# Innovation in libraries
## Report from the Business Librarian Association annual conference

Robert Elves
Information Specialist
(Business and Law)
Kingston University
And BLA Marketing and Com-
munications Officer
r.elves@kingston.ac.uk

## Introduction

Librarianship is a profession that is not afraid to reinvent itself, and business librarians are no exception. In an age when information is readily available online, how should the role of the business librarian evolve to continue to be relevant? This question was posed as the subject of the 2016 Business Librarians Association (BLA) annual conference, hosted by Imperial College London. Full membership of the BLA is for institutions that teach business or management courses to at least master's level; however, associate membership is available to other institutions such as the British Library. Most of the talks and keynote speeches were aimed at the higher education sector, but there were also talks from librarians at the City Business Library and the Chartered Institute of Insurers. As always, there were several short papers from members.

## Marketing library services

The first talk was from David White at the University of the Arts London. He talked about creating relevance and presence. Librarians need to evolve in order to enable their users to collaborate and to learn from each other. There are physical spaces and there are digital spaces; the library should be seen as a third space, where physical and digital can co-exist. Anywhere that has a network connection can be considered a third space. But will students have a sense of belonging when they visit such spaces? Students like lectures, as they make them feel they belong. Online resources should be developed in such a way that students do not just visit but feel resident there. The best resources are ones where students come to connect with other people, whether they are library staff or fellow students.

A library needs to move away from employing 'broadcast mode' when promoting its services. Users engage more if they believe they are dealing with a person, not just a service. Students may lurk, figuring out the discourse, but without fully engaging. It is much better for libraries to use 'chatty mode' to enable students to interact fully. To indicate that users are engaging with a person can be as simple as adding a name to tweets. Libraries should evaluate their websites, their window in from the outside world. Is it clear that people will be dealing with a human? There are risks, however, as authenticity also requires vulnerability – but that is what it means to be human. Library users understand this if they know they are dealing with a person, even to the extent of allowing staff to have a life away from work. Libraries are education sites and can enable peer education by creating a less formal environment.

Sarah Roughley demonstrated the humanity of the library service at the University of Liverpool, where they felt that they no longer knew who their students are and what they are studying. The sense of community had been lost as more services were delivered online. They were using Twitter, but only to broadcast information about services.

Following a change of strategy, the social media team in the library sought to engage more fully with their users by making posts more 'human' through the use of humour. Twitter is now used to answer enquiries, and complaints can be diffused with humour. The team have developed new services. Facebook has a different audience, including many alumni, and includes lots of pictures and videos. Instagram has proved effective and is used to share pictures of the campus and library. Most recently Spotify has been used to create revision playlists.

Staff now feel they have created a community of users. Students sense that library staff are human, and students who do not regularly use the library are engaged.

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### Aligning more closely with teaching

One fairly recent development in academic librarianship is library staff working much more closely with course teams to develop teaching. Several of the members' papers addressed how their roles have changed to align more closely with academic staff. This interaction takes place before students even arrive at their institution and throughout their course to graduation and beyond.

The University of Leeds library has developed an online tool called Skills@ Library. The conference learnt from Natalie Bedford about how Flying Start, now two years old, spotlights key skills that will help with independent learning. New students receive information about Flying Start before tem starts. This is followed up by workshops in induction week on subjects such as referencing and time management. The next step will be to use this at open days.

A team from Middlesex University, including library staff and others from across the university, talked about how they develop study skills in students from China who attend pre-sessional courses designed to help improve the students' English ahead of starting their university course. The team is seeking to help the students to become independent learners; they learn skills such as group work, something the Chinese students are unfamiliar with. The team have familiarised themselves with Chinese culture, and plan and redesign the sessions accordingly. The programme has evolved through a collaborative approach, and library staff have been key in this.

In a bid to create a 'paperless' course, business students at Imperial College London were given iPads between 2012 and 2014. Heather Lincoln and Rosemary Russell described how their induction evolved as a result. They were keen to get business students engaged with the resources and devised exercises to get them to use their iPads to bookmark key databases during their session. However, they found that many students did not bring their device to the induction and students are no longer being given iPads anyway. Heather and Rosemary will continue getting students who have devices with them at induction to add library resources, by highlighting resources such as the *FT* (*Financial Times*) that all students will want to use.

Still on the 'paperless' theme, Lorna McNally from the University of Strathclyde talked about digital textbooks. Strathclyde has about 2000 MBA students, many of whom are taught at one of eight international centres. Students were being sent print textbooks for which the shipping costs alone were huge. Using Kortext as a partner, they can now supply copies digitally to these students. This was an example of library staff acting proactively, saving the university a lot of money and providing a better service to students.

Finally Catherine Batson at the University of Surrey showed how job roles and alignments are evolving to make the service more proactive. The university reduced the number of academic liaison librarians to three – one per faculty. The new faculty engagement librarians are much more staff focused than previously, acting as business partners, and are encouraged to get involved in projects such as user experience. The university introduced information skills librarians at the same time to deal with enquiries, particularly from students, and instruction. These librarians are very much aligned with colleagues in learning development. Sometimes change is imposed from outside and at other times it evolves from within the service, but in either case it means the roles of staff have to evolve to align with institutional strategies.

### Support for researchers

Academic librarians have long been partners to a greater or lesser extent in university research strategies. This has grown with the increasing emphasis on

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open access. The conference heard from two speakers from Imperial College London – David Wilson and Ruth Harrison.

Economics researchers have been engaging in open access since 1993, and other disciplines even longer, although not all would necessarily recognise the term open access. According to David Wilson, business schools tend to be more concerned with journal rankings than open access. Library staff need to understand academics' constraints and incentives and use them to encourage compliance with university and national policy.

Ruth Harrison highlighted the support offered to researchers by the library. This includes research data management, copyright and licensing and open access. A lot of the work involves engaging with academics directly or with the liaison librarians, and being positive – focusing on what you can do rather than what you can't.

## Other areas of support

Helen Rhodes at the University of Bath reported on working for a short time for the careers service, and how this has opened up new areas of cooperation. One example was when a colleague at the careers service was aware that students had little commercial awareness that would help with their job searches. The library has lots of resources such as company and news databases, so it was fairly simple to devise a course to develop practical skills in searching. This relationship with the careers service has opened up the potential for future collaboration.

Some library staff have expertise in technical support that can be tapped. Phil Reed at the University of Manchester is in the business data services part of the library and is a heavy user of many of the company databases subscribed to at Manchester. There are several competing products with overlapping data available to students. Phil has created conversion tools that enable students convert data from one database to another when researching the same company.

## Evolution in the non-academic sector

Although BLA membership is primarily drawn from the academic sector, there are associate members from other institutions. The conference heard from staff at three institutions, all having to evolve in their own sector.

The City Business Library is a public library, part of the Corporation of London, based in Guildhall. Alexandra Leader, the Business Engagement Manager, spoke about transforming this service. It has often been described as a hidden gem, and the plan is to make it less hidden. The service is being rebranded to be more professional but, importantly, it will keep the nomenclature 'library'.

The library of the Chartered Institute of Insurers serves the professional members of that body. Many members are based overseas, so in recent years resources have gone online. As well as more traditional services such as providing reading lists and advising on copyright, the library has also been involved in heritage projects.

Neil Infield is the manager of the Business and IP Centre in the British Library. He described how the staff of the centre have been trained and accredited as business advisers. They had already been doing this more or less, but now it is more focused.

## Conclusion

As always, the BLA conference was stimulating, with plenty of opportunity to compare notes and learn how everyone is having to evolve to meet the

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demands of management, to remain relevant, and to provide the best possible service. This can lead librarians in totally new directions. The journey can be unpredictable and daunting, but is also intellectually stimulating.