THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHAMPTON

Abstract:

This article outlines and assesses the research into resource management and ordering processes at the University of Northampton and academics' knowledge of these processes. The aim of the research was to identify ways of streamlining the service, to improve communication between academic and library staff, with the objective of an enhanced student experience. The focus groups highlighted concerns around growing spoon-feeding in Higher Education and the ongoing communication barriers between academic and library staff. This article will evaluate the current debates, research and practices within the sector and present and analyse the findings of the research.

Article:

The nature of the academic library has undergone improvements over the last decade in order to meet the challenges of change that technology has introduced into modern university life. Michalak (2012) asserts there has been a concerted effort to 'develop research libraries from lumbering old-fashioned organizations into agile, change-oriented enterprises pointed directly into the future' (Michalak, 2012, p. 412). She maintains that a transformation has been effected by focusing on areas such as an 'outward facing approach' and how operationally it has become 'technology diffused' (Michalak, 2012, pp. 412-413). In terms of collection development, an outward facing approach means that librarians actively meet academic staff outside of the confines of the library space to assess the latter's teaching and learning needs. The diffusion of technology is realised through moving to immediately accessible e-resources and the digitisation of rare books and articles within the constraints imposed by copyright law. While these are major improvements to the learning experience of students and research needs of staff, print resources are still in demand. The Library and Learning Services (LLS) annual review for The University of Northampton (UN) shows, for example, that in 2015 the total number of unique print loans (excluding renewals), were 117,839, while section requests for electronic books went up to 1,216,549 (Appendix 1). Continued demand for print means that the availability and speed of availability of these

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resources remains a concern. Technology diffusion, allied with a concerted collaborative approach, could lead to a distinct improvement in the ordering process of these materials, thus enhancing both access and the learning experience.

Many of the issues that impede effective collections development stem from the different operational and communicative cultures that exist within academia, particularly between those of academic staff and librarians. Christiansen, *et al*. (2004) highlight these cultural differences, concluding that there is an 'asymmetrical disconnection', Librarians are fully aware of the work of academic staff and seek to further engage with them to enhance the collections and thus also the student experience. However, conversely, 'faculty do not have a solid understanding of librarians' work and are not seeking similar contact . . . they do not know about librarians' specific duties and projects' (Christiansen *et al*., 2004, p. 118). Indeed, Shen (2012) identifies a number of barriers to effective communication and collaboration in relation to collection development. Firstly, financial allocation, budget constraints and competition, i.e., who gets what share of the 'financial pie', can elicit 'variant priorities' between academic staff and library acquisition (Shen, 2012, pp. 14-15). Secondly, some academic staff or their representatives can be more engaged with, or influential with, acquiring subject specific research and teaching materials, leading to an unbalanced collection, an issue also observed by Mueller (2005). Thirdly, Shen (2012) shows that inefficient communication is a factor in thwarting patron needs. Thus, librarians are dependent on academic staff recommendations to acquire items that have already been enquired after. This creates reactionary libraries rather than a proactive acquisitions policy (Shen, 2012).

The issues highlighted by Shen (2012) have been addressed by the librarians at The University of Northampton, who have systematically engaged with academic staff concerning these specific problems to ensure that apportioning of budgets, a balanced collection and responding to patron/user needs are within the librarians' control. However, the 'asymmetrical disconnection' with regards to communication as identified by Christiansen, *et al*. (2004) still exists to a degree and is a fundamental issue that the research project

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reported here has sought to overcome. The fundamental aim of the project was to improve the efficacy of collection development, by increasing the efficiency of the ordering process. Such an approach would ensure the speed of availability of up-to-date and relevant teaching course materials, which in turn would enhance the students' learning experience.

The objective of the project was to review current practices relating to the book ordering process. The idea was to interrogate tutors' experiences and expectations of how materials are selected and acquired for their own and their students' needs. It also had the collaborative aim to inform academic staff of the operational processes and limitations that librarians and the resource management team engage with and encounter. Additionally, how tutors themselves select their relevant material for reading lists was subject to investigation to see if this could be improved through the diffusion of existing vendor technologies such as alerts and lists.

Literature Review

A survey of the literature surrounding collection development and university collection acquisition was carried out. Cassell (2007) found that collection development librarians at Adelphi University Library, New York were the ones responsible for building collections and selecting resources and used vendor lists for their selections. While the librarians liaised with academic staff representatives and academic staff had to approve the selections, their involvement and communication with librarians appears minimal. The biggest issue the Librarians faced was the apportioning of budgets; how much to allocate to e-resources and how much to print. Most importantly the student and teaching experience rather than academic staff research requirements was the resource priority. From Cassell's interviews, it was clear that while the development of an e-resource collection was important, print materials were still in demand. Unimpeded or immediate access to both types of resource was the all-important requirement of library users. This is also one of the fundamental considerations at the heart of our research project.

Wittenbach (2005) observed how a restructuring of fund allocation, from one centralised library fund to individual disciplines with their own specific fund codes, transformed collection development at the University of California Riverside University Libraries. Initially there was little collaboration with academic staff on what was selected, as subject specific profiles had been created and selections were made by specially trained bibliographers and subject librarians. However, after implementation, realising the importance of library and academic staff collaboration, this process was altered and bibliographers and librarians are now trained in liaising with faculties and their requirements (Wittenbach, 2005). Agee (2005) highlights the significance of collection evaluation in prospective collection development as well as the importance of library and academic staff collaboration. While he focuses on a number of crucial evaluative areas such as user-centred approaches and physical stock, his third area, involving the evaluation of specific subject support, entails a collaborative working relationship with academic staff. Thus, the importance of liaising with academic staff in appraising curriculum materials and reading lists is a determining factor in deciding whether stock is sufficient or, more importantly, what is required for future collection development.

Mueller (2005) investigated whether vendor approval plans are compatible with academic staff collection selection processes. Approval plans while based on subject specific profiles can bypass specific research or teaching materials required for academic staff and students alike. At the University of Montana, selection of curriculum-specific materials has always been conducted by academic staff. Librarians select reference and multi-disciplinary items, and also seek to fill any gaps they identify within the collection. Initial implementation of approval plans foundered in the 1980s precisely because of the failure to meet specific teaching and research needs. However, as Mueller demonstrates, in 2001 the Library decided to employ a mixed model of approval plan and academic staff selection which would work on a number of operational levels. It would aid cataloguing and classification issues, but would also relieve time constrained academic staff from selecting

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mainstream core texts so that they could focus on ordering specific research and teaching items.

The results appear positive. Academic staff no longer have to worry about budget constraints as budgets are apportioned to each department's approval plan, while academic staff can order the specific materials they need. The items come in shelf ready and as the profiles are already in place, the librarians do not have to wait for recommendations or approvals from academic staff for core items necessary to learning and teaching needs, thus speeding up the ordering process and the delivery of materials to the shelves for immediate access. The main issue concerning academic staff was that the library would seek to move to approval plan only rather than the mixed model to save on budget costs and academic staff did not want to lose their autonomy or ability to request research-specific materials (Mueller, 2005). Another drawback of the approval plan model is the initial work involved and the amount of profiles and accounts that need to be set up in order to make the scheme workable – is this feasible in a large University, where academic librarians themselves are time constrained with their own teaching and other commitments?

Jensen (2009) draws attention to constraints on time as a major factor that impedes collaborative ordering, especially in relation to monographs. Academic staff often have little time outside of their teaching and research responsibilities to focus on ordering materials and she finds that while they allot time to journal subscriptions and cancellations, 'very few provide advice related to monographic purchases' (Jensen, 2009, p. 117). Wanting to combat this lack of engagement and input from academic staff and focusing on the Physics Department as a control group, Jensen devised an online survey which incorporated bibliographic information compiled by scouring the library's vendor lists database and the Physics Faculty's own course information and research interests (Jensen, 2009). This list, comprised of two-hundred and sixty items of both new and relevant materials, was sent out to academic staff via the survey, who could then select titles for ordering, with a text box for any further titles for consideration. They were notified by e-mail with a link to the survey, so that they could comment on the process as a whole.The survey's results were mixed; only

50% of the academic staff responded to the survey within the two weeks it ran; however, one hundred and thirty items from the list provided were selected for purchase. Additionally, Jensen determined that the online survey itself was an effective way of gathering detailed information in relation to collection development needs and opened up further avenues of communication with academic staff in how best to support students' teaching and learning needs. While there were certain benefits to Jensen's study, i.e., the useful and efficient employment of the online survey, academic staff engagement and responsibility for material selection was still limited, with the librarians still shouldering the initial responsibility of collection selection (Jensen, 2009).

A more recent study detailed by Murphy and Buckley (2013) has further highlighted this lack of academic staff engagement. A Library dean, working in conjunction with one of the Institution's Deans, implemented a new academic staff purchase program in order to 'support the teaching and learning needs of new faculty' and as a 'hiring incentive', (Murphy and Buckley, 2013, pp. 213-214). Each incoming new member of academic staff was apportioned an individual budget of $500. Before offering their own recommendations, they would each meet with a specialist librarian in their particular subject area in order to 'review collections'. If these purchase recommendations fitted within the collections policy parameters, they would be submitted to the head of collections development, who in turn would allot the correct fund codes to each item and pass the information on to the acquisitions department. The related goals of this particular strategy was to increase library involvement with new academic staff recruits, the $500 would be seen as a 'goodwill gesture', but also the scheme would encourage greater collaboration between academic staff and librarians concerning the collection development process (Murphy and Buckley, 2013).

Once again the findings were mixed; those who partook in the scheme responded in a positive manner, with a 91.5% satisfaction rate. However, participation figures in themselves, comparably with Jensen's study, were poor, with one librarian complaining that, 'I have received very positive comments, but the follow-up, by classroom faculty members,

to actually choose titles and spend the funds has often not matched their initial enthusiastic response' (Murphy and Buckley, 2013, p. 218). A lack of department communication was cited as a possible explanation for the poor participation, most new recruits hearing of the scheme from their subject Librarians rather than at interview or induction. Also it was observed that the time constraints on new academic staff who have to devise and implement new modules in their first year of employment impeded their engagement with the programme and that perhaps rolling the scheme out in their second year, when they were embedded in their subject area and therefore clear about their research and teaching requirements, would have been more effective. While the scheme failed as a recruitment tool, it was noted that for those who did participate, collaborative relations with their librarians were improved and strengthened, which in turn had a wholly positive impact on the collections development process and the collections themselves. Murphy and Buckley's study demonstrates that getting in early with new academic staff can certainly aid academic staff and library affiliations and overcome the 'asymmetrical disconnection' diagnosed by Christiansen, *et al.* (2004). However, is there a way to improve these relationships and collaborations in relation to collection development with existing academic staff? It is a consideration that this research project intended to investigate.

Research Design and Methods Adopted

The research project was an extension of, but also a departure from, research into reading lists already undertaken by Academic Librarians in Library and Learning Services at The University of Northampton (Siddall and Rose, 2014). While the initial research had involved student participants, the departure that characterised this particular project was the focus on academics, their experiences, knowledge and suggestions surrounding collection development, their reading lists and the ordering process. The research team at UN were selected specifically so that the individuals involved were representative of all the different stages of resource identification, procurement and delivery. This ensured that the whole

collection development process was checked and verified by each member of the team responsible for the roles that make up the current system from start to finish. The team comprised five Library and Learning Services staff: an Academic Librarian, a Metadata specialist, the Acquisitions Manager and two Information Assistants, whose roles covered the ordering/receiving and Customer Services elements involved in the process. A successful bid meant that the project won internal funding from the Library and Learning Services' Research Fund, and this enabled the team to approach an external Online Survey Service Provider, a transcriber and to have resources available for the provision of any refreshments that were deemed necessary "incentives".

Initial meetings ascertained the exact working practices intrinsic to each research team member's role within collection development, and identified what was currently functioning successfully and where improvements to the service were necessary. How these could be developed and implemented was fundamental to the research aim. As already noted, a literature review was conducted to ascertain both the originality of the project, but also to highlight the common issues that were facing collection development departments throughout the sector. It was decided that data collection for the project would be achieved best through a two-pronged approach. Firstly, a concise, but thorough electronic survey was sent out to academic staff by their Academic Librarians; then secondly, individual academics who had expressed an interest via the survey were invited to take part in focus groups to expand upon selected questions that had appeared in the survey and to further investigate common obstacles or outstanding issues that the survey identified.

The 14 survey questions were collectively agreed upon by the research team. The questions required a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses. These included questions such as "How do you keep up to date with research in your area?" along with more specific questions regarding the respondents' understanding, use and relevance of the reading list, to questions relating to the ordering process, i.e., did the respondents order their own resources and what type had they requested over the past twelve months? In addition to compiling the questionnaire, the research team detailed and configured the existing

ordering process workflow into a diagram that would be utilised later for dissemination in the focus groups (Cameron and Siddall, 2015).

The survey ran in March 2014 for one month and the focus groups were conducted in May after assessment marking had finished. The research team used the time between survey and focus groups to analyse the survey results and prepare discussion topics. The time lapsed would be short enough for those respondents to the survey who had agreed to take part in the focus groups, to have remembered the purpose of the research.

Three focus groups comprising a range of different subject areas, Health, Education, Business, Social Sciences and the Arts were run. The survey results were used to create prompts for the focus groups. These concentrated on reading lists and whether they should be used as the basis for ordering resources for Library stock. Also, additional prompts asked whether there were any suggestions for improvements, incentives to more sustained engagement with ordering current relevant resources, and the academics' knowledge of Library and Learning Services' working processes. To support this particular prompt, the ordering workflow diagram (see Appendix 2) was made available to each participant during the session to determine their awareness, (or lack thereof) of how the Library procures resources for stock. The Academic Librarian facilitated the focus groups with a different team member supporting her at each event. Each focus group was digitally recorded and later transcribed. Every participant signed an ethics form agreeing to participate in the research.

Data Analysis: findings and results

The online survey attracted 46 respondents, an 8% response rate out of the 546 individuals that made up the academic staff at the time it was run. This response rate was similar to the regular virtual learning environment annual survey run by the Library, which attracted 76 respondents. The results were surprising. Only 80% of respondents ordered resources through Library and Learning Services; 78% recommended additional reading that was *not* on their reading lists and therefore unlikely to be stocked in the Library; and whilst the

majority of academics updated their reading list annually, only 59% informed their Academic Librarian about the changes. The majority used publishers' inspection copies to keep abreast of developments in their fields (Cameron and Siddall, 2015).

The survey, when considering both the disappointing response rate and the responses given, emphasised the barriers to communication between Library and Learning Services and academic staff that the literature review had identified. However, it also demonstrated that there was a distinct disparity in what individual academics considered constituted a reading list. There was a lack of consistency in opinions of the purpose of the reading list and what it should, or should not, include. This was at odds with how the reading list, as a potential pedagogical tool, was being approached and dealt with by the Librarians in UN's Library and Learning Services. These two factors meant that there was sufficient investigative scope to run the focus groups as planned. The prompts, based on four thematic concerns: reading lists; Talis Aspire (the electronic reading list software used at UN); student engagement; and the ordering process, were devised so that the research group could gain some real insight into the academics' perspectives. The research team ran three focus groups with between three and five academic staff involved in each group. The focus groups ran over a two-week period and involved academic participants that represented each faculty, except Science and Technology because there were no survey respondents from this subject area.

1. **Reading Lists**

The transcripts from the three focus groups revealed that the common consensus among the academics was that the reading list was a starting point, a guide for students new to university life. However, the concept itself appeared to elicit ambivalent responses as to how a reading list could be defined or what it should contain: the views expressed were disparate. To illustrate, in the first focus group, when the participants were asked the question "Do you think a reading list should be used as a basis for purchasing stock in the library?" the question of stock purchasing was overlooked, the immediate response being:

> *What are we talking about in terms of reading lists here? Are you talking about what appears in a module guide basically?* [Participant 1, Group 1]

While P1 agreed that the reading list should be a starting point, the reading list was also seen as something that should be a limited, not a comprehensive resource:

> *You don't want to present everything to them on a plate . . . because an important part of the research process is they can go and find stuff on their own.* [Participant 1, Group 1]

This was a sentiment echoed by the other participants in Group 1 and added to by Participant 2 who stated that the reading list should be "fluid", "added to" or "cut down" as the module develops; academics should not be "hostage" to their reading lists.

In the second focus group, the perspective of participants who, it should be noted, were from disciplines of a more vocational nature than those of Group 1, was markedly different. The prompt was answered with a definitive yes; the reading lists *should* be used as the basis for the ordering of Library resources:

> *From our perspective . . . there are so many textbooks . . . we've chosen ones that we think best suits our subject material, our subject content. It just gives the students a lot more direction as they'll be off . . . looking at all sorts of books and some are too detailed for them*. [Participant 1, Group 2]

This was met by general agreement in the group, with Participant 2 making the point that tutor reading lists *had* to be used, because "up to date and current reading" was paramount in this particular discipline, and therefore specialist expertise was necessary for the correct resource selection. Participant 4 added that it was beneficial that Academic Librarians also check the reading lists, as:

> *Having someone double-check it for us . . . to make sure that we've got the right edition or spelt the author's name right, I find that particularly useful.* [Participant 4, Group 2]

In Group 3, however, there were a mix of attitudes and perspectives. Participant 2 thought that an up-to-date reading list, with the most recent editions, was "important" but

considered this to be an "ordering issue" rather than a reading list issue per se. Participant 3, in contrast, while agreeing that the reading list is the "framework" or the "start point", was also more sceptical about the prioritisation of a reading list as a sole point of resource selection by both students and library staff:

> *In my previous institution, where the budgetary situation was not benign, what we ended up with was a situation where they started to use reading lists as a way of curtailing expenditure . . . we were told . . . you can only have 'X' number of books on the reading list . . . [p]articularly for us in the Humanities, where, being given an arbitrary figure, meant there were no more than a hundred books for any module, was deeply, deeply problematic* [Participant 3, Group 3].

Participant 3 also stated that books not on reading lists were seen as taking up unnecessary shelf-space and subject to indiscriminate weeding, when actually these books were relevant to modules taught; for institutions to operate this way presented a "huge problem" for certain subject areas. This was a comment acknowledged by Participant 2 who agreed that it was "a bit scary". Thus, the focus groups highlighted that for most, while the reading list was a useful guidance tool, the implicit fear was that to have one's module and course determined by the reading list alone, would ultimately be detrimental to course diversity and the students' skills acquisition and experience as a whole.

2. Talis Aspire

In May 2012, LLS acquired Talis Aspire software for the electronic management of reading lists. After a four-month period when the software was embedded alongside a training programme for LLS staff, it was rolled out to academic staff in September 2012. The focus group participants were questioned on the functionality, usability and the effectiveness of the software. The groups elicited a mixed response in relation to their experience of Talis Aspire which was, once again, determined by particular subject areas. In the Arts-dominated focus group, it was noticeable that not one participant mentioned Talis Aspire or their engagement with it – it was only through the questioner's prompt that Aspire was briefly discussed

because of its bookmarking functionality. Indeed, the overriding sense was that the participants of Group 1 were frustrated by the systems that they and the students had to deal with, and therefore, sceptical of getting involved with any more systems introduced by LLS. Participant 2 stated that the University's Virtual Learning Environment is, in contrast to social media, which the students are used to and are comfortable with:

> *. . . clunky, it's too complicated, they're* [the students] *not getting any of my messages because they are bombarded with messages from different modules . . . so now it's just like "I don't want to look at NILE anymore" . . . students are just switching off from it.* [Participant 2, Group 1]

In contrast, the views in Group 2 were, for the most part, supportive of Talis Aspire and its functionality and effectiveness. Participant 1 praised the flexibility of the system which allowed her to add "stuff . . . all the time". However, she recognised that the reading lists could become unwieldy because of the "danger" of "adding too much" (Participant 1, Group 2). Participant 2 was equally complimentary stating that "I really like Aspire and the students really like it and therefore . . . from a student experience perspective, it's a really good thing to have" (Participant 2, Group 2). Participant 2 also liked the fact that paper reading lists were still available for students' use, as they aid the development of skillsets - each student is required to hunt down the particular resources on these lists, especially in disciplines such as "History". While Aspire functions as an excellent pedagogical tool in some respects, other research skills are lost due to the links that "easily" take the student to the resource on the catalogue or via online databases. Participant 2 suggested that the "uniformity" of everyone doing things the same way, i.e., the Aspire way, would be resisted.

Another issue with Talis Aspire was its initial usability. All the participants agreed that setting up multiple module reading lists was extremely time consuming, taking "forever" to do, and each list involved a "tremendous amount of work", that was "off-putting and daunting" (Participants 4 and 2, Group 2). Participant 1 commented that "perhaps . . . a designated person" was needed to "set up Aspire". This was echoed by Participant 2 who rhetorically asked if there were any "minions in the library" i.e., "shelving" or "desk staff" that

could be setting up or "updating Aspire lists?" This was a sentiment supported by Participant 4, who lamented:

> *In the ideal world it would be lovely just to send a Word document saying, "These are all mine, this is my reading list, create my Talis Aspire list from that." That to me would be bliss.* [Group 2].

This reluctance to set-up reading lists on Aspire was echoed by the participants in Group 3 with one making the point that, because of the "sheer size" of particular "modules" and "reading lists", initial set-ups have taken a "number of days" (Participant 4, Group 3). Indeed Participant 4 emphasized how focusing on administration exercises, such as Aspire, were an inefficient and costly expenditure of time and money when academic priorities lay elsewhere:

> *Okay, that's an article not written, that's a large chunk of research not done . . . there are lots of other things that the University is paying me to do which should take priority . . . [Y]ou know, I'm a pretty expensive data entry clerk.* [Group 3]

While the consensus from Groups 2 and 3 was that Talis Aspire's reading list software was beneficial for the student experience as a whole, the organisation and maintaining of each reading list was problematic given the time required to be spent on them. Also, it was apparent that the amount of set-up and maintenance required differed significantly in relation to each individual discipline.

3. Student Engagement

It was clear from the focus group discussions that student engagement, i.e., how students engage, and how to ensure they engage, was a concern. In Group 2, it was noted that it was becoming "increasingly difficult to get students to engage with books"; the students, "just want to see what's there and what's easy" (Participant 3). Such an approach was often at the expense of the credibility, or suitability, of the sources. It is an issue also identified by Participant 1 in Group 1, who on the one hand praised Library and Learning Services' Academic Librarians for being "extremely helpful" in relation to their training sessions on

NELSON (LLS's electronic resource discovery tool) but who also suggested this was to the detriment of the development of the students' research skills:

The thing is they're [the librarians] *so helpful that none of them* [the students] *ever pick up a book again because they just fall in love with NELSON in that they can just sit there and give you the first hit from the top of the first search results and you get* [handed] *in thirty-five essays based on the same article.* [Participant 1, Group 1]

This was supported by Participant 2's assertion that, "in the last six years", it is "increasingly difficult to get students to engage with reading lists; to engage with libraries", giving an example of a class of seventy third-year students at a previous institution, of which only three "put their hands up", when asked if they had visited the Library in the last year.

Citing a similar concern, both Participants 2 and 4 in Group 3 stated how often, in their sessions, they included additional reading that was not on their reading lists either via the VLE, on PowerPoint, or in hand-outs. The additional reading often functioned as a way of assessing "separate aim[s] and learning outcome[s]" (Participant 2). Participant 4 utilised additional reading in order to:

Support students' skills in assessing content . . . because we need them to practice the skills of skimming and scanning and to be able to take the gist of meaning from their reading . . . so we try to model that a lot for our students, particularly when they are new to academic skills. [Group 3]

In Group 1, Participant 4 also acknowledged the use of additional reading within seminars which stood outside the published reading list, precisely because of issues of student engagement, or lack thereof. In a discipline that requires specific focus on a particular text/s in each seminar, Participant 4 noted how over recent years, fewer students were coming prepared, having read only part of the text, or none at all. This results at times in a "seminar situation where . . . you've got two hours to fill discussing a text that absolutely nobody's read . . . So what do you do then?" Producing a lesson plan that involves extra material means that the students can "read something in the seminar, analyse it" and "discuss it" (Participant 4, Group 1). While Participant 1 agreed that he too had used additional material

for the same reason, he also thought that this method became "self-fulfilling", in that some students came to class thinking that they would only have to read what was being set in the seminar itself (Group 1). So while there was agreement from all groups that reading lists as guides, electronic or otherwise, were conducive to the student experience, this had to be balanced with the reality of diminishing student engagement. Furthermore, to make things too simplistic and too accessible for the student meant integral skills, skills that students should necessarily take away from their degree programme, were being compromised. However the 2016 THE Student Survey rated the Library at 5.9 compared to an average of 6.2 across the sector. Therefore the students would appear to appreciate the support provided by the library (in the form of ebooks and electronic reading lists) (THE, 2016).

4. The Ordering Process

The final and most crucial question put to the focus groups centred on LLS's ordering process. How much did the academics' know about how to order, when to order, who from, what they could spend, and how does the resource get into circulation once a request has been submitted? A workflow poster was handed to each participant by the focus group facilitator which illustrated the process from start to finish (see Appendix 2). The process appeared to be a revelation to the majority of participants and the workflow elicited comments such as, "I have no idea how this works . . . [d]oes each department have its own budget?" (Participant 1, Group 1); "It's a miraculous process of saying 'I want this' . . . you nip down to the shops once a week with a big trolley?" (Participant 2, Group 2). Participant 4 in Group 2 summed up the general (lack of) awareness of the ordering process:

> *You tell us how much money we've got, we put a list together, and we sent it to you and miraculously it's all there. That's all I know. You tell us we've got money, we spend it.*

Participant 3 in Group 3 highlighted the indispensable role of LLS's Academic Librarians:

> *. . . one of the great things about coming to work here is that* [Librarian's name] *appeared and said, 'Right, you've got these two new modules. The budget for this is X, what do you want?'*

Not only was there a lack of knowledge about LLS's ordering workflows, but academic staff communication appeared lacking when it came to ordering resources for specific subject areas. Participants 1 and 4 in Group 1 described an ad-hoc process, especially when it came to Associate Lecturers on hourly pay who may be devising and leading modules but who have no formal introduction to resources, the budget, or even if they can order resources given their temporary working status. Participant 2 responded to Participant 4's comment, "subject leaders might know exactly the whole process, but are they filtering it down?", with an informed, "I don't!" (Participant 2, Group 1).

Given the participants' limited knowledge of the ordering process, it was explained to them both verbally by the facilitator and through the workflow diagram. The participants were then asked if there was anything that they thought could be done to improve the current system. The use of e-mail alerts and online ordering forms were proposed to each group. This produced a noticeable disparity between groups as to what changes they thought could benefit the process. Participants in Group 2 liked the idea of an online ordering form, a "uniform system" where the "lecturer places a request on a particular form which contains most of the detail you are going to need all the way through the process" (Participant 2, Group 2). However, an online form was rejected by Group 3, with Participant 1 suggesting "a quick e-mail". Participants in this group preferred a nudging e-mail from their Academic Librarian in relation to inspection copies, new titles, outstanding budgets to be spent, cancellations and when new titles came into stock. However, both e-mail alerts and online forms were rejected by participants in Group 1 who argued that e-mail traffic was too heavy and that often LLS mail was not getting through, or was overlooked. Participant 2 suggested a planning week, within which the subject leader and academic colleagues could meet directly with the Academic Librarian, outside of the usual Board of Studies meetings. The

librarian would be expected to bring publishers' catalogues, new titles to the session and then the resources could be selected:

> *Because you're on various mailing lists you get various catalogues through and you go, 'Oh that's good' and then forget all about it . . .* [we could] *sit down with the Academic Librarian[s] and make sure we've got stock in the library . . . and we can forget about it then; say it's been handed over to you . . . we can get on responding to the 48 e-mails we get every hour.* [Participant 2, Group 1]

The participants' knowledge gaps highlighted another issue which has been an ongoing concern for LLS. The time when budgets need to be spent and resources ordered is usually the busiest time for academics in the academic year with assessments, heightened marking loads and exam boards. These often clash so that ordering resources becomes the last priority, if not a forgotten one by academic staff. This leads to a barrage of urgent orders in the two weeks prior to the start of the new academic year, and can mean that some teaching resources cannot be obtained before teaching starts (Appendix 3). Most participants were unaware of this ongoing issue. Taking this into consideration, Participant 2 in Group 1 suggested that the proposed planning week could be held in June when the budget needs to be used up and in preparation for the release of the new budget in August. This would ensure that the resources necessary for each course are available and in stock in time for the new academic year.

What was evident from the focus groups relating to LLS's ordering processes is that Christiansen *et al.*'s (2004) assertion that there is an 'asymmetrical disconnection' in communication between faculties and libraries was confirmed. However, given the participants' diverse and differing responses to their understanding of, and suggested improvements to the reading list/ordering system, it is difficult to see how a *one size fits all* approach to address the issue can be implemented successfully.

Recommendations

The research undertaken demonstrates that there are a number of issues with communication between library procedures and academic staff regarding the ordering of new resources. Firstly, to rectify communication shortfalls, library staff should provide *all* academic staff with a clear overview of the ordering process and workflows in order to highlight the issues with budget schedules and the academic year. A webpage should be devised to promote the importance of up-to-date reading lists and Talis Aspire as an effective pedagogical tool that improves the student experience, but also how academic staff can order resources, when they need to order resources, and how long before they can expect their ordered resources to be made available. This transparency will not only aid efficiency and turn-around times, but will also be a source of information for hourly-paid associate lecturing staff, who may, or may not have been informed of how they can support their modules through resource collection.

Secondly, Academic Librarians should review how they order resources; rather than relying on e-mail updates to inform academic staff of new resources or remaining budgets, team meetings could be arranged with catalogues and lists that target key resource areas for that particular subject group. The process needs to be re-assessed to see whether simplifications can be put in place to streamline the system (e.g., mechanisms that can automatically notify tutors when there have been cancellations, or that a new course book has come into stock).

Lastly, a flexible approach to reading lists should be taken. This research has demonstrated that a one size fits all model does not suit individual subject areas. Some subjects will have a limited reading list with core texts, some will have a comprehensive reading list, and some reading lists function as guides to point the student in particular topics or areas of research. Each module reading list has its own nuances, and tutors will continue to use materials omitted from the reading list which may be found elsewhere (e.g., on the VLE, PowerPoint, handouts, etc.), whether to improve students' skillsets or to enhance levels of student engagement. Therefore, when it comes to weeding both physical and digital

stock, library staff should not assume that because the resource is not on the reading list, it is not being utilised.

Conclusions

Communication between academic libraries and academics, as this research has demonstrated, has proven to be an ongoing concern; the 'asymmetrical disconnection' identified by Christiansen *et al*. (2004) has unfortunately been confirmed. It has also uncovered a cultural fear that academics have in relation to the emerging reliance on electronic systems, i.e., that it exacerbates the spoon-feeding of students, effectively *taking the research out of research*. The increasing promotion of electronic over print resources has an interesting effect on the dynamic between academic and library staff. The academic staff's preference or dislike for eBooks influences their interaction with library staff and choice of one format over the other. However, as access to eBooks across the subject areas is still unequal it is difficult to introduce a workflow that can be implemented in all areas. Furthermore, time as a factor in compromising the streamlining of services has been observed. Innovative systems that improve the student experience require further investigation before implementation: a dialogue with academics would be helpful in order to ascertain what role they are able to take in the implementation process to guarantee smooth and effective transitions. More importantly, the research has found that the timetables of Academic Librarians and academics are fundamentally incompatible. By taking these factors into consideration and through further consultation, solutions can be sought so that both communications and processes are improved. These are needed to ensure that academics and library staff work together as a team, and the student experience of both academic provision and professional services is significantly enhanced.

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Appendix 1

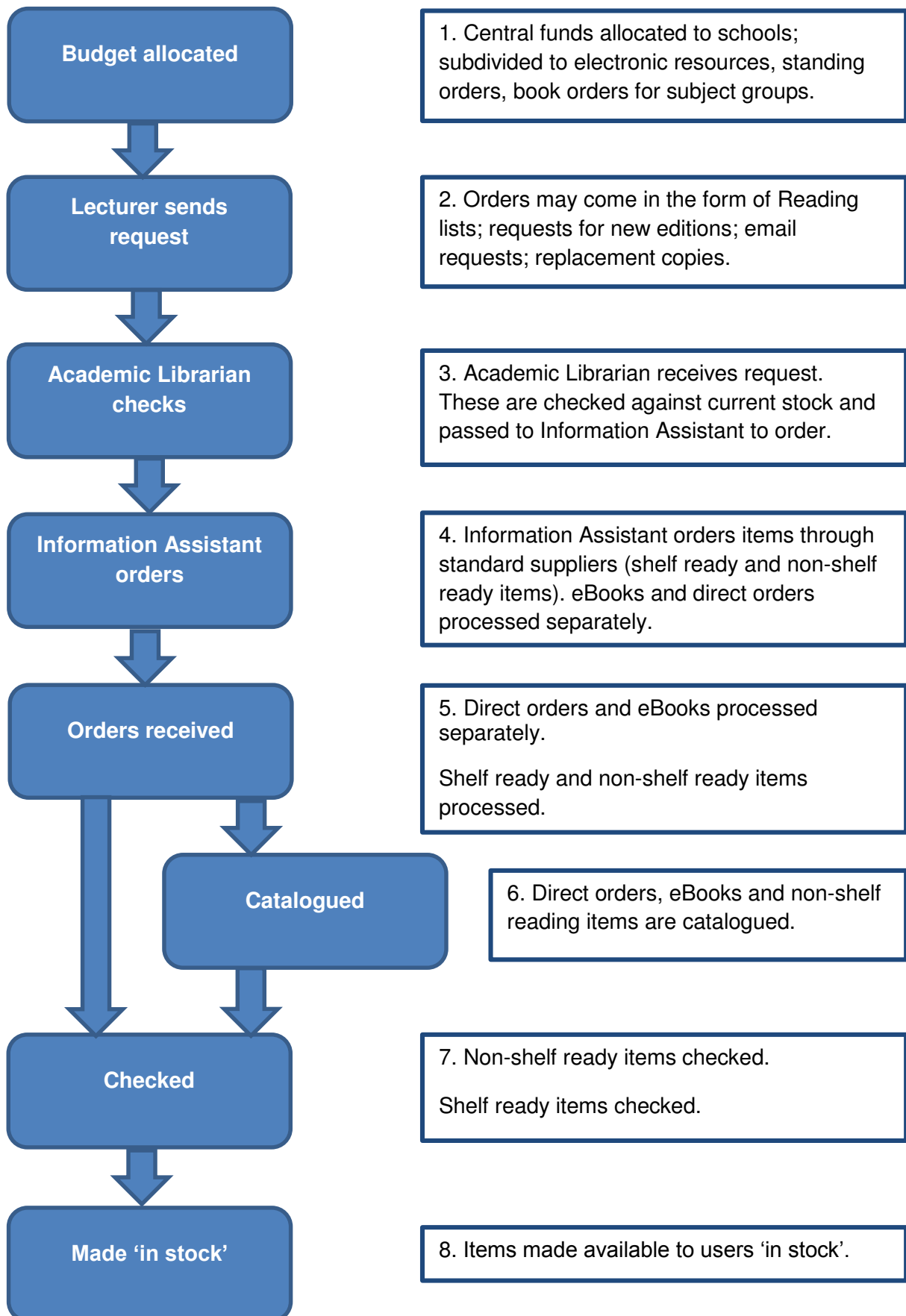Overview of University of Northampton Library statistics (print versus electronic loans).

Academic Year	FTE* students	Total print loans	e-book section requests	Total e-books
2011-12	10,824	544,309	444,564	5,691
2012-13	10,898	635,195	604,874	6,669
2013-14	10,872	192,348	644,972	7,474
2014-15	10,529	117,839	1,216,549	25,148

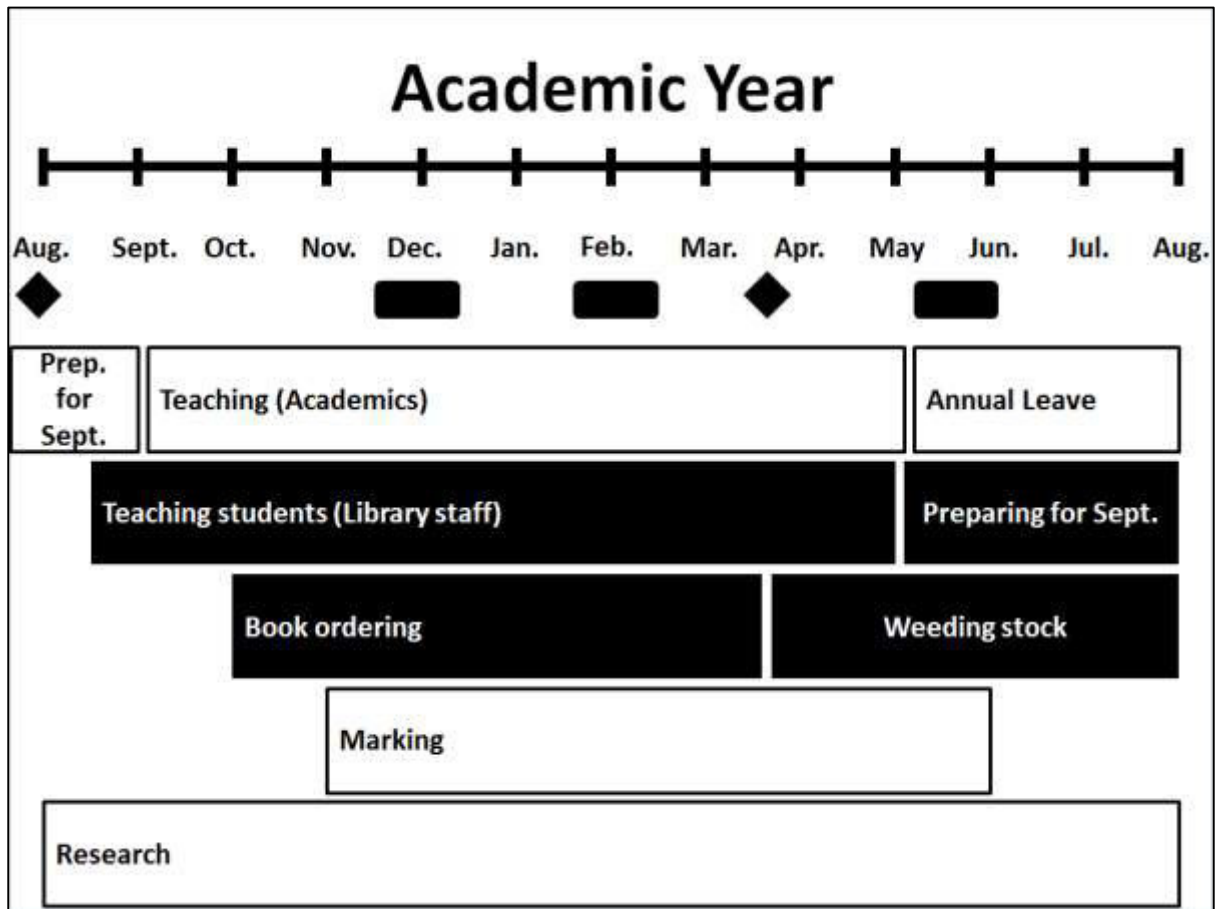Source: SCONUL Annual Library Statistics. London: SCONUL

As indicated in this four year overview of Library usage at the University of Northampton, e-Book section requests have risen steadily as the total number of print loans has reduced. This coincides with a Library policy to prioritise electronic resources wherever possible. The e-first policy help support the growing number of students who study and work, as well as those students who have a placement element to their studies and are therefore less able to come onto campus to borrow print resources. The Library has invested in a number of publisher e-book packages to significantly increase its e-book collection. Based on these statistics, it would follow that e-book usage will continue to rise, as students appreciate the flexibility and ease of access to electronic resources.

*FTE refers to Full Time Equivalent student numbers.

Appendix 2: Book ordering workflow: from request to in stock.

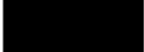| Workflow Step	Description
Budget allocated	1. Central funds allocated to schools; subdivided to electronic resources, standing orders, book orders for subject groups.
Lecturer sends request	2. Orders may come in the form of Reading lists; requests for new editions; email requests; replacement copies.
Academic Librarian checks	3. Academic Librarian receives request. These are checked against current stock and passed to Information Assistant to order.
Information Assistant orders	4. Information Assistant orders items through standard suppliers (shelf ready and non-shelf ready items). eBooks and direct orders processed separately.
Orders received	5. Direct orders and eBooks processed separately. Shelf ready and non-shelf ready items processed.
Catalogued	6. Direct orders, eBooks and non-shelf reading items are catalogued.
Checked	7. Non-shelf ready items checked. Shelf ready items checked.
Made 'in stock'	8. Items made available to users 'in stock'.

Appendix 3: Simplified overview of the Academic Year

Simplified overview of the Academic year with academic staff and Library staff work streams

compared.

Key:

Symbol	Meaning
◆	These represent in August – when the budget is released for purchasing. The second point in May/June is when the budget must be spent by in order to guarantee that purchases are complete by the end of the financial year.
▬	These represent Boards of Studies or Programme meetings with the course team.
▭	These sections represent a general indication of the Academic staff load over the course of an Academic Year.
▬	These rectangles are indicative of the library staff workload over the course of the Academic Year.