THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

Conference or Workshop Item

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Librarians as researchers

Why bother?

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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)

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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?)

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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), poster s(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
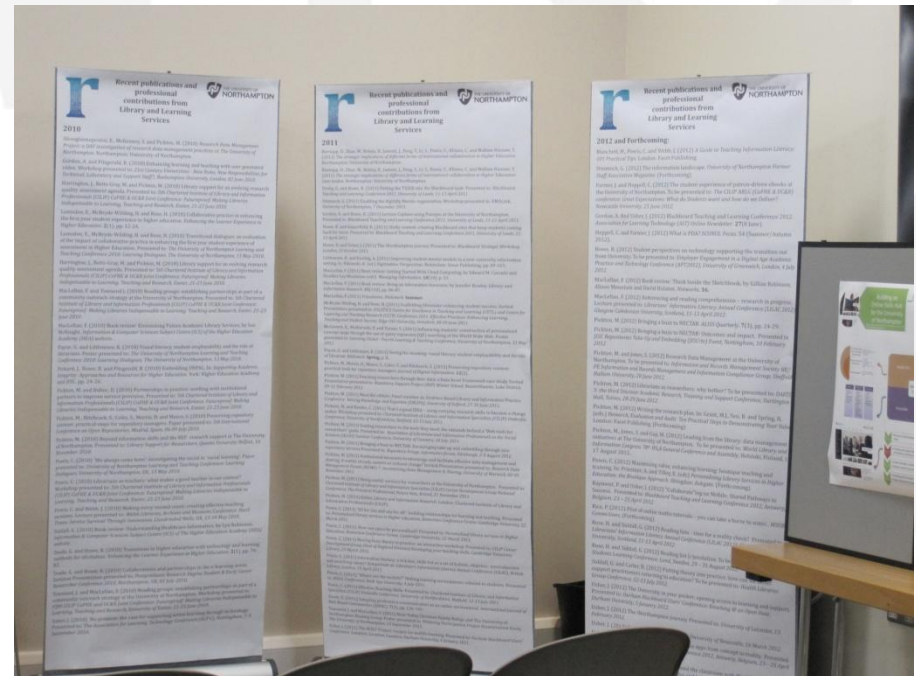
LLS Conference - impact

- 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?

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