

# Library and Information Management at the University of the West of England

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This edition of ASLIB Proceedings highlights the work of staff and students associated with postgraduate library and information study at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol. UWE is the largest university in the southwest region and has a strong focus on partnership, with an established track record in knowledge exchange with local community and enterprise. Teaching and research support in library and information science at UWE is shared between the Faculty of Environment and Technology and UWE's Library Service, with substantial input from other academic and professional experts from the region.

While maintaining its firm foundation of teaching traditional library, academic and management skills, the involvement of staff with computer science, information systems and web technology expertise is helping to maintain a curriculum relevant to the twenty-first century information specialist. Specialism routes currently offered include academic and public libraries and information service provision to health, government and corporate sectors. Research undertaken by staff and students is inspired by current practical issues in the profession and is a strong factor in enabling postgraduates to discover and develop new career directions.

UWE's information studies work benefits from an excellent network of employers in the region who both inform course design and employ graduates into professional roles. Through employer contacts the development of new programmes and collaborative partnerships are ongoing.

## The Current Issue

The papers in this issue span a range of topics from library education issues on the one hand, to library practice in the global arena on the other. A common thread is the changing environment in which information specialists operate, how this is being catered for in education and how it is creating new opportunities for influencing knowledge creation and empowering people. At the same time our authors identify evidence of continuing shortcomings in the self-promotion of the library profession and the impression this makes on the public consciousness.

In our opening opinion piece ***Sociable knowledge sharing online: philosophy, patterns and intervention***, myself and Robert Stephens look at knowledge exchange on the social web and how information professionals might understand and influence prevalent dynamics through awareness of the interaction patterns that have evolved to deal with problems of information overload, online authority and the representation of diverse opinion. Our approach is influenced by the social epistemology of Alvin Goldman, which we feel has a new applicability with the rise of social media for online communication. We conclude that positive, ethical interventions are needed to counteract the spread of ill-informed opinion and that these must pay heed to the subtleties of online social influence in addition to informational completeness.

Evidence for the need for better public understanding of the librarian's role comes from Leah Shaw in *Representations of Librarianship in the UK Press*. Through a content analysis of mass media sources, Shaw investigates the topics and skills that librarians are associated with in news reports. Results show that the image of librarians is generally positive, but rather vague – so we shouldn't be too surprised when the general public share this uncertainty about the librarian's role! These findings argue in favour of better promotion of the range of professional skills that librarians have to offer, but also show how we might capitalise on the interesting observation that librarians are starting to be noted and respected for their competence with technology.

The librarian's potential contribution to international development goals is discussed in the paper by Johanna Anderson and myself, *A Malawian School Library: Culture, Literacy and Reader Development*. Johanna's field work and analysis in Malawi has shown that the goal of global literacy in Africa will not be furthered through book donation schemes unless these are accompanied by localisation, contextualisation and librarian oversight. The paper argues for a renewed concentration on reader development as a way of fostering a reading culture that can productively complement cultural norms for oral knowledge sharing.

The next article, Dominic Fripp's *Using linked data to classify web documents*, illustrates the connection between long-established classification principles and those explicit in the design of the semantic web. Fripp compares Ranganathan's facets to semantic web representations of concepts and shows the basic underlying similarity through automatic entity extraction on a sample document. The ever accelerating development of the underlying semantic infrastructure for this type of classification bootstrapping will enhance the value of the semantic web to information managers as we go into the new decade.

While issues in library and information practice are discussed in the preceding papers, approaches to LIS education at UWE and new developments therein are analysed in the final two case studies. In *Developing work-based learning for Library and Information Science*, Jacqueline Chelin describes the motivation for the development of new teaching methods at UWE and the suitability of work-based learning to today's requirement for more flexible education that embeds knowledge exchange through guaranteeing a direct connection between academia and the workplace. The paper points out the expected challenges and potential gains for the academic team in moving toward this mode, in addition to highlighting the expected benefits for the student and employer.

In the final paper, *Practitioner involvement in teaching LIS at UWE*, Amanda Richardson uses the example of UWE's MSc to review the advantages of a high level of involvement of library and information professionals in course teaching. Evidence clearly identifies benefits to practitioners and students, in addition to highlighting the value of the formula in enhancing the employability of graduates. That said, skills and knowledge gaps remain in LIS education and these are presented. Finally, issues and concerns around the academic/practice balance are discussed, and Richardson reviews the possible risks to the LIS discipline associated with purely focusing on practice.