UKSG Conference and Exhibition 2002

15-17 April 2002
University of Warwick

Briefing session 15 – Newcomers to serials
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Introduction

This briefing session looked at the issues facing the librarian new to managing serials in a UK academic library and was divided between the two presenters. The hybrid nature of the serials librarian was covered in terms of the traditional role of serials management (typically with print journals), and the more recent role regarding the administration and management of electronic journals.

Jayne Everard was the Serials Librarian at Manchester Metropolitan University for five years up to August 2000, and Graham Stone has been responsible for serials at Bolton Institute since 1997 and has the new job title of Serials and Electronic Developments Manager. The point was made that the session was based purely on the speaker's experience of working with serials, and apologies were given in advance for this experience being confined to the UK academic sector. However, it was acknowledged that serials administration and management is considered to be fairly common worldwide.

The Traditional Serials Librarian

In 2001 UK University and HE libraries spent £69m on serials compared to £48m on books and £32m on online resources (LISU). Typically the serials budget in the academic library is the second largest area of expenditure after the staffing budget and the Serials Librarian is usually responsible for ensuring it is spent within the University financial year, although s/he does not normally decide what titles to spend it on. One of the main roles then of the Serials Librarian is that of the intermediary between Subject Librarian colleagues and the supplier/agent. Although this speaker concentrated on her experience of the 'traditional' Serials Librarian, her role had begun to metamorphose with the advent of electronic issues, such as different pricing models, licenses, archiving and VAT concerns, as well as the old problem of the cost of journals. Although the issue of inflation is in danger of becoming passé, the fact that journal prices consistently outstrip the RPI continues to be a real issue for libraries.

Journals can be bought either direct from the publisher or society, or via a subscription agent. The many advantages of centralising purchase via a subscription agent were described, especially where many subscriptions are concerned. The agent invariably offers services such as customised and one line invoices, early payment plans, electronic services, management information reports and many other time-saving and value added services which should be taken advantage of.

The benefits of tendering were covered, and a brief outline of the tendering process was given and why it was necessary. Since the EU Directive came into force in 1992, most of the UK academic libraries have formed consortia which tender their combined journal business, giving both the customer and supplier a professional and business contract.

The practicalities of journal administration and management were covered, from the purchase and subscription control, to the cataloguing, check-in, processing, binding and shelving of the journal and finally the claims procedure. This was based on experience of using an automated serials package and highlighted the need to be thorough and to keep on top of the claims and subscription queries. The need to get pattern predictions as accurate as possible was stressed, as this can drastically reduce the amount of claims produced. However, it was agreed that accurate patterns can be a contradiction in themselves!

The administration of print journals can be quite labour-intensive in terms of the time taken to deal with the physical item; unpacking, cataloguing, checking-in, processing, shelving and re-shelving and binding. In addition to this, consideration should be given to the space which print journals occupy. Whilst print journals create an automatic archive, the costs to store and maintain them are high. Access to print journals is fairly straightforward, if the library is open and the required issue is on the shelf,

then it is accessible. However, physical access can be hampered by many factors; the issue is out on loan or being used, has been vandalised or stolen, or the issue was never received.

The session then moved onto the second speaker who concentrated on the practicalities and challenges of dealing with e-journals and in particular making the move over to e-journals as seamless and painless as possible!

The E-journals Librarian

There are many perceived and real advantages of access to virtual stock, such as 24/7 access, no shelving or physical space required, no 'at binding' volumes or other missing issues, searchable content and links to other value added services. However, the reality of arranging this can often be very time-consuming and amounts to a whole new job in itself. The potential for the additional work this heralded for the traditional Serials Librarian has seen the creation of a raft of new job roles, such as Electronic Resources Co-ordinator, E-Journal Administrator, Electronic Information Manager or Serials and Electronic Developments Manager. These new roles typically include **all** electronic information, online databases, e-books as well as e-journals, plus the licensing, authentication and archiving issues.

Although there are no physical journals to deal with, the equivalent 'e-jobs' still exist, for instance, when an e-issue is 'late' it falls to the Electronic Resources Co-ordinator to find out why. Often, the process involved can be very longwinded and time-consuming, depending upon where the problem lies (i.e. registration, authentication etc). The question was posed as to whether there is an easy way of getting the internal and external mechanisms right for this process to work smoothly, but in the meantime aggregator services can be a great help, and services such as TDNet may offer a real solution, but at a cost.

Two main ways in which libraries provide access to e-journals have emerged over the past 4 years or so – via their web site or via their catalogue, and sometimes both. But, should you subscribe to something such as Science Direct, and access is via your catalogue, how do you catalogue the 1100 titles overnight? It is therefore well worth giving careful consideration to the implications of which option you take before making the final decision.

The latter part of the session covered many more practicalities of dealing with e-journals such as dead links, IT problems (knowing IT jargon can really help!) access for specific groups of students (overseas, FE/HE Consortia) and the implications of the Special Educational Needs Disability Act for web sites and electronic information display.

The session ended with a look into the future and a little crystal-ball gazing! This touched on the possible replacement for Athens; third generation e-journal management and control systems either from library system vendors of other third parties; and the possibility of linking to institutional VLE's and complete interoperability with all other University systems! Finally a light-hearted resume of the skills required by the Perfect Serials Librarian was given, which is reproduced below.

Financial Management	Technical Know How
Purchasing	Negotiation Skills
Tendering	Communication Skills
Legislation/Legal Aspects	Change Management
Licensing	People Management
Business Acumen	Economics
Bibliographic Expertise	Knowledge of Publishing Industry
Sound Office Practice	Patience
IT Skills	Sense of Humour
Problem Solving	Psychic Ability and/or Crystal Ball Owner

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