

New directions: Health librarians in the changing research landscape

Sally Dalton, *University of Leeds*, United Kingdom, s.dalton@leeds.ac.uk

Deirdre Andre, *University of Leeds*, United Kingdom, d.andre@leeds.ac.uk

Introduction

The role of libraries in supporting researchers is changing. Rapid developments in the research environment are requiring libraries to evolve to meet the needs of researchers. A number of external and internal drivers have led this change, in the UK:

- funder requirements for making research outputs and their associated data open access
- growing demand within institution for Research Excellence Framework (REF), Open Access and Research Data Management support
- increased interest from funders and institutions in using metrics to show impact of research outputs

This paper will discuss the drivers behind creating Leeds University Library's new 'Scholarly Communications and Researcher Skills Team' (SCoReS Team), and the challenges and lessons learned and implications for health researchers. It will also describe how the former subject librarians for health (who are now based in the new team), have developed and diversified their skills to meet the broader research support needs of the research community.

Discussion

Previously at the University of Leeds Library, Subject Librarians were the single point of contact for researchers within their Schools. With new challenges facing researchers in areas such as Open Access, Research Data Management and bibliometrics the subject librarian model was no longer meeting the needs of researchers within the institution. Subject Librarians did not have the capacity to become experts in these areas and were finding it harder to answer research related enquiries.

In 2014, Leeds University Library moved away from subject specific teams and created the 'Scholarly Communications and Researcher Skills Team': a functional team (rather than a subject specific team), focused on supporting researchers from across the University. The new team provides support to researchers on Open Access publishing, REF Open Access requirements, the University publications database, EndNote, literature searching, bibliometrics and digital publishing.

Librarians working in the SCoReS Team are mainly former Health Librarians and their specialist health knowledge and skills complemented the skills needed to work as Research Advisors in the new team. They had extensive experience of supporting health researchers in areas such as literature searching and EndNote so felt confident they could diversify their skills to support researchers across the university in new areas such as Open Access, Bibliometrics and digital publishing.

Conclusions

The rapid developments in the research environment have required the Library and former Health Librarians to evolve to meet the new needs of researchers. This radical change has created a number of challenges but the new team has embraced the change and welcomed the need to diversify and develop new skills and knowledge.

Keywords

Libraries, Medical, Librarians, Professional Role, Research personnel, Research Universities

Introduction

This paper discusses the drivers behind the creating Leeds University Library's new 'Scholarly Communications and Researcher Skills Team' (SCoReS Team). It outlines the challenges and lessons learned and implications for health researchers. It also describes how the former subject librarians for health (who are now based in the new team), have developed and diversified their skills to meet the broader research support needs of the research community.

The team was created to increase the library's capacity to support researchers. The drivers behind the growing demands for this support are explained and new research support service areas are outlined.

The team has grown significantly since its creation as demand for support increases, particularly in the areas of Open Access. The paper concludes with an overview of the benefits the new structure and explores plans for developing the service further.

Background

Until 2014 the University of Leeds library support structure for undergraduates, postgraduates, and staff was subject based, with Faculty Team Librarians being the single point of contact between the library and individual schools or faculties. They were involved in liaison activity, information skills teaching, collection and budget management as well as a relatively small amount of research support. Within the Health Team there were Faculty Team Librarians for Healthcare, Medicine, Dentistry and Psychology. There was also a specific liaison role with the local National Health Service (NHS)

In 2014 the Library reorganised, moving from a subject specific support structure to a structure based on function. Specialisms were split by topic, with teams being created around teaching and learning, research support and collection development. Academic liaison was split between Learning Services for undergraduates and taught postgraduates. Two new teams were created with the aim of developing an integrated service offer for research postgraduates and staff. A 'Scholarly Communications and Researcher Skills Team' (SCoReS Team), was set up to focus on supporting researchers from across the University in relation to Open Access publishing and compliance, as well as researcher information skills. Research Data Leeds Team (RDL) was established to set up an institutional research data repository, and to support researchers in managing their research data. Existing staff were recruited to the new teams following a change management process.

Drivers for changes

Drivers for creating the team included growing recognition of the value of research libraries in attracting and retaining academic staff and research funding. In 2011 a report by RIN/RLUK(1) identified the key characteristics of library provision required to support research in successful UK universities. They included exploiting new technologies and new models of scholarly communications, and connecting with researchers to enhance the value of the library's services. Excellent research libraries were also found to be outward facing and contributing to institution-wide initiatives.

Another driver was the increased emphasis being placed on the role of academic libraries in developing researchers' skills. A Researcher Development Framework(2) was published in 2010, following consultation with the Higher Education sector in the UK. This gave academic institutions a practical tool to use in planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers. It outlined the knowledge, behaviours and attitudes researchers needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive academic world. Around this time there was also growing interest from funders and institutions in using metrics to show impact of research outputs. Researchers needed support in understanding and accessing bibliometric information and were increasingly looking to the library to provide this support.

Perhaps the most significant driver for change was policy development by the UK government around Open Access publishing. In 2012 the UK government accepted the recommendations of The Finch Report(3) that Open Access was the best way to expand access to published research findings. The Finch Report favoured a model of "Gold" Open Access, in which journal publishers charge article processing charges (APCs). It also recommended that institutional repositories be developed to complement formal publishing as well as providing access to research data, grey literature and for digital preservation. At the University of Leeds it was decided that the Library was best placed to develop the support infrastructure to meet these new policy requirements.

In the wake of this policy change, funders including the Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the Charities Open Access Fund (COAF) strengthened their mandates. It became mandatory for articles that arose from funded research to be published open access. They gave block grants to research intensive UK Higher Education Institutions to support payment of the Article Processing Charges (APCs) associated with "Gold" Open Access. The Library at the University of Leeds took on the role of administering the RCUK block grant and the funds from COAF.

Linked to changes in government policy around Open Access were changes in the assessment criteria for REF. The REF is a peer review process to assess the quality of research activity at eligible UK Higher Education Institutions. Results determine the amount of research funding individual institutions are granted. The Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) mandated that to be eligible for the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) author accepted versions of journal articles and conference papers accepted from 1 April 2016 must have been deposited in an open access repository within three months of acceptance for publication.

Being a research intense university, much attention at the University of Leeds was focused on setting up systems and developing an institutional publications policy to ensure compliance with this mandate. The University saw a role for the Library in providing Open Access support to researchers. Expertise existed in the Library around copyright issues and dealing with publishers. Furthermore, the library was part of a collaboration developed with University of Sheffield and University of York to run joint institutional repositories. These were White Rose Repository Online

(WRRO) and White Rose Etheses Online (WREO), an online repository of doctoral theses from the three Universities. The Library had already been involved in the purchase and management of the University publications system, (Symplectic).

What have the changes meant for health researchers?

Health researchers have benefited from the changes to library structure. They now receive a holistic research support service from the Library. Capacity and expertise now exist within the Library to support compliance with Open Access requirements. The SCoReS Team have collaborated with IT staff to improve the functionality of the university publications system, making it easier for researchers to upload their research output in order to comply with Open Access requirements. The team deliver workshops and presentations to health researchers and support staff across faculties and hospital settings, advocating the benefits of Open Access and outlining what researchers need to do in practical terms to ensure compliance. This has been complemented by online support and guides developed by the team.

Information skills training, which health researchers previously received from their Faculty Team Librarian, is still provided. Librarians in the team who are mainly former Health Librarians retain their expertise in literature searching methods for Health. They have done this by attending training courses, keeping up to date with online literature searching forums and sharing expertise with a team of information specialists based within one of the Universities' Health Research Institutes. Participation in a Health cross team group within the Library has also enabled them to share expertise with colleagues who support undergraduates in Health related faculties.

The team has developed a dedicated section for researchers on the Library's website entitled 'Researcher@Library'.⁽⁴⁾ This provides a central point of support for Health researchers. It hosts online resources for all aspects of Library research support including literature searching, Open Access, Research Data Management, reference management, and bibliometrics. It also provides information about training and development opportunities for researchers and a news section through which the team can easily communicate new developments relevant to researchers. To complement the online support provided, the SCoReS Team delivers a programme of face to face training for researchers.

A previous aspect of the Health Subject Librarian role was to purchase, develop and manage the collections. In the new library structure they no longer are responsible for this. Knowledge of current health collections has waned as a consequence. However, it could be argued that the development of automated collection development tools based on patron suggestions and usage would have eroded their role in collection development over time, in any case.

How former health librarians developed and diversified their skills

Librarians working in the SCoReS team are mainly former Health Librarians. They were recruited into the team following an application and interview process where they were able to demonstrate their significant experience of supporting researchers. Under the previous Library structure they provided literature searching support and training for health researchers undertaking complex literature searches for systematic and other reviews, as well as in the use of EndNote. The team also has experience of delivering face to face bibliometric training as well as producing online guides. They had begun to develop a relationship with the University Research and Innovation Office through bibliometric analysis project work undertaken to identify strategic areas of research strength that the University could build on. This foundation provided them with a basis on which to build on as their remit widened to support researchers in all faculties across the University.

Knowledge of resources in subject areas beyond Health was acquired on the job. Support and training on subject specific information resources from previous Subject Librarians also proved useful. Cross team library groups in the areas of Business and Law, Health, referencing and EndNote software were set up to keep up to date with developments and share existing expertise in these with Learning Services, the newly created taught student library support team.

Team members also had opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge. Supporting staff around Open Access compliance required the team to further develop their communication and interpersonal skills to deal with challenging enquiries from individual researchers and research support staff around open access compliance. Newly created roles have provided career development opportunities. The former medical librarian, now the Institutional Lead on the University's publications system was tasked with investigating how the Library's scholarly communications information systems worked and how they would need to change to support new University and HEFCE Open Access policy in relation to the next REF. She worked in close contact with the IT department, liaising with them to adapt and develop existing Library systems to enable researchers to comply with the new Open Access requirements. It proved a steep learning curve. She had to develop technical understanding of how the systems worked and how they needed to develop to support the new University publications policy. She now works closely with the IT department to ensure that the systems work effectively, and uses problem solving skills daily to deal with new technical challenges as they arise. She has enjoyed the challenge and the excellent opportunity for development that she has been afforded to acquire new knowledge and skills in a growing area.

Increased contact with Researchers and Research Support Staff

The creation of the SCoReS team has resulted in the Library becoming more outward looking. It has created closer links to the rest of the University through its support function for Open Access compliance. The team has developed a wide range of contacts with researchers and research support staff within departments and the University Research Office as well as with senior university staff including Heads of Schools. Contacts developed through Open Access work are also used to raise awareness of other aspects of the research support services including research skills training and the team's fee based literature searching service for funded projects. Members of the team supporting researcher skills have also started to develop contacts outside the Library with other units within the University providing research support including IT, Careers and the Staff Development Unit. Developing these relationships has led to a better understanding of what each support service does. As a result, training content is less likely to be unnecessarily duplicated and researchers can be cross referred to relevant training provision across the University.

Broadening of the profile of staff and skill mix

The profile of the staff recruited to the team has broadened and added to the skill mix. A recently appointed Repositories Co-ordinator was recruited from an academic publishing background because of her experience and knowledge of the academic publishing process, Open Access and copyright issues. Knowledge of the ‘behind the scenes’ workings of the academic publishing process gives her an appreciation of the challenges academic face in complying with Open Access mandates. Her publishing experience also helps in negotiations with publishers over copyright issues on behalf of researchers. Other staff within the team includes a recent PhD graduate. Her direct experience of the research process and the workings of academic departments within the University makes her well placed to communicate and support researchers and share this knowledge with other members of the team.

Conclusion

The re-organisation of the University of Leeds Library has created the capacity to support researchers across the University in emerging areas such as Open Access publishing and compliance, bibliometrics and Research Data Management. It has also enabled the Library to develop information skills support for all researchers. Library support for Health related researchers has not been adversely affected. They are still receiving the specialist information skills support they require. Former Subject Librarians for health have successfully developed and diversified their skills to meet the broader research support needs of the research community.

Looking to the future, raising awareness and monitoring compliance around Open Access requirements for the next REF remains an important function of the team. Technical challenges around simplifying and automating processes for adding publications to the University’s Open Access repository remain. Work will continue on reviewing and developing relevant information skills support for researchers. It will remain important for research support librarians on the team to keep their subject knowledge current and relevant through participation in health related networks such as the University Health and Medical Librarians Group (UMHLG) in the UK and the European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL) internationally.

In September 2016 the SCoReS Team will move to a dedicated floor for researchers in the newly refurbished Edward Boyle Library. This will contain over three hundred study spaces and include a mix of social, group and individual study spaces, plus seminar rooms for training and events. It is hoped that this new space will provide a physical focus point for Researchers within the Library and build on the work done by the new SCoReS Team to provide comprehensive Library support to researchers across the University.

References

1. Research Information Network, UK Research Libraries UK. The Value of libraries for research and researchers: a RIN and RLUK report. 2011 [cited 2016 April 26]. Available from: <http://www.rin.ac.uk/our-work/using-and-accessing-information-resources/value-librariesresearch-and-researchers>.
2. Vitae. Researcher Development Framework 2011 [cited 2016 April 26]. Available from: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>.
3. Finch J. Accessibility, Sustainability, Excellence: How to Expand Access to Research Publications. 2012 [cited 2016 April 26]. Available from: <http://www.researchinfonet.org/publish/finch/>.
4. University of Leeds Library [Internet].Leeds:The Library; c2016 [cited 2016, April 26]. Researcher@Library [about 22 screens] Available from: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/researcher>