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Working together in difficult times: strategies for e-resource budgeting, negotiation and collection review - a JIBS User Group Event held in York December 2010

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As a member of the JIBS committee I helped organise the above event which was held at The King’s Manor, a beautiful medieval building in the centre of York belonging to York University.

About 30 delegates battled through the snow to attend, which was more than we expected given how bad the weather and train connections were to York last week. Thankfully all the speakers turned up and we had a good mix of talks and some thought provoking discussions.

The event was chaired by Gary Horrocks from King’s College London, and our first speaker was David Prosser, the director of RLUK. RLUK is a consortium of 29 of the largest research organisations in the UK and Ireland, including the three UK national libraries. David’s talk was entitled “Reassessing the value proposition – towards a fair price for scholarly journals” and focussed on the RLUK’s announcement that it would not support future journal big deals unless they showed real price reductions. With a cut to the teaching grant and research budgets flat at best, RLUK members believe that unless this happens they will be forced to cancel significant numbers of subscriptions which will fatally compromise the UK’s capacity for research. The bottom line was that we do not have the money to sign deals where prices rise and budgets fall. He finished off with a quote from Sir James Drummond Bone, former VC of the University of Liverpool - “Now is not the time to hunker down, but to innovate and develop new strategies and systems”.

Following on from this was Faculty Team Leader Martin Gill, from the University of Leeds, whose presentation was entitled “W(h)ither the big deal- is e-journal purchase about to fragment?” Martin outlined what big deals were all about and then analysed the ones they take at Leeds. Their e-strategy came into effect in April 2002 when they switched to online only subscriptions to save money, space and administration time. He touched on the economies exercise the University is carrying out to make total savings of £35m and said that approximately 40% of the library’s materials budget pays for 8 journal packages. As a result they have recently cancelled two big deals with effect from January 2011 and may have to cancel more in 2012. At the same time the Library has also had to increase their Inter-Library loan charges from £2 to £5 per request. Martin finished off by saying that librarians need to do more negotiating with publishers and drive a harder bargain, after all, the University of California refused to pay Nature’s 400% price increase didn’t they?

Tony Kidd from the University of Glasgow gave an insight into the workings of Library Consortia with his presentation on “SHEDL – negotiating together: the present and future role of consortia in academic library purchasing”. He talked about how it was set up, its relationship with JISC Collections and Nesli2 and the work they are currently carrying out. He said negotiations are more difficult this year as libraries are unable to commit to long term deals due to the financial constraints we are all experiencing.

We had two further talks in the afternoon, one from Sally Curry from the RIN and lastly Liam Earney from JISC Collections. Sally’s was entitled “Working together in difficult times: challenges for academic libraries” which dealt with budgeting and financial implications after the Browne Report and the Comprehensive Spending Review. She talked about how libraries could try to make cuts by
not replacing staff and recruitment freezes, we are already doing more with fewer staff and will need to give thought to restructuring, several things we are already doing at Huddersfield. She talked about cuts in service with relation to opening hours, enquiry services and user information skills training. Many libraries are already cutting plans in both building developments and IT projects. She then looked at content and how expenditure in books has fallen and asked the question - will e-books popularity increase as a result? She finished off by looking at new strategies for content which could include just-in case to just-in time, from librarian controlled to user generated acquisitions and will the future be e-only material?

Liam’s talk was called “Driving a hard bargain: negotiating the Nesli2 deals and the prospects for the coming round” and gave us librarians an insight into how difficult it is to make deals with publishers, how many meetings they need to have to negotiate a tiny reduction in real term costs and what a good job JISC does on our behalf!

All in all a thought provoking conference in a beautiful building even if it was freezing and took 4 hours to get home!

Catherine Parker

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