

The cpd25 programme of the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries

A regional consortium's approach to training and staff development



Thomas Baldwin
Executive Manager
M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries
m25libadmin@london.ac.uk



Rachel Telfer
cpd25 Coordinator
M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries
cpd25@london.ac.uk

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What the M25 Consortium is and what cpd25 is

The M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries (<http://www.m25lib.ac.uk>) has existed since 1993 and has always sought to help improve library and information services in London and the South East. A growing membership of university and other scholarly libraries has meant a continued interest in collaboration in our corner of England. Today there are fifty-six institutional members.

The Consortium is governed by a steering group (comprising library directors and their representatives, who are elected to the group) and run by an employed Support Team. Over the years the Consortium has completed many pioneering projects. For example, the SCONUL Access scheme we all enjoy today was first formed as the M25 Access and Borrowing scheme. But the most long-lasting and far-reaching project of the Consortium is the staff training and development programme known simply as cpd25.

How cpd25 is run

Formed in 2002, the cpd25 programme was initially governed by five task groups whose chairs, together with an overall cpd25 chair, formed a cpd25 steering group. Today there are four task groups and the steering group is called the working group, but the mechanism remains broadly the same. Each of the four task groups is responsible for devising training in a particular area. The task groups are:

- Career Development
- Quality Standards and Legal Frameworks
- Operations Management
- Personal, Management and Business Skills

The cpd25 chair is an ex officio member of the M25 Steering Group, ensuring the programme is responsible to the Consortium's executive. The M25 Consortium employs a full-time cpd25 Coordinator within its Support Team to work with all the task groups and the working group.

In addition to the employed Coordinator, cpd25 relies heavily on the work of volunteers from across the Consortium's membership to act as task group members. The M25 Consortium remains very grateful to library directors and other line managers who have released their staff's time to serve on task groups. Without their considerable contribution, both in terms of time and expertise, the cpd25 programme could not continue. cpd25 task group members and chairs can serve varying lengths of time in post, with some remaining on groups for many years.

The audience of cpd25

Participants in cpd25 events comprise library staff of all levels from both M25 member and non-member institutions. The latter include libraries from as far away as Bristol, Leeds and Dublin. As a response to the growing need to demonstrate library services' value and justify budgets, it is becoming customary for professionals to work in a variety of different roles and to develop skills beyond their traditional remit. This leads to a widening participation in the cpd25 programme; we are seeing an increased commitment to learning from entry level through to management roles.

The cpd25 programme of events and visits would not take place without the expertise and generosity of the speakers involved. We are very fortunate to be able to work with professionals in leading roles who share their abundance of experience in the library sector. We hope that by attending cpd25 workshops, participating in the task groups or speaking at an event, everyone involved with

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the cpd25 programme can continue their own professional development in some form. cpd25 aims to provide a platform upon which library professionals from all types of institution and job levels can collaborate and learn from one another whilst developing their skills.

Current cpd25 activities

As the academic year 2015–16 drew to a close, we reflected on the activities of the year and started planning and looking ahead to a busy 2016 autumn term. In 2015–16, thanks to the ideas and dedication of our four task groups, we have successfully run 38 training events and visits. Staff of M25 member institutions benefit from free visits to interesting collections both in London and beyond. Recent popular visits have included UCL Museum Collections, where we witnessed some of the charming treasures stored away in the Institute of Archaeology, and the Feminist Library, where we were able to learn about the challenges facing a unique collection managed almost wholly by volunteers. In the coming year we already have a number of exciting visits planned to collections such as the British Film Institute Reuben Library, the new library at the University of Bedfordshire, and Goldsmiths' Special Collections to celebrate Black History Month in October.

Training and development workshops usually take the form of presentations, often with additional group work. The wide variety of interactive training this year has proved a great success, the most significant being our Professional Qualification Workshops, organised by our Career Development task group. This is a hugely popular programme of between six and ten annual workshops aimed at library professionals working towards CILIP chartership. Workshops have ranged from Supervisory Skills and Developing a Service, through to Copyright and Marketing. It has become apparent over the years that individuals attending these events are not only those working towards chartership: they also come from a variety of job levels in order to improve their skills and job prospects. Therefore in 2016–17 the Career Development task group will be remodelling the programme of workshops to support a broader audience. We hold a number of other training events throughout the year. Some of the training looks at very specific challenges facing library professionals such as 'Supporting staff and students with autism and learning disorders', and 'Changes to the disabled students' allowance'. We also hold sessions with a more digital focus, such as 'e-resources and collections management', and 'Licensing e-resources for collaborative partners on overseas campuses. The Consortium takes pride in the flexibility of the programme, which responds to changes in the sector and provides training accordingly throughout the year.

What impact does the cpd25 programme make?

The year 2015–16 proved a successful year for the cpd25 programme as it contributed to the development of hundreds of library professionals across the sector. During the year, our workshops received 475 attendances from 97 institutions, and there were 152 attendances at our free library visits. Evaluation forms are provided at the end of each event to enable attendees to give their feedback, and the high return rate allows us a comprehensive evaluation of participants' experiences. This is an important way for us to measure satisfaction levels, identify what presentations or tasks were most effective and highlight any areas of staff development that we are not yet addressing. Based on the feedback we received, the vast majority of attendees rated their workshop either 'very good' or 'excellent'. This is to the credit of our task group organisers and first-rate speakers. We are delighted to be delivering training events of such a high standard and will continue to do so whilst responding to the needs of our ever-growing and varied audience.

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How cpd25 benefits M25 Consortium libraries

The provision of cpd25 training is a primary point of attraction for prospective M25 Consortium members. The impact of the training means that cpd25 is widely recognised for its provision of high quality and affordable training. This success record has made cpd25 into a strong brand within the overall M25 portfolio, with a reputation for quality, value and efficiency. The programme is recognised around the country as providing training that makes a real difference to staff members' skills. Since the training is provided by the M25 Consortium – itself a registered charity – and many courses are delivered by volunteer speakers, costs are relatively low, and so our attendance fees are highly competitive. M25 Consortium members are entitled to significantly discounted attendance fees and the visits are exclusively available to members. The organisation of the administration of cpd25 brings benefits to libraries too. The participation of staff from M25 members in task groups adds to their own personal networking and CPD opportunities, as well as being a great opportunity to give back to the information sector.

How cpd25 is responding to current culture

The growing popularity of the cpd25 programme is representative of the culture in which we are currently navigating. Staff development may not be a new term or a fresh concept, but it has become an increasingly important way for individuals to establish their value in a culture of cuts, streamlining and cross-role working. The CPD Certification Service (2016) describes continuing professional development as 'the holistic commitment of professionals towards the enhancement of personal skills and proficiency throughout their careers.' The cpd25 programme aims to provide a platform for this type of development by identifying gaps in skill sets, and addressing the needs of our member institutions, thus contributing to the proficiency of individuals and the overall effectiveness of organisations.

There is a fundamental relationship between individual growth and institutional growth that raises the question of where the responsibility for continuing professional development lies. Institutions are generally contributing to organisational development by overseeing and encouraging individual employee training. However, individuals who partake in training and development are also increasing their own job prospects by gaining additional skills and showing the will to learn and develop themselves. Therefore, both parties remain stakeholders in the impact that training and development can have on an individual or team's work. Without a doubt those who engage with a staff development programme such as cpd25 will find benefits at both an institutional and individual level. The success of the M25 Consortium's cpd25 programme can be attributed to the understanding that staff development is an essential factor in the progress and sustainability of libraries in the present day. In the coming year we will continue to offer training in both broad and distinctive skill sets and subject areas, responding to the needs of our members, and guiding the learning and development of library professionals in the south east region.

Reference

The CPD Certification Service (2016). CPD explained. Available at: <https://cpduk.co.uk/explained> [accessed 25 July 2016]

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