
A three-month library staff development project at the University of Cambridge



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LIBRARY STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

For three months during the summer of 2004 I worked as the temporary library staff development adviser for the University of Cambridge. Up until this time there had never been anyone in post to specifically address the development needs of library staff in the university, who represent a significant section of the university's workforce. The university has a 'tripartite' library system: there is the huge Cambridge University Library (a legal deposit library) with its four 'dependent' libraries; the 35 departmental and faculty libraries; as well as the 29 college libraries and 22 affiliated libraries (1). Their staff play a central role in helping the university meet its aims of achieving excellence in teaching and research. My work culminated in a report to the university on the development needs of library staff, and a website to communicate information to all library staff. I have now returned to my usual post as librarian at the Department of Zoology. The whole project improved not only the development of library staff throughout the university, but also my own and that of the assistant librarian in the Department of Zoology.

THE COMMITTEES CONCERNED WITH LIBRARIES IN THE UNIVERSITY

I reported to an especially established sub-committee on library staff development of the General Board Committee on Libraries (GBCL). Its role is to advise the General Board of the university on library policy, and to consider and advise upon the coordination of library services and practices, including those of the University Library. It does not have a budget but does advise the General Board on expenditure on libraries in the university. It would take far too long here to explain the complex and rather ancient university structure and how the General Board fits in to this, but in case you're really interested, you can visit the university's website at <http://www.cam.ac.uk/> and read about 'The University & its Departments' to see how the university works.

In recent years the GBCL has considered such matters as staff development, collection development policies and the funding of journals. Each year the GBCL visits faculty and department libraries prior to a scheduled full review, in order to ascertain any particular resource or organisational problems that might be addressed. A persistent comment has been a perceived need for more broadly based, library-oriented 'continuing professional development' and for more 'specific library training'.

AN INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE AND ITS RESULTS

In 2003 the GBCL issued a 'Development needs of library staff' questionnaire to all faculty and departmental library staff to determine for the first time exactly how far their needs were being met. The replies reflected how diverse and complex library operations throughout the university are, with a mixture of general and specialist posts, resulting in a wide variety of training needs. The replies also reflected recent improvements in the university's wider career development and training provision, but also wide disparities in how information about training opportunities is communicated, the subsequent feedback arrangements in place, and of support for attendance at courses already offered, particularly externally to the university.

No single body could appropriately be charged with taking remedial action on the results of the survey. The GBCL, with advice from the staff development office of the university, concluded that the appointment of a temporary 'library staff development adviser' could draw together various areas of expertise, and take some immediate

practical steps to improve the profile and content of library career development and training. The adviser would also ensure that existing opportunities are exploited to the best advantage. The post was advertised via email to all library staff within the university.

WHY I WAS INTERESTED IN THE POST

I applied for the post because of my passion for my profession and because I was very keen to play a part in raising the morale and profile of library staff in the university. This was probably the first time that their specific development needs were seriously addressed; it was to be a high profile post and a challenging opportunity to make a real contribution to my profession, as well as to enhance my own career prospects in the longer term. I considered that I had the skills, knowledge, experience and attitudes that were specified as being essential to do the work:

- experience of working in an academic library, or the ability to demonstrate familiarity with libraries in an academic environment;
- awareness of the wider library/information science career structure and organisations;
- ability to work on own initiative, prioritise and meet deadlines;
- good communication skills.

I also met the desirable criterion of experience of web-site design.

THE UNIVERSITY'S ACCELERATED EXPERIENCE SCHEME (AES)

This scheme exists to promote career and work flexibility, by providing money to support secondments of academic-related and certain other staff between departments. Departments can apply to the scheme's steering group for support for a particular project. If the group approves it, the department advertises the temporary vacancy and interested individuals apply with the approval of their home departments. The successful applicant is seconded full- or part-time for up to three months. His/her home department receives a payment from the scheme that covers the full costs of employing a replacement member of staff for the time, but it may spend the money as it wants: either on a straight replacement, or perhaps on an extra payment to people who cover the work, or a temporary upgrading for several people.

I had to apply for the temporary post as I would any other post being advertised within the

university, and with the permission of my home department, which would of course have to cope without a librarian for three months! Having found out more about the scheme, I had to outline to my departmental administrator how I proposed my work should be covered and how the project would benefit the library and department. I proposed that my assistant librarian (having first gained her cooperation!) could be temporarily upgraded to cover some aspects of my post, and that a number of graduate students could be employed from within the department to cover aspects of her post. I preferred to work full-time on the project, to save time and avoid any confusion in the zoology library caused by me being physically there but not actually as the librarian!

The project gave the assistant librarian a unique opportunity to effectively run a library service, enhancing her professional development. My own professional development would be enhanced by developing my skills in project management, networking, communication, web design, management skills and so on. To gain such experience usually, we would have had to find another job; this way the department did not have to lose a member of staff. In addition to my enhanced skills, the department would benefit from the wider knowledge of the library system that I would gain, in particular, bringing new ideas back to the zoology library. The university as a whole would benefit from a more motivated and skilled library workforce.

My department approved my application for the secondment post. I was invited for interview and eventually offered the post. I started the project in mid-May 2004, the work therefore mostly taking place in the summer vacation, which is a quieter time in the zoology library in terms of the number of users in the library (although we use this time to catch up on projects and tasks that we don't have time for during term).

MY ROLE

I represented the development needs of library staff of all grades, not only in faculties and departments, but also in colleges. While investigating these needs, I observed how they were similar to those of the staff of the University Library and its dependent libraries.

The aims of the three-month project were to:

- devise and implement centralised points of reference for all grades and types of library staff
- identify any specialist courses that might usefully be added to the university's training programme
- determine any ongoing personnel and financial resources required.

PLANNING

I had to plan for my temporary absence from the zoology library. Secondees usually remain in their home departments for the duration of the projects, but this was not appropriate for me. In the event, the Faculty of Law kindly offered to host: of which more below.

At the zoology department, I had to recruit a handful of graduate students from within as invigilators, and decide upon appropriate rates of pay with the departmental administrator. I asked the assistant librarian (who has a City & Guilds qualification in library and information work) to train the invigilators, giving her the chance to learn and develop this as a new skill. She would also go on to supervise them and allocate them work on a day-to-day basis – another good experience. I also had to advertise the posts and recruit the staff. We both worked out a suitable rota for these temporary staff.

I had to decide which parts of my post needed to be done to keep the library running over the short-term and which could easily be delegated to the assistant librarian. The more long-term and more (dare I say it) 'professional' ones (e.g. policy making, project management, collection development) were to be left for me upon my return. I wanted to take the assistant librarian away for most of the routine work she would do and has been doing for some time, by delegating it to the temporary staff wherever possible.

I was still contactable when on secondment, but my assistant librarian was officially acting librarian until I returned. I had to make sure I finished all my current tasks and projects before I left. I asked other people to help the assistant librarian out with certain tasks during my absence. I ensured that the assistant librarian knew whom to consult about what: their contact details etc., and all the procedures and instructions were typed up by both of us and compiled as a staff manual. I advertised within the department the fact that I was going away on secondment and all the staffing information.

It felt very strange leaving, even though I knew it was only temporarily, as I have been in post now for over four years and I was going to be working somewhere completely different.

THE PROJECT BEGINS

As for the project, I already had ideas for how to meet its aims, but I needed to plan my work by drawing up a project schedule to make sure I achieved these on time. I basically divided up the three months into weeks, and prioritised which tasks I would do when, allowing for contingencies, and did actually achieve everything on time.

The members of the newly established GBCL's standing sub-committee on staff development, which was to guide and supervise me for the duration of the project, did a sterling job arranging everything for when I started. They arranged the office space in the Faculty of Law, the loan of a PC with relevant software, and a printer, as well as much needed stationery – all without a budget, begged for and borrowed from different places. This was because I was in the unusual position of working outside my home department and this committee didn't happen to have its own budget.

My first day was much like any other in a new job: a tour of the building; being given access cards and keys; receiving emergency fire instructions; being told where all the usual facilities were; meeting the other staff; and so on. I was made to feel really welcome and people gave so much of their time for free to this cuckoo that had suddenly appeared in their nest! Having come from a busy biological science library, in a department where there are labs and people rushing around in white coats, it was certainly different working in an office-based environment towards the end of the academic year, and being physically isolated in comparison whilst working on my project.

MY APPROACH TO THE PROJECT

I won't go into great detail about the actual work that I did, I will just try to describe how I approached it and what type of things I did to eventually meet the aims of the project.

Email discussion list

I immediately set up the ucam-lib-staffdev email discussion list to communicate with library staff throughout the university, and vice-versa. Library staff were encouraged to join the list and express their views on various aspects of their training

and development needs, and how they could best be met. My post was quite a high profile one amongst library staff – they had high hopes for the improvement of library staff development in the university – and this list was important for facilitating my introduction to library staff and to update them on the progress of the project, as well as to ask for their help with some aspects of it. I am still the manager of this list.

FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Throughout the project, I reported every other week to the standing sub-committee on staff development, which was established especially for the project. The committee had representatives from departmental, faculty and college libraries, and a representative from the University Library's staff development steering group. This committee liaised with the staff development office of the university, which is responsible for the university's staff training programme. This structure strengthened coordination of staff development activities in the university.

PREVIOUS WORK

I re-read previous reports on staff development that had been written, to find any gaps that could be addressed. As a result, I sent two e-mail questionnaires to JISCMAIL's lis-link and lis-cilip-reg lists at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/> asking more questions about how library staff development is achieved in their institution, and how chartered membership of CILIP (the Chartered Institute for Information and Library Professionals) is supported. I received many helpful replies and consequently 'met' many people, who would e-mail me to say 'hey, you might be interested in this for your project...'. This enabled me to find evidence of best practice for library staff in other higher education institutions. I also summarised my results for the lists, so everyone could benefit from my findings. I gathered together information on all aspects of library staff development work that had already been done within the university; many members of staff had already been active in certain areas on their own initiative and I didn't want to duplicate their work. I wanted to acknowledge and build upon their work in the following areas:

- Chartered membership of CILIP and an institutional training scheme for candidates
- job exchanges and work experience
- distance learning.

GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

I made many visits to libraries in the university. Apart from discussing staff development with library staff, it was useful to see how other libraries work from a professional point of view. Departmental, faculty and college libraries generally don't interact much as the colleges are in effect independent of the university. I made several contacts through this networking, I explained the project and gained interest in it from everyone, I answered their questions, and asked for their opinions. It was also a good social opportunity for chats over coffee and biscuits! Otherwise, most of my contact with library staff was made through telephone calls and e-mails. It was really good to meet with people as it focused me on what I was doing and motivated me to get things done since I was working on my own. I had to limit this, though, towards the end of the project as it was very time-consuming.

BEST PRACTICE

I decided to consult the Oxford University Library Service (OULS) for evidence of best practice, since Oxford is very similar in structure to Cambridge, as reflected in both our library services. OULS has two full-time members of staff dedicated to library staff development and I wanted to see how that was organised. OULS was extremely helpful and it was very encouraging to see exactly how much it has achieved for its staff and how something similar could be achieved in Cambridge.

College librarians provided me with an invaluable report of the results of a recent college library staff survey they had recently carried out which covered staff development. This was incredibly useful and informative to see things from a college library point of view, and saved me a lot of time doing it myself.

PROJECT AIM: DETERMINE ANY ONGOING PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES REQUIRED

All of the consultation with internal and external contacts as I have described above, and more, went a long way towards meeting this aim, in that I and many other library staff had ideas for how to fund and staff a library staff development programme. Library staff felt strongly that there should be at least one full-time, permanent library staff development adviser in post, so funding for this was required. Such an adviser would be able to establish and develop library staff training and events programmes, and manage a central budget for this. It was also felt that a consistent university-

wide approach to funding library staff development would be more cost efficient and fair, as some institutions have more funds available than others to spend on staff training etc. A central fund was needed.

In the current financial climate of the university (i.e. being in debt) and in higher education in general, library staff have limited or non-existent training budgets. Some funding towards the cost of certain courses is available from a staff development budget for individuals, but this is limited.

Money for staff development comes from various sources, which can sometimes only be spent on certain staff groups (for example government money for teaching and research purposes can only be spent on the development needs of lecturers and researchers). Although library staff can attend generic training courses that the university offers, they need more specialist ones that are related to their profession that may not be relevant to any other staff group, e.g. cataloguing and classification.

Another aspect that library staff felt strongly about was the fact that many of them, especially those who run a smaller service (perhaps single-handedly), find it very difficult to get time away from their service to participate in development activities. They cannot afford extra staff to cover the service, even if they can afford to attend an activity in the first place. In the absence of any extra funding, it could only be recommended that staff take three days on top of their annual leave to continue their professional development, and to recommend ways in which posts could be covered for free, e.g. train some staff in similar libraries on a site to work in another library. I believe that it is important to communicate to library users, managers and administration staff that library staff are professionals with a need to continue to their development and that sometimes they will have to close the library to achieve this (at a mutually convenient time and with adequate notice, of course). At least this policy encourages and supports library staff in taking time away from their service.

This financial and personnel aspect of the project was the most difficult to address, both in terms of providing funding and cover in libraries for staff to participate in development activities, and the funding for the activities themselves. I recommended that the university created a permanent, full-time, library staff development adviser post and apparently it may just be possible in future. Until

this is done we cannot really move much further forward, but at least this project has shown that much can be achieved in the meantime, and for free.

PROJECT AIM: IDENTIFY ANY SPECIALIST COURSES THAT MIGHT USEFULLY BE ADDED TO THE UNIVERSITY'S TRAINING PROGRAMME

Based upon responses to questionnaires from library staff, and as a result of further consultation with them, I recommended that courses in the following areas should be added to the staff development programme:

- customer relations
- marketing and / or promotion of services
- strategic planning
- team working.

Copyright was deemed to be a neglected area of library staff training. Although guidelines on copyright legislation were provided by the university copyright officer for everybody in the university, there was no training. Library staff are in the front line on this issue and the consequences for the university for any copyright infringements by anybody are obvious. Library staff had to attend externally run courses, which could be expensive, and don't actually relate to the university's own copyright licence. It has been recommended that the university copyright officer runs regular courses on copyright, initially for librarians.

PROJECT AIM: DEVISE AND IMPLEMENT CENTRALISED POINTS OF REFERENCE FOR ALL GRADES AND TYPES OF LIBRARY STAFF

As part of my work, I had to create a central means of communicating information on professional development and training to all grades and types of departmental and faculty staff, as well as to draw up a common mechanism for feedback on courses undertaken and of making evaluated information accessible throughout the university. I designed the library staff development website at <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/GBCLStaffDev/index.htm>, which would do this virtually, by being accessible to everyone and not requiring a physical space to be held in. This was essential as when I left the post there would be no one to immediately continue the work I had been doing.

My website was kindly hosted on the University Library's (UL) web server, on the understanding that its contents and management would be entirely independent of the UL. I am still the web master for the site. I grappled with the technical

issues involved and achieved the design of the website with much help from UL staff.

Induction of new library staff in the university is performed differently in every library. I designed the induction page of the website to host an induction pack for library staff new to Cambridge or transferring inside the university. It was very challenging to attempt to describe the university libraries structure, but was a much needed resource. I adapted the university's standard induction checklist for new staff to suit libraries. I provided links to mentors and networking opportunities. This was a key part of the work done to achieve the particular aim above.

On the Networking page I prepared a list of qualified librarians willing to supervise candidates for chartered membership of CILIP and advise other staff intending to study for library and information qualifications. I also provided links to material to support these.

Other pages on the website include information on:

- accessibility
- advocacy
- careers and jobs
- conservation and preservation
- feedback
- funding
- legislation
- library staff development adviser
- news and events
- professional qualifications, training, and CPD
- training providers.

I had great fun taking pictures for the home page, asking fellow librarians to pose for me! I thought it important that actual people should be depicted on the page, rather than the usual pictures of pretty buildings, which is not what the project was about.

I promoted the website by email, on flyers to every library in the university, in meetings and at talks that I have given since finishing the project.

PHEW...

I even managed to get away on a much-needed one-week holiday to the south of France! The project work was quite intense, juggling several balls at once, and with only library staff development on my mind!

THE AES EXPERIENCE

Feedback has been given to Staff Development on the scheme from my home department's, zoology library's and the GBCL's points of view.

Working on my own for three months without the usual user interaction and trusting someone else with the running of my library service was a different and interesting experience. I had to switch off from my usual job mentally and let go. The assistant librarian apparently greatly enjoyed the experience of running a library temporarily (and was very good at it) but seemed to be glad I was back! I had been worried that people might not notice I'd gone but this didn't happen and I was welcomed back warmly. I did have to remember quite hard how to do some of the more routine things again, having been away for a quarter of the year. I appreciate my current role more now and have come back re-motivated, although I was sad to finish the project as it was exciting and important.

I just would have liked more time to do more work on the project: there is so much more to do. But hopefully the recommendations I made in my final report to the GBCL will be addressed in the near future. There were so many I don't think they knew where to start!

MY FINAL REPORT

I presented my final report to the GBCL in October 2004. The main outcomes are that funding is currently being sought to fund a full time, permanent library staff development adviser and that copyright training courses for library staff are being prepared. There are many other smaller issues that the report covers, which all contribute to the improvement of library staff development in the university.

I am very proud of what I have achieved in the time available to me, and extremely proud that library staff have told me that they are pleased with it. I was excited and privileged to be able to address this particular issue for my fellow librarians. In the end, everything about my particular project came down to effective collaboration with library staff – I couldn't have done it without them.

REFERENCES

1. Lesley Gray, ed., *University of Cambridge libraries directory, 23rd ed. 2003-2004*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2003. See also an online version at <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/>