Managing large collections-based projects at Maynooth University

A collections perspective

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Introduction

Maynooth University (MU) is located 22 km from Dublin city and traces its roots to 1795 when St Patrick's College was founded as a seminary in the town. The Universities Act 1997 established National University of Ireland (NUI) Maynooth, now known as Maynooth University (MU), as a standalone secular institution and a constituent university of the National University of Ireland (NUI), a system of colleges set up under the Irish Universities Act 1908, and amended under the 1997 Irish Universities Act. MU currently has over 11,000 students. The library was founded in 1795 and is now housed in the John Paul II library and the Russell library (pre-1850 collections). It provides an integrated service to both MU (https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/) and St Patrick's College Maynooth (http://maynoothcollege.ie/).

Froebel College of Education was established in 1943 and was located in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Its focus was early childhood education. The college was named after the nineteenth-century German educator and creator of the concept of Kindergarten, Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852). He advocated reverence for the child, learning through activity, exploration of the environment, enjoyment of beauty in all its manifestations and acceptance of the gifts of each individual. At the time of its closure, there were c. 280 enrolled undergraduate and postgraduate students, and c. 35 academic and other staff.

This article explores the transfer and integration of 3,000 items from the Froebel Library into the MU library, following the incorporation of Froebel College of Education into Maynooth University. The key processes, challenges and benefits are outlined.

Background

The incorporation was set against a background of the consolidation of Irish higher education institutions into a more limited number of larger colleges.

The Irish 2011 National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 report (or 'Hunt Report') http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf recommended that 'smaller institutions should be consolidated to promote coherence and critical mass' (Hunt, 2011, p. 109).

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2012-Press-Releases/Report-of-the-International-Review-Panel-on-the-Structure-of-Initial-Teacher-Education-Provision-in-Ireland.pdf recommended 'that teacher education should be facilitated in a university setting with systematic links to clinical practice in field schools which provide where possible for the full range of sectoral teacher education, spanning early childhood to adult education. This would facilitate greater synergies between the different levels of education' (HEA, 2012, p. 24).

Amongst the consolidations, mergers or incorporations to take place was that of Froebel College of Education with MU. This resulted in the creation of the new Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education and the addition of 3,000 specifically selected items to the MU library collections.

Preparation for incorporation

In 2012 preparation for the physical move began. The project team – library staff in each institution who were assigned responsibility for the physical move – were initially based in two locations – Blackrock, Co. Dublin, and Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The two institutions were approximately forty km apart. While MU library has 42.25 full-time equivalent staff (MU Library Strategic Plan, 2016, p. 2), the library at Froebel had three full-time equivalent staff at the time of

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incorporation. These staff were given a redundancy option. The librarian and one library assistant opted to go to Maynooth.

When considering the integration project, options such as electronic replacement of material was explored. However, it was found that electronic versions of print material were not available, making this option unviable. Discussions and site visits to Froebel by senior MU library staff took place on an ongoing basis in the two years leading up to the move. During the preliminary assessment of the Froebel collection, it was established that the library management systems (LMS) of the two institutions were not interoperable. MU uses ALEPH, while Froebel used AccessIT; it was therefore not possible to upload MARC records of Froebel items into the MU catalogue.

At the outset it was agreed that there would not be a specific 'Froebel collection' in MU library, but that the collection would be integrated into the existing collections. Both institutions use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). The majority of the books were in the social sciences and were easily integrated into the existing MU collections.

Preparation work by Froebel Library staff included checking Froebel College library holdings against MU library holdings for duplicates and identifying material for deselection, donation to local institutions, sale – via Isherwood's booksellers – or recycling. Three thousand books, in the fields of education, literature and history, were selected to be added to the MU library collections. MU library barcodes were applied and Froebel College library barcodes were covered. Each item had tattle tape (a security strip) added, ensuring compatibility with the MU library security system (3M system).

The move

Both MU and Froebel staff liaised with the logistics company planning and implementing the overall move of Froebel College of Education to MU. Froebel Library and MU staff liaised specifically with regard to the move of the three thousand items to Maynooth in mid-August 2013. Despite the short time frame it was essential for these items to be available to students in the first semester, which began in mid-September of 2013.

Processing of material

The material was shelved in Dewey order in a storage area in MU library. An initial survey was undertaken and education-related materials were prioritised, based on reading lists supplied by what had now become the MU Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. A project plan and workflow were drawn up, and processing of the items began. Processing of the three thousand items included downloading MARC records from OCLC and matching items to the records in the MU library management system (Aleph). Evidence of provenance, including stamps and labels, from Froebel College and previous owners, were not removed. Shelf marks were replaced if necessary. The prioritised material was added to the collection as promptly as possible and the department was informed when material on reading lists were processed and available for borrowing. Former Froebel Library staff were very familiar with the material in demand and this helped with its prompt processing. The library also liaised with the Froebel student representative, to reassure the students that the accessibility of in-demand reading list materials was a priority for the project.

Once the in-demand material had been processed, the balance of the material was dealt with in subject order. Within each subject, e.g. Irish literature, items of a similar nature were dealt with together. For example, all items written by or about W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Eavan Boland were processed together. As most items by or about Yeats are classified at IR 828.3 YEA, it meant that once records were found all items about Yeats could be processed and moved to

the shelves. The same process applied to the works of James Joyce and Eavan Boland. In terms of project management, it meant items by and about specific authors could be classified on one occasion and the classification details recorded in the project plan and workflow. A MARC 590 field, local note, was inserted in every record to indicate provenance and track the number of items added to the library catalogue.

A large part of the Froebel collection is material used by students during their four-week school placement, which occurs twice in the academic year, once in each semester. These placements are very intensive and critical times for students. The material used for the placements, workbooks, text books, atlases, picture books and young adult fiction, was not added to the MU library collections but placed in a resource room in the Froebel Department on the MU campus. The Froebel College LMS was retained for the first year so that the resource room could function as an 'internal library'. The former Froebel College library staff enabled the setting up of this resource room and were on hand to help alleviate initial concerns.

Challenges

The project met with a number of challenges. Initially staff were based in two locations. This made project management and logistics challenging, but with regular communication an efficient workflow was established. This continued when the material moved to Maynooth.

A major concern was the continuation of service provision to Froebel students and staff. As collections were being integrated it was important to ensure access to reading list material for Froebel students. The short time-frame from the arrival of material on campus in August 2013 to the beginning of the first semester in mid-September made this difficult. To help mitigate the impact of this, in addition to making reading lists material available, students and staff could request items by using enquiry cards which they handed in to the information desk. These items were retrieved and added to the collection within 72 hours.

The move was a culture change for Froebel staff, who had been members of a very small college and were now members of a university department, and expectations had to be managed. Previously they had been used to a highly individualised level of service due to the smaller scale of Froebel College library. To ease concerns, project staff met with department staff and remained in regular communication about the progress of the integration.

Another major challenge was that the two library systems were not interoperable. This made integration more time consuming as MARC records had to be identified and downloaded before the material was processed, as described above, and made available to staff and students.

Benefits

The merging of Froebel College with Maynooth University brought with it numerous benefits to both institutions and the library. MU now offers teacher education from early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education to adult and community education. The MU library collections were enriched by the addition of the specialist Froebel College library. With its focus on teacher training, it enhanced the existing MU library collections and filled gaps in literature, special collections and education. In turn, the MU library collections enriched Froebel students' access to a wider range of relevant material and facilities. This includes access to a very wide range of electronic content via IReL (Irish Research electronic Library) initiative which they would not have had previously.

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The importance of the library's role in facilitating the merger by prioritising the integration of the Froebel College library collection cannot be underestimated. Former Froebel College library staff, now MU library staff, facilitated the prompt resolution of queries and helped cement the MU library and Froebel Department relationship. The integration of the Froebel College Library was eased by continuous communication between the libraries of both institutions before during and after the incorporation.

From a project management perspective, the overall objective was to find the easiest and most straightforward way to integrate the Froebel College Library collection. Decisions were made which resulted in minimal intervention and ensured prompt processing and availability of material. This proved a successful approach and garnered the following comment from the Froebel Department: 'This seems to be working and the staff here really appreciates all the hard work being done to get books on shelves.'

References

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Useful links

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