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## What's in a name?



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The subtle change in the name of Manchester's John Rylands University Library on 1 October 2004 from John Rylands University Library of Manchester to The John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester was more than a bit of tinkering with nomenclature. It marked the library dimension of the decision of UMIST and the former Victoria University of Manchester to dissolve themselves and be reborn as the new University of Manchester (whose continuity is, though, indicated by its new logo, MANCHESTER 1824, which refers to the foundation date of the earliest of its constituent parts). We can claim to be both the newest and the third oldest university in England!

What did this mean in practice for the libraries and their staff? It meant the creation of a new library service from the merger of the former JRULM system and the libraries of UMIST and the Manchester Business School, with retention of the global 'John Rylands' brand in a modified form to reflect the change. More to the point it presented me, as Director of the JRULM and Librarian Designate of the new University, Mike Day, the Librarian of UMIST, and other senior colleagues with the challenge of integrating the staff and services of three previously independent library systems into a single entity in the year between the agreement of the two universities to merge and the merger itself.

The process was helped enormously by three factors. The announcement by the two merging universities that there would be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the unity process gave staff some degree of reassurance about their future. The degree of independence enjoyed by the library from central administrative structures left us free to begin the process of merger long before it became an official reality (typically we would do something, after which someone in the centre would say 'You shouldn't have done that

yet'. We'd reply 'But we have and it's working well' – to which there was no answer). Finally and, most importantly, the professional commitment and co-operation from colleagues from all three merging libraries at a time of uncertainty for many, as people had to compete for existing or new roles, was a revelation. The fact that we were a fully unified service by the time the new university came into being is a tribute to all staff of the former MBS, UMIST and JRULM libraries.

Apart from unifying the service, what has the change meant in practice? The first thing to emphasise is that our objective has not been to make savings (so far, at least, there has been no particular pressure to do so) but to add value. We have restructured our approach to subject support by re-designating all our former subject librarians, whatever their origin, as Academic Liaison Librarians with a specific remit to work closely with the large schools which have absorbed and replaced formerly independent departments. Because many of the consultative committees of the legacy universities have been replaced by a system of much greater executive responsibility it is important that we find other ways of two way communication and Academic Liaison Librarians who, ideally, are as much part of their School as of the library, play a pivotal role in this.

We have also been able to take advantage of the surplus of highly skilled staff produced by rationalisation of previously separate and parallel processes to develop digitisation and e-learning activities more quickly than might have been the case if it had been necessary to seek new resources for them. At the most senior level, Mike Day, as Deputy Librarian for Infrastructure and Planning Support, has brought his formidable analytical skills to bear on the integration and enhancement of our management processes whilst Diana Leitch, who has the remit for Information Resources and Academic Support, has developed close links with our new 'super' faculties, some of which are larger than many universities.

It was tempting at the outset of our planning process for integration to throw all the pieces of the jigsaw in the air and start everything from scratch. The problem with that approach is that the pieces we inherited would almost certainly not have fitted into the nice new slots we might have devised for them. We were also working to a tight timescale, which did not allow us the luxury of major experimentation. Instead, therefore, we took the more measured approach of adaptive, incremental change, with major shifts of

activity for some colleagues, usually into wholly new areas in which they were keen to work, whilst others modified or expanded existing roles, joined larger, integrated teams, or managed more closely defined but growing areas of activity. Jessie Kurtz, for example, who had been Head of Public Services at JRULM, took on the added role of Site Librarian for the Joule Library (the former Main Library of UMIST), whilst David Whitehurst, who had been Deputy at UMIST became Head of Technical Support, responsible for all IT-related activities in the new Library.

If the approach we adopted was not the most exciting way forward it seems to have worked very effectively, with the library emerging in a recent staff survey of the new university as easily the most highly regarded of all central services. The challenge now is to maintain the momentum of our merger and to build on the enthusiasm and flow of ideas that it has generated from many colleagues. The mixture of backgrounds and experience that the new library has gained from its three predecessors is one of our greatest strengths and to see, for example, a colleague whose background is in a technological university library bringing her skills and insights to bear on issues relating to Special Collections has been both stimulating and challenging to many of us.

At a recent meeting of our senior management group and other key colleagues with the President of the University he remarked on the fact that no one referred to which library they had originally come from and congratulated us on the degree of integration that we had already achieved in a very short time. This has enabled us to think strategically from the outset and the pleasing thing for me is that so many colleagues are more than keen to do so.