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**Library subject guides: a case study of evidence informed
library development.**

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Abstract:	<p>This paper describes the process whereby a University Library investigated the value of its subject guides to its users. A literature review and surveys of library staff, library users and other libraries were carried out. Existing library subject guides and those of other higher education libraries were evaluated. The project team reported regularly to the wider library team throughout the year long investigation and made recommendations. The project served to develop the professional skills of the project team, to expand the knowledge of the wider library team and encouraged new ways of thinking about guide provision to users.</p>

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Library subject guides: a case study of evidence informed library development.

This paper discusses a project examining library subject guides, which took place within the Library of Anglia Ruskin University during 2009-2010.

Although not described as such it could be called an exercise in evidence based – or at least informed – librarianship and an example of how this can be carried out as part of everyday practice. The project was prompted by the perceived need to review the provision and effectiveness of library guides in order to make decisions about whether such guides are actually necessary and, if they are, to make recommendations for improvements in terms of content and means of delivery. Although the activities described may also be used as methods of research we have used them as means of gathering information, which can inform our decisions and have been aware of their inadequacies and limitations.

The project was carried out by a small team of members of the Academic Services Division of the University Library. The Division’s main responsibilities involve working in liaison with Faculties to provide resources for teaching, learning and research. Anglia Ruskin University received University status in 1992. It now has four main sites and over 25,000 students, many of whom are part-time or studying at a distance from the University. Subject guides are seen as one of the ways that the library can support its range of users. The initial impetus was therefore to look at subject based guides.

Anglia Ruskin's idea of a library subject guide had, until recently, usually taken the form of a printed leaflet, which might be in an A4 or A5 format. These have been generated over a number of years and were originally produced and regularly updated and made available within the library. By the time that the project described here took place they had been converted into .pdf files. There are over 60 of them (ten of which are law related) and they were available for downloading from the Library's web pages. The guides were written according to a broad template under a series of headings relating to books and e-books, journals, databases and gateways, research sources, web resources, how to find information, using other libraries and sources of further help. Students might also access other sources of help and subject links within the Library's web pages but our focus within the project has been on the materials actually labelled as 'Library Guides'.

The preliminary project

A preliminary exercise was carried out in spring / summer 2009 involving:

- An informal audit of our library guides and their organisation;
- A brief examination of a small selection of library guides from other universities;
- A survey of library staff to obtain information about staff use and opinions of library guides

The informal audit identified links to 112 library guides from a single 'Library Information & Study Guides' webpage, divided between 7 themes of varying

breadth (for example, one section for subject-based guides and one section for RefWorks). Some sections included a single guide, some had nearly 60 and the sections were displayed using drop-down menus, direct lists or a mixture of both. Most guides were in PDF format, and some were HTML webpages. An early emphasis for this preliminary project was on the perceived importance of insuring consistency of style and feel across guides – as will be seen, this would later be challenged by our further research.

Nearly all Academic Service Division staff responded to our staff survey and two responses were also received from Customer Services Division colleagues, making 19 in total. Key points emerging from the survey included:

- A clear majority of respondents had not had any customer feedback about guides; what feedback there had been appeared to be very mixed;
- Suggestions for obtaining more feedback included adding a focus group question about library guides, creating a customer survey, possibly using SurveyMonkey, examining web usage statistics;
- A majority of colleagues felt that guides should be available as both PDF and HTML webpages, other formats suggested included videos, or those which develop interactivity;
- Colleagues identified a very wide number of guides for which they were responsible – from none, to 16 to ‘too many for me to list’!
- The most popular way of using guides was ‘to refer students to the electronic version in the course of enquiry work’, followed closely by

‘as a hand-out after teaching sessions’ and ‘for personal reference – to find out more about other subject areas’;

- There were significant differences in how paper copies of the guides were used across different sites;
- A majority felt that subject guides should be ordered in both a single alphabetical list and in subject clusters;
- There were mixed responses to the templates used by our library for subject guides – with a number emphasising the importance of flexibility and room for subject-specific approaches;
- There were also mixed responses about the usefulness of the library’s own database guides, although more respondents felt that the library’s database guides complemented those within individual databases than did not;
- A majority of respondents used database guides ‘to refer students to the electronic version in the course of enquiry work’ – the same number used them ‘for personal reference – to find out more about other subject areas’;
- Other general comments included:
 - Suggestions about layout of library guides page – for example, the problems with drop down menus.
 - Asking research students / staff / distance learning students what they want.
 - Importance of inclusivity / accessibility of guides and of consistency in terminology.
 - Investigate best practice elsewhere.

As a result of this survey and the other preliminary work, the Library Guides section of the library website was redesigned to improve the way guides are organised, including an option for clustering Subject Guides by Faculty. Feedback mechanisms were also added to these pages.

This preliminary project clearly identified the need for a bigger project to conduct a more systematic investigation into the issues related to library guides. This was a key recommendation from the initial project and this more detailed project was carried out during the 2009-2010 academic year.

The full project

The project team began by identifying what its main tasks should be. They decided that they would:

- carry out a systematic review of the professional literature on library guides;
- use the literature to identify criteria for evaluating guides;
- review existing university library subject guides, identifying successful and less successful elements;
- collate existing elements of feedback and usage statistics relating to library guides and seek further feedback from customers;
- within the time and resource limitations, investigate library guides provided by other libraries, with an emphasis on higher education institutions, including some international comparisons, if appropriate.

Aware that the work had to be completed by the summer of 2010 the team began work in October 2009 by drawing up a timescale for the completion of these activities. The whole project was completed by June 2010. Meetings of the group were held roughly monthly, in person or via video conferencing, recorded and discussed by means of a blog set up for the purpose and documents worked on jointly through Google Docs. In that time the team produced two progress reports and a final report that came to conclusions about the status of our existing guides and how they might be developed in the future. The various reports were discussed by the whole of the Academic Services Division staff meetings and informed by their ideas and suggestions. This process served to keep colleagues informed of what we were finding out and hopefully would encourage their 'buy in' to any activity that might result from the work. A number of the methods used in the full project had been suggested by responses to the library staff survey – these developments in particular were positive points to share with the whole Academic Services Division team. The final report was presented to and accepted by the Library Management Team meeting.

Literature review

The team began by carrying out a literature review of current work available on library guides. The aim was to be comprehensive rather than exhaustive. Searches were carried out on Library and Information Science Abstracts

(LISA), Library Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA), Emerald and the EBSCO Professional Development Collection. In carrying out a literature search it soon became clear that librarians, guide producers and authors often applied a range of terminology to their products and it was not always possible to be clear what type of guide was being referred to. The identified articles were gathered together within two freely available services – Connotea and CiteULike. Given the limited amount of time available members of the team chose about four different items each on the basis of which seemed to be most relevant to our project and read and summarised them for consumption by other members of the team.

Overview and challenges

Library guides provide a “map” of library resources (Kapoun, 1995 citing Stevens et al 1973). Jackson and Pellack (2004) found that guides were mainly unique across institutions, but that currency and relevance were difficult to maintain; a balance between producing guides to promote local resources and creating them just because it is expected was also difficult to achieve. Some authors also allude to the ad hoc nature of guide creation - Wales (2005) refers to the ‘cottage industry’ of library guides while Hemmig (2005) attributes a lack of early evaluation to the ‘stubbornly informal, homegrown nature’ of guides. Currency and relevance are often difficult to maintain. The availability of global personalised services offered by the web and the widespread use of internet search engines raise questions about the

value of local library guides, as well as raising customer expectations of personalised, relevant content. Advertising and promoting guides effectively is important in their use, and guides themselves can also serve as a means of personalising and promoting library services through, for example, a subject librarian photograph or an embedded chat facility. For Kapoun (1995) guides are not a substitute for human contact at an enquiry point, but they do provide a way of offering assistance to users, such as distance students, who do not physically visit the library.

Hemmig (2005) points out that early American library guides, known as pathfinders, were highly specialised in their topic focus (e.g. 'waste water treatment - sedimentation') but not necessarily focused on local resources. Whether a guide on a particular subject is necessary is a matter for discussion but it is important to select topics consistently. Guides aimed at a broader subject level may appear less obviously useful to students - they may be 'too broad to be very helpful' (Dahl, 2001). Course-specific guides may be more useful than those about a subject (Courtois et al, 2003). Anglia Ruskin's guides were usually aimed at a range of courses within a broad subject area. Producing quick and easy course guides may be a more valuable exercise than revising subject-level guides according to Strutin (2008). However, Brazzeal (2006) suggests that course-level guides might be seen as encroaching on academic territory and may require more effort to maintain. Galvin (2005) cites research that showed that students were more likely to use scholarly resources if they had an assignment-specific guide. To be really effective, this requires collaboration between academic staff and librarians in

guide creation. Within the Anglia Ruskin context academics might produce guides to course resources within their Module Guides, whereas the focus of the Library Guide would be on what sorts of resources were available and how to find them rather than lists of sites.

Formats

As indicated above, one of the issues which prompted our investigation of subject guides was an awareness that our own guides were essentially based on a print format. The ‘online’ versions were simply PDFs of original printed guides.

Kapoun (1995), while indicating the potential waste involved in creating printed guides, suggests ‘Universal pathfinder format guidelines’ for printed guides as an appendix to his article. These include:

- a brief description of the resources for the subject,
- tools for deciding on subject headings,
- how to find books,
- a brief list of reference titles and indexes and abstracts for locating journal articles,
- a brief list of key journals,
- special formats
- a map of the library,
- details for obtaining help.

Dahl (2001) suggests that ascertaining customer preferences for paper or electronic guides would help librarians to tailor their guides appropriately.

Electronic guides allow the library to reach larger and more diverse student groups. However, differences in the availability of equipment or individual levels of knowledge may create problems for particular user groups. Web pages themselves do not allow for easy visualisation of information in the way that print guides can (Cooper, 1997). Galvin (2005) cites research which indicates that some students may be more willing to seek help from a guide than at an enquiry point, allowing them to work at their own pace. However, he also cites another study which suggests that online guides can sometimes be confusing and print may be a preferable format.

Content management systems, such as LibGuides, are specialised examples of databases that can be used to produce subject guides. These can be expensive and time-consuming to set up. However they can provide a means of delivering customised content to the user and facilitate the reuse of a single content element in different guides (Tchangalova and Fiegley, 2008; Vilen, 2007). Reeb and Gibbons (2004) report on a project to offer guides in a new context through a web-based database driven system which allows quick creation of guides tailored to individual courses. The authors note that developing the system took a committee of six librarians eight months!

Various web 2.0 technologies have been used to produce library guides. However, Morris and Del Bosque were prompted in their research partly by the apparent ‘shortage of writing about the incorporation of Web 2.0 into subject guides’ (2010: 184). Wikis are easily updatable and searchable, facilitate collaboration between colleagues and aim to capture the knowledge of users (Tchangalova and Feigley, 2008; Farkas, 2007). Boeninger, however, noted in 2005 that none of the 28,400 visitors to his *Biz Wiki* felt moved to add, edit or correct material on his site (quoted by Morris & Del Bosque, 2010). Services like *delicious* are easy to use and can feed dynamic content directly into static webpages (Tchangalova and Feigley, 2008). Strutin (2008) discusses a project to investigate the potential of screencasting, podcasts and mobile devices in relation to library guides. Wales (2005) also mentions examples of guides with audio-visual and interactive elements (e.g. those from Northumbria University Library) and the software used to create them (such as Camtasia and Captivate). He also emphasises the importance of inclusivity and Special Educational Needs Discrimination Act compliance.

Supporting information literacy

Library guides can be used as an aid in library instruction. Galvin (2005) suggests that well-focused and well-organised guides can extend the educational role of the library while Villeno (2007) has shown that demonstrating a guide in a class improved customers' satisfaction ratings for it. Brazzeal (2006) goes further by suggesting that research guides should be structured around library instruction sessions. They can include a welcoming statement, with contact details of a specific librarian, a session overview –

essentially a scope note and table of contents, material relevant to core information literacy standards (guidance on developing a search strategy, for example), and provide information to assist students in searching beyond local resources.

Librarians as users

Both Jackson and Pellack (2004) and Reeb and Gibbons (2004) emphasise the usefulness of guides for library staff. The former indicates the usefulness of guides as a staff development tool, for reference enquiries and as training tools for new staff, and the second suggests that librarians felt more informed about the curriculum through the process of creating guides. Tchangalova and Feigley's (2008) survey of librarians responsible for creating guides showed that they used guides to support reference services and to fill gaps in their subject knowledge. This supports the results of our library staff survey indicating that colleagues find guides helpful for developing their knowledge of other subject areas and databases.

Usage and customer feedback

The literature highlights a significant and acknowledged lack of research into customer use of guides. The research which has been done has often involved very small scale group feedback (Staley, 2007).

Reeb and Gibbons (2004) cite several American surveys that suggest that around half of library users never or rarely use library guides.

Insight can be gathered into what users want from guides via, for example, focus groups, surveys and usability testing (Vileno, 2007). Tchangalova and Feigley (2008) describe adding a four question questionnaire to individual guides to gain customer input. Such embedded feedback mechanisms can serve a basic practical purpose, by highlighting additional resources and identifying broken links for example. Guide evaluation by students can highlight the unrealistic expectations of users, who may want explicit answers rather than guidance (Vileno (2007) citing O'Sullivan and Scott (2000)).

Evaluating our Library Guides

The next stage of our project was to examine our own library guides in more detail. A number of articles describe studies evaluating guides provided by university libraries. The criteria suggested for assessing guides include purpose and format (Galvin, 2005) consistency, scope, readability / usability (Wales, 2005; Dahl, 2001; Kapoun, 1995), and currency, especially in links to websites (Wales, 2005). Based on the criteria found within the existing literature, the project team identified a set of categories and examined our University's own guides in the light of them.

The broad categories we used are:

- Type of guide (e.g. subject, database)
- Explanation of purpose of the guide
- Scope (course, subject range)
- Format and printability
- Date of origin and revision

- Explanation of key terms / use of jargon /readability
- Navigation route (ease of online use)
- Design (fonts, icons, colour)
- Notes (specific points, feedback)
- Location

We evaluated 26 of our own guides according to these criteria. Our local Anglia Ruskin guides tended to lack any indication of purpose, most tended to target subjects at departmental or even Faculty level, were in PDF format, most had revision dates of less than 12 months, about half contained unexplained library jargon, all were accessed via a library guides page (accessible within three mouse clicks from the library homepage), and although following a broad template, there were a variety of different section and topic headings. Individual librarians had also begun to create a small number of podcasts using Camtasia, originally for consumption by overseas students.

Use of Anglia Ruskin Guides

The third element of our project sought to pull together what feedback we already had about guide use and sought further information from our users. Data was gathered in three main ways. A check was made of the numbers of printed guides picked up from the Cambridge site enquiry desk area over a short period. Other Anglia Ruskin sites no longer have printed guides available in the library. Secondly a check was made of internet accesses of subject guide web pages over the last year. Thirdly a brief three question

survey was placed on the University Library web page with an invitation for users to respond.

Print copies: A record of the number of printed guides taken from the display at the Cambridge enquiry desk was kept between the 10th February and 20th March 2010. The recorded usage varies, with a few guides seeing no usage (Art and Design, Philosophy, Public Service), but most having somewhere between one and ten copies used. This doesn't reflect guide usage in lessons. During the time that guides were monitored, one printed guide seems to have been withdrawn, and one introduced. This snapshot of usage tells us nothing about how useful people found the guides, why they took them, what they used them for or even who they were. Nor can it pretend to be representative of annual usage or potential usage at other sites.

Internet access: Internet logs for the period from September to December 2010 provided us with some indication of actual usage. Online access peaked in October in terms of Visitors and Page Views. This may be because new users are exploring the web site at the start of the academic year or they have been pointed to the guides by library induction sessions. Subject guides (as opposed to database guides) are most accessed but achieve fewer than a thousand views per month from fewer than 400 visitors. In terms of total numbers of students and numbers of accesses to the website, these figures are minuscule. The Subject Guides page contains a 'Was this page useful?' button. Four people said they found them useful, none found them 'Not useful'. (After this project was completed the Library held some focus groups

where a question was asked about subject guides. The response here was that many of the people consulted knew nothing about our library guides. Those that had used them found them useful. The Guide most consulted was the Harvard Referencing Guide, not strictly a 'Subject' guide).

User survey: A small scale three question survey of Anglia Ruskin library guide use ran from 10th to 26th March 2010. A link was placed on the University Library homepage to a Survey Monkey questionnaire. Promotion was minimal though library staff did notify their contacts within the teaching staff and elsewhere to state that it was available. There were 62 respondents. The majority of respondents are staff (23) or undergraduate students (27). 44 respondents (71%) noted they access the library guides online, with 12 (19.4%) respondents accessing them in print from the enquiry desk, 16 using them in a library session, and 10 (16%) reporting using them not at all. Only one respondent found the guides unhelpful, with the majority (26) finding guides very helpful (15 found helpful, 6 found neither helpful nor unhelpful). In the free comments, seven respondents made positive comments about the Harvard guide, three made irrelevant comments, two mentioned wanting clear, generic 'introductory' guides, and two made specific suggestions (making guides available in both pdf and rtf, and having 'case studies' in guides). The guide to Harvard referencing was the one noted most by name but is not one of the subject-based guides which we were mainly concerned with. While the responses are mostly positive, it should be borne in mind that they represent a self-selecting and small fraction of the number of library and website users.

The value that users attach to the guides is difficult to ascertain from the minimal feedback we have regarding usage. Suffice to say that most people who use them find them useful but some find them more useful than others. From our review of the literature our situation seems fairly typical of academic libraries in terms of both usage and feedback.

Evaluating guides by other university libraries

In addition to reviewing our own library guides, we applied similar criteria to evaluating guides provided by a number of other UK Higher Education Institution libraries.

The literature review had suggested a range of potential methodologies for assessing guides from a range of academic institutions. Brazzeal (2006) described a comprehensive review of library guides from all institutions offering a very specific subject, Dahl (2001) had selected guides from three top universities from each of three different types of Canadian universities identified by annual published rankings and Dunsmore (2002) had evaluated guides on companies, industry, and marketing from the top 10 ranked business school universities in both the US and Canada. We adapted the approaches suggested by these articles, selecting two UK Higher Education Institutions from each tenth of the Times Higher rankings for 2010. We also examined guides from a couple of libraries that had scored well on the National Student Survey 2008/9 and those from universities which our University has been benchmarked against. We also made post hoc decisions to include some universities we had already identified as having interesting guides. We reviewed 32 guides from 23 different institutions. This provided

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both a snapshot of how guides are used in university libraries generally, as well as an opportunity to discover examples of best practice.

The features we noted and the criteria we used included:

- Guide title
- Name of university library
- Type of guide (subject, database guide etc)
- Explanation of purpose
- Format
- Scope
- Explanation of key terms
- Printable
- Update date
- Navigation route (how far from the library home page?)
- Content covered / section headings
- Use of icons, images and or symbols
- Links - how they are shown and whether they work
- Feedback mechanism
- Integration with an e-resource platform
- Consistency between different guides from the same university
- Notes
- Location

The guides we examined were very diverse. 18 varied significantly from others provided by the same library. Formats represented included not only

PDF guides and HTML webpages, but also online tutorials, screencasts and video casts, guides delivered using content management software, wikis, blogs and webpages with integrated access to the library catalogue. The review showed:

- Nearly a third the guides examined (10) included examples of library jargon, but these tended to be relatively minor terms or phrases;
- Nearly half (15) did not seem to include explanations of the purpose of the guide;
- 14 guides did not include an update date, potentially raising questions about their currency;
- The majority (25) of the guides examined were located within three clicks of the library home page (including a small number which were directly accessible from the homepage);
- One guide was located six clicks away from the library service home page – this was a multisite institution and the location of the library guides depended on the library site;
- 17 guides included some level of integration with an e-resource platform; one guide was located in the library catalogue.

The review particularly highlighted the use of library guides content management software such as LibGuides or Alacarte, and how these can assist the delivery of subject guidance.

Online survey of library guide use

Keen to gain further information about the experience and opinions of the wider library community about library guides, we also distributed a *SurveyMonkey* survey of library guide use via the Lis-Link and Lis-Infoliteracy JISC Mail discussion lists.

This element of our project took place between 17th February and 10th March 2010. 182 replies were received of which 151 were completed responses.

Over three quarters of the respondents were from academic libraries and of these 80.3% provided database guides and information skills guides, while 83.8% provided subject guides. The most common types of 'Other' guides are general or policy related or guides concerned with referencing. Guides are most commonly provided in web /html (70.9%) paper / print (67.9%) and PDF Format (67.4%). Not surprisingly most university guides are accessed from a library website (92%) and around 68% of university library respondents also provide printed versions. Guides are most used to by our respondents support enquiry work and within teaching sessions.

Our focus has been on subject guides. 122 respondents specifically said they produced subject guides and 62% of these indicated that guides are produced by people with job titles like Subject librarian, subject advisor or subject specialist. Eight respondents mention Learning and Teaching support teams or similar terminology. A couple mention input from academic staff. Some work with technologists, marketing departments or graphic designers. 92% of respondents based their guides on a template though this was sometimes

described as 'basic', 'rough' or 'flexible'. A few admitted that their template was not used consistently. Guides are most commonly produced on the basis of which subjects are taught. Among other reasons for producing guides were relevant to specific modules, perceived need or demand of students, a desire to promote particular resources, or demand from particular faculties or user groups.

Our survey asked if respondents could identify one major advantage or disadvantage to producing subject guides. The main advantages highlighted the guide as a starting point, a quick and easy source of information, a way of identifying and pulling together sources of information and of responding to actual enquiries and perceived user needs. Smaller numbers of respondents mentioned that students identified with material related to their own subject area, that guides could be useful to staff as well as students, that guides helped to promote library activities and resources and that they might encourage students in helping themselves and directing their own learning. Guides are also seen to have disadvantages for librarians: they need frequent updating, which can be very time consuming, and the level of use by readers is uncertain at best. It is also perceived that they will be selective with regard to subjects covered and cannot be comprehensive or, at the other extreme, may overload the user with information. They may overlap in some areas with materials produced by academic staff.

Our survey asked if the Library had a feedback route for customers and if so how the information is reviewed and analysed. 69.2% of the 146 respondents

to this question said they did seek to gather feedback. However most users interpreted the question to be about feedback in general so very few responses related specifically to subject guides. Feedback routes include meetings, comment cards, contact details on library websites, surveys and blog posts. Comments on the actual level of feedback include

- *My email address. I receive no feedback.*
- *Email address at the end of every guide (not used as far as I am aware).*
- *...I'm not aware of any specific feedback sought just in relation to the quality and content of subject guides*
- *Suggestion box both physical and via an email address - neither used*
- *Feedback boxes on my pages - have had no feedback as yet.*
- *Feedback links available via the Opac and the general library website. I have never received any though in the 5 years I've been here so nothing to review and analyse!*

The next question asked if any statistical or anecdotal evidence had been gathered relating to guides. 124 respondents answered this question and nearly a third said they had no information on guide usage. Some commented in relation to printed guides

- *Only that students come to the enquiry desk asking for them, not how useful they've found them afterwards*
- *how quickly we have to replenish our guide racks at the Enquiry Desk*
- *At peak times eg. beginning of term, dissertation launch, the guides fly out of our dispensers. This means students are interested in a guide aimed at their subject area ...*

- *No, though our Harvard Guide is very well used and requires extra print runs.*
- *Printed copies of the guides are available in holders on the relevant subject floors and these have to be topped up regularly indicating that students are picking them up - we don't know what they do with them after that though.*

Usage measures of online guides were varied but generally positive.

- *Our online guides come with a statistical package - during 09/10 our guides have been accessed almost 46,000 times which we are happy with - it also tells us which guides are used most. We keep stats on how many copies are made of printed guides. This only tells us about use not about how well received they are for this we rely on feedback*
- *Statistics of webpage use are lower than I would wish but once students have been shown them they seem to use them as we get queries about broken links*
- *Our subject guides are available online only; we are about to investigate the number of hits they've received recently. Where staff have put guides on their blogs, and directed users to those during teaching, traffic to the blogs always increases*
- *We have web statistics, but these are not very revealing*
- *We produce in addition to 'traditional' A4 printed guides a folding 'Z-card' guide for 'Library Essentials' and it is hard to over-emphasise the popularity and take-up (tens of thousands) of the latter in particular. We have them professionally produced:*

- *Certain online guides are used heavily depending on course (e.g Halsburys Laws guides for postgraduate students). Subject specific web page guides used more heavily if embedded/ linked to from VLE module page than on open we pages.*
Twitter not used by students, but information we push out using twitter is accessed if twitter is embedded into web pages as an rss feed.

A final question asked for any additional comments about guides. 43 respondents answered this question.

Amongst the respondents (only 37.9% (69) of the total responses) who use Web 2.0 tools to provide subject content and guidance, the most popular technology was the blog (60.9% (42)), with Twitter and RSS feeds a distant joint second (34.8% (24)).

There were a range of general comments were offered at the end of the survey. Respondents from two university libraries, which have implemented the *LibGuides* software, were particularly positive about their experiences. A few respondents also mentioned moving to shorter guides (1-2 pages of A4) or removing their guides altogether (especially to databases).

Conclusions

It cannot be denied that the work undertaken in this project has been time consuming for the people involved. However it has fulfilled several needs. It has enabled team members to develop, albeit at a basic level, some research

skills. The team has actively used some of the new ‘web 2.0’ technologies, such as blogs and social bookmarking tools. Through ongoing reports to colleagues the broader library team has been kept informed of progress, contributed to the course of the project and enhanced their own knowledge and professional development. In addition it has served its explicit purpose of informing the future development of the Library’s subject guides.

The preliminary project had succeeded in carrying out basic housekeeping changes to the way our university library displayed and organised its electronic guides. It highlighted the need for more detailed research into the topic of library guides, and began this process with a detailed and useful staff survey. (Surveys of library staff have since also been used to gauge opinions about a staff blog and about the library staff intranet). The literature review demonstrated the lack of clear evidence about the usefulness of subject guides, whilst providing information about current and past trends in guide provision. Librarians seem to expect to produce guides but are less efficient in maintaining them or evaluating their use. Examining our own guides more closely, we realised that however detailed our guide templates might be, there were already significant differences between how guides for different subjects were designed and delivered.

For one of the team, what had been a strong assumption of the importance of consistency in the content and style of our library guides had been challenged over the course of the project. Our examination of other library's guides showed that there could be considerable diversity of guide provision within a

single library, without diminishing the potential value of the guide content.

Different guide structures - for example, frequently asked questions or case studies - may suit different learning styles. Or, as Gilmour (2010) suggests, 'Keep a consistent look and feel ... But make it unique'.

The opportunities offered by web 2.0 technologies mean that guide content can potentially be delivered in many different ways. Reassuringly, figures from our survey of fellow library professionals in other organisations showed that, although some are implementing technologies such as library guides content management software, wikis, blogs and podcasts, web 2.0 technologies currently remain peripheral to guide provision, with their potential waiting to be exploited. A key recommendation by the project team was that, although the online printable PDF document will remain as the basic level of guide provided by our library, Academic Services Division staff should be encouraged to experiment with new technologies to deliver subject guidance. Another recommendation - again supported by our review of guides from other libraries - considered how we can potentially improve integration between electronic resources and our guides - for example, by including links to our guides from our subject resources interface. We also need to consider how we can promote guidance available within databases, rather than duplicating this information in our guides.

Overall, the project shows how library and information professionals can identify areas for service improvement and carry out research adequate enough to fill some gaps in their own knowledge. It shows how information

from a range a different sources - a staff survey, a literature review, an evaluation of library guides (our own and those from other university libraries), a customer survey and a survey of the wider library community - can be brought together to draw conclusions about an issue of relevance to day-to-day library practice.

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