

The Future of Learning Resource Centres: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In 1999 the team working on the University's Information Strategy produced a report on Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) which proposed that there should be a central LRC (Frewen) with up to four satellite centres and 'strong co-ordination' between them. Portland, Goldsmith and Park Building were envisaged as the satellites in the first instance. It was acknowledged that much negotiation would be needed to satisfy local needs and that there were a number of key problems, especially management structures, funding and IT support. Since the report was published no progress has been made towards implementing the proposal and in the meantime circumstances have changed. Ivan Moore, the University's Director of Learning, was asked to take a fresh look at this problem and in response set up a working group to examine the issues and make some proposals. The group, which Ivan chairs, includes Deans of Humanities, Science and Environment, Director of ISO and Ian Mayfield of the Frewen Library. It may be worth pointing out to members of Technology and Business Faculties that their Deans are involved in another working party chaired by Ivan, looking at an e-learning strategy for the University; the two groups will work closely together, sharing information and trying to ensure that their deliberations are co-ordinated.

So what is the current situation?

* **The Frewen Library** is full. There is pressure to install more PC workstations but this cannot be done without losing seating and/or shelving. A rolling stack was installed during summer 2002 to accommodate a reserve store, and a continuous programme of weeding is in place. However, staff time and storage space and the need to consult constrain the amount of material which can be withdrawn over a given period. A Frewen Phase Three is not currently included in the University building programme.

* **The Goldsmith LRC**, at the Business School, will close with the move of the Business School to the Guildhall campus in 2004. There is no LRC space planned in the new building, with the exception of a small library for CEMARE, the Centre for the Economics & Management of Aquatic Resources. CEMARE stock is catalogued by the University Library but there are no Library staff on site. It is envisaged that Goldsmith stock not withdrawn will be transferred to Frewen but the move is likely to place increasing pressure on Portland.

* **The Portland LRC** was conceived as a Faculty of the Environment resource. It provides a traditional library space plus reprographics, a map library, a shop and student workstations. It is still largely financed by the Faculty; the printed collection is mostly bought and catalogued, but not staffed, by Frewen. The

library area is heavily used but understaffed, with one full and one part-time member of staff. Security of stock is a major problem. There is increasing use by students from other faculties and this will be exacerbated when the Business School moves to the adjacent site

* **The Park Building LRC** houses a resource centre which is used mainly by students from the Humanities and Science Faculties. It is essentially an IT suite, staffed by ISO, but there is also a substantial separate collection of audio and video tapes to support language learning, managed by SLAS. There is no Library involvement.

* **The Eldon Library**, housed in the Eldon building and supporting the School of Art, Design and Media, was not mentioned in the Information Strategy proposals. A traditional library which is fully managed by the University Library, it is better staffed than Portland but is less heavily used.

The group needs to identify an appropriate structure for the provision of learning resources for the medium term, following the move of the Business School to the main campus and the consequent closure of the Goldsmith LRC. A conclusion which was quickly reached is that Faculty-based LRCs on the Portland model are no longer appropriate. What is needed is to draw a distinction between specialised resources, provided by faculties and departments, and generic resources which should be provided centrally within what has been termed a 'Generic Learning Resources Network'. A major matter for consideration is whether the generic resources should be provided by a single central resource (Frewen, which would require enlargement) or a central site supported by one or two satellites (perhaps Portland and Park). Beyond IT facilities, what should the generic centres contain: printed materials (in Portland but largely not at Park); copy shops, academic support materials and staff, flexible learning areas for informal work, individually or in groups? How should they be managed, and by whom?

A preliminary survey of students has been undertaken in order to gather their views and this will be extended to take in a larger and more representative sample. Staff views have been sought initially via Deans (three of whom are of course group members) and Associate Deans (Curriculum). The consultation process will continue and readers are strongly urged to communicate any views on these issues to the author.

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STUDY SUCCESSES

Three members of library staff have recently celebrated successes with the Open University courses that they studied in 2002.

Ann Head completed 30 credits, on a level 2 Geology course. She will be embarking on a 10-credit 'Introducing Astronomy' course, this year. Ann says she wants to take it easier and "have a bit of a rest" this year. A planned trip to Chichester Planetarium should provide a good taster for her forthcoming studies.

Sian Kennedy has just finished the 60-credit, Level 3 course, 'The Nineteenth Century Novel'. She too will be having a break, to do other things with her spare time in 2003.

Becky Denyer completed two 30-credit, Level 2 History courses with the Open University, in 2002. These were 'Princes and Peoples: France and the British Isles, 1620-1714' and 'State, Economy and Nation in Nineteenth Century Europe'. Becky has decided to complete her degree here at Portsmouth by enrolling on the part-time BA Humanities course. She has been studying at Portsmouth since September and is about to complete units on 'Crime, Culture and Society in England, c.1750 - 1914' and 'Themes in Nineteenth century Europe: 1780-1850'. So far, she is enjoying her studies at Level 3, although she is looking forward to getting her current batch of essays out of the way so that she can do something else at the weekends for a change!

Paula Thompson is in the process of researching her MA History dissertation on Whitby Abbey; she would be very glad to receive any old photos or information about that fair Yorkshire seaport should anyone happen to have such things lying around!

Jennie McGinley has gained a European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and says that she thoroughly enjoyed the course. Of the linguists amongst us **David Francis** achieved a C grade in 'A'-Level German and **Janet Wilmot** gained an A* in GCSE Russian.

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OUR FRIENDS IN JENA

The University Library's link with Jena began in 1991. The British Council and the German Library Association were anxious to establish contacts between university libraries in this country and libraries in the former German Democratic Republic. Roger Macdonald, the Languages Librarian here at the time volunteered, and with two weeks notice found himself in Jena in the autumn of 1991.

Jena has a population of some 100,000, its economy resting on glass instrument manufacture (Carl Zeiss and Schott) and the University, founded in the middle of the sixteenth century, and with strong links with Goethe, Schiller, Haeckel (who coined the word 'ecology') and several other world-renowned scholars. The town sustained a good deal of bomb damage in the war (including the obliteration of the University Library in its last weeks), but a lot of interesting old buildings survived. A less attractive feature is a multi-storey circular tower built to celebrate the achievements of communism and which necessitated the destruction of several more valuable sites. The University occupies many buildings, old and new, in the centre of the town. When Roger first went there, the Library had over fifty separate service points in a variety of locations.

Roger went again in 1993 and 1995, with colleagues from Jena coming here in 1994 and 1996. In 1991, the two Germanys had been unified for only one year. Over the five years of his visits, Roger noticed hefty price rises and a vast increase in car ownership - this latter having two consequences, namely an enormous drop in the number of passengers carried by Jena's buses and trams and a correspondingly enormous parking problem. The new authority soon did something about this by investing in a long extension to the tram system. This has resulted in a great improvement - although the locals still grumble about the costs - a flat fare of 1.20 euros a journey by bus and/or tram with up to two changes - or a day ticket allowing unlimited travel for 3 euros. Monthly or annual season tickets are cheaper still. Where could one go by bus in Portsmouth for 80p?

A change in the pattern of visits took place in 1996 when I went to Jena for the first time. Whereas Roger spoke fluent German, I knew none*, but the Librarian there welcomed the opportunity this afforded his staff to attempt to speak English. Many of them had learned some English at school, but had never had the opportunity to speak it. An example of this was the member of staff who was the first point of contact for students with queries about English literature; she could read English quite adequately, but could hardly speak any.

The University Librarian was a scholar deeply involved in local history, a pursuit frowned

upon in GDR days when one was supposed to think in terms of the paradisiacal country as a whole. He had been deputy-librarian before the fall of communism. Before then, the Librarian had been a former senior police officer! This one would presumably have approved, at least officially, of the opening of a book in his stock about Shakespeare which began "*It is hard to write about the beauties of Shakespeare's language with the threat of NATO bombs hanging over us...*"

Another problem in the former GDR after the fall of communism was/is unemployment, and consequences this had on individuals' health insurance. I had to visit a doctor during the first visit and found that my E111, supposedly valid indefinitely, was not accepted because it was more than a year old. Now I get a new one whenever planning to travel to Europe. (But a reflection on the kindness of doctors the world over - knowing the problem, he treated me for free!)

A reciprocal visit from Jena took place in the spring of 1997, with me going again that autumn. In the summer of 1998, the agreement between the two institutions was formalised in a signing ceremony that took place in Frankfurt during the German Librarians' annual conference, with representatives of both libraries, including both University Librarians, and of the British Council present. Visitors from Jena came to Portsmouth later that year and again in 2000.

Then two things happened which understandably put the arrangements on hold, the retirement of the Librarian in Jena and his consequent replacement, and the construction of a new library building on the site of the one blitzed in the war. The new library, housing the humanities material, archives, rare books collection and bindery opened last December. It was pleasing to receive an invitation for two colleagues to visit this summer. I went once more to see what effect the new Librarian and the new Library have made on working arrangements, and Chris Martin from the Eldon Library to do some research for a book he is writing.

There had been a competition for the Library building, and it was satisfying to hear that the winning design, from a final short list of two, was the one preferred by the librarians on the judging panel. The academic staff and students also like it a lot. The building has some points in common with the Frewen Library - a lot of glass that sometimes makes it too hot (we were told that it is expected to take a year to get the internal environment right), and a lot of open internal space that sometimes causes noise problems. It is in the entrance foyer that glass makes its presence particularly felt. The whole sloping roof of this section is glass, as are two walkways linking staff and reader areas in the upper stores. A series of sculptures, entitled *Stable*

Knowledge, and consisting of waist-high stacks of square glass and metal slices each illuminated from within by a vertical strip light, starts outside the building and leads into this foyer. More traditionally, a romantic portrait of Goethe by Heinrich-Christoph Kolbe keeps watch inside the foyer.

Working arrangements and break times have been more carefully regulated. A good deal of flexi-operating was apparent during my earlier visits. Now work begins precisely at 7:30am (some staff preferred to start at 7:00am) with a strict 15 minutes for coffee or tea breaks, (I have pleasant memories of extravagant breakfasts with tablecloths, fresh coffee and a plenitude of filled rolls and biscuits - all behind closed office doors), and 30 minutes for lunch! There are small staff rooms on each floor, and a public canteen in the foyer area.

Chris's research is on the English painter Christopher Nevinson. It was known that Nevinson's father had spent some time in Jena in the 1880s. The University archives revealed that he had been permitted to attend lectures, without being formally registered, for a couple of semesters, and provided two addresses where he had lodged. One of these buildings is still standing and is still used for student accommodation.

The Germans are still very conscious of whether they are Wessies, from the former West Germany, or Ossies, from the former GDR. Two examples, from my experience: once, during a private visit, I found myself sitting next to an obviously prosperous Bavarian on a train from Munich (in the old West) to Berlin, crossing the former GDR en route. "*What were you doing in Jena?*" she asked. "*Visiting friends*", I replied. "*How can an Englishman possibly have friends in Jena...?*"

Or, again, the opinion of two friends, well-travelled by former GDR standards, is that they feel more at home in England than they do in the west of Germany; that is, they are still made to feel like foreigners there. We welcomed Herr Dr Uwe Glatz, a graduate trainee at Jena, to this library for the first two weeks in September, and Nicole Ackerman, a librarianship student from Leipzig was here for the whole of the first semester. Given the warmth of hospitality all the visitors from Portsmouth to Jena invariably receive, we can but do our best to reciprocate and ensure the Portsmouth-Jena friendships are extended and that our visitors continue to feel at home here.

*** David started German lessons after this, and got a grade C in A-level this summer - Editor.**

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A GERMAN STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE OF THE FREWEN LIBRARY

The editor of Harvest asked me to write an article on my impressions of the English library system. But all that I can do is to write about my experiences in the Frewen Library and add some facts comparing it to German libraries. This shouldn't be seen as a generalisation.

I am a student from Leipzig, Germany, studying Library and Information Science. During our fifth semester we are required to do a placement in a library, to experience all theoretical things we have learnt so far.

I have never worked in a library before. But I know of course some German libraries as a user. From this point of view I was quite surprised about the services of the Frewen Library. It's fantastic - introduction sessions, working papers, self guided tours, bibliographical information, lists with sources to different subjects etc. and not to forget the friendly staff. The idea of the floor teams is especially interesting. But to avoid

any misunderstanding: I don't say that we don't have any of these services in Germany, but I do say, I've never found such a complex service. This shows a high awareness of the most important things libraries are there for - the user.

The English library system seems to be more aware of all possible users than the German ones. Especially the many school libraries are an advantage in comparison with Germany. In my view English libraries are also some steps ahead considering the accessibility for disabled people. In the Frewen Library you have automatic doors, a toilet for wheelchair users, a lift, two contact persons and the new computer terminal for special needs. My faculty library at Leipzig for example has none of these things.

And there are more differences. Because of some stories I've heard of in Germany and some talks to colleagues here I got the impression that hierarchy (at work) in England isn't as important

as it is in Germany. I, myself noticed surprisingly that nobody at the Frewen Library made me feel that I was only a trainee. That makes it indeed attractive to work here.

But everywhere, as good as whatever, there is always something to improve. Because of being sensitised to the theme of guiding and signing by one of my lecturers, I looked closely around the Frewen Library. And I found some problems! But they don't need to hide themselves. This subject is a problem in many buildings and staff in the Frewen Library are aware of this theme. That's the first step to improving something.

Altogether I enjoyed working at the Frewen Library. I hope to find such a library after I've got my degree.

By: Nicole Ackermann, Library Trainee from Leipzig University, September 2002 - February 2003.

Editor's note: Although she is studying in Leipzig, Nicole was born in Halle, the birthplace of George Frederick Handel. It has been a great pleasure to have Nicole working with us and she has participated fully in the working and social life of the Library. I'm sure that all her friends in the Frewen join me in wishing her the very best in her chosen career.

Library Services for a Diverse Student Population - the Library Staff Awayday, December 2002

It's not often that all your Library staff have the opportunity to go away together to 'talk shop' - in fact, the last time was three years ago - but the University Library was closed on Friday 20th December to allow just this. We went away (well as far as Portland Building) for the day to look at 'Skills and services for a diverse population'. The aim of the day was to raise awareness amongst all staff about future changes in the student population and also to look at how library services could continue to change and so better meet the needs of this changing population. We also wanted to look at the skills library staff would need to make these changes successfully. It was a rare opportunity to engage a wide cross section of staff at the same time in planning for the future and we were very pleased that 50+ members of library staff contributed to the day (including some of our student shelvers and student IT assistants).

The background was set for us by Angela Glasner who outlined the national scene in a series of graphs and charts illustrating trends over the last few decades based on HEFCE analysis, these were then contrasted with our local circumstances. A look at what we need to do as an institution to support our diverse students set us up for the first group work session where staff discussed what we could do to develop/improve services in the areas of disability, widening participation, distance learning, increased student numbers, international students and postgraduate / research students.

Our second speaker was Professor Andrew McDonald - Director of Information Services

at the University of Sunderland - who some may remember from the University Learning and Teaching Conference last year. Professor McDonald highlighted some of the services developed at Sunderland (generally considered to be an innovative library service) and it was good to see that many are features of our service here at Portsmouth, and also that the group work beforehand had identified a number of similar themes. There were however some areas where we could see a definite need for development and these will be looked at in the future.

A second round of group work after lunch (which included Christmas crackers, we librarians really know how to enjoy ourselves!) looked at the skills needed for development of new services. This was a tougher brief in many ways than the first group work session as we had to identify often very 'soft' skills. A prioritising exercise followed to produce a visual indicator of where staff feel our priorities should lie. Linda Amor from Personnel had been with us for the day attending a number of groups and had the unenviable task (very ably achieved) of collating, organising thematically and feeding back on the skills identification process.

The day ended with a summary by Ian Bonar of how he saw Library strategy developing over the next three years and an undertaking to include what had come out of the awayday in future service planning. And with that we started our Christmas break.

By: Roisin Gwyer, Associate University Librarian - Ext.3221 / roisin.gwyer@port.ac.uk

Bon Voyage FIONA!

Not only are we saying 'Auf Wiedersehen' to Nicole Ackermann, but we are also saying 'Bon Voyage' to Fiona Martin who has provided cover for Anne Worden whilst she has been on maternity leave. David Francis writes...

Anne Worden will be returning from maternity leave soon, which means we also have to say good-bye to her temporary replacement, Fiona Martin. We first met longer ago than either of us would care to remember - it's long enough ago that neither of us recall the precise occasion - but no doubt we did meet when Fiona studied for her first degree here. She coped with me (and more especially Roger Macdonald) then, and in the last few months she has again coped heroically with me and assorted other colleagues, as well as (much more heroically) with the School of Languages' lack of library money, their demanding study skills programmes and their students' often eccentric involvement with these - all this against a background of the vagaries of the railway system in the Clapham Junction area. Fiona's access to delicious biscuits has proved an additional bonus. So to Fiona too, our thanks for everything, and very best wishes for the future.

FROM PORTIA TO PORTAL?

Empowering Users of Electronic Information Resources

Do you feel confident that you are fully aware of the electronic resources made available in your subject area by the University Library? What about your students: to what extent do their information-gathering activities reflect the learning objectives you set? Recent research shows that the electronic resources most frequently used by both undergraduate and postgraduate students are Internet search engines (Armstrong et.al., 2001). Locally provided electronic information services (EIS) come much lower down the list and those provided nationally by the Joint Information Services Committee (JISC) come lower still. Is there any point in our spending large sums of money on databases and electronic journals? Is it a matter for concern that Google is the first and often the only recourse for many of our students? If so, what can we do about it?

Let's start by thinking about why people - yes, librarians often included - go to Google first. Hard information is more difficult to come by here, but it isn't hard to guess: Google is familiar, it's easy, and more often than not it will find you something on your chosen topic. Something is better than nothing, and sometimes the something found by your Google search is enough - even if the vast range of scholarly information is not touched by search engines.

Now let's turn the question round and look at the reasons why other resources are less used. It seems reasonable to suggest that the key factors are the inverse of the Google case, i.e. unfamiliarity and complexity. More particularly,

- Not only students but also many academic staff feel a lack of confidence that they are aware of all the relevant resources, let alone familiar with their workings and confident in their use
- A wide variety of EIS are available including library catalogues, bibliographic, full-text and numerical databases, e-books and e-journals, archives, images and web sites
- There is a variety of access routes including the Portia web site, the Library catalogue, subject gateways, journal 'aggregators' or direct to individual resources
- The wide variety of authentication systems in use represents a barrier to use
- Neither the search engine on the Portia web site nor the Library catalogue search WITHIN resources such as e-journals and databases; both search only the available information ABOUT resources and not their content
- There is a wide variety of search platforms, making it difficult for users to search effectively across a number of sources
- Search results are not related to local availability: result lists may include materials not easily available

- Since information about availability is missing or unreliable, users may select an inappropriate route to procuring material or may even pay for something which would be available free via a different route

Part of the solution to this problem would seem to lie in the area of information skills: as a library service we need to redouble our efforts to develop appropriate levels of awareness and skill in our students. The effectiveness of this effort will depend on how well what we do is in tune with the learning objectives determined by academic staff: we need a better dialogue about what is expected of students in a changing higher education environment - widening participation and all that - and how we can best help them to achieve it. This is a subject to which I will return in a later issue of Harvest. For now, I'd like to consider the other key element in any potential solution: that is, making the EIS easier to use and more closely related to students' other learning activities.

You may have heard the expression 'the Googleisation of higher education' - and indeed the route to simplification would seem to be to make it possible, as in Google, to search everything at once and present the results in a clear fashion. Expressed in more detail, the elements of an improved EIS might include:

- * A search facility which enabled simultaneous searching of a range of sources of varying types and across different platforms, and searching within the content of databases and e-journal sites
- A 'portal' facility giving students their own work space in which they, their tutors or subject librarians could identify key resources in relation to their courses, and in which individual profiles/result sets could be saved
- Single login enabling access to all resources including different commercial sites
- Links to and from wider university portals, departmental sites and WebCT enabling users to access the information portal via a number of routes
- Result displays clearly showing the nature and availability of material retrieved, containing links to full text where available and signposts to locations of print copies, interlibrary loan and document delivery service etc.

This specification is far from being totally unrealistic. The creation of such an environment, or 'portal', is a dominant issue in academic librarianship at present. A number of products exist which deliver all or some of these solutions and companies are falling over themselves not to be left behind in the race to deliver library portal environments. Some academic libraries have

already bought into such products. Here at Portsmouth we have looked closely at a number of them but for the moment are maintaining a watching brief. This does not indicate lack of commitment, rather an awareness of the wider University context. A lot is going on at the moment and we need to ensure that whatever we put in place sits comfortably with the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), with any future managed learning environment (MLE) and with other institutional infrastructures. Amongst the factors guiding our thinking are the following:

- The software which currently underpins the Subject Directory in our Portia web site is no longer supported and will need to be replaced
- We need to re-think the browse structure in Portia, perhaps reorganising it around the University's academic structure (departments or courses) rather than the broad subject headings currently used
- We need to monitor the situation as the University considers the issue of its institutional VLE and to have a dialogue with the e-learning community about the most appropriate ways to embed EIS into e-learning materials
- It is uncertain as yet whether the University will opt to set up an MLE (an extension of the VLE which integrates student records and other administrative systems), a campus-wide portal or both. If so, it will be necessary to consider how the information portal will relate to this, both conceptually and technically.
- The University has recently selected a Content Management System for its external Web site. We need to evaluate this with regard to how far it will move us towards the specification outlined above
- The provider of the University's Library system, TALIS, is amongst those currently working on a portal-like environment. We need to evaluate this before investing in any third-party products

Above all, we need to inform the University community about how we intend to develop the EIS for their benefit, and to secure support for the funding that will be necessary. It is hoped that this article will contribute to that process. Please send any comments or questions to the author.

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Reference: Armstrong C. et.al. (2001). A study of the use of electronic information systems by higher education students in the UK students. Program, 35(3), 241-262.