Conference or Workshop Item

Title: Librarians as researchers: why bother?

Creators: Pickton, M.


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http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/4570/
Librarians as researchers

Why bother?

Miggie Pickton

DARTS 3

Discover Academic Research Training and Support Conference

28th-29th June 2012
Outline

• What do we mean by research?
• Why bother with practitioner research?
• What are the barriers to practitioner research?
• Overcoming the barriers
• Developing a research culture at the University of Northampton
  – Research Summer School
  – The LLS research conference
  – Impact
What do we mean by ‘research’?

‘Academic’ research

- Problem solving or curiosity driven - purpose is to create new knowledge (or confirm existing knowledge)
- Grounded in disciplinary context (literature, theory, methodology, interpretation)
- Produce outputs of publishable quality
- Audience: other scholars, policy makers, practitioners
- Make an ‘impact’ (REF)

‘Practitioner’ research

- Focused on current problem or need
- Pragmatic approach to theory and methodology – often investigative or evaluative
- Results inform practice – support decision-making for immediate benefit
- Dissemination often a secondary consideration
Why should we do practitioner research?

- What are the benefits:
  - To the individual?
  - To the organisation?
  - To the profession?
Benefits to the individual

• Interesting – opportunity to explore something in more depth, learn something new, satisfy curiosity
• Challenging – develop new skills, stretch yourself
• Variety – a change from routine, opportunity to do something different, work with new people
• Increase job satisfaction
• Support professional development
• Enhance personal reputation
• Improve career prospects
• ...
Benefits to the service or organisation

• Gather evidence of value / demonstrate impact
• Engage with users:
  – Understand their perspective
  – Show interest in their needs
  – Do what they do (library as ‘academic department’)
• Support decision-making
• Improve service / solve problems
• Increase staff motivation
• Achieve recognition (within and beyond the institution)
• ...
Benefits to the profession

- A means of furthering professional excellence (CILIP, n.d.)
- Create new knowledge
- Provide an evidence base for practice
- Provoke conversation and debate
- Instigate positive change
- Enhance reputation
- Develop an engaged and vibrant professional community
- ...

CILIP (n.d.) A CILIP policy for information and library research
What are the barriers to doing research?

- Consider the likely barriers to research in your library:
  - What are they?
  - How can they be overcome?
  - Whose support is needed for this to happen?
Barriers to practitioner research

- Lack of research skills / experience
- Lack of confidence in ability to do research
- Don’t know what to research / where to start
- Insufficient resources
- Insufficient time
- Lack of support from managers / colleagues
- Cannot see the benefit
Overcoming the barriers – skills

- Training and skills development - research seminars, workshops (provided internally or externally; either generic or specific to LIS research) – put together your own if nothing suitable exists

- Collaborate with partners (e.g. academic staff; colleagues from other support departments; professional colleagues from other institutions – anyone with whom you have shared goals)
  - Build a team with complementary skills
  - Take advantage of others’ expertise

- Mentoring / buddying – share experience, learn together
Overcoming the barriers – resources

• Time:
  – Choose a topic that complements / supports / informs your day job
  – Choose a project that leads to service efficiencies later
  – Combine a research project with other professional development (e.g. Chartership, PGCTHE)
  – Share the workload with a research partner

• Funding:
  – Many practitioner research projects are relatively low cost
  – Submit a bid for funding - externally (e.g. HEA, JISC, LIRG) or internally (e.g. University research or L&T awards)
Overcoming the barriers – generating ideas

You may already have a pressing need, but if not:

- Evaluate service performance e.g. are current services for researchers meeting identified researcher needs?
- Identify gaps in service provision and recommend measures for filling these e.g. could more be done to support international students?
- Measure impact/effectiveness e.g. of a new approach to information literacy teaching
- Investigate potential new services e.g. use of mobile technologies for alerting or accessing resources
- Identify good practice elsewhere and introduce it to your own workplace e.g. advocacy for the institutional repository
Overcoming the barriers - gaining support

• Make the case – persuade others (line manager, colleagues, potential research partners) of the value of your work:
  – How does it support departmental/organisational priorities and strategy?
  – How will it benefit the individual and the service?
  – What is the cost of not doing the research?

• Produce a formal research proposal, with costs and deliverables (courses and guidance are available e.g. Eve, 2008)
Developing a research culture at Northampton – top down

- Research activity supported and encouraged by senior managers
  - Included as an objective in PDRs - senior staff expected to bid for funding, conduct research projects, present at conferences, publish etc
  - Team leaders allow staff to participate in research activity
  - Some financial support available (e.g. for participant incentives, refreshments at focus groups)
  - Recognised and rewarded through funding to present at conferences, departmental notices etc

- Cross departmental and collaborative projects especially welcomed
Developing a research culture at Northampton – bottom up

- Individuals encouraged to follow up own ideas for projects (with proviso that it will inform their practice)

- Initial impetus sometimes comes from other professional development e.g. PGCTHE

- Research and Enterprise Committee – a forum for dissemination and discussion of research activity

- Peer example and support – from own teams and Research Support Team; first projects often done in pairs

- Research training arranged in response to staff requests – e.g. LIRG ‘Writing research proposals’ workshops, occasional workshops and Research Summer School
Research Summer School – June 2011

- Two days of research related training with sessions on:
  - Defining the research question
  - Winning support for the research
  - Research methodology
  - Qualitative and quantitative methods
  - Disseminating the research

- Tailored to needs of library staff – emphasis on choices involved (e.g. Which data collection method is most appropriate? Which form of dissemination will result in most impact?)

- Speakers included library staff, UoN academic and support staff and one external speaker
LLS Conference – June 2012

• Purpose:
  – To share research findings with LLS colleagues
  – To promote ‘librarian as researcher’ to academic colleagues
  – To showcase the work of the department to professional colleagues
  – To celebrate our research successes

• Supported by professionally designed publicity materials and a conference blog

• First ever practitioner research conference (for us, for the sector?)
LLS Conference – on the day

- Introductions from the Vice Chancellor (on video), Head of Library and Learning Services (LLS) and external speaker
- Four **types of presentation**: research papers (6), work in progress (2), posters (12) and ‘minute madness’ (12)
- Banners and posters emphasised range of LLS research outputs and professional contributions
- Presenters represented all parts of LLS
- Event supported by a large team of LLS volunteers
LLS Conference - impact

- Attended by 36 LLS staff, 27 academic and support staff from UoN and 23 librarians from across the UK (Yorkshire, Kent, Dublin ...) – many more than the 30 originally hoped for!

- Hugely successful:
  - Feedback overwhelmingly positive from all audiences
  - Tremendous ‘buzz’ on the day translated into huge amount of pride among LLS staff and enthusiasm for new research activity
  - Large number of hits on conference blog
  - Invitation for conference blog to archived in UKWA
LLS research - impact

• ‘Scaffolded’ approach to teaching information skills – widespread interest from other universities; approach adopted elsewhere at UoN

• Reading lists – huge interest at LLS conference, VC now involved

• Learning spaces – informed refurbishment of library; library staff now recognised as knowledgeable in this area

• Research data – results underpinned institutional research data policy and subsequent RDM activity

• Mobile apps – colleague left yesterday for an exciting new job with Blackboard 😞

• Delivery of maths tutorials online – project demonstrated that these were not popular so not worth pursuing
Questions?

Miggie Pickton
Research Support Librarian
miggie.pickton@northampton.ac.uk