

Impact

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Editorial

This edition of Impact is a bumper conference issue featuring a number of the papers presented at this year's New Professionals Conference. It is clear that there were a huge range of professional topics discussed at the conference, and the findings and ideas apply equally to more seasoned professionals.

Katie Birkwood and Naomi Herbert, whose paper was voted the best at the conference, demonstrate the value of promoting special collections in the community, with lessons that apply to all collections.

Runner-up Megan Wiley gives us an insight into the perceptions of careers information professionals by their counterparts with advisory roles.

Helen Murphy describes the 23 Things for CPD programme which launched over the summer, and invites everyone to participate. Jo Norwood and Ka Ming Pang report on professional activism among their cohort at university. Rachel Bickley's paper explores the relationship between newer and older professionals, and identifies a number of areas which could benefit from improved dialogue.

Finally, Nicola Forgham-Healey, Sue Hill and Susie Kay report from a session at Umbrella 2011 where they considered the aspects which make up your professional reputation, at any stage of your career.

Due to uncertainty over the exact nature of special interest groups going forward, we have decided to make Impact an open access publication for the foreseeable future. This will ensure all those who wish to read it are able to and open up our content to all.

If you have any feedback or constructive criticism, please email the editor:

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I hope you all enjoy this exciting and varied issue.

Lizz Jennings
Editor

Teaching old books new tricks: how special collections outreach can help you, your career, and your library

Katie Birkwood and Naomi Herbert

Introduction

I'm Naomi Herbert. At the moment I work as the Assistant Librarian at Christ's College, Cambridge. In my last post, at St John's College, I set up a schools and communities program for the special collections there.

I'm Katie Birkwood. I currently work as a rare book specialist at Cambridge University Library. For 3 years until March 2011 I worked at St John's College Library as Hoyle Project Associate. I'll explain what that means later.

Special collections

The title of this paper is a bit misleading. When we talk about special collections, we don't simply mean old books; special collections needn't be books, and they needn't be old. They are any collections that have particular significance because of subject, provenance, rarity, or any other reason. For example, important archival collections often end up in libraries and these can have been collected at any time – right up to the present.

Outreach

The word outreach can have many different meanings so we need to clarify the sense(s) in which we're using it.

At St John's College, 'outreach' meant engaging non-academic audiences with the Library collections through events held in the Library, in the College, and elsewhere. The Library's primary audience is academics, either from the College, the University or from other institutions around the world. The Library's outreach work aimed to give other sorts of people access to the collections. These people were school pupils, local residents, special interest groups, and so on. In other libraries, 'outreach' of this kind might mean engaging young people, old people, academics, schools, colleges - whoever doesn't currently have access. What we're not talking about is marketing or promoting your collections to your core user groups.

Why do outreach?

Outreach has many benefits for the institution, the staff that organise it, the wider community, and society as a whole.

The community get to experience something out of the ordinary. They get to see amazing books, photographs, documents, or buildings. They get privileged access to what's normally a hidden environment. And they get to connect with history by interacting with tangible objects. Those who participate also get a great educational experience. They might learn about the local area, their special interests, or the wider world. Their intellectual curiosity will be aroused, and they, and their teachers and group leaders, will be inspired.

The institution that offers the outreach also benefits. The public image of your library will be improved, and an active outreach program might encourage benefaction now and in the future. You will learn new things about your collections by using them for outreach, both from the research you do beforehand, and from what you learn from your visitors. Outreach also helps preservation, even though that might sound like a paradox. Using your collections for outreach you will find out what needs conservation work, and will be able to justify that work being done. Outreach will also inspire and motivate your staff.

Outreach benefits everyone. It improves the public image of libraries, it increases public access to cultural and heritage events, and both staff and visitors will have fun because of it.

Case studies

We will use two case studies from our work at St John's College to illustrate different ways of doing outreach. Our first case-study is a school outreach project that Naomi started in 2007.

Hocus Pocus Junior, Naomi Herbert (Librarian's Assistant, St John's College Library, Cambridge, 2007-2010)

Background

When I joined St John's College Library, its special collections had recently received MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives) Designated status.¹ This Designation scheme was designed to recognise, and improve standards in, important collections outside national museums. Designated collections are expected to widen access. Consequently, I was encouraged to provide opportunities for new audiences to access the special collections.

In Cambridgeshire the professionals who had the most experience working with these audiences were the museums education officers. So I made myself a cunning disguise and went to their meetings. I met professionals from all around the region and they gave me support, ideas, and information about funding and training. Although the funding and training seemed to be aimed at museums only, I realised that St John's Old Library was a museum of the written word in all but name.

I applied for MLA Learning Links Funding and was awarded £1500 to collaborate with teachers.² I used my network to find two Year 4 teachers at a Primary School within walking distance from St John's. They were initially encouraged to work with us by the funding. Once they had seen the seventeenth-century library they were determined to work with us and asked me to help them overhaul a boring literacy module on explanatory texts.

We worked together to design the module. They brought their knowledge about the curriculum and their students and I brought my knowledge of our

collections. I showed them lots of books that I considered to be explanatory texts and they chose Hocus Pocus Junior, published in 1638, the first book in English devoted to magic tricks.³ I then researched their choice and the rest appeared almost as if by magic...

What we did

We planned that pupils would end the project with a hand-made book that contained explanations of how and why magic tricks work (like Hocus Pocus). These would be judged at the end for a prize. To prepare the pupils for their visit to St John's, I went into the classroom the week before. I used E2BN (a photo sharing network for teachers in the Eastern region) to take the pupils on a tour through the College to the Library and introduce Hocus Pocus.⁴ I then took pupils through making and decorating a simple stab-stitched book.

On their visit to the Library, we split them into three groups on a rotation of half hour activities: A tour of the College with the Librarian (a History Fellow), a look at Hocus Pocus and other magic books in the Old Library with the Special Collections Librarian, and...a magic show! (Thankfully not by me). I also put all the resources I'd created on our website, including pictures of Hocus Pocus and the College, and my instructions on how to build a book.⁵ Hopefully other people may use them.

What people said about it

This project was so successful that we ran it again the next year, and the next. The children wrote thank you letters which show the impact of the project. Here is a selection:

"Dear Naomi. The magic show tricks were brilliant. I would love to be a magician when I grow up."

"I loved the small book. In fact I went home and had a go at making one. But did not succeed. The Old Library was amazing. Next time I come I would like to stay for longer. P.S. see you in 9 years"

"I can't believe we got to see Hocus Pocus Junior! Although I really enjoyed it next time I would like to see the biggest book because it looked very exciting."

"The number one best was when Jon showed me the old library and I saw all the old books. That was cool."

"Thank you Mark, Jon and you for giving us a wonderful trip ever!"

Costs

The costs of the project could have been covered entirely by the funding. Some of the teacher's and all of my time was given free, and photocopying and materials were paid for by St John's, so we had some funding left over. We used the extra funding to pay for the magic show a second year running. The third year that we did the visit the school paid for the magician.

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Magician (two years' worth from funding, 3rd year paid by school): £235 (including costume hire)
Supply cover (to release teachers for planning sessions): c.£400
Materials (needles, thread, coloured card, white paper. Decoration materials provided by school): c. £30
Photocopying: c. £10 (but not accounted for separately)
Staff time: Not recorded

Our second case study is a science-based project that Katie designed and ran.

Build your own astrolabe, Katie Birkwood (Hoyle Project Associate, St John's College Library, Cambridge, 2008-2011)

Background

In 2002 the personal papers of astronomer and author Sir Fred Hoyle were donated to St John's College Library. The Hoyle Collection comprises some 150 boxes of papers, a library of 600 books, audiovisual materials and a number of artefacts. At the time of donation it was the largest collection of personal papers in the College Library, and because of its size and prestige it became a processing and cataloguing priority. The Library made a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant of £48,000.⁶ This covered half the costs of a three-year project and one full-time member of staff to run it.⁷ That member of staff was me, the Hoyle Project Associate.

The Lottery requires its projects to engage with the public, so I had a clear mandate to increase the level of access to the Hoyle Collection. One of the outreach elements stipulated in the Project plan was involvement with Cambridge Science Festival. The Festival is an annual two-week programme of free events coordinated by Cambridge University and part of National Science and Engineering Week. It focuses on families and hands-on activities.⁸ It was difficult to find a hands-on activity directly related to Hoyle's work, much of which was about cosmology and stellar physics. We couldn't really hold a 'build your own big bang' session in the Library!

Inspiration came from an exhibition that I had already curated about the history of astronomy at St John's College.⁹ The exhibition included an astronomical manuscript from the Library's collection of medieval manuscripts: an early fourteenth-century copy of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*.¹⁰ I really enjoyed working with this manuscript, because I'd previously studied Middle English manuscripts and although I didn't know much about astrolabes when I started, I discovered that they're both beautiful and fascinating. Astrolabes are portable scientific instruments, traditionally made from brass and intricately carved, that let you calculate which stars will be in the sky when, or let you work out from the stars and sun what time it is, and where you are.

However, despite thinking astrolabes are great, I found it very difficult to explain in words and diagrams how an astrolabe works. They're something that you really have to see in action. I had a pie-in-the-sky idea for how I could have improved the exhibition - why not have a working model for people to handle? And, indeed, if we could have one working model, why not let everyone have one of their own?

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What we did

I did a literature search to find out more about Chaucer's Treatise on the astrolabe and to see if anyone else had produced an astrolabe kit. This search uncovered an article which explained how amateur astronomers could build their own astrolabes.¹¹ But this wasn't written at a level that a general audience could understand. I happened to be friends with a professional astronomer and he helped me design and test a simplified template for building an astrolabe out of card, overhead projector transparencies, glue, ribbon and split pins.

I submitted an event for Cambridge Science Festival 2010. I ran three hands-on sessions aimed at ages 10-plus. Each session had a capacity of 15 people. The publicity and booking were managed by Cambridge Science Festival, not by the Library, which saved a lot of work. The aim of each hour-long session was for everyone there to build a working astrolabe, and to learn the basics of how to use it.

Although this seemed like an ambitious plan, it was such a success that I ran the same event again the next year, although this time I enlisted some volunteers to help run the sessions. I wanted those who came to the sessions to be able to find out more about their astrolabes when they got home, and I wanted the kit to be accessible to more people than the 45 who could be there in person. I therefore designed and built an online resource to add to the Library website.¹² It has a kit of astrolabe parts to download and print, assembly and usage instructions, some historical background information, and brief introductions to the Library collections that inspired it.

Costs

The costs of the project were confined to materials, photocopying, and staff time.

Volunteers designed the astrolabe and ran the 2011 sessions, and their costs were limited to goodwill gifts.

Card, acetate, scissors, split pins, glue, ribbon and other astrolabe-building necessities: c. £90

Photocopying: c. £20 (but not accounted for separately)

Staff time: Not recorded, as part of wider project with outreach remit.

Volunteer time: c. 5 days

Volunteer gifts: c. £50

What people said about it

Visitor comments such as these proved the event to be a success:

"This was a really useful workshop. I've seen astrolabes in museums & had no real idea of what they are for."

"Very interesting - I didn't know how old astrolabes were, for example & fun for non-science minded people"

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The Library has had enquiries about the online kit from astronomers around the world, and the template has been downloaded hundreds of times.

Summary of useful points and conclusion

Questions

We hope that these two case studies answer some of the questions you might ask when thinking about doing outreach for the first time.

Where will the money come from?

Funding, both major and minor, may come from large organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, or, at least in the past, the MLA. Other bodies such as professional organisations, learned societies and charities may also have funding schemes from time to time. Even if you can't get external funding, it is still possible to have an outreach offer. Many independent museums charge schools for their visits, so it's not unreasonable to fund library outreach with a small per-person charge. Costs outside staff time can be very low; your institution and collaborating institutions might manage to squeeze together the funds to cover limited quantities of materials, especially as the success of initial events will help to bring in funding in the future. (The St John's HLF application was strengthened by the existing schools outreach work.)

Who can I ask for help?

There are all sorts of people and groups who can help you out, simply by being a supportive listening ear, or with specific technical advice, or with practical on-the-spot help, or as collaborative partners. Institutional colleagues are a great source of advice and support, especially if you need an extra pair of hands when your event is taking place, but do look more widely, too. Don't be shy about using existing contacts to support what you're doing. That might mean professional contacts who can help directly, or who can put you in touch with people who can help, or even your own personal friends. Museum education professionals in particular are very knowledgeable, friendly and helpful. Get in touch with some local to you, and try and get involved with any ideas-sharing meetings that they might have. Local and national organisations, such as the Museums Association and the Archives and Records Association also have useful publications, courses and email lists.

Don't I have to be an expert to work with special collections?

You probably already have expertise about something; don't be shy about using that. If there's interest in something outside your expertise, you can always learn, and recruit experts to help you. You don't ever have to know everything; you can use the skills of those around you, or of the people to whom you're offering the event. Don't be scared that visitors will know more than you. They'll always be learning something new, and the new things that they can tell you will contribute to your institution's knowledge of its collections; it's a win-win situation.

Where will I start?

It can be daunting, looking at a collection and wondering what you could do with it. There are various ways to make it less scary. You can ask potential

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visitors what they would like to see or learn about, and then work from there. Or you can find out what other events - festivals, open weekends, or open nights - are happening locally or nationally and think of ways in which you could contribute. Always remember that you don't have to 'do everything at once'. You can try one thing first, and see how it goes, before carrying on to exploit your collections more fully. You also might not need to start from scratch: use what's been done before, even if that's not much, and improve that, rather than reinventing the wheel.

Practical stuff, or Where are the toilets?

Every venue and event is different, but there some practical things that every event will have to consider. These include:

- Transport and parking (whether it's a group that want to bring a coach or minibus, or public opening when people will want to know how to find you. Never underestimate how difficult it is for people to find their way around new buildings: put up lots of signs!)
- Food and drink (will your school group be eating lunch during their visit? Will visitors want to know where the nearest cafe is?)
- Toilets and other facilities (How will you cope with a class of 30 that want to go to the toilet before they leave?)
- Disabled access (Are your venues accessible? How will you let potential visitors know about access restrictions? How can you make your visits accessible to as many as possible?)
- Timing (It's best to have a to-the-minute plan so that visits and events run smoothly)
- Staff and volunteer roles, responsibilities and training requirements (Make sure everyone knows exactly what they are, and aren't responsible for in advance, on the day, and afterwards. Make sure that everyone taking part can confidently fulfil their role.)
- Risk assessments, child protection and health and safety (These will not stop you doing what you'd like to do. They will make sure that you've thought about any potential dangers, and will have your back covered in case of the worst happening.)
- Evaluation (How will you measure the success of your program? Evaluation will help you to plan the next step, improve and hopefully justify the work to your stakeholders and funders.)

Will my employer like this?

We can't promise that your employer will go head-over-heels about the idea. But it's very likely that once they've seen it happen they'll start to appreciate the benefits. So do try and see what you can do.

Your CV

Organising outreach projects and events can seriously enhance your CV. You'll be able to add skills and experience such as:

- Staff and volunteer management
- Staff and volunteer training
- Bidding for funds and grants
- Budgeting
- Project management

- Exhibition and design work
- Teaching people of various ages and abilities

Lastly, working with people who are amazed by your library holdings is fun for all concerned.

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For your eyes only?

Why careers information teams need to demonstrate professionalism

Megan Wiley

Introduction

Since August 2009 I have been an Information Specialist in the University of Bristol Careers Service. I have chosen this topic because as a newly qualified librarian working outside a library for the first time, I was struck by the need to market my team's services and professionalism to our immediate colleagues in the careers service. Students and graduates use careers services in a very different way to an academic library, with many being unaware the service exists at all, let alone understanding the help an information team could offer. Information resources will probably never be the key draw for our users, which makes it even more essential that our colleagues, particularly careers advisers, recognise our worth and can promote us to both users and management.

I work alongside some people who have no conception of what a librarian is or does – a very different situation to when I worked in university libraries. Indeed, I completed my MSc nine months after I started working in the careers services and – despite often talking about my dissertation - found that some of my colleagues had no idea what I was studying or that it had any relevance to my role. To some extent, they do not need to know this, but it did make me realise how different my own perception of my role might be to theirs. This could be an advantage as it means I cannot assume others in the team are aware of my work and skills, as I might do if I worked in a more traditional setting. This raises a question of relevance to all information workers, qualified or unqualified, in any sector: are you communicating your value as clearly as you could be? From my own perspective, many Higher Education (HE) careers services do not employ qualified librarians and several are making cuts, so this issue seems more pertinent than ever.

HE careers services and AGCAS

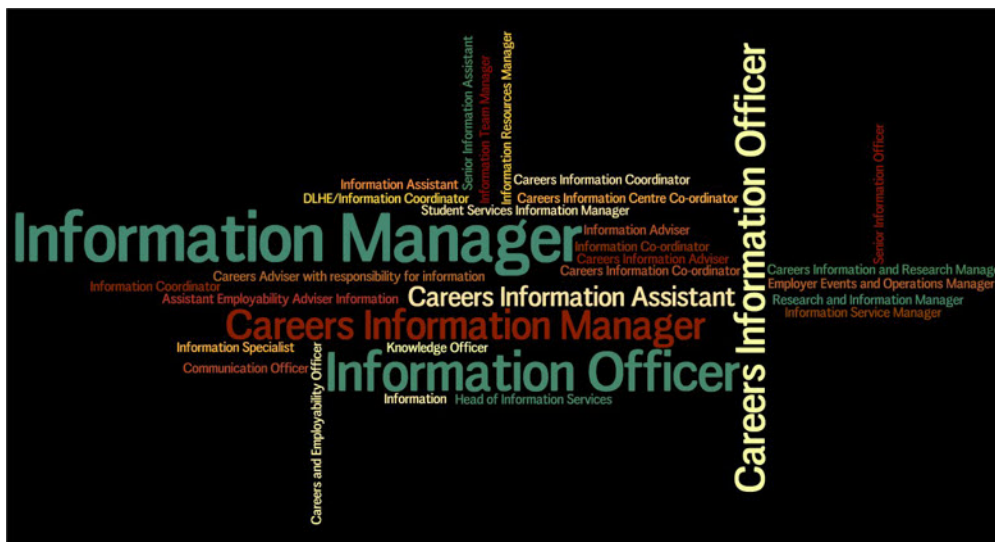
UK HE careers services vary greatly in terms of staff numbers and responsibilities. Whereas my own service has around 30 full time equivalent staff, I have met people who are the sole employee in their careers service and some services are much larger. As such, generalisations are difficult, but services tend to focus upon the key areas of employer liaison (which might include attendance at careers fairs, other events and vacancy listings), advice and guidance (often including one-to-one meetings with careers advisers and workshops) and some information provision, although this can range from a website to a relatively large collection of print resources, depending on service priorities and staffing levels. Careers services also usually collect data from graduates for the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)

survey. Most cater not only for current students but also graduates, although levels of support vary.

We also field a number of questions from prospective students, attend University events such as open days, and provide a limited service for graduates from other universities too.

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) is the professional association for HE careers practitioners. Similarly to CILIP, they provide training and relevant qualifications for staff, hold events and opportunities for networking, accredit services and represent the industry. Information is embedded within this with an active Careers Information Specialists Group (CISG), careers information officer mailing list and a specialised qualification in careers information. I utilised this network myself to send out a survey asking for information about different services, including: the number of staff both overall and within the information team; whether anyone in the team had a CILIP-accredited qualification; attitudes towards CILIP membership; how valued they feel by their colleagues; what they do to actively promote their team's work to colleagues; how they perceive their role within their service and their work with immediate colleagues outside the information team. I received 50 responses which have helped to clarify, confirm and challenge my own perspective.

What do careers information staff do?



[http://www.wordle.net/show/wrdl/3771026/Careers_information_job_titles]

As with careers services in general, there is no typical information team. Responses to my survey demonstrate that information workers have varied roles and, as some of their job titles indicate, many have responsibility not just for resources but other areas including employer liaison, vacancy listings and the DLHE survey. The variety of responsibilities and division of labour described by my respondents confirmed that there is no single approach.

I have identified several key differences between my current role and what I perceive to be more traditional librarianship roles in academic libraries. The main one is that I am nearly always front-facing and so spend a lot of time helping with reception-type queries such as basic questions about event bookings or the service in general. Many careers services do not have library management system and instead use Web 2.0 technologies such as tagging and social bookmarking. The website is often the key resource and

physical stock is often relatively sparse or even non-existent. One reason for this is the fact that the majority of students will never come into the building and graduates tend to live further afield. Another is that our stock has to be reviewed and updated very regularly, since careers information quickly become obsolete, so the need for weeding and new acquisitions is near constant. I attend regular cross-team meetings such as the Publicity Group and Employer Group to ensure we are working well across our teams and promoting our services effectively, and most of the respondents to my survey talked about similar working practices. We also have a lot of contact with our Employer Services Team, including the provision of regular tours for visiting employers – a commercial aspect to our role. In our service the relationship with careers advisers is a key one, as they refer students to see us and have input into our stock development. Although we also do ‘traditional’ work such as basic cataloguing and classification, handling complex enquiries and delivering information literacy training, it can be difficult to unpick the information within our roles and focus on this, as many of my respondents agreed.

Are we seen as admin?

I think the issue of being perceived as admin is a common concern for many librarians and information staff. However it is arguably a particular issue in careers services, since if your colleagues perceive you in this way it can have an effect on the work you are given, or feel able to prioritise.

Several respondents expressed frustration that their role was not fully understood or that they were seen by colleagues as “a generic admin role”, “receptionists”, were “treated like secretaries”, or expected to deal with “mundane, trivial matters and tasks” such as broken photocopiers. Some of this is due to the range of the role and the necessity to undertake a variety of tasks, not just information-specific ones. This is not always imposed from outside, as one respondent talked about information staff feeling “unhappy at being asked to take on an information role as they were originally employed as admin staff”. Another person described the difficulty of proving value to colleagues without the support of the entire information team.

I asked people how valued they felt they were by their immediate colleagues outside the information team and of those who answered this question the responses were: very highly (10); quite highly (17); unsure (4), not very (3). Whilst some people feel they are already doing all they can to raise their profile, this mixed response suggests that there is more we could be doing to demonstrate our worth.

Online developments: pros and cons

One area described by many of my respondents as their key focus is the updating and development of their website. As in most library services, I have already noted that online information is increasingly central to careers work. Another reason for this is lack of staff time to update and develop both print and online resources, particularly in services where only one person is looking after information or people have many other responsibilities too. Some respondents to my survey feel that this has enabled them to raise their profile within their services, whereas others expressed concern that the increasing predominance of online information might reduce the need for information staff or threaten our existence.

One of my respondents described how much “information research has disappeared from the role” due to the availability of information online, whereas I would argue that this has actually increased the need for information staff to help organise and navigate an overwhelming amount of information. This is a point commonly made by librarians but it often needs reemphasising. I have been asked directly more than once by students “what can you tell me that I can’t find online?” and it has been important than I can articulate this. Similarly, some of our careers advisers are confident using the Internet and may not come to us for help if they don’t think we will offer anything further.

Are careers services all about advice and guidance?

In my service, as in many others, much of our more detailed enquiry work comes to us through careers advisers after they have met with students. This is perhaps one reason why information staff can suffer from what one respondent labels “status anxiety”. My survey results confirmed a common concern that advice and guidance may enjoy a higher profile. As I have outlined, it is what most students associate with careers and anyone working in a careers service will be able to tell you about students insistent that they need to see an adviser when their query is “can I have a list of dental surgeries in Kent?”. From my own experience, information teams do tend to be smaller than their advice counterparts and directors of services are themselves often advisers by training. Information staff are also generally paid less, as more than one respondent mentioned. Perhaps for all these reasons information work can sometimes be seen as a stepping stone to advice work rather than a career in its own right. One respondent spoke of “the idea that the main career aspiration should be to become a careers adviser – it’s definitely not in my case!”. It is also probably more common for careers advisers to be professionally qualified than their information counterparts and this may add to a perception that they have higher status. However I also had many positive responses about teams who disputed that this was an issue and I think that the responsibility for redressing any imbalance lies with information staff, who need to be clear about their own value.

Professional qualifications and CILIP membership

I feel that there is an obvious overlap between ‘traditional’ librarianship skills and careers information work. I believe that our ability to organise information and present it in the most appropriate form is a specialist skill shared by all information professionals. So although it is rare for careers services to be utilising cataloguing standards, for example, this is because they have adapted the essential skills of the profession for their own environment. Yet a number of the respondents to my survey who do not have a professional qualification stressed that they do not identify as librarians and could see no relation between the two areas of work. I suspect that this has more to do with misperceptions of librarianship than anything else, but it does raise the issue of how ‘professional’ careers information roles are in general.

Of the 50 responses I had to my survey, 17 people said they work in services where none of the information staff are professionally qualified.

The majority of these were from post-1992 universities (10 of 17 respondents), whereas only 3 of the 19 respondents from Russell Group institutions said the same. 41 people answered the second part of my survey and of these only 11 were CILIP members. Some had been members and left and many feel that it is not relevant to their current role and that the support offered by AGCAS is enough. Whilst the strength of the AGCAS network is evident from the number of responses I gained to my survey, I believe that CILIP could be doing more to engage this group of information workers and that it does offer something additional.

The fact that a professional qualification is not a given and many people are not CILIP members could be another reason why information staff in careers services sometimes struggle to maintain focus on the 'information' element of their role. Whilst I do not believe that professionally qualified staff are inherently better at their jobs, I do think that being part of a professional information organisation provides you with a wider perspective of information work, whilst helping you to recognise your specialist skills and how best to promote them. So, although much of the work I do is not obviously 'professional', I feel that my membership of CILIP and networking with other information professionals help to remind me of the importance of identifying the information aspects of my role and to keep these in the foreground. As my qualification was an essential requirement of my role, I perhaps have more scope than others to focus on this. It is important to remember though that the management of my service, or the wider University, could decide at any point to review the necessity for a professional qualification, just as a couple of respondents to my survey are doing themselves.

Why pay a professional?

Whilst I think that being qualified and a CILIP member are advantageous to me, why would any service bother to pay a professional librarian in a sector where so many people do not have that background? I would argue that the wider professional knowledge that I gained from my course is also of benefit to my organisation, as it means I am aware of a context to my work beyond the immediate one. Collection development and management are skills that are definitely enhanced by a library qualification. Even if your course, like mine, does not include a significant practical element, it still provides you with an appreciation of the key principles behind this kind of work. Your ability to apply these to your own setting is key, yet this is exactly the sort of work that may not be noticed or understood by non-library colleagues.

However, what I consider to be misperceptions about traditional librarians expressed by some careers information staff are potentially damaging not only for them but for the wider information profession. For example, one of my respondents felt that their employer would be likely to remove the need for a professional qualification for the role in the future and a manager described their reluctance to hire qualified staff who they imagined might view the Internet with "trepidation". New professionals have a key role to play here in articulating the value they could bring to a service and challenging stereotypes. In careers services, as in many special library settings, managers (and even information managers) are not necessarily professionally qualified themselves and so may not see the point in hiring someone who is. It is also essential that those of us already working in this

environment recognise and demonstrate our unique skills as information professionals.

As I have outlined, many of my respondents talked enthusiastically about the variety of their roles but also expressed concern about this. The generic skills we offer are important and without our ability to contribute to different tasks and teams outside our information work we would not be contributing effectively to our services. Nonetheless, we need to make sure that we understand what we offer as information staff that nobody else can. Many of my respondents expressed concern about cuts and staff losses, either impending or already happening, and there is a danger that if we cannot articulate our value we will be seen as dispensable or replaceable by someone on a lower pay grade.

Keeping in touch with colleagues

It is up to us to make sure our colleagues recognise the work we do (whether we are qualified or not) and value it, by telling them about it. However, this is not as straightforward as it perhaps sounds. I am fortunate to work in a service where my professional qualification is recognised, my manager and colleague are also qualified, and I am being encouraged to get involved with professional development opportunities such as Chartership. My wider team are supportive and appreciative of the work I do yet, even in this fortunate situation, it is not necessarily the case that they understand what I spend all day doing. I can identify with one respondent to my survey, who said: "I feel that my skills are valued but unsure whether these are identified as being part of my 'information' skills".

We try to regularly communicate our activities to our colleagues and we always provide new staff with an induction, just as many other careers services describe. Yet the difference with a traditional library setting is well illustrated by an exchange with a colleague a few months ago, who revealed they did not know what I was talking about when I mentioned our library management system, as they had forgotten that we had an online catalogue at all. As someone who adds or amends records on there almost daily, this was unthinkable to me, yet why should a member of staff working exclusively with employers be expected to remember? Much information work can be invisible and the majority of respondents to my survey recognised this and described using meetings, newsletters, demos and email to inform their colleagues about what they do. I agree that these are all important activities but I suspect that we need to go further to try to help our colleagues understand more about the nature of our work and its value.

What works?

Some of my respondents were extremely positive about their status in their respective services. However, of these, many were members of small teams who felt that everyone knew what they were doing anyway – an assumption I would challenge. Of the others, one person had introduced an enquiry form to professionalise their research process and raise its profile amongst the careers advisers. We have done this in my own service and have found that it has increased usage of our team by colleagues who had not previously realised the level of research we could offer. We are also now using a Word template to respond to users and we copy our emails to the relevant careers adviser, as well as keeping records of the sort of

enquiries we have tackled. One respondent's service sends out a weekly summary of research to all advisers, not just the one who requested help, which is an interesting model. Volumes of email are high in most work environments now, but I can see the advantage of circulating this type of information.

One of the other key areas of our work is keeping resources current. This is perhaps also one of the most difficult elements to explain to our colleagues. Although they are quick to notice if a link is broken or a folder contains outdated information, it is rarely practical to describe the process of identifying, acquiring, describing and placing a new resource to someone who is not involved in the process. Yet drawing attention to new resources and updated information is definitely important and many services are making use of social media to do this, often ostensibly for the benefit of users but with the added bonus that colleagues will also notice. One example from my survey that I thought went some way to addressing this was a service who have held a 'day in the life' event at a staff training day to demonstrate to colleagues exactly how they approach their work and what is involved in information work. This potentially both demystifies and elevates the work of the team. It is obviously impractical to repeat such exercises regularly, and they depend on the interest of the wider team – and management buy-in – but opportunities like this should be seized and remind us not to make assumptions about our colleagues' understanding.

Relevance to other information services

In summary, it is important for all information professionals to recognise their value, actively demonstrate and articulate this to colleagues and fully utilise the professional networks available to them. Even if you work in a library environment surrounded by qualified colleagues you cannot assume that they understand what you are doing if you have never told them. Plus just as my colleague forgot that we had a library catalogue, your colleagues cannot be expected to remember what you do on a day-to-day basis. As the careers service example demonstrates it is important to consider what you are articulating and how, so that your colleagues feel involved and hopefully appreciate your work but also have the opportunity to give you feedback. It's something that we still have not got right in my own team but that we continue to work on. In a time of cuts the support of your colleagues is a key first step to ensuring that your organisation recognises your worth.

If your attitude to your work is that it is 'for your eyes only', then you may be failing to demonstrate your worth. In any sector or working environment, I would argue that puts you at risk and reduces the chance of you working most effectively with your colleagues.

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Supercharge your CPD: 23 Things for Professional Development

Helen Murphy

23 Things for Professional Development is a self-directed, self-paced, cost-effective, inclusive and practical way for all professionals, at any stage of their careers, in any type of sector or role, and from anywhere in the world, to underline, boost or kickstart their professional development. This paper will introduce the programme, also known as cpd23, in more detail, identifying its background, origins, content and espousing some of the predicted benefits of taking part. It will also discuss how a programme like cpd23, in our current economic situation, is particularly timely, useful and productive.

CPD: why it's (becoming more) important, and why it's (becoming more) challenging

New professionals are acutely aware that professional development is the hallmark of a good, successful and fulfilling career. Its benefits are wide-ranging and varied, extending far beyond the simple goal of career enhancement or the opportunity to earn more money. CPD enables professionals to remain relevant and current in a sector undergoing significant and rapid changes. It concretises and cements our existing skills, encouraging us to reflect critically on our career profession, assisting us in identifying where we want to be, and in assembling our plans of how we will get there. It demonstrates that we are flexible, adaptable and motivated people, that we are committed to improving our performance, and concerned about our jobs. It confers a fitness to practice, helping us to develop a sense of professional identity and responsibility. Megginson and Whittaker summarise CPD concisely and accurately: it is "...a process by which individuals take control of their own development and learning, by engaging in an ongoing process of reflection and action" (2004, p. 5).

Conversely, though professionals are proficient in talking fluently about CPD, in defining it and espousing its advantages, this ability can often fail to translate into practice. Knowing what CPD consists of, what might potentially constitute CPD, how to track one's CPD and how to make the most of it, form a series of different challenges. Being aware of what 'doing' CPD actually looks like can be a barrier to professional development, especially for those at the nascence of their careers. There are other barriers too: pressures of time often mean that CPD is relegated or forgotten; opportunities may seem scarce and when they do arise, they seem unsuitable, directed instead at people with more experience, or less experience, than we have. Lack of confidence or shyness may be another genuine obstacle. Or we may work in isolated roles, in rural areas, far away from the perceived 'hub' of CPD activities in our big cities.

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These barriers have existed for a long time, but the economic downturn has exacerbated them. Opportunities are scarcer, and our employers' training and development budgets may have been cut, placing the responsibility for our CPD even more squarely on our shoulders, which can be daunting. Yet in a situation where there have been, and will continue to be, redundancies, cutbacks and closures, our ability to advocate strongly and persuasively for our jobs, our profession and for ourselves becomes ever more crucial. Jobs are fewer, and competition is fierce. We all know that these are not easy times for the profession, yet what we learn through constant, ongoing engagement with the branches of CPD may equip us with the confidence, knowledge, tools and skills to prove our value more consistently and more thoroughly, and to emerge from the economic crisis in a stronger position than we otherwise would have. This is a CPD-centred Catch 22: just as professional engagement becomes ever more essential, it becomes ever more challenging.

23 Things for Professional Development is a potential solution to this dilemma, and makes a step towards overcoming these barriers. It will supply participants with the knowledge, connections and ideas to navigate our current situation more skilfully and more positively. It is a self-directed course, modelled on the now familiar 23 Things framework, so it has been designed to be completed at participants' own pace, mitigating some of the time pressures we face. It is cost-effective and entirely inclusive, practical and forward-thinking. It is about exploring the different routes towards CPD and doing CPD in a positive, useful way, and not simply because it is something that we ought to do. It provides enough guidance and support for all participants, not just from the organising team, but from everyone else taking part as well, generating significant opportunities for making connections with the people in our profession.

But first, a bit of background...

The first 23 Things programme was held at the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg in North Carolina in 2006. The aims of the original programme were to introduce library staff to Web 2.0 technologies, encouraging a culture of exploration, and to consider if, and how, these technologies could be incorporated into the working lives of staff (Blowers, 2006). Its success led to several other versions, and in the UK alone, there have been academic library programmes at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Huddersfield, Warwick, Westminster and Limerick, and public library versions at Devon, Kirklees and many others.

The Cambridge version (Cam23) was launched in May 2010, and was completed by just over 60 members of the library community in Cambridge, including several members of the cpd23 organising team. It is no understatement to stress that Cam23 has had a noticeable, tangible impact on libraries of Cambridge University. Among the many outcomes have been an increased (but critical) use of Web 2.0 by libraries, for a variety of purposes, and increased confidence of those using it, by both those who were already skilful and those who were new to Web 2.0. Participants developed better understanding, applied their knowledge, and reflected on this process. The programme led, if indirectly, to other events and innovations—the birth of the Library TeachMeet owes its existence, if only in part, to Cam23. However, the most significant and hopefully enduring consequence has been the generation of a sense of community across Cambridge libraries and librarians. Cam23 provided unhierarchical

networks of support, advice and communication across a playing field now far more level than it was before. It encouraged librarians to communicate and engage with each other, no matter who they were or what job they had. It was also, crucially, an enjoyable, rewarding experience—a comment made by many participants in the feedback collected after the programme (Priestner and Carty, 2011).

The 23 Things framework is well established and familiar. There is a central blog, to which posts are published approximately once a week, on each of the Things. The posts are staggered, so that participants are not overwhelmed, and they contain detailed but accessible instructions. There are built in 'catch up' (or reflection) weeks, which provide not only some breathing space, but allow participants to reflect on what they have learned so far. Each participant is asked to write a post on each Thing after exploring it and, if they wish, to read fellow participants' blogs and start conversations. The programme is strictly informal and can be completed at participants' own pace.

Why CPD23 is a bit different (...in a good way)

23 Things for Professional Development works in the same way as these tried and trusted frameworks, but there are a few differences. First, the focus is not simply on Web 2.0, but on a combination of social media and what might be considered more 'traditional' means of doing CPD. Second, the aim is not to consider whether that Thing could be integrated into daily working life, although of course the application of any new ideas is encouraged! Rather, the aim is to focus on how these tools can assist participants in their professional development and how to make the most of them: how, for example, joining a network like LISNPN could benefit their careers. Third, although we hope that participants will complete the entire programme, there is no reason why they cannot 'dip in' for Things that particularly interest them. It is hoped that this new twist on the 23 Things framework will encourage those who have already participated in them to get involved, but the familiarity of the framework has assisted in the organisation, promotion and explanation of the programme.

Being comprehensive in the selection of the 'Things' proved a near impossible task, especially given the number of worthy candidates. In selection, therefore, an attempt was made to be varied, broad, thematic and fair—and, importantly, free to use. The first week is taken up with setting up a blog and exploring others' blogs, so that everyone begins from the same starting point. Participants are asked to register their blog so that a list of urls can be developed, facilitating the process of making connections with others. The Things then include, among others, personal brands, on- and offline sources of knowledge to assist professionals in remaining current, ways to organise yourself and this new knowledge, training available at all levels, both formal and informal, tools for collaboration, filesharing and presenting, and ways to discover what is happening around you, and how you can get involved professionally. Other topics include guidance about identifying one's strengths, and expressing this in application forms and at interviews. The posts will be researched and written either by members of the organising team, or one of our truly fantastic line-up of guest bloggers.

It is expected and hoped that participants will have additional insights, knowledge and suggestions, and they are strongly encouraged to share their perspectives on their blogs and to offer alternatives. This highlights the

principal point that not all of the organising team are especially 'experts' in this particular field; we all have different levels of knowledge and experience, both of the tools and of CPD. This is very much a grassroots enterprise and we hope to learn as much from the programme as everyone else. It is also not expected that each Thing will be either immediately applicable or useful to every person taking part, nor is it expected or desired that participants will arrive at the same conclusions about the utility or value of each tool. We are looking forward to some conflicting ideas! Integral to the selection of Things is a sense that there are several routes to CPD, and no 'one-size-fits-all'; we hope that in the exploration of alternative routes, participants may be able to determine which one(s) work best for them. By recording their thoughts and progress on blogs, it is also hoped that participants will gain some skills or experience in being critically reflective; the blog will also function as a very personal learning toolkit, which can be revisited and revised once the programme has ended.

The BIG question: what will I gain from it?

There are several benefits to taking part in the programme. The first, and most practical, advantage is that it is cost-effective—it requires no travel, nor any financial commitment, demonstrating that CPD does not have to be expensive. The programme is an example of lifelong learning—and the form of learning which is adopted and encouraged, through playing and discovering, is highly effective. This should encourage a spirit of investigation and instil confidence among those taking part. Third, it provides an excellent opportunity to engage with other professionals, to support and advise them and to receive support and advice in return. As professionals we can learn a great deal from one another, even if we often underestimate quite how much we personally have to offer; cpd23 is an incentive and an excuse to think more closely about the skills and the knowledge that we each have, how we can make the most of this personally, and how we can contribute to the professional development of others. Fourth, the programme is absolutely inclusive, with no barriers at all to taking part. It emphasises the equality of participants, no matter what role in the profession they have. Fifth, it is an opportunity for participants to grow in confidence through the setting—and achieving—of their own goals, which we hope will be a rewarding experience. Sixth, it is an opportunity to take part in something which has never been done before; part of its fun lies in its potential unpredictability!

Taking part in 23 Things for Professional Development is, in itself, a form of CPD. It reflects a commitment to learn about new tools, to make new connections and gain a deeper insight into our profession. This makes taking part in the programme an excellent starting-point for some, and an excellent mid-point for others, and we genuinely hope that participants will enjoy the experience and will gain from it. 23 Things for Professional Development began formally on June 20th, 2011, but participants are welcome to join in at any time.

Important links:

Central blog: <http://www.cpd23.blogspot.com>

On Twitter: <http://twitter.com/cpd23>

On Delicious: <http://delicious.com/cpd23>

On LinkedIn: <http://linkd.in/ikTbRp>

On Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/cpd23>

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Can We Play?: Building Opportunities for LIS Student Activism and Why It Matters

Joseph Norwood and Ka Ming Pang

Introduction

Following a year that has seen student protests, rises in tuition fees, cuts in university budgets and a highly visible campaign to save public libraries; the role of information professionals as advocates for their workplaces and their profession is increasingly important. Library and Information Studies (LIS) students have both a vested interest in the condition of libraries, and membership in student groups that places them in an excellent position to use their skills and training to actively engage with issues affecting information provision and education. However, LIS students often appear dormant in both student and professional groups. This means that they not only miss opportunities to become vocal within the community, but also miss out on chances to extend their skills and learn from others before going into an increasingly challenging job market.

We will define what we mean by advocacy and engagement in the context of the information profession and LIS courses. Using the University of Brighton Information Studies students as a case study, we will look at how engaged and active students are within the course and in their professional lives if they are already working. We will attempt to ascertain whether interventions from outside professionals and university librarians have been successful in encouraging engagement in the class. We will discuss the barriers that prevent students from being more active in our field.

Finally, we will describe what we have done to encourage engagement and advocacy, and what we think students could do to participate more and promote activism amongst their peers, and the ways in which professional bodies, librarians and teachers can support student activism.

Advocacy

Activism is the most visible element of advocacy, and in the library context it has received increased attention in the past year as a result of large scale campaigns to save libraries and to prevent university cuts. However, advocacy work also goes on behind the scenes. It includes building contacts with decision makers and local media, connecting with supporters and communicating what the library does, how it does it, why it is important and what will be lost if the service is not available. In order to be most effective, activism should be carried out within the context of existing contacts and research into user needs.

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Students in LIS courses can play an important role in this process as users who are likely to make good use of their library's resources, and as future professionals with a vested interest in the library sector. LIS students are therefore both the target of advocacy from their libraries and professional bodies, and are sometimes engaged in advocacy themselves as part of their work life or as activists.

Engagement

We define engagement as the process through which students build contacts and develop opinions in the context of the information profession. This has both professional and educational benefits for students on LIS courses and involves building better networks of contacts inside and outside of the class, as well as building up a better idea about available community resources such as the library blogosphere, JISC Mail and CILIP Special Interest Groups.

Engagement is an important concept in education theory, students considered to be engaged are those that are able to get feedback and talk with class members. These students are more likely to talk and write about their subject, which is an excellent reflective learning practice, and will be better at finding information independently. Following graduation, engagement continues to be important to professionals as a way to encourage reflective learning, meet useful contacts and to help support career development goals such as getting a charterhip.

The Relationship between Advocacy and Engagement

By being engaged with library issues students become aware of specific problems in the profession and become more enthused about them, or horrified by them. Better engagement will lead to an increased likelihood of participation.

One of the most important ways that engagement can help with advocacy is that it creates a network of people, through whom any pertinent news can be disseminated. Some of these people may have skills, experience and useful contacts which would otherwise be inaccessible. For instance, class member are often more likely to listen to their peers than an outsider, so if a librarian can get a student to pass on their message, it's more likely to be heard.

That said, through the year there have been several attempts to engage with the class, and these have met with varying degrees of success.

What Has Been Done to Engage the Class

Below are some of the ways in which people have attempted to create engagement with the profession in our class this year:

- Representatives from CILIP, the university library and new professionals have been into our class to talk about the benefits of joining professional organisations, following library news, engaging in professional development activities and networking with librarians.
- Library advocacy has been introduced to the class at various stages through videos, references to campaigns and discussion of advocacy methods.

- Ka Ming organised class socials which gave students an opportunity to talk to different class members, outside of their normal groups. For example part time students got to meet other part time students that go to classes on different days.
- She also ensured that the mass e-mail function for the class was set up.
- We created a class blog to give students another way of sharing information. (www.inforgs.wordpress.com)
- We promoted relevant events and training programs to our classmates.

Impact of What Has Been Done

Attempts to engage the class have met with varying responses: CILIP's representatives only encouraged one person to sign up straight after their session; some class members joined Twitter, started blogging or put in applications to attend conferences following sessions on career development, and the class mailing list has become a way to share information and get news.

It is worth noting that measuring the effectiveness of these sessions is difficult. There is a definite correlation between classes explaining a new technology and students starting to use what they were taught. But in many cases, students had been thinking about these technologies and activities beforehand. Often, classes do not seem to have had an immediate effect, and introductions to Twitter and RSS have been given on multiple occasions, with different people taking it up at different times.

Students tend to adopt tools when they see a specific use for them, and our best classes have been the ones that introduce these tools via active learning. This means getting students to use these tools, rather than just explaining them. Even then, whether or not a student has a need for these technologies is a very individual thing relating to their workload, priorities and tasks.

Class Survey on Activism and Engagement

To get an idea of the communication networks that students use and their current level of engagement and activism, we surveyed our cohorts asking questions related to the use of communication tools; their personal engagement with the profession; whether they've engaged in advocacy, and how connected they felt to class members.

We received sixteen responses including our own, out of a class of eighteen. In the process of collating the data from the survey, we decided our study sample was too small for any significant conclusions to be drawn from the quantitative data. Furthermore we had not factored into our surveys how people tend to talk themselves up, or down, and in cases, be forgetful of what they have done. Thus we felt that there were no meaningful statistics that we could draw out from the results.

Conducting the research gave us insights into the difficulties of formulating a questionnaire, but we did not draw as much from our tick box questions as we had hoped to. The most valuable part of the survey turned out to be the written comments, which gave us richer descriptions of their perceptions of activism and engagement levels. These comments will be discussed below.

Results

Despite being a survey with flaws, we were still able to draw some results from our data set.

First of all there appears to be no correlation in our sample between generation, gender, or part time/full time student status, and the communication tools people used to engage with the profession or for learning. A wide variety of communication tools were used such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, but each student used a different set of tools, and there were also differences in frequency of usage.

We also asked class members whether they had joined CILIP and the reasons leading to their decisions. Reasons given for joining CILIP include cheaper costs as students, that it was good for employability, and it kept them up to date with library related information.

The reasons cited for not joining CILIP included the cost of membership, and the feeling that it did not benefit them as students. Some students indicated that they wanted to take advantage of the student prices by joining later on in the academic year, which indicates that they felt CILIP is only useful once they are in the profession. One student cited the lack of political activity as one of the reasons why they did not join.

“CILIP is supposed to join information workers together to have a collective voice, but I haven’t seen evidence of that. I don’t see organised political activity during the current crisis in our industry, or anything of use.”

Another class member stated that they did not join because they felt that CILIP has not been visibly doing enough about library closures, indicating perception of CILIP’s role in advocacy is a barrier to joining the professional body. However, most respondents did not mention CILIP’s role in advocacy as a factor.

We asked whether class members have been politically active in issues related to libraries, and whether they felt the MA course has made them more politically active. The results showed that two thirds of the respondents have been politically active. The examples of advocacy include: use of social media to pass on information, sending petitions and letters to MPs, read-ins, leafleting, and joining protests. Two thirds of the class said that the course had not made them more politically active, indicating that activism may not be stemming from what is taught in class.

Conclusions and Action Points

From these results, we have come up with the following conclusions and action points.

The type of communication tools used and the frequency of usage varied from person to person, showing that there is no single medium that is the best for reaching the entire class network. So an effective communication strategy has to include a variety of tools. This needs to be adopted by teachers and students, and we believe that due to the shortness of MA courses, it should be teacher lead. Though, students also need to be proactive.

There is a perception that CILIP is not relevant to the needs of LIS students, and the organisation is not strongly associated with advocacy work. If CILIP wants students to be more involved in its activities, they need to market themselves better to students. For instance, they could contact students earlier in the academic year, and tie these sessions to further relevant events. They also need to promote their advocacy work better to those who are not CILIP members.

One of the most unexpected results for us was the variety of political activities students were already participating in, which we had not been aware of. Students were being active, but this was not being fed back into the class. If there was a stronger communication network, then these isolated pockets of activism could be joined together to create a potentially more powerful collective voice that would speak out on behalf of libraries. We believe that a class working as a coherent whole would be stronger than the sum of its parts. Beyond that, students should also try to connect more with LIS students from other universities. An example of this is the Hack Library School blog that runs real time discussions on LIS issues through Twitter, which is used primarily by American students. UK based LIS students could be more proactive in generating similar discussions at a more convenient time for this country.

Our points that mention the increased use of communication tools, and fostering a better peer to peer network, tie in with what we've been trying to do within the class. But what we feel is needed is better support from academic staff, librarians, and professional bodies such as CILIP to help provide training sessions and events to encourage student participation early on in the term and in a way which matches student needs and interests.

In conclusion, students benefit from engaging with classmates, teachers and the wider professional community. Doing so will help improve their learning and their involvement with the profession. It is also beneficial for librarians to have students engaged in their projects and acting as advocates for the library, this also applies to professional bodies. To some extent students are already politically active, but it would be more effective if these activities fed back into a more joined up class network. Professional bodies should also reach out to students through better timed introductions and student focused events. Bridging the gap between the LIS students and information professionals will create a more dynamic, better connected, professional group.

Further Reading

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Establishing dialogues between new and experienced professionals

Rachel Bickley

Introduction

Last year I had the opportunity to participate in a session at the SCOUNL Conference, about new professionals' views of the future of academic libraries¹. The attendees were really keen to engage with us, but interestingly a lot of them held misperceptions about the knowledge and experience that we had. This insight was useful a few months later, when I was looking for my first professional post, as it pointed me towards the things I might need to concentrate on demonstrating in job applications. With the difficult economic climate, newly-qualified librarians and information professionals are having to fight for the jobs – that is, when the person specification for a job even gives them a chance without professional experience. Therefore, it is more important than ever for new professionals to be able to demonstrate that they can bring just as much to a position as a more experienced colleague could. This is one very significant reason why establishing dialogues between new and experienced professionals is important.

Over the past year or so, an amazing community of LIS new professionals has sprung up, on the LIS New Professionals Network (LISNPN) website², and on Twitter. We share experiences, ideas and concerns, and offer encouragement to each other when things are going well and going badly. The CILIP Career Development Group has put a lot of effort into supporting new professionals over the past couple of years; there are New Professional Support Officers on the committee for most divisions, and they run an annual New Professionals Conference. The support network in place for new professionals is fantastic, and has won praise from both new and experienced professionals. However, we need to be careful not to become too insular; as with any network or community, we need to engage with other networks and communities too. Establishing dialogues with experienced LIS professionals is not just about getting a job – it's about engaging with the other people in our profession, in order to work together successfully at a time when the profession is facing difficult times.

I conducted a survey of experienced professionals, aimed at discovering their perceptions of new professionals. I distributed a questionnaire on Twitter and the LIS-LINK mailing list, inviting any LIS professional who did not consider themselves to be “new” to participate. I received 35 responses. While my survey is by no means scientific, and the results cannot be taken to represent the perceptions of experienced LIS professionals as a whole, I believe that many of the responses that I received demonstrate why we should be establishing dialogues. The following results are a summary, with particular comments highlighted. The full results are available on my blog³.

Experienced professionals' perceptions of new professionals

Twenty six of the 35 respondents said that they worked with new professionals.

How do you perceive their attitude towards their work?

Fifteen had only positive comments to make: they found the new professionals with whom they worked to be enthusiastic, "keen", "dedicated", "knowledgeable", "professional", "hard-working", "self-motivated", "engaged", "innovative", "willing to learn", "willing to volunteer for tasks and take on new challenges", and said that they demonstrated a "positive" attitude and had a "broad range of interests".

The other 11 respondents who answered this question gave a mixed response, the negative aspects of which mainly covered issues to do with knowledge and skills rather than attitude, although one respondent suggested that new professionals could be "naïve".

How do you perceive their knowledge/ability?

Twenty five of the 26 respondents who worked with new professionals answered this question. Seven had only positive remarks to make, commenting that knowledge and ability was "good" or "excellent". Two highlighted new technologies and social media as being particular areas of expertise. One respondent felt that the new professionals with whom they worked were "knowledgeable". Another highlighted skills such as "resource discovery, cataloguing, classification and systems management" as being good.

The other 19 respondents gave mixed responses. Six felt that new professionals lacked practical skills, although 2 of these respondents felt that this was to be expected when someone is new to any profession. Five respondents felt that new technologies, digital information and social media were strong areas of knowledge and ability. Areas in which new professionals' knowledge and ability were considered to be weak were cataloguing and classification and subject knowledge. One respondents highlighted time management and the ability to prioritise as a "learning need".

Seven respondents felt that ability and knowledge varied depending on the person. Four respondents felt that, where they lacked skills or knowledge, the new professionals with whom they worked were "willing to learn". Three respondents commented that, while library school provides a "basic introduction", it leaves major gaps in new professionals' knowledge and skills (although they do not pinpoint what).

If you do not currently work with any new professionals, do you have any comments on LIS new professionals, based on other experience?

Eight of the 9 respondents who said that they did not currently work with new professionals gave comments on their perceptions based on previous or other experience. Most gave answers similar to those given to the earlier questions.

Two respondents specifically stated that their experience and perceptions of new professionals come from blogs and Twitter. One felt that, although the new professional blogs that they had read were “insightful” and “interesting”, they could sometimes be “frustrating in their stating the obvious, introspective, cliquy”. This respondent was unsure whether they should be defined as a new or experienced professional, but did not “especially identify with the current clique of new prof bloggers”.

Have you ever recruited a new professional to a professional role?

Nineteen respondents had recruited a new professional to a professional role. Six simply said that the new professional was the best candidate on the day.

Four highlighted previous non-professional library experience as a factor. Two indicated that a “willingness to learn” played a part, while three commented on enthusiasm and/or a positive attitude. Other answers included an expectation that they would be “supportive of new technologies”, that they demonstrated an ability to problem-solve, management/leadership potential, or good IT skills, that they had good customer service skills, or that they demonstrated a “committed” approach to the profession.

If you have never selected a new professional for a professional role, is there any reason why not?

All 5 of the respondents who said that they had never recruited a new professional to a professional role replied to this question, as well as 1 respondent who had experience of recruiting and rejecting new professionals.

Of the 5 who had never recruited a new professional, 2 said that this was because none had applied for the job. Two others said that they were looking for someone with a “significant” amount of experience. One said that as there are so few positions available in the current job market, they could “afford to be picky” for professional roles.

The respondent who had both recruited and rejected new professionals for professional roles commented that the rejections often occurred when “the applicants stress what our institution can do for their career, rather than what they can do for the institution”.

What would you be looking for when interviewing a new professional for a professional role?

Twenty four respondents answered this question. Willingness to learn (8 respondents) and enthusiasm (6 respondents) were the most often-cited qualities. Four respondents said that they would be looking for experience, and that this would not have to be professional experience. Other responses included flexibility, IT skills, communication skills, adaptability, self-motivation, customer service skills, common sense, professional commitment, an understanding of what is required from the role, an understanding of and interest in the wider profession, the ability to think in an original way, the ability and willingness to work hard,

leadership/management potential, good presentation skills, subject knowledge, ability to work in a team and ability to reflect.

One respondent expected competency in “librarianship basics”, citing “cat/class, knowledge management, enquiry technique” as examples. None of the respondents who answered this question specifically cited professional experience as something that they would be looking for. One respondent explained that they felt that new professionals can use examples from non-professional experience to meet criteria for professional skills: “successful applicants tend to use the experience they have through work or study to display they meet the criteria specified. Skills such as project management and staff supervision (often required for professional roles) can be demonstrated by new professionals if they analyse their own experiences.” Similarly, another respondent said that if a candidate had no professional experience, they would be looking for “how well they demonstrate transferable skills”.

Two respondents explained that they would be looking for the same skills and competencies that they would be from any candidate for a professional role.

Do you have any other comments to make about your perceptions of LIS new professionals?

Sixteen respondents responded to this question. Seven of them echoed earlier perceptions of new professionals being enthusiastic, positive, hard-working and adaptable. Three referred to the difficult economic climate and how it is “depressing” that this potentially driving new professionals away. Two respondents were unsure about the term “new professional”; one didn’t know when someone stopped being “new” and became “old”, and the other found the term “a bit exclusive”: “I am not that long in the tooth and find myself already classed as too much of an old lag. I generally think the new pros should just get involved with the old pros.” Similarly, another respondent thought that having such a strong support network for new professionals in place was a good thing, but that “it is a slight worry that that it is creating a clique”.

What can we learn from the survey results?

Many of the responses were encouraging. The experienced professionals who responded held many positive perceptions of new professionals. Enthusiasm, a willingness to learn, and a commitment to the profession and to continuing professional development were phrases that appeared throughout, and I was pleased to see that these qualities are coming across; qualities that, in my experience, most new professionals have in abundance, and qualities that are really important in giving new professionals that edge that they need when going up against more experienced candidates in job applications.

However, some negative perceptions which could potentially create barriers between new and experienced professionals came out of the survey questions. As I said earlier, I do not claim that this small-scale survey is something from which we can draw firm conclusions, and there are conflicting opinions within the results. However, the respondents were people who could potentially be our employers now or in the future, so I believe that we should be addressing some of their perceptions. Moreover, regardless of whether these particular perceptions are representative of the

views of experienced LIS professionals as a whole, they are examples of the sort of problems, opinions and barriers that we could discover through establishing dialogues.

Something which was mentioned by quite a few of the respondents was practical skills, which they felt new professionals lacked. Some respondents suggested that library school does not adequately prepare new professionals for the workplace. What can we do about this? Obviously library school cannot teach us everything – how can we cover specialist knowledge for all of the different (and growing) sectors in one fairly short degree? This issue is an example of how establishing a dialogue between new and experienced professionals would be beneficial: new professionals can show that they are willing and able to learn quickly (“willing to learn” being a perception that occurred throughout the questionnaire) while discovering what it is that employers are looking for. While we will not all have practical experience of many things, we can at least demonstrate a commitment to learn. For example, one respondent said they would be looking for what they called “librarianship basics”, citing “cat/class, knowledge management, enquiry technique” as examples. These are things of which it can be difficult to gain experience when not working in a professional role. So we can read up on them, and think about ways in which the theory can be put into practice in a workplace situation, so, even if we don’t have the experience, we do at least have some knowledge, can express some ideas around the practical elements (in lieu of actual practical experience), and can demonstrate an understanding of our learning needs and a commitment to fulfilling them. If you’re working, you can have some idea of the things you could request to shadow as part of your professional development. And those of you who are studying could push your course leaders to cover these skills, perhaps doing some practical work with you; you then have some practical experience even if you’ve not got workplace experience.

Another perception I’d like to address is one regarding the online LIS new professional community. A couple of respondents expressed concern about new professionals and “exclusivity”, with one picking out the network created through LISNPN and blogging as creating a “clique” with which they felt unable to identify, although they felt that they perhaps still fell into the category of new professional. Although it was only one person who said this, it concerns me, and this is another reason why I think we need to forge links and start conversations with experienced professionals. When LISNPN began, Laura Woods wrote about the importance of a network for new professionals, in which she referred to concerns raised on Twitter about a network for a specific set of LIS professionals such as LISNPN⁴, so such concerns are nothing new. Laura argued that networks such as LISNPN are not intended to be a “replacement” for “mainstream networking groups” but that they are important in meeting the specific interests and needs of specific sets of people⁵. I would make the same argument, but I also feel that we need to be careful not to alienate other people and communities within our profession; this respondent’s use of the word “clique” makes me uneasy. This is one example of where we need to establish dialogues with experienced professionals not for the purpose of getting a job, but for working together successfully.

I was really pleased that several of the respondents addressed the “post qualification professional experience” issue, saying that they did not

necessarily require this kind of experience, and instead would be looking for the new professional to demonstrate that they meet the person specification for a job through other experience gained from work or study. I find it really encouraging to discover that some of the potential recruiters who completed my questionnaire are open-minded and willing to give new professionals a chance, providing they are able to demonstrate the required skills from some kind of previous experience. This demonstrates the importance of establishing dialogues with experienced professionals when it comes to job-seeking; we understand what we need to do.

How can we establish dialogues?

There are things that we can all do to build links and start conversations which will be beneficial for everyone.

Online communities and networks appear to me to be the spaces where we can most easily and effectively get dialogues started. Twitter is a very obvious place, as both new and experienced professionals use it to share and discuss ideas and to network. Get involved in discussions; although it can be daunting to contribute to a discussion where the other participants are more experienced, or where the topic is something around high-level strategic issues or similar, your contribution will be valued, as will any questions that you ask. You don't have to state that you are a new professional; you can contribute as a LIS professional in general. The same goes for reading and commenting on blogposts.

LinkedIn is another online resource which can facilitate dialogues. I am not yet hugely familiar with LinkedIn. However, from what I have seen so far, it appears to be a space where a lot of discussions take place, between different types of LIS professional at different stages of their careers, often on topics around recruitment and professional skills. Thus, it seems to me to be an ideal place in which new professionals who want to know what they need to do to get that first professional post, or to discuss what new professionals can offer, can start a conversation with experienced professionals.

There is, of course, also the LIS New Professionals Network (LISNPN). There are already a number of experienced professionals registered and participating in discussions, as well as contributing their knowledge in articles and guides in the Resources section of the site. This is something which I would like to encourage, as, as valuable as it is to have that space where new professionals can share ideas, concerns and experience, it's also useful to have a different perspective on things. Equally, LISNPN socials are open to anyone with an interest in LISNPN, or in networking with new professionals. I encourage other LISNPN members to invite their experience colleagues to join, as I believe it is another ideal online space in which to establish a valuable dialogue.

I'd like to appeal to those who are not so involved in the online LIS professional community (or not involved at all). I appreciate that LISNPN, Twitter and blogging can all appear daunting, but I have found engaging with the online community to be highly beneficial in making contacts, finding out about opportunities, picking up new ideas, and even just making new friends in the same profession, so I would like to encourage other new professionals to join in. I suggest you start with LISNPN, posting on the "introduce yourself" thread. Read other introductions, many of which include

members' Twitter names; your next step is to join Twitter and start "following" other librarians. One you "follow" a few you discover many more, and your network begins to grow.

It's not just online that you can start dialogues. You can talk to your experienced colleagues at work face-to-face. Your conversations don't have to be about topics like professional skills - talk about what's going on in the library, ask them about what they're working on, show an interest, offer your thoughts, ask questions – anything to demonstrate your interest in the overall workings of the library or organisation, to try to ensure that there are no barriers such as misperceptions. Or chat about anything, in the staffroom at tea break! This applies online as well. Networking is not always about talking about professional issues; talking about things like football, television or hobbies in order to make friends rather than just professional contacts is a valuable way to network too.

There are of course opportunities for face-to-face networking at conferences and training events. Look at going to those with a wider attendance base than new professionals, and devote some time to sharing ideas and getting to know experienced professionals.

Another idea is to get involved in committee work. One of the things that I enjoy about committee work is meeting the other committee members, who are from different LIS sectors and at different stages of their career. Getting involved is a great way to get to know experienced professionals and to work closely with them. Don't presume that you'll need to take on a new professional specific role – on my current committee there are new professionals holding other roles. Additionally, look around at the different committees that you could join – don't presume it has to be the Career Development Group, just because that's something that's important to you as a new professional – join a committee or a group that's involved in another aspect of supporting the LIS profession. As I've said already, you don't always have to focus on the fact that you're a new professional; sometimes it's better to just be a LIS professional in general!

I hope that I have demonstrated why it is important to establish a dialogue between new and experienced professionals, and offered some ideas about how to go about this. I'm sure that there are many other ways to build links and start conversations. I encourage you to go out and get a dialogue started, in any way that you can think of. Breaking down barriers and starting conversations between different members of the LIS community can only be beneficial for all of us, and, as we new professionals are the future of the profession, I believe it is up to us to lead on establishing dialogues with experienced professionals; in the words of one of my survey respondents, "the new pros should just get involved with the old pros".

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Umbrella 2011: Do Skills and Professionalism Matter?

Nicola Forgham-Healey, Sue Hill and Susie Kay

This was the question which was asked at a recent workshop held by Sue Hill and Susie Kay at Umbrella 2011. The answer is somewhat more complex, as there are various aspects which go into being a professional such as reputation, first impressions, how we as individuals behave towards others, our level of work and customer service we might give to people we meet throughout each individual day. This workshop was very interactive and everyone was given the opportunity to think about the question and provide opinions.

Attitude

Reputation

An individual's attitude can affect a range of aspects, one of which is your reputation. You need to provide an honest assessment of your reputation; this is sometimes done using a 360 degree appraisal. This allows you to see how your peers, managers and people you supervise view you: it's about how good you are and how you want to be perceived. Developing and maintaining your reputation will, in turn, help you get results; in a work project, demonstrating your service value and can be used to help drive your career path. There are lots of opportunities to achieve this; engaging with the professional body, being an ambassador for your library, taking part in online discussions. It is vital to remember that your reputation has to be earned in order to assess the effects which you are having on your service. In order to increase and enhance your reputation you need to do it for *you*.

Library Sector in general

Discussion centred on what key library services are. These can include: customer service, training, cataloguing. One person stated that as information professionals "we act as connectors to information for our users – information enablers – we are marriage brokers not stock brokers"

In general, information professionals can be adaptable, flexible. The present climate is very much very much doom and gloom and our services have to be continually justified in order to prove our worth. We therefore have to expand our knowledge on proving evidence of the worth which we provide to the organisation and our users.

johnrdolan John Dolan #ub11 library?- Sue Hill says it's the 'beating heart of your organisation'

Impact
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Trumpet blowing

A good place to start is makes sense to create a list of all your skills, and this does not have to be limited to your 9-5 job, you can also include skills and abilities which you have learnt through hobbies or committee participation. You need to be a “career chameleon”, and be willing to undertake roles which might be outside of your comfort zone. The job titles are also changing – but the skills which we have as “librarians/information professionals” are ones which we can apply to many different roles – they are things which we can do, just called something different.

It is sensible to remember when you are applying for jobs, just what the recruiter wants – so document and deliver this information. During a job interview we should state not “we” do this but “I”: don’t be negative. Part of the process is standing up for yourself – talk about the interesting things first.

Sue stated that it is useful to remember that you are not Tesco supermarket’s value range but its finest range.

Plan B

It is vital to sit down and think about your “plan B”. What would you do if your library or service made you redundant and there were no other library jobs. It was suggested that you should find a quiet place to think and carry out a skills audit, this can include:

- What are you good at
- What is your dream job – what would it look like?
- Sell your skills – look at hobbies and include these
- What could you be good at and what would you like to do.

One key aspect is to be honest with yourself and about the level of your knowledge. If there are some things which you would not want to do remove them from the list or relegate them to the bottom.

Behaviour

In this era of mass and social media it is necessary to think about your reputation, as employers can now find you via facebook, twitter and LinkedIn. Recruitment agencies and companies search these sites to find the right employees for their vacancies. It is useful that we use this media in the right way, as we can also use this media to help find advisers to help shape us and build our reputations and our networks. Therefore it is a good idea to recognise that, how we write and portray ourselves on blogs and twitter can also affect our reputation. It is also practical to think about how you interact with the colleagues you come into contact with during the day, meetings and conferences.

First Impressions are still important! It takes 6-7 seconds to make a first impression after this it is difficult to change impression. This can happen in a wide range of locations, work, pub, by email, social networks. Therefore this can mean that a first impression is being made about you by lots of different people that you come into contact with. Therefore how to do you ensure that you make the right impression and you get a positive outcome. Susie’s comments were that they were all about self-esteem, being flexible, changing the label and open yourself to new potential opportunities.

Character

Information skills can be very individual you need to look at both your own and what you need to make yourself employable. Library folk are very good at only concentrating on their own role, and helping others to develop their skills. It is very easy to make a good impression; this can be done by having marketable skills, services and in everything which we do.

Skills and Competencies

Sue stated that “there are always new skills to learn”, these can be tangible and practical. Your attitude about how you meet these needs is key. The generic skills which are taught at library school are fine in theory but how do you prove that you can put them into practice? In order to do any type of job, you have to have the self-belief that you are capable of carrying out the duties. With soft skills there is no rubber stamp to say that you can do this. It’s all down to you showing that you not only have the subject knowledge but that you have a variety of the soft skills, such as presenting, communication and team work.

A discussion was held about the types of skills which were needed to meet the demands of today’s workforce some members of the workshop had recently recruited and below are some of the skills which they were looking for:

- Accuracy of work
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Can do – forward thinking
- Knowledge of Organisation
- Attitude
- Adaptive
- Passion for job and role
- Winging it
- Delivering
- Translating user needs
- Thinking on feet
- Vision
- Planning
- Managing those around and above
- Thinking ahead

The overarching question of what is professionalism, it was argued that it is not just one aspect but, in Susie’s opinion, three aspects that form this concept; they are Attitude, Behaviour and Character.

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Forthcoming Events

International Trip to Netherlands

Call for expressions of interest

As part of CDG International activities, a visit is due March 2012 in the Netherlands. The plan is to visit the National Library, Gallery, Tropical Research Institute and some libraries and other places of attraction. Further details will be communicated to those who register an interest.

Please send your expressions of interest with preferred airport and days by 30th November to receive a registration form.

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Certification, Chartership, Revalidation and beyond

Date: 9th November 2011
Location: CILIP, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE
Time: 4pm - 6.45pm
Cost: Free

The Career Development Group (London and South East Divisions) would like to invite you to 'Certification, Chartership, Revalidation and beyond'

This event considers the importance of continuous professional development, both in preparing for Certification, Chartership, Revalidation, and throughout your career. It is aimed at those who have embarked on the Certification, Chartership or Revalidation process, or who are thinking about it.

There will be an introductory presentation by Franko Kowalczyk, part of the Career Development Group's candidate support team. Michael Martin from CILIP's Qualifications and Professional Development Department will then talk about the Certification, Chartership and Revalidation process. Example portfolios will be available for perusal and borrowing.

Learning outcomes

- Improved understanding of how to progress towards the relevant qualification and what you will gain by doing so
- Awareness of the Regulations and assessment criteria
- An understanding of what constitutes a portfolio and why CILIP requires this for submission for its qualifications
- Ideas about how to construct a portfolio and the types of evidence that can be included in it
- An enhanced understanding of the benefits of Continuing Professional Development
- Awareness of the support networks and information available to help candidates
- Confidence to progress towards gaining a CILIP qualification successfully

To reserve a place on the course please contact Alex.Seymour@nas.org.uk for a booking form

All divisions are welcome to send their events for inclusion in Impact.

Career Development Group National Conference 2011 The Practical Professional

Monday 21 November

Venue: Future Inn, Bristol

Themes of the Conference

The conference will enable participants to share experiences and explore issues relevant to the overall theme: the practical professional, including:

- Making a splash - how you have developed your service
- Internet marketing - what works and what does not
- Keeping motivated during challenging times
- Being a career chameleon – how to adapt to a changing landscape

There will be a prize for the best paper, as voted for by delegates on the day. A selection of papers will be published in Impact, the group's journal.

Questions/Comments

The organisers are happy to receive and respond to questions or comments. For further information please contact: cdgnationalevents@gmail.com

Full details will be made available on the Career Development Group website in due course:

<http://www.cilip.org.uk/cdg>

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