

Library Environment

Reference Queries



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Library Staff Exchanges a catalyst for sharing practice, CPD and fresh thinking

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Abstract

This paper outlines a library staff exchange that took place between the librarians of Bord Bia and Institute of Technology, Carlow in December 2016. The authors reflect upon the perceived benefits of participating in the staff exchange, resulting new initiatives, and offer tips for getting the most from a library exchange programme.

Keywords: *Library Staff Exchange, CPD, Ireland*

"We may sit in our
library and yet be in
all quarters of
the earth."

John Lubbock

Marketing Activities
Information Literacy Training

Introduction

The aim of this initiative is to promote work shadowing, job swaps and staff exchanges between libraries.

Background to the exchange

The genesis of our exchange programme dates to the 2016 ASL – Academic and Special Libraries Conference. Brigid Carey (Business and Humanities Librarian at IT Carlow) presented a paper on formulating and delivering a first year orientation information literacy programme. This very much piqued the interest of Mairead McKeown (Librarian and Information Specialist at Bord Bia) who was asked to develop a new information literacy programme for her organisation. Over lunch, both parties became interested in what the other library was doing. Of interest to IT Carlow Library was Bord Bia's new state-of-the-art Consumer Research Centre (The Thinking House), then under construction, which would incorporate their library. The idea of a library exchange programme was informally discussed to tie in with Library Ireland Week 2016.

We have known each other for many years, having both qualified as librarians from the UCD class of 2001. After graduation, we pursued different career paths branching off into the academic and corporate/special library sectors respectively. Prior to the exchange, informal communications had occurred occasionally. What became increasingly clear is that while both libraries have quite different user groups, they deal with the same subject matter in terms of utilising authoritative sources of consumer and market information to enrich the academic and business lives of their users. As such, the Library Ireland Week Staff Exchange Scheme was seen as a very natural and mutually beneficial fit and a good CPD opportunity.



LRC Building, IT Carlow

Library Overviews

Institute of Technology, Carlow

The library at IT Carlow consists of its main campus library and two branch libraries based at its Wicklow and Wexford campuses. The main library in Carlow is an integral part of the Learning Resource Centre. The library holds an extensive collection of print items and also has an extensive array of online resources including e-books and e-journals. The library partners closely with academic colleagues to ensure that the most appropriate and relevant material is provided to support and enhance the teaching,

learning and research activities of the Institute. A team of Liaison Librarians liaise with each Faculty to provide the appropriate support services.

Library and Information Service, Bord Bia

In 2016, the library moved to a physical library space which sits in the open plan Insight Centre "The Thinking House".¹ It features a collection of niche food, drink and horticulture authoritative databases; online and print journals; e-books and print books; an exhibition of treasures and trivia from Bord Bia's past and a Bibliotherapy collection. Motivational quotes are displayed on the walls to inspire library users and staff.

The library team unlock access to information which drives, through market insight, and, in partnership with industry, the commercial success of a world-class food, drink and horticulture industry. Library users are made up of the food, drink and horticulture industry, talent management cohorts and staff.

Planning and objectives:

On returning to our respective libraries and agreeing to participate in the

¹ located in Dublin city centre.

2016 Library Ireland Week staff exchange, a plan and objectives were put in place. The exchange would take the form of both librarians job shadowing each other for a day during December 2016. It was also agreed that to collaborate on a reflective paper highlighting the perceived benefits, which could then be shared with the wider LIS community.

Our agreed objectives were to develop a better understanding around four key themes:

- **Physical library space**
How the physical library space caters to diverse user needs
- **Information Literacy**
Better understand how information literacy instruction is facilitated
- **Marketing**
Explore marketing activities run by the library
- **Search requests**
Observe the nature of search requests and how they are fulfilled

Reflections and outcomes of the exchange

The physical Library and the space it occupies:

Our first objective was to get an insight into how the physical library space serves diverse user needs. Each exchange started with a library tour, with the purpose of surveying the physical environment. Undoubtedly, despite the marked differences in terms of the size and use of the space available, the over-riding impression of both libraries is the central space they occupy.

Bord Bia’s library is situated in “The Thinking House – Bord Bia’s Insight Centre”, which also incorporates functions such as Marketing, Research, Packaging and Branding. “The Thinking House” is an integrated state of the art consumer research and market insight centre, which houses a team of professionals including the library team.

Information is the foundation of The Thinking House and, the library is

strategically positioned at the entrance to the centre, conveying its position as a fundamental partner in the research process undertaken by the insight team and wider food industry.

The overall sense and impression of “The Thinking House – Bord Bia’ Insight Centre” is a space that actively seeks to cultivate a dynamic and creative environment, where brainstorming, creative thinking and imagination is the order of the day. This is reflected in the different features/zones within the overall physical space, for example: the Library; the Living Plant wall (containing living Irish plants); Packaging Zone (a display of innovative food and drink packaging from around the world); Gallery of Irish food and drink brands and new products (brought to market through co-investment with Bord Bia); Creative Workshop area (an inspirational space containing a Lego wall and oversized post-its to inspire collaboration and creative thinking) a Living Room and viewing facility (purpose- built to hold consumer focus groups, which can then be recorded live and transmitted to locations around



Front of The Thinking House



Library and Living Plant Wall, Bord Bia



Brand and New Product Gallery, Bord Bia

the world); a Consumer Lifestyle Trends Zone (featuring the six biggest trends affecting consumers lives around the World); and finally a Cultural Insight area (where the walls are decorated with Street Scapers - culturally connected consumers, such as bloggers, actors, musicians, who feed into Bord Bia's consumer trends programmes).

Similarly, the IT Carlow library as an integral part of the Learning Resource Centre, is placed at the heart of the Carlow campus. The guided tour indicated that this was a busy and bustling physical space and empty seats were few and far between. Spread over three floors the library space comprises different functional zones including a quiet study room and group study areas. This environment allows the library cater for different types of user needs all under one roof.

Both libraries endeavour to create flexible learning spaces that have intrinsic value in encouraging and accommodating creativity, teaching and learning (Helfrich, 2014). The exchange provided an opportunity to challenge our

perceptions of how a physical library environment can cater to diverse and different user needs in one central space: as a stimulus for creative thinking, a showcase of examples of work, a destination for research, a training and learning space, a source of inspiration, and equally as a quiet space for study and reflection. Since the exchange, Bord Bia have incorporated a quiet area into the Thinking House, whilst IT Carlow has a deeper understanding of the intrinsic value of providing diversity in its usage of space.

Information Literacy Training

As part of IT Carlow's formal information literacy programme, the librarians deliver specialised training workshops and individual instruction, where in consultation with the relevant lecturers, they endeavour to instil good information literacy practice. A recent development has been the creation of a digital offering comprising RLOs (Reusable Learning Objects) which are designed to enhance the digital learning experience of distance learners. These RLOs cover varied topics such as Critical Thinking, Starting Your Research, Searching for Literature etc.

Bord Bia's information literacy activities up to 2016 included internal staff presentations on topics such as Managing your Digital Life, Picture Perfect Images Beyond Getty (organised around events like Library Ireland Week) and informal database instruction. In addition, Bord Bia utilises webinars to provide training on and promote library resources. These webinars are carefully chosen based on organisational strategic relevance. They are also used to help staff keep up- to -date with current thinking and trends, and importantly as a medium to encourage staff to learn together as a group. After each webinar the librarian synthesizes the main findings and distributes the key takeaways and full recording to all staff, those in attendance and those who are unable to participate.

Whilst both libraries serve different client bases with diverse user needs, it is evident that certain core principles inform the delivery of this instruction or sharing of ideas on the topic of information literacy. These principles include collaboration with faculty/staff/clients as integral to the process, prepared

examples for instruction work best and encouraging participants to learn by doing as crucial. These key principles can be applied to a physical or virtual space, whether through face-to-face or online instruction.

The learnings around information literacy from IT Carlow were invaluable to Bord Bia, which has since collaborated with its Talent Management team to design and deliver their dedicated information literacy instructional programme - "Steps to the Information Literacy Process". The programme heavily promotes learning by doing and has now been successfully rolled out to Bord Bia's MSc International Marketing Practice Fellows, MSc Design Innovation (Food) Insight Champions, MSc Retail and Supply Chain Management and Bord Bia's CEO Tara McCarthy.

Similarly, in meeting the needs of different audiences, the usefulness of webinars as a vehicle of current awareness in subject areas was identified. IT Carlow Library is now actively highlighting the value of relevant webinars directly to students in training tutorials,

Library Marketing Activities

IT Carlow library has a presence on a number of social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. In summer 2016, the library ran a Facebook campaign "How far can your library take you?" Branded bags were given to staff and students, who were then encouraged to take a bag on holiday and photograph the bag in famous and far flung places. This campaign ensured the library was kept "top of mind", during and beyond the academic year and acted as a great medium for engagement which was fun in nature.

The Bord Bia library engages in a broad range of marketing activities, reflected on LinkedIn (which is managed by the Library Team); their regular contributions to Bord Bia's weekly newsletter – the **FoodAlert (which captures breaking news with implications for the food industry)**; programme of weekly TED-talks and webinars and the very important Library Ireland Week annual showcase. The Library Ireland Week showcase is an annual event that celebrates the services and work of the librarians in Bord

Bia. It takes the form of a number of presentations from library staff and suppliers, and Bord Bia's CEO has been the advocate for the event for the last two years.

The value of social media campaigns as a medium for keeping library services "top of mind" throughout the year is evident through the activities of both libraries. Bord Bia is now running a photo competition similar to the IT Carlow Library campaign in 2016 to market and promote its library amongst staff, which has proved very popular and successful.

The relative merits of various social media platforms as communication tools were explored during the exchange. It was useful to gain insight into how both libraries utilise different social media platforms to connect and communicate within their local and national contexts.

Nature of Search Requests

Our fourth and final objective was to observe the nature of search requests and how they are facilitated using authoritative market insight.

The Bord Bia library manages search requests from Staff, Industry and Talent Management cohorts, who are seeking authoritative sources of insight and information. The nature of these search requests varies: a client seeking to be better informed about trends before meeting a buyer; an internal staff member seeking information to include in a presentation or article, or an MSc student requesting information for a market assessment. The librarians then deliver a tailored set of research results bespoke to each and every library user, acknowledging that one size does not fit all. Library searches incorporate findings from Bord Bia's proprietary consumer and market insight studies and their niche collection of external information purchased and licensed to Bord Bia.

At IT Carlow, there has been a growing demand for students to undertake research using specialised market intelligence. The key factor in driving this demand is the ongoing development and delivery of courses at the Institute such as the MBA, Masters in Business and the new BSc (Honours) in Brewing

and Distilling. Many of the specialised tutorials that IT Carlow Library deliver, revolve around disseminating the location, value and relevance of market insight to various student cohorts. An added value of the exchange was the opportunity for IT Carlow Library to broaden its knowledge of authoritative information resources/products in the marketplace such as Bord Bia's collection of consumer and market insights studies, which are now actively highlighted in tutorials.

Conclusion

This exchange, which took the form of job shadowing afforded us a cost neutral learning opportunity to share practise, exchange ideas, learn from one another, foster collaboration and enrich our professional experience. Through challenging our perceptions on various aspects of providing a library service both librarians have benefited from new ideas and thinking which have emerged. It was fascinating to experience how two different types of libraries, one academic and one special, approach delivering quality services to their respective users. This is indicative of the partnership role fulfilled by each library in delivering a relevant and dynamic library service to their users. There were comparisons and also contrasts in the delivery of service, but what was clear to us is that whether you work in an academic or special library, with diverse groups of library users, we are all ultimately involved in collecting, organising and facilitating access to information that helps users make better sense of the world around them.

As a community of information professionals, it is important to keep seeking different and unfamiliar experiences that can act as a catalyst for new ideas, and enrich our professional experience. Staff exchanges are the perfect medium to help us learn, develop, connect and stay relevant, and as such are an invaluable CPD tool. Based on our experience we have compiled our top tips for getting the most from a library staff exchange:

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Our top tips for getting the most out of a staff exchange visit:

- **Partner:** seek an exchange partner early, so you can both ensure time to plan
- **Objectives:** set out a clear set of objectives to get the most out of the experience
- **Tour:** Start the process with a tour of the library to set the scene and context
- **Retain:** capture key learnings and gather images on the day to enhance information retention
- **Good thinking:** Take some time out after the exchange to consider what has been learned and see how you can align any new thinking and ideas to your libraries strategy
- **Relationships:** maintain and build on relationships fostered during the exchange
- **Share:** share your experiences and findings with the wider community of librarians for collaborative learning

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