

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a subject information specialist



HEATHER WOODFIELD

Social Sciences Information Specialist
Kings Norton Library, Cranfield University, UK

It's impossible to talk about my job without talking about the enquiry desk team as a whole, as we basically do the same job, but with the emphasis on different subjects. Cranfield is unusual in being a small, primarily technical, and entirely postgraduate university. So, the Library isn't quite what you would expect of a normal undergraduate library, and no two days in a subject information specialist's life are ever the same!

Unlike a lot of academic subject librarians, we don't have timetabled stints at the enquiry desk, taking refuge elsewhere for the rest of the time. Instead, we sit in full view from dawn to dusk, functioning as cannon fodder for whatever enquiries come our way. A lot of people would hate it, but total visibility and accessibility goes hand in hand with our focus on building individual relationships with our customers, and the enquiry desk at the Kings Norton Library is no place for shrinking violets!

So, my day tends to start more or less as it goes on ... building relationships. This usually involves a quick gossip with any students who are near my desk before logging my machine on; Cranfield is unusually well-resourced in terms of electronic

journals and subject databases, but I like to think that it is the personal relationships that we emphasize which ultimately make the difference, so I try to keep a lookout for anyone who might be feeling a bit depressed or lonely, or who might be struggling with their course or need a bit of encouragement and moral support.

Allison, a sweet Jamaican girl with whom I have become friendly, has an important presentation today, so I e-mail her to wish her good luck because I know how nervous she is, and how much she doesn't want to do it. The payback comes in the form of invitations to parties and boxes of chocolates and, on a more professional level, of greater use of the service.

My inbox invariably sports at least one query about ProCite, the reference management software that I support, and I spend a lot of time answering questions about why conference dates don't appear in the bibliography and how you reference a personal e-mail. Today it's someone wanting an output style set up so that they can submit an article to a particular journal. It doesn't take long to set up the style, and is far quicker than showing people how to do it for themselves.



I come back from my pigeon-hole with the long-awaited CLA licence and sit down to plough through it. I've been keeping abreast of the heated discussion on *lis-copyseek*, but despite the forebodings that some people appear to feel, I think it offers a lot more flexibility for very little extra money. I have been Copyright Officer at Cranfield for over ten years now, during which time my role has evolved from fretful finger-wagging to the gleeful publicizing of ever-increasing permissions, so it will be very nice to be able to tell people that they can scan articles for class use, after years of having to tell them that they can't, unless they want to pay.

Next task on the list is to give some thought to our internal training on Issue Desk procedures. This year we are basing it on our rules and regulations – a rather stark and unforgiving document which feels completely out of sync with our natural inclination to be as helpful and accommodating as possible. But we are applying for the Charter Mark for customer service, and unarguably it isn't good customer service to be inconsistent, or to be helpful and accommodating only to our favourite customers.

Claas stops me on the stairs and asks where he can get figures for credit-card holders worldwide. He buys me a coffee, and in return I have a poke around on GMID – Global Markets Information Database. It doesn't cover all the countries he wants, and it isn't presented on a silken cushion exactly as he needs it, but it does give current figures and forecasts for an impressive range of countries and he is suitably impressed with what we find.

It strikes me that it would be useful to have a short article about GMID in the next issue of *fji*, our electronic newsletter. It has just had its first birthday, and from the initial germ of an idea a year ago, it has something we can all feel proud of. The tone is upbeat and jaunty, but putting a

positive spin on essentially dull subjects like recall notices and copyright is a constant challenge!

Felicien, one of the air transport students, plonks a hefty bar of Belgian chocolate on my desk by way of thanks for the time I spent with him earlier in the week helping him to set up a ProCite database. Then, Omar ambles up to the desk with a list of articles he needs to trace. We find one in PDF format using Google Scholar, which has rapidly become a mainstay of unpromising bibliographic references. The others are trickier because he doesn't have much information, but with a bit of perseverance we find almost all of them on Compendex and IEEEExplore.

At the beginning of the new term I will be heavily involved in the training for the new management PhD and DBA students. It's always gruelling at the time, but I see it as the start of a three-year relationship, and so worth giving it 110%. It can be difficult to strike the right balance between bombarding them with too much information and being patronizing, but we know that although it's not brain surgery, it's not blindingly obvious either, and that's the line I try to take.

I get back from lunch and Rony is waiting for me. He's a part-time PhD student and needs help in formulating his search. It's one of those nightmare searches where the key concepts don't actually work terribly well as search terms and I suspect that it might take a bit of poking and prodding until we come up with a workable strategy. But that's my job, and that's what we spend the next couple of hours doing.

Mid-afternoon I have a meeting with Steve, the course leader for one of the courses that I look after. I need to check that we have the latest booklist and that all the tours and training sessions have been booked, but more than that, it's about making sure that I know what's going on with the course, which assignments they have when, and what those assignments are going to be. I will be able to do a better job for the incoming students if I know exactly what they are working on, and it strikes me that reading a few of this year's theses would be a good idea too.

An e-mail pops up on my screen – Allison got 80% for her presentation, and tells me that it's her birthday as well, so she couldn't have had a better present. It's time to go home, and I think, as I always do, just how lucky I am to have a job that lets me eat chocolate, chat to attractive men, and get paid as well!