A networking group for London satellite campuses

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Background

Although London has long been the home to campuses of universities based elsewhere, the past six years has seen a huge uptake of UK universities launching a London base. This growth was first discussed in an article in *Times Higher Education* in May 2014.[1] In December 2014, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published its thematic review of thirteen London Campuses of UK universities [2] and hosted an event in February 2015 to discuss development of higher education policy in relation to London based campuses, findings from the review, good practice and lessons learned. Recognising both that this is a new phenomenon and that there is rapid expansion of satellite campuses opening in London, it seemed an ideal time to create a forum for library professionals working in this environment to connect and share best practice.

Formation

The Times Higher Education article identified thirteen new London campuses, and these details were used as a starting point for contact.
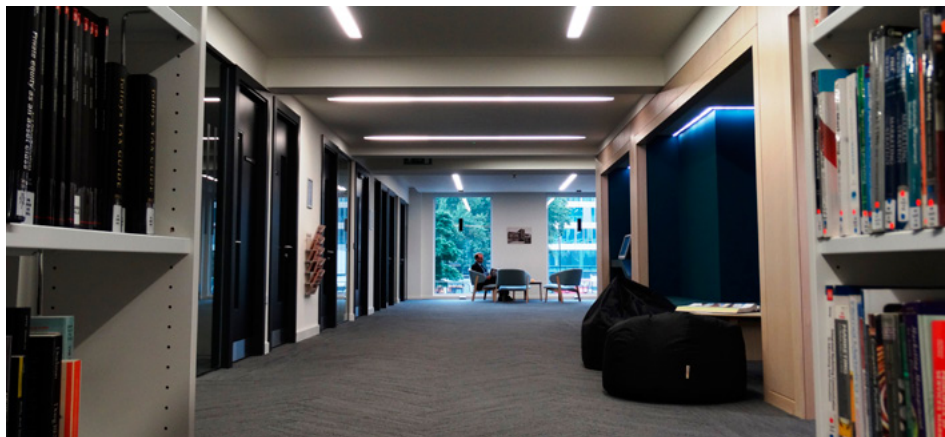
A search of the websites of all these new campuses revealed that only three listed dedicated library contact details. For the rest there was a generic email address – with fingers crossed the email would make it to the appropriate person. The response rate from the outreach email was about 50%; six named contacts were identified, and the forum began to take shape. We created a Jisc mailing list (Londondonsatellite@jiscmail.ac.uk) for on-going discussions and to plan opportunities for collaboration. Members of the group were happy to find a platform for networking that we could promote as inclusive, cost-free and meeting a unique need. As we learn of new London satellite campuses opening, we continue to reach out to potential library professionals and would encourage library staff at these new campuses to sign up to the Jisc mailing list.

At the beginning of March 2015, a group of library professionals attended an inaugural meeting at the Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU London) campus. Nine librarians representing six London satellite campuses of UK universities were present – Coventry University, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Liverpool, University of South Wales St Trinity, University of Sunderland and University of Ulster. Within the group we identified three different models of operation: a smaller branch of a larger UK institution, private sector and a subsidiary organisation providing the library services. From those represented at the meeting of London campuses the length of time they had been established varied from around six months to six years. All had similar portfolios, were heavily business focused, and some offered more specialised programmes.

GCU London library – networking group

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London Liverpool library – networking group

Unique challenges

At the initial meeting each campus shared an overview of their history, and a growing list of our unique needs became apparent:

- building an adequate collection quickly
- determining and advocating for appropriate budgets
- staffing and line management arrangements
- managing academic liaison duties
- developing library space, opening hours, self-issue and security systems.

The theme for our second meeting, at the University of Liverpool London campus, was 'facing challenges', where each participant shared a unique challenge, followed by discussion and suggestions from the group. Broader themes arose from the challenges presented, ranging from:

- developing working relationships with the larger institution
- support from management outside the library sector for continuing professional development
- engaging student and staff participation in information literacy
- staffing resources

While many of these challenges might seem familiar to most working professionals, a distinct perspective is shared amongst library professionals working in London satellite campuses. Therefore, input from colleagues who may have encountered similar challenges and have experience to share is especially valuable.

We were fortunate to be joined by Lori Bailey from SCONUL, who shared the challenges experienced by London libraries in the SCONUL Access scheme, as there was concern about inconsistencies in library provision at satellite campuses and private higher education providers' campuses, and the implications for long-established and popular university libraries in London. This was a good opportunity to discuss further how the London satellite campuses could improve in their contributions to the SCONUL Access scheme. Consequently, SCONUL updated its Access membership criteria to embrace the question of different campuses: university satellite campuses and other higher education institutions must have libraries open to other SCONUL members in order for their students and staff to be eligible for SCONUL Access.

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We plan to continue seeking other professionals in the field to invite as guests to our meetings, both to raise awareness of our campuses and to ensure that we stay connected to the larger professional context.

Collaboration

Many of members of this group are the sole librarian or part of a very small team on their campus, so it is vital to have this network of colleagues to connect with. We often manage a wide range of library services covering academic liaison, library operations and acquisitions. This means that we are likely to find ourselves working in areas outside our comfort zone. Pooling our knowledge and experience through the group allows for discussion and potential solutions. An obvious benefit is the opportunity to visit the library space of other London satellite campuses as we take turns to host our meetings.

One example of collaboration is the creation of a survey of library facilities for London satellite campuses by one of our group members that we can all use for benchmarking purposes.

Another institution has also generously extended an invitation to their library staff development day to the rest of the London satellite campuses group.

One group member, Ihar Ivanou, says about the group, 'As the structure and nature of the higher education sector has started changing rapidly, some librarians found themselves in unchartered waters – with very loose or even non-existent links with the professional support organisations and Jisc. All satellite campuses are small, often employing only one or two professional librarians. In this situation, I have already benefited from a dedicated support group: I quickly built a better understanding of the SCONUL scheme, got helpful ideas for facilities development and staff provision in small settings, and for professional development away from big library teams.'

A suggested future meeting theme is to each share our approach to organising and delivering information literacy.

Outcomes

The following outcomes of our discussions have helped to deliver services and resources to our users:

- a plan to share information by maintaining a list of temporary staffing cover options
- suggested methods for increasing academic uptake of embedded information literacy
- a solution for hosting a special collections exhibition from the main campus at the satellite site
- using the Jisc email list and the survey of satellite campuses to help plan variations in opening hours

Many of these outcomes came from practices that have been successfully used by colleagues in a similar environment. These outcomes help to promote the ability to use limited resources effectively and to work creatively to find solutions – an essential skill for those working in satellite campuses.

Future

Our group plans to meet several times a year in order to discuss ideas for collaborative working and address our unique challenges. We continue to contact library colleagues at newly opening London locations and have advertised the details of our Jisc mailing list through various avenues for

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interested parties to join.

References

1   Grove, J. 2014. London is another planet. *Times Higher Education*. 29 May. See: https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/london-is-another-planet/2013540.article [accessed 11 August 2015]

2   QAA Report: London campuses of UK Universities. See: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/London-campuses-of-UK-universities.pdf [accessed 11 August 2015]