

“I don’t have time” – library services and competing demands on researchers’ time

The following notes summarise discussions from the 2 research support workshops held at the SCONUL 2006 annual conference. Notes have been arranged into 7 broad categories:

- Showing relevance of library services
- Skills and researcher education
- Staff activities
- Research and finance
- Space and location
- New models of publishing
- Current and new services

Showing relevance of library services

- In some disciplines researchers may be losing sight of the relevance of university libraries to their work.
- It was noted that from the researchers’ point of view, the question of who provides them with the information they need is not important, they just want the information; however, it is extremely important that senior figures within the university recognise the library or information service as being the source of information vital to researchers’ work, in order to promote themselves and demonstrate the value they are adding to the university’s work.
- Delegates shared experiences of success and failures in getting the library’s voice heard at committee level within institutions. Examples included:
 - Simply inviting oneself to a committee!
 - Problems with senior academics and administrators resisting moves by the library to become involved.
- The RAE can be used as a lever by libraries to demonstrate their value to their institutions – it was noted that training sessions had been held for administrative staff within one institution to provide support to those creating departmental publication returns.
- Another lever that can be used by library services to demonstrate their value is the current elearning agenda, though it was noted that very few delegates’ universities have institution-wide Information Literacy policies.

Space and location

- Researchers seem to be using a wider range of libraries than before, going out to where the best information can be found.
- Some suggested that academic libraries are becoming less attractive as a workspace for researchers.
- The issue of where researchers do their research work was discussed a little further, delegates noting that a great deal of research work is done at home, or at least away from the campus, which can hamper attempts to build real, rather than virtual, relationships. This also highlights the importance of providing high-quality, highly-relevant web services to researchers.
- It was noted that at one institution academics are being invited to give their input into the redesign of library space.

Skills and researcher education

- One delegate noted that they were encountering increasing numbers of researchers with poor research skills.

- The importance of successful user education was a major theme in the workshops. Some notes included:
 - That it is easier for information skills training to be built-in to programmes for postgraduate students than for academic and research staff.
 - That, further to the above, it can often be the case that newer researchers are more comfortable using electronic resources in particular than those in the middle of their careers.
 - That the nature of information required cannot be assumed – it is often the “little things” that can cause researchers most anxiety, and so user education efforts should not make assumptions on initial awareness.
- Issues such as plagiarism concerns can also be used by library services as a lever to demonstrate their value – for example, by building bibliographic software training into research programmes, libraries can help inculcate best practice within researchers and thus help researchers understand the issues and avoid the pitfalls.
- Library services should be targeting graduate schools and graduate programmes to “get them early” (see also later note about e-theses under *New models of publishing*).

New models of publishing

- Changing models of publishing were discussed, with a focus on Institutional Repositories (IR), and the ways in which library services can become involved with these.
- The role of learned societies was raised, including the possibility of their shifting towards a service-based model (possibly providing peer-review for IR) and away from journal publication (delegates did not consider this likely, certainly in the near future).
- It was noted that in taking the lead on IR developments, libraries can take those opportunities to raise awareness of the other important services they provide.
- Arguments that could be used to justify IR developments were raised, such as the increase in citations enjoyed by authors whose works are available in IR.
- The value of promoting e-theses to graduate students was raised – by encouraging PhD candidates to engage with e-theses, library services can educate them in literature searching, bibliographic software and copyright, and foster an Open Access ethos amongst the next generation of researchers.

Staff activities

- The possibility of library staff performing literature searches for researchers was raised as one way of saving researchers time and providing tailored services, though the general consensus was that a move towards mediated searching would be a retrograde step. An addendum to this was the possibility of library services offering to take initial literature review work done by researchers and then build on and expand those searches.
- Some libraries now have posts in place with an exclusive remit to support research – delegates who work in libraries with such a post recommended it as a good way forward.
- Relationship-building was identified as one of the key aspects of successful research support – while one-to-one meetings can be time consuming, and there are scalability issues (as there would be with mediated searching), they can often yield the best results, allow for many different issues to be addressed, and raise the library's profile.

- Further to the above, delegates noted the importance of holding dialogues, rather than training sessions, with researchers.
- One avenue available to library staff to demonstrate their knowledge and credibility is to be credible researchers themselves.
- Throughout both workshops, the notion of restructuring current library provision was raised as an area in need of more investigation.
- To help address the issue of the scalability of research support activities, library services should target specific research clusters or centres, build relationships with individual research directors, and target their efforts at institutional research strengths, demonstrating how they contribute to those strengths.

Current and new services

- In order to demonstrate their relevance to researchers, libraries should promote more aggressively those services of theirs that save researchers time.
- It was noted that given the proliferation of information, researchers may at times experience a sense of being lost, and that library services should demonstrate how they can help address this.
- It should be remembered that researchers want the best and most relevant information available, not necessarily the greatest *amount* of information available.
- Given the growing role of universities as drivers of business in their regions, through spin-out companies and knowledge transfer, it was noted that libraries may need to explore ways of supporting such endeavours. Within this it was noted that:
 - Publisher licences would make the provision of information to spin-outs very problematic.
 - Libraries could explore the possibilities for income generation activities through supporting spin-outs.
 - One institution was undertaking a trial to explore ways of supporting spin-outs and knowledge transfer activities.
- Delegates noted the importance of identifying best practice in certain areas and then investigating how best to adapt that practice to other areas, though it was also noted that the importance of library resources to researchers varies enormously between disciplines.
- A specific service supplied to researchers in one institution is the provision of computers onto which researchers can download software specific to their own work, giving them a base outside of their departments in which they can work on their projects.

Research and finance

- The implications of Full Economic Costing, and how library services can become involved in this (e.g. making sure the costs of information resources can be built into funding bids) were discussed – delegates did not have strong real-world examples of where libraries had successfully pursued this.
- Further to the above, it was suggested that library services should be more pro-active in communicating with their institutions' finance departments with regards to research budgets.
- In some institutions it is the library service that is managing the funds the Wellcome Trust makes available for making results from its funded research available through Open Access channels.