

THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR SUBJECT LIBRARIAN:

we have the technology - let's build
the ideal research support librarian

Antony Brewerton

RLUK Workforce Think Tank

& Head of Academic Services, University of Warwick

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RLUK Workforce Think Tank

Research Project: Investigation into the 'subject librarian' skills sets required to effectively support the information needs of researchers in the current and future research environment

Background

The learning environment in general – and the research environment in particular – is going through a period of rapid change. Education is moving from instruction-based content delivery on a one-to-many basis to a more participative, 'learner-centric' and 'learner as producer' model. Research, once characterised by the lone researcher with quite traditional needs working in isolation, has moved to a more collaborative multi- and inter-disciplinary focus. Libraries have responded by using the opportunity of increased digital content to free up space to provide more physical collaborative work environments (such as the Wolfson Research Exchange at the University of Warwick, pictured) and to populate virtual learning and research environments.



The support libraries offer to their user communities is also developing with more emphasis on roving services and greater use of peer-to-peer support. The survival of the subject/liaison librarian role in this environment is dependent on an agile and flexible response by staff in such roles and their managers. Much work has been done in recent years to re-energize support for teaching and learning but despite the emergence of new roles, such as data librarians, more is still required to develop subject/liaison support for research.

An initial overview of [job descriptions](#) and literature on the role of subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff suggests that – although examples of good practice exist – role descriptions are generally 'library-orientated' rather than orientated towards the needs of the research community. It suggests there is a need to match researcher needs (in different disciplines and at different levels) more closely to 'subject librarian' skills sets.

The 'subject librarian' project

Latest News

- [Workforce Think Tank: Updated Project Information](#)
- [Preservation Assessment Survey Workshop: 5th October](#)
- [RLUK- BL PAC: Training Day on Damaged books and bound archives: Practical first steps 9th November 2010](#)

Changes in the Learning Environment

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
Reactive/stable	Creative/agile
Instruction	Construction
Content delivery	User generated content
One to many/interactive	Peer 2 peer/participative
Interactive	Participative
Curriculum centric	Learner centric
Mundane	Engaging

Changes in the Research Environment

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
Sole researcher/small teams	Global research collaborations
Single disciplinary focus	Multi- & inter-disciplinary focus
Nest	Community of scholars
Print dependent	Desk top delivery

Changes in the Library business

<i>Traditionally</i>	<i>Now</i>
Physical stock	Digital resources +
Scarce resources	Amazon/Google etc.
One study size fits all	Third place
Physical barriers	Accessibility
Independent provider	Collaborative partner
Controlling	Motivational
Supply driven Library/operations centric	Embedded user- focused service

From: Brewerton, Antony
To: lis-sconul@jiscmail.ac.uk
Cc: Brewerton, Antony
Subject: Subject Librarian roles
Attachments:

Sent: Tue 21-Oct-08

Hi everyone,

I am currently doing some work on future roles for Subject Librarians and was wondering if colleagues would be able to help me.

Could you please send me copies of job descriptions and person specifications for Subject Librarian posts (or equivalent) or any posts relating to subject/liaison work?

I am especially interested in anything you may consider to be an 'example of good practice'.

I would also be interested to see examples of generic approaches – for example, liaison librarians for undergraduates and – especially – for research support. (Research support is a key interest.)

I'd also be keen to hear if you have any plans to develop these roles, again especially with regards research support.

Subject Librarians?

- Academic Subject Librarian
- Academic Support Librarian
- Academic Support Consultant
- Academic Librarian
- Academic Liaison Librarian
- Information Librarian
- Information Specialist
- Senior Information Advisor
- Liaison Librarian
- Faculty Liaison Librarian

...and rather excitingly...

- Research Support Librarian
- Research Support Specialist
- Research Liaison Manager

Core Subject Librarianship skills

<i>No.</i>	<i>Job description duty</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
1.	Information skills teaching	53
2.	Liaison/user-focused approach	50
3.	Collection management/development	47
=4.	Budget management	36
=4.	Enquiry support	36
5.	Production of print/Web guides	28
6.	Blended learning/e-learning/VLE support	15
7.	Current awareness	3

Liaison/user-focused approach

‘to be proactive in establishing effective communications with the designated subject areas, identifying and responding to their information needs, and informing the development of LIS facilities and services in support of teaching, learning and research’

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Information skills teaching

‘contribute to the design, delivery and evaluation of a range of information literacy and retrieval skills programmes and learning support materials’

Information skills teaching

‘design examination questions for inclusion in assessment as required’

‘design and mark assessments’

‘ensure that teaching is embedded in the curriculum wherever possible and that it has sound pedagogical foundations’

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Blended learning/e-learning

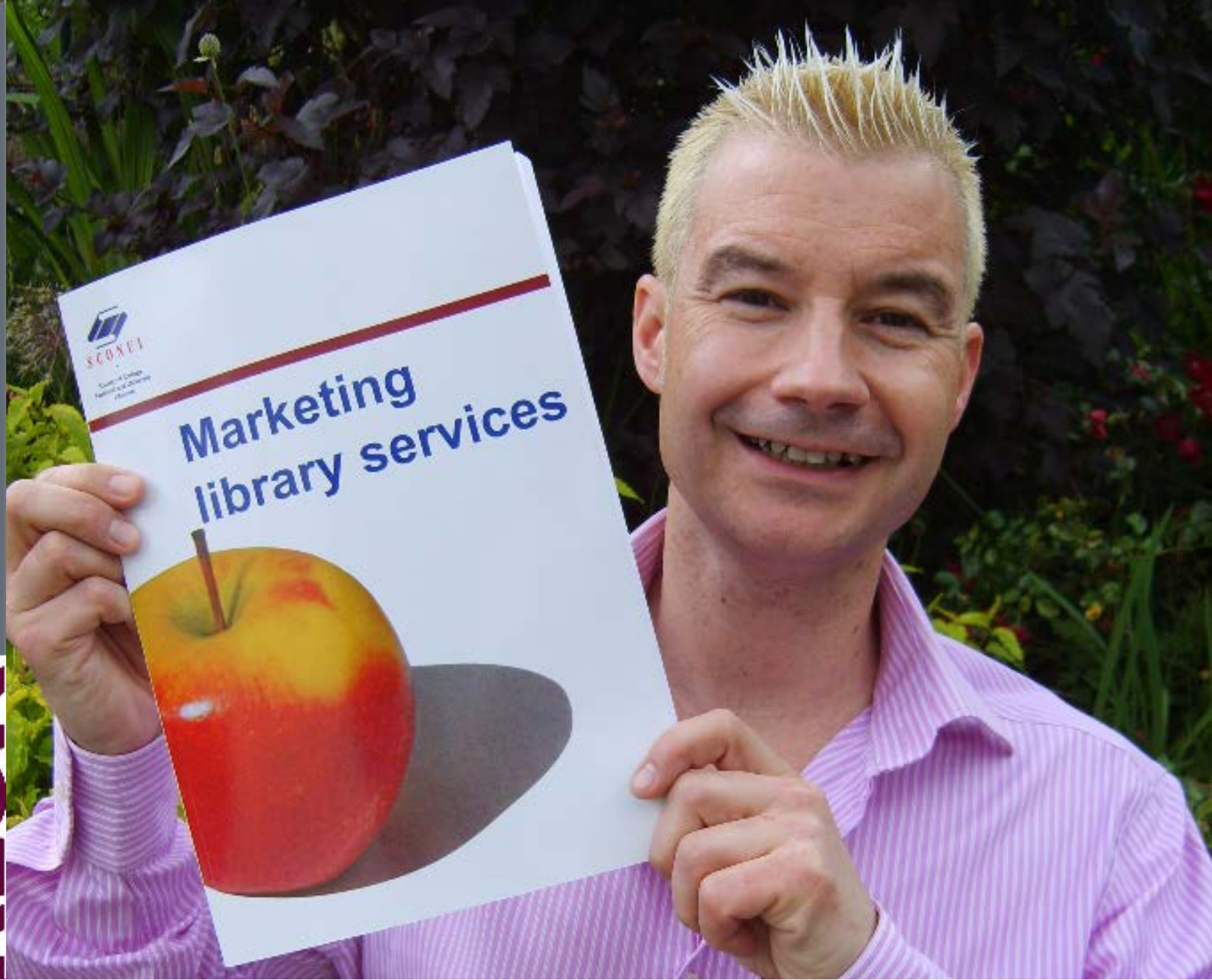
‘providing advice on pedagogical aspects of e-learning particularly with respect to the inclusion of electronic information resources’

New skills

<i>No.</i>	<i>Job description duty</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
1.		
2.	Staff management	28
3.	QAA/quality assurance/audit support	8
4.	Management data collection	6

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Research Libraries UK



New skills

<i>No.</i>	<i>Job description duty</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
1.	Marketing	35
2.	Staff management	28
3.	QAA/quality assurance/audit support	8
4.	Management data collection	6

Continuing Professional Development

<i>No.</i>	<i>Job description duty</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
1.	Professional activity	39
2.	CPD	21
3.	Staff training and development	17
4.	Keeping abreast of developments	11

CPD

‘will receive a personal Induction Award of £1,500, to be used for any purpose that will allow the appointee to become established and productive in the University in as short a time as possible’

Keeping abreast of developments

‘to be proactive and develop best practice models of support, through knowledge of experience elsewhere in the sector’

Continuing Professional Development

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1.	Professional activity	39
2.	CPD	21
3.	Staff training and development	17
4.	Keeping abreast of developments	11

Professional activity

‘engage in a full range of staff development activities including attending and presenting at conferences and seminars, write articles, engage in professional development and scholarly activity’

Changes in the Research Environment

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
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Single disciplinary focus	Multi- & inter-disciplinary focus
Nest	Community of scholars
Print dependent	Desk top delivery

Research roles

<i>No.</i>	<i>Job description duty</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
1.	'Research support'	15
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		

‘Research support’ – job purpose

‘to be responsible for developing and implementing a research support strategy across all library user groups to ensure that the needs of researchers are met’

...and...

‘to ensure that the library fully supports the [institution’s] research strategy’

Research roles

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Research roles

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1.	'Research support'	15
=2.	Bibliographic software support	8
=2.	IR/IR advocacy	8
=3.	Promotion of special collections	4
=3.	Copyright	4
4.	Bibliometrics/impact measurement	3
5.	RAE/REF support	2

‘The research highlights some key areas of **mismatch** between the expectations and perceptions of the key players (employers, students, educators). Employers appear to believe that educators are not developing the appropriate qualities (e.g. flexibility, commitment, reliability) while educators seem to believe they are and students appear to believe that they do actually possess these qualities.’

- **Anne Goulding et al.** *Likely to succeed: attitudes and aptitudes for an effective information profession in the 21st century (Library and Information Commission Report 8)*, 1999, p.78

RLUK Workforce Think Tank: **supporting library staff to support researchers**



RLUK Workforce Think Tank

Projects

- To identify researcher information needs and develop 'subject librarian' roles and staff members (current and future) to meet these needs
- To grow existing talent for RLUK members through mentorship and leadership training

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Aims

To map the information needs of researchers onto tasks to be undertaken by subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff and to develop the skills sets of existing staff to ensure they meet the needs of a constantly changing research environment

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Stakeholder groups

- Subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff
- Directors
- Pro-Vice Chancellors for Research/research managers
- Library Schools
- Professional bodies

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Areas of investigation

- 1. Review of subject librarian (etc.) roles**
 - Literature review of subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff roles in the UK, North America and Australasia
 - Environmental scan of subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff job descriptions, staffing structures and models of researcher support in the UK, North America and Australasia

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Areas of investigation

2. Review skills sets required to support researchers

- Literature review on the information needs of researchers in the UK, North America and Australasia (to include the 'seven ages of research' model)
- Define skills sets required by subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff to support researchers (to include politically pressing issues such as supporting the REF as well as ongoing skills such as advocacy/marketing) mapping these to researchers' information needs
- Conduct a gap analysis in selected RLUK institutions

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Areas of investigation

- 3. Review of relevant training and development activities currently available in the sector**
 - Review training for existing professionals and gaps in the market
 - Review training for new entrants and opportunities for working with library schools to ensure new professionals are equipped to support the current and emerging research environment

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Areas of investigation

- 4. Review alternative models of information support for researchers**
 - Review alternative routes to providing 'library' support for researchers (eg. research data)
 - Review approaches that bypass traditional 'library' support and implications for the profession

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Outcomes/deliverables

- Analysis of the literature
- Mapping of researcher needs (using ‘seven ages of research’ or other models) onto support activities
- Review of support landscape and review of issues related to alternative models of information support for researchers
- Sample staff structures
- Composite job description and person specification
- Tools for training needs analysis for staff
- Analysis of training offered by library schools/other bodies and opportunities for developing new courses (for both entry level and established staff)
- Analysis of how the research might inform future RLUK activities and opportunities for greater working with other professional bodies

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Benefits

To Subject Librarians (etc.)

- Scoping of activities required to support research will enable staff to identify opportunities for new roles, to extend portfolios and stretch postholders
- Skills analysis will enable staff to identify skills gaps and training needs
- Leadership/distributed leadership opportunities may also be identified

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Benefits

To Directors

- Scoping of activities can be used by Directors for role development, informing planning and assessment of what staff currently offer, what can be abandoned, and what needs to be developed in line with institutional strategies
- This in turn can inform structural reviews of LIS services
- Skills analysis can inform institutional training programmes
- Customizable job descriptions and person specification templates can be used to be tailored to meet the needs of individual institutions

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Benefits

To PVCs for Research/research managers

- Scoping of activities will enable research managers to become more fully aware of what can be offered by subject librarian/information specialist/liaison staff, rather than accept traditional models of support or seek support from alternative routes/sources
- This in turn may increase demand of (and support for) LIS services

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Benefits

To Library Schools

- Identify opportunities for library schools to develop courses for new professionals which are more closely aligned to the needs of library managers to ensure new entrants to the profession have the appropriate skill sets to support a constantly changing research environment
- Identify opportunities to work with RLUK to develop courses aimed at developing existing professionals

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Benefits

To Professional bodies

- Increase understanding of relevant bodies (RLUK, RIN, RLG, SCONUL, CILIP) regarding the needs of researchers and support options
- Highlight opportunities for RLUK to work with library schools or other providers to develop training programmes for staff
- This in turn will help RLUK to finesse its USP and raise its profile
- Highlight opportunities for RLUK to work more closely with CILIP to inform its marketing to potential LIS professionals to show another dimension to library work

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The Project

- timely
- of international interest

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Methodology

- Mary Auckland
- June – October 2010
- 4 Work Packages

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Work Package 1

Researcher needs & Subject Librarian roles

- An exploration of the **information needs and information seeking behaviour of researchers**, and the role of Subject Librarians supporting these, and mapping the role of Subject Librarians to the needs of researchers
- An environmental **scan of ‘subject librarian’ job descriptions, staffing structures and models of researcher support**
 - review of current literature
 - short questionnaire to 23 libraries

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Work Package 2

Subject Librarian skills sets

- Defining the **knowledge and skill sets** required by ‘Subject Librarians’ to support researchers based on the information gathered in WP 1
- A **validation** of current and future relevance of the knowledge and skills sets identified and **analysis of the extent to which Subject Librarians and their managers think the skills are currently available**
 - review of current literature
 - questionnaire completed by 22 RLUK member libraries

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Work Package 3

Training and development currently available for new and existing professionals

- Investigate **current training opportunities** for Subject Librarians
- Investigate **gaps** between provision and needs
 - desk research
 - short web-based survey of training suppliers
 - survey of LIS Schools

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Work Package 4

Alternative support models

- A review of **alternative models** of information support for researchers and **implications for the profession**
 - interviews with key players

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Findings

- Researcher information (and other) needs ...and how we are addressing them
- Subject Librarians' skills & knowledge, training needs & opportunities available, now & in the future
- Subject Librarians and models of researcher support

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Researchers

‘...researchers are not a homogenous group.’

- discipline
- career stage

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7 Ages of Research

- Masters students
- Doctoral students
- Contract research staff
- Early career researchers
- Established academic staff
- Senior researchers
- Experts

- Bent et al (2007)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Subject Librarians

- sea change
- see change

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

~~Subject Librarians~~

- see change
- see change

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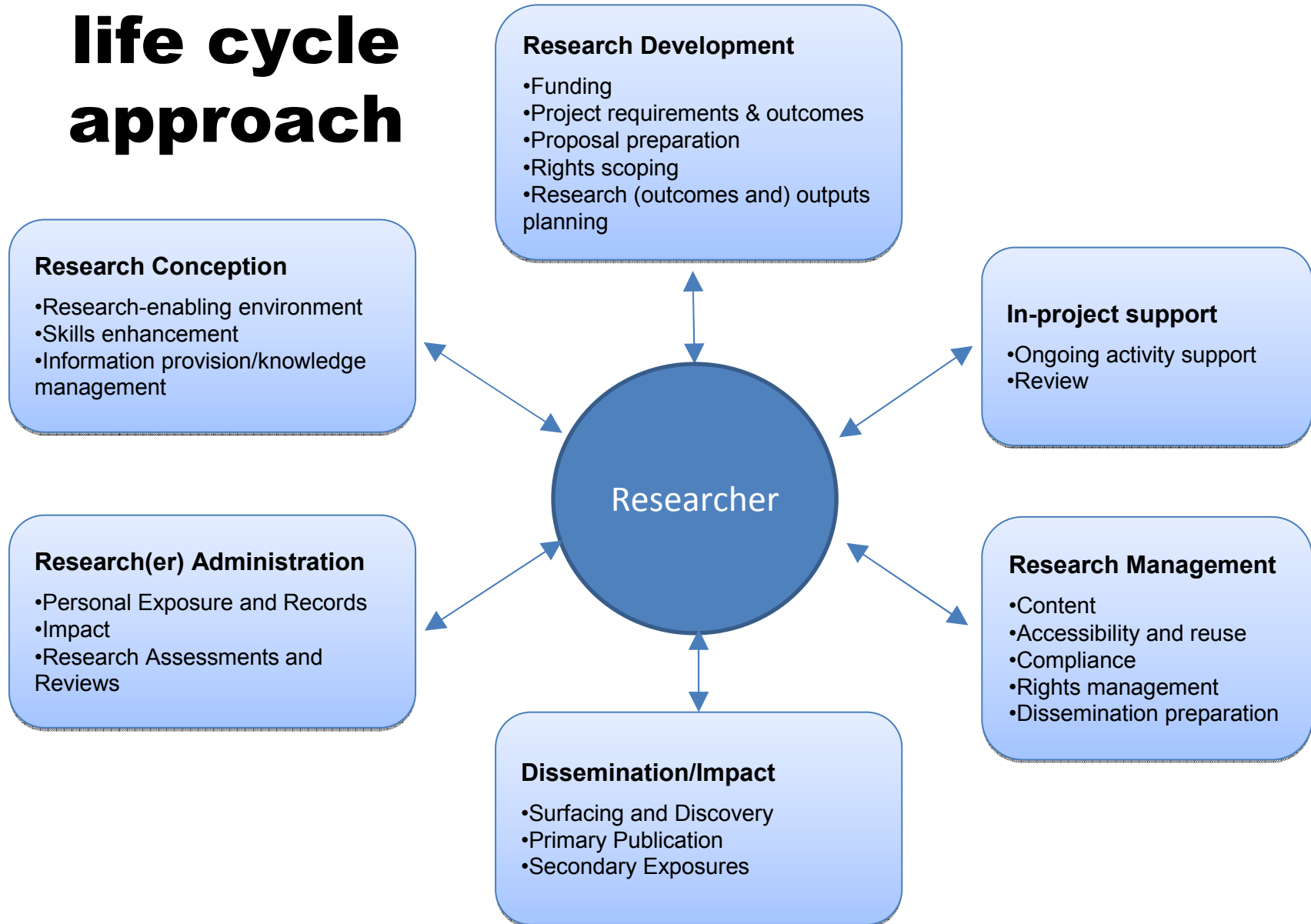
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Researchers

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Research life cycle approach



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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Research life cycle

- 1. Conceptualising new research, developing proposals, and identifying funding opportunities**
- 2. Seeking new information**
- 3. Information management**
- 4. Data collection**
- 5. Data discovery, management and curation**
- 6. Sharing, discussion, online collaboration**
- 7. Analysing and reflecting on information and data**
- 8. Writing up and dissemination**
- 9. Compliance, IP, © and other statutory requirements**
- 10. Preservation**
- 11. Quality assessment and measuring impact**
- 12. Commercialisation**
- 13. Emerging technology**

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

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- 13. Emerging technology**

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Generally...

‘To date, Subject Librarians have supported the needs of researchers through relatively traditional services revolving around information discovery, collection development and some elements of information management.’ (p.28)

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Flexibility

‘...the most important skills or attribute staff can have is an adaptable and flexible approach to work.’ (p.29)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

32 skills & knowledge areas

1. Deep understanding of discipline/subject
2. Excellent knowledge of content (in all relevant media) available to discipline/subject
3. Excellent knowledge of bibliographic and other finding tools in discipline/subject
4. Knowledge to advise on relevant archive and special collections
5. Awareness of current and changing local research interests
6. Understanding of typical researcher's experience, including their workflow, and how researchers access and use information, within a discipline/subject and at different stages of the researcher's career
7. Ability to gain an appreciation of individual researcher/project needs (including listening skills)
8. Skills to build strong relationships with researchers and other campus professionals and to establish collaborative partnerships...
9. Awareness and ability to recognise the value of services provided by agencies such as UKRR, RIN, RLUK
10. Outstanding skills in information discovery, literature searching, etc.
11. Ability to synthesise, analyse and provide digests of 'discovered' information

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

32 skills & knowledge areas

12. Knowledge to advise on the management of researchers' information, including its portability, particularly for bibliographic management and referencing tools, e.g. EndNote
13. Knowledge to advise on the manipulation and presentation of researchers' information
14. Good knowledge of data sources available in the discipline/subject
15. Knowledge to advise on data management and curation
16. Knowledge to advise on potential data manipulation tools
17. Knowledge to advise on data mining
18. Excellent skills to design information literacy training (both face-to-face and online)
19. Ability to advise on current trends, best practice and available options in research publication and dissemination ...including scholarly communications and open access publishing
20. Ability to advise on preserving research outputs
21. Ability to advise on the preservation of project records

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

32 skills & knowledge areas

22. Sufficient knowledge to support compliance with the various mandates of funders, including open access requirements
23. Understanding of the national and local research assessment processes
24. Understanding of research impact factors ...the REF, and the ability to advise on citation analysis, bibliometrics, etc
25. Understanding of author rights, copyright legislation and IP issues, and plagiarism
26. Knowledge to advocate, and advise on, the use of metadata
27. Skills to develop metadata schema and advise on standards
28. Knowledge to advise on citing and referencing, and the use of bibliographic management software
29. Ability to advise on the value and use of mobile technologies, Web 2.0 and other communication tools to researchers
30. Skills to participate effectively in research projects ...assisting with bid and report writing
31. Knowledge of sources of research funding to assist researchers to identify potential funders
32. Ability to proactively advise and market appropriate library services to researchers

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

9 areas of increasing importance over next 2 – 5 years

1. Excellent knowledge of bibliographic and other finding tools in discipline/subject
2. Excellent skills to design information literacy training (both face-to-face and online)
3. Outstanding skills in information discovery, literature searching, etc.
4. Knowledge to advise on citing and referencing, and the use of bibliographic management software
5. Ability to proactively advise and market appropriate library services to researchers
6. Good knowledge of data sources available in the discipline/subject
7. Excellent knowledge of content (in all relevant media) available to discipline/subject
8. Awareness of current and changing local research interests
9. Ability to gain an appreciation of individual researcher/project needs (including listening skills) (p.33-34)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

4 areas unnecessary now or in the future?

1. Knowledge of sources of research funding to assist researchers to identify potential funders
2. Deep understanding of discipline/subject
3. Ability to synthesise, analyse and provide digests of 'discovered' information
4. Ability to advise on the preservation of project records (p.35)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

9 areas of high skills gap, relatively high importance

1. Ability to advise on preserving research outputs
2. Knowledge to advise on data management and curation
3. Sufficient knowledge to support compliance with the various mandates of funders, including open access requirements
4. Knowledge to advise on potential data manipulation tools
5. Knowledge to advise on data mining
6. Knowledge to advocate, and advise on, the use of metadata
7. Ability to advise on the preservation of project records
8. Knowledge of sources of research funding to assist researchers to identify potential funders
9. Skills to develop metadata schema and advise on standards (p.43)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Traditional liaison model

- Information literacy training
- Provision of information on Web pages
- Helping researchers on a 1-to-1 basis
- Committee work/meetings
- Informal liaison (p.50 – 52)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

New ways of working with researchers

‘Several libraries report an evolution or possibly a transformation from this traditional liaison model to a new way of working with researchers.’ (p.52)

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Better engagement

‘Re-establishing a lively and sustained dialogue with their research communities is a key challenge for the library and information services in many libraries... Better engagement between information professionals and researchers could add to the efficiency and effectiveness of research... Such a strategy would have to be proactive... And it would have to meet the challenge of delivering results that correspond to researchers’ patterns and timetables of work.’ (p.54)

- RIN/BL (2009)

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Proactive

‘This new model requires Subject Librarians to be more proactive, seeking out researchers to discuss their activities, assess needs, identify strategic opportunities to act on, and help describe and propose solutions to a problem.’ (p.53)

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Job descriptions

‘Most participating libraries provided copies of job descriptions and person specifications for their Subject Librarian posts. On the whole these documents make little mention of support for research, and even when they do the tasks and responsibilities included, and the skills and knowledge mentioned, are couched in very general, rather than specific, terms. By and large they do not reflect the richness of the [researcher’s needs].’ (p.56-57)

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A change in focus

‘...the focus needs to change from collections, to the process of doing research and mainly supporting the latter, “from collections to connections”.’ (p.62)

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**“from collections
to connections”**

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Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

A team approach

‘[Subject Librarians] cannot be expert in themselves in each new capability, but knowing when to call in a colleague, or how to describe appropriate expert capabilities to faculty, will be key to the new liaison role. Just as researchers are often working in teams to leverage compatible expertise, liaison librarians will need to be team builders among library experts where this advances client research. New liaison roles are not emerging *de novo*, but rather in continuity with established roles.’ (p.63)

- Hahn (2009)

RLUK Workforce Think Tank

Subject Librarians/Information Specialists/Liaison Staff Project

Leadership

‘Leadership plays a critical role in developing and implementing a transformative plan for change within research libraries... Understanding what type of individuals and skills will be needed in the future research enterprise are critical to developing a strong and capable staff to lead the transformation.’

- Association of Research Libraries (2010)

RLUK Workforce Think Tank

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Where next?

- What other activities would you like RLUK to undertake regarding staffing and staff development?

RLUK

Research Libraries UK



Thank you

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