Teaching 'old' librarians new tricks

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In 2012 the University of Manchester Library completed a restructuring exercise which was radical in approach and ambitious in vision. After consultation with our senior academic colleagues, a review of existing services and gaps, and reflection on what the future was likely to hold, we decided to abandon almost completely the traditional subject liaison model. We concluded that instead of following that model, we would most effectively meet university needs by aligning our staff with strategic objectives, so we created teams responsible for research services and teaching and learning services. In addition, to ensure that the services these teams developed met the needs of our wide range of disciplines, and also to ensure that our large customer population was aware of them, we created an academic engagement team. The named contacts for all our academic disciplines are in this team, but they are certainly not traditional subject librarians, as I shall explain.

Former research and learning support structure

New functional structure

Fig. 1 Restructure of library faculty team model

Having made the decision to restructure one department (Research and Learning Support) along these lines, we realised that we needed to go further, to ensure that emerging strategically important service areas were represented appropriately at the senior level. So the department was broken up, and some teams merged with other areas to create new departments, reflected in a new top-level library structure (Fig. 2).

Former library divisional structure

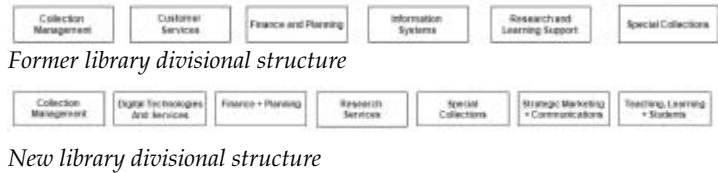*New library divisional structure*

Fig 2. Change in top-level library organisational structure

As a consequence of this reorganisation, we have been able to allocate effectively the responsibilities for developing new services and to change – often substantially – existing areas where services have become outmoded or inefficient.

New services

In the area of research support in particular, we are now introducing services which are entirely new to the library. Research data management, for example, which has been in development at Manchester for some time as a result of funded project activity, is now being transitioned to service through the Research Services team. There is still a lot of work to do, but the Research Services team now runs a service, provides support (e.g. in the development of data management plans) and acts as first port of call to any enquirer needing advice. Similarly, the team provides a focus for taking forward open access scholarly communications work, and in that sense the restructure came at an apposite time, able to respond to changes brought about by the *Finch report*[1]. Of course, this activity is also central to the work of our existing institutional repository team, but the scale of the advocacy and communications activity would not have been sustainable if it had been allocated solely to that team. Research Services also includes bibliometrics, and we have created a new post to focus on this activity, which has seen demand rise very quickly.

In terms of teaching and learning, the focus brought about by the restructure has allowed us to develop a suite of general interest online academic skills modules, make use of our new building (the Alan Gilbert Learning Commons[2]) as a vehicle for the teaching and learning objectives of the library, begin to apply a strategic focus to the management of student core texts and to take on responsibility for a new university-wide copyright enquiry service. This team has also benefited from new posts: we have recruited an e-learning technologist who provides the technical skills for the production of our online learning modules, and a learning development officer, who builds partnerships with other skills providers in

the university and ensures our skills provision is academically robust and student-centred. Additionally, as part of a wider initiative to introduce interdisciplinary learning to our undergraduates, the library has for the first time managed and delivered a credit-bearing academic course, recognised by the College Director as having 'highly academically trained staff' with the right teaching expertise.[3]

For our Academic Engagement team, the challenge has been to continue to work directly with academics, but with real partnership status, rather than in a support capacity, and with a smaller

team. Instead of taking responsibility for two or three disciplines, a librarian in this team might be responsible for as many as five academic schools. However, the requirement is no longer to provide every aspect of support that the school might require, but to act as a bridge between the academic community and our functional teams, and to ensure that library services are of the right quality and fully match needs. In corporate parlance, these members of staff are now key account managers who are required to build relationships, spot opportunities, carry out marketing activities and act as highly efficient and approachable points of contact for the library. Freed from routine
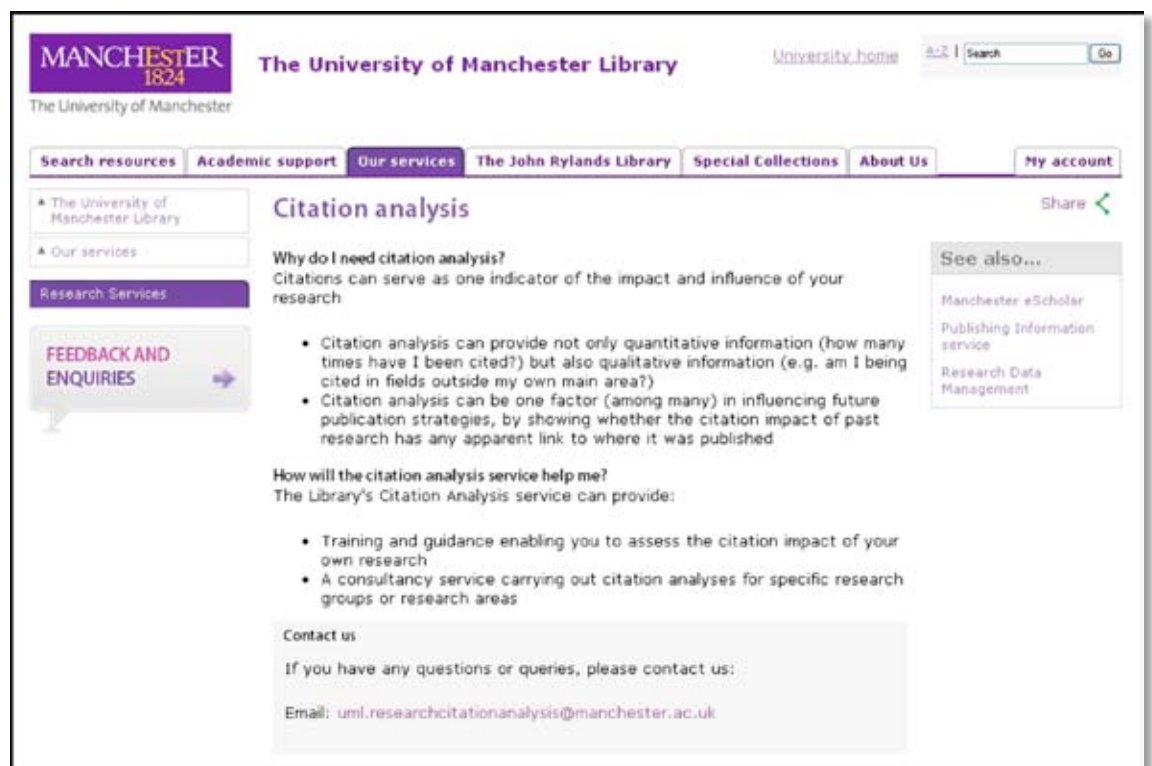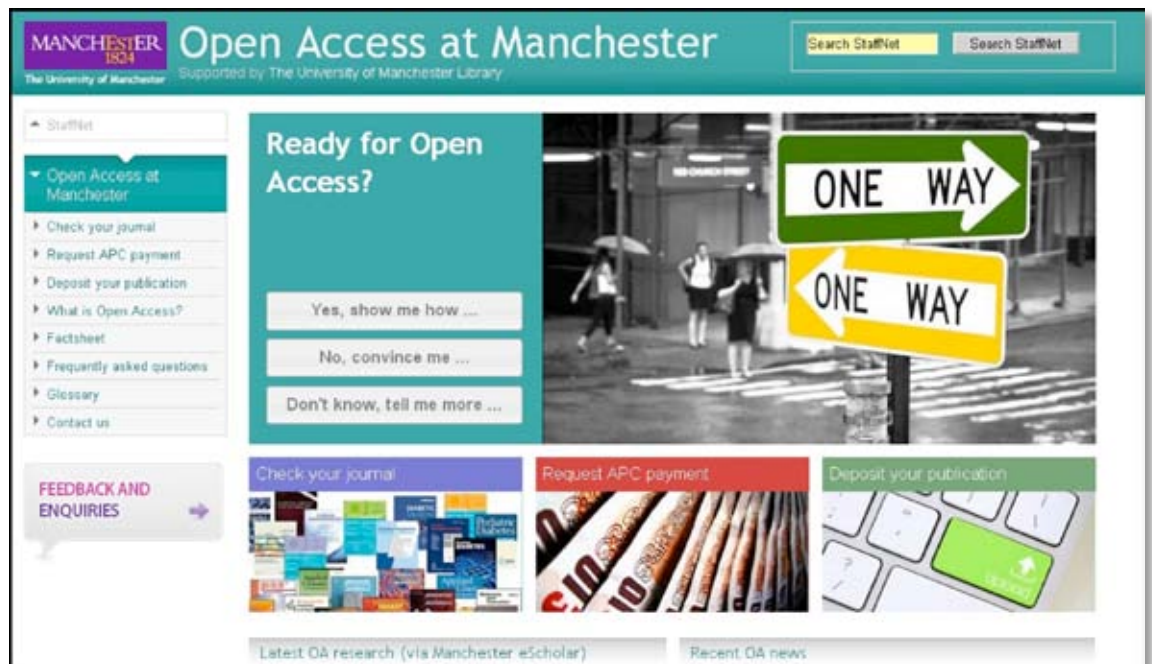

Fig 3. New services that required new skills

activities (checking reading lists, ordering stock, staffing enquiry desks and providing induction sessions), they are able to be more outward facing and visible to their customers, many of whom rarely, if ever, visit physical library buildings.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

These changes were made after careful consideration and consultation, and with the support of senior university leaders (hence the additional resources to create new posts), but in order for the new roles to be truly effective it was necessary to provide the development required for our staff to perform well in them. This was a consideration at the outset of the project, and the timing was such that we were able to take advantage of a university initiative to support staff development across all areas of activity. As a result, we made a successful bid for additional funding, and this allowed us to introduce a training programme with both breadth and depth. We identified a mixture of functional and 'core skills' training needs, and sourced providers with the necessary credentials. Training courses delivered as part of this programme were:

- bibliometrics
- copyright (basics, advanced and policy)
- e-learning
- marketing
- podcasting
- relationship management
- project management
- statistics
- team-building
- writing for the web

The intention in every case was to ensure that training met our needs effectively. For example, it was felt to be insufficient to make use of existing introductory marketing courses available within the library profession, so we used qualified marketing professionals for the marketing and relationship management training. The most appropriate and comprehensive bibliometrics training we could source is delivered by a provider outside the UK, so we sent a member of staff overseas for a week's intensive course. Copyright training needed to cover everything from the basics to what policy makers and strategic managers need to know, so we arranged three sessions, covering all aspects, and selected staff to attend the session or sessions that most applied to their remit. In order to develop a much more substantial online skills offer, we needed to train staff in the pedagogy of e-learning as well as developing

their technical skills such as writing for the web and podcasting. In many cases we worked with course providers to deliver the training locally in order to ensure it was bespoke, and to reduce time and travel costs.

Of course, training and development, like change, is a constant in today's library profession, so there is no sense in which we believe we have completed this process. Rather, we hope we have been able to match recent substantial change with a similar level of investment in training, and that this has helped staff move to the acceptance stage of the change curve more rapidly, and with less anxiety. Plans for further training, currently under discussion, include:

Strategic project management training – We are assessing the value of best practice frameworks such as *Managing successful programmes and Portfolio, programme and project management* as models to support strategic change.[4]

Data analysis – As we develop a management dashboard and seek to demonstrate the impact of our services on our customers, we want to improve skills in statistical analysis and move beyond the production of spreadsheets and graphs to the application of statistical modelling techniques. This sort of work has already been shown to have real value in associating library use with measures of impact in both research[5] and teaching and learning.[6]

Publishing – Building on the central role of the library in supporting open access publishing, we have ambitions to develop services to produce and host open access journal titles and to explore the options for open access monographs. Staff working in this area will need to know much more about publishing processes.

Communication skills – Focusing on negotiating and influencing skills to build confidence and ensure library staff are involved in university business as trusted partners. There are also plans to develop a strategic approach to the use of social media for effective marketing.

E-learning technologies – Although relevant staff have been introduced to learning technologies in a reasonably comprehensive way (through a BTEC accredited course), there is a need to develop technical expertise further, in order to avoid bottlenecks caused by over-reliance on a single learning technologist.

CONCLUSION

It has been immensely gratifying to see how quickly staff have picked up their new roles and introduced new services to our customers. The response to these new services has been very positive, and demand is already becoming an issue. We feel confident that we can make the business case to support further investment in these areas, as it is very clear that the library is adding significant value in areas that are of high strategic impact to the university. That we have reached this position so quickly after a significant restructure is, of course, first and foremost testament to the talent and industry of our staff. Their ability and confidence levels have certainly been enhanced through staff development and the additional opportunities for team development and networking that come with it. Any library considering strategic reorganisation of the sort that Manchester has recently undertaken is encouraged to think early, and in detail, about the associated training needs.

REFERENCES

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