LEARNING ON THE JOB, TEACHING ON THE JOB: CPDWL AND A NEW QUALIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH INFORMATION-LITERATE LIBRARIAN

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OVERVIEW

This presentation was originally very wide-ranging. It has been cut down in size and shape and now reflects some significant current literature and the results of a small informal study carried out in order to

- identify requirements for “research information-literate” librarians, particularly in South Africa;
- identify a new unique focus for research librarian practice; and
- propose content and method for a research librarian qualification, or formal means of high level specialist recognition, through a hybrid post-basic modular curriculum incorporating Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning as well as underpinning theoretical academic study and knowledge relevant to the academic research domain.

It is contended that only by such study and by learning on the job can research librarians become “research information-literate” and deliver high level research information literacy from such a personal professional base.
OVERVIEW (ctd)

The almost serendipitous discovery of two major reports\(^1\) while doing the groundwork for this paper, and an article\(^2\) from a colleague only a few weeks ago, have been central to changing the original direction (acquiring advanced subject librarianship skills) planned for this paper.

These three studies show that, in contrast to some earlier major futures studies\(^3\), great value is now being placed on the bibliometric and related expertise of academic/research librarians in the research assessment process (institutionally, nationally and internationally) and on relationships formed with researchers and research entities, to the extent that these elements of practice seemed to highlight a new identity for research librarians within their parent institutions as well as libraries.

Higher levels of research information literacy are implicit in these areas of best practice.

\(^1\) OCLC/Key Perspectives 2009; Lewis et al 2011
\(^2\) Drummond & Artho 2009
\(^3\) Walker, Clare M. (2009). Pathways to new academic library practices: a South African exploration towards 21\(^{st}\) century academic research support.
EARLY HINTS OF NEW ROLES

From CDROM citation searches 20 years ago to present day Research Analysis tools (e.g. Elsevier’s SciVal and Thomson Reuters’ InCites), developments in technology push new service environments and new individual and institutional research partnerships, for which new skills are constantly required.
... Changes in the library environment, such as technological innovations and legal limitations on the use of information, will continue to offer opportunities for research librarians to gain and apply new knowledge. At the same time, the expertise that librarians have developed in organizing, providing access to, and preserving information will become more important than ever.

The research librarian of the future will have more opportunities to support learning, enhance teaching, and improve research, providing services to the users of today as well as anticipating the needs of the users of tomorrow.

ASERL Competencies, 2000
Changing institutional role of research libraries and the academic research librarian reflected in


2. RIMS: the Research Impact Measurement Service at the University of New South Wales (Drummond & Wartho, 2009, in Australian Academic & Research Libraries, 40 (2): 76-87);


“... librarians have the skills and experience that enable them to make valuable contributions to their institutions, helping to facilitate institutional responses to the requirements of national and internal research assessment systems.” (p. 12).

“The library is also perceived to be unique in that it is involved with all parts of the information life cycle, from helping researchers to source the information they need to providing advice on bibliometrics ... expertise in data management planning and, ultimately, digital data curation” (p. 47).
Additional research librarian skills that contribute to the research assessment process include:

- managing Institutional Repositories;
- bibliometric expertise;
- ability to find or acquire information necessary for research assessment submissions;
- understanding of metadata;
- expertise in cataloguing and curation, especially digital curation.

These skills, valuable in their own right, also contribute to assembling and managing the information required for research assessment (OCLC/Key Perspectives, 2009, p. 15).

They are skills that must mostly be acquired on the job, by continuing professional development (CPD) in many forms, rather than by advanced academic study.
2. **RIMS: the Research Impact Measurement Service at the University of New South Wales (Drummond & Wartho, 2009)**

In Australia, the Library at the University of New South Wales in 2005 “began a comprehensive restructuring, process that fundamentally changed the provision of services to its academic community. This led to the development of a Research Impact Measurement Service (RIMS) using bibliometrics. “RIMS is now integral to the measurement of research outputs at UNSW, and has significantly raised the profile of the Library throughout the academic community” (p.76).

Renewed emphasis on research at the University of New South Wales, together with the restructuring of the University Library has provided the opportunity to support the academic community in innovative ways. The new flexible information service structure at the UNSW Library is “very well-placed to respond to the changing academic environment and to further incorporate support for research in the general strategic direction” (p.85).

This major research project recently undertaken in Australia has used an evidence-based approach to determine the future skills requirements of Australian health librarians.

- The Australian research team now plans to develop a structured, modular education framework to meet these skills requirements.

- Today’s presentation proposes a South African approach as a potential solution to an area of critical skills need in our profession.
Engagement with institutional and national research assessment processes should be the driving force for librarians to acquire and apply those higher level skills and knowledge that would define the core nature of the Research Librarian, and distinguish this area of practice from advanced subject librarianship alone.
INFORMATION LITERACY AND THE RESEARCH LIBRARIAN

Information literacy has traditionally focused on the application of ever more sophisticated library ICT tools in the academic endeavour, and the effective use of library resources to develop “critical thinking” skills.

As Harrington\(^1\) has suggested “... change in the physical and virtual presence of a research librarian will prove to enhance the level of information literacy knowledge of research-intensive graduate students” (p. 188).

The **2011 SCONUL Seven pillars of information literacy: research lens**¹ core model describes a set of generic skills and understandings. For the *Research Lens* these attributes have been developed and expanded to include aspects of specific relevance to the research community ranging from the emerging to the mature experienced researcher.

For delivering information literacy rooted in framework structures with models such as the *Seven Pillars* and the Vitae *Researcher Development Framework* (2010) the critical nature of research librarian advanced skills and understanding is self-evident.

The “Seven Pillars” are outlined in the following slide.

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SCONUL 2011 *Seven pillars of information literacy: research lens*

- A researcher is able to IDENTIFY a need for information to address the research question;
- SCOPE: Researchers can assess their current knowledge and identify gaps;
- PLAN: A researcher can construct strategies for locating information and data;
- GATHER: Researchers can locate and access the information and data they need;
- A researcher can review the research process and compare and EVALUATE information and data;
- MANAGE: A researcher can organise information professionally and ethically;
- Researchers can apply the knowledge gained: PRESENTING the results of their research, synthesising new and old information and data to create new knowledge, disseminating it in a variety of ways *(SCONUL 2011 pp.5-11)*
The expansion of the “seven pillars” in the SCONUL text (pp5-11) makes clear the extensive skills and knowledge required by the research librarian, who cannot deliver information literacy at this advanced level without deep personal and professional understanding of the experienced researcher in the research environment and the constituent elements of the research publishing and assessment processes (Lewis et al, 2011, pp. 67-68).

The implementation of the contents of the SCONUL pillars leads, at the most advanced level of researcher, to the development of a relationship of individual referral and consultation – a triangular process in a developmental learning/teaching relationship between the research librarian and individual researchers and institutional research managers.
The South African academic research environment

Only a few South African “research universities” realistically compete for ranking in the top five or six South African places in the annual global university “league tables”, where research performance is a determining factor (Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2011-2012; QS World University Rankings®, 2011/2012).

Individual and institutional research output in South Africa is managed within an accredited and assessed national research and publishing environment created by the National Research Foundation (NRF), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

Viewed together, the web sites of these national bodies show the holistic national developmental vision for, and products to support, research productivity, quality and capacity development in South Africa.
The South African academic research environment (2)

- A **researcher ratings programme** is managed by the NRF.
- An **incentive policy in the form of a subsidy** for accredited research publishing is administered through the DHET.
- ASSAf has produced a report on research publishing, has a *Scholarly publishing programme*. ASSAf specifically **supports Open Access** through the Brazilian-linked SciELO programme (ASSAf, 2011).

University research offices or similar units manage these programmes institutionally. Many academic libraries have taken the initiative to develop and promote institutional repositories (IRs) for open access to research outputs from the academic research community.
How do South African librarians get “there” from “here”?

- Some may be born great but many struggle to acquire the mix of new skills and knowledge. In general, academic research librarians acquire skills on the job in a largely opportunistic, unsystematic and personally initiated approach, though this is usually institutionally supported at the point of delivery.

- Librarians are also increasingly engaged in Masters and doctoral level studies, frequently in very intellectual and theoretical fields that on the surface have little immediate application to the practical environment, so that study may take place in a “silo”.

- Where, how and to what extent academic librarians in South Africa might acquire, develop and hone the knowledge, skills and institutional relationships described above, particularly through structured CPD and high level Workplace Learning (CPDWL), is the focus of the remainder of this presentation.

- Point of departure for thinking about “research librarians” in South Africa and the roles they should play in their research institutions. CCNY RLC described in detail elsewhere (see printed paper);

- In brief, the aim of the project has been to improve research skills and subject domain knowledge of librarians and build a platform for high level library support of academic research, both for emerging researchers and for experienced academics. Initially three university libraries were selected for the project and, in phase 2, an additional three. All six libraries were from top ranked South African research universities.

- Kaniki from the South African NRF, addressing the first RLC academy in 2007, highlighted new areas in the research environment in South Africa in which research librarians (and most specifically the RLC project participants) should become informed and proactively engaged.

- These closely match the role of research librarians described in the major 2009-2011 reports referred to above, in contributing to the research assessment process.
An informal survey on development of South African research librarians

- to track informally the post-CCNY RLC Academy impact on the development of “research librarians” (a formal survey already carried out by Darch and De Jager in 2011).
- Emails sent individually to each of five directors, all personally well known to the presenter, from the six RLC university libraries;
- explicitly described as a “personal conversation, NOT a survey” and the responses, received from all five, similarly conversational and narrative in style;
- as a result, tabulation and summarising of the responses presented in edited narrative rather than tabulated format.
The six libraries are referred to in the printed paper as UL1, UL2, UL3, UL4, UL5, and UL6 in no significant order, to give identity but retain anonymity in a very small academic library circle.

Q.1 How do professional subject librarians in your library build and expand their subject knowledge as well as their technical skills? Are they expected to do so, as part of their performance management goals, particularly as South African librarians come equipped with relatively “thin” subject knowledge at the postgraduate/faculty level?
Q.2 Do librarians in your library have a **structured relationship with the university research office**, or **research administration** in faculties and schools, or **graduate research support programmes** through which they (librarians) provide support in training and preparation for publication, NRF ratings, personal promotion etc.? How do they gain the confidence of academic researchers and higher degree supervisors?
Q.3a Are there any systematic concentrated specialist library/information staff development programmes planned or already in place at your library, by means of which this kind of professional and specialist self-development – in-house staff development programmes of various kinds – could be made available?

Q.3b If so, how does the library accommodate higher level staff development within working hours ... Does self-development carry a performance reward? And are there alternative kinds of development for different levels of staff? Are any or many such programmes currently in place, recognising that they take up workplace time and possibly personal time, even if this seems slight (e.g. lunch hour lectures, after hours online seminars in USA time zones, etc.) and is any system of in-house credits in place to serve as incentive?
Q.4a Should we be looking at a completely new kind of higher level staff development, an advanced specialist, possibly modular, qualification certificated through portfolio work in the workplace as well as being underpinned by theoretical knowledge, on the lines of the pre-graduate National Certificate (Level 5) unit Standards and Qualifications registered for LIS that were created within the SAQA NQF framework (South African Qualifications Authority, n.d., National Certificate). Since that time a Higher Education Qualifications Framework has as you know been put in place and a specific postgraduate diploma qualification level 8 between Honours and Masters is part of the structure (South Africa. DHET. 2007, p. 26)

Q.4b If the academic library sector could contribute to the purely hypothetical development of such a practice-based qualification, what would you like to see incorporated in it? I see our research librarians now having to know a great deal about new style bibliometrics, research management tools, datasets and similar concepts and tools that have only emerged in relatively recent years.
• Subject knowledge (UL2);
• Research methodology; engaging in research in field of personal expertise (UL2);
• Writing and publishing (UL2);
• Specialised advanced areas of professional expertise, e.g. bibliometrics, research management tools (UL1, UL3, UL5);
• Research practices: work within schools, faculties with researcher willing to share research methodologies (UL3);
• Research management: research performance evaluation, peer review process (UL3);
• Datasets and data management plans (UL3);
• Innovative services using technology (UL5);
• Relationships management in research sector (UL4);
• Higher education and research environment in South Africa and other countries; national imperatives; research-led university (UL3, UL4).
An advanced specialist qualification for research librarians in South Africa

- Workshops, seminars, short courses and specialist conferences all have their place, but
- ultimately depend upon internalization and willingness to change in order to succeed:
- survey input from library directors has shown this is not always the case in practice.
- A specialist advanced qualification is one way to affirm a professional identity for research librarian practice;
- if CPD contents were embedded in a broad modular framework together with formal theoretical study, this formalised approach could deliver the body of knowledge and skill reflected in a generic research librarian profile incorporating the range and depth of the new roles (shown in the literature and described in outline above) to be required of research librarians globally, and in particular for support of the quite structured national research environment in South Africa.

Question Four in the survey of leading South African academic libraries engaged in the Carnegie-funded project to develop librarians to such a level, received positive responses to this proposal.
WHAT SCOPE?

- **Subject knowledge**: on-the-job learning in association with academic researchers and research programmes. Isolated examples of these include “Boot camp: science immersion for research librarians” ; “Professional development days”; a strong focus on the research environment, research assessment processes; and on subject specific conferences;

- **practical CDPWL elements**, that include advanced specialist events;

- **advanced technological skills and tools** including bibliometrics, dataset management, digital curation; keeping updated through intensive training presentations and short courses or workshops as part of advanced “research information-literacy”;

- **academic study and writing for publication**, incorporating specialist professional elective contents with subject discipline-based elements in mentored personal professional research writing and publishing;

- **in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research environment** and the world of research publishing;

- **Institutional Repository (IR) management**; IRs provide online Open Access retrieval of institutional research output and are part of the research publishing environment; IR/OA promotion needed among sometimes reluctant researchers Research librarians manage IRs;

- **relationship-building** with research managers and research units as well as academic researchers themselves; librarians, however senior and expert, are not routinely recognised as professional peers.
WHAT STRUCTURE & FRAMEWORK?

- Not purely academic; should this be offered through academic LIS schools? Questions raised regarding required prior qualifications;
- Could be located within the South African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) with a modular and flexible structure strongly linked to CPDWL deliverables at an advanced level;
- Agreement on development, positioning, content and delivery would be negotiated nationally. HEQF has incorporated a Level 8 Postgraduate Diploma, a qualification shown in other fields to accommodate professional evidence or practice-based specialisation rather than purely academic study;
- Would need to be tested with LIS schools, academic and research institutional libraries and the South African Library and Information Association LIASA;
- Work in progress reported by Lewis et al (2011), proposing a modular qualification for Australian health information professionals, provides a stimulating model for a similar South African development.
IN CONCLUSION...

To borrow Jane Austen’s famous opening words in _Pride and Prejudice_, “it is a truth universally acknowledged” by our profession that a competent librarian can become a knowledgeable and skilful subject librarian in almost any discipline -- but

- may no longer by virtue of that alone necessarily become a research librarian.

- Similarly, the technical skills to exploit databases and complex information resources can be applied at many levels but in themselves do not define a research librarian.

- It is the **holistic** understanding, relationship-building and expertise that a research librarian can bring to the environment of research assessment that has been suggested here as most likely to evoke well-founded confidence and trust for professional support in the increasingly cut throat world of academic research.
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What I have done with their input is my responsibility alone; I hope it will prove a fruitful seedbed of ideas for the future.
-- THANK YOU --

Your further comment and input is invited...

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