



Mapping The Needs Of A Generation

Interim findings of major study of doctoral researchers indicate urgent need for libraries and universities to develop their understanding of 'Generation Y'

Emerging findings from a major three-year research study into the information-seeking behaviour of doctoral students have highlighted the need for far greater understanding of the generation born between 1982 and 1994 - commonly dubbed Generation Y.

Researchers of Tomorrow was commissioned by the British Library and JISC to establish a benchmark for research behaviour, against which future generations can be measured - and also to provide guidance for librarians and information specialists





on how best to meet the research needs of Generation Y scholars.

Earlier this year 70 full-time doctoral students at UK colleges and universities were recruited for a longitudinal study of their research habits during the course of the next three years. The study will investigate their research habits in digital and physical environments, as well as their use of resources both off- and online.

The longitudinal study will be supported by a number of surveys to establish the wider context of the doctoral research landscape. The first of these surveys has just been completed; it surveyed a representative sample of all doctoral students in the UK and yielded a number of significant interim findings.

- Information format. Three quarters of Generation Y students – more than those in any other age group – found the information they sought in an e-journal article. Emergent technology. Only a small proportion of respondents (10-30%) in any age group say they use 'emergent technology' – such as wikis, virtual research environments, social networking and other Web 2.0 applications – in their research. Of those that do use them, more generally find them useful in their research than not.
- Help and advice. Fewer Generation Y students than other age groups say they regularly use library staff support to find research resources (11% of Generation Y compared to an average of 17% for other age groups), or take advice from subject specialist librarians (4% compared to 9% average). More Generation Y respondents (46%) than any other age group turn to their fellow students and/or supervisors for support in using emergent technologies.
- Location of work. Compared to other age groups, more Generation Y researchers work

from a dedicated or shared office space (or laboratory or studio) (40%), than work from their own home (39%).

See: www.researchersoftomorrow.net

68 colleges and universities around the UK collaborated with the distribution of the wider 'context-setting' survey, and a total of 6562 questionnaires were returned. This excellent response rate provides a detailed and nation-wide snapshot of doctoral research across all types of education providers.

Joanna Newman, the British Library's Head of Higher Education, said, "The interim findings of the Researchers of Tomorrow study provide a fascinating snapshot of current research behaviour of doctoral students. It's perhaps surprising that so few researchers in the 21-27 range really use the wide range of Web 2.0 applications for research or collaborative working. And when it comes to emergent technology, they're more likely to seek the advice of their peers or supervisors than librarians or information specialists – a finding that could suggest a need for professionals to rethink how best to deliver advice and support in this area."

Charles Hutchings, JISC's market research manager, said, "Of those students who have used advanced technologies in their research 27 per cent have received no advice or guidance at all or they self-help for instance using online guides and manuals. This could be because these technologies are being underused and undervalued, due to a lack of understanding of the benefit they can deliver during the research process. As the study continues it will be interesting to see if this is true."

The study is being conducted by Education for Change, in association with The Research Partnership, and builds on the study by CIBER of the

'Google Generation', which was published by the British Library and JISC in January 2008.

Joanna Newman concluded: "Although it's still early days with this project, we're already uncovering some fascinating detail about how doctoral research behaviours are evolving – some of which throw into question some of the key assumptions often made about Generation Y in particular. The three-year longitudinal study that began this September will add much concrete detail to our understanding of researchers' changing needs and, once complete, will help inform and guide research support over the coming decade."