The Future of the Systems Librarian

Paul Smith, Head of Library Systems

Library | **Coventry University**

A brief overview of the set-up at Coventry:

- We have been a customer of Ex Libris for over 20 years, using Alma (previously Aleph), Metalib (2004-2015), SFX (2004-2016), and Primo (2010-present).

- We are a team of information technical professionals responsible for maintaining the system requirements of the CU Group libraries.

- Over the past few years, the team has rebuilt successfully, increasing from two to four members. However, this process was more problematic than we would have liked.

A brief overview of the set-up at Coventry:

- We continually identity and provide new solutions, but our daily work still involves managing fault resolution and development.

- A small team that consistently delivers professional support and diverse solutions in multi-site environments.

My journey to become a Systems Librarian:

- Becoming a systems librarian was not a planned career path for me; it happened by chance.

- Previous experience managing various digital services such as server and web development.

- Over 24 years of experience in library system implementation and management.

- My career evolved alongside our library digital services.

What are the challenges currently faced when trying to recruitment to the post of systems librarian(s)?

- Very few viable applications.

- A shortage of in-depth knowledge and experience within the market.

- The world has seen a significant shift in how we work due to the rise of remote working.

- The role of system librarian is often considered to be uniquely specialised.

- Libraries face difficulties due to an absence of well-defined career growth opportunities within this discipline.

How does the post of Systems Librarian fit within our current library or institutional structure?

- As a member of the senior management team, the post holds a key position within the library.

- My team, consisting of only a four staff, is located in the main library.

- We are fully responsible for maintaining and developing all library systems – across a multi-site environment.

- We play a vital role in offering solutions for discovery, teaching, and learning.

- Despite working closely with our Digital Services team, our service is best suited within the library framework.

What are the key attributes we look for in recruiting or developing systems librarians?

- A variety of transferable technical and soft skills.

- A minimum level of expertise and experience in managing library system architecture is required, varying depending on the post-entry level.

- A team player with the ability to communicate clearly and efficiently in order to achieve set goals and build strong relationships with others.

- Exceptional analytical and problem-solving abilities.

- Being creative, innovative, and resourceful is crucial. Possessing these qualities is essential to achieve success.

What do I expect to see change in the library's requirements in this area over the next five years?

- Continual upskilling and improved digital dexterity are increasingly necessary to keep up with unpredictable, fast-paced technological advancements.

- Synchronise with the library's customer-focused intuitive. Alignment with customer requirements.

- The financial and political factors that affect the educational system and its environment could be a key factor in progressing services.

- Experts provide adaptable solutions driven by cutting-edge technology, notably AI.

- The development of AI will be primarily driven by solution providers, with the commercial sector playing a significant role in shaping its future.

Can I see any fresh ways of recruiting to this types of post?

- It's important to approach recruitment with an open mind. It's time to break away from traditional methods and try new approaches.

- Include entry-level opportunities for those just starting out.

- Build a team that can handle diverse tasks rather than relying on an individual.

- It is essential to ensure that there is a high possibility of progression and reward within the company to retain valuable employees.