

# Inspired Ideas from the Sharp End

Five Innovations from Frontline Library Staff



## Introduction

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This year Taylor & Francis attended the 'Inspired Ideas at the Sharp End' event, where customer-facing library staff from around the UK presented a diverse set of initiatives they have spearheaded. The packed programme included presentations on integrating teams, breaking down barriers, supporting student welfare and reading for pleasure schemes.

At the time of producing this dedicated snapshot the world is in a state of flux, with COVID-19 causing huge disruption and unprecedented change. Some of the ideas included may prove challenging in a world that must still implement physical distancing, but nevertheless we hope that you will be inspired by the innovation, dedication and perseverance from the frontline library staff represented here.

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## Read at Leicester

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*Heena Karavadra and Hannah Congrave, University of Leicester*

**The Read at Leicester initiative was launched in 2016 by front-line library staff in a bid to promote sustained reading amongst students. There have been many activities to support Read at Leicester:**

Until 2018, all first year students, no matter which course they were taking, were gifted a book when they first started at the University. This aimed to encourage students to initiate conversations with their fellow peers about the book, and to encourage students to read for pleasure; this in turn aided their wellbeing and academic studies.

Lots of events were also tied into the Read at Leicester project, such as book clubs, social media, roundtable discussions, walking tours and author events. Library frontline staff were asked to discuss the events and wellbeing study tips more generally.

## FIVE INNOVATIONS FROM FRONTLINE LIBRARY STAFF

One highlight was Leicester's outreach work with Kendrew Barracks, based locally. A selection of soldiers pre-read some stories, and library staff visited the Barracks to discuss them. It was an eye-opening event with some difficult conversations, but both sides came away with a positive experience.

Due to budget restrictions, there was unfortunately no free book for students who arrived in 2019. But Leicester library staff still wanted to encourage reading for pleasure, so they made a programme of events throughout the academic year. This involved bringing students together across the naturally formed borders of student experience, i.e. to encourage people to mix beyond their halls and seminars.

A 'Welcome Tent' was raised on campus at the start of term. Inside was a games console to draw people in, and the library staff were on hand to talk about the Read at Leicester campaign and library services. The narratives in the video games brought students together, showcased library staff as fun and friendly in their positive engagements with students, and was a good staff development opportunity. A group of male students who met for the first time at the games console went on to become friends.

Inside the tent was also 'The never-ending scrolling story': an activity whereby each visitor wrote the line of a story on a flip chart. Numerous people across the university contributed, and everyone's voice had the opportunity to be heard.

As the library was no longer able to give away free copies of books, the library created the Read at Leicester Leisure Reading Collection to encourage students to continue to read for pleasure. After a successful panel discussion of *The Good Immigrant*, it was important that the Collection included underrepresented authors whose titles were added with the help of a small amount of alumni funding.

To engage students with the development of this collection, the Academic Librarian then approached the Associate Director of Resources with the idea of starting a campaign called Represent through which students recommend books representative of themselves and their experiences; this was successful in receiving further funding. Students and staff now recommend books to buy to develop this collection and to date the library has received over 150 requests. The institution's Women in STEM Society, who had not previously engaged with the library, also suggested books to the Represent campaign. This shows that a library can diversify its collections without the need for a big budget.

Future plans include a zine-making workshop, further funding successes, some research into the impact of the Leisure Reading and Represent campaigns, and more engagement opportunities.



Welcome tent with Mario Kart and The Neverending Scrolling Story



*The Good Immigrant* was part of the Read at Leicester Leisure Reading Collection

## Collaborative Medicine

*Jade Daniels and Samantha Greasley, University of Lincoln and University of Nottingham*

The **Lincoln Medical School**, a project born from a collaboration between the University of Lincoln and the University of Nottingham, aims to increase the recruitment of doctors to Lincolnshire and the surrounding areas. The new institution will deliver a Medicine BMBS and Medicine with a foundation year over 5 years.

And of course, this collaboration means that two universities with differing perspectives must bring together their library services. A 'Library Task and Finish Group' was formed, made up of a range of Library staff from both institutions. As well as taking stock of the collections and support services at both libraries, this working group has also carried out a GAP analysis around every aspect of the service, from fine policies to the maximum number titles which can be loaned at any one time.

A number of project groups were also formed, including a workflow group that is focused on customer services, an induction group and a copyright group. Collectively, these groups identified several workflows for all interactions that the students may have using the library, and how to tackle any issues that arose, such as streamlining email addresses and different library cards. And with over 700 meters of books being transferred to the new library, building space was to be considered too.

Unsurprisingly, this initiative has had a big impact on the Customer Services team. They needed to develop new processes to ensure consistency in student experience – and they have already created a Knowledge Base filled with vital information on procedures, which is checked and updated regularly. With Medical students sometimes being more demanding than other students, the Library team wanted to maintain their high customer satisfaction.

There are complexities surrounding online access and ICT too: for example, Library Assistants have seen an increased demand on operational services – so training is needed for staff and students. Everyone needed to familiarise themselves with Moodle, a different virtual learning environment, as well as with relevant academic databases and referencing tools. A bespoke library website was created and all the information updated.

There is still a lot to learn and more challenges ahead once the building is built and new staff recruited. The specialist Bio-Medical Library for the new School will be nestled within the medical building and is due for completion in Spring 2021.



Architect's rendering of the Lincoln Medical School



Medical books [Peakpx]

## The Human Library

*Mikella Richards and Mostafa Mahmoud, University of the West of England*

The Human Library is an international organisation and movement which started in Copenhagen, Denmark. It stemmed from the problems around stereotyping, social exclusion and stigma sometimes experienced by minorities and marginalised groups.

UWE Bristol prides itself on being inclusive and diverse, so the values around The Human Library were an excellent fit. Library staff have created a 'safe space' understanding for the library, promoting The Human Library as an open space for students to ask any question they want of 'the Human Books', for example, 'How has this experience shaped your life?' or 'What advice would you give to others?' The Human Library runs on the same day and time each week in a designated location, and each Human Book has 15-20 minutes with each 'reader'.

At each Human Library event a promotional banner is raised, sign in sheets are required (three slots per Human Book) and print guidelines and sample questions are available.

The first phase involved in organising this initiative was to recruit the Human Books, which involved reaching out to lecturers, relevant student societies, and staff networks. Library staff also put up relevant signage. The second phase is to support the Human Books by sending them an overview, guidelines, and sample questions. Before the event they receive follow-up emails and feature in promotional videos to help spread the word.

This initiative was not without its challenges, for example, there were issues around space in the library, which does not lend itself well to big events. The group study area worked well until it was exam time. Furthermore, engagement can be difficult as many people are busy. It is also very important to be careful and sensitive about the language used in promotions for The Human Library: some adverts' terminology was not always necessarily correct.

Future ideas for upcoming Human Library events are Students Who Are Carers and Mental Health Awareness.

### LGBT History Month: Human Library

We are recruiting 'Human Books' for our upcoming Human Library event on Wednesday 26 February.

If you are LGBTQ+ and would like answer questions to help others understand your lived experience, please get in touch with us by Wednesday 19 February.

Contact:  
Mikella.Richards@uwe.ac.uk



Human Library – LGBT History Month Promotion



## Embedding Welfare in the Library

*Susan Hill and Marion Lewis, University of Surrey*

Student wellbeing at the University of Surrey is core to the student experience. It is recognised now that student life is more challenging and complex than ever. As the library is a destination building and open 24/7 it was felt that a more active and proactive role could be taken by library staff in supporting student wellbeing, and the work of the Centre for Wellbeing which provides professional advice and support.

The Student Wellbeing Group formed, comprising Library Customer Services, Academic Skills and Development, and Faculty Engagement Librarians.

The purpose of the Student Wellbeing Group is to ensure that Library and Learning Services (LLS) spaces and services are designed and operate in such a way that they support student wellbeing and healthy study. And that LLS student welfare and wellbeing initiatives are fully integrated with other university initiatives and services.

The Centre for Wellbeing runs a Happiness Café on Wednesday afternoons in the library. The Café offers tea, coffee and wellbeing activities such as mindfulness colouring. The Student Wellbeing Group have also produced posters around the themes of beating exam stress, sponsored services by the University (e.g. Nightline), national campaigns (e.g. fighting hate crime) and mental health support.

The Group has supported other departments operating in the Library, such as Disability and Neurodiversity, purchasing SAD lamps for use by supported students and promoting the Mental Health Support Group.

The library also offers a self-help collection for any students or staff to use; this is displayed prominently in the library. Furthermore, a collaboration with Faculty Engagement Librarians on Student Curator projects means that the library can have open discussions with students on topics such as mental health and healthy learning. Each project has an accompanying reading list.

Inspiring messages on postcards are placed throughout the library building and on social media with the hashtag #wellnesswednesday. Other social media campaign hashtags include #LibraryChristmas (wishes and letters) and #lovemylibrary.

Latest initiatives from the Group include mental health first aid training for staff, noise cancelling headphones, library-branded water bottles and plants in colourful pots.

**'The library continues to fulfil its role as the heart of the university'**

– *SCONUL, The value of academic libraries* (2012)



Promotion for Happiness Cafe



Inspiring message outside the University of Surrey Library

## Feedback Reporting

*Philip Segall, Royal College of Nursing*

The Royal College of Nursing Library and Archive Service (LAS) has introduced a quarterly feedback report which combines the various types of feedback they collect within the LAS. The RCN is the largest trade union and professional body for nursing staff. They represent around 450,000 members, including registered nurses, nursing support workers, midwives and nursing students. The RCN LAS is an award-winning service and is committed to ongoing improvement through Customer Service Excellence accreditation and Archive Accreditation.

When it came to recording enquiries, the RCN LAS initially used spreadsheets. This had several drawbacks, so the RCN Library set about deciding the aims of a new system for recording enquiries and feedback - this needed to include web chat and email enquiries too, as well as a free text field to capture comments.

Survey Monkey was trialled first as a quick, free option. Staff were asked for comments on how they found using the tool and responded positively – the survey was accessible from anywhere and was quick and easy to complete – but they found it more difficult to use during busier shifts when they had more than one enquiry to record. Furthermore, retrieving the data was not straightforward.

Based on these comments received, the library switched to SmartSurvey, which became the basis for recording LAS enquiries and capturing feedback. This new tool proved quick to use, and able to record multiple enquiries. Retrieving and sorting data was a smoother process too. It also included the RCN logo. An option was added to allow staff to indicate whether the any feedback received was positive, negative or neutral.

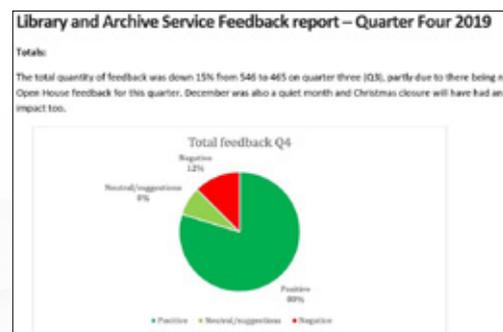
Data from the survey is exported to Excel and analysed on a quarterly basis. Feedback is separated into positive, neutral and negative. Useful quotes, unusual comments and suggestions are highlighted. Feedback is categorised by topic and results are tabulated into overall totals and totals for each category. The category headings are changeable and still evolving.

The reports created from this feedback are summarised and any resulting action points are raised at Customer Service meetings. Discussions take place about how the Library could improve or collaborate with other teams. After several months, key trends can be identified and addressed.

After the success of the Enquiries Survey, the basic format of the report was extended to include other areas of library user feedback. Attendees at RCN events and information literacy training sessions are asked to complete a feedback form. Visitors' books are used to record feedback too.



Survey results [Unsplash]



RCN Library and Archive Service Feedback Report slide

This was added, along with other, less formalised types of feedback; these include a tablet with different smiley faces displayed on it placed at the library exit, allowing users to record their mood and to type comments about suggested improvements. The Library also seeks feedback using a whiteboard in the library space. Furthermore, they have introduced a 'Lightning Survey' which is added via a line of text sent to enquirers at the end of emails and when closing web chats.

The actions which come out of the LAS Feedback Report are communicated through a noticeboard and online via a 'You said, we did...' section on the website. The reports have now also started to include progress on actions from previous reports. The feedback communicated via "You said, we did" is also linked to an online feedback and suggestions form which provides further feedback in an ongoing process.