Bibliometrics
a job for the library or the research office?

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Bibliometrics was essentially a discipline created for librarians. Eugene Garfield's now much vilified Journal Impact Factor was created to help librarians to assess the 'bang for buck' of their journal subscriptions. It did this by providing a rough and ready 'average cites per paper' figure. Of course, in a world obsessed with value, this ubiquitous measure started being used for all sorts of other purposes; by academics seeking to choose the 'best' journals to publish in; by journal publishers to sell their journals; and by those seeking to measure the contribution of academics themselves. Quite rightly, there is much backlash against this, and the result has been a proliferation of additional publication metrics attempting to measure everything from level of citation and collaboration the visibility, reach and impact not only of journals, but also of articles, individuals, universities, countries and everything in-between. Interestingly, the expansion of the role of bibliometrics from its small beginnings in libraries to the wider world of research assessment mirrors my own experience of moving from the library to the research office (RO). In this article I reflect on this move and whether it makes a difference where in the institution bibliometrics is based.

My own bibliometrics journey began as an academic services manager with research support responsibilities at Loughborough University Library. Initially the extent of my role was to understand this burgeoning new field and to advise academics on where to find their h-index and how to engage with new services such as Web of Science's Researcher ID. In 2010 I established the Lis-Bibliometrics Forum with Jenny Delasalle, then of the University of Warwick, to share advice and best practice with fellow librarians seeking to support their academic colleagues through this new field. In 2011, I wrote up a survey on bibliometrics training practices in another SCONUL Focus piece (Gadd, 2011).

Around this time (2010) the game changed when *Times Higher Education* separated off from the QS World University Rankings to develop its own World Ranking of universities using a new methodology that allocated 30% of the total score to citations. This had a negative impact on Loughborough University as a relatively young university (receiving its charter in 1966) which has neither medical nor life sciences faculties, and which had a high proportion of engineering disciplines that relied on conference publications, which tend to be less frequently cited. Using newly purchased citation benchmarking tools, I found myself spending more time investigating some of the reasons for this negative impact. Then in 2014, the new Research Excellence Framework (REF) weighted outputs at 65% for all panels (in the 2008 RAE outputs could be weighted from 50% to 80% at the discretion of the panel). The REF also offered panels the choice of accessing citation data to support their decision-making (HEFCE, 2014). At this point the RO saw the area of publication strategy as important enough to merit the re-focusing of an existing vacancy and the post of Research Policy Manager (Publications) was born. I applied and was successful.

I've often been asked whether this post would sit better in the library, and I have colleagues at other institutions who do similar jobs who are based in the library. In Loughborough's case I would say that moving to the RO was critical because we were operating in an environment where publication practices in some areas would benefit from change. There were three reasons why being based in the RO enabled me to drive forward policy change far more easily than if I had been based in the library.

Firstly, there is something neutral about libraries. They are the quintessential intermediary sitting between academics and students on one side, and suppliers on the other. In the area of publication practice, libraries advise and facilitate, they don't set and monitor policy. Research offices on the other hand have more of a monitoring and compliance role, so a message from the RO has more impact. Secondly, there is something about geography and access. Libraries, by virtue of being large, self-contained units, are often geographically

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separate from the Vice-Chancellor's office or other decision-making centres. At Loughborough, the RO shares the same building as the Vice-Chancellor's senior management team including the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research). This inevitably increases the visibility of the RO and those who work there. I've had some significant conversations with senior managers about publication strategy as a result of bumping into them in corridors. This may seem minor, but in my experience is actually quite valuable. Thirdly, there are fewer direct distractions in the RO. Higher education libraries are busy service departments, often with tens of thousands of customers. The customer comes first, and at certain times of year it is 'all hands to the pump' – teaching, staffing information desks, and contributing to library-wide projects. By contrast the RO, although very busy and having institution-wide interactions including with performance indicators, deans and associate deans, does not have the same potential distractions. In my experience this enables a greater focus on policy matters.

Since I joined the RO in 2015 there have been significant moves forward in the provision of publication data in various settings to raise awareness and start conversations around best practice. There is now a new university key performance indicator for citations; publication data is supplied regularly to Schools to inform conversations with senior managers; and some research visibility data is now supplied as part of the Performance & Development Review process for academic staff. As a result of this increased activity, we considered it important to respond to the Metric Tide report (Wilsdon, 2015) to develop an institutional statement on the responsible use of such indicators. Loughborough was one of the first universities in the UK to do so (Else, 2017) and our statement is available on the web (Loughborough University, 2016).

My move to the RO does not mean that the library no longer has a stake in bibliometrics in particular or publication strategy in general – far from it! All academic librarians are expected to have achieved a certain level of competence in bibliometrics. Indeed it was the library's work in this area that inspired a wider piece of work commissioned by the Lis-Bibliometrics Forum, sponsored by Elsevier Research Intelligence and carried out by the University of Sheffield, into the development of a sector-wide set of bibliometric competencies (University of Sheffield, 2016). This work should deliver a set of entry-level and core competency statements for those engaging with bibliometrics at different levels of specialism. It is hoped that this will facilitate the recruitment and training of staff in this area.

The library also continues to deliver training on bibliometrics and publication strategy either in conjunction with me or independently. I deliver briefings to academic librarians to keep them up to date with institutional policy changes, and they helpfully share their learnings with me. One of the key bibliometric services that the library provides – and on which I utterly rely – is one-to-one support for academics and postgraduate researchers. I work part-time (0.5 full-time equivalent) and do not have the capacity to respond to every individual query, whereas their remit and subject focus allows for this more easily.

Thus, to answer my own question as to whether bibliometrics sits better in the library or the RO, I think the answer has to be both. My role in the RO has certainly enabled a greater focus on this important area within the institution. It has allowed the Schools to make evidence-based decisions about their own publication ambitions and provided a policy framework for the university to work with. However, these policies could not be driven forward without the support of the library, and indeed are influenced by my network of informed colleagues in the library. Whether the bibliometric function is based in the library or the research (or even planning) office, it is essential that the relevant parties develop good working relationships in order for the institution to gain the maximum benefit. Hopefully, having a librarian in the research office facilitates this.

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