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STAFF MANAGEMENT IN A DISTRIBUTED LIBRARY SYSTEM

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Introduction

The library system at Imperial College has evolved as a result of continuing change and growth, and is again facing new plans for change and growth. In this paper I wish to outline the main areas of staff management in the existing library system and the factors which have made our policies what they are today and how they will impact on our planning for tomorrow.

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine was established in 1907 by Royal Charter "to give the highest specialised instruction, and to provide the fullest equipment for the most advanced training and research in various branches of science, especially in its application to industry". It is a major school of the University of London, the largest UK university, which is organised on a federal pattern with each individual College or School having a very large measure of autonomy.

This pattern of federal, semi-autonomous colleges is mirrored within Imperial College itself which consists of 4 constituent colleges - the Royal College of Science, (originally the Royal College of Chemistry, founded in 1845); the Royal School of Mines (formerly the Government School of Mines and of Science applied to the Arts, founded in 1851); the City and Guilds College (founded in 1884 by the City and Guilds of London Institute); and, since 1988, St. Mary's Hospital Medical School (founded in 1854 and a School of Medicine of the University of London since 1900). The constituent colleges are closely linked within the College framework and divide the work of the College between them. The main subject areas (medicine, pure

science, minerals, materials and earth sciences and engineering), are spread between 15 academic departments. In 1994/95 there were 7,281 FTE students, of whom 68.2% are undergraduate, 12.7% taught postgraduate, 19.1% research postgraduate (or 31.8% total postgraduate). Overall, 23% are from overseas, 27.4% are female.

The role of duality

It is a reflection of this complex structure that the College library system has evolved into its current distributed form. The College is unique in the high level of co-ordination between the libraries on the campus and the two key elements of the dual system are:

- a. The Central Library - situated on the main square of the campus, it contains monographs and serials on all subjects which form part of the College curriculum, and specialises in undergraduate and interdisciplinary materials. This includes multiple copies of textbooks, recommended books on short term loan, general reference works, bibliographies and abstracts. There are facilities for photocopying, microreading, videos, online and CD-ROM literature searching and self-service PCs for networked information services. There is also a specialist collection consisting of humanities support material and the College collection of fiction, history, art, literature, travel and other general interest material including newspapers, magazines and a music library.
- b. The Departmental Libraries - The fifteen Departmental Libraries are situated mainly within the academic departments. Two of these Libraries are off-campus (one within the Medical School and one outside London at the College field station). In terms of size these departments are equivalent to faculties in some other technical institutions. The Departmental Libraries serve as the College's main specialist collections, and provide a local service based on specialist and research material and specialist subject area expertise. They also provide essential textbooks and course material. In addition a further three Departmental Libraries (Biology and Biochemistry, Computing, Management) are housed within the

Central Library and as such form quasi-Departmental Libraries as part of their functions are centralized (e.g. circulation and cataloguing). In terms of collection policy they take both undergraduate, interdisciplinary material and specialist, research material.

This system has evolved as a result of the College administrative structure which accords the departments a great deal of autonomy. This is reflected in the number and importance of the Departmental Libraries. Changes were prompted by the need to use College finances more effectively as most universities suffered decreases in funding in the 1980's, so a co-operative system has been developed to build library collections throughout the Central and Departmental Libraries.

During the late 1980's the College looked overall at its library service and a policy document (known locally as the "Brown Report") was formulated in 1987, which enshrined the principle of duality. This report was endorsed by the College Board of Studies (our equivalent of Academic Council) in October 1987. This report reinforced the Departmental Library component of the College Library system within a highly coordinated structure. Its key aims were to ensure that all books, periodicals and library services regularly required by members of the College are available on site and accessible at the point of greatest need:

- to continue a duality of libraries which would evolve into a more integrated system, requiring high levels of co-operation between Central and Departmental Libraries;
- to have the Director of Library Services co-ordinate all the College libraries.

Collecting profiles have been agreed and some Central Library book selection in specialist subject areas is done by, and with, Departmental Librarians.

It is this dual responsibility of Departmental Libraries based on distribution of stock, services and staffing which is seen as one of the major strengths of the College libraries. The specialist collections and the expertise they require are maintained because of the existence of the Central Library facilities for general reference,

interdisciplinary material and for the co-ordination of the total library operation. Moreover the high level of co-operation between Central and Departmental Libraries has led to:

- the evolution of an increasingly integrated system based on co-ordination of shared resources;
- uniformity of policy;
- economy of scale.

The effects of this dual and distributed library system has been most evident in terms of staffing structures and resources.

Staffing structures

In the Central Library the staff structure was introduced following a thorough review in 1988. It is organized on largely functional lines with 3 divisions - Bibliographic Services, Collection Development and Reader Services, all headed by a Sub-librarian. The main areas within each Division are as follows:

Bibliographic Services

- acquisitions, including binding and processing;
- cataloguing;
- serials;
- systems and automation.

Collection Development

- co-ordinated selection, classification, and maintenance of material for specialist subject collections in liaison with Departmental Librarians;
- textbook collection;
- archives.

Reader Services

- circulation and reception;
- general reference and information services;
- electronic and network information services;
- inter library loans and document delivery services.

In this way there is a clear and well-defined staff structure - sub librarians, collection librarians, service librarians, (e.g. electronic, reference, user education), heads of sections, senior and junior library assistants. To each member of staff is allocated a space in the hierarchy and this defines their role to a great extent.

The staffing structure of the Departmental Libraries (both gradings and levels of staffing) was reviewed in 1990 to examine:

- adequate staffing levels to ensure proper functioning and provision of services;
- co-ordination of functions and services with Central Library;
- ratio of senior / junior staff in respect of job content and responsibilities;
- release of staff for participation in professional activities and training, both within the College and externally.

In the Departmental Libraries there are, on average, 2 - 3 staff, with a Departmental Librarian, senior and/or junior library assistant. Their roles are less defined by function as their duties are more widespread. This is further complicated by the line management upwards in that the Departmental Librarian is responsible to both the Director of Library Services and to the academic Head of Department: to the former for general and co-ordinated library services, to the latter for special local services.

It is here that some problems can arise in working towards a truly integrated service as departmental views and interests can sometimes run on different lines (both between individual departments and between departments and the Central Library) at a time when the total library operation is becoming increasingly co-ordinated in terms of administration and management.

We have found, overall, that the more efficient, economical and flexible use of all library staff and resources has led inevitably to closer collaboration, integration and exchange of staff between the Central and Departmental libraries. This has, in turn, enhanced the career prospects of individual staff within a more rational overall structure.

Recruitment and selection

Library staffing as a College resource has been centrally funded for all staff groups since 1990. Recruitment and selection, staff training and development are also financed and administered centrally.

Central funding of staff has led to a co-ordinated policy on fair and open recruitment of library staff -all jobs are reviewed before an application to replace is submitted to the College. In this way current operations are reviewed along with job content and procedures. For staff in Departmental Libraries the Head of Department is usually consulted along with the Departmental Librarian prior to advertisement, and the Departmental Librarian is normally involved in both the selection panel for shortlisting interviewees and the actual interview process. In all cases the administration is handled centrally to facilitate co-operation and to maintain a high standard of selection.

Annual review of grading and salary

Our integrated staff management, and increasingly rational overall structure, has led to a greater comparability of grades and duties between Central and Departmental library staff. This has in turn been reflected in the unified annual staff review exercise. This takes place in the spring term and every individual is positively reviewed by an independent panel in terms of the salary and grading of their job.

This is a hierarchical exercise and in no way linked to staff appraisal or development. In the Central Library the 3 Sub-Librarians and Deputy Librarian are involved in reporting to the Panel on all staff under them, irrespective of grade. In parallel, the Head of Department is asked to report on all staff in the Departmental Library. Subsequently, the Head of Department or his/her nominee is invited to attend the Panel when the relevant staff are considered. Regrading is normally supported only where substantial changes in responsibilities can be quantified. There is a further mechanism to reward outstanding performance and /or exceptional achievement by way of non-automatic increments or bonus payments.

Appraisal

A further area of impact of duality is that of staff appraisal. Here the complications are twofold. Firstly that, as yet, a significant proportion of staff are not appraised as no scheme has been agreed for library assistants (on national clerical-related salary scales); secondly, that because of the split line management for Departmental Librarians the appraisal scheme which has been devised is one of peer appraisal, not a hierarchical one, and is combined with comments, as appropriate by the academic Head of Department.

The peer appraisal scheme, now in its third biennial round is aimed at improving and enhancing job performance by setting and reviewing work and personal objectives, identifying training needs and assisting with career development. It identifies any problem areas in the libraries' organization and operation and also promotes understanding of institutional and individual needs. It is completely separate from the annual staff promotion review and carries no immediate assessment for promotability. The result of the exercise is an action plan which is agreed by appraiser and appraisee and which is approved by the Director of Library Services. For Departmental library staff the action plan is approved by the Director of Library Services, in consultation with the Head of Department. A full description of the appraisal scheme is available elsewhere¹.

Staff training and development

On the wider question of staff training and development, this is seen as an integral part of staff management in the College library system and separately resourced. It is co-ordinated by a library Staff Training and Development Officer. As in many libraries it takes various forms:

- . "on the job" training (including varied work experience for library assistants via split posts);
- . induction training for new staff, including health and safety training;
- . formal internal and external courses, seminars and visits;
- . participation in internal bodies, discussion groups, working parties, panels and committees which formulate Library policies and procedures;
- . participation in the work of external professional activities and organizations;
- . supported day release for junior staff studying for a first professional qualification;
- . supervision of staff working towards professional associateship of the Library Association.

Training for *all* College library staff is centrally funded and organized. The system works quite well with staff encouraged to take a positive interest in their own development. There is also a positive input for academic-related staff in that the framing of an action plan during appraisal includes identifying training needs and proposing training actions. This is then fed into the library training programme, and also into the College training and development plans. For library assistants unified staff management has led to an increase in mobility of staff between Central and Departmental libraries, which in turn has led to opportunities for professional development and work experience.

In terms of the library's relationship with the Science Museum Library (SML), it is a matter of policy that there should be a common training scheme. In practice this has taken the form of new SML staff joining the College Library Induction Programme;

joint staff training in electronic and networking areas; SML staff registering on courses organized by Imperial College for time management and other personal effectiveness areas. However we are a long way yet from a common training scheme in terms of full co-ordination and funding.

Staff management and the Science Museum Library (SML)

A further area of distributed library management arises from the ongoing collaboration with the Science Museum Library which shares the building with the College's Central Library. The SML is a national library specialising in the history of science and technology and in the public understanding of science. It also has a collection of pictorial archival material relating to the function of the nearby Science Museum. Since 1992 the two libraries have worked together to harmonize stock and services in order to form one of the largest science and technology libraries in the country. There is a coherent and wide-ranging stock of monographs and serials and a unified range of reader services (circulation, reference and enquiries, IT and networking facilities).

Recently, however, the most important changes have come about in the area of staff management. The two institutions retain separate staff structures and funding, but with increased commonality and community of enterprise. Since 1992 we have seen the growth of areas with joint staffing under agreed line management. At present the College has day-to-day management of the following areas which are staffed jointly by IC and SML.

- . General reference and information services;
- . Inter library loans and document delivery;
- . Acquisitions (with processing under review);
- . Cataloguing;
- . Systems;
- . Serials.

Joint circulation and reception services are staffed by IC staff alone. In many ways the SML operates on similar lines to the specialist subject collections or quasi-Departmental Libraries housed within the Central Library. These too have certain centralized functions (e.g. circulation, ILL) which is not the case in physically remote Departmental Libraries.

The joint staffing arrangements have implications for recruitment and selection of staff in that each institution, being separately funded, has its own procedures - e.g. the Museum policy is to advertise its posts internally first, the College's to advertise internally and externally simultaneously. The grading structures and terms and conditions of services are also different. For some staff in joint teams this can have implications for services where an SML staff member is on flexitime yet an office or enquiry point needs to be covered. Conversely College employees are officially on leave for College closure days while SML staff are expected to work even if the library is closed to users at Christmas or open for shorter hours at Easter.

The joint teams have meant that College Sub-Librarians have now extended their staff management roles. They supervise SML staff on a day-to-day basis where those staff are assigned to joint functional sections. Moreover they are officially involved in the SML annual appraisal exercise (which includes staff on *all* grades). Unlike the College appraisal scheme this is hierarchical. Moreover, it is linked to pay in that it reviews staff grading and salary at the same time. (It is possible that the University sector will also go down the road of performance-related pay in the future.)

Difficulties with staff cover for holidays, sick leave, maternity leave and training are complicated by the separate reporting lines and we are continuously working towards the most efficient possible use of the two staff groups.

In terms of the staff structures the SML reviewed their structure in 1994 and it centres on the collection policies for its 2 main specialist collections - history of science and public understanding of science and their support services. As at Imperial College, the Museum Archives are also part of the Library structure. As in the College Central

Library the SML staff structure is largely hierarchical and is in the overall charge of an Assistant Director of the Museum.

Overall this dual library within a library is working reasonably well but, in my view, would benefit from more co-ordinated resources and staffing. A major objective was to cut out duplication of stock and to rationalize services and this has been largely achieved. However, duplication of effort where staff management is concerned is still having major implications for planning and resourcing.

Towards the future

The last area I wish to draw to your attention is that of future developments at Imperial College and their implications for staff management. There are 2 main features, the first is externally driven and brought about by electronic information developments. As with all libraries today Imperial College has been affected by developments in this field and will I hope, continue to play its part in the spread of such media. At the present time we are involved in drawing up a College-wide strategy which will make best use of staff and resources. This process is complex, given the nature of College itself, and made more complex for our library service given the diversity of funds and expertise available in the fifteen or so Departments. It may be that again by increased co-ordination we will change the existing patchwork system to one of integration and co-operation for the benefit of our users. That at least is our aim.

The second feature is internally driven - the process by which the College is introducing a new School of Medicine. The College is to merge with four more external bodies:

- . Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School;
- . Royal Postgraduate Medical School;
- . National Heart and Lung Institute;
- . Institute of Cancer Research.

Together we will form a new integrated academic medical institution with affiliated hospitals in north-west London. This will shift the emphasis of the College more to the medical side and to medical-related or applied medical teaching and research. It will also result in a physically extended Central Library with a new bio-medical sciences library on our 4th floor and a new 5th floor for the relocated Management Collection and staff offices. The challenge will be to secure resources (financial and physical) and staff to make it a success. Again we will be faced with a revision of existing libraries, their stock and their staff with a view to rationalizing, streamlining and co-ordinating policies, material and management in order to give the best service to all our staff and students going into the 21st century.

Conclusion

This brings me back to why the College was founded and why the dual library system exists. This process of continuous evolution and change has accelerated in the past eight years. We expect this process to continue with the new developments in medical education so that our distributed library system will grow, not shrink, in the near future. I can only hope the staff management challenges it brings will be met with as much enthusiasm as they will no doubt merit.

References

1. BARKER, L., ENRIGHT, S. Academic related library staff appraisal at Imperial College Libraries: a peer review scheme. *BJAL* 8(2) 1993 pp 113 - 128.