‘Snapshot’ – Executive Summary

The Snapshot project adopted the user experience (UX) research technique of a ‘cultural probe’ in order to uncover detailed information on the information and research behaviours of postdoctoral researchers and PhD candidates at the University of Cambridge. A cultural probe is a collection of carefully designed activities and exercises that are given to a number of individuals from a specific community in order to probe more deeply into their practices and routines. These activities are completed over a set period of time, with a view to deriving a richer understanding of motivations, thoughts and behaviours, along with the cultural and social context that informs these. Probes are designed to engender engagement and inspiration in those who have agreed to complete them, in order to maintain their interest and enthusiasm throughout their duration and to help them to evaluate and reflect on their day-to-day choices and actions.

Methodology

An intentionally analogue approach was taken when designing the probe, for example, handwriting questions in participant diaries, and providing pens and tactile materials for the various tasks assigned, in order to increase engagement and elicit more detailed responses. Participants were also met in person on two occasions in order to establish positive relationships and encourage their investment in the project.

Over the two-week period of the study we set our 10 participants the following tasks:

• Complete a ‘research diary’ of their research and information behaviour, and answer specific questions we had written into the diaries in advance.
• Take photographs of places, components and tools that were important to their research.
• Draw a cognitive map of their learning landscape.
• In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants at the end of the study, with a focus on the contents of their completed packs and their experience of the project.

Only one participant dropped out of the project and the remainder completed all the set tasks.

Findings and service design suggestions

Several clear themes emerged from mapping the data received from our participants and a range of potential new services were suggested as a result, specifically in response to those areas where knowledge, support or information appeared to be lacking,

• Expertisefinder: a service that would list library staff and their individual areas of expertise, allowing University members to search for these online.
• Library Envoy: the briefing of researchers in research groups with a view to them acting as a conduit for information on library services and developments among their peers.
• Embedded Librarians: the need for an in-depth study of the value of embedded librarianship (librarian working alongside researchers) at the University.
• The I-D Network: an inter-disciplinary network facilitated by libraries offering opportunities for research, methods and data sharing across disciplines.
• Stat-wise: a ‘one stop shop’ for information and training on statistical packages

The full report can be read here: http://bit.ly/thensnapshotreport