
Supporting research and researchers

A NOWAL event 14 November 2011

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This one-day event, held at the University of Liverpool, attracted an audience of subject/liaison/institutional repository librarians from throughout the north west of England. In all, nearly a dozen institutions were represented: testimony to the high emphasis that academic libraries are giving to the importance of supporting researchers and their research. The stimulating programme, which combined presentations, a workshop and Oxford-style debate (just to make certain the audience kept very much on its toes!), was introduced by Phil Sykes, Chair of Research Libraries UK (RLUK) and University Librarian at the University of Liverpool.

Information is at the heart of research, and supporting researchers with their information needs is at the heart of what we do. Facilitating the development of researchers' skills enables us to engage effectively with and support the research process and, by this active contribution, ensures that we can fully integrate ourselves into the research community and discover additional opportunities to add value. Well, that's what we're all hoping for isn't it?

So, given this *raison d'être*, it was quite uplifting to start the proceedings with a voice from the other side of the fence. 'Life as a researcher' (John Wilson) provided an insight into what researchers think, want and need and was an enthusiastic recognition of the role of the subject/liaison librarian in helping them to achieve this. Despite John's anecdotal experiences and huge personal successes, one has to remember that this topic is subjective and not everyone receives (or even thinks to ask for) such gold-plated service. Nevertheless, it was an extremely welcome message that ended on a positive note of collaboration, both between academic institutions themselves (resource-sharing) and between researchers and librarians (information-sharing) and was an appropriate

way to start the proceedings. Indeed, we were all basking in a warm rosy glow after listening to this insightful presentation. And now for the flip side!

'The value of libraries for research and researchers' dovetailed nicely. This 'pukka' research, a jointly commissioned RLUK/RIN (Research Information Network) report, focused on qualitative data (the reason being that there is a dearth of robust quantitative data available) and told ten 'stories' – a device that served to present the findings of a systematic study of the value of the services that UK libraries provide to researchers and of the contributions that libraries make to institutional research performance. The aim of the report (which is available on the RLUK website at <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/content/value-libraries-research-and-researchers>) was to identify the key characteristics of library provision to support research in successful UK universities and departments, to reveal by its findings that 'the truth is out there' and to pose the question: What's next? The answer is to take the report's findings and prepare for the future; the key to success is communication.

Papers on publishing ('The scholarly publishing scene and ASPJ'), managing research data ('Managing research data, including the MaDAM project') and preparing for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) ('Preparing for the REF: implementation of the PURE CRIS system and integration with eprints') neatly followed on and posed thought-provoking questions and matters for reflection. To pick out some strands from the first paper to illustrate this, there was contemplation of the question 'Is the golden age of universal access to journal literature ending?' We have enjoyed back-file deals, free access to archives and 'big deals' from publishers, but are these halcyon days coming to an end? Something to ponder, given that we now live in an economic turmoil of currency fluctuations, funding cuts and debt crises – a world financial situation where everybody's hurting! Where does that leave us, surrounded by research funding cuts, declining student numbers, clashes between employers and unions fuelled by a pension crisis? Well, it's comforting to know that there is success in a painful world – the publishers are thriving!

And now for something completely different and a change of pace and format! 'The researcher development framework and the updated SCONUL Seven Pillars' was a stimulating workshop after a tasty lunch. Equally meaty scenarios around the theme of using the Resource Descrip-

tion Framework (RDF) to develop information literacy were given out to the four discussion groups, each of which was tasked with drawing on experiences within their group, discussing strategies for developing the information literacy attributes in an allocated RDF domain for a given user profile and scenario and then reporting back to the group as a whole. This ensured some lively chat and got everyone back into the cerebral swing after the relaxing networking lunch.

Phil Sykes chaired the final session, a debate that posed the contentious question that '*This house believes that in five years, all research outputs will be available on green Open Access.*' David Prosser (RLUK) and Alicia Wise (Elsevier) spoke (very convincingly) for and against the motion and some interesting questions ensued but, ultimately, the motion was resoundingly defeated (in fact there was not one person who supported it)!

CONCLUSION

Summing up, Phil Sykes reflected that this event demonstrated how libraries, academics and even publishers must work together in communicating best practice to support and facilitate the research community.

The key message from the day's programme was that libraries' active contribution to and integration in the research community are essential for the development of a comprehensive skills support strategy that meets both current and future needs. The future isn't orange it's 'C': collaboration, communication, comradeship!