Professional Development and Chartering

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Continuing professional development is at last being recognised as a necessity not a luxury. The scale and pace of change, especially the rapid advances in information technology, make constant up-dating essential. People used to talk about the 'shelf-life' of a qualification being only five years, but a qualification today is worth nothing if it is not followed through with continuous learning and practice. New information professionals face particular challenges, as the range of knowledge, skills and insights required or desired continues to expand, covering not only professional and technical competencies, but also management and business understanding, as well as personal qualities and abilities.

Professional education lays the foundation for subsequent training and development, and practical experience provides the real-life context for the new professional to bring together theory and application. The new professional is thus faced with the challenge of trying simultaneously to update and consolidate what he or she already knows, and to acquire new knowledge and skills related to his or her job and place of work, as well as developing a professional identity and career path. Working towards chartered membership of the Library Association (LA) can be both motivational and burdensome at this stage, depending on whether employers and supervisors help or hinder the process.

Designated posts

At Reading University Library we have introduced a new approach to supporting newly-qualified professionals working towards chartership, which builds on other training and development initiatives, but also makes special provision. Over the years many members of Library staff had achieved chartered status, with the necessary supervision and training being provided on an *ad hoc* basis. However, more recently, the pressures under which candidates typically work on a day-to-day basis and the range of skills required just to fulfil their regular duties, had made it more difficult for them to find the time to devote to their wider professional development and, in particular, to complete their professional development report (PDR).

The departures of several long-serving members of staff gave us the opportunity to create three trainee posts specifically designed for people who had recently completed a postgraduate library or information qualification. These posts are three-year fixed term appointments at a para-professional level (paid on senior clerical grades) intended to provide practical experience in a wide range of professional work, including supervisory and budgetary responsibilities, as well as enabling an overview of service developments through a structured training programme. Most members of the LA gain chartered status two or three years after graduating, and we feel that our contracts offer a reasonable period for candidates to complete their PDRs and move on to a suitable post (at Reading or elsewhere) when they are fully qualified.

Our approach has several distinctive features.

1. The posts are *hybrid roles* within our matrix structure, combining work as a Liaison Librarian in one of our Faculty Teams, with a specialist responsibility in one of our Process Teams (for example, Inter-Library Loans or the Short Loan Collection).
2. In addition to their day-to-day work, the trainees (in common with other Library staff) are also expected to manage or contribute to *special projects* - we currently have around forty development projects under way, many arising from our user survey in spring 1997.
3. The trainees have designated *Chartership supervisors* - personal mentors who are not their line managers, which ensures regular exposure to different perspectives and encourages a more holistic view of the Library.
4. As Chartership candidates, they are allocated their own individual *development budgets* (currently £1,500 over three years) which they can spend on courses, conferences, publications, visits and other approved expenses.
5. We promote continuing professional development through a monthly cycle of one-to-one and group *discussion sessions*, involving the trainees, their supervisors and other senior Library staff.
6. As Chartership candidates, they are entitled to attend events organised by the local Registration Liaison Officer and are also offered three days of *study leave* (which can be taken as a block or in single days) for the purpose of writing-up their PDRs.

Library-wide programmes

Training and development takes place in a variety of ways, formal and informal, on and off the job. Over the last three years, Reading University Library has given high priority to staff training, with special emphasis on management development, team-working and IT skills - reflecting the organisational changes and system developments that have occupied us during this period. We have formally stated that *Developing staff knowledge and skills* is one of our 'strategic thrusts', and we aim to allocate a sum equivalent to two percent of payroll costs to training and development annually. This budget funds attendance at external events (such as courses run by Aslib, BLIP, the LA and the Universities and Colleges Staff Development Agency) and also the expense of using external consultants to deliver tailored training on site. There are several strands to our current provision.

We have recently introduced a weekly **Training Hour**, which offers staff a choice of talks, demonstrations and workshops, or alternatively self-paced training, each week during termtime. Sessions run concurrently, at our two main sites, and are organised in eight modules:

*   Information Technology
*   Customer Care
*   Faculty Team Topics
*   Our Library
*   The University in Context
*   Beyond Reading University Library
*   Management
*   Issues in Librarianship.

Presenters are mainly Library and University staff, but we also have visiting speakers.

We also have an ongoing **Management Development Programme**, which includes financing attendance at one-day and longer courses in London and around the country, as well as externally facilitated on-site seminars or workshops to meet identified needs. Topics covered by the latter include effective meetings, project management, recruitment interviewing and problem-solving techniques, with events typically repeated or cascaded on a Library-wide basis. (Management development at RUL extends to all staff, including library assistants - not just people on professional/management grades.) In addition, at least once a year, we organise **Guest Lectures** on service development issues, such as the 'virtual library' and subject-based 'information gateways'.

Chartership programme

As well as taking advantage of the above programmes, the trainees participate in a structured programme of monthly discussion sessions intended to develop their understanding and awareness of the wider environment and to place local services in context. We cover both professional/technical and managerial aspects of information work, and we aim to encourage a cross-sectoral and international view of service and business issues, and to relate general management concepts and techniques to library and information services. This modular programme covers the following topics:

The library in context
1. The service environment
2. Strategic management

Meeting information needs
3. Information sources
4. Information services
5. Information skills
6. Information systems

Managing the organisation
7. People management
8. Financial management
9. Space management
10. Marketing the services

The information professional
11. Personal development
12. Professional activities

For each session, one of the two supervisors prepares a discussion paper, which aims to provide an overview of recent developments and current trends in the field, drawing on published literature and examples, and also including practical exercises/discussion points and suggestions for further reading. For specialist topics, we invite other senior Library staff along to our meeting (for example, the Head of Systems for module 6).

Our aim is to build on what people have already learned from their professional education and practical experience, to help them make sense of the contemporary information world and to devise effective strategies for developing their skills and services to customers. We also try to

foster a reflective and critical approach to service provision, and we encourage professional networking and visits to other organisations to support this. These group sessions are then complemented by monthly one-to-one meetings between individuals and their supervisors, which enable people to pursue topics of particular interest as well as raising other issues related to their professional development - including discussion of the contents and structure of their PDRs.

Future plans

Although the supervisors – myself and Antony Brewerton (Faculty Team Manager, Education and Community Studies) – have found the preparation of the background material quite burdensome at times, it has helped us to keep up-to-date and to clarify our thinking, and the resulting discussion has also provided new perspectives and insights. The amount of material generated has varied from module to module, ranging from ten to twenty pages of specially prepared text, often supplemented with copies of published articles and samples of library documentation. We think that this material will be of interest and value to colleagues in other organisations - both newly-qualified professionals and their supervisors - and so we are planning to rework it for publication in book form, with a view to publishing it commercially (via Library Association Publishing) during 1999.

Looking farther ahead, we have already appointed one additional trainee this year, and by the next session we plan to have five such posts - one in each Faculty Team - on a continuing cycle of three-year contracts. We also plan to expand and refine all our development programmes on the basis of feedback received and needs identified, with an emphasis on facilitating self-paced training and practice, as staff have flagged this as a priority need. Finally, we are interested in exploring the scope for moving beyond 'one-off' visits to other libraries towards staff exchanges or even short placements - there is perhaps a potential role here for a professional organisation (such as PTEG) to act as a co-ordinator or broker, particularly to facilitate cross-sectoral contacts and communication.

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