

Library services without a library

Post-earthquake use of virtual reference at University of Canterbury

Following the September 2010 earthquake and the closure of all libraries, library staff at the University of Canterbury were forced to rethink how they connected with their users. Using the library's established virtual reference service, students were able to contact library staff regardless of their physical location. After the February earthquake, with University library closures ranging from 3 weeks to indefinite, this service came into its own

as a vital communication tool. It facilitated contact between the library and both students and academics, as well as proving invaluable as a means for library staff to locate and communicate with each other.

Our virtual reference tool was well used in the difficult post-earthquake periods and we can see this usage continuing as university life returns to normal.

Queries by topic

During the first weeks of the University Restart following the February earthquake, a small majority of AskLive questions were concerned with how to renew or return items, reporting items lost in damaged buildings, and other lending matters. As libraries began reopening, these questions dropped off (both as a percentage and in absolute numbers). During this reopening period there was an increase in reference queries, especially on finding information for assignments, accessing specific online resources, and citation styles.

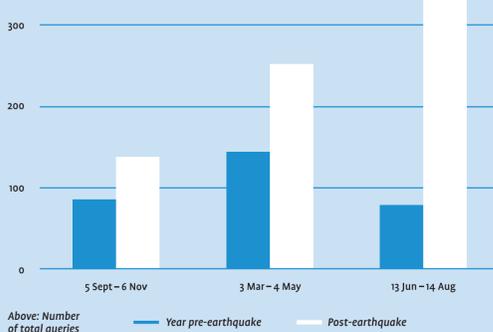
Queries by topic



Usage increase

The nine-week period after each of the three major quake events saw a significant increase in question numbers compared with the equivalent period in the year previous. (Note that these time periods don't include the 17-23 August peak referred to under "Ongoing usage".) The most queries received in a day in 2010 was 8 (on two occasions); whereas from 3 March to 14 August 2011 there were 39 days where we received 8 or more queries. Since April 2011 we have covered weekends as well as weekdays, and now weekend usage is similar to weekday usage in 2010.

Usage pre- and post-earthquakes



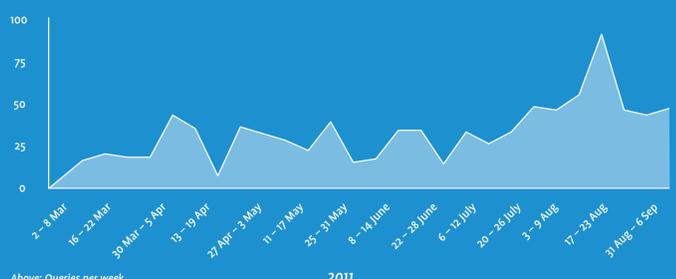
Ongoing usage

The number of queries received each week since March has continued to trend upward (counter to trends in previous years to decrease after the start of semester). Low points for 2011 are due to:

- 20-26 April - Easter closing
- 1-14 June - some data lost during a software upgrade
- 29 June - 5 July - mid-year break

The peak in 17-23 August was due to the 15th August snowday when AskLive was advertised on UC Facebook pages and on the Learn course management system. We received 20 or 21 queries on each of the 15th-17th August and 30 queries on the 18th.

Ongoing Usage



Timeline

- 4 September 2010 7.1 Greendale earthquake**
All 5 libraries closed
- 13 September**
Education and Macmillan Brown Libraries reopen
EPS and Law Libraries partially reopen
- 11 October**
Central Library levels 2-3 partially reopen
- November-February**
Earthquake remediation and planned renovation/RFID projects
- 21 February**
Semester 1 started
- 22 February 2011 6.3 Lyttelton earthquake**
All 5 libraries closed
- 2 March**
AskLive restarted
- 14 March**
Macmillan Brown Library reopens
- 28 March**
Education Library reopens
- 16 May**
Central Library levels 2-3 reopen
- 13 June 2011 5.7 / 6.3 aftershocks**
All libraries closed, AskLive "stuck" on but erratically staffed
- 17 June**
AskLive returns to Library opening hours
Macmillan Brown Library reopens
- 18 June**
Education Library reopens
- 4 July**
Central Library levels 2-3 reopen
- 26 July**
Law Library reopens
- 25-26 July Snow closes University**
AskLive continues
- 15 August Snow closes University**
AskLive advertised on UC Facebook page & Learn Moodle
- 12 September**
Central Library all levels reopened
- EPS Library still not reopened due to risk from adjacent buildings.*