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Positioning the academic library within the institution: structures and challenges

Higher education institutions are experiencing significant change within an ever increasingly complex political and economic environment. Universities are now more accountable than ever before as they try to operate in a highly competitive global market place. This competition and accountability cascades down to the constituent parts of the university, which in turn results in an internal market for resource, visibility and attention, and the position of the academic library in this environment becomes all important.

Over the last decade I have been involved in a number of discussions about the role and position of the academic library within the academy. Some of this debate was triggered through a movement to converge and super-converge academic library departments with other services (Heseltine et al, 2009). Interest for me in particular was around my own involvement in a super-convergence project in which I was responsible for bringing together library services, IT support services and student administration into a single super department known as Library and Student Support (Appleton, 2010). Such activity sparked debate, certainly within the UK higher education library sector, about the perceived role and value of the academic library within the institution when it is merged, converged or blurred with other academic and support function. However, convergence and super-convergence are not global occurrences, and there are a whole host of other elements which need to be considered when addressing the position of the academic library, many of which this volume will address.

More recently, there have been some significant studies in the UK, around the future role of the academic library and a growing scrutiny of the leadership of 21st century academic libraries in ever changing higher education environments (Pinfield, Cox & Rutter, 2017; Baker & Allden, 2017a; Baker & Allden, 2017b). Similarly, debate around the actual and perceived value of academic libraries within their universities has been of particular recent focus within the U.S.A (Oakleaf, 2010; Wolff-Eisenberg, 2017). There continues to be a healthy debate about the role, value and position of the academic library within the parent institution and there is currently more interest and discussion across the sector than ever before.

This growing interest in the position of the academic library resulted in a call, in late 2017, for contributions from the international academic library community for papers, case studies and general insights into what the current issues and challenges are with regard to effective positioning of the academic library within the institution. There were 35 submissions in response to the call, from academic librarians from 12 different nations in four continents. This reassured me that there was indeed global interest in the theme and the abstracts received certainly suggested that issues and challenges around positioning the academic library are international. Following a double blind peer review process eighteen abstracts were accepted and a further four papers were commissioned to ensure particular themes and case studies were included in the resulting collection of papers. Of the eighteen accepted abstracts, four were subsequently withdrawn, leaving a total of eighteen papers and case studies. Table 1 shows the geographic breakdown of all the submissions and commissions and the final papers which made it to this publication:

Country	Abstracts received	Abstracts accepted	Final submissions and commissions
UK	13	7	7
USA	10	5	3
Australia	4	3	3
Ireland	2	0	1
Canada	2	1	1
New Zealand	1	1	1
Portugal	1	1	1
Germany	0	0	1
Turkey	1	0	0
Kenya	1	0	0
Sierra Leone	1	0	0
Nigeria	1	0	0
Total	37	18	18

The final collection of papers includes a literature review, research papers, theoretical insights and several case studies, both at specific institutional level and also some personal individual reflections. There is a breadth and depth of insights and themes contained within the collection and holistically they capture the different structures employed by academic libraries to position themselves within the institution and the associated successes and challenges. The overarching theme of 'positioning the academic library within the institution' has allowed for the authors to reflect on their experiences and understanding of how their own library services are regarded, positioned and aligned within their parent university. Institutional strategic aims such as research excellence, teaching excellence or student experience can often drive library service development and focus. This collection of papers and case studies provides many examples of such drivers. Similarly, some authors have chosen to reflect on general leadership of academic libraries, and in some instances their own leadership of services and in establishing a position for their libraries.

The literature

Whilst there has not yet been a collective publication of examples and reflections of the position of the academic library presented, there is much literature available covering and detailing many of the micro-topics and issues which contribute to the discussion. John Cox sets the scene with his comprehensive review of this literature and presents it within the context of emerging areas that higher education institutions are focusing on. This includes: student success; international research profile; community engagement; global reputation; and, demonstrating impact through metrics. He also discusses external environmental factors, such as: internationalisation; economic conditions; political environments; increased competition for student numbers; and, increased competition for research funding.

Cox presents his literature under theme headings commencing with stakeholder perspectives before moving into library positioning strategies, which in turn addresses the strategic alignment and leadership that libraries need to demonstrate alongside emerging and developing library roles and identities. Further themes include the deliberate positioning of the library for student success and for researcher productivity. A common, but key thread to emerge through all the themes is the emphasis on partnerships across the institution and that libraries operating in isolation are at risk.

The idea of the university

Having established the breadth and depth of the issues and challenges of successfully positioning the academic library within the university through Cox's literature review, Fiona Salisbury and Tae Peseta invite us to consider 'the idea of the university'. This theoretical paper makes the case that there are compelling reasons for academic librarians to engage critically with the historical discourse of the evolution of the university. Harland and Peseta argue that this discourse has predominantly been led by academics and that several voices in our university communities are missing. Academic librarians need to ensure that their voice is not absent from the discussion in order that they take ownership of how their professional library practice is intertwined with complex scholarly arguments and relationships.

Strategic alignment

Aligning the academic library with university strategy stands out as fundamental in Cox's synthesis of the literature about positioning. Baker and Allden (2017b) argue that strategic relationships and being able to contribute to strategic aims and objectives are pivotal to academic libraries achieving success. To do this, library leadership must use the library's vision, strategy and goals to demonstrate that it is contributing to the university's goals (Albert, 2014; Jubb, Rowlands & Nicholas, 2013). The first paper within this collection to exclusively address strategic direction and alignment is by Harland, Stewart and Bruce, in which they report back on their grounded theory research into academic library leadership in Australia and the USA. This very thorough research explores the processes that senior library leaders can undertake to strategically align the library, whilst also demonstrating its impact and value to the university.

In keeping with the theme of comparing approaches to strategic alignment, Lydia Price-Jones follows this with a study of UK and German academic libraries and asks the question 'How do academic libraries adapt within an ever increasing marketised higher education landscape?' In order to answer this Price-Jones reports back on her empirical research where she has looked specifically and closely at university library mission statements. To round off this theme Tatiana Sanches presents a case study from the University of Lisbon, where library strategic planning has been aligned and used as tool to manage risk as well as to deliver university wide goals and objectives.

Research support and scholarly communications

Delivering world class research and aspiring to be internationally renowned in the research arena are strategic aims which seem to be common to many universities. Universities are

responding to the changing research landscape and this is having a significant impact on the way academic libraries are responding to this strategically (Atkinson, 2016). Within this arena, Lang, Wilson, Wilson and Kirkpatrick provide a case study from the Victoria University of Wellington where the library is repositioning services and support in order to fully align itself with the university's ambitious research strategy. This has included addressing the expectations and responsibilities of library staff and developing specific skills, knowledge and relationships across the university in order to address the new research lifecycle. This new 21st century research environment stretches libraries to engage in areas such as research data management, support for researcher profiles, research impact and metrics, researcher development, Open Access support, as well as publishing and scholarly publications. Sarah Brown and colleagues from the University of Queensland (UQ) provide a further complementary case study which focuses on how, at UQ, the library has successfully impacted upon the university's research strategy. This has been achieved through leveraging the information within the institutional repository and establishing the repository function as the core of the library's research support service. Scholarly communications as a key strategic area for libraries is also the focus of Ruth Harrison's contribution, in which she tells how the scholarly communications team at Imperial College London has developed through a deliberate and strategic change in how library services are delivered. For Imperial College there has been a significant shift from liaison and subject expertise to relationship management and understanding the impact of scholarly communications.

Emerging themes

There are many other areas in which academic libraries are strategically engaging and influencing within their institutions. Examples include: greater involvement in student experience and student engagement (Gwyer, 2015); institution wide information management responsibilities (Dempsey 2015); shifting traditional subject liaison structures to relationship management focus (Hoodless & Pinfield, 2018), positioning through repurposing of library space and learning space (Blummer & Kenton, 2017); and increased involvement in the holistic research cycle, as illustrated above (Maxwell, 2016).

In addition to such pan-institution influencing, academic libraries can also position themselves through singular innovations or developments. These often have transformational outcomes and a longer lasting impact within the parent institution. Within this collection are several examples of such new and emerging sub-themes and in each case the visibility, and subsequently the position of the academic library is enhanced. For example, Blake and Gallimore write about how the 'Understanding Academics' library led User Experience project at the University of York has been influential in professional service areas across the institution understanding key motivations, frustrations and aspirations of academics, therefore enhancing the ways in which support is developed and delivered. Similarly, Tilley and Murphy share findings of an ethnographic research project carried out in order to understand the impact of relationships between academic staff and library staff in a devolved institutional school based structure

Further initiatives include Elizabeth Jardine's overview of the library leading the institutional knowledge strategy at LaGuardia Community College, and the case study from Stony Brook

University looking at the library as a forum for academic discussion within the institution. In this particular case study, Kasten describes how events programming implemented at her university library have allowed for the library to emerge as an important forum for interdisciplinary exchange on campus and for the dissemination of research. The emerging themes are rounded off with a case study exploring the non-discipline based approach to subject liaison and library partnership at Lafayette Community College. This particular model has proved highly successful and has enabled a strong visibility and positioning for the library within the college.

Leadership reflections

A recurring theme in the literature is that libraries should not just align reactively to the parent institution but should seek to provide positive leadership on campus going beyond the roles of service provider and support partner (Pinfield, Cox & Rutter, 2017). At the heart of the notion of the library leading across the institution is often the individual library leader and this is the closing theme of the collection. To introduce this is Roisin Gwyer's analysis of the leadership research commissioned by SCOUNL in the UK, which investigated the current position and profile of the library leadership within the organisation. This is followed by four leadership case studies, in which individuals reflect on their own leadership and the impact it has had on the position of the library and their respective institutional strategy. Tim Wales draws upon his leadership experiences at three separate (and quite different) academic institutions in the UK and uses a personal self-assessment of the challenges and opportunities posed by common and locational factors which have allowed for particular strategic outcomes through his leadership. Regina Everitt reflects upon her time as the Assistant Director of Operations at the Library Services department in the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). She uses the McKinsey 7S framework to reflect on the approach that she took to converge services within the library in order that the department was better placed to deliver and support the institutional strategic goals. Madeleine Lefebvre shares her story of transformation at Ryerson University Library in Toronto, where she has led library teams for many years and over that time has repositioned the library to achieve the university's academic mission. The final leadership reflection then comes from Nick Woolley and Jane Core, from the University of Northumbria. Woolley and Core describe how a seven year super-convergence of library services with other student facing services has strategically enhanced the student experience over the long term. This mini collection of leadership reflections demonstrates how long term vision and strategic positioning by individual library leaders can have a significant impact on the position of the library. These personal reflections demonstrate leadership of not just how the library operates, but also how university-wide approaches to teaching and learning, support service models and learning environments can be influenced by the library.

Final thoughts

Editing this collection has been a privilege and has allowed me to gain a real insight into the wealth of issues, barriers, challenges and successes within the theme of positioning the academic library within the institution. There is a real acknowledgement throughout the literature that libraries need to work hard at ensuring they are visible and hold a strong position within the academy. It is therefore heartening to read of all the excellent practices and innovations from libraries across the globe which are significantly impacting upon their institutions and their respective strategic missions. There is a rich variety of papers, case studies and reflections in this collection, and many major themes and topics are addressed. I am very grateful to all the authors who have contributed their work and I hope that those who are able to read the collection in its entirety will appreciate the

different ways in which library leaders and librarians throughout the world can positively effect and influence not only the position of the library within their institution, but the holistic work of the institution itself.

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