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Using QR codes in the library at Leeds Metropolitan University



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John Bottomley describes a project he undertook to incorporate QR codes into library services at Leeds Metropolitan University while in post as a graduate trainee.

Following on from the success of the PC Availability service downloadable via a quick response (QR) code introduced in 2010, the library at Leeds Metropolitan University looked to introduce QR codes across the library at points where it was thought to add value for students. QR codes are two-dimensional square barcodes that contain text or a URL; scanning QR codes with a mobile browser using a camera phone shows the text or opens the browser at that URL. QR codes can be produced quickly and free from various websites, e.g. <http://keremerkan.net/qr-code-and-2d-code-generator/>.

Initially it was thought the codes could be added to the library floor plan key to link to the relevant pages of the library website in order to give more information about the areas/items marked on the floor plans. However, adding QR codes required changing the design of the floor plan key; this had been simplified and revised many times to aid clarity, so how could we add QR codes?! Nevertheless, with editing and after experimentation to find the smallest size of readable QR code, they were fitted in. After discussion we also decided to add a one-or-two word description of the linked page of the QR code on the key in the hope of increasing their use. Whilst information about printing costs etc. was obviously useful, would a QR code link to the catalogue be useful (when the floor plans were in the library) or would it be more relevant to link to the guide to using the

catalogue? It was thought that the link to the catalogue would still be used by more students and so this was used.

The Library

Key to Library Floor Plans

Audio Visual Equipment, Stock (including videos, DVDs and CDs)	Books, Journals, Quick Reference, Short Loans
Group Study Area / Student Meeting Rooms	Silent Study Area
IT Labs / Open Access PCs <small>Find a PC</small>	Printers / Photocopiers <small>Prices</small>
Help and Information Point <small>Online help</small>	Adjustable Height Desk <small>DRA info</small>
Catalogue <small>Find resources</small>	Kiosk (top up your Campus Card here) and change machine <small>Online top up</small>
Accessibility Toilet	Lift / Stairs
The High Demand Area Self service holds, past exam papers and short loans are all located in the High Demand Area on the ground floor	
QR code for Library floor plan:	Wireless internet access Eduroam wireless internet access is available throughout The Library <small>Wireless guide</small>

Students and staff were then surveyed to assess their awareness of QR codes and whether they thought the codes would provide extra benefit. A draft version of the floor plan key was also produced and shown to those questioned. The survey results showed that c. 75% of those interviewed knew about QR codes, had a phone that could read them and thought that adding them to the floor plan key would provide extra benefit. However, about half said we should also publicise what QR codes were and how to use them before we added them to library materials, so perhaps knowledge about QR codes was not as ubiquitous as it appeared.

Following a colleague's suggestion, it was also decided to add QR codes to the printed 'How to...' guide-holders. They could be added to the laminated sheets at the back of the guide-holders (i.e. visible and to be used when the guides had run out) or stuck on the front of the holders so the guides could still be seen, but so that the QR codes could always be seen and be used whether or not the guides were present. It was decided

that putting the codes on the fronts of the spinners would give more value to students and support the library's green agenda if students downloaded the guide rather than taking a printed copy.

QR CODE DESIGN

The website above can produce QR codes in different colours so, using <http://jdstiles.com/colors/colorboxes.html> (or similar) to find the hexadecimal colour number of the Leeds Metropolitan University shade of purple, subsequent QR codes were produced in this colour.

We have further ideas for the use of QR codes, but it was decided to begin with these to get staff and students used to them. Additional ideas include adding QR codes that link to the relevant library webpage at the self-issue and return machines to provide help to users, especially during non-staffed hours. The above website can also increase the error correction level in the QR codes it produces, which means that although the QR code slightly increases in size, more of it can be removed without affecting its use. Using this facility we are also going to superimpose the Leeds Metropolitan rose on to larger QR codes and remove the parts of the code underneath the rose to 'personalise' these codes further.

Finally, we are going to survey the students and staff again in time to ascertain how much the QR codes are used and where and how else they could be used.