# Promoting Resources Through Physical Library Displays

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**Abstract: Physical Library resource displays offer an effective, low-cost means of publicising relevant resources to user groups and enhancing library spaces. This paper discusses the experience of using displays in academic libraries to prominently highlight a wider range of resources, which might not otherwise be used by students and the potential this offers to improve the level of work they produce. The formation of teams to create, plan, maintain and document resource displays at Leeds Beckett University Library has provided an opportunity for members of staff across the Library to work together using knowledge and creativity to enhance the overall student experience. Displays have provided opportunities for the Library to create closer links within the university and work with external organisations. Gathering detailed usage statistics and providing opportunities for users to interact with displays and offer feedback, has contributed to a better understanding of the study areas and themes which students respond to. Future directions are explored to further develop the Library display as a tool for connecting with users, including closer linking of physical displays with online resources and personalising display experiences to specific student groups and reading lists.**

## Introduction

Library displays are an effective yet low-cost tool, which can be used to enhance both the physical and online library spaces (Baule, 2015, Mikos, 2015). They have the potential to promote creativity and higher levels of academic work amongst library users by encouraging use of a wider range of resources. Displays provide opportunities to create links between the library and other university departments or external organisations, as well as encouraging creativity and teamwork amongst library staff. While some might question the need for physical library displays when students are increasingly using online Library spaces, there is evidence that material library spaces are still highly valued by students (Cha and Kim, 2015, Dominguez, 2016). And while those within the 18-29 age range have been shown to prefer eBooks over print books, Zhang and Kudva emphasise that both print and online resources 'have unique attributes and serve distinct functions to meet people's reading needs' (2014, p.1705).

Leeds Beckett University in Leeds, West Yorkshire, has campuses in the city centre and Headingley. Both campus libraries are open to all students and offer two distinctive learning environments. The recently renovated Sheila Silver Library, situated in the centre of Leeds, houses a large collection with an emphasis on health, business and social sciences. The historic Headingley campus library, situated in 100 acres of parkland is home to collections such as sport, education and computing. Over the last year, separate display teams working at both campus libraries have experimented with different approaches to using physical library displays more effectively. The formation of teams of library staff contributing towards display planning and creation has meant that with limited time and resources, varied and attractive displays can be produced on a regular basis. Research has been undertaken to determine better positioning of displays, popular topic areas to focus on and the best ways to display stock. By working together across campuses, ideas, tips and reusable resources can be shared and developed, which

contribute to improving the overall student experience, with little extra time or cost expenditure from the Library.

### Highlighting Library Resources

Although marketing is arguably a necessity for libraries nowadays (Garoufallou et al., 2013), academic libraries have been much slower to adopt display marketing techniques than public libraries and book shops (Jones, 2011, Alire, 2007). Camacho observes that few university libraries use book displays and many only dedicate 'minimal effort' to their creation (2014, p.116). Yet she refers to studies carried out in both public and academic libraries which show that the increased visibility of books in displays leads to greater probability of resources being borrowed (2014, p.116). Dewan discusses the risk that books become 'invisible' in modern academic libraries where other services are often emphasised and many resources are now available only online (2013, p.314). This idea can be seen to be particularly relevant at Leeds Beckett Library where both library buildings have very little stock on the entrance level Ground Floors. Displays can therefore play an important role in providing a dedicated space for physical resources in the busiest parts of the Library.

Camacho also stresses the importance of attractive resources and bright, eye-catching covers in displays (2014). Godfrey describes how carefully constructed displays at a popular local bookstore in Canada are frequently posted on social media by customers and the displayed books 'always see a sales boost' (2015, p.15). Evidently, as observed by Maloney, the eye-catching cover art of resources must be matched by 'quality content' (2012, p.285). At Leeds Beckett

Library, research has been undertaken to explore how displays can be made more visually appealing to Library users. Staff from Headingley Library visited a range of book shops in order to identify the kinds of techniques used in the commercial sector and staff at the Sheila Silver Library are planning such a trip later in the year. Display ideas used in public and academic libraries are also being referred to regularly, using websites and Pinterest boards. Simple yet effective techniques such as stacking multiple copies of the same title have been found to be particularly effective. Staff have received positive feedback from students commenting on how Library displays brighten their experience and 'make them chuckle'. Additionally, the popularity of display resources,
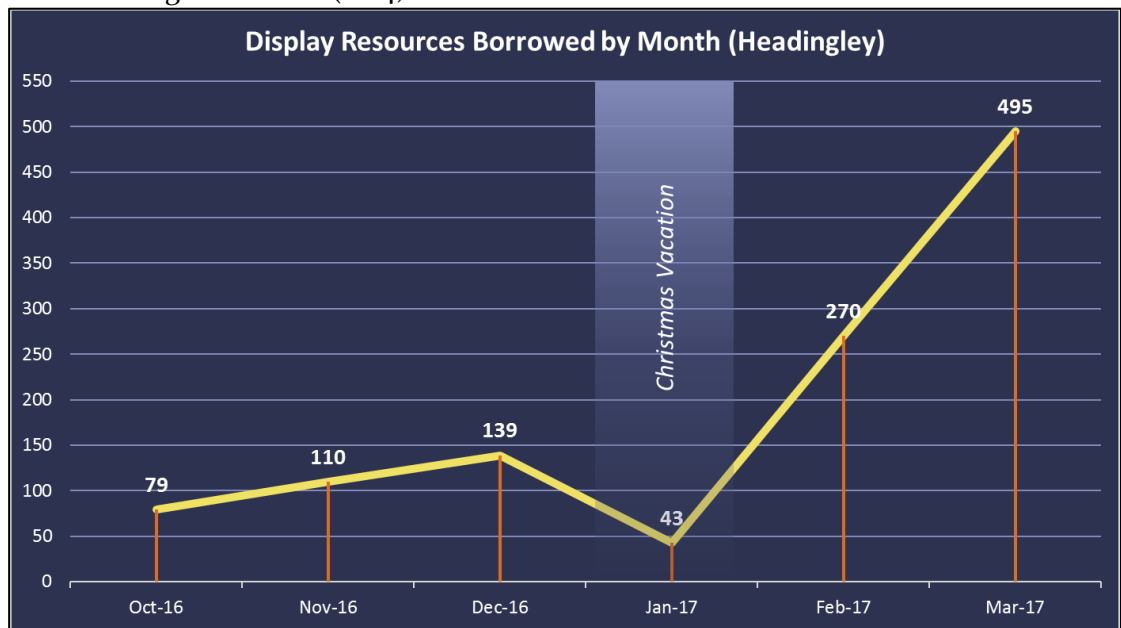


**Chart demonstrating the growth in student engagement with displays at Headingley Library, since their inception**

demonstrated through usage statistics, has been evidence of the fact that they are attracting the attention of Library users and building a dedicated audience. At Headingley Library, staff have seen a marked increase in usage since new displays techniques have been implemented and at the Sheila Silver Library, more students have been observed stopping to look at displays.

User experience research has also been undertaken at Leeds Beckett Library to establish the most strategic positioning of displays to attract the attention of Library users and to best enhance study space. Headcounts and

observations have been carried out in order to track frequent paths used by students and display tables moved accordingly, to ensure user access to display resources is both straightforward and intuitive. At Headingley Library, display tables were initially placed in the entrance area and have gradually moved further back into student work spaces, breaching the cocoon of the 'study area'. While students are encouraged to take charge of their own learning space by moving furniture to address their learning needs, library staff are not encouraged to take the same kind of initiative to experiment with the modification and improvement of the library environment. Allowing staff to be creative in positioning display furniture has helped to reverse this tendency. Spontaneous, anecdotal feedback on the benefits of displaying stock outside of shelving areas was captured during a recent Library interview exercise. The student explained how 'I wouldn't have known where to find [the item I borrowed] actually if it was on the shelves [...]'. The great advantage of displays is that they are a space where resources which students would not normally look for in the Library can be publicised. Resources on subjects such as wellbeing and study skills have been particularly popular in displays at Leeds Beckett yet might be missed by students if they were only browsing specific shelf space focusing on their subject area.

**Behavioural maps of Ground Floors at the Sheila Silver and Headingley Libraries courtesy of Jenny Morgan, Pippa Wood and Alison Davies**
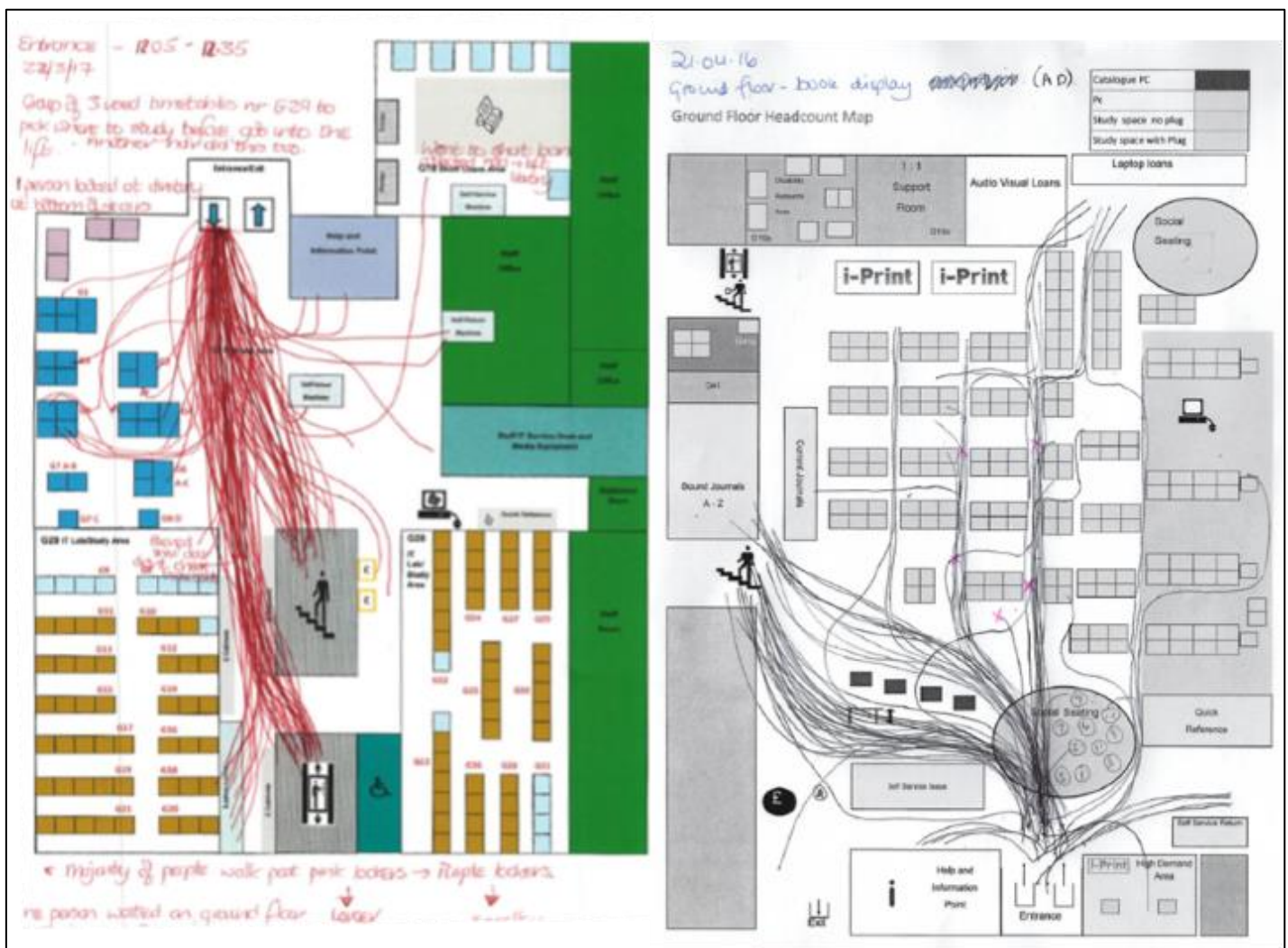
### Inspiring students

Bieraugel and Neill suggest that in addition to their traditional goals, academic libraries can 'strive to provide spaces that foster creativity and innovation in support of their institution's educational goals and mission' (2017, p.35). As Maloney observes, book displays are able to contribute to such a goal, transforming '"passive" Library collections into communal spaces of discovery, cultivation, and contemplation' (2017, p.35). As Maloney observes, book displays are able to contribute to such a goal, transforming '"passive" Library collections into communal spaces of discovery, cultivation, and contemplation' (2012, p.282). Displays can be used to encourage the use of resources which might not otherwise be selected by students. By placing displays in areas where students frequently pass by, the chances of serendipitous discovery of resources are increased. Rather than focusing purely on reading list items or frequently visited areas of the library, students might be attracted to related resources they see on display and be encouraged as a result to take a more innovative approach to assignments.

Steps have been taken at Leeds Beckett Library to go beyond the simple presentation of stock within displays, to offering interactive elements with the objective of promoting a collaborative study community where students share ideas and study tips. Whiteboards and post-it exercises have resulted in contribution and feedback from a wide range of students. In order to build and maintain library user engagement, library staff have responded to feedback through various channels which lend themselves to instant engagement, including Twitter, the Library blog https://leedsbeckettlibrary.wordpress.com and in the

display space itself. Feedback has also helped inform the future content and direction of display plans.



**Use of post-it exercise at Headingley Library**

### Choosing resources for displays

Larkin-Lieffers (2013) refers to a study into book store displays in which there was a clear tendency of customers to select books on displays for purchase. Camacho et al. (2014) and Maloney (2012) refer to studies which demonstrate that displays in libraries result in more issues. However, in the academic Library, the objective is not only to increase circulation but to get the right resources to the right people. In order to address this objective, Maloney discusses the use of 'aggressive weeding' of displays involving the removal and replacement of any items which have not been borrowed from a display within a few days (2012, p.286). This method has been experimented with at Headingley Library with staff noting that it is a successful way of identifying content that students are most interested in, ultimately resulting in higher use of displays.

Staff across both campuses have explored a range of subjects for displays, initially basing these around events in the academic calendar such as exams or events celebrated by the university community such as LGBT History Month. Scheduling displays in this way has encouraged library staff to develop their knowledge of the

wider academic calendar, enabling them to better identify and understand library users' changing needs throughout the study year. The success of each display is monitored by noting each replaced resource. Gathering and analysing usage statistics has helped inform and plan future displays.

Display topics at Leeds Beckett Library can be divided into three main types: academic, topical and novelty.

| Academic | Topical | Novelty |
|---|---|---|
| Welcome, Study Skills, First Essay, Research Methods, Dissertation, Exams, Careers | World Mental Health Day, International Women's Day, Disability History Month | Halloween, Blue Monday, Christmas, Holiday Reads |

**Examples of types of displays**

Across both campuses academic displays generate most student engagement and usage statistics. The display teams feel that it is important to initiate key events in the students' calendars by putting up displays on data analysis or exam preparation just before the majority of students will be taking part in these stages of their studies. This can be seen as an opportunity for the Library to guide and direct student focus and therefore improve their overall university experience. Topical displays can be seen as a valuable opportunity to demonstrate both the University

and the Library's commitment to raising awareness and providing support for a variety of groups and organisations. Library staff have received positive feedback on displays such as mental health awareness, which revealed that certain students were previously unaware of the existence of such stock in the Library. A student at the Sheila Silver Library put in a specific request for a display on the subject of autism after seeing other health-related displays. Library staff have
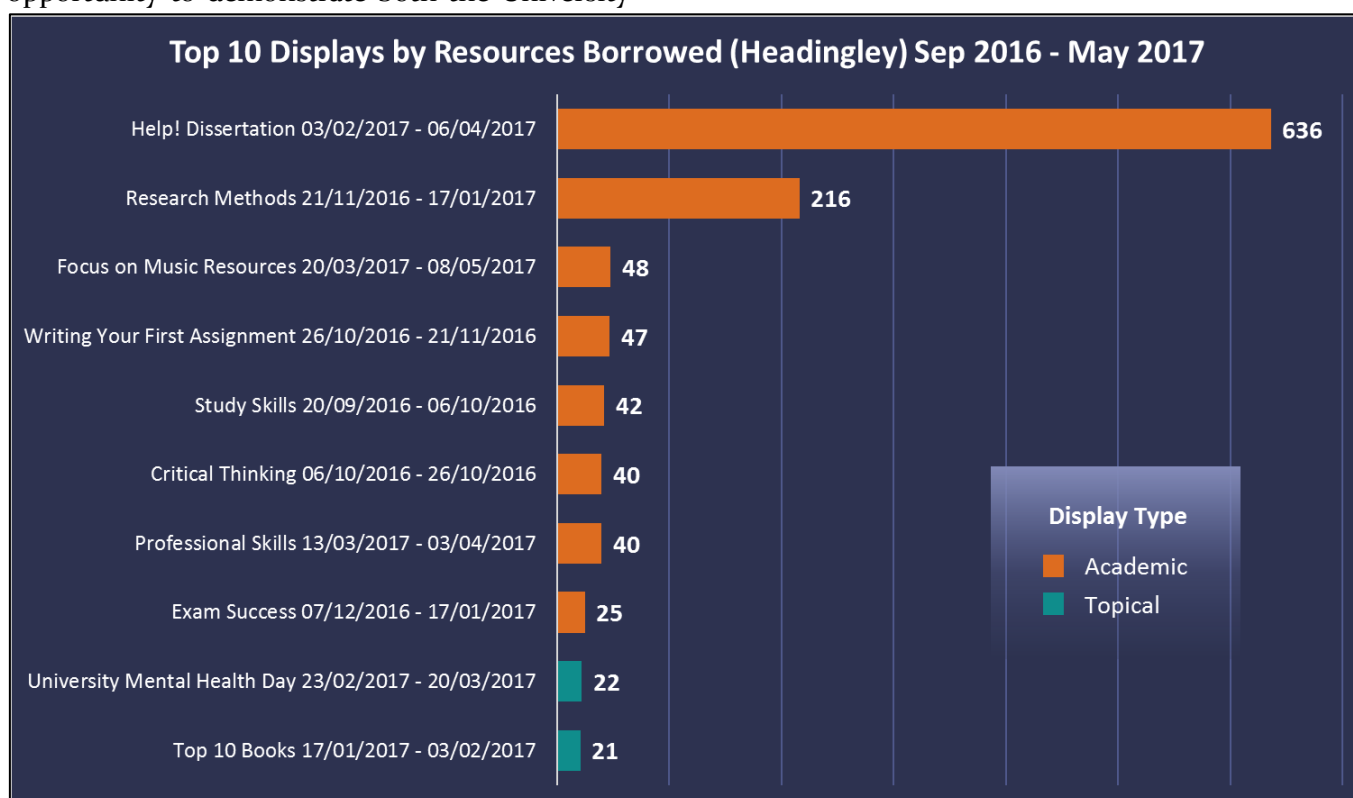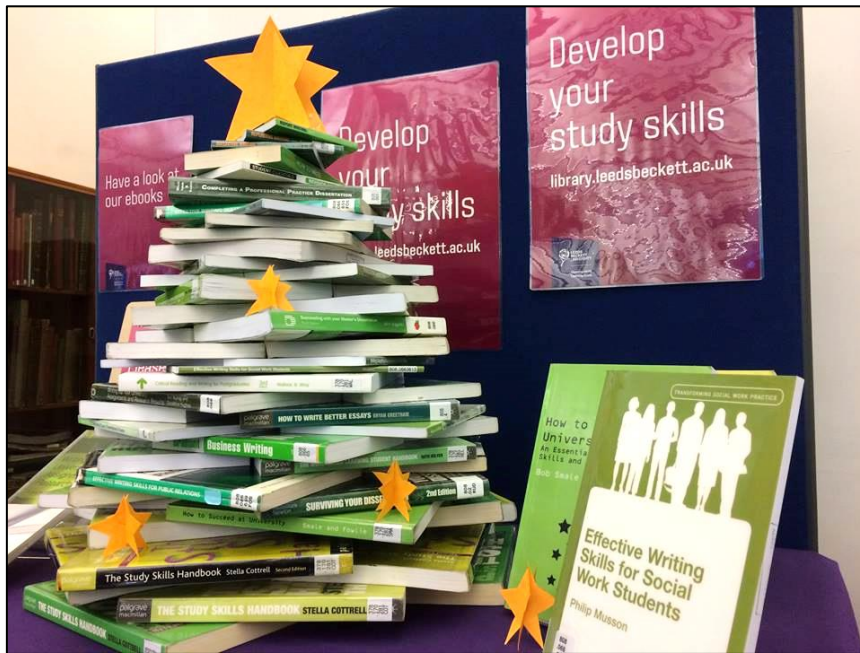
observed that novelty displays generate little student engagement suggesting that when students are in the Library, they are focused on their studies. The regularity of these types of displays has therefore been limited, although library staff will continue to experiment with new topics and remain attentive and aware of the potentially changing preferences of students in the future.

**The Top 10 most utilised displays at Headingley Library clearly demonstrate the popularity of Academic and Topical displays**



Top 10 Displays by Resources Borrowed (Headingley) Sep 2016 - May 2017

| Display | Resources Borrowed |
|---|---|
| Help! Dissertation 03/02/2017 - 06/04/2017 | 636 |
| Research Methods 21/11/2016 - 17/01/2017 | 216 |
| Focus on Music Resources 20/03/2017 - 08/05/2017 | 48 |
| Writing Your First Assignment 26/10/2016 - 21/11/2016 | 47 |
| Study Skills 20/09/2016 - 06/10/2016 | 42 |
| Critical Thinking 06/10/2016 - 26/10/2016 | 40 |
| Professional Skills 13/03/2017 - 03/04/2017 | 40 |
| Exam Success 07/12/2016 - 17/01/2017 | 25 |
| University Mental Health Day 23/02/2017 - 20/03/2017 | 22 |
| Top 10 Books 17/01/2017 - 03/02/2017 | 21 |

Display Type: Academic, Topical

**Christmas display at Sheila Silver Library which attracted positive comments online**

### Forging links in and outside the university

Displays can also be used as a tool to connect with other departments and groups both within and outside the organisation. Jones et al. explain how this was an 'unanticipated benefit' for their team at James Madison University and that both faculty members and students requested topics for displays at their Library which were then particularly popular with students (2011, p.115). Mikos et al. describe how 'the input of various stakeholders in the creation and voice of the display builds an audience for the display alongside the display itself' and how this collaboration of different groups or individuals leads to 'a richer, wider, more inclusive community' (2015, p.2). Maloney also supports this idea, writing that, in addition to helping to increase awareness and circulation of stock, book displays can be a 'surprisingly effective locus for partnerships with groups across campus' (2012, p.281).

At Leeds Beckett Library, displays have often been based on events or themes which link to other parts of the university. This frequently involves library staff contacting colleagues in other departments to request related materials and therefore demonstrates the Library's commitment to supporting and promoting the work of the wider university community. Recently, a display based on interviews and CV writing involved a member of library staff asking colleagues at The Gateway (Leeds Beckett careers service) for permission to utilise a selection of their resources for use in the display. The ability to physically visit other departments reinforces the potential for inter-departmental connections to form. Other displays have involved collaboration with Skills for Learning, Leeds Beckett Students' Union and Disability Support. Displays have also linked to external events and organisations such as LGBT History Month, Leeds International Film Festival and Leeds City Council. For a recent LGBT History Month display, email contact was made with the creators of the LGBT History Month website to check that their materials could be used as part of the display. This led to an encouraging reply stating that they were 'thrilled' we were using their resources. Similarly, organisers of the Global Accessibility Awareness Day initiative thanked Leeds Beckett Library staff for supporting their cause when they contacted the group to ask about using their logo.

### Facilitating employee creativity and promoting teamwork

Castiglione has discussed the way in which creativity can lead to 'organizational learning, adaptation and renewal' (2008, p.169) and encourages managers to provide an organizational culture that facilitates 'creative expression'. Display planning and creation is a simple way for library staff with creativity and a passion for promoting resources to provide a value-added service for library users. In some cases library staff have previous experience working in bookstores and therefore have marketing knowledge and expertise which they can bring to the academic library. McPhie and Wannerton explain how a new member of staff at their university, with experience in the commercial sector encouraged them to review their marketing of stock by instigating a series of book displays, which proved popular with students and also encouraged library staff to get involved and become more aware of the range of

stock available (2014). At Leeds Beckett Library a number of staff members have experience working within book shops such as Borders and W H Smith, in addition to public libraries. Book trade techniques have been directly employed in displays, such as the practice of cross merchandising, where a retailer promotes impulse buys by displaying items from different sections of a store together so customers perceive a relationship between them. This practice was successfully employed in Headingley Library's 'Destinations' display where travel guides, language packs and holiday literature were displayed together to promote overlooked areas of the Library's collections and add value to the user's experience. Inspired by similar practice in bookshops, artistic members of staff have undertaken the creation of bespoke blackboard designs to accompany displays. Utilising hand-drawn blackboards rather than more formal signage has helped add a personal, human touch to displays and enliven otherwise dry academic subjects.

Plumb describes how she made substantial use of resources left by her 'predecessors' when she started to look after displays at University of Wyoming College of Law Library. She encourages library staff to keep an archive of previous resources and as well as doing so herself, she created a web page to share articles and resources with the wider public (2010). This sharing of ideas and resources contributes therefore not only to institutional teamwork, but also encourages a wider sense of community amongst library staff who are interested in promoting resources in this way. At Leeds Beckett Library, the formation of teams to work on displays has given more staff the opportunity to use creative skills in their roles. By working together across campuses, ideas and resources can be shared resulting in a more effective service for all. Photographs of displays and display artwork are often shared on

**Display artwork at Headingley Library and the Sheila Silver Library created by Tom Lennox (top) and Laura Green**

Facebook and Twitter and have received comments and likes. Display ideas from Leeds Beckett Library have also inspired and been imitated by other libraries. Seeing designs and ideas contributing to the development of the display medium, across the information sector, has further helped enthuse and motivate Leeds Beckett display teams.

### Next Steps

Monitoring displays over the last year has given Leeds Beckett Library staff a much better idea of the topics which students most respond to. However, certain displays continue to surprise with their success or lack thereof. A recent display on data analysis at the Sheila Silver Library was not expected to be especially popular yet was consistently well-used day after day over the period of a month. The display teams would like to experiment with more focused academic displays over the coming year, in particular basing displays around specific reading lists. This idea is currently being trialled at Headingley Library with a music resource focused display. At the Sheila Silver Library, the display team will start to experiment with mini subject-specific displays on the upper floors of the Library, therefore locating them at the heart of the study space rather than leaving them on the periphery.

Staff would also like to more closely investigate the popularity of, and need for, more stock in certain areas. As has already been mentioned, displays on exam preparation and study skills are often very popular yet resources on these subjects are limited, making original display creation challenging at times. Resources relating to wellbeing and mindfulness are often on loan when displays on these subjects are being planned and resources searched for. Where high usage figures are noted in certain subject areas, it may be advantageous for the Library to purchase more resources to improve the overall stock on offer.

Library staff have discussed ways in which physical displays might be used to direct students to online resources. Baker discusses the use of mobile tagging and Quick Response (QR) barcodes to enable Library users to 'interact with both print and electronic media' (2010, p.24). However, after discussions at Leeds Beckett Library, it was felt that QR codes are now a slightly dated technology. Alternatives such as simple but
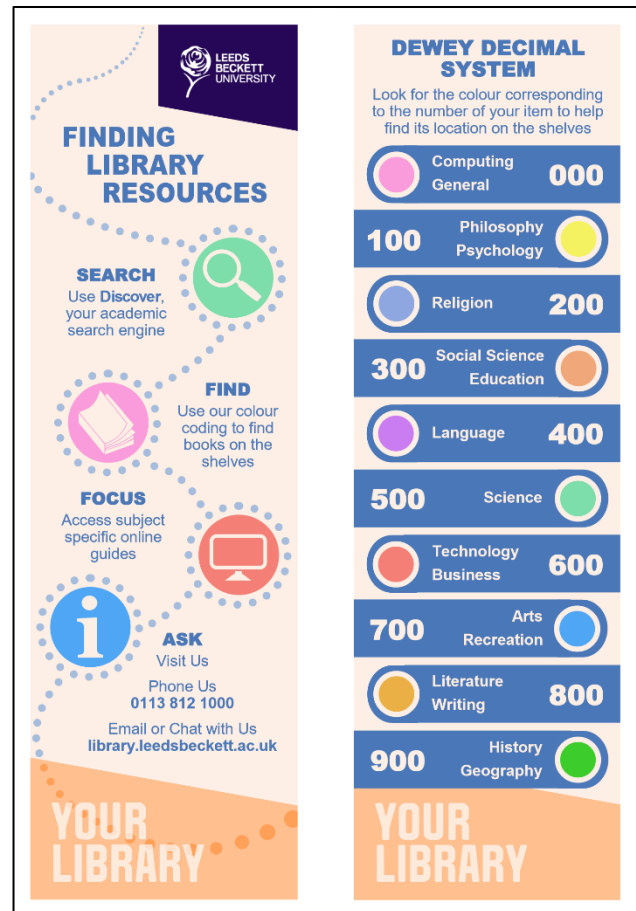


**Bookmark by Tom Lennox. These will be given away on displays to help promote online resources and the wider collection**

practical bookmarks with useful search advice and guidance have been designed and will be

investigated over the year in order to try to integrate electronic resource promotion into the physical book displays.

In order to ensure that physical Library displays also enhance the student experience for those who are unable to visit the physical Library space, social media has been used as an important tool in sharing photos of Library displays. Plans are underway to also create a Pinterest board to bring images of Library displays together and this will be linked to via the Library website. It is hoped that this will provide inspiration and ideas to students using the online Library and give them the opportunity to interact as part of feedback exercises. Such an online presence can also be seen as a way to contribute to the wider library community in sharing best practice and in encouraging more academic libraries to take advantage of this simple yet effective promotional tool.

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