SCONUL Focus goes digital

Steve Rose
Editor, SCONUL Focus *and*
Head of Library and Learning Services
Mountbatten Library
Southampton Solent University
steve.rose@solent.ac.uk

This issue of SCONUL *Focus* heralds another significant change in the publication's history.

The first issue of the (then named) SCONUL Newsletter was published in the spring 1994. Therefore, it is now in its 21st year, the age when traditionally young people 'came of age'.

This issue is also significant in that it is the last one to be published in paper copy, so SCONUL *Focus* is to come of age – as we welcome it fully to the digital age!

A survey of the SCONUL membership earlier this year resulted in an almost unanimous approval of the proposal that we go e-only, a proposal that was then endorsed by the SCONUL Board. True, many respondents also said they would miss the printed copy, but if we think of trends in publishing and the impact on our own decision-making with regard to collection development, it would be difficult to argue that we stay as we are! The move to e-only also presents the opportunity to review the current electronic version and consider ways it may be improved. Therefore the new version will include a number of enhanced features including improved design, navigation and layout. For those who still want a hard copy, it will be still possible to print articles (or the whole issue) in pdf format.

For those of us who have been in the profession many years (nearly thirty now for myself), there is no doubt a sense of nostalgia in thinking about the bays of printed journals and newsletters that adorned our library spaces. We will remember that current awareness services were not at that time about RSS feeds and other digital solutions, but centred on the latest journal issues that were put out on display after they had been suitably processed. Therefore, it is perhaps apt to reflect on the journey that SCONUL *Focus* has made as, with this issue, we bid a fond farewell to the paper version.

This reflection has been made much easier thanks to an article by Antony Brewerton, a previous SCONUL *Focus* Editor, published to mark the publication of issue 50 (Brewerton, 2010). In his article, Antony presents a humorous recollection of the publication's history looking back from the first issue published in 1994. He reviews some of the key milestones, but also looks forward by asking 'what of the future?' Here, he predicted that 'changes will come with technology' and stated that 'although the paper issue has many benefits, technology provides the opportunity of including "value-added" elements and enhancing the reader experience'. Five years down the line, we aim to show how insightful you were, Antony!

We have now published another twelve issues since issue 50. The format has not changed greatly. Many of the issues have been themed, to reflect topics that are pertinent to us. Issue 51 saw my predecessor, Valerie Stevenson, take the Editor's reigns from Antony. She entitled her editorial 'The austerity issue' as a key theme running through it was 'doing more with less', a recurrent theme that many of us will no doubt still relate to. Other themes have included 'doing things differently' (issue 52), whilst issue 58 focused on the new skills library and related professionals require, seemingly having a close alignment to the topic covered in issue 52.

If we consider how we rise to the challenges of both doing more with less in times of economic uncertainty and meeting ever-increasing student expectations – a possible double-edged sword – then the ability to be able to demonstrate our value is paramount. This was tackled in issue 54, which looked at impact measurement.

With reference to expectations, it is gratifying to know that the availability of high-quality learning spaces which are open extended hours remain very important to students – increased availability of e-resources and the avalanche of 'knowledge' retrieved from Google searches has not decreased the significance of the library as a space. This was reflected in issue 57, which focused on the many developments that are happening as a result of significant capital spends on our estate, either in the form of refurbishments or, in many cases, the construction of new buildings. Additionally, this is recognised by the SCONUL library design awards, last made in 2013.

The themed issue that I would like to conclude with is the one featured in issue 53 'learning from each other'. Some things don't change, and for the right reasons. One thing that remains great in our profession is the culture of sharing, backed up by the enthusiasm for networking – meeting by embracing new technologies and face-to-face through, for example, the two conferences organised by SCONUL each year.

This culture of sharing good practice, learning from each other and stimulating debate and new thinking remains at the heart of SCONUL *Focus*. We shall continue to look to commission new content from managers and practitioners accordingly, identifying themes that are relevant as we move forward. As such, you can already find a call for articles from the SCONUL *Focus* web pages for our first e-only edition. Aptly, we have decided to focus on digital developments in relation to accessing content as we move away from hardcopy. See http://www.sconul.ac.uk/page/sconul-focus [accessed 2 Oct 2014]. By embracing new technologies, as Antony predicted, we aim to enhance the ability to share and learn from each other, not move SCONUL *Focus* in a different direction in terms of core values and aims.
I hope you will continue to enjoy, benefit from, and most importantly, contribute to the new look publication.

Reference

A. Brewerton (2010). SCONUL *Focus*, 50, pp. 4–8. Available at: http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2_4.pdf [accessed 2 Oct 2014]