



# Case study

## Improving strategic and operational usage reporting during the transition to COUNTER Release 5

Library and Learning Resources at Birmingham City University were keen to improve the processes around collecting and reporting on electronic resource usage. The transition to COUNTER Release 5 (R5) was one key factor influencing the need for a review and to make changes.

This case study outlines:

- ◆ The drivers influencing changes to the approach to collecting and using usage statistics.
- ◆ The revised processes that have been developed and their rationale.
- ◆ How BCU managed the transition between R4 and R5.
- ◆ Considerations and lessons learned.

### The original approach

Birmingham City University has approximately 24,000 students from 80 countries. Library and Learning Resources provides resources and services that serve the needs of a diverse student population.

On an annual basis, information about eresource usage was reported outside Library and Learning Resources to the University Executive Group. A single headline eresource usage indicator was presented showing the percentage change in all eresource usage over time. The figure presented had limited value in informing operational and strategic decision making because:

- ◆ COUNTER compliant and non-COUNTER compliant usage statistics were combined
- ◆ Usage relating to different resource types were combined
- ◆ It lacked granularity
- ◆ It was difficult to provide a meaningful contextual narrative to the statistics

### Drivers for change

In October 2019, a number of factors led to Library and Learning Resources undertaking a review of the practices surrounding the collection and use of eresource usage statistics. These included:

- ◆ the appointment of a new library director bringing a fresh perspective
- ◆ a desire to understand resource usage in more detail (the potential and limitations) to improve decision making and to be able to consistently assess trends over time
- ◆ a requirement to communicate usage of eresources to senior university management more clearly and effectively
- ◆ a drive to improve data collection across the whole of the service.

## An interim approach (November 2019- March 2020)

In recognition of the limited value of a single combined annual headline figure the processes for the collection and presentation of usage data were changed in the following ways:

### Frequency

Reporting frequency changed from annual to quarterly. This would allow monitoring of changes over time and at different points during each year.

### Resource Type

The starting point would be collecting robust usage data for ejournals. This would allow more consistency in what was reported and, once the processes for ejournals was established, other resource types could be considered. Article downloads as a measure was also widely understood.

### Data Sources

The default was to collect COUNTER Release (R4) reports where available and to supplement this with other data. This enabled comparisons with previous years to be made. At this point, where COUNTER data was provided, the majority of the data for BCU eresources were still using the R4 format. Where R4 was not available, a priority for collection of data was agreed (see box 1).

BCU make use of JUSP which is a Jisc service that collects usage data on behalf of institutions and presents data in a range of reports through a single interface. JUSP provides a **TR: Transition Report (R4-R5)** which presents the closest equivalent metrics to R4 reports. This has helped to support the comparison between R4 and R5 data.

#### **Box 1: Priorities for data collection: Interim (extract from BCU report)**

1. COUNTER 4 Journal Report 1 (Number of Successful Full-Text Article Requests by Month and Journal) are used by default
2. JUSP TR: Transition (R4 - R5) reports where available
3. COUNTER 5 TR\_J1 Journal Requests (Excluding OA\_Gold) (Total Item Requests) reports if necessary.
4. COUNTER 5 TR\_J1 Journal Requests (Excluding OA\_Gold) (Unique Item Requests) are also recorded for providers/publishers where COUNTER 5 (C5)

## Formal review (April 2020- July 2020)

An increasing number of publishers adopted the COUNTER Release 5 (R5) standard during the course of 2020. This prompted a decision to undertake a formal review of the processes for collection and use of eresource usage in July 2020.

Whilst COUNTER R5 had been the new standard since early 2019, the take up for compliance amongst publishers was not consistent or immediate. As a result, some publishers were still providing R4 data and others were providing R5 data beginning at different dates. Although the situation was challenging, a decision was made to further revise the usage data collection processes to proactively reflect the increasing availability of R5 data and acknowledge that at some point in the future R4 data would no longer be available.

The review recognised the importance of having consistent and robust data with an appropriate context and narrative to build a strong foundation going forward:

*“If you unpick that headline figure, the data behind it has to be accurate because people see that figure and make assumptions about it and it results in service judgements so that’s why our focus has been on trying to build the data from the ground up.”*

In addition, BCU experienced unusual usage patterns due to changes in resource access as a result of COVID-19. This reinforced the need to have robust data to be able to investigate such changing patterns.

An audit of the available data pertaining to eresources provided by Library and Learning Resources was conducted to inform the review. Using information taken from administration access to platforms for each COUNTER compliant provider, including of books, databases, journals, and multimedia, the adoption of the various COUNTER standards as of July 2020 were recorded and analysed.

The review concluded that COUNTER R5 was the dominant COUNTER standard in use by Library and Learning Resources’ providers and publishers (see boxes 2 and 3).

### **Box 2: Main results of the review audit (extract from BCU report)**

Of the forty-eight providers/publishers examined, 2% (1/48) remained on the COUNTER 3 (C3) standard, 79% (38/48) had adopted the C4 standard and 92% (44/48) had adopted the C5 standard.

Dual access to both C4 and C5 reporting was available for 73% (35/48) of providers/publishers.

For how long dual access to C4 and C5 reporting was available was unclear.

Of the 92% (44/48) of providers/publishers who had adopted the C5 standard, nine were exclusively providing C5 reporting with no dual access to C4 reporting.

### **Box 3: Key conclusion of the review (extract from BCU report)**

At 92% (44/48) compared to C4 at 79% (38/48), C5 was the dominant COUNTER standard in use by L&LR providers/publishers.

With C3 and C4 reporting still in use a complete transition to C5 would not be possible.

## Revised approach

The review concluded that the “adoption of C5 as the default standard for reporting would aid our position to benchmark our usage with other organisations who have adopted the standard” and resulted in the following recommendations:

- ◆ From 1st August 2020, for the 2020/21 academic year onwards, R5 is the default COUNTER reporting standard used for the collection of usage data to report on the percentage increase in resource use.
- ◆ For journals, COUNTER R5 TR\_J1 Journal Requests (Excluding OA\_Gold) (Unique Item Requests) is the report used.

Although there were still three key journal publishers not providing COUNTER Release 5 data, it was considered that the recommended approach would provide the best basis for making year-on-year comparison from this point forward. It could also help with making benchmark comparisons in the future.

The need to make retrospective comparisons was also considered, and in this respect the report recognised the value of the JUSP transition reports and concluded:

*“Where necessary, because of the need to compare usage data from the 2020/21 academic year with C4 usage data from the 2019/20 academic year, JUSP TR: Transition*

*(R4 - R5) reports or COUNTER 5 TR\_J1 Journal Requests (Excluding OA Gold) (Total Item Requests) depending on their availability are also used.”*

It was also agreed to provide a contextual statement alongside the data provided to make clear any caveats that anyone using the data would need to be aware of. The recommendations of the report were signed off and the new processes are now in operation.

## Lessons learned

Staff at BCU have learned that they need to take pragmatic decisions and to review data collection processes to reflect changing requirements and changes within the environment.

In addition, BCU staff has benefitted by gaining:

- ◆ a better understanding of R5 and how to compare with R4, such as ‘total item requests’ provide a better comparator than ‘unique item requests’.
- ◆ new skills for manipulating R5 data using the SUMIF function and pivot tables in Excel.
- ◆ An appreciation of the flexibility of R5 data. Now that R5 data has become the default for the data collected about ejournal usage it has been possible to explore the increased flexibility that this format offers over R4.

## Looking forward

The review has provided a basis for collecting and using reliable usage statistics on a consistent basis. Looking forward for Library and Learning Resources there are further plans, opportunities, and areas to explore. These include:

- ◆ Collecting COUNTER compliant usage statistics for other resource types. While the focus has been on ejournal statistics, there are plans to apply the approach to other resources such as ebooks.
- ◆ Exploring the collection of data relating to Open Access resources. These continue to represent a growing proportion of eresources.
- ◆ Understanding cost per use. BCU is keen to undertake more work to develop a more rigorous understanding of cost per use, how this compares with other institutions and what this means when compared between different resource types.
- ◆ New Library Management System. BCU are about to transition to a new LMS, which it is hoped will provide an opportunity to support its collection and use of eresource usage data through SUSHI harvesting and new analytics features.
- ◆ Integrated approach to service wide data use. The review reflects a growing appreciation of the value that reliable data can provide in managing the library service and improving decision making. Library and Learning Resources has recently appointed a Library Data Officer to help look across the service to develop an integrated approach to data use and examine how data can be combined and used effectively.

## What you can do now

- ◆ Take a look at the [JUSP guides on COUNTER Release 5](#).
- ◆ Watch [JUSP's short video guides](#), including one on Pivot Tables, to learn more about working with R5 reports.
- ◆ Check what R5 and R4 data is available to your institution in JUSP from the **Supplier Status** and **Your Data** tabs on the [portal home](#) (login required).
- ◆ Try the [JUSP TR: Transition Report \(R4<-->R5\)](#) available from the menu in the R5 area of JUSP.