Preparing for a new shared library – the UWS and SAC experience

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In Scotland a consequence of the challenging financial environment is that higher education institutions 'must […] prioritise collaboration and co-operation between themselves and with other sectors'.[1] Institutions in England are also being encouraged to seek such opportunities.[2] Collaboration has been a salient theme in the Scottish higher education sector for almost a decade.[3] In this context, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) opened a shared campus building, complete with shared library space, in Ayr on 1 August 2011.

Library exterior (photograph by Neal Buchanan)

Since 2004 the Scottish Agricultural College and the University of Paisley (which merged with Bell College, Hamilton, in August 2007 to form UWS) have intended to pool resources in Ayr .[4] In 2006, after it became clear that a shared campus was being planned, librarians from UWS and SAC worked together to ensure that the library service in the new building would be vital, vibrant and fit for purpose. As UWS and SAC were not merging, the library service would need to support the needs of all staff and students of both institutions.

The librarians had a prior relationship through membership of the Ayrshire Libraries Forum (ALF), which eased the process of collaboration. Involvement in the design process started early, which was vital because the library service was intended to be the hub of the building. The library is on three levels and was imagined originally with entrances on every floor and a space-consuming spiral staircase. Fortunately the architects (RMJM) proved willing to take professional advice and limited the design to a single entrance and exit for security reasons and removed the spiral staircase to prioritise space for stock and seating.

From December 2008 the campus librarians from UWS and SAC met approximately every six weeks with a representative from the design consultants, Space Solutions. Meetings were held alternately at UWS and SAC's Ayr campuses, emphasising that it was to be a partnership of equals and giving the librarians a better feel for each other's service.[5] These meetings were an essential part of the process. Space Solutions gave advice regarding potential furniture layouts and how the library fitted into the project as a whole, while librarians gave guidance on a design suited to the needs of staff and students of both institu-

tions. Space Solutions also had the task of facilitating the physical move of resources to the new campus and advised on how to plan for the move and what to expect on the day (e.g. equipment inventories, weeding, new shelf-by-shelf plan for stock, crate delivery dates, move timings). Action points were agreed upon and recorded, which was crucial because there was so much to remember!

Discussions took place on the harmonisation of processes since both institutions were keen to emphasise that the service should appear seamless to the users, and agreement was reached upon:

- A single, integrated collection: both UWS and SAC use Dewey Decimal Classification, making it easy to physically interfile the books. There was little in the way of duplication as our subjects do not generally overlap but some duplicates were weeded out. As UWS use white spine labels and SAC yellow, it is easy to identify resources at a glance.
- A single, integrated service desk: staff from both institutions would work at the desk, answering queries and issuing stock to any library user. Staff working off-desk would share the space available.
- A single office would be shared by the campus librarians of UWS and SAC.
- Shared access to PCs and printers: students from either UWS or SAC would be able to sit at any PC, log in to their own institution's network and access their own institution's resources.
- A merged library management system (LMS): UWS already hosted SAC's Talis system, so it made sense to merge the two to form a single catalogue interface. This also enabled the two institutions to share books by lending between the six campuses they service.

The Talis merge was a major part of the project. A merger sub-group was created involving the systems librarians from UWS and SAC and a Talis project manager. From May 2010 this group worked through testing and harmonisation mat-

Social study / meeting space (photograph by Neal Buchanan)

ters (such as loan periods, fines, borrower types) with a view to merging the systems in May 2011, three months before the Ayr move. This group had a particularly challenging task since the LMS merger would affect the UWS libraries at Dumfries, Hamilton and Paisley and the SAC libraries at Aberdeen and Edinburgh. A few troublesome issues did crop up (e.g. duplicate item barcodes), and this delayed things, but the merger eventually went ahead with a week to spare.

Quiet study area (photograph by Neal Buchanan)

We have now been in our shared library for over six months. The move went well and staff and students have settled into their new space. Since library staff were kept well informed of developments prior to moving, any problems that have arisen have tended to relate to building snagging rather than sharing space with another institution. The LMS merger was the right thing to do from a service delivery perspective because it was the most practical of the available options and emphasised the concept of sharing and collaboration. The success of the LMS merger encouraged us to consider LMS sharing with other institutions, and plans are in place for UWS and SAC to enter into partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands to share their system from September 2012.

Lessons learned:

- Build positive relationships with library colleagues in your region and sector. You never know who you'll be sharing an office with in five years' time!
- If moving to new premises, build positive relationships with the project manager and external professionals. They deal with a lot of people and may bend the rules for the nice ones.
- Discuss your plans with IT departments at an early stage. They will be able to advise you from their perspective about what is and is not possible.
- Involve and inform library staff throughout the change process. They have good ideas and will be concerned about the future.
- Present a united front. Sort out library differences in private and give other departments and external partners unequivocal guidance about what you want.
- Say what you think and be prepared to fight your corner. Don't want a huge spiral staircase? Say so before it's too late.
- Accept compromise as part of the process. Some aspects of change are outwith your control (e.g. IT budgets, inter-institutional politics, a pre-agreed colour scheme) and your ideas may not be compatible with them.

REFERENCES

1   Scottish Government, *Building a smarter future: towards a sustainable Scottish solution for the future of higher education*, [Edinburgh]: Scottish Government (2010), p. 4

2   Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, *Higher education: students at the heart of the system* (Cm 8122), Norwich: Stationery Office (2011) p. 19

3   Scottish Executive, *A framework for higher education in Scotland: higher education review: phase 2*, Edinburgh: Stationery Office (2003), p. 54; Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, Higher education in Scotland: a baseline report, Edinburgh: (2005), p. 101; P. Wilson, Scottish Funding Council, Review of shared services and collaborative activities in Scotland's universities, Edinburgh: York Consulting, 2007

4   *The Scotsman*, 'SAC reveals plans to secure future' (Saturday 25 September 2004)

5   UWS is the larger of the two institutions and would be responsible for a greater part of the new building.