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# Thinking the unthinkable: disaster planning for the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries

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While the idea of a disaster befalling individual library services is, at best, unnerving, today's best practice in higher education libraries demands that we plan for the unthinkable. In the last fifteen years, disaster planning in libraries has developed from an add-on and, perhaps, a specialism to a core strategic and operational responsibility. In the United Kingdom, with hindsight, one of the milestone events towards this was the fire at Norwich Central Library on 1 August 1994. The entire building was destroyed in what the BBC described as '...the worst British library fire in living memory'<sup>1</sup>. Other notable disasters of recent times in United Kingdom universities include the flood in the Fawcett Library on 11 August 1994<sup>1</sup>, the flood at the University of Sussex Library's Lewes Store on 11 October 2000<sup>2</sup> and the fire at City University on 21 May 2001<sup>3</sup>. Terrorism has also affected library services and collections, significantly in the World Trade Center towers on 11 September 2001, when three librarians and an artist were among the many dead. The Center housed at least 21 libraries, mainly for legal and financial services, the Broadway Theatre Archive and the Helen Keller International Foundation, containing many first editions, photographs and autograph letters<sup>4</sup>. And, very recently, extraordinary natural forces have also devastated library services, especially the Asian tsunami on 26 December 2004<sup>5</sup> and Hurricane Katrina in August 2005<sup>6</sup>. In addition to greater awareness in the library sector generally of the need for disaster

planning on sound principles, significant institutional drivers for academic libraries, have been risk management, risk registers and organisational resilience in general. The Higher Education Funding Council's *Guide to risk management in higher education* being notable in this regard<sup>7</sup>. Colleagues will be familiar with risk assessment exercises and risk registers as part of the increasing institutional priority accorded to business and service continuity planning. In sum, disaster planning is at the forefront of contemporary library strategy and practice.

The M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries recognised at any early stage the importance of consortial disaster planning for the mutual benefit of members and has a long track record of provision and innovation. The consortium now has 55 member institutions and as a requirement of membership they are signatories to the mutual support agreement. The agreement is key to the consortium's strategic aim to provide mutual support for members and has been in force since 1 February 1999. In the event of a disaster, the agreement is invoked by the director of the affected library, whereupon consortium members have agreed to endeavour to allow staff and students to have access to study space for up to one month after the disaster occurred, providing physical access and services in line with the arrangements in place and normally offered under the SCONUL Research Extra and UK Libraries Plus programmes, and, for the small number of members ineligible to use these schemes, the M25 Consortium Access and Borrowing Scheme. This enables staff in the affected library to focus on dealing with the disaster and the orderly resumption of services. Where additional support in specialist subject areas is required, the resource discovery service InforM25 may be used to identify host libraries to provide these services. Once again, a request for specific support is made by the director of the affected library. Liability arrangements for the affected and host libraries operate in a similar fashion to the UK Libraries Plus Programme<sup>8</sup>. Operational responsibility for monitoring the continued effectiveness and responsiveness of the mutual support agreement rests with the consortium's Disaster Management Group (DMG), formed in 1997. The M25 DMG's remit is to promote awareness and best practice in disaster control management including disasters affecting IT-based services; to assist in the dissemination of information on disaster control management in conjunction with CPD25 (the staff development and training organisation working with Consortium members); and to undertake

co-operative initiatives, including investigating purchasing opportunities<sup>9</sup>. This remit is expressed via the provision of generic advice, training and sharing of good practice.

Perhaps the best known product of the M25 Consortium's work in disaster planning is the disaster control plan template. Initially created in 1997, it has been revised and enhanced to reflect changes and initiatives in good disaster planning practice and to incorporate new areas. It is freely available for consultation at <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/m25dcp/>. Prefaced by an introduction and complemented by an extensive bibliography, the template is divided into five key sections: fostering a disaster management culture within the library service; prevention; preparedness; reaction; and recovery. The template offers generic advice and prompts for the compilation of a local disaster control plan, including lists of practical equipment, training and communication within the library and the institution. Most recently, new content has been added on special collections and IT considerations, and further content on archives and e-resources is being prepared. However, in response to demand from consortium members, business and service continuity has been the priority work for the DMG and new content for the template in this area will be launched shortly. This content focuses on timely and effective reinstatement of library services in the aftermath of a disaster and, once again taking a step-by-step approach, enables compilation of a local response plan. DMG members very much welcome feedback on this new content and look forward to receiving comments to continue to shape the Disaster Control Plan template.

The DMG keeps in regular contact with nominated disaster control plan representatives in various ways. There is a closed jiscmail list to encourage dissemination of good practice within the consortium and seeking advice on queries. There is an annual exchange of experience for representatives, to provide an update on the work of the DMG and a forum for discussion on 'hot topics'. The event in 2005 focused on promotion of the provisions of the consortium's mutual support agreement through a series of escalating scenarios, facilitated by Mary Auckland (a consultant and former university librarian). These guided participants through the impact of imaginary fires and floods, with key decisions points, and every now and again, even more unexpected issues to deal with. Participants are encouraged to cascade this scenario-based training approach in their institutions. This year's event, to be held on 30 Novem-

ber 2006 and once again facilitated by Mary Auckland, will offer scenarios related to business and service continuity planning in the aftermath of a library disaster. Amongst key learning objectives, the scenarios will draw the distinction between disaster recovery in the immediate aftermath and planned re-introduction of a partial and full range of services in line with the provisions of a business continuity plan. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to discuss recent and emergent issues, such as institutional responses to a potential avian influenza pandemic.

The DMG surveys consortium members regularly to gauge awareness of disaster planning and preparedness. The most recent survey was completed during the spring of 2006, and is an important means of staying in touch with members' needs. The headlines results from this year's survey were that there was an improving state of planning and preparedness, better coverage of IT in library disaster plans, better overall awareness of consortium services and a need for support in business continuity planning. Amongst requests for training in the coming academic session, were the most popular disaster scenarios, business continuity planning, IT and e-resources, special collections, principles of disaster planning and insurance. It is planned to run several training events in the academic year 2006-2007 with CPD25. The results of the survey overall confirm the continuing priority and relevance of the DMG agenda to consortium members.

In addition to the strategic objective of mutual support, the M25 Consortium seeks to work in collaboration with other regional and national partners. With regard to disaster planning, the Chair represents the M25 Consortium on the regional emergency planning group, convened by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and on the advisory panel for the project Safeguarding Heritage at Risk, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council<sup>10</sup>. This project recently conducted a survey of current disaster preparedness across the archives, libraries and museums sectors. Through this participation in a cross-domain, national project, consortium members will benefit from access to the latest research in modern disaster management practice.

During the academic session 2006-2007, the DMG will continue to respond to consortium members' needs by providing generic advice and training in all aspects of disaster planning, and, increasingly, best practice in business and service continuity planning. Full details of the DMG's work is avail-

able from the consortium's website at <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/> and enquiries are welcomed.

## REFERENCES

- 1 The flood, its aftermath and outcomes are documented in a case study in Christine Wise, 'Flood prevention and recovery', in Graham Matthews and John Feather (eds), *Disaster management for libraries and archives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- 2 For a photograph of the impact of the flood, see the *University of Sussex Library annual report 2000-2001* at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/aboutus/annualreport-2000-01.pdf>.
- 3 The report on the fire, entitled *Project Phoenix – a case study of City University's recovery from fire*, is available from [http://www.city.ac.uk/marcoms\\_media/PDF/phoenix.pdf](http://www.city.ac.uk/marcoms_media/PDF/phoenix.pdf).
- 4 Full details are available in the report *Cataclysm and challenge: impact of September 11, 2001, on our nation's cultural heritage*, by Heritage Preservation on behalf of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force. <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PDFS/Cataclysm.pdf>.
- 5 See the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals' summary pages at [http://www.cilip.org.uk/cgi-bin/MsmGo.exe?grab\\_id=677&page\\_id=3868416&query=tsunami&hiword=TSUNAMIS+tsunami+ for further information](http://www.cilip.org.uk/cgi-bin/MsmGo.exe?grab_id=677&page_id=3868416&query=tsunami&hiword=TSUNAMIS+tsunami+for+for+information).
- 6 See the American Library Association Libraries and Hurricane Katrina web pages at <http://www.ala.org/ala/cro/katrina/katrina.htm> for updates.
- 7 For this document and other HEFCE guidance, see [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05\\_11/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_11/).
- 8 Full details of the history, development and provisions of the mutual support agreement are available from <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/content/view/424/204/>.
- 9 Full details of the activities of the consortium'sDMG, including minutes of recent meetings, are available from <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/content/section/11/66/>.

- 10 The project will conclude in September 2006. Full details are available from <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/BSN/58823.htm>.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the resources cited above, here is a select bibliography.

### Printed resources

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Don Revill, (ed), *Working papers on disaster management*, London: SCONUL, 1995

### Web-based resources

American Library Association *Disaster response guidelines and standards* <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=disaste>.

John McIlwaine (compiler), 'First, do no harm': *a register of standards, codes of practice, guidelines, recommendations and similar works relating to preservation and conservation in libraries and archives*.

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## Inspire with a slight twist in Wolverhampton



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### BACKGROUND

To date, much of the emphasis of Inspire<sup>1</sup> has been to increase access to different types of libraries -including access to academic libraries- to learners that are not necessarily registered students. At the University of Wolverhampton we have been committed to this and have made visitor PCs available with links to appropriately licensed electronic resources, worked with other Inspire members for managed referral, and been heavily involved in the series of Inspire demonstration projects that took place in the West Midlands during 2004<sup>2</sup>.

However we have been also very eager to find new ways of collaborating with other libraries to improve our own students' learning experience and develop them as life long learners for when they leave the University. Therefore when colleagues at Wolverhampton libraries and information services suggested looking at sharing borrower data across our two Talis library management systems, to enable our staff and students to access materials at their libraries using their university ID card, it seemed too good an opportunity to miss.

### THE LEGAL STUFF

Before exploring the technicalities of sharing data across the two systems it was important to explore whether it was legally possible. Transferring personal data from a university system to system that exists outside its immediate control was obviously going to be sensitive. However our University Secretary was very supportive of the idea and keen to help. After undertaking some research and consultation he advised it would be feasible provided that: