

*SCONUL Focus* is the journal of SCONUL, the Society of College, National and University Libraries.

*SCONUL Focus* aims to bring together articles, reports and news stories from practitioners in order to generate debate and promote good practice in the national libraries and the university and college sector. As well as the paper copy, the current issue of *SCONUL Focus* is also available electronically via the SCONUL website (<http://www.sconul.ac.uk>). Contributions are welcomed from colleagues in all fields and at all levels: we merely request that the items contributed are concise, informative, practical and (above all!) worth reading.

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## A is for Advocacy...

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As this issue of *SCONUL Focus* was going to bed, we were still awaiting to hear the fate of the Bangor Eight, the eight subject librarians at Bangor University who were being offered up to make a saving of £300,000.

Why were library staff so readily identified as a potential and desirable saving? Part of the reason is, of course, that old chestnut "everything is easily available on the internet, nowadays". As the University's consultation document –quoted in *The Guardian* and now on virtually every librarian's weblog- states:

'The support to the academic and student communities from the qualified subject librarians, whatever its contribution to the teaching and research roles of the institution, is hard to justify in value-for-money terms at a time when the process of literature searches is substantially deskilled by online bibliographical resources.'<sup>1</sup>

As a subject team leader (in my day job) I found this particularly chilling. Could I protect my team if similar charges were levied at us?

This news came just as we were compiling the Oxford Brookes University Library annual report and developing operational planning templates that made the link to the strategic priorities of the university more explicit than before. More than ever, it is essential to show just how we (all) are supporting the strategic aims of our parent bodies,

just what a good job we are doing, that we are successful and worthy of continued investment. Advocacy is part of the answer.

For me, this was the key theme of this year's SCONUL Conference, reported in some depth in this issue.

But that is not the whole of the story. Increasingly, we need to consider -and re-consider- our role. What is our Unique Selling Point?

My Sunday paper recently described a wonderful service:

'It helps you answer questions and solve problems. It enables you to discover new things, which is always fun.... Oh, and it's free to use.'<sup>2</sup>

And what is this brilliant service? Well, it's your library! Only it isn't. The article is (of course) about Google. But it *could* describe us. SCONUL has recently been actively consulting with its members on concerns and worries. It has also recently updated the SCONUL Vision. One of the concerns (quoted in SCONUL Chair Suzanne Enright's article) is Google. One of the big messages of the SCONUL Vision 2010 is marketing<sup>3</sup>. We need to remind the rest of the world just how valuable we are.

But how can we compete with Google? Google and Google Scholar do have their short comings, and it is just as well to be aware of these, for when another academic colleague emails us to give us the Good News ...or the powers that be start comparing 'free' services with 'expensive' subject librarians. Hence Martin Myhill's article -included in this issue- is particularly welcome. But more than this, we need to promote what we can offer over and above the world's favourite search engine.

The answer? Us.

Phil Sykes bravely argues that in the virtual future, real live librarians are the answer. In this crazy world of digital information we need more help, not less.

I'll leave you with a quote from my library's annual report, the acknowledgement in a part-time undergraduate's LLB dissertation:

'This study would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of a ... group of unsung heroes: the university librarians who look after printed and electronic resources, enabling students to access an amazing range of materials.'

It's time we started singing our praises. It's time to pump up the volume.

Antony Brewerton  
SCONUL *Focus* Editorial Board

#### Notes

- 1 Curtis, Polly, 'Bangor librarians face internet threat', *The Guardian*, 16 February 2005. Available at [www.guardian.co.uk/uk\\_news/story/0,3604,1415830,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1415830,00.html)
- 2 Simmons, John, 'How Google created a brand out of the ether', *The Observer*, Business, 3 April 2005, p. 7
- 3 [www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs\\_stats/pubs/vision%202010](http://www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs_stats/pubs/vision%202010)