
A week in the life of the director of the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU)



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Monday

The week starts as it so often does — with a screen full of unread e-mail. While much is dealt with – or deleted – pretty quickly, some is more interesting, and I spend time digging around the LISU archives to write a reference for a former member of staff, extracting figures from the SCONUL database on electronic subscriptions to answer an enquiry and fleshing out a survey timetable for an ongoing project on open access to research outputs. I also receive an invitation to a digitisation workshop in Luxembourg but, after quickly discovering that I cannot fly direct from East Midlands, pass the challenge of making travel arrangements to Sharon, one of LISU's administrators, who is much better at such things!

In the afternoon, a complete change of tack, and a tele-conference with a colleague in Loughborough's department of information science and representatives of the charity BookTrust to discuss possible options for research into primary school libraries. School libraries in general are a quite neglected area, with particular issues for primary schools – few have specialist library staff, let alone qualified librarians, and many do not even have a separate library space. We agree the outline for a piece of largely qualitative research, designed to identify factors that make for a quality school library. Now we just have to write the formal proposal to get it funded.

Tuesday

The day starts with a meeting in the University Library to discuss proposals for their next

user survey, on the support provided to the University's research centres. The library staff are more than capable of undertaking their own surveys, but seek advice on how to target the questions and whether a sample survey would give them reliable information. I also 'volunteer' LISU staff to pilot their questionnaire – a fair reversal of the usual role, where we are asking library staff to pilot our questionnaires.

Later we hold our monthly LISU team meeting – a chance for everyone to be brought up to date on the various projects going on at any one time, and to discuss other issues of interest. This month, much of the discussion is taken up with designs for the cover of the new edition of *Who else writes like ...?* A reader's guide to fiction authors. On balance, we are not impressed with the design team's first suggestions, and decide to go back to them with a tighter brief. The book will not be published for another six months, but the cover is needed well in advance, for inclusion in the various publishing directories, which appear in the summer and are an important source of publicity. We also discuss the format of LISU's web pages (<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu/index.html>), and publicity for LISU's 21st birthday this year.

Wednesday

Today starts with a university staff development session on project management and team leadership. For three hours, I am one of a group of eleven senior researchers led through the maze of issues around how to get the best out of your team, how to handle the various stakeholders in a project – not just the funders, but a whole range of individuals and organisations which many of us had not thought of. I leave with my head buzzing and some good ideas.

I get back to find the office in uproar, with strange computing problems – documents which print from one pc but not another, and no, not Microsoft – and deadlines in danger of being missed on a number of fronts as a result. A temporary solution is found, and the deadlines met, with a promise of further investigation by our IT support team. As the panic dies down, I turn my attention to the SCONUL return enquiries in my inbox, and finish the day by logging the 100th response on the 2006–07 statistics. Only around another 40 to go ... The SCONUL statistics have their greatest value in the high response rate and, while many of the smaller members may find collecting the data rather a burden, the value that can be gained

in terms of advocacy for the sector as a whole, and for individual libraries, is immense.

Thursday

To London, for the SCONUL Working Group on Performance Improvement (WGPI) meeting. For once, the train is on time, and not crowded. Train journeys are a good opportunity to catch up on the reading I don't have time to do in the office, and this is no exception, including the latest Update, and selected extracts from SCONUL Focus, as well as a variety of reports and drafts requiring detailed comments.

Discussion at the meeting is wide-ranging, and some good ideas emerge for the development of the SCONUL statistics (referred to the statistics sub-group for more detailed consideration), the encouragement of members in small institutions to contribute to the annual statistics and the Performance Portal. The group also considers its action plan for the year, and how to take forward some of the more aspirational tasks.

Back on the train and more reading — this time, the draft of a new international standard for performance indicators relevant to national libraries. Compiling new standards is a lengthy process – international expert committees prepare drafts, which are circulated to national standards organisations for comment. For the UK this is the British Standards Institute, who refer the draft to their own committee of experts, then collate the comments for the International Standards Organisation. This process can have several iterations before an international standard is finally agreed and adopted.

Friday

I spend the morning with two colleagues going through the comments received from a project steering group on a draft final report. As is so often the case, different members of the group have come up with contradictory notes, which makes revision a difficult task. Many of the amendments suggested are simply to expand and clarify specific points, but others are concerned with the description of the findings, and we suspect that individual political agendas are being aired. LISU has a reputation for independence which we are keen to preserve, so a carefully worded e-mail will be needed.

Friday afternoon is often spent tidying up and finishing off, and this week is no exception. I do my filing (electronic as well as paper), answer more enquiries, write the executive summary to

finish off another project report, send off a set of e-mails in the final round of chasing the last SCONUL returns and submit two bids for new pieces of work. What will next week bring, I wonder ...?