

*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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## Why come to the library when the library can come to you?

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A few years ago the library world abounded with articles/conferences/books on the theme of 'libraries without walls'. Most of this naturally focused on stock and the electronic delivery of information.

Increasingly, though, the library without walls concept could be used to describe the 'support' element of our offering. Most of our communication and help gets to our users via email or the Web. Learning (and research) environments are virtual just as much as physical. Web 2.0 applications make our messages instant and communications two-way. Enquiry services are no longer tied to the enquiry desk and even complex demonstrations can now be cheaply tailored to individual needs using Jing and the like<sup>1</sup>.

But it isn't all virtual. Support is increasingly being offered outside the library in person.

In issue 45 – our 'Subject Librarian' issue<sup>2</sup> – I used my editorial to report on a review of subject librarian job descriptions I had been undertaking. Some of the posts reviewed made reference to the post-holder physically working outside the library ('a significant amount of time is spent within the school'). In my own team a number of my Academic Support Librarians have regular times when they work in their academic departments. As a profession, I think we need to be doing more of this.

I was therefore overjoyed to receive an article on outreach for researchers (another area where we need to do more!) which focused on taking services out to the departments, to our clients in their offices. Emma Thompson's excellent lead article in this issue describes how Desktop Library Visits have been developed to good effect at the University of Liverpool to build links with research staff. A beautifully simple and effective approach.

Also in this issue we have a suite of articles on information skills support, including pieces on mobile services and virtual approaches.

The library world is becoming more complex, more interesting.

A few years ago libraries were going to be made redundant by the Internet (we were told). Today, with more investment in library spaces, footfall is rocketing: I have never seen our library so busy.

But some of our users prefer to access what we have to offer remotely and not set foot in the new, buzzing library building.

These users need support just as much – if not more – than others.

Some will use our virtual support. Others will prefer the face-to-face support of the librarian – the librarian without walls.

*Antony Brewerton*  
*SCONUL Focus Editorial Board*

### NOTES

- 1 Daren Mansfield will explore this approach to enquiry support in our next issue.
- 2 See <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/45/> (accessed February 2010)