

# Editorial

## Back to basics: the importance of library collections

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Issue 70 of *FOCUS* turns its attention to 'Collections'. The topic is of course rather broad and would no doubt benefit from greater clarity if it were offered as a specialist subject on a librarian-themed edition of *Mastermind*! However, as far as *FOCUS* is concerned, it has provided the opportunity to present an eclectic mix of articles relating to the wider theme.

When reflecting on the content, however, a number of key issues emerge which, whilst relevant to the collections theme, also resonate with other activities, agendas and challenges that our profession faces. Some of these will have emerged as specific themes in themselves in previous *FOCUS* editions.

Joint working and the development of shared services drives a number of professional activities. With reference to collections, Wendy Walker and Colin Sinclair describe the development of a collaborative evidence-based e-book acquisition project undertaken by the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library (SHEDL) and describe the benefits, challenges and lessons learnt.

The importance of marketing and 'selling' our services based on a thorough understanding of customer requirements is a key thread running through the value and impact agenda. In relation to collections to support teaching, Helen Rimmer and Sian Downes describe the approach taken at Royal Holloway, University of London, to market and launch their reading list system to academics and students.

The student experience, the student voice, students as partners or students as service champions – there are many ways to describe the concept, but changes in higher education in recent years, and those currently under way, further emphasise the importance of placing the student at the heart of all that we do. With reference to collections, two articles touch on this theme. Marion Harris describes a student library reps project at Goldsmiths College, University of London, that is designed to give students a say in collection development, whilst at UWE Bristol, Ted Spilsbury and Matt Durant show how the launch of a bold but flexible patron-driven acquisition model has resulted in the provision of more content at better value for money, based on what students need and when they need it.

In challenging times, the requirement to make decisions (particularly in relation to resources spend) that are data-driven and evidence-based have become increasingly significant. Kirsty Franks from Regent's University London shows how an assessment of their usage statistics of print and e-book titles suggests that collection improvements could be made. Jonathan Chipp outlines the initial steps taken at the University of Southampton to develop a collections review framework with a particular emphasis on assessing scholarly value.

A number of articles focusing on special collections feature in this issue. Rob Hodgson and Simon Bralee describe how an appraisal of the archives and special collections at City, University of London resulted in the exciting discovery of a previously unrecorded manuscript; whilst authors from Bangor University describe the work of their Archives and Special Collection department, a relatively new function of the library. Focusing on a library which majors on special collections, authors from the National Library of Scotland turn their attention to the conservation challenges they face. Barbara McCormack describes how the Hibernian Bible Society Collection at Maynooth University constitutes an important research resource in their library.

Finally on this theme, a project to integrate collections into Maynooth University from a college of education that was to be closed is described; and Catherine Williams from Buckinghamshire New University shows how their library was accredited with the Book Industry Communication (BIC) e4libraries award in recognition of the deployment of beneficial technologies in resource supply, acquisitions, circulation and metadata quality to industry standard.

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As in many other issues, *FOCUS 70* features some articles not directly related to the broader theme, but they are included as they address issues which are likely to be of interest to our community.

After nearly four years as Chair of the Editorial Team and the publication of eleven issues, as well as the move to this e-only version, I am stepping down. It has been a great experience. As SCONUL reviews all its activities to ensure that it maximises its relevance for members, it is great to note that *FOCUS* is to be retained going forward. Some of you may have seen the resources to have emerged from the work carried out by the Leadership Task and Finish Group: <https://www.sconul.ac.uk/news/sconul-launches-leading-libraries-programme> [accessed 24 October 2017]. This is a series of practical support measures for leaders and aspiring leaders: <https://www.sconul.ac.uk/page/support-for-aspiring-leaders> [accessed 24 October 2017]. You will see that one of the suggestions is to 'read and write for *FOCUS*' – emphasising the continued value of the publication both for sharing the good practice that is developed across all our institutions, and for authors who may not have a great deal of experience in publishing, for whom it offers a great staff development opportunity. As I now bow out, I hope you will heed SCONUL's advice!

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