



Deputies & Senior Staff Group

Outline Agenda: 2-4pm, 7th April 2022

Meeting Chair: Chris Porter

Present: Chris Porter (Newman, Steering Group Sponsor), Luke Fowler (Wolverhampton), Katie Mann (Newman), Kirsty Kift (Coventry), Anne Knight (Cranfield), Curwen Thomas (Harper Adams), Julie Robinson (Newman), Liz Mallett (Lincoln)

Apologies: Alison Pope (Staffordshire), Vicki Mcgarvy (Staffordshire), Georgina Dimmock (Northampton), Phil Vaughn (Coventry), Jon Granger (Wolverhampton)

Summary of Actions

ACTION: ALL to share information on processes, policy and service standards for click and collect services now in operation

ACTION: GJJ to poll members of theme(s) of next meeting via email

ACTION: GJJ to arrange poll for date of next meeting with members

22/01 Meeting Chair

GJJ asked as no one had volunteered ahead of today's meeting, that someone needed to take a lead on chairing this meeting. As no one felt able, Chris as Steering Group sponsor agreed to act chair for today.

22/02 Issues & actions from Previous Meeting

It was agreed all actions had been handled, and the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

22/03 Themed Discussions

a. National Student Survey

Chris started the ball rolling by asking what people were doing in relation to the NSS currently. Kirsty noted Coventry had achieved a 63% return rate but it was still running. Given the split off-site/on campus final year for some students, it would be difficult to gauge their experiences ahead of the results. Anne noted Cranfield's post-grad focus meant they didn't use the NSS, but had observed a similar increase in on-campus numbers. Liz agreed Lincoln's campus was busier, but the library was still a much lower traffic area than pre-pandemic. She noted interest in how much 'online resources' used by students would be related to library provision in the survey results. Katie countered that Newman still hadn't seen a big increase in users, despite 'Back to Newman' events in March. However, the library was getting more requests for silence from students, so was probably being visited more often.

Chris commented since the NSS became 'official statistics' there was no longer an alert before all the results went live. She also noted the perceived reduction (~10%) in satisfaction scores across the board in the survey. Kirsty said while the sector had been down last year as a whole, Coventry hadn't dipped as much as the national average. Hence, while it wasn't seen as a concern then, but if it was repeated this year it would be more of an issue. However, students reportedly had been happy with Coventry's library's efforts to remain open as much as possible, although some still expected 24/7 even in the depth of the



lockdown restrictions. Anne added internal surveys at Cranfield had shown a similar dip in satisfaction rates, although the library was still 'top of the heap'. Like Coventry though, there was an expectation that things must improve this year.

Chris raised the issue of the NSS questions being revised for next time - e.g. no longer 'satisfaction' but 'quality of experience' – but most notably the 'library quality' question was being redrafted to ask instead about 'were learning resources good enough'. She explained while some directors are concerned about this, others were less bothered. She asked how people had used the 'library' grade and results previously, and moreover if they thought the wording changes would impact on how they used the NSS results.

Kirsty suggested 'learning resources' would be perceived by most students as equalling 'the things I use in my dept' such as lab kit, studios, and materials rather than library resources. She said it could be problematic, as the free text comments on the 'library' question could be data-mined for useful feedback, and it would be less focussed on relevant issues to the service in future. Julie agreed that she suspected students would relate the question VLEs, as they are primarily seen as 'learning resources'.

Liz commented that at Lincoln they had found academic resistance in the past in discussing the results of the survey, as departments weren't interested where the library had done well. Their focus was always on improving scores across the board, so the question emphasis change was perhaps less of an issue for their service. However, she agreed that a library-centric question was invaluable for gathering feedback for internal processes and service reviews.

Chris highlighted issues at Keele, where a high library score indicated satisfaction from the student body, although the library staff were keen to drive service and facility improvements; something the high score tended to de-prioritize with the university exec. She commented some library directors across the UK wanted to demand a return to 'their' question, not least because it was perceived to diminish library standing and importance. However, other professional service sections such as student services don't have their 'own' question, and additionally the general feeling is the OFS wasn't listening to librarians.

She suggested taking future comments in context and drawing what value could be gained where common elements for concern resonate with the library's needs – although careful interpretation would be needed. Kirsty commented how a lot depended on how and where the library was situated in the local political strata. She asked if others had NSS related funds, like Coventry puts aside to address key concerns emerging from each survey. No one else in the meeting took this approach.

Chris thanked everyone for their discussions and moved to the next item.

b. Future of print collections

Chris opened the topic, which had also been debated at the recent Board meeting.ⁱ

Liz noted at Lincoln how circulation was much diminished, although students still demanded more print texts. She highlighted how paid-returns for books had been a big success. Kirsty noted how at Coventry circulation had been down as well, with the pandemic reducing it further. There was however a vocal minority who remained wedded to print use in their user community. She reported a lot of stock had gone missing or been lost in the past two years. While efforts to have it returned had been a modest success, because many students had left campus earlier than expected or shifted to online learning this had been challenging to resolve. She suggested a postal returns service might have helped in this respect.



Anne explained Cranfield had lost some stock, but not to a greater degree, but this might have been due to the paid-for postal returns service like Lincoln. While currently physical circulation wasn't clear, she expressed it was perhaps worth investigating. Notably, some of Cranfield's libraries had offered an on-shelf reservation service, but demand had been too high for staffing levels to accommodate – which did demonstrate a demand for print existed. However, Cranfield was mainly an 'access' rather than 'holdings' library, and print collections were being weeded of underused materials.

At Harper-Adams, Curwen explained, print circulation has dramatically reduced. There wasn't pre-pandemic a heavy e-material focus, but this had changed, and now students seemed to like it on aggregate. E-resource usage had become higher than print as a result. She cited how click and collect was still offered for print stock, but little use was being made of it. However, one difficulty was academic staff who prefer print and add specific print texts to resource and reading lists, even when online alternatives are available.

Anne commented on a frustrating trend, where staff helped students to find material on shelves, which was then later recalled via click and collect by the same students rather than gather the books themselves. There were also instances of students in the library requesting collection of material held on shelves a short walk from where they were sitting. Additionally, a lot of material recalled this way was never collected, which raised questions of how long to hold it for one student. Luke expressed surprise, having worked in the public library sector where on-shelf reservations were highly popular, that it had taken the pandemic to drive academic libraries to adopt the practice. Liz noted Lincoln were running a small project with their business books to compare circulation data and reading lists. They were also offering paid mail-returns too.

Kirsty observed how pre-pandemic there were concerns on the staffing and time resource to operate click and collect services, especially in terms of 'right here and now' student expectations. Now the service had been implemented it had been popular. She observed it would be beneficial to expand the service, but the capacity issues remain a challenge to resolve in this respect. Like others, Coventry has observed students requesting books from the shelves close to where they are sitting.

Luke commented that it is usually high-demand texts which are requested, and asked a question about how long libraries hold these for before returning the stock to the shelves. He had observed particular issues in this regard from part-time students who would visit the library to collect items reserved less frequently than their full-time peers. Liz noted that click and collect had become a normalised and successful service at Lincoln, and texts were held for a couple of days, although students could get in touch and request a longer hold period. In terms though of turnaround speeds from request to collection, this was still something which was up for debate.

It was suggested others not present today may have thoughts and observations on processes, policy, and service standards for click and collect - from retention periods to turnaround – to share. Hence, Chris invited everyone to continue these discussions on the mailing list.

ACTION: ALL to share information on processes, policy and service standards for click and collect services now in operation



Chris highlighted the Board discussions about Anglia Ruskin University's new Peterborough campus, where no book stock was being purchased; although older print would be available for the first two years before being withdrawn. She also noted how Paul from Staffordshire had talked about their experiences with reducing stock but increasing its availability across campus.¹ Kirsty noted that Coventry's Poland campus' issues with stock and security, had seen it adopt an e-book only model. This had raised considerations around the library as a collection or a space, and there were also questions about how, or if, students were able to browse for books.

Julie raised a point about weeding electronic collections, although observed perhaps most libraries were still in an accumulation mode. However, she suspect there would be a point reached where texts' currency and superseded edition issues arise. She posed the question to the meeting - do people already remove materials or has this point yet to be reached?

Kirsty observed where sole items had been purchased an access licence could be turned off, but this wasn't possible for items bought as part of an aggregated collection. At Cranfield the issue of e-weeding had been considered, but wasn't seen currently as a major problem. She agreed with Kirsty concerning the issues with aggregator platforms though. Luke noted he was working on a related policy at Wolverhampton, although currently there was no process or programme which can deal with aggregated materials. He suggested they might explore suppressing item records on the OPAC as a way to 'hide' superseded works. Wolverhampton didn't buy physical stock where e-format materials available, although academics often asked for specific print editions which weren't available electronically. These requests were taken on a case-by-case basis as there is no desire to write broad exception rules for each discipline. Ideally, the library looked to only invest in print where it was strategically valuable, but not in terms of textbooks.

Lincoln was about to start work on a new collection development policy, so had strong interests in this area. Liz noted a law academic who stressed how an older, print edition of a text had a specific content which was not included in later, or online, versions. Kirsty concurred and had encountered similar challenges at Coventry. All the same, their service was seeking better ways to flag up non-withdrawal stock. She suggested storage, both physical and electronic, was the driver for any e-withdrawal; e.g. can the catalogue grow indefinitely? She noted in some subject areas materials remain print only, which meant as a result any move to more online stock was less practical or desirable.

There was some discussion around the benefits of broad collection retention and development policies vs those nuanced for individual schools, departments or courses. Although, it was observed too much granularity might introduce difficulties in applying, maintaining and balancing the impacts of these. It was suggested where a strong adherence to print was observed from specific academics, departments or courses, that exploring the rationale behind this was a valuable datum for developing policies which are sufficiently evidenced based. In this respect, Liz recalled the example of an academic who desired their students to 'visit the library and experience it like a sweet shop' , and desired activities which would drive students to find the collections.



However, Liz noted Lincoln had been routinely purchasing multiple physical copies of new, leading business texts but these seemed to get scant usage. Hence, they were reviewing the circulation data for this area to see how many of the 'top 100' books had been (a) borrowed or (b) appeared on reading lists. This would help to identify where they were essential or additional reading items. Certainly, so far much of this stock seemed not to have been borrowed.

At Coventry when the library moved art and design texts onto movable shelving there were a lot of negative feedback, although the stock had not been in high use. Today, the library's physical book collections were seen as part of the wider reading collection, rather than comprising 'core textbooks' which are more likely to be online. Luke raised a point that defining what is a 'textbook' could be challenging, as many monographs were tagged as essential 'textbooks' by some courses or academics.

Chris observed with a shift away from physical books and journal, this was likely impacting on the value gained from SCONUL access to external visitors. She asked if people had seen a downturn in visits, or were external visitors using the library as much for space as they were for collections? Kirsty commented that 99% of Coventry visitors were there to use the space, partly as an artifact of location – many local students attend other universities but don't want to travel. Hence, the library had a lot of requests about when SCONUL access was restarting. The library did provide one walk-up access terminal, but this didn't provide access to everything in the online collections. Certainly, she'd observed students purchasing article access for themselves too, as it was still cheaper than paying for public transport.

Julie said Newman had been considering offering a walk-in access point, but probably wouldn't be implementing it. Luke observed that open-access offered the potential for off-site access to collections by visitors, but the reality was a long way from making this ubiquitous. Cranfield, Anne commented, had very few visitors due to their location being somewhat remote. Those they did have under SCONUL Access were usually there to make use of the study space though. Chris observed being close to Birmingham with its relatively larger stock and collections was an attractive prospect for Newman students to use under the scheme.

Chris thanked everyone for the comments and moved on to the next item.

22/04 General discussions & institutional updates

Coventry: A busy period currently with exams starting today (7th April). While it will go quiet once these are finished, the library has been in a busy phase since January this year. The university line is that things will be 'back to normal [operations] in September' for campus-based activities, although blended learning will continue. Senior management are keen to be offering a 'vibrant campus' environment.

Cranfield: Noticeable that footfall is up as there is more usual levels of wear and tear on the library fabric and fixtures. As Simon Bevan has retired, and Tim Wells won't start until 9th May, the library is between chief librarians currency. Additionally, with Sally Wilkinson retiring soon, Anne Knight herself will be in charge in the brief interim. The library is not post-pandemic operations yet, but after Easter there will be more of a return to normal operations. Notably, a lot of Cranfield's senior exec have changed in the past year, so new university strategies are being developed as a result.



Lincoln: The library is about to go through a print book tender process and a new VC has also arrived and is in a questioning and consultation phase. Additionally, the university has new teaching and learning strategies, among a range of other new policy initiatives. The university has moved to a flexible working approach, where staff are expected to normally work a minimum of two days weekly on campus, albeit depending on job roles. A new library has been built in Holbeach close to the National Centre for Food Manufacturing. The Medical School library which opened last year is also reportedly being well used. In terms of staffing currently a few vacancies are being carried, which is creating its own challenges.

Newman: It has been a relatively quiet period, with a somewhat limited engagement from students in terms of attendance at events. A fines amnesty was held in March to encourage people to come back, but with limited success. A new LMS has been implemented, plus there are new nursing and health courses starting in September 2023. As a university they're rolling out Office 365, including Teams, which has meant some challenges in terms of data migration. There have also been some library staffing changes in recent months.

Staffordshire: Neither Alison or Vicki could be present, but had sent a report ahead of the meeting.

'Vicki McGarvey has announced that she will be leaving the University in early June. We will all miss working with Vicki but wish her well in the future. The new university 'Reading Lists Online' system went live on Tuesday 18th January. Integrated with Blackboard or MS Teams, the new software has lots of useful additional functionality. For example, you can enrich your reading lists by, adding notes about sections you wish students to focus upon, ordering resources for addition to University Library stock as you add them to your list in one seamless process and monitoring usage of suggested texts. All lists in the old system (Keylinks) have been migrated to the new system (Leganto). The old Keylinks system will cease on March 31.

Buildings: Library Core (formerly Ashley 1 lecture theatres) houses our core collection which covers most subjects excluding creative/arts subjects. Library Creative (Blackstone ground floor) houses our creative collection (most items with '700' shelf numbers on the library catalogue but includes fashion also). It is open 24/7 and is located here so it is convenient for most creative subject delivery. Library Centre for Excellence (Stafford BHL) - furniture arriving Feb. Library Catalyst ('Click & Collect facility opened February 2022). Current opening times are available on [the library web pages](#). Users can reserve print books from any library location for collection at any library location, with 24/7 study spaces available in Cadman building. All locations have new self-service library machinery and the Student Connect Team travels to all library spaces at least twice a day to maintain the spaces and to help students.

Book Return campaign / Fines Amnesty: If students (or staff) have any overdue books, up until Tuesday 8th March 2022, they can be returned without paying any fines! Just return your books to the Library by 8th March, and all fines will be cleared (excludes outstanding invoices for damaged or lost books). From Wednesday 9th March, overdue book rates are being halved, from £1 per item per day, to just 50p per item per day. The rates are to encourage the return of books for the next user. SCOUNL Library Access is now available again.



Training: Workshops in Spring 2022 included ‘skills bridge’ and ‘applicant online’ career development workshops. [Skills for Study](#) is a new piece of software which can help ‘students build the skills for success in their studies and beyond with their own personalised learning pathway’. Integration into the VLE for this is continuing. Finally, the [Library Unlimited](#) project is continuing as part of the University’s Race and Inclusion strategy.’

Wolverhampton: Library patron numbers are up on previous periods, although not to pre-pandemic levels. There’s been a lot of work on timetabling at the university to improve the efficiency for students, although this has impacted on the library’s operations. A number of executive management posts have changed personnel, which itself is a big change for the institution. There’s been a lot of work on the student enquiry service, post-REF activities with researchers, and on revising reading list policies and its rollover period. Looking to recruit a new resources team librarian, and also will be reviewing their big journal package deals. Additionally, looking at the UPC framework too for procurement issues.

22/05 Next meeting (Summer 2022)

a. Meeting Chair

Anne Knight volunteered to host the next meeting. Chris thanked her for stepping forwards. It was agreed to seek the chair for the meeting after next at the opening of the next meeting.

b. Potential themes & topics

From today’s discussions a number of themes were suggested:

- **Procurement:** E.g., dealing with deals, what happens when there’s no deals, how different consortia membership contrasts, issues in the medium to long term
- **Student Induction:** E.g., preparations for the new (autumn) term, campus services and experience, dealing with hybrid/blended delivery
- **Staffing:** E.g. current levels, remote vs campus working, recruitment and retention, managerial strategies and practice, balancing resource (fiscal, numbers of people) with service and community need

It was agreed as many members had not been able to make today’s meeting to poll the mailing list on these, and any other themes, to arrive at a consensus.

ACTION: GJJ to poll members of theme(s) of next meeting via email

ACTION: GJJ to arrange poll for date of next meeting with members

22/06 AOB

As there were none, Chris closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

ⁱ See item DB: 22 March 2022, Item 22/01 (a) pp. 2-5.

<https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/minutes/22nd%20March%202022%20Directors%20Board%20Minutes.pdf>