

Getting to know our researchers and understanding their needs

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Introduction

Our aim is to support researchers in accessing the information they need. Some of it is in our Library and Archives collections, but much of it is in other institutions across the world and across the world wide web. During a group discussion at a recent meeting at Cardiff University (WHELF/GW4, 2014) we had difficulty defining a research collection, and found that we were describing our role as 'gatekeeper to resources'.

Stephen Bell (2009) discusses an idea put forward by Seth Godin that library staff are not so much gatekeepers as 'gate openers'. 'Godin urged the audience of librarians to better understand what their community members need to accomplish, and to then open up the gates in order to deliver the resources they need for their learning, their research, their lifestyle, and their well-being, and to invite them to discover meaning through personalized relationships with library workers.' Bell goes on to discuss the user experience and how we can deliver meaning to library users. I shall discuss further the idea of librarians as gate openers and partners of researchers.

Background

Following a complete restructure of the service in 2013–14, an academic support team was put in place to act as liaison and point of contact in each college of the university, and a small research team was developed to cover open access, research data management, research skills and the needs of researchers. Over recent years we have invested significant time in getting to know our undergraduate students, the teaching staff and the organisation of modules, lectures and assignments. We now regularly hold undergraduate focus groups and work with them to explore their needs and their experience of our service. This has been underpinned this year by the establishment of a team of student library champions who work closely with the academic support librarians, the Students Union and the university's Student Engagement Officer.

However, we know a lot less about what researchers need from the Library and Archives Service. We need to acknowledge that the scholarly communication environment is fast moving and evolving. In recent years technology has had a huge effect on research and scholarly communication; big data is everywhere and digitisation and coding of texts and new methods for the analysis of results has changed the way information can be created and shared.

Researchers as partners

D. Scott Brandt (2012) states that 'to partner successfully with researchers requires an understanding of research not only as methodological problem-solving, but also as an academic enterprise. Identifying a discrete problem to solve is one thing; building a research service to partner with researchers involves understanding and leveraging the "business side" of research.'

Moira Bent (2014) recently spoke about how we engage with researchers; if we understand how researchers work we can use this information to find areas where we can add value. Moira suggested that by thinking of ourselves in the support role we may be placing ourselves in a secondary or subordinate role, and this could limit what we are able to achieve. Moira proposes that we re-evaluate our identity and our relationship with researchers.

At Bangor University, we are working closely with our researchers to develop our services to meet their needs. We are focusing on ensuring that we have a seat at the table and are involved in the right discussions. The Director of Libraries and Archives attends the Research Strategy Task Group, where we have a standing agenda item. The Academic Support Librarians, who also have a College-wide research function, attend School and College research meetings, while the Research Support Librarian and the Repository and



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Research Data Manager have an advocacy role across the institution. We are now leading on developing a new Research Data Management Service for the university, working collaboratively with the Research and Enterprise Office, IT Services and the Finance Department.

For the past two years, we have been raising awareness of open access publishing by organising regular key events during Open Access week, providing training sessions and attending School meetings. We manage the Research Councils UK block grant and are helping to prepare for the new open access requirements of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Recently we have started working with the university's Centre for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning to develop a new open access journal. We are looking to adopt a solution that could be rolled out to other potential open access journals across the university.

Understanding the needs of researchers at different points in their career is vitally important. We are developing training sessions for postgraduate students via the new Doctoral School at the university, and we are contributing to the Researcher Development Training Programme for researchers at all levels in the university.

We recognise that building relationships with researchers is critical, and we try to ensure that we are involved in their world, and learn more about the business of research. We attend research seminars, and create displays in the four libraries relating to research in the academic departments. We are actively aware of what research staff at the University are publishing, what grants are being received and the leading areas of research at Bangor. We work closely with the Research and Enterprise Office in collaborative projects and this allows us to see different sides of the research process including the grant application stage.

One of the best ways we have found to understand the research process is by being an integral part of a research group. Academic Support Librarians are costed in to support funded projects, for example on systematic review and realist review projects led by research staff in the School of Healthcare Sciences, and we are supporting a bid by researchers in the School of Computer Sciences as part of the JISC Data Spring Project. We are also writing collaborative research papers with academic staff.

The University Archivist has recently been involved with colleagues from the School of History in setting up and identifying funding for the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, which aims to support research on land estates in Wales, to collaborate on inter-disciplinary research projects, to organise conferences and workshops, as well as working with the heritage sector, schools and history groups and societies across Wales. Similarly the Director of Library and Archives and the Archives and Special Collections team are working closely with academics in the School of English Literature to establish a Centre for the Study of Arthurian Literature to support research, teaching and learning, community engagement and digitisation of the collection.

Working in these areas has given us opportunities to understand what researchers need, how they work and how we can add value. We have been able to identify and build relationships with research staff and research students willing to work with us to develop our services. This involvement has also given us opportunities to explain to researchers what we do and what our service is about.

Marketing and branding are essential so that researchers know the resources they are using have been provided by the Library and Archives Service, but it has proved invaluable to be there in-person, to point out in discussion that a resource is managed by the Library and Archives Service, or that Library and



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Archives staff have skills in the areas they have been discussing. We want to know more about the research tools that researchers are using beyond the tools we offer via library subscriptions, for example social networking sites for researchers, reference management tools, mind-mapping, visual searching, annotation and note-taking tools. There will be potential here for the Library and Archives Service to support researchers with new technologies, and also to explore new methods of communication with researchers.

We are still on a journey to a better understand what our researchers need to access and how they want to access it. In order to develop our services, we intend to work proactively and collaboratively with researchers as partners, just as we have been doing with undergraduate students in recent years.

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