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# Managing, marketing, maximising: creating an information resources development policy to further academic–library relations



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*This article outlines the development of a school information resources development policy and illustrates how these policies can be used to further liaison among academic libraries, to market library resources to our users and to ensure that library purchases accurately reflect the teaching and research needs of each school.*

Information resource development policies provide a method to constructively and progressively review library subscriptions, enabling librarians to reassess and reprioritise key books, journals and databases. University College Dublin is Ireland's largest university and the library supports the users of 35 schools, representing humanities, arts, human and social sciences, business, law, life sciences, health sciences, engineering and physical sciences. To actively manage the information resources available to the university's students and staff, the associate librarian for resources and information (who is a member of the library's senior management team) initiated a project to create a template document which could be piloted with two schools and then rolled out to the remaining schools. The creation of individual school policies would align the resource develop-

ment strategies undertaken by individual liaison librarians (who are responsible for subject and resource support) to the library's overall information resources development policy.<sup>1</sup> Each librarian would also be able to tailor the policies to fit the requirements of the individual schools while still operating within the guidelines provided by the library-wide policy.

## **POLICY TITLE**

The title 'information resource development' was deliberately used instead of 'collection development' to encompass all formats purchased by the library and to suggest a more flexible approach to the user-driven purchase of resources. Because many UCD teaching librarians are currently promoting the delivery of embedded information skills training, using 'information' as the common term in all library efforts to develop resources (either through purchase, promotion or training) creates a synergy and ease of communication in all liaison activities.

## **DEVELOPING A TEMPLATE**

To prioritise this initiative appropriately, it was decided to create the role of project manager and I was appointed to this post in April 2008, prior to taking up my current job. The specific brief was to create a template policy and pilot it with the school of English, drama and film and the school of medicine and medical science. The choice of such different schools in which to pilot this policy was deliberate, as it was to reflect the huge variety of resources required by these schools – English requires extensive primary sources via print and e-book purchases, while medicine is driven by evidence-based requirements that reflect academic and practitioner needs. As project manager, I drew up a template policy document based on a literature search<sup>2</sup> and review of existing policies on the internet.<sup>3</sup> I then met with each liaison librarian and his/her manager and a meeting was set up with the head of school (or designated nominee) to discuss the process. In conjunction with the relevant liaison librarian, a draft was produced and reviewed by all parties. These drafts were e-mailed for comment and each draft was clearly numbered. The policy was driven by a number of considerations including:

- identification of appropriate minimum levels for resource collections
- frequency of subscription reviews
- gaps in key areas
- growth in interdisciplinary research

- demands of specific module requirements on resources.

These project drivers reaffirmed the demands placed on library resources, particularly at undergraduate level. Each policy was to be based upon the template document but liaison librarians could tailor it appropriately, giving more or less emphasis to each section as determined by user needs, budget allocation and individual schools' requirements. The final policy was agreed, signed off and added to a specially created page on the library website.<sup>4</sup> Each school was encouraged by the relevant librarian, as part of the policy rollout, to display the policy on its own website, and to date both schools have done this.

#### **SELLING THE PROCESS**

To ensure that liaison librarians and their managers had an overview of the entire process, I then presented the documents to the entire cohort of liaison librarians and provided support documentation detailing the above process and outlining how liaison librarians themselves can act as project managers and can lead the development of these policies with the schools. Guidelines on how to manage the timeline, who guides the process and how to get the policy signed off were included in this presentation and I remain available for background information or assistance to any liaison librarian who requires further information on managing the process.

A certain amount of 'marketing' to the schools is required and the benefits of an information resources development policy to the school can include:

- assistance with resource evaluation in light of the school's strategic priorities
- a better understanding of the school's teaching and research needs
- identification and promotion of little-used but content-rich resources within the existing collection
- provision of further opportunities for constructive dialogue between librarian and school on proactive resource management
- creation and development of synergies and linkages with other related and interdisciplinary areas in the library
- creation of a unified framework of collection-building priorities within which to support and enhance the research and teaching in affiliated centres.

Academics are invited to detail their school's research and teaching specialisations and particular resources can be highlighted and promoted via the policy. A commitment to provide information skills training is also included in both pilot documents. This may seem an unusual segment to itemise in a resource development policy, but a statement regarding the intent to organise information skills training provides a guarantee that the resources will be appropriately profiled and therefore a 'value for money' provision is built into the purchase of resources.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The creation of these policies was illuminating and honest! Writing a resource development policy illustrated the positives and negatives of the library's relationship with each of the pilot schools, identifying key areas for growth. Librarians can showcase to academics the range of resources available to their individual students, which may not necessarily fall within the subject resources allocated to their school, for example, identification of titles of interest to a range of disciplines via our journal packages and general reference resources. This plethora of interdisciplinary and other subject-specific services and resources offered by the library to all our users is often unknown to academics and the development of these policies can help with the promotion of current library resources. Schools' information resources development policies are not designed to be window-dressing but represent a practical and in some cases innovative approach to resource allocation, academic-library partnership and support for resource use. The school became far more aware of the impact of evolving degree programmes, the introduction of new modules and the implementation of new pedagogical practices on the library and its resources. The library in turn learned more about the pressures under which academics were placed when it came to module/programme design, the introduction of new courses and any change in personnel within a programme. The academics also became more aware of the role their support librarians play in the school's activities. This in turn created an environment where the academics became more open to the inclusion of librarians on school committees, thereby enhancing the school liaison librarians' awareness of developments in teaching and learning in each school.

The economic climate of 2008 makes the itemisation of library spend on resources based on school priorities more relevant than ever and the

creation of these policies means UCD's library has a transparent and constructive method to ensure a fair spread of library resources for all our users. Although the process is in the early stages of creation, having individualised policies for each school will facilitate the liaison librarians' efforts to foster new working relationships and will strengthen existing ones with the academics. Detailed school-by-school policies will also help to actively manage the print and electronic resources strategically, and in support of all our users across the university.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 UCD Library, 'Information Resources Development Policy', 2006, available at [http://www.ucd.ie/library/about/policies\\_and\\_regulations/info\\_resources\\_dev/index.html](http://www.ucd.ie/library/about/policies_and_regulations/info_resources_dev/index.html) [accessed 28 November 2008]
- 2 See, for example, J. Agee, 'Collection evaluation: a foundation for collection development' *Collection building*, 24 (3), 2005, pp 92–5;  
3. J. Vickery, 'Making a statement: reviewing the case for written collection development policies', *Library management*, 25 (8/9), 2004, pp 337–42; American Library Association, 'Guidelines for liaison work in managing collections and services', 2007, available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesliaison.cfm> [accessed 28 November 2008]
- 3 See, for example, University of Queensland, 'Medicine collection development policy', 2007, available at <http://www.cybrary.uq.edu.au/hsl/herston/cdp/medicine.html> [accessed 28 November 2008]; University of Reading, 'English and American literature: collecting policy 2005–2008, 2007; available at <http://www.reading.ac.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=11268&sID=52790>
- 4 See note 1, above