The digital Reference Service
An essential element of the virtual library

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Summary

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Objectives

Our two main objectives are:

• Survey the current status of the Reference Services in the major Spanish Virtual Health Libraries.

• Analyze the used tools and the services provided by these Virtual Libraries.
Methods and Materials

• Study of the regional virtual health libraries websites to verify the access to the resources, services, availability, etc.
• In addition, questionnaires were sent to the library managers of the main virtual libraries in Spain in order to complete the information

  – Questionnaire was sent to 19 organizations: the main regional virtual health libraries + BNCS
  – We received information from almost 60% of the libraries.
  – Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.
Results: Types of Virtual Reference Services

- **Structured Virtual Reference Service**
- **Traditional Reference Service**
- **No centralized Reference Service**
Results obtained from the web sites analysis

Contact by e-mail/form
- YES: 47%
- NO: 53%

Specific Requests by e-mail/contact form
- YES: 18%
- NO: 82%

Authentication required to access resources or contact
- YES: 18%
- NO: 82%

FAQ's section
- YES: 29%
- NO: 71%
Survey results: Resources for the users

- Tutorials
- Video/audio-tutorials
- User Manuals
- Quick Guides
- FAQs
- Other resources (e-learning, attendance course, etc.)
Survey results: Users tools to make questions

Traditional Reference Service

Structured Reference Service

- E-mail: 33%
- Phone: 33%
- Face to face: 17%
- Chat: 17%
- Social Media: 17%
Survey results: Librarian tools to answer

Traditional Reference Service

Structured Reference Service

Legend:
- Web form
- Intranet
- E-mail
- Chat
- Phone
- Face to face
Survey results: Evaluation

What do libraries evaluate?

- Do not evaluate: 40%
- Number of requests: 20%
- User satisfaction: 13%
- Type and number of questions: 13%
- Response time: 7%
- All kind of information: 7%
Other results

• Only one region has a specific budget for the Reference Service

• Only 2 use specific software, both free software (one of them pointed out that they use HESK, a helpdesk free software, not specific for libraries)

• The data treatment is very different: no storage of the dates to the storage of all transactions and conversations.

• No uniformity either in the time of data storage and monitoring of the data protection policies.
Conclusions

- The development of an independent Reference Service in the Spanish Regional Virtual Libraries is quite uneven.
- Nevertheless all of them have focused their efforts on providing other services, such as the remote access of electronic resources (databases, publications) to all users from any computer connected to the web.
- The Reference Librarian profile is not really developed.
- Reference Service is mostly still developing, although big advances are being made by regions such as Andalusia, Balearic Islands or Galicia, which are pioneers in the implementation of this kind of service.
Recommendations

• The introduction of a digitalized Reference Service in a virtual library would be essential in order to centralize the work done by librarians
• Evaluation should be done, in order to better quantify the library work
• A Virtual and structured Reference Service could have a marked positive effect on user satisfaction

The results show that **there is still a lot of work to do** in the Regional Virtual Libraries in Spain
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