provided."

"The range of training courses and the ample opportunity offered Library workers to attend them is extraordinary."

M25 generally

"I think it's very good, both in terms of offering affordable staff development activities, and allowing consortium staff to gain crucial experience through involvement in the various working and task groups."

"It has made an enormous difference - both for access to resources for our students (when we are all suffering from not enough money to buy everything everyone needs)and for training our staff."

"I think that the Consortium does excellent work and feel that we benefit both as an organisation and as individual professionals from its existence."

Web site and Disaster Control Plan

There were few qualitative comments made about these two areas of activity perhaps supporting the view that there is an opportunity to have greater impact through web delivered services and there remains a need to more proactive in promoting the Disaster Control Plan.

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