

Librarians supporting research in Wales

Collaborative staff development and capacity building

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Introduction

Librarians based in higher education involved in user support have seen their role change over the years as the demands of students and academic staff have changed, but with a recent increase in demand to support research there is a feeling that we are now moving into 'uncharted waters' (Auckland 2012).

There are key areas where libraries have supported research at their universities for many years, including collection building, researcher training, and providing specific information retrieval support such as searches for systematic reviews. Over the last four to five years, we have seen an increasing demand for academic libraries to provide services for researchers engaging with new models of scholarly communication, requirements for research data management and emerging technologies. The recently published UK Survey of Academics 2015 demonstrates that since the last survey ran in 2012, open access and research data management have increased in importance for researchers. The two surveys give us access to valuable data that map researchers' behaviours and attitudes, and which we can use to plan our library services (Wolff, Rod & Schonfeld 2016). As Jaguszewski and Williams (2013) state, we are now having to focus on 'what users do (research, teaching and learning), rather than what librarians do (collections, reference, library instruction)'. We should see this as an opportunity to 'draw a new map of support and services for researchers' (Auckland, 2012).

Some libraries have responded with a restructure and now have dedicated research support teams; others have a more dispersed model. Many academic support librarians have taken on the challenge and have added another string to their bow to support researchers' needs; for others this role change can be intimidating. As Bent (2016) describes, 'we are moving from a cosy library to a scary library, where our role is less about being custodians of knowledge and more about "assisting to increase the productivity of research and scholarship."'

Creaser et al. (2014) describe how developing library research support services is challenging when researchers are not able to identify the support they require, when we are faced with the 'self-sufficient image projected by academics', and with 'librarians lacking the confidence to approach academics with offers of help'.

Keeping up with the demands of students and teaching staff and continuing to complete traditional library functions is a major challenge for libraries responding to researchers' needs. 'For far too long, the mantra in many libraries has been 'do more with less' – the idea that we should somehow solve shrinking budgets by creating more projects and services despite time and budget constraints. This inevitably results in a slew of half-finished projects and frazzled librarians.' (Hoffman 2016)

In April 2015, the Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELP) established a new Research Support Group with the aims of developing a research action plan and a research strategy for WHELP, whose mission is to 'promote library and information services co-operation, to encourage the exchange of ideas, to provide a forum for mutual support and to help facilitate new initiatives in library and information service provision' (<http://whelf.ac.uk/> accessed 29 June 2016). One of the main aims of the new research group is to identify areas where we can work across Wales to support librarians who are transitioning into a role that more actively supports researchers.

Initially the group focused on the desirability of establishing a shared repository across Wales, but with the transition to a new LMS and sometimes new research information management systems in member institutions, it was agreed that this was not the best time to be proposing further major system

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changes. We also identified great interest in our libraries in the future role of the academic liaison / subject librarian and decided to tackle this first.

Regional events

We organised three parallel regional events in May 2016 for north- and mid-Wales universities (at Aberystwyth), for south Wales universities (at Cardiff) and for universities in west Wales (at Swansea). These events were not designed as traditional 'chalk and talk' training events, but as sessions where we could come together to share experiences. We were able to pool our thoughts, work together to identify areas where we need more support, and identify areas of best practice.

All three events were organised in the same format: members of the WHELP research group prepared three presentations beforehand, and we asked librarians who were attending the events to volunteer to present these presentations. The slides provided bullet points that would set the scene and prompt questions and discussion points. Each presentation was followed by a lengthy discussion session on each topic.

The role of librarians in supporting research

The first of the presentations was on the role of the librarian in supporting researchers. We could all identify areas where we had concerns about taking more of a research support role: lack of confidence, lack of time or capacity, not fully understanding researchers' needs. Before the sessions ran, we had compiled a list, from a scope of the recent relevant literature, of potential mechanisms that could help to alleviate these concerns. We discussed whether the suggestions from the literature were something we were already doing, and, if not, whether it seemed likely that they could work in our own contexts. The list included the following:

- Identify and potentially re-purpose skills we have as librarians (Auckland 2012, Jaguszewski, Williams 2013, Bent 2016, Brown, Wolski et al. 2015, Hoffman 2016, McKnight, Wycoff et al. 2016). This suggestion was popular and it was suggested that a skills audit might be useful. The usefulness at an individual level of the CILIP Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB) was also discussed.
- Identify efficiencies, mapping roles and carrying out time inventories (Hoffman 2016, Malenfant 2010). We discussed how difficult it is to quantify what we do; we cannot always measure and separate the tasks.
- Become more targeted and focused in our support, and scoping projects (Kenney 2014, Jaguszewski, Williams 2013, Gore, Jones 2015). While some institutions described effective scoping work, some librarians also described a situation of 'trying to please everyone all the time' and not always looking at a cost-effective solution, which may mean outsourcing in some cases.
- Concentrate on what is important to researchers and the institution (Kroll 2010, Auckland 2012, Malenfant 2010, Kingsley 2016, Hoffman 2016). This was seen as a key area where we should be gathering more evidence.
- Sharing the load and collaborating (Jaguszewski & Williams 2013, Simons & Searle 2014, Watkins & Morrison 2015, Reinsfelder 2012, Verbaan & Cox 2014). We were able to identify many examples where we have collaborated successfully across library services, and it was felt that it was very important to keep this up. Discussions moved to how we can work more closely with staff in the Research Office and with researchers themselves.
- Planning a clear strategy and considering organisational change (Hoffman 2016, Corral 2015, Barbrow & Hartline 2015). We liked the idea of

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involving everyone in the team in strategy planning, but understand that this is difficult to do in practice. Institutional policy changes come up often, and the library strategy needs to respond to those changes.

- Developing dedicated support for academic support librarians, dedicated training budgets and clear roles and expectations (Law 2014, Rodriguez 2015, Johnson, Bresnahan 2015, Malenfant 2010). Face-to-face training is highly valued and shrinking training budgets should be protected.
- Building partnerships with researchers (Creaser & Spezi 2013, Delaney & Bates 2015, Creaser et al. 2014, Carlson & Kneale 2011). It was agreed that it is key that researchers get a better understanding of what librarians do, and that librarians get a better understanding of what researchers do.
- Taking risks (Malenfant 2010, Carlson, Kneale 2011). It may be that we are not comfortable about taking risks in developing new services or support, perhaps because we are scared of alienating customers who think of us in one particular way.
- Being ready to change again, horizon scanning. Our structures need to be flexible enough for us to be able to pick up or adapt to the next hot topic in research; Vitale (2016) suggests this may be research reproducibility.

Researchers and the open access agenda

The aim of this presentation was to describe the open agenda in the UK and in turn how this informs library services developments. The slides described the controversial Sci-hub, the open data agenda, the inadequate reporting of clinical trials data, and the Finch report and the position of the UK government on open research. The research councils' policy on open access publishing was described along with the requirements for open access research for the next research assessment exercise. The slides also prompted us to talk about the reasons why researchers are still reluctant to engage with open research; they include the risk and fear of change, the effort involved, contracts with publishers and commercial partners, the sensitivity of their research data. We highlighted useful tools that librarians attending the sessions could look up when they got back to their desks, and we shared our experiences of offering support to researchers in this area. Examples of enquiries dealt with on open access publishing included: identifying the post-print version of a research article, contacting a publisher to ask for their copyright policy, explaining creative commons copyright licences, and calming panicked researchers. Examples of enquiries answered on research data management included how to comply with a funder's policy, how to anonymise data, and calculating the costs for data storage.

We had a wide-ranging discussion around where and how library staff support researchers engaging in open research; it is important to know when the institution needs someone to intervene and to be able to identify where else in the institution help may be available. We discussed the open access training we currently offer in our different institutions and shared experiences of how we felt delivering these training sessions

Researchers and social media

The third theme we chose for the events was researchers' use of social media. The Survey of UK Academics 2015 demonstrated that, since 2012, there has been a 'substantial increase in the share of respondents who indicated that they have shared findings in blogs or via social media'. In addition, a large proportion of the impact case studies submitted to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) mentioned the use of social media for promoting their research outputs and engaging with communities outside academia. Researchers have difficulties keeping abreast of all the information that is being shared on social networks, and in deciding which of the overwhelming number of digital academic communities they should belong to (Matthews 2015).

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We also talked about alternative metrics (altmetrics), which measure the impact of research articles in newer forms of media such as social media sites, online news sources, and collaborative reference management tools like Mendeley. There are opportunities for librarians to get involved in many ways, from increasing researchers' awareness of the benefits of engaging with social media, describing the different communities and tools available, helping researchers measure their metrics, and advising on copyright and how researchers can share their outputs lawfully. We shared examples in some Welsh universities where librarians are already involved, but some librarians indicated that they would want more training in this area before feeling confident on supporting researchers. In some institutions it was clear that this support is being provided by other areas of the university, but there may be opportunities to offer assistance.

Going forward

The feedback from the events was very positive, with many librarians commenting that this was exactly what they needed at this time.

'More like this, please! It's really helpful to have the opportunity to step out of the office and share experience, worries and ideas with others.'

We have agreed that we shall repeat the events next year. We gathered a lot of information at the sessions, which we are in the process of analysing. We have identified four main themes for the WHELF research group to work towards developing initially:

Providing more training events and shared resources. There was a lot of feedback that face-to-face meetings and opportunities to share experiences and knowledge were highly valued. We have already organised collaborative events on institutional publishing for international open access week, and have contributed to a research theme at the annual WHELF colloquium at Gregynog Hall in June 2016. We have further training events in planning, including a session on research data management, and we are using the WHELF blog to share resources and experiences.

Evaluate and demonstrate proven strategies for working more efficiently and on target. A collaborative project between Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities investigated the use of human performance technology; the process mapping used in that project was found to be very useful and could be used more widely.

Identify opportunities across the Wales higher education institutions for librarians to become embedded in the research environment and to build (or rebuild) relationships with researchers who often have not stepped into the library building for a number of years. This could involve working on joint research bids with researchers. We have some good examples of this already happening in Welsh universities and in these cases it is important that we communicate our involvement and share our experiences of being part of the research team. Librarians who have authored their own peer-reviewed research articles will be able to demonstrate to researchers that we understand the process of authorship, as we have been through it ourselves.

Demonstrating our value and impact in supporting research, building on the advocacy role that WHELF has within Wales. This will involve promoting our skills and rebranding our services: for example, one librarian attending our events identified that 'researchers currently have to admit a weakness for us to go in and provide support'. It is important that we communicate our impact in terms that a researcher values. A series of case studies would be useful. It is clear that we can increase the confidence of librarians if they can see that researchers value their skills and their contribution to the research process.

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From providing advice on collections and information literacy, we anticipate making the leap to guiding the creators of new knowledge in managing and disseminating their research. This work has always been undertaken by librarians but the context and connections are different. Librarians have always been an adaptive team; this presents our next challenge.

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