**Mapping our skills in learning and teaching**

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*In a climate of efficiency savings and increasing emphasis on the student experience the academic librarian’s skills are as vital as ever to supporting learning, teaching and research. At UEL we have been able to use the university’s sector leading Professional Standards Framework (PSF) to encourage librarians to reflect on their professional practice, gaining recognition for individual achievement whilst also ensuring our skills and knowledge are fully understood in the context of learning and teaching. The process has helped us demonstrate to academic colleagues and senior managers in the university the diversity of expertise within the library and to showcase the library’s real value to learners and researchers.*

In recent years there have been big changes for academic librarians as we have continued to embrace and exploit new technologies, regularly updating our skills to do so, and responding to changes in the curriculum and pedagogy by developing spaces and services that are truly supportive of learners. In addition there are new organisational structures to work within – ‘super convergence’ in some universities taking us beyond the now familiar convergence of IT and library services. Shared help desks with specially trained customer services experts are springing up on our campuses, particularly where IT, library and other student support services have converged into a ‘one stop shop’ with the aim of enhancing the student experience or, in many cases, to use university resources more efficiently.

As the information environment becomes more complex, as technologies develop more swiftly and as student information skills continue to require development the supportive presence of the librarian is vital for many students, and it is more important than ever that librarians achieve a meaningful integration with learning and teaching in our universities in order to fully demonstrate their value to learners and to justify both the financial resources and the physical space required to provide library services.

Happily the achievements of librarians as early adopters of new technologies and innovators in learning support are increasingly being acknowledged; however, we sometimes lack opportunities to showcase our work beyond the library, so the librarian’s contribution often remains hidden from senior academics and managers in the institution, even though it is highly valued by the individual students and lecturers who have regular direct contact with members of library staff. To quote from a recent article by Tara Brabazon we are still, for many students and academic colleagues, the ‘invisible support network.’

At UEL, in common with most other HE library services, we have already achieved a measure of integration with L&T in a number of ways; some are fairly traditional, such as library representation on School and Programme committees and leading collaborative projects on the digitisation of collections; others are less obvious, though very beneficial, such as our adoption of the UEL policy on peer evaluation for teaching. Our internal committee structure for learning and teaching mirrors that in the academic Schools with a LILT (Leader in Learning and Teaching) for LLS sitting on UEL’s Learning & Teaching Committee, as well as our own departmental Learning and Teaching Committee reporting upwards via the university committee structure. As the LILT for LLS I have been able to contribute to the development of the current Learning and Teaching Strategy for UEL and a number of other L&T initiatives across the university. However, there is still a lot more to be done to ensure library staff skills are understood and valued by academic colleagues and, more importantly, that they are fully exploited by the university to improve the overall student experience.

At UEL we have had a unique opportunity to address this issue.

In 2006 the national Professional Standards Framework for HE was launched, described as “a flexible framework with a descriptor approach to professional standards” with a strong focus on CPD. UEL’s immediate response was to set up a working group, chaired by the Director of Learning and Teaching, to develop a framework of its own. When I arrived at UEL in July 2007 I joined the PSF working group in place of a LLS colleague who had just left the University and, although I was not too familiar with the aims of the PSF, I was very keen to become involved in initiatives relating to professional development for UEL staff. The group was working to develop a UEL framework mapped to the national one and accredited by the HEA (Higher Education Academy), which would encompass a post graduate certificate in Learning and Teaching for staff, Masters level courses and a CPD route to HEA Fellowship. The PG Cert and CPD route to Fellowship would be of particular interest to library staff, although all members of staff would be eligible to apply for any of the programmes on offer.

When the UEL PSF framework was launched in 2007 I began to encourage librarians to apply for HEA Fellowship via the CPD route, either by completing the required form or making a presentation to the HEA panel at UEL. I tempted them with the promise of additional letters after their name and the opportunity to have their contribution to L&T support recognised on an equal footing with academic colleagues. A small group of Subject Librarians decided to apply for Fellowship following a short workshop run by colleagues from UEL’s Learning Teaching and Assessment team to explain how the CPD route works, and the importance of presenting and mapping evidence to the 3 sections - areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values. A large part of this workshop focussed on how librarians might provide evidence of such activities as assessment and giving feedback to learners, designing and planning learning activities, evaluation of practice and continuing professional development - among others.

When we started discussing it we realised that Subject Librarians in particular were in a very good position to provide such evidence, given their involvement in training for information skills and close work with academics to support students. I’m please to say that our first three brave applicants were all successful and this success encouraged others to apply. So far we have an impressive 9 Fellows within Library and Learning Services and more colleagues are considering making an application.

Most people have preferred to make a presentation or ‘personal dialogue’ to the panel of HEA assessors and these have had quite an impact, partly because they highlight areas of library work that many academics are unaware of but also because they provide an opportunity for panel members to engage in a dialogue with the candidate, enabling them to delve deeper into the evidence presented and to find our more about the range of activities librarians are engaged with.

As a PSF panel member myself I have been privileged to hear about the innovative practice of many academic colleagues but also proud to witness some of the librarians’ presentations and the reaction of our colleagues. To say they were simply ‘wowed’ by several of the presentations would not be an exaggeration. Written feedback for individual candidates has consistently shown that academic panel members are impressed by the professionalism and knowledge that library staff are bringing to learning and teaching right across the university. I must also stress that it is not just Subject Librarians who have achieved this award. Our Collections Development Manager and our Assistant Electronic Resources Manager both also made successful applications by presentation and, as a result, one was invited to teach on the UEL Lecturers’ Development programme and the other to show case her project work at an event for UEL colleagues.

Libby Homer, our Collections Development Manager, commented ‘*The thing I found most important about going for the Fellowship was proving that, although I have a “back office” type job, I still do contribute to the student experience and teaching and learning. ‘*

Judith Preece, one of our Campus Library Managers said of the experience*:’* *The work I have done with both UEL staff and those from other institutions was received with overwhelming enthusiasm by the panel.  They really had no idea that Library staff could be so extensively involved in the professional development of a much wider group of people. This reaction was both affecting and energising’*

The recent Browne report makes reference to the HEA professional standards framework and hints at its potential to become a national standard for teaching quality and, consequently, a tool to support future student recruitment:

*“Increasing competition for students will mean that institutions will have stronger incentives to focus on improving teaching quality. If they are not able to attract enough students, their funding will decrease.*

*Students will also expect that those teaching them will have a minimum level of skill in teaching. Teaching in HE is diverse and a one size fits all ‘licence to teach’ is not appropriate. The HE Academy has developed a professional standards framework which can be used for accrediting individual institutions’ own teaching and development activity so that it meets a nationally recognised minimum standard.”*

In this context it must be positive to continue encouraging academic librarians to engage with the PSF and seek Fellowship or Associateship of the Academy, both for their own benefit and for that of the university as a whole. As information professionals of course we have access to our own awards via CILIP, and these are still highly relevant to academic librarians, but Fellowship of the HEA also signals to academic colleagues that we posses a diverse range of skills that distinguish libraries as academic related services which, ideally, are closely integrated with learning and teaching and are at the heart of a truly excellent student experience in our universities.

**References**

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