

From generic to bespoke: Enhancing researcher engagement with library research

Vicky Wallace
Subject Advisor
University of Birmingham
Library Services
v.j.wallace@bham.ac.uk

This paper gives an overview of how colleagues from different divisions within Library Services came together to deliver an innovative 'world café' style event for researchers at the University of Birmingham, and offer a range of menus for bespoke training to help researchers raise their academic profile.

Background

Library Services at the University of Birmingham has been offering training sessions as part of the Raising Your Research Profile (RYRP) programme since November 2012. RYRP trainers – a mix of subject librarians and copyright, open access and repository advisors – offered traditional library workshops lasting one and a half to two hours. Each session covered a research-related topic such as publishing strategies, open access, social media, copyright and bibliometrics. Over time, the content of the programme evolved. Research data management was added to the programme in November 2014, and open access and publishing strategies were merged into a single session. Sessions were open to all researchers, including research staff, research postgraduates and staff supporting researchers, and were held in computer clusters in the library and IT training facilities in order to allow for hands-on practice.

A longitudinal survey of previous attendees was undertaken in 2014. This found that the workshop approach was beneficial, with attendees appreciating the opportunity to commit time to exploring a topic in great depth in a traditional teaching format. Although feedback was positive, overall engagement was low, with very low take-up for some sessions. It is possible that the positive feedback came from a population that preferred this teaching method.

Whilst the two-hour workshops were valued, the trainers felt that there were drawbacks to this approach, including the facts that:

- Attendees needed to invest significant amounts of time to gain an overview of all five topics.
- Sessions had to be pitched at a general audience to meet the needs of a wide range of attendees, from experienced researchers to postgraduate research students, and from a range of disciplines. This meant that particular nuances relating to researcher disciplines, funders and researcher stages could not be addressed in depth.
- There was no opportunity for cross-topic discussion, e.g. how social media could be used to raise the impact of research outputs, and how altmetrics can inform a social media strategy.
- The low take-up reduced the possibilities for useful networking.
- Networking was incidental to the workshops, rather than a focus.

In order to mitigate the first two of these difficulties, online course materials were developed in the areas of bibliometrics and research data management. They were used in a blended approach in the face-to-face sessions to enable more context-specific hands-on activities, and could also be used later by individual researchers to revisit any of the topics in more depth. The online courses were listed on the university's 'course gallery', so any university member could self-enrol. Whilst these materials were well received, some commented that everything they needed was already in the online material, so the value of the face-to-face sessions was limited.

Ideas for rejuvenation

Due to low turnout and a sense that the format was tired and unattractive to researchers, it was felt that the programme would benefit from an overhaul. After a discussion amongst the course trainers, it was suggested that the five two-hour workshops be compressed into a single one-hour lunchtime slot to give an overview of the issues facing researchers in academia. The trainers hoped that this reduction in time commitment would remove one of the

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.



From generic to bespoke: Enhancing researcher engagement with library research support services

barriers to signing up to the session, allow for more cross-topic synergies to be raised, and that a 'world café' style approach would afford more networking opportunities.

The trainers also designed menus of smaller training modules that could be used to construct bespoke sessions for particular groups of researchers. At the end of the showcase session, researchers were to be invited to commission their own bespoke training session at a time to suit them. This would have the benefits of targeting a specific group and being able to offer in-depth discipline-specific guidance and support on the areas of their choice.

Menus were constructed for each of the five major themes. For example, the bibliometrics menu offered: finding citation metrics (demonstrations and hands-on of Web of Science, Scopus, or Google Scholar); introduction to the h index (strengths and weaknesses of the h index, data sources, demonstrations and hands-on of how to find a h index on Web of Science, Scopus, or Google Scholar); journal metrics (journal metrics available, how they are calculated and how they can be used). For more information go to <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/library/ryrp/menu>

The first showcase session took place at lunchtime in the training room of the university's brand new library – a further incentive for researchers to come to the session. The introduction outlined the aims of the session and how the 'world café' approach would work. This was followed by the five experts (one each for bibliometrics, copyright, open access, research data management and social media) presenting their topic using one slide and in one minute each. They then sat one at each of five tables and hosted a discussion about their topic for five minutes, after which the attendees moved to the next table where a new discussion would begin. This process was repeated until everyone had participated in a discussion at all five tables.

Student feedback

Twenty people attended, and nineteen completed paper feedback forms. Attendees were invited to score aspects of the session on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Two attendees gave a score of 3 (average) on length of session and clarity of presentation – all other attendees gave scores of 4 or 5. Apart from one person who didn't indicate, everyone said that they had greater confidence in the subject matter after the session.

In response to the question 'What did you find most useful?' all five topics were mentioned. Nine people commented that they liked the way the session was run. Attendees also welcomed the signposting information.

We asked them how the sessions could be improved. Eight people commented that they wanted more time for discussion and two commented that the presentations at the start of the session should be longer. One thought it would be useful to include information on the stages at which issues become important during PhD programmes.

The future

The trainers felt that the first session was successful, with good attendance, a lot of useful discussions and that there was a 'buzz' in the room. Although several attendees had commented that they would like longer sessions, it was felt that this was a sign of success, and that leaving attendees wanting more would encourage them to commission their own bespoke session or explore online course materials and web materials in their own time. It was felt to be important to keep the showcase session short in order to maximise take-up and to give an overview in a short timescale. However, to increase the opportunities

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.



From generic to bespoke: Enhancing researcher engagement with library research support services

for networking, it was decided that future sessions would start fifteen minutes earlier, with tea and coffee before the start of the main session.

There has been take-up on the menu offer. Sessions have been designed and delivered on bibliometrics, social media and research data management so far, and more are planned.

In addition to the topic-based menus described, example thematic sessions have now been suggested. These take advantage of the fact that most of the topics covered are interconnected and in reality most research groups would be interested in a session including elements from more than one of the topics, tailored to their particular research stage and discipline. Suggested sessions include:

- RYRP – an introductory session
- What are scholarly communications?
- Getting your thesis ready
- I'm funded, what do I have to do?
- Introduction to open research
- Navigating the scholarly communications maze

As well as the positive impact on attendees, there have been benefits for the trainers. They have had the opportunity to develop cross-topic publicity (with logos and publicity material achieving a consistent RYRP brand) and to work together more closely. Trainers have been able to use their time more effectively by drumming up interest in the RYRP topics during the lunchtime showcase session, and delivering high-level bespoke training to those who request it. It is hoped that as more groups attend the lunchtime showcase and commission bespoke courses, word of mouth will help to build relationships with colleagues in the academic departments and increase researcher effectiveness.

With thanks to Suzanne Atkins, Adrian Bromage, Alex Fenlon, Patricia Herterich and Aslam Ghumra who co-developed and co-delivered the programme, and to Judith Hegenbarth for organisational support.

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.

