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Facilitating a research culture in an academic library: top down and bottom up approaches

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Structured abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to consider why and how a research culture might be established in an academic library and to describe and evaluate efforts to achieve this at the University of Northampton.

Design/methodology/approach

Contextualised within current literature on this topic, the paper examines the top down and bottom up approaches taken to facilitate practitioner research in one academic library.

Findings

The approaches taken have led to a significant increase in practitioner research activity from library staff, resulting in a variety of enhancements to library services; a number of innovative practices being shared with the professional community through conference presentations and publications; and consequent rise in profile and reputation for individuals, the Department and the University.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable)

Not applicable.

Practical implications (if applicable)

The paper offers a wide range of ideas and practical suggestions for encouraging and facilitating practitioner research in an academic library. These include incorporating research activity into job descriptions and annual performance reviews; facilitating peer support for research; and providing competitive research awards, research training opportunities and funding for staff presenting at external events. Many of these require relatively little resource yet offer significant benefit to those involved.

Social implications (if applicable)

Not applicable.

Originality/value

It is rare, and maybe unique in the UK, for an academic library to attempt to instil a research culture throughout its staff and to provide ongoing resources, activities and practical support for

this. The many positive outcomes from this work demonstrate its success and value. The experiences described in this paper are transferable to other academic and research libraries and, if replicated, have the potential to increase librarians' engagement in research activity, promote research informed practice, and stimulate interest in library and information research across the sector.

Keywords

Practitioner research, research culture, academic libraries, librarianship, evidence based practice, research informed practice, University of Northampton, UK

Paper type

Case study

Literature review

It is the premise of this paper that practitioner research provides the evidence to improve services and that the likelihood of it occurring will be increased if a strong organisational research culture exists.

Library Associations internationally recognise research skills as a key competency for a professional librarian (American Library Association 2009, 4; Australian Library and Information Association 2014, 5; Canadian Association of Research Libraries 2010, 9; Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals 2014a). Practitioner research enables librarians to practice and develop this competency.

Benefits of practitioner research

Watson-Boone identifies three types of 'practitioner researcher': the first undertakes research as part of their continuing or formal education; the second carries out projects to inform service decisions and the third conducts practice-oriented research to satisfy their own curiosity (Watson-Boone 2000, 85). Aligned to the second of these, Wilson suggests that "practitioner researchers largely conduct research to inform their own practice and to make decisions around practice issues" (Wilson 2013, 112). Her view is that the practitioner researcher works on the inside: observing, reflecting and attempting to understand practice so that things may be improved.

Many authors have articulated the reasons why library practitioners should engage in research activity, generally agreeing that a vibrant research culture delivers benefits to the profession, the organisation and the individual.

Research is needed to advance the **profession**: to use and contribute to the professional knowledge base; to sustain the profession's reputation for knowledge discovery and innovation; to demonstrate professional value and impact; and, by means of a scholarly approach, to raise the

profile of Library and Information Science (LIS) as a discipline (Aytac and Slutsky 2014, 147; Bhatti and Chohan 2012, 1; Hall 2010, 85; McNicol and Dalton 2004, 174; Swanepoel 2006, 1).

For the **organisation**, research activity generates evidence that may be used to inform, improve and refine services; support benchmarking; assist planning; enhance engagement with service users; support marketing activity and raise the library's profile (Clapton 2010, 9-10; Hall 2010, 84; Luo and McKinney 2015, 124; McNicol 2004a, 120-122; McNicol 2004b 37; McNicol and Dalton 2004, 173).

For **individuals**, the benefits are far-reaching. Engagement in research may lead to new knowledge and skills; satisfy intellectual curiosity; bring professional recognition (from their professional association, academic and professional colleagues and service users); support career advancement; and enhance job satisfaction. (Aytac and Slutsky 2014, 147; Clapton 2010, 10; Luo and McKinney 2015, 124; McNicol and Dalton 2004, 174; Montanelli and Stenstrom 1986, 483; Swanepoel 2006, 1; Hall 2010, 85; Walkley Hall and McBain 2014, 131). Research projects often present opportunities for collaboration, enabling practitioners to work with academic and professional colleagues, exposing participants to new viewpoints and increasing collegiality (Luo and McKinney 2015, 124; McMenemy 2010, 322; Walkley Hall and McBain 2014, 132). There are also softer benefits: the act of doing research may encourage reflective practice; improve the ability to think critically and analytically; enhance problem solving and decision-making; build confidence; and increase openness to innovation and responsiveness to change (Joint 2006, 6; Montanelli and Stenstrom 1986, 483; Swanepoel 2006, 1).

Barriers to engagement in practitioner research

With so many positive inducements to do research, why then do so many practitioners fail to participate? Again, the literature is extensive on this subject.

For individuals, lack of confidence is frequently cited as a deterrent, often coupled with a real or perceived lack of skills; lack of research training or experience, and procedural uncertainty (Carson *et al.* 2014, 3; Clapton 2010, 11 and 15; McNicol 2004a 123; McNicol 2004b 41; Swanepoel 2006, 2). Additional anxieties include the potential impact on work-life balance (Fox (2007, 460) notes the amount of scholarship that is undertaken on "own personal time"); a sense of isolation (McNicol 2004b, 40); a lack of motivation or incentive (Swanepoel 2006, 2); and the inability to shed entrenched working habits, which prioritise other activities (Clapton 2010, 10).

Other deterrents are structural. Lack of time is the most frequently cited barrier to engagement in research. Library staff often have high workloads with little time to reflect and still less to undertake research. Unless research is an organisational priority, or a requirement of the job role, support is unlikely to be forthcoming from managers or peers. The expectation that only academics publish their research or that research projects detract from the library's service orientation

disincentivises practitioner researchers still further (Clapton 2010, 10, 11 and 15; McNicol 2004b, 41; Wilkinson 2013, 57).

Several authors have reported a lack of practically focused subjects to research (Clapton 2010, 11; McNicol 2004a 123; McNicol 2004b 41; Swanepoel 2006, 2) and even a lack of suitable participants (Clapton 2010, 15). Coupled with limited funding for LIS research, and the strong competition from academics in applying for it (Hall 2010, 84), these factors together can make it difficult for a practitioner to get a research project off the ground.

Facilitating a research culture

Having established that engagement in research is desirable for both organisation and individual, and being mindful of the challenges faced in achieving this, the literature offers a number of suggestions for actions that library managers and staff can take to facilitate a research culture.

Top down approaches

For a library-wide research culture to develop, the support of the head of service is critical (Swanepoel 2006, 2). Commitment to research should be evident in strategic plans and reflected in service goals (Carson *et al*. 2014; Fox 2007, 459). If this support is in place, then other measures to facilitate a research culture will align with library policy, and future expenditure in terms of staff time or other resources will be easier to justify.

Some institutions have created positions to support the development of research competencies. The University of Alberta has a Director of Research and the University of Saskatchewan has assigned the library's chief administrator the rank of Dean (Carson *et al.* 2014, 4; Fox 2007, 459). Others have incorporated research into job descriptions. In this respect, the experience of librarians in North America differs significantly from those in Europe and Australia. In the USA and Canada, professional librarians are frequently employed as faculty on tenure track and research is a formal requirement of their role (Aytac and Slutsky 2014, 151; McBain *et al.* 2013, 450; Wilkinson 2013, 56; Wilson 2013, 115). In the UK and Australia, practitioner engagement in research is rarely an obligation but is nevertheless sometimes encouraged because of the wide range of benefits which accrue.

As noted above, lack of time to conduct research presents arguably the greatest barrier to its execution. Library managers are in a position to address this in a number of ways. In a survey of Canadian academic librarians, Fox observed that 75 percent of (467) participants reported that they were eligible for sabbatical leave, 73% were eligible for study leave and 31% for some form of short term research leave (Fox 2007, 459). In the UK, it is rare for an academic librarian to be awarded a formal research sabbatical, although there are examples of practitioners being seconded to funded research projects on a temporary basis (e.g., Moira Bent used her National Teaching Fellowship award to buy out several blocks of her time for research purposes (Bent 2008) and Jane Secker and Emma Coonan used a research fellowship funded by the Arcadia

Programme at Cambridge University Library to work full time on a joint project for three months (Secker and Coonan 2011)). Shorter periods of research time, such as a day a week over a specified period, may also be granted, especially if a project has attracted funding (e.g.,Davis 2015; Rothera 2014, 2015). On a more informal basis, sympathetic managers may sometimes permit staff to work at home for a day or two to progress a piece of research (Myhill 2015). Other libraries have a policy of awarding study time to staff engaged in professional development such as taught courses (e.g., a postgraduate certificate or diploma), doctorates or professional qualifications (e.g. CILIP Chartership) (Alcock 2015).

Managers can support research further by adjusting job roles and workflows to include research time (Carson *et al.* 2014, 4). Fox (2007, 460) suggests that some professional duties may be taken up by para-professionals while McNicol (2004a, 123) simply recommends that extra staff may provide cover whilst research is undertaken. In Clapton's (2010) survey of UK librarians, "protected time to write" was the most requested support mechanism for librarians writing for publication and McBain and colleagues have highlighted the positive correlation between conducting research and time to do research in work hours (McBain *et al*. 2013, 451).

'Buying out' time is just one of the ways in which management can invest in a research culture. Other examples from the literature include the creation of research funds; start-up grants for research programmes; payment of tuition fees and reimbursement of research expenses (Fox 2007, 459; Carson *et al*. 2014, 4).

The creation of formal and informal research groups and committees, the provision of practical resources, and the availability of venues and forums for discussion may all also contribute to the research infrastructure. At a national level, Jacobs and Berg (2013) describe the creation of a 'Librarians' Research Institute' to foster "a positive and productive research culture in Canadian academic libraries" (Jacobs and Berg 2013, 227). Based on three principles: to focus on strengths, not deficits; to inculcate habits of mind, not skills; and to rely on internal not external expertise, the Institute's four day curriculum brought together 29 academic librarians with six peer mentors to kick start the development of a practitioner research network.

In an Australian university context, McBain *et al*. (2013, 451-457) describe how they established a research culture by creating a departmental Research Working Group. Conceived as a staff development exercise and following a model which was driven by management but developed in consultation with library staff, the Research Working Group benefitted from expert leadership and a significant amount of funding ($10,000 p.a.) to support the projects undertaken. Membership of the group was determined by a panel of senior staff based on previously agreed selection criteria. Library staff were invited to submit research project proposals in line with the University's strategic plan and the Library's goals. Four projects were selected for the group and each was incorporated into the Library's operational plan, thus ensuring it qualified for resource allocation.

The Research Working Group is an example of a very formal approach to research development: group meetings were held every six to eight weeks, with projects reporting progress each time. By sharing experiences of the research process, group members were able to learn and develop as researchers. As members of the group they were able to call on funds to buy out time at critical stages of their projects and call on expert help from a research consultant. In McBain *et al.*'s words: "the researchers were constantly aware that their projects were officially supported and funded and took confidence from this" (McBain *et al.* 2013, 457).

Walkley Hall and McBain (2014, 131) additionally cite Stephens *et al.*'s (2011, 536) description of the Texas A&M University Libraries research committee's role in supporting tenure track librarians to do research. The provision of a half day research forum, opportunities to practice presentation skills and the offering of constructive criticism are all featured.

The provision of a forum, either physical (making a suitable space available) or functional (facilitating a discussion) is another important element of research infrastructure. Fox describes the support given by the University of Saskatchewan's Librarians' Research Forum: "a bi-monthly meeting for librarians to discuss their research, to share ideas, and to hear reports of sabbatical projects" (Fox 2007, 459). Guest speakers were also invited,; a library lecture series was arranged and a researcher-in-residence programme was planned.

A common thread in discussions about practitioner research is that many practitioners feel they lack the necessary skills and expertise to conduct credible scholarly research. Whether factually true or simply demonstrating a lack of confidence, some organisations have responded by offering training in research skills, some instigated and run by librarians themselves, others inviting external colleagues from LIS and other disciplines.

Several of the groups mentioned above incorporated research training in their programmes (e.g., Carson *et al.* 2014; McBain *et al.* 2013), whilst other practitioners take advantage of development opportunities offered by professional organisations. Academic librarians may be able to attend research training sessions put on by the Schools and Departments they serve or attend courses in LIS departments in local universities for discipline-specific development.

For those that cannot access face to face training, collections of online resources are a useful source of support. The Library and Information Science Research Coalition in its RiLIES2 project developed research resources and training materials to support librarians in both using and conducting research and in ensuring that the research they conducted had impact (Hall *et al.* 2012, 226; Library and Information Science Research Coalition, 2012a). The Coalition also used social media (a blog and Twitter feed) and a regular newsletter to alert LIS researchers to research events, training opportunities and current research activity. On a local level, Walkley Hall and McBain noted that members of their Research Working Group made good use of documentation produced by previous in house research projects (Walkley Hall and McBain 2014, 136).

Beyond the practical and material supports, library managers can also play an important role in motivating and encouraging staff to engage in practitioner research. Unusually, Swanepoel (2006) adopts an inclusive approach to engaging practitioners in research, describing a research project that might potentially involve a library's entire staff group (Swanepoel 2006, 3-5). Other encouragement may come in the form of recognition and reward, for example by celebrating research achievements (Swanepoel 2006, 2) and permitting time off and funds for research dissemination (Carson *et al.* 2014, 4, Booth 2011, 9). McMenemy (2010, 324) notes that practitioner PhDs may be a positive step in encouraging research within the workplace.

<u>Bottom up approaches</u>

Peer support features prominently in the literature, whether in the form of peer mentoring, peer support groups, collaborative research activity or simple peer encouragement. Clapton's (2010) survey of LIS practitioners rated "peer encouragement" second highest after "protected time to write" as the most helpful supports when writing for publication, with "online support group" and "online peer support" also being mentioned (Clapton 2010, 15-16). Jacobs *et al.* (2010, 9) refer to engagement in "reflective, productive conversations about research" as a means of developing and supporting a research culture.

In a spin-out from the Librarians' Research Institute described above, Carson *et al.* (2014) describe the foundation of a 'Librarians' Research Partnership' between librarians from McGill and Concordia University Libraries in Montreal, Canada. Initiated by four attendees of the original Librarians' Research Institute, the purpose of the Partnership was to build a research community among librarians at the two universities by fostering research partnerships and collaboration, and in particular, providing support for those new to the research process and culture (Carson *et al.* 2014, 7). The desirability of this practice is echoed by other authors who recommend mentoring schemes as a means of building confidence in research among those just getting started (Hall 2010, 85) and assisting new librarians to conduct high quality research early in their career (Aytac and Slutsky 2014, 152).

Another peer support initiative is described by Fallon (2009, 2010, 2012). Initially conceived as a formal writing support programme, the 'Introduction to writing for academic publication' course for library staff was first offered as a one day event (Fallon 2009, 417). Several iterations later, Fallon describes a blended programme comprising "a formal writing seminar; a structured series of online exercises and mentoring support; and two peer-feedback days" (Fallon 2012, 7).

A number of authors exhort the benefits of collaboration. For example, Aytac and Slutsky suggest that librarians "should seek out colleagues with different expertise to hopefully form a synergistic relationship" (Aytac and Slutsky 2014, 151). Luo and McKinney note several benefits of research collaboration: the sharing of skills and techniques; knowledge transfer (especially tacit knowledge); the cross-fertilisation of ideas; intellectual companionship; contact with new networks; and

increased visibility of the work (Luo and McKinney (2015, 126-127). In McBain *et al.*'s Research Working Group, two of the four projects selected were collaborative ventures, one undertaken by a team of liaison librarians and one by a librarian in conjunction with a member of academic staff. Reporting feedback on the Research Working Group, Walkley Hall and McBain later noted that librarians showed significant interest in working collaboratively for future research projects and observed that "projects done by groups are an excellent way to share both the research workload and the opportunity to be involved" (Walkley Hall and McBain 2014, 137). Buckley Woods and Booth take this idea a step further, recommending the "hive" based approach used by the North West Clinical Librarians collaborative review (Brettle et al., 2011 cited by Buckley Woods and Booth 2013, 11). This approach divides the research task "between individuals and institutions in order to make individual tasks more manageable" (Buckley Woods and Booth 2013, 14).

Some authors single out collaboration between practitioners and academics for particular attention. Reporting from their Research Landscape Project, McNicol and Dalton (2004) note several benefits of such collaborations. For practitioners there are opportunities to recognise the value of research; to learn how to interpret findings; and to raise academic standards or "gain academic standing" for practitioner research. Academic researchers on the other hand might understand better the practical applications of their research; and achieve greater dissemination into or credibility within the practitioner community. For both groups, McNicol and Dalton's participants noted the benefit of balancing the "inward looking" tendency of practitioners with the "divorced from the real world" nature of some academic research. (McNicol and Dalton 2004, 175). There may even be a citation advantage to publishing work jointly. Finlay *et al.* found that "collaborative articles between librarian and non-librarian authors were cited twice as often as those articles written solely by librarians" (Finlay *et al.* 2013, 410).

Ultimately, engagement with practitioner research depends on the willingness, motivation and capacity of the individual. By focusing on people's strengths, i.e., what they know and what they can do, and on habits of mind, such as thinking flexibly, questioning and innovating, the Canadian Librarians' Research Institute took a very positive and enabling approach to developing research capacity (Jacobs *et al.* 2013, 230-231). This contrasts with the potentially negative approach of focusing on overcoming the barriers to research.

The time barrier is a case in point. Many practitioners cite lack of time as being the greatest deterrent to doing research, however Booth (2011) argues that what they are really doing is failing to prioritise it in their workload. Booth further suggests that the 'lack of time' argument might be countered by the concept of 'opportunity cost', that is, by not engaging in research informed practice, practitioners run the risk of wasting time and resources delivering sub-standard services (Booth 2011, 11).

University of Northampton: a case study

The Department of Library and Learning Services (LLS) at the University of Northampton has neither the resource to waste on ineffective processes, nor the desire to deliver less than optimal services. In recent years it has therefore had a policy of informing service development with evidence from research. This section describes some of the approaches that have been taken to implement this policy.

Organisational context

The University of Northampton is a relatively new university, having won university status in 2005. It is a 'teaching-led' UK institution with approximately 740 academic staff, 550 non-academic staff and 13550 students. Of the student population, roughly 11000 are undergraduates, 2300 are taught postgraduate students and 250 are registered for research degrees (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2015).   Disciplines taught at the University's two campuses include the arts, business, education, health, science and technology, and social sciences. Between them, the two campus libraries provide access to over 500,000 books and 54,000 journals, many of them online.

The 85 staff (60 full time equivalent (FTE)) in LLS are responsible for providing traditional library services (including customer services, academic liaison, research support and resources) to these groups, as well as support for academic skills development and technology enhanced learning. All divisions of LLS work closely together, led by an Executive Team under the guidance of the Head of LLS. Approximately 34 (FTE) staff are employed on professional or management grades.

Facilitating a research culture in Library and Learning Services

In his introduction to the most recent LLS research conference, described further below, Chris Powis, Head of LLS stated: "Research is central to the business of a university and should, therefore, be reflected in the activities of its constituent parts. In Library and Learning Services (LLS) here at Northampton we are really committed to encouraging research activity of every type, from small scale practitioner projects to fully funded external bids and from individual work to major collaborative efforts. This helps us to further our work in support of the university and, we hope, makes some contribution to the greater sum of knowledge." (Powis 2014).

Support from the highest level has been critical to the development of a research culture within LLS.

Top down approaches

Departmental research policy

The LLS policy for practitioner research is outlined in its departmental vision, operational plan and Guidelines for the Support and Conduct of Research by LLS staff.

The departmental vision statement notes that LLS should "contribute to the academic output of the university through research and professional engagement and to the university's wider role through its involvement in local, national and international communities of practice". In support of this, the LLS operational plan states that "innovation will be encouraged from all staff and practice-based research supported, and the results, where possible, acted upon" (LLS Operational Plan 2013-2016).

This policy is expanded in guidance for LLS staff:

"LLS staff will also seek to inform the development of existing and new LLS services in accordance with departmental priorities by:

- Taking an evidence based approach to service development

- Working collaboratively across teams on research projects which will enhance the user experience

- Conducting research in an ethical manner

- Bidding for internal and external funding to support LLS research activity

- Collaborating with others on bidding and research activity when LLS resources, including staff time, are fully costed and agreed

- Sharing research outcomes with professional colleagues, within and beyond the University of Northampton."

(Guidelines for the Support and Conduct of Research by LLS staff, August 2014)

Collectively, these documents demonstrate the value placed on practitioner research activity in LLS and its role in informing service development. There is a proviso though: in applying this policy, senior managers are clear that research projects, including those conducted with, or even led by, academic staff or external partners, must align with University and LLS goals.

Involvement of LLS staff

Since relatively few LLS staff are employed on academic contracts or have research as a feature of their job descriptions, engagement in research activity is not a formal obligation for most staff. It is, however, often included in annual professional development review (PDR) objectives, especially among senior and professional grade staff. These staff are encouraged to bid for funding, conduct research projects, present at conferences and publish.

However, research activity is not the exclusive domain of senior staff. All LLS staff are invited to take part in research projects, subject to their line manager's approval and on the condition that regular service obligations are met. In one example, staff from all divisions and grades collected data in a project to map and describe student choices of learning spaces across the campus prior to a refurbishment project in the library (Powis 2010a) and in another, para-professional staff were

part of a group researching the selection and ordering of resources for reading lists (Siddall *et al.* 2014).

In addition to providing library support to the University's research community, the two members of the Library's Research Support team have particular responsibility for promoting and supporting practitioner research within LLS. The team leader's job description requires the role holder "to coordinate and manage applied research to underpin Departmental objectives, including the identification and securing of funding streams". The Research Support Librarian (the author of this article) therefore acts as research 'champion' and facilitator of research related events and activities within the department. Some of these are described below.

One other individual plays a key role in the research life of the department, Visiting Professor Charles Oppenheim. Professor Oppenheim has a dual role: to advise the department and University on matters related to his specialist areas of copyright and scholarly communications, and to advise and mentor LLS staff on research matters. It is unusual, if not unique, for an academic library in the UK to appoint a Visiting Professor, but the input of an experienced and highly credible academic researcher has proved to be extremely valuable to LLS research and its researchers.

Departmental research infrastructure

As a research active department, LLS seeks to mirror the research infrastructure of the University's academic Schools. The department therefore has an equivalent research committee structure.

LLS Research and Enterprise Committee meets six times per year, following the same cycle as, and reporting to, the University Research and Enterprise Committee. The regular agenda includes updates on department research activity, ethical issues, matters referred from other School and University research related committees, and matters relating to LLS support for University researchers. In addition, at three meetings each year the committee features an additional discussion item. This may comprise a presentation of in house research; a discussion of a research related topic; an aspect of research support; or a debate on the direction of LLS research. Where appropriate, external speakers are invited to attend and the event is opened out to the full LLS staff group. This inclusive approach ensures that all staff can be made aware of research activity in the department even if they are not actively involved.

In a similar way, LLS Ethics Committee is aligned with the University Research Ethics Committee and mimics the ethics approval processes of the academic Schools. LLS Ethics Committee is a much newer committee and so far has focused on developing the procedures and skills needed for its operation. However, by convening the committee and reporting to the University Ethics Committee it has sent a clear message that LLS takes its research responsibilities seriously.

To reinforce communications between LLS and University Committees, the Research Support Librarian is a member of both University committees described above. This gives the department

a voice in research decision-making at the University and an opportunity to promote LLS research to research leaders across campus.

Research Funding

As mentioned above, LLS staff are encouraged to bid for funding to support their research activity. Winning external funding not only brings additional income into the department but also enhances the credibility of LLS research among professional and academic colleagues. Academic researchers are familiar with the difficulties of bidding for funding and have respect for those who have been successful. For practitioners, engaging in the process of bidding for funding, and then, when successful, managing a project according to the funders' requirements, gives a greater insight into the challenges faced by academic colleagues.

LLS staff have been particularly successful in bidding for internal research funding. The University of Northampton has several funding schemes to support research and innovation in learning and teaching. Two of these provide money for short projects and one, the URB@N (Undergraduate Research Bursaries at Northampton) scheme, supplies successful projects with an undergraduate student as a research assistant for 50 hours (University of Northampton 2014). All of these schemes are highly competitive and are open to both academic and professional staff. One of the requirements of the schemes is that projects must present their findings at events organised by the funders. The University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference and URB@N poster event provide excellent opportunities for LLS staff to raise awareness of their research activity among academic colleagues.

LLS has a very small pot of internal funding to sponsor an annual departmental research award. This is open to all staff and there is a formal application process. The process, which is supported by written guidance and advice from the Research Support team, is designed to help those who may be new to research bidding. Bidders are expected to produce a summary of the proposed project and to address its context and rationale; aims and objectives; methodology; workplan; ethics; risk management; deliverables; dissemination; budget and necessary staff development. The application must be signed off by the line manager before submission. The funding provided by the award is sufficient to cover research expenses such as travel expenses, refreshments for focus groups and other modest expenses; it cannot be used to 'buy out' staff time so successful applicants must be able to demonstrate that the project can be conducted alongside their day job.

The same applies to bids for external funding: staff must not only show how the project will contribute to LLS goals but also how they propose to combine the project with their existing workload. Externally funded projects have in the past employed new staff as research assistants and paid for extra hours for existing part time colleagues.

Skills development

It would be unreasonable to expect LLS staff to engage enthusiastically in research without support in the form of training and development opportunities. Whilst most professional and senior staff have some experience of conducting research, and residual skills from their own experiences as students, others may be new to research and uncertain where to start.

Several types of development opportunity have been offered. One-off workshops have covered topics such as writing book reviews; poster design; preparing to present at a conference; copyright; and bidding for funding. Some of these have been timed to coincide with departmental research events, such as the launch of the LLS research award and the two LLS research conferences (see below); others have been arranged at the request of LLS staff.

In the last five years there have been two research summer schools and a writing retreat, each organized by group of LLS volunteers and lasting two days. Up to 20 staff were involved in each. The first summer school, in 2011, focused on steps in the research lifecycle (i.e., defining the research question; winning support for the project; research methodology; dissemination); the second, in 2013, addressed topics suggested by LLS colleagues (i.e., generating research ideas; techniques for data collection and analysis; writing up). Appropriate speakers were invited from within and beyond the University of Northampton and came from both professional and academic backgrounds.

The writing retreat, held off campus in the summer of 2015, was designed to encourage staff to write for publication. After several years of promoting engagement with research, it was apparent that many LLS staff were making a name for themselves on the conference circuit but not necessarily disseminating their research findings in the form of published papers. The two day retreat was facilitated by a member of LLS staff and the Visiting Professor, and comprised blocks of time to write, interspersed with talks and peer feedback. Seventeen staff attended. Preparation was key to the success of the retreat and all participants were expected to have completed a number of tasks prior to the event. Although feedback from delegates was extremely positive, and the time away from the day job much appreciated, it is too early to assess whether the retreat has contributed to an increase in published works.

Finally, some staff have taken advantage of training offered elsewhere in the University. LLS staff are invited to sign up for generic research skills workshops delivered by the University's Graduate School. Additionally, a few staff conduct research projects as part of ongoing professional development courses (such as teaching or professional qualifications) and those people may benefit from training provided as part of their course.

Encouragement

The robust and highly visible support given by senior managers is vitally important to the development of the department's research culture. The willingness of LLS managers to give individuals the freedom to innovate and experiment is a further encouragement. Jacobs *et al.* note

that "one of the strengths of librarianship as a profession is our commitment to improvement through innovation, something which requires great adaptability and accommodation" (Jacobs *et al.* 2010, 5). They further recognise the importance of a 'flexible and forgiving' environment to allow ideas and research interests to come to fruition.

Cross-departmental and collaborative projects are particularly encouraged. Not only do these enable the participants to reap the benefits described above but also they facilitate intra-departmental communication and foster better relationships between teams. The criteria for the LLS research award favour collaborative projects.

Research successes are celebrated in several ways. At each LLS Research and Enterprise Committee, team representatives report on the progress of projects, conferences attended and papers accepted for publication. The Head of LLS shares this information in his weekly newsletter to all staff. Records are kept of all research outputs and other 'professional contributions' (such as memberships of Editorial Boards and professional committees, external speaking engagements and workshops hosted). A selection of these are displayed in prominent spaces in the two campus libraries, ensuring that service users are made aware of LLS staff achievements.

Where possible, individuals are rewarded with funding and time to present their work at external conferences. Over the last few years, LLS staff have presented at national and international conferences in the UK and Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Russia and Spain.

Bottom up approaches

Without the willing cooperation of its host community, a research culture cannot develop. LLS staff are not only predisposed to support each other, but also have a range of practical research skills to share.

Peer support

As mentioned above, colleagues are encouraged to collaborate on research projects. In LLS, this has enabled those new to research to work with more experienced practitioner researchers. A number of University-supported URB@N projects have involved a member of LLS working with a member of academic staff as well as the student research assistant. Such projects can be very successful because they engage different stakeholders and draw together several perspectives. Some colleagues prefer to do their first projects in pairs, deriving confidence from working with someone of similar ability and experience.

Occasionally, a colleague will play a minor role in a research project, for example, by running a focus group, assisting with data collection or acting as 'critical friend' in the design of some element of the project. This can be a good way to involve those who do not feel able to take on a full scale project yet.

Simply talking to colleagues about one's current research can be helpful and productive. Whether looking for a new insight to a research problem or simply considering the best methods for data collection or analysis, some teams have found that free and open discussion of their research is both useful and motivating. Furthermore, by maintaining a high profile for research activity in the department, staff are aware of who is research-active and therefore who they may approach for support and help.

Drawing on her experiences in supporting the Northampton Business School, one colleague, Rachel Maxwell, initiated a lunchtime reading group. The LUN@R (LUNchtime Academic Reading) group meets once per month to discuss articles and papers of common interest. Prior to the meeting, group members are expected to read two scholarly papers, usually presenting alternative views on a topic. Not only do these sessions provoke discussion between colleagues, but also they reinforce the habits of professional and scholarly reading, critical thinking and applying other people's research.

Dissemination

A key element of a vibrant research culture is that of sharing one's research findings with others.

Organised by a small group of LLS staff, the first LLS conference had four objectives: 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; and to celebrate our research successes. Staff were invited to submit a proposal for one of four types of presentation: a 30 minute research presentation, for projects substantially completed, and in most cases already disseminated through other conferences or publication; a 15 minute 'work in progress', for projects at the design or pilot stage; a 'minute madness' presentation, with just one minute to describe, explain, promote or otherwise share ongoing or completed work; or a research poster, ideal for smaller projects or those best represented in graphical form (Pickton 2012). The 'minute madness' idea had been used successfully by the Library and Information Science Research Coalition in their 2010 conference (Library and Information Science Research Coalition 2012b) and it was felt that this would be a means of encouraging more colleagues to share their work.

The conference was promoted using professionally designed publicity materials and a conference blog. Being the first conference that this group had organised, it was itself a learning opportunity and the blog (University of Northampton Library and Learning Services 2014) provided an outlet for sharing that experience. The conference involved 36 LLS staff as presenters and poster authors. Many other colleagues supported it on the day by staffing the welcome desk and networking with conference delegates. As a means of promoting a research culture and generating a 'buzz' within the department (Mc Bain *et al.* 2013, 458) it was a resounding success.

A second conference, modelled on the first, was held in 2014 and it is intended that this will be a biennial event. In the intervening years LLS researchers have the chance to share their work each summer at an internal research showcase event. Open to all LLS staff, the ten minute talks at the showcase give attendees the opportunity to find out what their colleagues are working on and to ask questions give feedback on their projects.

Discussion and evaluation

The activities described above have gone a long way towards establishing a research culture in LLS, but without a positive impact on services, staff or reputation it would be difficult to justify the time and effort expended. As indicated above, LLS staff are encouraged to take an evidence-based approach to service development. This generally means identifying either a new requirement or an area for improvement and then conducting research to establish the most effective way of meeting the need. The examples given below are typical of this approach.

Example 1: Reading lists

Gillian Siddall and Hannah Rose are both Academic Librarians in LLS. Having seen their Foundation Degree students struggle with tutors' reading lists, they identified a research opportunity. They bid for, and won, the LIRG Research Award for 2011 for a project addressing the use of reading lists as a pedagogical tool to support the development of information skills. The project involved a review of the literature, focus groups with students, interviews with academic staff and an analysis of 14 reading lists (Siddall and Rose 2014, 63). The project raised awareness among academic staff of the student perspective on reading lists and made recommendations of good practice in reading list design.

The project findings informed the purchase and implementation of new software for online reading lists and generated an invitation to Siddall to run regular reading list workshops as part of the University's development programme for academic staff. These in turn promoted further discussion and debate on the topic. Whilst uptake of the good practice is not ubiquitous, a number of tutors have started to organise and annotate their reading lists, are more careful about checking them for accuracy and have started to signpost students to appropriate resources. These actions should help the students to develop their own skills in finding and evaluating information.

Siddall and Rose have disseminated their work at a number of national and international conferences and are very positive about their experiences of doing and using the research. It has since been replicated elsewhere (Kelly and Loake 2014).

Example 2: Online courses

Kate Coulson and her team are responsible for supporting students' academic skills and learning development. For many years, the team has offered a pre-enrolment course to new students wishing to improve their study skills before starting at university. Delivered face to face, access to

this course favoured those who live locally or could afford the time and cost of an early visit to Northampton. In order to better meet the needs all students, the decision was made to move the course entirely online. Following a period of research and development, Coulson's team were the first in the University to launch a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Having evaluated and reflected on this experience, Coulson and her colleagues have gone on to develop a number of other online courses (Littlemore 2013; Littlemore and Farmer 2013, 2014; Coulson, Armellini and Farmer 2014). The collaborative approach, involving multiple teams in LLS as well as staff from the University's Institute for Learning and Teaching, has been particularly effective and the subject of several conference presentations.

These activities, and the research that has underpinned them, directly contributed to the University's goals of increasing provision of online learning opportunities and reaching out to new students. Coulson is now recognised and respected for her expertise in this area and is regularly approached by academic staff for advice.

Example 3: Learning spaces

Chris Powis, Head of LLS, has had a long-standing research interest in the teaching and learning of information skills (Webb and Powis 2004; Powis 2010b, 2012). More recently, he has turned his attention to the spaces in which students choose to learn. Powis instigated a project which first mapped the locations where students could be found studying and then followed up with semi-structured interviews with students in those spaces (Powis 2010a). Powis identified four influences on student choice of open learning space: resources, environment, social and emotional. These factors, he argued, should be taken into account in planning the design of future learning spaces (Powis 2010a, 9).

Powis's research was particularly timely, first in informing the refurbishment of existing library spaces in 2011 and 2012, but more significantly, in planning for the Learning Commons on the University's brand new campus (currently under construction and due to be completed in 2018). The Learning Commons will incorporate student support services, teaching rooms, open learning spaces and the library in a single building at the heart of the new campus. Powis has worked closely with the architects to ensure the Learning Commons ethos is adhered to and as the moving date approaches, he will lead an innovative workstream to implement collaborative management and working practices in this shared space.

Example 4: Online mathematics tutorials

Not all research projects have had the outcome that was hoped for. Paul Rice and David O'Hare were granted funding by the Sigma network (a centre for excellence in mathematics and statistics support) for a pilot study to investigate the effectiveness of one-to-one mathematics tutorials offered online via video conferencing (Rice and O'Hare 2012). Such tutorials were expected to be of particular benefit to distance learners and would offer parity of provision with local students.

Unfortunately, despite efforts to publicise the tutorials, lend equipment, and provide support for downloading the necessary software, no students chose to avail themselves of the service, thus bringing the project to a premature end. However, there were some positive outcomes. The project team had expended significant effort in finding the right tools to support the tutorials and it was then possible to use these for other purposes; the lack of interest from students demonstrated to others that this approach might not be worth pursuing, thus saving colleagues time; and the work provoked a brand new research question: why do students not engage with this type of service? (Rice and O'Hare 2012, 21)

These four projects, taken from a much wider group of projects undertaken, exemplify the impact of LLS research on the development of LLS services and on the experience of service users. They are typical of the type of research which has direct application in the researcher's working life, enabling staff "to merge "research work" and "library work"" (Wilkinson 2013, 62), a key element of a successful research culture.

LLS research: impact on staff

As noted above, over the last few years, LLS staff have won funding from both internal and external sources. Externally, project teams have received funding from the Higher Education Academy, JISC, Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) and others. Funds won have in some cases simply covered modest research expenses, such as participant incentives, transcription or travel to a conference, but in others they have enabled the employment of a research assistant or buyout of staff time. Those who win funding have reported a boost in confidence, both in the project and in their own ability to conduct the research. They have also observed that it gives the research extra legitimacy, reminding managers and colleagues that the work is important and should be prioritised. This legitimacy is further conveyed to participants, especially academic staff, who recognise the achievement in winning funding and are more likely to engage with such projects.

Since 2007, details of around 150 research outputs from 35 LLS staff have been uploaded to the University's research repository, NECTAR (http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk). These include articles, conference presentations, posters, books, book chapters, reports and reviews. Topics covered include information skills; visual literacy; learning and teaching; mobile learning; open access; research data management; collection development; librarianship and others. Authors come from all six divisions of LLS and although dominated by professional staff, include some non-professional staff as well. The numbers involved demonstrate that engagement in research activity is high, varied and ongoing.

The majority of LLS outputs have multiple authors, indicating a preference for collaborative research, some with LLS colleagues, some with academic staff at Northampton, and a significant minority with external colleagues in the UK and overseas. In many cases, the invitation to

collaborate comes from a third party, and is down to the reputation of that individual. By sharing their work at conferences and other events, LLS staff have raised not only their own profile but also those of the department and University.

Many LLS staff are active in external special interest groups, for example the Library and Information Research Group. Others have served on conference organising committees, acted as peer reviewers for papers submitted to conferences and scholarly journals, and arranged workshops based on their research interests. The learning from these experiences undoubtedly contributes to the development of a vibrant research culture in the department.

LLS research: challenges

It is clear from the above that efforts to encourage engagement in research and the outcomes of that research have generally been very successful. However, a few difficulties have been encountered and there are still some outstanding challenges.

Providing development opportunities at a level that suits everyone has been difficult. Although the two research summer schools received mostly positive feedback, it was inevitable that some sessions would be pitched inappropriately for everyone in a very mixed audience. The subsequent decision to run a writing retreat instead of a third summer school was in part an attempt to offer something that all participants could benefit from, whatever their previous experience.

The writing retreat also addressed another ongoing challenge, that of converting professional engagement into publications, in particular, papers in peer-reviewed journals. Many colleagues are not practiced at writing for publication and view it as a time-consuming chore. Those that have published have often opted to write shorter articles and to submit them to practitioner publications. This echoes Clapton's finding of "high practitioner authorship in professional magazines and low practitioner authorship in peer reviewed journals" (Clapton 2010, 13-14) and supports Finlay *et al.*'s observation (based on 20 leading LIS journals) that the proportion of peer reviewed articles authored by librarians has decreased in recent years (Finlay *et al.* 2013, 410).

Lack of confidence plays a part too, with colleagues sometimes failing to recognise the value of their research and fearing it lacks sufficient substance for a full 'academic' paper. This is an area for future attention.

LLS is a busy department. For many months of the year, professional staff are bogged down in routine duties. This situation is unlikely to improve in the near future. The University's planned move to a new campus has triggered a decision by University managers to move all courses to a blended learning approach. This has increased the demand for support from LLS staff. However, the move is a potential opportunity too, and it is hoped that colleagues will turn to research evidence when considering how to adjust to and exploit these changes.

The pressure of work possibly explains the absence of applications for last year's LLS Research Award. Whether deterred by the timing (at the start of the academic year), the bidding process or the prospect of fitting additional work into an already high workload, colleagues initially showed interest but proposals failed to materialise. The decision has been made to announce the next award later in the academic year and to call for projects linked to the campus move and the new approaches to learning and teaching. By focusing the award onto an area of development it is hoped that research and practice will complement each other.
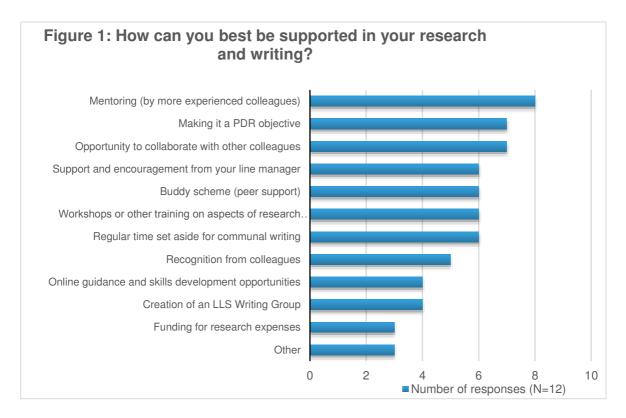
An interesting 'problem' to have is the over-demand for LLS staff to collaborate on academic staff projects. It has not been uncommon for academic staff to include LLS staff in their project proposals at zero cost and sometimes even without the knowledge of the people involved. The LLS response to this has been to develop new guidance for staff and to disseminate this to the academic community. As described above, LLS staff may now only collaborate with others on bidding and research activity "when LLS resources, including staff time, are fully costed and agreed".

Lastly, around half the LLS staff group have not engaged at all with the research opportunities around them. In some cases, this is to be expected, for example, for many non-professional staff, their time spent at work is highly structured (serving on desks, re-shelving books and so forth) and does not allow for time to do research. Others have reported that they 'have nothing to say', supporting McNicol's (2004, 40) finding that the lack of practically focused research projects was a barrier to involvement in research. Undoubtedly some areas stimulate more potential topics for research than others. In an analysis of papers published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Luo and McKinney found that the top four topic areas were information literacy, user information behavior, library personnel, and scholarly communication (Luo and McKinney 2015, 126). Within LLS, these areas are of greater interest to some teams than others.

Two divisions in particular have failed to engage. Both have a higher proportion of staff in non-professional posts and both are generally self-sufficient in terms of day-to-day activity. Their interactions with other teams tend to be transactional rather than developmental and opportunities for research collaboration are less obvious. In both cases, staff have perceived a lack of support from their team leaders and for neither is engagement in research a priority.

Where next?

In order to establish the best way of supporting future LLS research activity, colleagues were recently asked which of a series of potential interventions, drawn from the literature, would be most useful to them in supporting their research and writing (see Figure 1). The survey was completed as part of their event feedback by 12 of the 17 people who had attended the writing retreat and therefore represents the views of those who are already engaged in research activity. A future survey will elicit opinions from the wider staff group.

Figure 1: How can you best be supported in your research and writing?

Category	Number of responses (N=12)
Mentoring (by more experienced colleagues)	8
Making it a PDR objective	7
Opportunity to collaborate with other colleagues	7
Support and encouragement from your line manager	6
Buddy scheme (peer support)	6
Workshops or other training on aspects of research…	6
Regular time set aside for communal writing	6
Recognition from colleagues	5
Online guidance and skills development opportunities	4
Creation of an LLS Writing Group	4
Funding for research expenses	3
Other	3

These data suggest that the creation of a mentoring or buddy scheme would be a useful next step. Mentors potentially could be sought from within LLS, from among academic colleagues or from the LIS research community beyond the University. In the 'other' category, one respondent requested a 'critical friend' to read one's work and advise on what needs doing for publication.   Our Visiting Professor is an ideal candidate for this role.

The enthusiasm also shown for collaborative research (ranked joint second in the list) may also be related to the wish for peer support, since collaborators can perform an informal mentoring or buddying role. Collaborative research is already strongly encouraged and the Research Support team might play a facilitating role in this.

Two of the responses are within the control of line managers: the willingness to give support and encouragement, and agreement to make research activity a Personal Development Review objective. Since both of these comply with departmental policy, they ought to be achievable. The strong support for research from the Head of the department is already cascaded down through most LLS teams; hopefully this evidence will provide an incentive for the others to engage.

Although online research training did not appeal to many respondents, there was some appetite for face to face workshops on aspects of research and writing. There may be an opportunity to use these to initiate a peer support network, especially if we take advantage of in-house expertise to facilitate the workshops. Jacobs and Berg's suggestion, to use activities that draw upon and share the participants' experience and expertise, would seem to be a good model to follow (Jacobs and

Berg 2013, 231). This has been attempted before with workshops on bidding for funding and writing book reviews but there is scope here for further development.

Following the example of Walkley-Hall and McBain (2014, 136) the LLS Research Ethics Committee has started to collect documents which might be helpful to those starting new research projects. A project proposal template and application form for ethical approval have been created, with completed examples of each made available. Colleagues are generally very willing to share past project documentation on an *ad hoc* basis but a central collection would be even better.

The next LLS Research Conference is planned for the summer of 2016. Learning from our experiences of the last two conferences, it seems likely that the next conference will be relocated to a more flexible space and will feature parallel strands and breakout groups. As before, all staff will be encouraged to take part in the conference, as presenters, helpers or delegates. This inclusive approach seems to be the most effective way of engendering a research culture right across the department.

Finally, there are also changes underway in the University's research environment. A new Director of Research has reviewed all the research-related policies and realigned the University's research plan with the latest institutional strategic plan. In the next few months, we will review the LLS research plan to ensure it continues to comply with University research goals.

Conclusions and recommendations

Reflecting on the last few years, LLS has seen a large increase in practitioner research activity and the dissemination of its outputs and outcomes to others. Over half the staff in the department have been research active during this period and, due to the bottom up and top down encouragement they have received, many of the remainder are at least research aware.. The department has reaped the benefit in terms of staff development, service development and reputation. However, there are still some outstanding challenges, of which active engagement across the whole department and an increase in published work are priorities.

Based on the experiences of Northampton and other academic libraries, the following recommendations are made to those wishing to establish a research culture in their library.

Recommendations for managers:

1. Top level support is essential. Senior managers should recognise the benefits of research-informed practice and, ideally, lead by example.

2. Embed the principle of research-informed practice in library policy and planning. This will encourage those who wish to engage in research activity.

3. Include research projects when setting annual performance objectives.

4. Encourage staff to bid for research funding, whether internal or external.

5. Appoint a research 'champion' to take the lead on promoting, supporting and coordinating practitioner research.

6. Allow time and resource for research-related training and development opportunities.

7. Celebrate research successes.

Recommendations for practitioner researchers:

8. Adopt a research mindset: question, reflect and seek evidence to support change.

9. Recognise the benefits of doing research. Incorporate it in your plans to develop your services and make it part of your everyday job.

10. Get your manager's support by framing research objectives to align with team, department and institutional goals.

11. Support less experienced colleagues through mentoring and buddying.

12. Share research outcomes with colleagues and service users.

13. Publish research findings using a variety of media.

The result will be staff with greater motivation, better library services and prestige for the library within the institution.

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