

# Supporting knowledge exchange for Birmingham City University Library and Learning Resources staff



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## Introduction

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Like many libraries, Birmingham City University (BCU) Library and Learning Resources (L&LR) is a multi-team department across different locations and includes staff with various areas of expertise and interest, many of whom attend training and events to further develop their knowledge and skills. In order to make the most of this wealth of experience and knowledge, we have recently been looking at ways to facilitate knowledge exchange within the department.

This has grown partly from a strategic focus on supporting more effective knowledge exchange. To align with the university's strategic aim '*to support the university's commitment to using innovation to enhance provision*', one of the objectives set out in the Library and Learning Resources Service Plan for 2014–15 was to adopt an external focus. Subsequently, horizon scanning has been added to strategic team meeting agendas and L&LR staff are encouraged to suggest new ideas for service improvements.

The support for knowledge exchange has also grown from staff wanting to share and reflect on their own learning experiences and learn from their colleagues.

This article gives a brief overview of our work to improve knowledge exchange so far and our future plans.

## Knowledge exchange events

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We were particularly inspired by colleagues at the University of Cambridge who established a series of events supporting knowledge exchange with the aim of encouraging people to share what they had learnt at events, training, or conferences they had attended. Having discussed this on social media and read the subsequent article (Sewell, 2015), we agreed this approach was something BCU L&LR could benefit from too.

Following a successful proposal to senior management, we held our first event in December 2015. We branded the event LIKE (L&LR Information and Knowledge Exchange). Organisation was minimal; we booked a room, set up a booking form on Eventbrite (this wasn't essential but it helped us ensure we had enough space as we'd only booked a small room), produced a digital flyer explaining the purpose of the event, publicised it using the internal library newsletter and emails, and brought along some refreshments on the day. We made it clear that the event would be very informal, and that we wanted to encourage sharing of knowledge through conversation. We chose not to arrange for people to present, but we did encourage them to prepare some things they would like to share. In addition to sharing learning from events people had attended or training they had received, we also wanted to encourage sharing of interests, in order to support potential collaboration or knowledge transfer. Awareness and understanding of colleagues' interests would, we hoped, ensure that future opportunities could be shared and connections made. For example, if one member of staff will be attending a conference and spots a session that they know a colleague would also be interested in, they may choose to attend on their behalf and pass the information or contact details on afterwards.

The first event went well. We had a relatively small group, as expected, because of the fairly short notice we'd been able to give people about the event, and because it was during term-time. Despite its being a small group, we had representatives from most library teams and from different sites and we discussed a variety of topics during a packed two hours. Some staff shared projects their team had recently been working on that colleagues may not have been aware of; others shared things they had read about or what they had learnt about at conferences. Everyone went away having learnt something

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new, and as a group we came away with some things to investigate for future potential service developments as well as staff development opportunities.

One of the potential service developments discussed was a series of 'Day in the life' blog posts to advertise what each department or section in L&LR does and to break down some of the barriers between users and staff. This was implemented to tie in with National Libraries Day 2016.

As a follow-up, a summary of our discussion was posted on our blog and shared in the library newsletter. It was hoped that staff who had been unable to attend could nevertheless see what had been discussed.

The second event held in April 2016 attracted even more colleagues who wanted to learn and share their experiences, which ranged from a visit to University College Ghent to ethnography and the world of libraries.

Judging by the comments we received after the sessions, attendees found them inspiring. Suggestions for improvement included having broad themes for sessions, and inviting academic staff.

## CILIP Professional Registration event for staff

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One form of continuing professional development that both authors have found beneficial is CILIP's Professional Registration (i.e. Certification, Chartership, Fellowship and mentoring). A number of L&LR staff have successfully completed a level of CILIP professional registration, though not all are aware of its benefits. In order to share this more widely, we organised an internal event to coincide with Love Your Libraries day, which focused on encouraging staff to invest in their professional development through CILIP membership and professional registration. We invited a member of CILIP staff to introduce the event, and then had candidates (including ourselves) talk about their experiences.

Again, the event was informal in its focus, and discussion and networking were encouraged. Our aim at this event was to encourage staff to work towards a level of professional registration, if appropriate; to revalidate their current level; or to consider mentoring others. We also hoped that this sort of event would enable more connections to be made in terms of supporting colleagues through the process (not necessarily through formal mentoring, but through informal support mechanisms) and again lead to potential collaboration and knowledge exchange. Although we didn't collect formal feedback after the event, those who attended commented that they had found it really useful and were considering professional registration in the future.

## Future plans

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In future we plan to hold one knowledge exchange event per term. The effort in organising is very low, with high potential benefits both for the individuals attending and for L&LR. In future we may encourage people who have completed training or attended a conference to prepare an update to share at the next LIKE event. We may also consider holding events on particular topics, to support knowledge sharing in specific areas in which staff have expertise.

In addition to the events, we intend to encourage knowledge exchange on a more regular basis through online communication. We are currently investigating different means of delivering this, but are likely to use a combination of our library blog (which is publicly available and could therefore support knowledge exchange with other library colleagues outside the university), and a LibGuide to be used for shorter updates and discussions between staff. In this way, we hope staff will share what they are learning as well as development opportunities that they are aware of, and which others may be interested in.

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Our intention is to enable staff more easily to share knowledge with the rest of the department, whether through informal events or through online communication. Our hope is that by supporting this we can enable effective knowledge exchange and foster collaboration.

## References and links

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