'Developments in New Technology':

University Science and Technology Librarians Group meeting, 11 May 2010, Royal Society of Chemistry, London

Reviewed by Timothy Collinson
Faculty Librarian (Technology),
University Library,
University of Portsmouth,
Tel: 023 9284 3224
E-mail: timothy.collinson@port.ac.uk

After the successful re-launch of meetings of the USTLG (University Science and Technology Librarians Group) in November 2009 in Liverpool, it was great to see over 60 people turn up to the London meeting on May 11. Held in the awesomely prestigious surroundings of the Royal Society of Chemistry in Burlington House, its 11.30am start meant a relaxed journey rather than a stressfully early one as well as the opportunity to get there in good time to meet other science and technology librarians – some new acquaintances, some 'old' friends. Although a visit to the library next door was out of the question because another booking was using the space, the fleet-footed could poke a nose in the door and get a flavour of the main room, but the council room we were sitting in was grand enough for the purposes and the juxtaposition of PowerPoint and stately oil paintings was a fascinating mix of old and new.

Following a welcome cup of tea and a game of spot-the-twitterers-I-follow, Moira [Bent] got the introductions going at noon and, after thanking various bodies and dealing with housekeeping, she volunteered Andy [Barrow] to put together a write-up of the event. Quite how that's now fallen on me is one of those unsolved mysteries. She pointed out that technology is developing all the time and we're in a constantly changing environment – an 'exciting time' she called it! Unfortunately my attendance was part of a journey back from five days in the Baltic helping a friend sail a boat he'd bought in Stockholm back to his home harbour, so I was without technology such as laptop or iPod. However, resorting to wristcramp-inducing pen and paper, I was able to take old-fashioned notes even if it wasn't possible to do live blogging or tweeting.

The first session was from Jon Fletcher of Nottingham Trent: 'Taking your service to scientists: embedding subject-specific resources within VLEs'. He described how, in the relatively early stages of a new post, he'd been able to get library resources embedded in Nottingham Trent's VLE, where the students would more naturally come across the information skills and resources he was promoting. Rather than expecting them to visit the library's web pages, Jon suggested that liaison librarianship was about getting access to the VLE in conjunction with academics rather than just sending material to staff to use if they wished. He outlined a five-step guide to this embedding,[1] of which one of the key points was sustainability. He was using a learning repository to make it simpler to keep material up to date – a resource could be used over and over and only had to be updated once. This would affect teaching and learning, increase visibility, build on embedded teaching sessions and increase use of resources.

The second session saw Mark Gavillet from the University of Newcastle on 'MyLibrary: building a library dashboard app'. This was an open-source web app that could be easily customised and, in the same way that iGoogle brings together a variety of web tools and real-time information that are useful to have on the desktop, MyLibrary brings together whatever tools and data users feel would help them most in their particular situations. Mark gave us the results of three questions from a survey showing that Google – somewhat unsurprisingly – is the first place respondents begin research for an assignment and that e-mail is the first place they go when sitting down to a PC or laptop in the library. The third question asked, 'If you were able to have one webpage that allowed you to very easily use key library services all in one place, what would those key library services be?', to which the top five answers were: e-journals, book renewals, federated search, reading lists and OPAC search. There was much amusement at the 'customer journey' map Mark then showed us, revealing how complicated library resources can be from a user's perspective. The MyLibrary dashboard does much to alleviate this complexity. Moira, summing up and introducing us to lunch, reminded us that 'the library homepage should be a gateway and not a destination'.

Lunch was provided by RCS Publishing and they were given 15 minutes to show off the new

beta version of their website. Anyone interested was invited to help with evaluating the site and we saw the dedicated librarian portal, which for the moment is running alongside the old site. Features include topic clouds, filtering search results, integrated tools such as bookmarks, saved searches, dynamic news and a librarians' login. I've no doubt the science librarians amongst us were keen to give it a go, and the technology librarians could simply drool in envy. We also got a glimpse of ChemSpider, a free(!) database of chemical structures.

Next up, Paula Anne Beasley and Linda Norbury of the University of Birmingham talked to us about 'Advocating professional social network- ing to academics'. They informed us about a workshop they'd developed for staff, following a survey run to identify the skills gap they were encountering and to inform the content of the training they would deliver. From starting points such as comments that 'Twitter is virtually useless' and social networking is 'counterproductive to enhancing student learning', the presenters clearly had an uphill battle. However, the background research and event-planning enabled them to put together a workshop that 31 academics attended and, despite some technical glitches (such as Linda getting caught in the Eyjafjallajökull ash cloud!), they were able to introduce staff to blog- ging and Twitter. They left as an exercise for the listener the question of why those most in need of basic IT skills training seemed to come from the computer science department. The presenters plan to follow up with seminars on social networking and social bookmarking.

The final session of the day came from Gareth Johnson of the University of Leicester. 'Do librar- ians dream of electric tweets?', he asked. Gareth is better known in many corners of web 2.0 as 'llordllama' and his reputation for providing a lively and interesting session had preceded him. Concentrating on getting the most from blog- ging and microblogging, he was able – with good examples – to explain why we should be using such tools and how we can be using them better. Just one example is a quote which rings a bell with many people: 'Twitter enhanced my profes- sional networks more in 2 years than CILIP has in 15.' He had pointers on what makes a good post/ tweet and on tracking conversations and a useful consideration of whether professional develop- ment, workplace or personal content is a more effective way to network. (His opinion was that the most power came from a careful mixing of all three.) Very useful were his ideas for convincing

management and he wrapped up by encouraging us to experiment and find out how the tools might or might not work for us.

By the end of the day, the sturdy bookshelves and panelled walls had just about stopped washing up and down as my brain began to sort out being back on terra firma. However, the interesting mixture of topics and the enthusiasm of all seven presenters had made the group meeting well worth attending. I, for one, have come back with notes and ideas to feed into training and service delivery and I would just like to thank the com- mittee and all those involved in the day for their time and effort. I look forward to future events.

REFERENCE

1   See the slides on website http://www.leeds. ac.uk/library/ustlg/Spring10/index.htm, which has all five presentations.