

- 4 <http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/objinfolit.html>
- 5 <http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/iqtest.html>
- 6 <http://alia.org.au/groups/infolit/>
<http://alia.org.au/groups/infolit/information.literacy.html>
- 8 *ibid*
- 9 <http://dis.shef.ac.uk/literacy/>

Library and information services for alumni



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Although an Alumni Association exists at Bolton Institute, it is rather low-key, and take up has not been high. In the past, with no formal arrangements in place regarding access to library and information resources, in practice, ex-students wishing to continue using these facilities have been required to apply for external membership. With the likelihood of the Institute promoting its Alumni Association more actively, and a commitment to widening access, and assisting students' lifelong learning, further clarification of our policy on this issue became a major objective for Learning Support and Development.

Very little appears to be written on the subject of services to alumni. A preliminary search of the LISA database demonstrated that a main area for concern has been the importance of alumni as a means of fundraising for libraries! The problematic area of access to electronic databases for alumni is becoming a prominent issue¹, which may lead to further research on the subject of access to library and information services in general.

A certain amount of data on current practice at UK universities was gathered from their websites. A 1998 survey on external borrower charges, available in the lis-link mailing list archive², mentions that charges to alumni are normally 50% of the standard external rate.

In order to gain further details of current practice, a request was sent to the lis-link mailing list, containing the three following questions:

- do you make a charge for library membership for alumni? if so, how does this compare to your usual external membership fee?
- what services does this include? (e.g. number of loans, restrictions on short loans?)
- does membership include access to computing facilities or use of any electronic resources? (This question is highly relevant to our situation at Bolton Institute, where a converged service is in operation)

Although the message was posted during the summer vacation, it generated some very useful replies from colleagues. There were twenty responses in total: all were from academic libraries, and the majority were from large university libraries.

A short summary of the findings was posted to lis-link in August.

FREE ACCESS

Eight of the 20 institutions make no charge to alumni members. Five of these include borrowing rights; three provide reference facilities only. Another two institutions offer free membership for the first year following graduation, and one for the first six months. A subsequent annual fee is then charged, usually less than (but in one case, the same as) the fee paid by other external members.

CHARGES

At those institutions where a charge is made, the yearly subscription ranges from £20 to £80. There are two examples of arrangements whereby members can join for shorter periods, e.g. £75 per year, £20 per quarter. Overall, the average rate is around £40 per year. The subscription usually includes borrowing rights, although in the case of one, more specialised, medical library, a yearly amount of £75 is charged for reference use only.

The usual practice is to charge an amount linked to the external membership rate, with the following examples quoted:

- 10% discount - 1 institution
- 30% discount - 4 institutions
- 50% discount - 5 institutions

SERVICES AVAILABLE

Five of the institutions only offer reference access (Four of these made no charge for this). The remaining 15 libraries allow limited loans to alumni members, from 2 to 6 items, with short loans usually excluded.

Different rules occasionally apply to alumni borrowers: one library, which does not fine staff or students for overdue loans, does make a charge in the case of alumni.

COMPUTING FACILITIES

In general, alumni membership does not include the use of computing facilities, with 12 institutions offering no computing services at all. The other eight tend to offer access to stand-alone CD-ROMs only, and, in some cases, restricted access to electronic resources, in line with their licenses. Access to computing services immediately following graduation is clearly an issue, to assist students in their search for work. Four institutions stated that they allow access to the computer network for up to a year. At one, this is free, but the other institutions make a charge. Various rates exist, such as £12.50 a year, or £2.50 per month.

Some respondents mentioned that their service was not a converged one, which affected their response to the question relating to computing facilities.

Several of the respondents commented that they felt there is a need to review services to alumni within their own institution. One mentioned that they had set a limit of 50 alumni joining the library per year, a limit that has never been reached.

The information from the lis-link survey has proved to be an invaluable aid, informing our own decision-making here at Bolton Institute. A proposal relating to alumni access has been formulated, for further discussion and approval. This will not, in the first instance, include access to electronic resources, and the annual subscription will be linked to our rates for external membership. The implementation of such a policy will result in improved provision of service to alumni members, whilst the overall approach takes into account the needs of all users of the Learning Support Centres.

- 1 Ferguson, T. 'Alumni remote access to online resources' *Advanced technology libraries*, 29 (10), Oct 2000, p.7
- 2 <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/lis-link.html>