

NoWal Technology Community of Practice

Monday 15th June, 2.00-3.30pm

Online via Zoom

In attendance:

Gopal Dutta (MMU), Ian Gifford (Manchester), Tim Leonard (Bolton), Stephen Morrin (Salford), Pete Morris (Manchester), Graeme Prescott (Bolton), Alex Widdeson (Liverpool)

Apologies received from:

Laura Riella (Edge Hill), Emily Shields (MMU)

How has your Library adapted its services through technology during the COVID-19 pandemic?

While all institutions were taking steps to be ready, it still required a lot of work to move to online-only services, work is still ongoing in many areas.

Some examples:

- Manchester have redeveloped their webpages to emphasise online resources for the time being.
- MMU have seen large increase in website traffic/use of resources. Usage up 111% across main library website and libguides. Webpages edited to emphasise online resources.
- Bolton have introduced a new online chat service.

Library staff at all member libraries have shifted to using tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc. In some cases the library had access to these tools before the lockdown and had started to make use of them, though circumstances have considerably sped up adoption. Some libraries are using these tools for the first time (Manchester got access to Office365 and Teams about a week before closure).

All libraries reported a transition period in moving to using Teams/Zoom, but said that they had been very important to their continued operations. Salford noted there was maybe a couple of weeks of transition but overall staff have dealt with it very well.

Equipment for staff has been a challenge. Not all staff had devices suitable for their work. MMU and Bolton among those who have had to source and provide equipment for staff.

Establishing norms of communication has sometimes been a challenge. Some libraries have been looking at how to replicate on-campus communities and enable teamwork. Online social events have been good for this (Digital Team at Manchester have had online bingo session)

A number of libraries said that smaller teams within their libraries have continued to work very well online. Working in silo's can bring challenges though Liverpool noted that small teams have been able to work very fast and be flexible. Most libraries had seen disruption to their planned work and projects.

MMU asked if anyone else had specifically moved staff into a digital/online support role, from a face-to-face customer service role. There were some examples from other libraries of staff taking on new digitally focused work, but no formal secondments.

There was a discussion of recruitment freezes and budgets. Some institutions are forecasting considerable impact on their income, particularly those with large numbers of international students. Implication for libraries unknown at this stage, though most participants were expecting a halt on recruitment and/or potential budget cuts.

The group discussed if the pandemic and lockdown would lead their libraries to look at their operations in a new way. A number of participants said that there had been discussions about this, and more home working was something that they could see staff being in favour of. Some digitally focused teams are planning on working from home for the foreseeable future. All participants said they had been able to carry out the majority of the duties from home, and that for the most part they were busier than ever.

Discussion of setting up “free” resources/short term offers from publishers. MMU noted that this has been time consuming and intensive work for library staff, for only a limited window of access. Publishers have contacted academic staff directly, and increased demand for take-up of these services.

Most of the member libraries had taken fairly limited advantage of offers; mindful of setting expectations, and not being able to retain access. eTextbook providers (Kortext, BibLiU) were noted as being particularly forward in their marketing approach.

There was a discussion of plans for the new academic year and the gradual resuming of physical library services.

All participants agreed that at this stage it was hard to be clear about operations for the new academic year, as planning is still ongoing. Although some libraries were being asked by their University’s marketing departments for information about the new year.

Bolton are now offering limited on-campus services (book return and reservation collection, no access to study space or PCs yet). Using LibCal to offer bookable slots for students.

See this blog post from Springshare for how to configure LibCal’s Spaces feature for this:

<https://blog.springshare.com/2020/05/20/using-libcal-to-schedule-curbside-pickup/>

Here is Bolton’s public booking page:

<https://libcal.bolton.ac.uk/reserve/booking>

Management of user groups for access eg ‘full’ staff and students vs external students, walk in user and so on. How are people managing these groups across authentication services like EZProxy and Shibboleth, how are the groups mapped internally with University systems like swipe access?

Most participants noted that their IT depts. were responsible for the management of user groups. Both MMU and Bolton expressed an interest in developing a more granular approach to user groups in future, to aid security and analytics.

Tim O’Neill at Manchester was suggested as a helpful contact on this topic.

Any good tips on courses or training, particularly CSS and JS (Paid, more supported courses, rather than free codeacademy courses)

W3Schools and Stack Overflow were highlighted as useful resources

Good feedback on Pluralsight courses:

<https://www.pluralsight.com/paths/css>

<https://www.pluralsight.com/paths/javascript>

Pete from Manchester noted that as JavaScript has so many applications these days it is best to try and find learning materials about your specific context, as broad tutorials may not be that useful.

Any other updates

All libraries still working on Accessibility regulations coming into force in September

The recent Kent Digital Accessibility Conference was highlighted as a useful event. Resources should be shared online at some point. Tweets from the event can be found here:

https://twitter.com/search?q=%23KentDigitalAccessibility2020&src=typed_query

Next Meeting

Stephen Morrin from Salford offered to organise the next meeting in about three months time.