

User Advisory Forum minutes – Senate House Library (SHL)

Monday 6 June 2022, 11:30-13:00

Online meeting - Microsoft Teams

Chair: Martyn Griffiths (MG)

Minutes: Lisa Miller (LM)

Attending: Axel Sabitzer (AS), Catherine Stephen (CEDS), Fran Frenzel (FF), James Cook (JC), Martyn Griffiths (MG), Lisa Miller (LM), Richard Espley (RE), Forum members (FM)

	Minutes	Action/Outcome
1	<p>Welcome and introductions</p> <p>MG welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited members to introduce themselves.</p>	
2	<p>Library update on services, collections and engagement</p> <p>PW introduced themselves as Deputy Director of Services, and spoke about other institutions where they had worked and that they came to the Library from Birkbeck. PW described the areas they are managing including Customer Services, frontline services, managing online enquiry services and back-room teams including inter-library loans, ordering and cataloguing books, shelvers and user engagement.</p> <p>PW then gave library updates on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers returning to pre-covid levels • Majority of staff back in the office and we also have flexible working for some staff. • Perspex screens taken down • Services introduced are group study rooms, food and drink area, automatic renewals, no longer adding fines for readers with overdue books (except reservations where fines still apply). • The project is continuing to move older material from storage back to the tower. 9,000 linear metres of material. Consolidating collections onsite rather than paying for external storage. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cataloguing of collections continues. E.g., the Heisler Collection. Making collections visible via the catalogue. • Opening hours - to extend Friday later into evening and we are also discussing later opening into the evening more generally and on Sundays. • Looking into an App for registering online and to enter the library without the need for a card. • Library Transformation Programme (LTP) includes opening hours, SHL space and to look at the store in Egham, modernisation and discussion on a Special Collections centre in the tower. • Working with CS on concrete plans and proposals on what we want to do to modernise the library. <p>CEDS gave an introduction as Deputy Director, Collections. They came from the University of Surrey to the Library and their remit is to build on collections and to make them as visible as possible to our users, the public and to support the research agenda.</p> <p>CEDS then gave Library updates as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEDS spoke about the LTP and the two strands they are working on. The first is digital, access, curation and engagement which is looking at underpinning digital infrastructure, how we manage our collections and materials and working digitally as best as we can. To have a better system for how we handle our digitised content, digitised assets, the images we have and that we have a system working in the background that works more like a platform. • Second strand is collection development and management policies, sensitive not to duplicate materials that we have in the other School of Advanced Study libraries, to show the breadth of collections in the University of London and that it is a location for humanities research. To continue to build on the collections and our strengths and that they are discoverable online to reach as wide an audience as possible. • Engagement - an event and exhibition launched at the end of June. Artangel exhibition and installation, A Thousand Words for Weather working in collaboration with the School of Advanced Study and SHL. Live feeds affected by weather. Running for around nine months supported by a display of SHL materials. Includes poetry from London based poets and words for weather in 10 languages. • PW added members of the public need to pay to access but free for library members. PW mentioned the preview on 20 June. • CEDS Mentioned the recently donated Paul & Adelaide Joseph collection and how RE will be talking about the collection at the Holden Lecture. • RE described Paul and Adelaide Joseph, who they are and the collection which includes several letters from Nelson Mandela. 	
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	<p>Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and FM asked if the library is thinking of joining the four-day working week experiment?</p> <p>PW responded by saying that we don't have any plans to do that at the moment. It is difficult with public facing organisations like libraries to make sure we have enough staff to open the library. We do have a flexible working policy and some staff do work from home for some of the week and staff are able to work hours over a condensed period of time.</p>	
3	<p>The Heisler Collection: The practical work in taking a large donation, challenges in cataloguing the different material and conscious and unconscious bias when working with a collection of radical material</p> <p>FF, Metadata and Discovery Manager and AS, Metadata Library Assistant introduced themselves and their roles within the library.</p> <p>FF described the Heisler Collection, and how the collection is catalogued. That it contains radical political material, far left to far right and in the middle. A lot of surprising material and which has thrown up difficulties in how we approach and catalogue the collection and also some ethical questions in how we catalogue the collection and make it discoverable.</p> <p>There are an estimated 60,000 items in the collection. FF then gave an idea of how much work is involved in cataloguing the collection. With one cataloguer we would be able to catalogue roughly 2,000 items a year. The reason it is so different to modern research collections is that we are doing more in depth cataloguing to describe the collection in more detail. FF then said that it is not necessarily the items themselves that make the collection so special but by having a huge collection together, from so many different viewpoints that is what makes it special. It requires in depth cataloguing, recording inscriptions, provenance and some items require a lot of research to describe them correctly. The collection also has ephemeral material which are niche and tricky to catalogue due to their nature and we can't re-use records from other libraries which is why it is slow to catalogue and takes time to make each record.</p> <p>FF spoke about the ethical questions around cataloguing the collection and the impact on the cataloguer when dealing with radical material and gave an example of their reaction to cataloguing holocaust denial pamphlets all day and the psychological impact this can have on the cataloguer. Some ephemeral material is of a personal nature so cataloguers must consider how much to include that may reveal identities and activities of people and how far to expose these affiliations</p>	

	<p>of those who may no longer want to be affiliated with the material. In some cases, these are unpublished materials.</p> <p>FF then talked about bias in cataloguing. Personal known bias and unconscious bias of a cataloguer and the ability to be able to switch that off. As a cataloguer you can't let your own ideas affect how you create a record. For example, you can't create a worse record because you disagree with the content.</p> <p>There is also bias in the vocabulary we use. For subject indexing we use Library of Congress subject headings which are skewed to an Anglo-American and US centric view of the world. FF described issues in the wording, that it can be out of date and how the subject headings are grouped together. They can seem too detailed or too broad.</p> <p>Then there are questions in how far we go to curate material. Is it our job to do this or just describe what we see. If we do curate material, are we introducing bias in doing so. We are exploring these questions with the Heisler Collection.</p> <p>AS then gave examples of the collection to illustrate the points FF raised which included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An example of three identical looking postcards by artist Steve Rushton with different inscriptions. One an invitation but two others with personal messages and concerns around privacy. AS showed the catalogue entry, what is included in the entry and what was left out. This included an address and phone numbers. AS then spoke about how the entry can be found by subject, inscriber and author to make the item discoverable. • The second example, 'Our financial Masters' which presents itself as a tract on the financial systems in the UK but on closer reading, it ties everything back to Jewish control of financial markets of the world and therefore controversial literature and so there is a curatorial element to adding the subjects for the catalogue entry. AS then described the reasoning for the subjects which included anti-Semitism and conspiracies, even though this is not the subject of the pamphlet but that it could be described as such. The catalogue record needs a subject and this involves some curatorial description. In this case and it could be reckless not to add context and an explanation to the item but also to add subjects so it can be discovered. This is not strictly what subject headings are used for, but these are the tools we have. • The third example shows the pitfalls of using an external vocabulary when cataloguing items and AS referred to the book 'Race and 	
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	<p>Nationhood’ about inter-racial marriage and the difficulty using the subject headings and vocabulary that the Library of Congress uses. AS discussed what words are appropriate within subjects and that the vocabulary that is used in the Library of Congress can be challenging and that it takes time to replace outdated words. Cataloguing items like this can be distressing but the item record needs to be done well.</p> <p>MG followed on to say Ron Heisler is a member of the library. AS gave a brief account of how Ron started collecting books as a child and his involvement in left leaning political movements in Hackney and how he has donated a massive amount of material to the library.</p> <p>FM commented that it must be frustrating and fascinating to be a cataloguer, trying to pin down access to materials when language refuses to be pinned down...</p> <p>FF answered yes, it is frustrating. Especially around sensitive topics in this collection. Problems with the vocabulary we are bound to. The Library of Congress subject heading vocabulary used globally but bound by and maintained by the congress of the USA. FF then gave a case of the Library of Congress wanting to change a subject heading to show an example of how the Vocabulary is politicised.</p> <p>FM mentioned the Library of congress documentary about the Library of Congress subject heading ‘Illegal Alien’ and if there is any progress on these terms.</p> <p>FF There have been some changes and the Library of Congress are trying to change these terms. There is always movement in the vocabulary and they publish any changes.</p> <p>FF went on to say that we have a big collection on sexuality, sexual identity, LGBTQ rights and Library of Congress subject headings will be a challenge when cataloguing this collection.</p>	
4	<p>SHL user survey discussion</p> <p>PW mentioned that we launch the user survey on 10 June a little later this time and after the exam period. We have been working on making this survey a bit shorter and to make some changes that reflect how readers use the library onsite and increasingly online as well.</p> <p>PW said that the survey will be emailed to current members, gave an overview of the questionnaire as follows:</p>	<p>LM let members know when the survey opened.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on access collections, reasons for using services, new services introduced since the last survey, have readers taken advantage of these new services and looking at future services. • Future services, with the LTP we listed improvements we might hope to bring in to see what readers would value and what the priorities should be. PW then went through the options in the question on future services and mentioned these are the things we are going to ask our users to rate. <p>PW added that we would benefit from feedback from forum members on which improvements we should concentrate on and generally if there was anything else forum members would like to raise about the library.</p> <p>FM asked a question about what is meant by 'technology rich' including for visually impaired students.</p> <p>PW responded that we do have a room for visually impaired students. That would be included in that and a space where students can attend online lectures, meetings and even makerspaces which some libraries are beginning to introduce. Having spaces with a focus of doing things rather than the book stock.</p> <p>FM asked about Improvements in signage (and possible link to an app?) and added it is very important as far as I am concerned</p> <p>PW responded that it is definitely something we want to look at. Whether some of our signage can be done virtually rather than physical signs using a phone and an app.</p> <p>FM added a comment about the survey and said 24-hour opening is not important for me - cost will presumably make improvements elsewhere less likely. The Maughan library does it, and not convinced how much it is used in practice.</p> <p>PW added that we did it at Birkbeck. There is some demand for it, and it is a judgement we will have to make to see if it is worthwhile. As you say there will be cost implications.</p> <p>MG asked about when the survey will be published, how long it will be open for and when the results will be available.</p> <p>LM it will go live on 10 June and run for a month.</p> <p>PW Hope to look at analysing the results soon after the survey closes and publicise the results later in the year.</p>	
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	<p>FM asked, might it be worth separating out evening opening from Sunday opening on the survey? Because I expect there may be a different market for each.</p> <p>PW Difficult to predict what is going to be the most popular. Looking at feedback and the last survey there is demand for both and we want to look at extending opening hours into the evenings and on Sundays. We will be assessing how much take up there is and amend hours accordingly.</p>	
5	<p>AOB</p> <p>LM raised a comment from FM in their absence on making the archives of the library digitally available and that this can be great for users internationally and especially those whose research institutions do not have the resources to send researchers to London in person.</p> <p>CEDS responded by saying there is a lot of work and a rolling programme looking into what can be digitised. It is expensive so we are looking at collections where we think there is wider interest and value and then looking to find partners to work with, to share the volume and the financial cost of that.</p> <p>CEDS mentioned the Cusichaca archive and the Women and Social Movements Library as recent examples, where we've worked with commercial partners. What happens when items within the collections are digitised. That they are then made available behind a pay wall for other institutions, but we make sure we have it accessible for our researchers. As part of these agreements, we also make a selection open access through our platforms such as the website and that is how we digitise a mass of amount of material and make it available.</p> <p>We also do digitisation on request. So, if there is something particular, to send in a query and we can look at that.</p> <p>We are also exploring new technologies to set up a virtual reading room using visualisers. A member of staff can have the material on a visualiser and it can be viewed online which means it doesn't have to be digitised and we can turn the pages in an online session. We have succeeded in securing a grant for this and look forward to introducing this service in the coming academic year.</p> <p>CEDS advised FM to get in touch if there are further questions to see what we can do if there is something in particular, to see how we can facilitate that.</p>	

	<p>Vouchers, certificate of contribution</p> <p>LM let members know that where applicable, they will be contacted about vouchers and certificates as a thank you for taking part in the forum this academic year.</p> <p>MG thanked everyone for attending and the speakers Fran and Axel, and Pete and Catherine.</p>	LM contacted members
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