
Staffing and staff development in Irish university libraries



John Cox
*Deputy Librarian,
National University of Ireland,
Galway*
Tel: 00 353 91 524809
ext 3712
E-mail: john.cox@nuigalway.ie



Helen Fallon
*Deputy Librarian,
National University of Ireland,
Maynooth*
Tel: 00 353 17 083880
E-mail: helen.b.fallon@may.ie

Life has certainly been interesting for Irish university library staff in the past few years. The rise of the Celtic Tiger has brought with it many opportunities and challenges for university libraries. In staffing terms there has been an unusual degree of change at senior management level. The majority of head librarian posts have changed hands, while new posts have been created at deputy, associate, and sub-librarian level. New appointments have resulted from retirements, re-definition of posts and 'unfreezing' of posts vacant for some time during periods of retrenchment.

IT has been a key driver for new or changed posts at all levels, with increased focus on systems support and electronic resource management. Some new areas, notably digitisation and Web site development, have emerged, introducing new skills and opportunities, sometimes on a project basis. Funding for academic research has increased significantly and this has created demand for additional staffing in information services. Special collections and archives have seen notable growth also, reflecting not only increased research activity but also greater availability of funding for prestige acquisitions.

With growth has come increased complexity. As well as having more staff, we have many more users, while the increased range and accessibility of electronic information have created opportunities and demands for new services. For some the hybrid

library is viewed as a series of exciting challenges. Others see it less positively and feel threatened by some of the uncomfortable questions it poses such as:

- Whose responsibility is this?
- Do 'we' need to work with 'them'?
- Who will train whom?
- Is this work expected of my grade?
- Could my job disappear?
- What about 'custom and practice'?

These concerns will have surfaced in libraries worldwide. Two factors may place them in sharper focus in Ireland: first, the extent of change in all areas of society resulting from an unprecedented period of sustained prosperity, and second, the enduring influence of trade unions. Before the mid-1990s opportunities for change in staffing and services were limited and user expectations were lower but, as already described, the climate has changed radically. The consumer is now far more confident and demanding. Expectations of libraries and their staff have changed significantly and this can be particularly difficult to manage if there is a strong tendency to refer 'change' issues to trade unions immediately.

An issue such as changes to library opening hours can take a long time to resolve and will typically involve detailed negotiation with staff representatives, trade union officials and members of the personnel department, along with external arbitration on occasion. Recruitment, grading and pay are other issues that engage the attention of the same parties on a regular basis since staff have different expectations in light of national prosperity. There is an ongoing tension for library managers between the need to address these issues thoroughly, ensuring that future staffing and service are not compromised, and the imperative to deliver new or extended services. Both require major investment of time.

The introduction of so much new blood into senior management teams provides an opportunity for managers to work closely together from an early stage and to take a planned and consistent approach to change management. Effective communication is a priority for staff at a time of expansion and change. Informality, traditionally a positive feature of Irish life, is not enough on its own and more structured approaches have emerged. Building trust between management and staff is essential too. Change needs to be better explained and placed in a wider context; otherwise we have a series of industrial relations battlegrounds. A partnership approach with trade unions, built up over a period of time, is favoured as a constructive way forward. Two-way flexibility is needed. Managers are expected to accommodate

flexible patterns of work, such as job shares and career breaks, in addition to expecting the more flexible working hours needed to meet changing service demands. Ensuring staff development is also key to the success of the library operation.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The following section tells how Irish university libraries successfully got together to cooperate on addressing the issue of staff development. It briefly examines the situation at national level in relation to university library cooperation; it outlines the establishment of the Academic and National Library Training Co-operative (ANLTC), and explains how the group operates.

The establishment of ANLTC was against a background of a move towards increasing formal cooperation between Irish university libraries. One of the early initiatives was IRIS (<http://www.iris.ie/index.htm>), a project partially funded by the EU Timatique and Libraries Programme. Its brief was to develop the application of Z39.50 protocol to enable the simultaneous searching of the catalogues of six university libraries and one special library. The project also included a document supply component. Another cooperative project established in 1995 was ALCID (Academic Libraries Cooperating in Dublin) which currently allows academic staff and postgraduates access (without borrowing) to each other's libraries on production of an ALCID card. Other cooperative initiatives included the cooperative tender for periodical purchase and consortia purchasing of datasets. The establishment of procurement officers at each of the Irish universities to source most effective purchasing methods has encouraged greater cooperation in this area also. These developments have taken place against a background of sectoral funding which does not encourage cross which, was invited by CONUL to present a course for librarians and training officers at Trinity College Dublin. Following this the CONUL Training Officers Group (TOG), comprising representatives from CONUL libraries, was formed. They had the remit of reviewing training needs and producing a model training plan for participating libraries. The Training Officers Group submitted the model training plan to CONUL in 1995. At this point the group adopted the working title of Academic and National Library Training Cooperative (ANLTC). The group includes one representative from each of the eight university libraries in the Republic of Ireland and the National Library of Ireland. Subsequently the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast were invited to join, bringing the total number of participating libraries to eleven.

Each participating library nominates a representative to the ANLTC committee. This is the person responsible for staff development in the organisation, generally a Deputy Librarian. The committee meets in the autumn to decide on a programme of courses for the coming year. Courses are selected based on feedback from participants on previous courses, input from CONUL and developments in the library and information sector. Each participating institution organises at least one course. The responsibility for all aspects of that course lies with the person organising it. They identify the presenter(s), do the housekeeping arrangements, advertise, take bookings for the course and invoice the participating organisation. Until 2002 a printed brochure was produced. In 2002 a website was established with details of all courses, which will replace the printed brochure on an experimental basis. Courses are evaluated by participants and the feedback made available to the ANLTC committee. If the course makes a profit this goes into ANLTC funds. If it runs at a loss ANLTC makes up the shortfall.

Between 1996 – when the first courses were run – and 2002, over 1000 participants have attended total of 68 ANLTC courses. For 2002 it was decided to introduce a standard charge of €100 per course. Courses cover a broad range of management, technical, personal development and library information related topics. The majority are one-day courses. In addition to training courses ANLTC organises briefings on topics such as copyright along with library visits. The group administers the CONUL Library Assistant bursary, an award of €1270 to a library assistant for professional development purposes.

Cooperation with other national and international library related bodies is important to ANLTC. Links have been established with SALCTG (Scottish Academic Libraries Training Cooperative) and the American ARL (Association of Research Libraries). ANLTC maintains close links with CONUL, submitting a report each year. In turn suggestions for courses are received from CONUL. Close co-operation is maintained with LIR, the HEAnet User Group for Libraries, to ensure there is no overlap in IT training. ANLTC is also represented on the Standing Committee on Staff Training & Development – Public Library Service.

Now firmly established as a cross-university training body, ANLTC plays a key role in staff development in the Irish university library sector.

The ANLTC website is at <http://www.ul.ie/~library/ANLTC>