When Less Forces Change: A Phoenix Approach to Rebuilding Research Support from Restructure Ashes

Joanne Marsh
Head of Open Research and Scholarly Publications

Michelle Mayer
Open Research and Scholarly Publications Officer

The Sector Context

Sound familiar?

Academic libraries are increasingly asked to:

- Do more with less
- Support growing researcher needs
- Demonstrate impact
- Adapt to changing institutional priorities

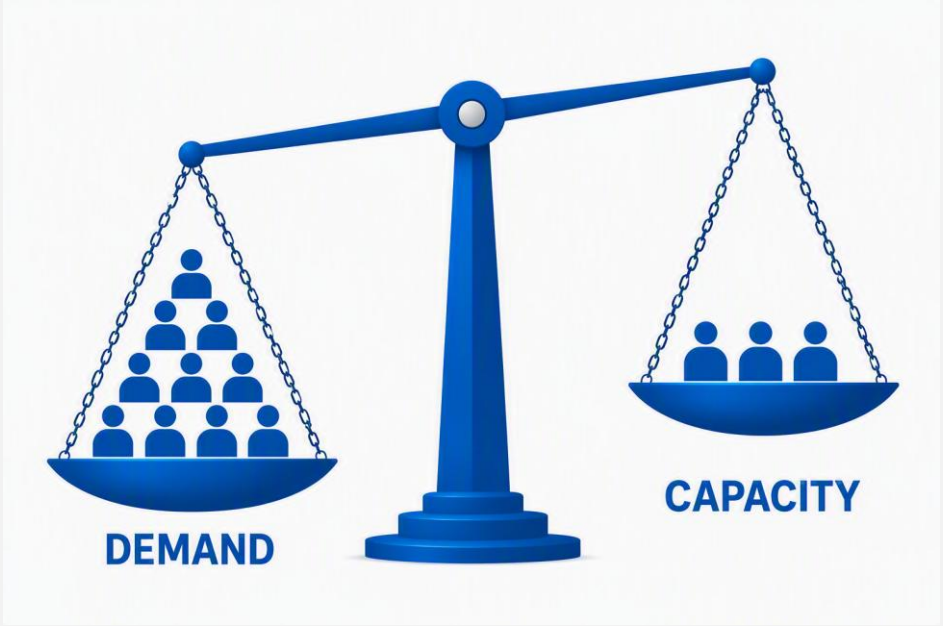
Yet resources and staffing are often reducing.

Our Challenge

What Happened?

Library restructure during 2024/25 led to:

- Reduced staffing within the Open Research & Scholarly Publications Team
- Reduced capacity for training delivery
- Ongoing expectations around researcher support, REF, OA compliance
- Requirement to maintain visibility and value



We couldn't simply continue doing the same things with fewer people.

Quick Show of Hands

How many of you have experienced:

- Staffing reductions?
- Increased workloads?
- Pressure to demonstrate impact with fewer resources?
- Cancellation or reduction of training programmes?

Turn to someone near you

What service did you have to stop or reduce because capacity changed?

What Was No Longer Sustainable?

Services focused on:

- Compliance
- Scheduled classroom training
- One to one support
- Repeat sessions

Which meant:

- Significant preparation time
- Variable attendance
- Duplication of effort

A Shift in Thinking

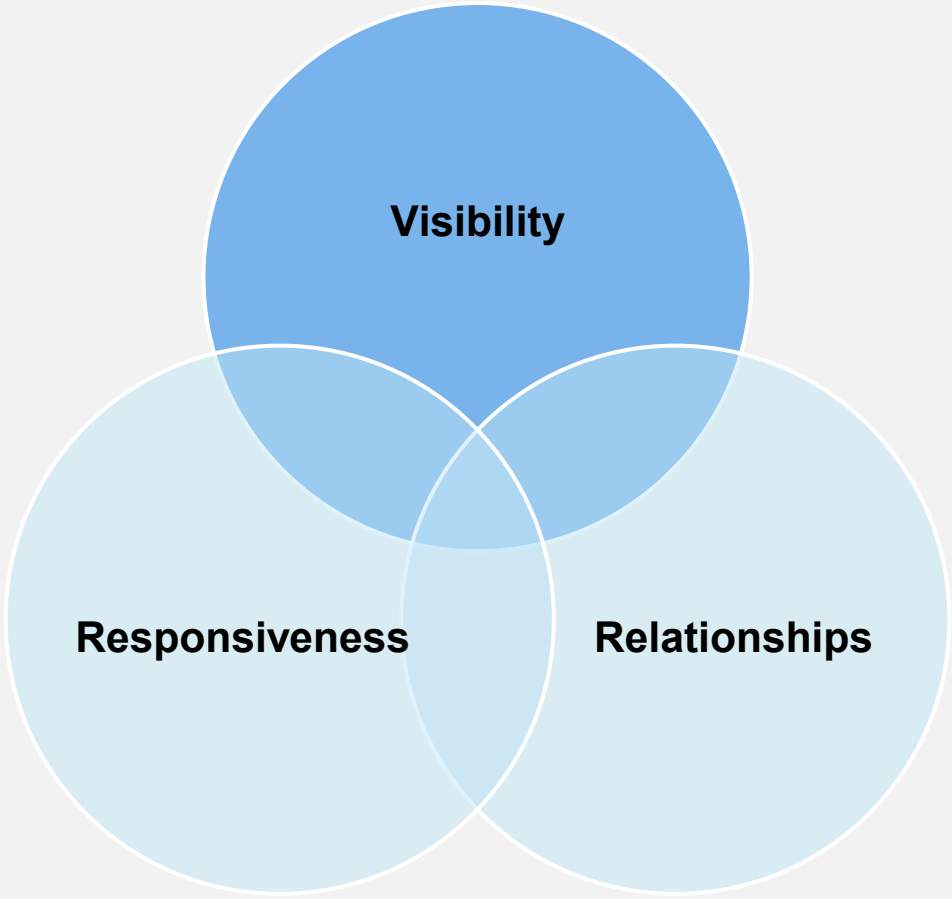
“What activities create the most value for researchers?”

- From volume → impact
- From scheduled delivery → point-of-need support
- From ownership → partnership
- From creating new initiatives → making better use of existing opportunities

What We Changed

Our Approach:
Embedded Support

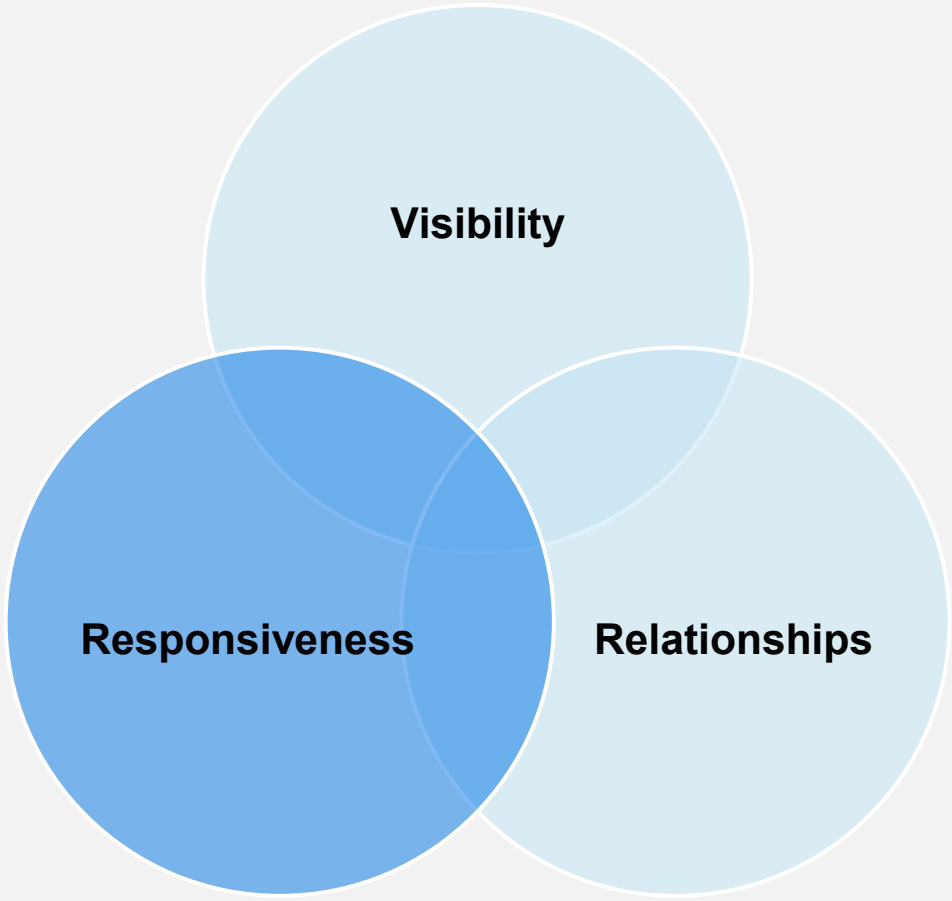
- Research cafés
- Research Centre drop-ins
- Virtual drop-ins



What We Changed

Our Approach:
Asynchronous Support

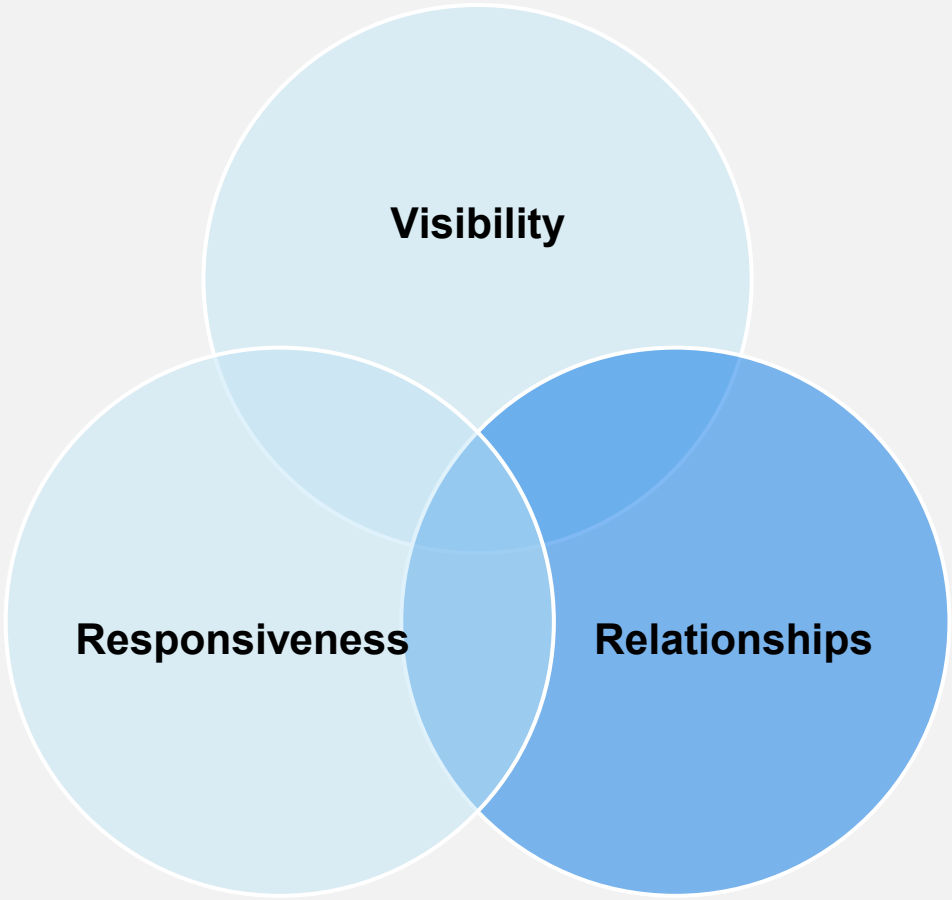
- Shared inboxes
- Online guidance
- Self-service resources



What We Changed

Our Approach:
Strategic Partnerships

- Research Centres
- Researcher Development Programmes
- Writing Retreats



What Happened?

Despite reduced staffing, we were able to:

- Sustain research support
- Reach researchers in contextually relevant settings
- Strengthen institutional partnerships
- Maintain visibility
- Focus staff time on higher-impact interactions

Researchers often engaged more naturally in informal spaces than in traditional training sessions.

Key Lessons Learnt

Less can force focus

Not everything adds equal value.

Existing structures are powerful

You don't always need new services.

Relationships scale better than sessions

Partnerships extend reach.

Visibility matters

Researchers need to know you're available.

Strategic reduction is not failure

Doing fewer things can increase impact.

Audience Reflection

What Would You Stop?

Imagine your team lost 25% of capacity tomorrow.

Which ONE would you prioritise?

- A. Training programmes
- B. Drop-ins
- C. Online support
- D. Partnerships

Key Message

Our Phoenix Lesson

The solution wasn't to work harder to maintain existing services.

The solution was to adapt and work efficiently to maintain support.

We learned that:

Sustainable research support comes from intentional focus, partnership, and meeting researchers where they are.

Thank you

Any questions?

Joanne Marsh and Michelle Mayer
Coventry University