

The changing face of learned and professional society libraries

A Research Information Network and Royal Society event

5 August 2009, Royal Society, London

Report on the workshops

The afternoon was given over to workshops on five different themes. Each workshop was run twice allowing each delegate to attend two of the sessions.

The workshops focused on the following themes:

- A. **Sustainable resources** - journal subscription charges; material development and acquisition of material; ensuring online access to catalogues; effective management and curation of material.
- B. **New roles for the library** – providing training; optimizing dissemination and impact of member's research; enhancing awareness of new developments in scholarly communications; developing new efficient ways for researchers to discover, locate and access material.
- C. **Web 2.0** - are researches using these tools; should they be embraced by libraries?
- D. **The changing shape of the library as a space** – traditional library space or learning centre.
- E. **Balancing the needs of diverse customer groups** - e.g. internal staff/ elected members/ paying customers/ the general public.

Some of the workshop sessions raised more questions but answers but did provide a forum for an exchange of ideas amongst library staff from different societies. Others raised questions and provided potential solutions. Details of all the issues from each workshop are given below.

The workshop findings – key questions and discussion points

Workshop A: Sustainable resources

(to be included soon)

Workshop B: New roles for the library:

1. Print v digital issues

- difference in access available
- loss of income (photocopying cannot be done from e-versions of journals).
One delegate noted that they continued to take the hard copies of journals specifically as they were so frequently asked for photocopies of articles.

2. Maintaining the relevance of the library to library users

- The following groups were identified 'members'; researchers/students; the wider public and colleagues and staff.

3. How to market the library

- This required an awareness of principally the needs of members. The needs of other uses would also have to be taken into consideration.

4. The profile of the library within the organisation

- Concerns were expressed that, in some societies, other departments, notably IT, were taking on work that the library staff felt lay within their remit.

5. The concept of the library

- Access and marketing
- The competing needs of users
- Café culture as opposed to a quiet place to study – especially where the library was too small to accommodate both.

6. Collection Policy (and disposal policy)

- Continue with print copies – move to e-only, a mixed option – managing competing costs.

- What is the library's responsibility – Members' needs only? a wider but local role? regional? National? International remit?
- Collaboration to purchase materials.
 - This has been tried in various ways and has not usually been successful although the LLSL group and CHILL have had some success in this area.
 - Problems were identified with aggregators – publishers involved pulling out of aggregated agreement when they realised that Societies were involved – and the university presses.
 - Work had been undertaken with Content Complete – with out success in the instance reported here.
 - The various Engineering institutes do collaborate over what they collect and try not to duplicate unnecessarily.
 - Would it be possible for the Learned Societies to work with JISC [JISC Collections]?

[These issues link with the next point:]

7. Collaboration and ownership

- If co-operation includes sharing / housing other collections, do they remain the property of the other organisation? Are they the new host library's to use and dispose of?
- Issue of donors and donations. Are there any guidelines?

8. Learned society libraries in a wider context

- What is their role as information providers, retainers of historical collections and on behalf of whom and how widely?

9. Recognising the skills of the profession.

- This topic links to several others from this group and was widely discussed with a focus on the difference in skills needed now from those needed ten years ago – the ongoing and increasingly rapidly changing information environment.

- There were reports of accolades in some societies for what had been achieved by library staff but no accompanying recognition of the value of the library profession to the organisation.

10. Changing management (and user) perceptions of the library

- In some cases, in these organisations, the library has a low profile – it is not seen as essential and may find itself moved between departments.
 - The suggested solution was for librarians to be much more outgoing and proactive and, wherever possible, to work through the organisation’s strategy, find areas where the library could and does have a role and publicise this.
 - RIN’s [Ensuring Bright Futures for Libraries briefing](#), although intended for VCs contains much that could be of use to these libraries too.

11. How can we find affordable library training courses for staff?

- Staff have many new roles – sourcing resources in the e-environment, managing the new wider range of resources; facilitating access. How can training be found for a group which is frequently poorly financed?
 - Suggested solutions – to share information on this amongst the group such as good training options, useful websites etc.
 - However, it was agreed that, just sending emails round would not be effective enough, a website to host this information was really needed.
 - It was also suggested that joint training could be arranged for several libraries

12. Do library staff have a teaching role? (“Weaning off Google”)

- The society libraries have far better portals for our subject areas which will lead to better results more quickly than Google. We want our members to use this but if pushed too hard is there a danger of censoring materials and access to resources?

- It was agreed there was a role on advising users on value and authenticity of websites and that in some cases library staff did have the opportunity to do this with visitors to the library.

Workshop C: Web 2.0

1. What are the drivers for experimenting with web 2.0 tools?

- carbon accounting (i.e. facilitating non face-to-face collaboration)
- enhanced engagement esp. with younger generation
- enhanced sharing of information and generation of “new” information (mining)
- enhanced dissemination of library material (e.g. RSS feeds of new library material, tagging increase access)

2. Issue of sustainability

- archiving/preservation of e-resources – who is responsible and can you trust this is being done
- cost

3. Institutional resistance to new tools

- Web 2.0 associated with trendy social networking sites – meets with suspicion
- Some librarians deal with this by proving usefulness of tools first before seeking institutional/strategic support

4. Compatibility of web 2.0 tools with existing systems

- How to integrate web-based applications with highly specified VLEs and VRE
- Impact on library catalogues
- Skills training needed

5. Issue of trust/quality assurance (e.g. collaborative peer review)

- research and information skills training remains key

6. Role of learned and professional societies and their libraries in more open access world

- Collaboration with different groups to have a voice in generation of standards
- centres for creating/harvesting of knowledge – control and accreditation
- convene communities of practise
- provide authoritative information
- copyright/ IP/ patents – potential role for LPS to education

Workshop D: The changing shape of the library as a space

1. How do you provide library space for different uses and user types?

- need good design (use of experts)
- zoning/separating out space if possible
- clarifying purpose of different types of space
- identifying the requirements of the different user groups
- evidence based planning
- collect evidence for institutional funders and architects/designers
- Survey users to find out what they like/don't like/want etc.
- learn from others (e. [SCONUL](#) website, [Flickr](#))
- build in flexibility and priorities rather than compromise

2. How does one maintain the library space within the institution? Dealing with political pressures

- raise librarians status within the organization (mentioned by Bidy as something she is keen in doing via CILIP)
- align library with strategic objectives of organization
- use library collection to raise profile of organization – library becomes identifier of the organization
- use external advice and standards to emphasise importance of care of collections
- get institutional champions to support library space requirements

- make the library an integral part of the organization – use the library space to promote collections and services and to host organizational events and exhibitions
- get library questions into institutional surveys

3. *Traditional library vs “hip” learning environment – why does it have to be either/or?*

- space should be fit for purpose
- know your users’ needs
- library space needs to fit in with the rest of the organization
- importance of design in raising profile of library (e.g. Kings Library at the BL)

Workshop E: Balancing the needs of diverse customer groups

1. *How do you balance the needs of a diverse user group (researchers, members, public, staff, students, internal clients, external users, overseas users)?*

- Need a clear understanding of what the different groups want from the library

2. *How do you balance priorities between the needs of the different user groups?*

- some libraries limit time spent of telephone enquires regardless of who they are dealing with
- standard operating procedures at a management level

3. *How do you market to different groups?*

- use library website and other sites to prompt library to the different users (include stories of how using the library led to new research)
- highlight recent acquisitions
- identify the requirements/needs of the different groups
- face-face meetings with different user groups – will help to identify needs and put a face to the library
- detailed understanding of members profiles will enable targeted marketing

- integrate library with the rest of the Society – tie library activities and marketing with organizational events
- provide news not just advertisements
- need a realistic idea of the number of people in a target group
- need constant marketing

4. How do you get non-members to become paying members?

- make it more cost effective to become a member
- offer additional services to members that non-members can not access or use
- members like to have access to something non-members have to pay for

Additional questions that were presented by attendees, but not directly answered during the sessions:

- Do we still need to focus on attracting actual users?
- Is it OK if the library is a virtual space?
- How do you deal with reduced storage space especially when users still want access to print copies?
- In an open age what constitutes a publication?
- How do you control access for different groups (licensed users/members vs non-members)? When do you charge for a service and whom do you charge and how much?
- In an underused archive and library how do you promote your collection in such a way as to attract a variety of users?
- How do you manage the expectations/priorities of funders/stakeholders or intervening management with the users?
- Is it possible to sharing of e-resources between different organizations?
- If you have a fixed budget how do you cover the cost of going electronic?
- How can librarians ensure the relevance of collections when catering for researchers in diverse fields within one organization?

- How do you deal with the diverse information needs of information literate and illiterate users?
- How should/can learned and professional societies engage in new collaborative web-driven research world?
- Should learned and professional societies and in particular their libraries become more integrated with the higher education research sector and other relevant bodies (i.e. JISC)? How could this be achieved?
- 'The new paradigm for the profession' - seen as being too big a topic for the day's programme
- New information services eg digitising on request or planned digitisation of materials
- Using the library website to create direct links to research materials of interest
- How to increase usage by members; research staff; and how to provide the skills they need
- How to restore the 'serendipity' possibilities available when searching the shelves in an online environment?

Summary and key points from the day

Throughout the day many issues were raised. Amongst these three main challenges for learned and professional libraries seemed to emerge:

Challenge 1: Identification of the needs, wants and expectations of diverse user groups.

Possible solutions:

1.1 Using the Royal Society of Medicine Survey

The model of a survey undertaken by the Royal Society of Medicine could be of value in addressing all of the last three points above.

- The RSM Library, with other departments, [developed a survey](#) (available on the RIN website as an example) to review users' views on all the

- services the organisation as a whole offered, including overnight accommodation and the Bar as well as library services.
- Five simple questions were provided about each service. The library included the services of physical access (including out of hours service), range of e-resources and single point of access (that is the value of all these library services being available under one roof).
 - Because the survey was organised by a cross organisational group and not just by the library, the results were seen as unbiased.
 - The three library services mentioned above turned out to be deemed to be the three most highly valued of all services provided by the organisation amongst members. The survey thus created a great tool for raising the profile of the library and getting more recognition for the staff.
 - The RSM also surveyed non- members via a marketing agency and through this work became involved in the organisation's push to draw more junior medics into becoming members – and also other members of the health professions. These collaborative efforts all helping to embed the library more closely into the work of the organisation as a whole.

Whilst not all libraries could undertake anything so extensive, the model is one which could usefully be adapted and adopted.

1.2 Making use of RIN and other organisations' information

The RIN and other organisations are producing a large evidence base, focusing on the needs, wants and expectations of researchers. This information is available on their websites. *Noted:* It would be advantageous for these reports to be available/ linked to a central site. This site could also provide examples of good practise and case studies from learned and professional societies which have successfully addressed any of the questions posed above.

1.3 Surveying entire library user base to identify needs

Many learned and professional societies have additional users other than their member users and academic researchers. It would be advantageous to survey the entire user base of the organisation to identify their needs, wants and expectations with regard to the society as a whole and the library. Several individual libraries are currently surveying their members and their surveys and the answers to survey questions could be made available to provide a substantial evidence base and enable others to build on these experiences. Again a central website/resource centre would be advantageous in this endeavour.

Challenge 2: The lack of recognition of and support for the library profession within the learned society environment

Possible solutions:

2.1 Internal issue, but also seek help from professional organisations

This may be addressed internally but also needs to be addressed at a wider level. Input from professional organisations such as CILIP could be beneficial.

Challenge 3: The need for further information skills training for both learned society library staff and the library users

This would allow both groups to make best use of emerging technologies and resources.

Possible solutions:

3.1 A resource point for shared information

Sharing information on the availability of appropriate courses, other good training options and useful websites etc amongst the groups would be beneficial. A central website to provide this information would be useful: sending emails round is not effective.

3.2 Arranging joint training amongst several libraries

This could help lower costs and enable best practice and knowledge exchange between organisations.

3.3 Influencing at a policy level

RIN has undertaken some work on researcher skills and training (see our [Mind the skills gap report](#)) and on how library staff can support this and we are currently working with a number of key organisations including RCUK and Vitae to move this agenda forward.

The RIN will review the outcomes of this workshop and will contact the delegates to take the agenda forward in key areas. Any comments or suggestions are gratefully receive, email branwen.hide@rin.ac.uk