Tools to develop effective research support in an academic library: a case study
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As research support becomes an increasingly topical issue within academic libraries in the UK, this paper examines two different approaches used by Loughborough University Library to assess the effectiveness of its research support. The first is a traditional benchmarking survey distributed to universities within the well-regarded 1994 Group of UK universities. This online survey produced largely quantitative data to compare resources (physical and financial) and services provided to researchers. It enabled both Loughborough University and survey respondents to identify their relative strengths and weaknesses, and draw up plans for future developments.

This external benchmarking was then followed by a second, inward looking survey which examined the information needs of a group of research centres. The survey obtained quantitative data from an online survey and internal library systems, plus qualitative data from follow up interviews. This data has provided an extremely valuable insight into the ways in which these centres and their researchers operate and use library services and resources, as well as, even more importantly, why they may not do so. The paper discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches and how the results themselves can be carried forward into operational plans.

Key Words: Academic libraries, Research support, Qualitative data, Quantitative data, Case study, Library services, Benchmarking, User surveys, Practitioner research.