User Advisory Forum minutes – Senate House Library (SHL)
Thursday 25 November 2021 11:00-12:30
Online meeting - Microsoft Teams

Chair: Rebecca Simpson (RS)
Minutes: Lisa Miller (LM)

Staff attending: Catriona Cannon (CC), Richard Espley (RE), Rebecca Simpson (RS), Lisa Miller (LM)

A list of forum members (FM) may be found on the User Advisory Forum webpage

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| 1. **Welcome and introductions**  
RS welcomed new and returning members to the first meeting for the academic year and outlined the structure of the meetings, how members can take part and encouraged feedback throughout the session. Members were then invited to introduce themselves and their affiliation to the library. |  |
| 2. **The purpose of the forum, terms of reference and operational matters**  
LM Highlighted the purpose of the forum with an overview of the terms of reference which included the structure and frequency of meetings, SHL and member commitments and the benefits of being a member. | LM to contact members regarding a list of members on the forum webpage |
| 3. **Collections & services update & Library Transformation Programme (LTP)**  
CC Started by saying how wonderful it is to meet people from SHL user community and went on to talk about taking up the post of SHL Librarian and Programme Director, career background and previous roles at the University of Oxford, Bodleian Library and also within the institutes of the University of London and other higher education institutes. |  |
CC gave tribute to predecessor Richard Warren SHL Interim Librarian who is also Associate Director for Information Systems within the library for his stewardship throughout a very difficult time during the pandemic and for the clever decisions made which have put the library in a stronger position now.

**Library updates** included the financial constraints brought upon by the pandemic, staffing structures and those services almost back to normal including opening hours. CC mentioned the user survey and aware that opening hours frequently comes up so wanted to reassure people she had seen it. Also group study spaces has come up in the survey. Spaces for online learning and not quiet study areas. Something to look at more in the longer term, but in the shorter term said we are offering two rooms for bookable group study on the 5th floor. SHL has also got rid of fines.

CC highlighted the work of library staff contributing to the research and engagement of the University. The History Day blogs on the website with the theme of environmental history. The work SHL is currently doing on inclusion and diversity in the Inclusivity Review and a case study by Academic Librarian, Leila Kassir and the SHL 150 campaign.

SHL blogs  [https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/blog](https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/blog)

SHL Diversity and Inclusion  [https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/our-collections/diversity-and-inclusion](https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/our-collections/diversity-and-inclusion)

SHL 150  [https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/senate-house-library-150](https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/senate-house-library-150)

CC gave the background to the **Library Transformation Programme** (LTP) based on a review from a former Librarian who looked at the future of SHL how the job of SHL Librarian be filled, how it interacted with the School of Advanced Study (SAS), University of London Worldwide (UoLW) and the federal member institutions (FMI’s). The recommendations included in the LTP.

The LTP covers several areas: **Digital infrastructure**, research with our Special Collections, establish a National Centre for Humanities working with SAS, increase digital visibility of Special Collections, embedding them also with research and engagement projects.
**Physical space**, look at creating a Special Collections centre not just for SHL but all FMI’s and SAS to look at studio space for digitisation, reading rooms, conservation studio and storage.

CC mentioned **engagement** and exhibition space, looking at areas that are easier to access without coming to the 4th floor and going through barriers. Also working with the Pro Vice Chancellor of Research and Engagement on this as part of the National Centre for Humanities.

CC added that another part of the LTP would be to look at making the building and library **welcoming** while respecting the historical fabric of the building.

Lastly, in terms of **service**, the implementation of RFID and self-service has helped make the library easier to use and SHL would like to increase that and enable us to have greater flexibility in terms of staffing and how we provide services such as longer opening hours. The LTP will look at that.

### 4 Opportunity for questions & answers

**FM** asked in relation to making the collections more visible digitally, is the plan to make them accessible remotely even restricted to members only or is this to bring attention to what is in the collection?

**FM** also mentioned a programme of workshops their institute ran on how they use the collections for teaching and was interested if SHL do something similar and if so, it would be good to hear about them.

CC answered the first question by covering two areas:

1 - **Special Collections** where some material is available through a website and also open-source platforms for making digital content available a first priority. Already have a lot of digitised images because of the partnerships entered into with publishers to digitise content but want to do this more coherently and with more functionality than we do now to open up the collections to a whole world of users.

2 - **Current materials**, things we subscribe to, journals, eBooks and other e-content. CC mentioned the licensing restrictions but said that SHL had been working very hard to sign agreements that allow access to as wide a range of people as possible and mentioned SAS, FMI’s and Alumni and external members. It is
something we want to do and SHL wants to reinstate itself as a National Research Library on the same level as the SAS libraries and providing access outside, outside the UK is key to that. It’s hard to do and not straightforward but something we want to do. We are currently working with Jisc on licensing and content throughout the University. We’re also looking at offsite authentication.

CC answered the second question, by saying yes and gave an example of a professor who came to teach in the library using some of our physical collections and said absolutely something we want to promote and mentioned again a digital platform for digitised content, we want to encourage teaching with digitised objects. CC also added the bigger issue around born-digital content, preservation and storage so a lot of things that go into supporting research.

**FM commented that thrilled to hear about the plans for engagement. Are there any plans to widen this out to sixth form students?** g., the British Library has some wonderful webinars that appeal to A Level student. I think it would be great as many of them have no experience of an academic library.

RE this is something that we formerly did do and something we would like to do again. That conversations on how best to manage this type of visit took place before the pandemic and that slightly derailed it. RE also added that there is real scope to doing them online digitally with classrooms and that SHL has been funded in the past to work with school children as part of our engagement programme, sharing items in the library they might not otherwise have seen. RE said that it is always very rewarding for us and the feedback we have got back from schools has been tremendous as well. My understanding is that this is something we’re trying to look at reactivating again.

RS over the pandemic, we created an online resource to share with students on how to use the catalogue and a video induction/guide that we share with students and teachers who get in touch. It’s an area for development to improve access to academia, higher education and bridging the gap between further and higher education.

RE added the point of not having access to an academic library is an important one and something to reflect about and the sort of terminology we use and how we talk about our service but also
about reaching out to people at the early stage in their learning life to have that productive conversation as well.

**FM** commented that particularly interested in plan to move exhibitions to the ground floor, who thought it would be really great to make it easy people to pop in and out and to increase footfall and added that it could be a way of catching people as they go through the foyer downstairs. KFS also commented on the point of making the library more welcoming. There are several gates to go through, and you’ve got to know how to navigate them and how to navigate the lifts, etc. An easy but costly way would be to have a library representative down there on the ground floor, but that would increase your staffing and put the costs up a lot. So would be really interested in seeing how plans for that develop.

CC one of major challenges is how to get people up from the ground floor to the 4th floor. It’s an absolutely fascinating building that inspires great love among its users, but it is a challenge in terms of making it a welcoming place. It’s not just the library that's working on this. It is a major area of focus for the university generally and plans for the building as a whole to make the ground floor more welcoming. CC mentioned an estate strategy meeting she will be attending to discuss these areas and added the aspiration to make the people of London, the visitors, communities that have some kind of connection to the university or to the library’s collections, to make them feel that this is theirs too. That this is not an academic building where only the privileged few are allowed into it. It should be a place where people feel welcome to come and contribute.

CC added that more and more universities are recognizing their societal obligations in this area and we have a lot to offer and in the library, our collections are truly international. There are a lot of communities around the world who know more about them than we do and we want them to come in and interact with them as well as our buildings and spaces.

RS added that the building restrictions have been a barrier to accessing exhibitions and content generally, particularly holding events inside the library. The plans that CC has outlined seek to address this. It would be great to see improvements to the building to help with accessing material and improving engagement online as well as in person in the future.

**FM** the British Library, says on the outside the British Library, clear for passers by what’s there. If you pass SHL you probably
**w**ouldn’t know there is a library there. Are there plans to signal to passers by that there is a library that could be explored if they would be interested.

RS This is another barrier we face. The gates are part of the listed building. As such, we can’t attach posters or banners. We do have poster frames in some areas but there’s some way to go to improve signage.

CC referred to the estate strategy meeting and that it was a really brilliant thing to bring up there and thanked UT for the question.

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<td>RS gave an update on engagement plans for 2021 and 2022. This included the recent successful hybrid event celebrating 50 years of Terry Pratchett’s ‘Carpet People’ with publisher Colin Smythe. It is available to view on the SHL YouTube channel: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJw28HpfF5w">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJw28HpfF5w</a>.</td>
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<td>History Day took place in November which included the blog series referred to by CC. RS also created a video gallery combining 2 minute videos on Environmental History collections from 23 of the institutions that joined History Day and is also available to watch on the SHL YouTube channel: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFUR8DOA-4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFUR8DOA-4</a>. The IHR has a catch-up page for the day: <a href="https://historycollections.blogs.sas.ac.uk/programme/">https://historycollections.blogs.sas.ac.uk/programme/</a> It is a great way of joining libraries together and invited members to get involved in next year’s History Day in November.</td>
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<td>SHL was shortlisted for a Times Higher Award for the work over the pandemic in 2020 and said whatever the outcome it was an honour to be shortlisted.</td>
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<td>RS then gave a short presentation on the SHL 150 campaign to mark the 150th anniversary of when the first collections arrived in the library, an online gallery telling the story of SHL in 150 items in the collection. Over the first weekend there were over 1,400 visitors online. The campaign is continuing until June next year with a focus on developing the staff and member choices online gallery. We encourage people, including forum members, to make suggestions on unique items they find exciting and show the diversity of SHL collections. RS then gave some examples already online.</td>
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<td>RS/LM contacted forum members with further detail on how to suggest an item for the staff and member favourites.</td>
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RS added that there will also be SHL 150 Discovery Days with sessions working with Engagement, Librarians and Archivists for staff and library members to explore collections beyond their usual focus or extend their current focus, how to use the catalogue and extend a search. RS then gave details on how to suggest an item and that we will be in touch with further details.

**FM asked if the email to suggest items will be shared for example with the wider community of the University of London students so they can suggest as well.**

RS added it’s available to SHL members and we will be sending it by email in a handy way you can make it more shareable rather than just sharing the email address to ensure we are getting focussed information to put into the online gallery and added it would be brilliant if it is shared with fellow colleagues, students and researchers.

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<td>FM added that it really sounds promising the plans for the future and looking forward to hearing more and to see what happens in the coming years.</td>
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<td>FM happy that opening hours and group study spaces are noted and to emphasise that it is the same feedback they have got so it’s nice to know it is on the agenda.</td>
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<td>FM also raised that with digitising the collections it’s always good to think about researchers in advance and gave a personal example. To bear in mind that especially in London, with the UK and its colonial history, the content could be interesting to people all over the world and not everybody has the resources to come to London, so to keep this in mind when trying to make the collections accessible.</td>
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<td>CC added two reasons to say how important that is to them.</td>
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<td>1 - Voices that for various reasons through our world history have not been heard as much. Memory institutions like ours are absolutely vital to bring those voices further to the surface in various ways.</td>
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<td>2 - The way we work with people outside the academy has to be two way, not about specialists telling them what to think or what’s there. Actually, it’s about all learning from one another and the collections being the raw material of that learning.</td>
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<td><strong>LM to follow up with meeting notes and the date of the next meeting</strong></td>
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CC mentioned they were the lead for engagement at the Bodleian and described how it is much easier to put on a traditional exhibition and those have their place but would like to do harder things, get people in who may have not been in a library before and certainly not curated an exhibition before and referred to the digital reach around the world for people who can’t physically come to the library. I think those are the things that are fundamental to what we should be achieving and putting those first over other forms of engagement.

RE added in response to the conversation a bit about the Inclusivity Review and stressed that it is an open process of critical inquiry to look at SHL collections, to what assumptions or world views influence decisions to acquire material or other decisions to donate them. Also, decisions that Librarians and Archivists take to how material is handled, the impact on how accessible it is and how it is presented to the world. It is the beginning of the process and happy to say it will never end.

Currently developing case studies which illustrate hidden bias, sometimes overt bias and prejudice with the intention to work with those case studies to take them to as many communities as possible; User Advisory Forum and our users and to go much further than that to get a genuine collaboration to develop ideas, explore SHL’s own history as an example of library history.

RE then mentioned the anti-apartheid material in the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Collection that was crowd sourced in South Africa and sent to SHL. For example, digitising that collection would give us an opportunity to go to the communities who put themselves at risk and ask for help in better describing and talking about the material. There are more examples of potential collaborations once material is digitised.

RE offered to come back to the forum to talk in more detail about the Inclusivity Review.

RS thanked everyone for their time and commitment to the forum. Followed on to say notes will be shared when possible after the meeting.

Date of next meeting – 21 February 2022