USTLG Meeting – November 2010 'The role of libraries in the research process'

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As a newbie Science Librarian, I was really keen to find out what the University Science and Technology Librarians' Group (USTLG) got up to and was quite surprised by the number of people from all over the country that attended the Autumn 2010 meeting. It promised to be a packed day with lots of speakers so – laptop in rucksack, iPhone in handbag – I was ready to tweet and notetake on what was hopefully going to be many interesting presentations and discussions.

I certainly wasn't disappointed. Professor Richard Darton, from the Engineering Department at Keble College, got us all hot under the collar with the first session of the day, 'An academic perspective on libraries supporting research'. He discussed how we've moved on from the idea of 'librarian as curator', but that librarians have now become more like "web managers". He also posed the question: is it time to give control of library resources to the researchers? As a lot of good information is to be found openly accessible on the internet, and the current peer-review process leaves a lot to be desired – what is the importance of subscribing to particular journals? Students are not always aware of what journal they've found an article in – so he suggested that cost of materials be devolved to users who know exactly what they want. This prompted questions and discussion about the role of librarian as trainer, whether undergraduates should be given the responsibility to purchase material (possibly!) and alternatives to the peer-review process.

Kimberley Hackett from the HEFCE REF Team gave us an update on the progress of the REF (Research Excellence Framework) 2014 which replaces the RAE. The outcome of the exercise, assessing research output of higher education institutions, will inform funding decisions and make explicit the contributions of research to the government and make clear how good quality research benefits society generally. The REF will look at different types of impact on society and a pilot on assessing this was carried out at 29 universities. The results from this pilot can be found on the REF website: www.ref.ac.uk. Membership of the panels will be announced in January 2011 and further documentation about the process will be published in July.

Anne Costigan from the University of Bradford gave an enlightening talk on research metrics, where different metrics are available from and how they're calculated, and more importantly, what do they really indicate? Impact factors for journals vary widely between disciplines, so it's important to not to compare across disciplines because the results can be misleading. Anne also posed the question whether it is fair to judge a paper by the journal in which it's published? She also covered article-level metrics and author metrics, and discussed interesting new ways of assessing articles through web 2.0.

Kate Bradbury, from Cardiff University, shared with us her methods for training in research metrics: what should be covered, how it should be delivered and how to answer tricky questions! Interest in metrics was primarily driven by the REF – Kate

devised a variety of workshops tailored to particular audiences. Her longer workshops consist of a 30 min talk plus a 1 hour workbook which includes finding journal metrics and citations, setting up citation alerts, Researcher ID and open access resources. She shared with us how the workshops had progressed and how she'd refined sessions and garnered interest from departments – this was particular useful for those who are just starting to give training sessions in metrics.

Alexa Dugan from Wiley spoke to us their new Interdisciplinary Reviews (WIRES), which are currently free to access (for a limited time) at http://wires.wiley.com/WileyCDA/. The Reviews were set up to emphasise the importance of communicating across disciplines, and are focussed on areas such as climate change, which benefit from a cross-disciplinary approach. There are currently six publications in the series, with more planned in 2011 and beyond, and some have been accepted by abstracting and indexing services. Credit also has to go to Wiley for providing a very nice lunch in the Divinity School.

Yvonne Nobis from Cambridge University Library discussed their science@Cambridge portal. It's designed to be a one-stop-shop where students and researchers go to find information and includes RSS feeds of science news, new books and podcasts, with quick links to subject guides and information skills training. In a particularly disparate library service, where it's difficult to reach out to researchers and guide students in the right direction, this was seen as a good way of engaging with them. For more info see http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/scienceportal/

Katy Sidwell and Sara Thornes from Leeds University also discussed their website for researchers – researcher@library. In 2005 they received Roberts funding to support researchers, then began reviewing their library support for research – how could the library help? What did the researchers really want? One of the researchers wishes was to have a bank of information where they could go to find everything they needed to support them through every stage of the research process. This would aid them in discovering services they didn't know the library offered, but also help them find things they knew the library offered but couldn't find! Katy and Sara got us to think of our own contributions to the research process, and look at where there might be gaps in our support. Our "wheel of research" can be found on the USTLG website (www.leeds.ac.uk/library/ustlg/index.htm) which is maintained by Sara, along with presentations from all the other speakers.

The next meeting will be held at Sheffield University in May 2011, on the theme of "Information Literacy".