Appendix 3 – Library Support Volunteers - Impact Report Jan 22

Following a pilot in January 2018, the Library Support Volunteer role was first fully introduced later that same year for the September presentation.

This role was created as an additional support service for students studying in secure environments (SiSE). Student volunteers in this role are able to conduct research on behalf of students in secure environments who may not otherwise have access to library services and research materials. Without this service it would be impossible for some students in secure environments to study with the Open University and to gain qualifications which could make a life-changing difference for them. There are currently c1,800 students studying in secure environments and the service is available to those studying at Level 2 and above.

The service is accessed on a 'by request' basis, with the pool of active volunteers able to complete research tasks on an individual project basis, working to a target deadline of 10 days for completion of the research. The Warehouse who do the printing and posting have a service level agreement of 48 hours and so students should not wait longer than 14 days for their resources after making a request. We're very proud that on average, requests are completed within 4 days.

In our 2020 Annual Membership Survey we asked students about their motivations for volunteering – two of the highest scoring motivations were 'To support fellow students with study' (43%) and 'To help the student community' (42%) and this is reflected in our recruitment outcomes in terms of the popularity of these roles. In the most recent round of recruitment for new Library Support Volunteers we received 82 applications, of which 84% were submitted by students who had never volunteered with the Association previously. We also know from the 2020 Annual Membership Survey that time constraints and competing demands on students' time are one of the biggest barriers to volunteering, cited by 27% of responders. These types of roles offer flexibility in terms of how many requests volunteers agree to take on and in terms of how and when they carry out the work, providing a more accessible route to volunteering for many students.

Demand for the service has grown steadily since it was introduced. In December 2021 we received 129 research support requests from students in secure environments, a 63% increase from December 2020. We were thrilled in Summer 2020 to receive feedback from the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences (FASS) that as a result of the success of our service, they were looking into increasing the number of FASS masters and post graduate modules available to students studying in secure environments.

We recently conducted a feedback exercise on the service and wanted to share some of the direct feedback from our students in secure environments:

"Without being able to access the research materials, articles, reports etc I would be unable to conduct the research required to undertake my PhD studies. The volunteers have also on occasion substituted materials they have been unable to source with materials of similar content, enabling me to progress with my work."

"Without this service I would not have been able to complete my last module. The access to additional material enabled me to obtain a distinction …"

"This has provided me with extra study material which I would not have had access to otherwise…"