THE ROLE OF THE E-JOURNAL CO-ORDINATOR AT READING UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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This paper looks at the role of E-Journals Co-ordinator in a university library. Such specialised posts are still a fairly rare solution for managing electronic journals in the UK, but are necessary if sufficient time is to be devoted to the development and promotion of e-journal access.

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Origins

The original idea for a specialised post came from the then Periodicals Librarian. Some time in 1998 she wrote a paper for the Senior Library Managers on electronic journals in the library, outlining the current situation, the problems that existed and proposing some ways forward in the future. Up until then e-journals had developed piecemeal, rather than as part of a considered strategy. The library had registered for the UK Pilot Site Licence Initiative (PSLI). This gave access to journals published by Academic Press, the Institute of Physics Publishing and titles from Blackwell Publishers and Blackwell Science. Outside of this, lack of staff time meant that e-journals could only be supplied on a reactive basis, in response to requests from individuals. The Periodicals Librarian, as an unofficial extension of her role, dealt with e-journals. She felt that she did not have the time to devote to the development of e-journals provision alongside the traditional management of print subscriptions and argued that only a specialised post could focus on and develop electronic journals.

"I believe that it will be necessary for the library to designate one person to deal with most, or all, aspects of electronic journals. The person will probably not be the Periodicals Librarian. Investigating developments and promoting adequately the use of material requires much more time than the present post holder is able to give. It is a function which requires considerable technical expertise and should be given recognition as of great importance within the library."

This proposal was accepted and taken forward to the Vice

Chancellor by the Librarian. She highlighted the following points:

- the post would be a re-designated existing Liaison Librarian post;
- the post would keep a liaison responsibility;
- it would provide an essential focus to help the library move forward and support users;
- the post holder would provide technical advice, identify and access material, and advise on legal and economic aspects.

The proposal was accepted and the post was set up for a three year fixed term contract. The librarian had argued that "…in the longer term it may not be necessary to have a specialist role of this sort."

It is, therefore, an experimental post, and initially set up to achieve a limited number of aims and to solve particular problems. It is not necessarily seen as a long-term solution to managing e-journals.

Duties of the post

The new post has a theoretical 40/60 split of responsibilities between e-journals and subject liaison duties respectively. The main responsibilities for e-journals include identifying all the titles which we are entitled to access through current print subscriptions, registration and licensing of these titles, and liaising with colleagues to get and maintain access to these titles and to make them available to users.

There are clear advantages to this specialised post. As e-journals are part of the responsibilities, rather than an add on, time is made available to develop the service. There is obviously flexibility between the two roles and, outside of timetabled duties, I can use my time as needed. The post provides an identifiable person to deal with e-journal issues, both to the library staff and to library users. The liaison role enables both a provider and a user viewpoint to be maintained in the development of the service

Clearly, there are also disadvantages. There can be times, such as at the start of the new academic year, when I may have to all but abandon the e-journals role in favour of the requirements of my subject liaison duties. Progress can therefore be hindered. Both in the library and on campus people read "electronic journals" to mean all types of electronic information. At present I keep

very strictly to e-journals, although developing this post to include all electronic sources would seem a logical step forward. In some ways it is also a disadvantage that there are liaison duties. It would be nice to devote all my time to electronic journal provision!

In general terms the 40/60 split has worked well, although in reality it is more like 60/40 in favour of e-journals.

The situation in May 1999

I took up this post in May 1999. Some decisions on e-journals had already been made, for example, that links to e-journals would be added into the catalogue records on our web catalogue and that the catalogue would be the principle means of accessing e-journals. There were also some e-journal web pages with links to provider's home pages. I did not start off with a completely clean slate.

The library had between 250-300 e-journals in the catalogue. We had also subscribed to one National Electronic Site Licence Initiative (NESLI) deal, for Blackwell Science titles, and to the Mellon Foundation Journal Storage Project for American economics and history (JSTOR) archive.

Access to e-journals was either via links in the library web catalogue or through links to publishers and providers on the library e-journal web pages. The latter appear to have been started during the PSLI stage of development, when only a few publishers were providing titles. They were thus useful links. After PSLI the pages were simply continued and developed, as titles from more and more publishers and providers were added. In the process it appeared to me that they became less and less useful since most users neither know nor care which providers supply the titles in which they are interested. The publisher/provider web pages only linked to home pages, not to individual titles, so our users were still left with the work of finding the actual title they wanted. In the catalogue, links were to the holdings pages of the specific title.

Library policy is to have some PCs dedicated to online catalogue access only. On these machines users can see the links to e-journals but are barred from using them. They have to use other, non-dedicated networked PCs to actually access the journals. This does not

appear to cause any problems. In those cases where a username and password are also necessary to access e-journals, links to these passwords are also provided in the catalogue entry. This caused some confusion, mostly due the field titles given for each link. The link to the source itself was labelled as "Online source" whereas the link to passwords was labelled "Related resource" which does not mean anything to users. As a consequence some users were ignoring the related resource link and going straight for the online link. They then found themselves barred from accessing the journal because they did not have the required username and password.

There was – and remains – no specific money to develop e-journals. Money for the NESLI deal and the JSTOR archive was found from various sources in the library. This means that the library limits itself to do not much more than gain access to all those e-journals, to which it is entitled through print subscriptions. There is no specific plan to develop the service beyond this.

How does the role fit with the library in general?

In some ways it seems a little strange that the E-journals Co-ordinator post is located in the Science Faculty Team, where my liaison duties reside, instead of somewhere more 'appropriate', such as acquisitions or periodicals. However in practice it works very well.

I work closely with two colleagues, the Metadata Co-ordinator and Library Web Manager. Between the three of us we make e-journals accessible. The Metadata Co-ordinator is responsible for adding links into the catalogue record, for running a regular universal resource locator (URL) check to ensure links are working, and for creating new catalogue records as necessary. The Library Web Manager maintains all the library web pages, including the electronic journal pages. We communicate mostly by e-mail but have a regular monthly face to face meeting that is mainly concerned with keeping each other informed of progress. We have developed an online form to add new titles to the catalogues and web pages. I fill in the details on the form, such as bibliographic information, URL, format of text files, access control, password and

username, whether there is an existing catalogue record, and any alternative online access. It is then e-mailed to the Metadata Co-ordinator and Library Web Manager who add the appropriate details from the form to catalogue records and into the web pages. It saves unnecessary duplication of information and is quick and efficient.

I work closely with colleagues in the periodicals and acquisitions sections but not as often as might be expected. Most of the information that I need is available via the library management system, to which I have access, or it is not kept at all (e.g. the subscription numbers many publishers are fond of imaging we keep on record). Most of the time, if I cannot find the information myself from the system, I will just as likely contact our subscription agent representatives or someone else outside of the university to help or provide information, as work with colleagues in periodicals and acquisitions.

Achievements

Since May 1999 we have added around 900 new titles. Much of this growth is due to using all available free services to gain access to e-journals. These include Catchword, EBSCO online, Springer Link and Emerald.

The University Library has around 3000 current subscription titles so there is still a long way to go. Having used all of the free services that we know about, the question for us, as we have no money to throw at the problem, is how do we most efficiently get access to the remaining 2000 journals? I suspect that there will be no alternative to laboriously checking all the remaining titles to see if there is a free electronic version and then linking them one by one. Ever the optimist, I am still hopeful that all the titles that we are entitled to access will be linked by the end of my contract.

We have been working hard, trying to provide an alphabetic listing of e-journals by title, an access method strongly desired by our users. As yet we are not near a solution. The E-journal Project group has begun working on promotion and publicity ideas, and these will begin to be used as soon as possible.

E-Journals Project

The E-Journals Project, which is running for the duration of my contract, effectively provides extra help in the form of five colleagues to achieve the aims and objectives of the post. The project runs alongside the day-to-day work of the E-journals Co-ordinator. There is some overlap between the two but the essential distinction is that I deal with licences, obtaining access, technical problems and the day to day management while the project deals with the wider issues, such as promotion and publicity. The fundamental aim of the project is to make access to our e-journals as clear and simple as possible.

Conclusion

Only half way through the contract, I believe that I have already demonstrated the advantages of this specialised post to Reading University. We have been able to add 900 titles in 18 months compared to 250-300 that had been added in the years up until then.

This has been achieved simply by giving the post holder the time to find providers, to deal with registration and licencing and to co-operate with other members of staff to make e-journals accessible. It has also made it easier to keep track of developments in the rapidly changing world of electronic journals and to utilise them as and when appropriate.

The E-journals Project will help in the process of linking the remaining 2000 or so titles in the next 18 months. It will also make e-journals easier to find and use, and to boost use through publicity and promotion. Whether there is a long-term need for such a post remains to be seen.