

RLUK: Redefining the Research Library Model

Workforce Survey Findings

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The Research Libraries UK (RLUK) Redefining the Research Library Model (RRLM) team is currently reviewing workforce development issues. As part of our investigations we have conducted a survey of the RLUK membership.

Background

In 2012 RLUK issued the report *Re-skilling for research* (1) outlining the findings of investigations carried out by Mary Auckland (in 2010/11) on behalf of the RLUK Workforce Development Group.

The aims of the project were:

‘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.’

The key areas of investigation were:

1. Review of subject librarian (etc.) roles
2. Review skills sets required to support researchers
3. Review of relevant training and development activities currently available in the sector
4. Review alternative models of information support for researchers

The most important of these was point 2. As some previous research had shown (2), as a profession we have often taken traditional ‘subject librarian’ roles as a starting point for planning support for researchers. Instead of starting here and tweaking job descriptions, we felt we needed to go back to basics, understand researchers’ (specific) needs and then develop services around these.

To do this we took a research lifecycle approach. Building on her investigations, Mary employed a 13 step approach to inform our thinking:

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, copyright and other statutory requirements
10. Preservation
11. Quality assessment and measuring impact
12. Commercialisation
13. Emerging technology

As part of the project we audited existing support for these 13 areas of activity, through reviewing the literature and surveying colleagues. This gave us a picture of support covering the UK, Europe, North America and Australasia. Although provision can vary widely from institution to institution, some overall patterns became apparent. By employing a traffic light approach to chart the territory (where green = 'go', well established activity; amber/green = tasks we are beginning to support; amber = libraries are preparing to undertake activities; red = 'stop', we are not doing this and show no intention of doing so) the picture in 2010/11 looked something like this:

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, copyright and other statutory requirements**
10. **Preservation**
11. **Quality assessment and measuring impact**
12. **Commercialisation**
13. **Emerging technology**

In the study we also reviewed 32 skills sets that could help library staff to effectively support researchers. We reviewed what staff skills were present now and what skills sets were deemed important for the future. The study concentrated on the skills that underpin research support around:

- information literacy;
- information management;
- subject/discipline & knowledge of tools/sources;
- partnership building;
- research process – generic & local knowledge;
- Research Data Management;
- metadata and research data;
- Scholarly Communications;
- funder mandates, assessment & other 'legal' requirements;
- Web 2.0 & other emerging technologies relating to researchers.

The key headline finding was that staff felt confident with traditional activities (the green steps above) but lacked skills in the amber elements. Without developing the skills portfolio of relevant members of the profession these opportunities may not be effectively grasped.

This view was amplified in interactions with the community. Feedback from a session at the RLUK Conference 2010 (3) included:

- 'Subject Librarians will need support with change. Many Subject Librarians have been in post for a long time but they need to change or their posts will seem less relevant, especially given the need to demonstrate value for money';
- 'We need considerable staff development support to help staff take on new roles'.

The survey

To see how the landscape has changed and to help inform future planning, in summer 2013 the RRLM team undertook a survey of the RLUK membership. The survey (hosted by Survey Monkey) (4) was open from June to October 2013 and covered:

- details about you/your organisation;
- where research support sits in your organisation;
- restructuring: has your Library been restructured in the recent past, are you currently restructuring or do you plan to in the near future?;
- posts focused specifically on supporting research/researchers;
- the 13 elements of the research life cycle: which are supported and by whom?;
- how has workforce expertise has been developed (by recruitment or training)?

We received 13 responses, representing 12 institutions (5).

The first thing to note is around provision for researchers (Q9) (Figure 1). This is a rapidly changing field (in which demand is both evolving and growing) and we have responded accordingly. A traffic light exercise similar to that conducted for the 2010/11 landscape reveals several steps forward. From our survey findings, the 13 steps now look something like this:

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, copyright and other statutory requirements**
10. **Preservation**
11. **Quality assessment and measuring impact**
12. **Commercialisation**
13. **Emerging technology**

I would need to add a couple of caveats, though, at this point. This survey has only covered the Russell Group (and members of the Russell Group most eager to talk about developments in research support), so one would expect a more highly developed service offering than found in some other HEIs. It was also only a small return (12 institutions) which also needs to be taken into consideration. Although the base line in 2010/11 may have been higher for these 12 than other HEIs, other responses from the survey indicate moves forward.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is still interesting to note the direction and speed of travel.

9. The RLUK report 'Re-skilling for Research' identified 13 steps in the research lifecycle. Which areas does your Library support now or plan to provide support for in the future? Please provide details as appropriate.

	Now	Within 12 months	Within 3 years	Later	Probably never	Rating Count
1. Conceptualising new research, developing proposals, and identifying funding opportunities (e.g. facilitating collaboration, helping researchers plan strategies to fulfil funder requirements)	23.1% (3)	30.8% (4)	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	23.1% (3)	13
2. Seeking new information (e.g. workshops, 1-to-1 support of researchers)	92.3% (12)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
3. Information management (e.g. training around bibliographic software)	100.0% (13)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
4. Data collection (e.g. 1-to-1 support)	53.8% (7)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	13
5. Data discovery, management and curation (e.g. advice with RDM, repositories)	53.8% (7)	38.5% (5)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
6. Sharing, discussion, online collaboration (e.g. providing physical space for researcher collaboration)	46.2% (6)	7.7% (1)	30.8% (4)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	13
7. Analysing and reflecting on information and data (e.g. 1-to-1 support)	58.3% (7)	8.3% (1)	16.7% (2)	16.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	12
8. Writing up and dissemination (e.g. advice with impact, journal publishing)	84.6% (11)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
9. Compliance, Intellectual Property, copyright and other statutory requirements (e.g. specialist advice services)	69.2% (9)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	13
10. Preservation of outputs (e.g. advice services, repositories)	69.2% (9)	23.1% (3)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
11. Quality assessment and measuring impact (e.g. support with bibliometrics and altmetrics)	76.9% (10)	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
12. Commercialisation of research (e.g. brokerage services)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	30.8% (4)	53.8% (7)	13
13. Use of emerging technologies (e.g. support with digital profile management)	38.5% (5)	30.8% (4)	23.1% (3)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	13

Figure 1

Where does research support sit in these institutions? From the free text comments (to Q2) there seems to be a split, with support residing still with 'subject librarians' for half the institutions (6 responses). However 5 respondents said this was spread across the library and 2 more were planning to bring diverse support more closely together. So the survey shows quite a mixed economy of traditional routes (through subject librarians) and perhaps slightly more institutions following newer models and making greater use of specialist roles. This is echoed throughout our findings.

How has enhanced provision been achieved? For many institutions restructuring is a key part of the answer. Nearly two-thirds of the libraries surveyed have been restructured in recent years to provide more capacity to support research (Figure 2) and one-third is planning restructuring or more restructuring (Figure 3).

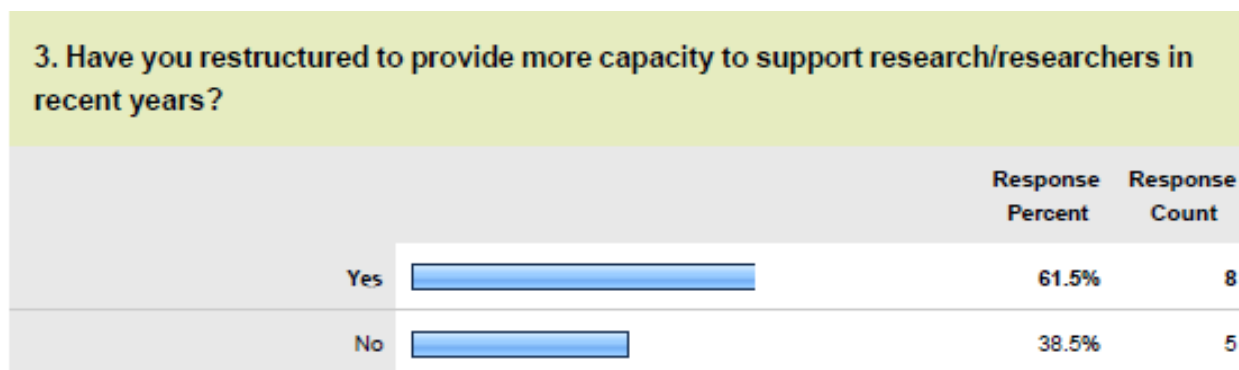


Figure 2

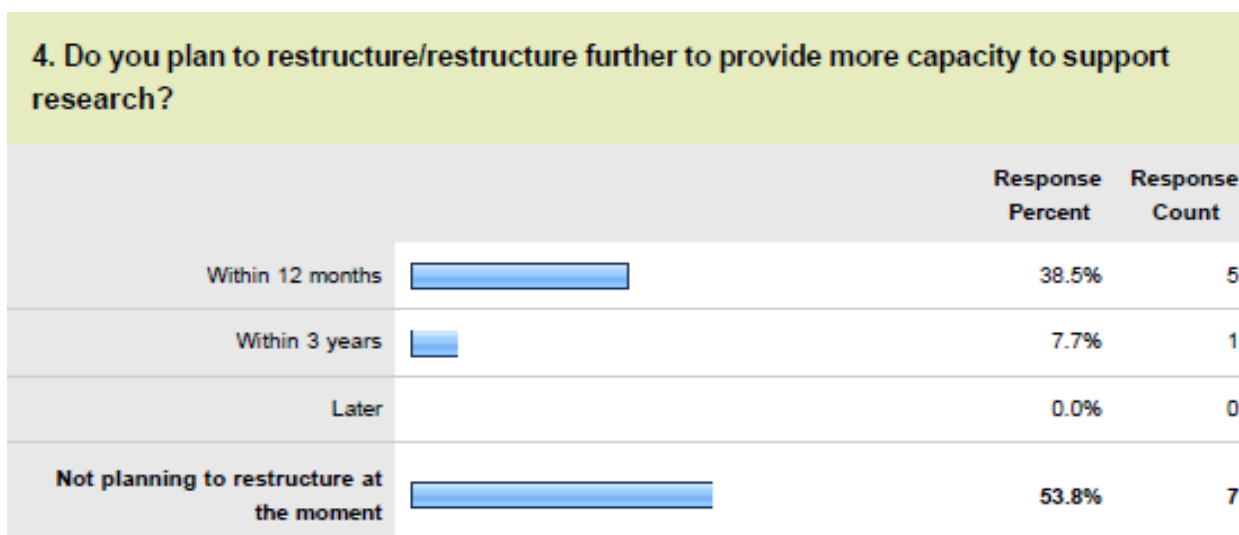


Figure 3

When asked why (Q5) a variety of reasons were given:

'Currently the Academic Liaison team do not have sufficient focus on Research Support and concentrate primarily on teaching and learning support. A restructure will provide a focus on research which will then be backed up by the wider team.'

'Restructuring was necessary in 2009 to provide resources dedicated to supporting research. This was important for two reasons: 1. Time – 'subject librarians' do support researchers to an extent but there is always a conflict between support[ing] research and supporting teaching and learning. Although research is currently the

University's number 1 strategic priority, teaching and learning is a close second. The sheer UG student numbers plus fees mean teaching and learning often dominates diaries. Time needed to be protected for researchers.

2. Expertise – 'subject librarians' have great expertise but this is often focused around finding, using and managing information. Other aspects of the researcher lifecycle (developing research ideas, seeking funding, managing data, managing outputs, copyright, impact, profiles, etc.) require different skills sets, some of which are lacking in most 'subject librarians'. Specialist roles can have different person specifications and attract staff with different expertise.'

'Why did we? a) subject teams in silos offering inconsistent services b) too many subjects to offer this type of support effectively c) need to specialise in an era when professional librarians need to offer everything from advice on H indexes to online induction modules d) Need to have resources to respond to strategic demand for better student skills provision, better measurement of research impact, leadership in scholarly comms changes, support for research data policies, etc.'

Unsurprisingly, different drivers led to different approaches (see Q3):

'We restructured the Library in 2009... developing a small team to focus on supporting researches. Traditionally, the 'subject librarians' have supported researchers around information retrieval and management. As a result of changes we have developed services around collaboration (focused largely on the Research Exchange, its activities and services), impact, bibliometrics, publishing and developing your digital profile.'

'Research support has long been provided by the subject team but we have now incorporated support for the institutional repository and Open Access issues.'

'Subject teams replaced by functional teams aligned to university strategy - student facing services whether physical library site support or information skills and enquiry services joined up; new strategic marketing division which includes academic engagement (the 'new' approach to subject liaison).'

Where colleagues are planning further restructuring (see Q4) the reasons for this include plans to recruit new posts: Bibliometrician, Research Publications Librarian, Research Data Management posts.

Another headline is concerned with *who* provides research support in the institution (Q10) (Figure 4). As we saw earlier, although some activities remain firmly with 'subject librarians' the responses to this question again point to the rise of more specialist posts. Posts range from those who cover all aspects of researcher support to specialists covering (often technical) responses to the research life cycle:

- Research Services Managers;
- Research Services Librarians;
- Institutional Repository posts;
- Open Access Officer posts;
- Research Data Management roles;
- managers of research spaces;
- discipline-specific roles (e.g. Social Sciences Data Librarian and Subject Consultant).

10. Who delivers support for these areas in your institution?

	'Subject Librarians'	Specialist staff in the Library	Specialist staff elsewhere in the institution	Others	Nobody	Don't know	Rating Count
1. Conceptualising new research, developing proposals, and identifying funding opportunities (e.g. facilitating collaboration, helping researchers plan strategies to fulfil funder requirements)	15.4% (2)	38.5% (5)	84.6% (11)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
2. Seeking new information (e.g. workshops, 1-to-1 support of researchers)	92.3% (12)	38.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
3. Information management (e.g. training around bibliographic software)	92.3% (12)	38.5% (5)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
4. Data collection (e.g. 1-to-1 support)	30.8% (4)	61.5% (8)	23.1% (3)	7.7% (1)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	13
5. Data discovery, management and curation (e.g. advice with RDM, repositories)	38.5% (5)	69.2% (9)	30.8% (4)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	13
6. Sharing, discussion, online collaboration (e.g. providing physical space for researcher collaboration)	30.8% (4)	30.8% (4)	38.5% (5)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	13
7. Analysing and reflecting on information and data (e.g. 1-to-1 support)	53.8% (7)	30.8% (4)	38.5% (5)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	13
8. Writing up and dissemination (e.g. advice with impact, journal publishing)	69.2% (9)	46.2% (6)	23.1% (3)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	13
9. Compliance, Intellectual Property, copyright and other statutory requirements (e.g. specialist advice services)	38.5% (5)	69.2% (9)	46.2% (6)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	13
10. Preservation of outputs (e.g. advice services, repositories)	23.1% (3)	84.6% (11)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	13
11. Quality assessment and measuring impact (e.g. support with bibliometrics and altmetrics)	69.2% (9)	46.2% (6)	23.1% (3)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	13
12. Commercialisation of research (e.g. brokerage services)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	84.6% (11)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	13
13. Use of emerging technologies (e.g. support with digital profile management)	23.1% (3)	46.2% (6)	61.5% (8)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	15.4% (2)	13

Figure 4

Apart from specialist posts, colleagues also highlighted (in full-text responses to Q8) other ways in which they supported researchers:

- Subject Librarians – supporting researchers as part of their work to support academic departments;
- Subject Librarians – expanding traditional roles to cover OA and RDM activities;
- Archives/Special Collections staff;
- Project-funded pots – from RCUK OA funding, for example.

Several respondents also pointed to the importance of working with agencies outside the library:

‘Increasingly we work in partnership with other service providers and specialists across campus on much of the above.’ (Q10 response)

‘Several emerging areas overlap with IT, Legal, Research Services etc, and increasingly librarians need excellent organisational knowledge to connect with stakeholders.’ (Q10 response)

‘We work with others on campus – eg: Graduate School to deliver training and support for PhD students. We work with Staff Development to deliver training and support aligned to the Vitae framework, for researchers.’ (Q8 response)

Building on *Re-skilling for research*, the survey also asked how expertise has been developed (Q11). Again we see a split between developing existing staff (84.6%) and a slightly greater reliance on new roles and new staff brought in (92.3%) (Figure 5).

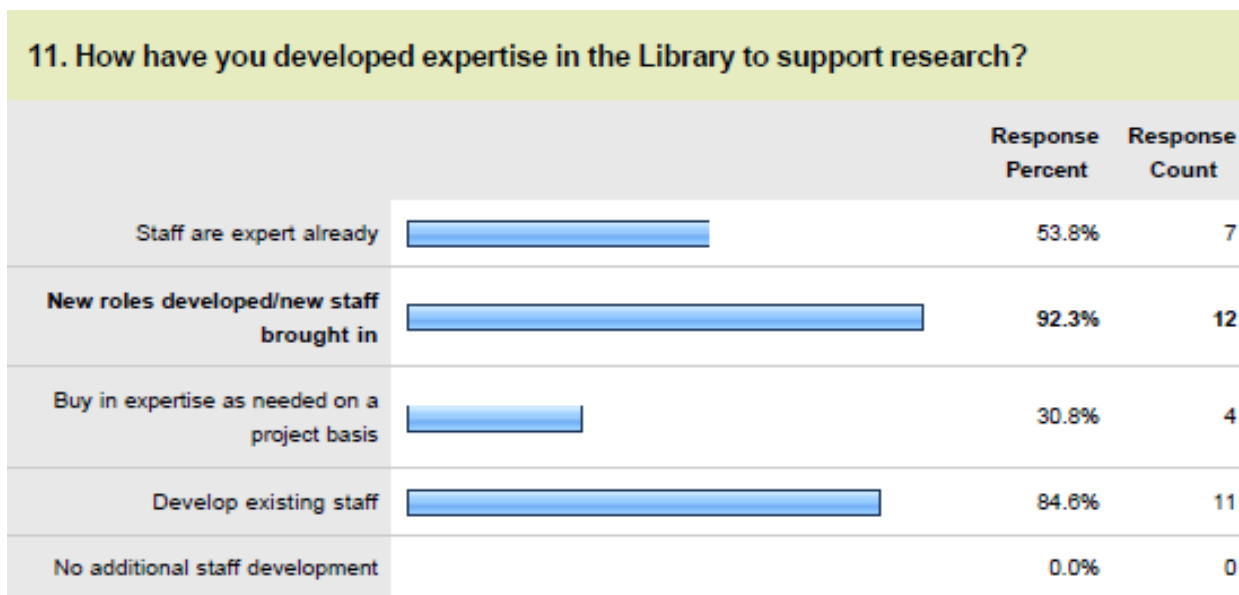


Figure 5

How easy has it been for libraries to attract new staff (Q12) to fulfil these roles? Here we saw an even split with 38.5% reporting no problem and an equal number facing difficulties.

This polarity is reinforced by the free-text responses to this question:

‘Very much less than anticipated, but there are concerns about the staffing requirement for RDM, in terms of both numbers and skills needed.’

‘Well qualified applicants for all posts we have advertised for in the last 12 months.’

‘While we have been able to appoint good quality individuals to posts, the field hasn’t been strong, and additional development of those appointed will be needed.’

‘...Even those who focus on research support in applications are often (when probed in interview) more experienced in information retrieval. We have not filled some posts due to poor fields.’

Of course, we should remember that various factors impact in recruitment (salary, location, etc.) but the numbers facing difficulties still seems significant. It would be interesting to compare this with how easy colleagues find it to attract staff into more traditional roles.

There is a feeling that new entrants into the profession (Q13) (Figure 6) are poorly equipped to support researchers. However, we would need to add the caveat (raised in the comments attached to this question) that research support staff roles are not typically aimed at new professionals (given the salary and person specifications) but at those who have developed wider professional expertise.

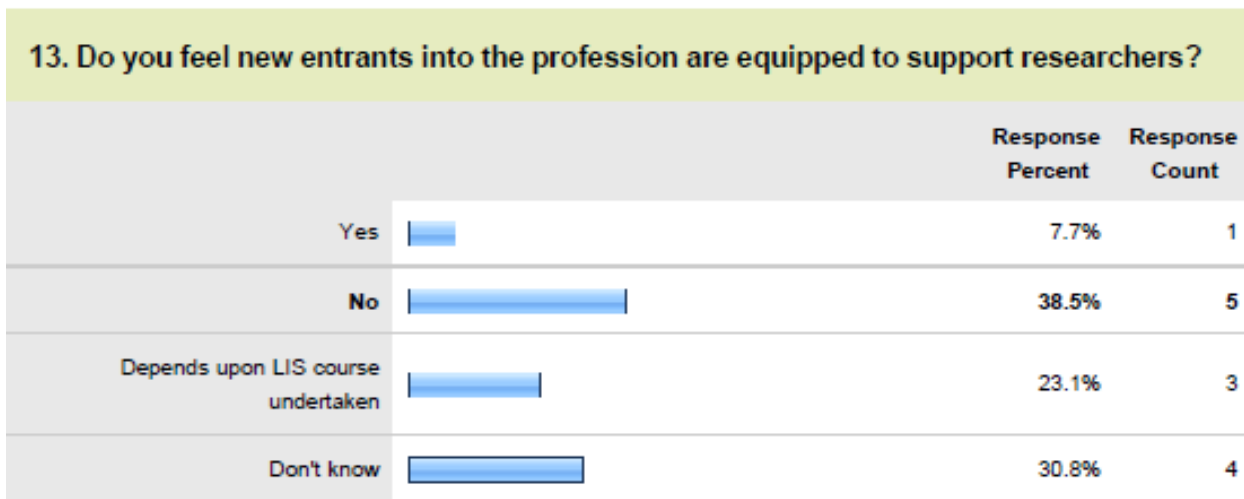


Figure 6

Perhaps of greater relevance is the response to Q14: how have you developed existing staff and their skills sets around research support? (see Figure 7). It is interesting to note that joint highest used are conferences and professional engagement (both 92.3%). Why is this? Is this because the profession is changing so rapidly and these are good approaches to get up-to-date information, network and (in the case of professional engagement) get involved in projects that may help to develop services back in the workplace? It is also interesting to note that external courses – typically the most popular form of training – score relatively low at 76.9%. Is this because of the nature of the topic (courses on marketing, for example, are now well-established but courses on RDM are not) or because main providers have reduced their offering over the last few years? Likewise, mentoring scored very low (15.4%). Is this because there are few practitioners expert enough to mentor in some of our 13 steps? Or is this an area that could flourish if structured and promoted by a professional organisation?

Given comments above about the need to develop both new and existing staff, it feels like there is more work that can be done around this topic.

14. How have you developed existing staff and their skills sets around research support?



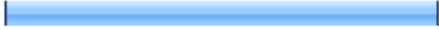





		Response Percent	Response Count
Existing in-house training		53.8%	7
Specially developed in-house training		61.5%	8
External courses		76.9%	10
Conferences		92.3%	12
Reading		76.9%	10
Mentoring		15.4%	2
Professional engagement (e.g. committee work, project work)		92.3%	12
Other		7.7%	1

Figure 7

Finally, respondents submitted general comments (in response to Q16: 'Are there any other issues around Library support for researchers that you would like to raise?'). These covered a range of relevant topics:

'It [the field of researcher support] varies greatly from discipline to discipline.'

'I think we are in a stage of development and the landscape is shifting and changing – we need to be flexible and on our toes to make sure we make the right offers and choices to our institution to support research.'

'The landscape has changed a lot in the last two years. Research support is firmly on the map and there are pockets of good practice developing. Ongoing cost-effective sharing of practice needs to be facilitated. As an institution that is seen as an exemplar in some areas, I can say that visits are fun but take up lots of staff time and the flow of information is often one-way. If RLUK could facilitate sharing events so all benefited (at practitioner level) that would be a step forward.'

'A big issue for us is that old chestnut: how do we stop doing old things in order to free up time to do new things? A challenging area is around collection development in an environment where there are no subject librarians, with issues ranging from strategic (profiling collections to identify collection strengths and collection development priorities) to the very practical (where do you send a publisher who phones offering a trial or a special offer?). Another area I'd highlight is publishing - doing it as well as offering advice. Lets break the old model rather than support it. I think there has to be mileage in offering RLUK support to emerging academic-led publishing initiatives to help them break through.'

There may not be easy answers to some of these final points but on-going sharing of good practice at a practitioner level may be the best way forward. Is there a role for RLUK to facilitate this physically or virtually, with one-off events or on-going fora?

Conclusion

Despite the limited response rate and the fact that this should be treated as a very blunt tool, this survey adds to the evidence that research support is a rapidly evolving area and the profession is responding accordingly to develop its offering. Restructuring has helped libraries to provide new services. Some of these services are provided by 'subject librarians' but we have also seen a growing reliance on specialist roles and multi-agency working across the institution. New structures – and new ways of working – are emerging, and these will present new opportunities but also new challenges.

As the field continues to evolve, staff development remains an important theme, both for existing and new staff, both for traditional and new roles. At present staff focus on conferences and professional activity to develop understanding and skills. Other approaches could be developed (around formal training, mentoring and sharing best practice). There could be a role for RLUK in this regard. Likewise, RLUK may wish to continue conversations with the LIS education providers to ensure new entrants to the profession are skilled to support researchers in the ways that employers are now seeking, and to explore opportunities to provide CPD offerings around research support for more established professionals.

Antony Brewerton

6 November 2013

NOTES

1. *Re-skilling for research: an investigation into the role and skills of subject and liaison librarians required to effectively support the evolving information needs of researchers* (Conducted for RLUK by Mary Auckland), RLUK, 2012 (available at <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/content/re-skilling-research>)
2. Brewerton, Antony. '...and any other duties deemed necessary': an analysis of subject librarian job descriptions, *SCONUL Focus*, 50, 2011, p.60-67 (available at http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/18_2.pdf)
3. Brewerton, Antony. The Six Million Dollar Subject Librarian: we have the technology – let's build the ideal research support librarian (parallel session), *RLUK Conference 2010: Edinburgh* (10-12 November 2010)
4. See https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Supporting_Research_2013
5. Details from both responses from the one (very large!) institution that entered two responses are included in this report to add to the richness. This should be borne in mind but this does not affect the overall messages. As I stress throughout, this is a small return and could not be seen as representative of the profession as a whole.