USTLG rides again …

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'Whatever happened to …?' is the kind of conversation you may have time for in the summer vacation. In the summer of 2009, Zelda Chatten and I, colleagues in the science and engineering subject team at Liverpool University library, wondered, 'Whatever happened to the university science and technology librarians' group (USTLG)?'

USTLG is an informal group of librarians who are associated with the subjects of engineering, science and technology in university libraries in the UK. The group was started by Ian Winship twenty years ago and was continued after his retirement by Moira Bent. Members (anyone can join) keep in touch via the JISC mailing list lis-scitech.

The group has never had a budget, but endeavours to meet a couple of times a year for a day of presentations on topics of interest to members. Speakers are volunteers from within the group and give freely of their time and expertise.

In the summer of 2009, although the lis-scitech list was still being used for communications on topics of interest to science and technology librarians, there had not been a meeting of the group for two years. Pressure of work and changing commitments meant that those who had organised meetings in the past were no longer able to do so.

Zelda and I contacted Moira Bent to ask her advice on reviving the group and we sent out a general appeal to the lis-scitech list to see if there would be interest in starting up the meetings again. The response was overwhelming, with librarians saying how they had missed the chance to meet up with colleagues, offering their libraries as meeting venues and suggesting plenty of interesting themes and topics for discussion. We also received many offers to speak: in fact enough to carry us through several meetings.

The first meeting of USTLG 2.0 took place on 30 September 2009 at the Harold Cohen library, University of Liverpool and was attended by 35 sci-tech librarians, who came from as far afield as Portsmouth in the south and Newcastle in the north. Some people had got up at 5am in order to come. The theme of the meeting was student engagement. Moira Bent chaired the meeting with her usual charm and the group enjoyed presentations from four librarian speakers and Neil Wood of Content Online, who kindly sponsored lunch.

Geoff Walton of Staffordshire University gave an inspirational talk about using discussion boards as a means of engaging learners. The learners in question were first-year sport and exercise students – at times a challenging group of library users. The students were encouraged to use discussion-board postings to critique each other's work constructively, which enabled them to redraft an assessed piece of work for submission. In criticising each other's work the students started to grasp some information literacy basics, such as the importance of quality information, for example: 'Your whole reference list are [*sic*] websites. could you know [*sic*] use books as its easyer [*sic*] as you dont [*sic*] have to worry if they are credible?' (The speed of the exercise meant that their spelling was less than perfect.) The exercise also uncovered an unexpected enthusiasm for getting referencing right. Geoff's presentation was enlivened with video footage of students discussing their experiences, and both the students and the academic staff involved were enthusiastic about this method of learning. Geoff's experience may inspire more use of the discussion-board features of university virtual learning environments (VLEs). More detail can be found in his book: see M. Hepworth and G. Walton, *Teaching information literacy for inquiry based learning*, Oxford: Chandos, 2009.

Sally Patalong's talk about Coventry University library's teaching on the university's employability modules gave insight into the challenges of delivering content as part of a university-wide initiative. A series of compulsory modules (known as Add+Vantage), under the aegis of the university's careers and employability service, are aimed at developing skills for use in the workplace after graduation. Contributing a level-3 module entitled 'Information in the workplace' has given the library a chance to develop a credit-bearing module and to build up a rapport with a mixed cohort of students from all disciplines by seeing them over a semester. Students' comments about the library module were more positive than

their experience of the employability learning programme as a whole. They appreciated learning how to find information in the world after university, and were impressed with the library staff's professionalism with regard to setting coursework, giving prompt feedback and providing a welcoming environment for learning. Although Add+Vantage itself is likely to change, taking part has raised the library's profile, broadened the horizons of the subject librarians and introduced some students to the concept of lifelong information literacy.

Tracey Ainsley of Northumbria University presented on the subject of using TurningPoint for evaluation. TurningPoint is a piece of software that allows a presenter to ask questions within a PowerPoint presentation, have the audience respond anonymously, in a 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' style, via small handsets, and to display the results graphically on the next PowerPoint slide. USTLG members were treated to a live demonstration and found the technology engaging, although their response to the question 'Who do you want to win the X Factor 2009?' was overwhelmingly 'Don't care.' Tracey recounted the improvements in student engagement made by using TurningPoint in a variety of aspects of library teaching at Northumbria. For example, a session on referencing and plagiarism that was reworked to incorporate the technology elicited responses from the whole group and encouraged discussion. Further advantages included instant feedback for the presenter and quantitative data to inform future teaching. The library at Northumbria has used it successfully in a variety of contexts, including school visits and staff-development activities; the only thing to beware of is overuse.

Timothy Collinson gave a demonstration of the library's contribution to University of Portsmouth's 'PrepUP' project: an online environment designed to prepare pre-entry students for university life. Students who have been offered a confirmed place receive a login and password that take them straight to their course's section of PrepUP. They can find out what lectures or seminars might be like, link to Facebook groups of fellow students, see a sample timetable and lots more. They can also explore the library virtually before they arrive. Ideas generated by library staff have been coded in Flash by an educational technologist. A panoramic view of the ground floor of the building contains silhouetted figures and other items that prospective students can click on to interact with informative content. The represen-

tation of the upper floor has links to information literacy resources and an international section provides non-UK students with an extra welcome and pointers to language material. Plans for the future include a basement with visual summaries of library workshops – from 'The Google, the bad and the ugly' to 'The dark side of the web'. The 'Second Life'-type visuals and the chance to explore and engage with the content in a game-playing way encourage students to think of the library as a helpful and friendly place before they even arrive at university.

Slides for all the presentations are available on the USTLG website, http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/ustlg/autumn09/index.htm, which is maintained by Sara Thornes at Leeds University.

The presentations sparked interesting debate and the other main success of the day was in getting like-minded librarians together in person. The networking opportunities afforded by USTLG enable us to swap notes, share good practice and be reassured by the fact that we, as university science and technology librarians, face similar challenges and can work together to find solutions.

Thanks to volunteers found through lis-scitech, we now have a USTLG organising group, who will keep in touch by email and share the job of organising future meetings. This should ensure that the group goes on from strength to strength. It is planned to have two meetings a year, in November and May. The next one is set for May 2010, on the theme of new technology and the proposed location is the Royal Society of Chemistry in London. Keep your eye on the USTLG website, http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/ustlg/, and announcements on the lis-scitech mailing list for further details.