**Learning how to teach unfamiliar subjects: developing training on writing for publication and presentation of research for health libraries**

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**Introduction and context**

Academic librarians with teaching responsibility have traditionally delivered training in discovering and organising information. Whether their focus was on finding resources through discovery tools and specialist databases, and managing the resources with referencing software (Baruzzi & Calcagno, 2015). However, in recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on supporting researchers through all stages of the research lifecycle (Covert-Vail & Collard, 2012). There are various factors driving this change, including the pressure on researchers to publish, and the resulting emphasis placed on metrics, open access publication, and research data management by funders and universities (Auckland, 2012; McClellan, Detmering, Martinez, & Johnson, 2017). Librarians would appear to be ideally placed to navigate the complexities of scholarly communication and research dissemination, particularly academic writing, publication, and other forms of presentation of research.

While there are certainly instances of librarians providing this kind of support (Delaney & Bates, 2018), a survey of the websites of 144 academic libraries in the United Kingdom suggested that these isolated cases are very much in the minority (Barker & Phillips, 2019). Of the libraries that do deliver training, 38 per cent offer writing training (N=38), 33 per cent offer no writing training of any kind (N=33), and the remaining 29 per cent (N=29) have unclear details as to the forms of training they offer. Of the libraries which offer writing training, 71 per cent (N=27) offer this solely to undergraduates in the context of coursework: essays, dissertations, and assessed presentations, rather than research publications (Barker & Phillips, 2019). This means, based on publicly available information, only nine libraries in the United Kingdom appear to deliver training on writing for publication or external presentation of research. When compared to the findings from other studies, these figures appear, if anything, high. For example, a study surveying librarians from US universities found that only 18 percent of 337 surveyed respondents offered training ‘about the publication process’ (Baruzzi & Calcagno, 2015). Much research into factors driving change in information literacy training within UK universities similarly focuses on academic skills in the context of undergraduates and their coursework, rather than researchers disseminating their work to a scholarly audience (Harris & Ashton, 2011; Howard, 2012). It is of course possible that training in this area is being delivered outside libraries: by scholarly communication or academic skills departments, by teaching staff within individual faculties, on an ad hoc basis, or that information about writing training is accessible only to individuals with an institutional login. However, based on publicly available information, it would appear that libraries delivering formal courses teaching academic writing with the aim of publication are rare in the United Kingdom.

One reason for this hesitancy may be that librarians lack direct experience of the publication process, and given the high importance placed on publication for researchers, librarians feel reluctance to involve themselves in an area with such profound implications for researchers’ future and ongoing career prospects. In 2010 Gannon-Leary and Bent conducted a survey asking librarians to suggest ways they felt they could support researchers through the publication process. Their findings suggested that librarians were hesitant to involve themselves beyond offering advice about navigating journal metrics and impact factors (Gannon-Leary & Bent, 2010). Likewise, a study based on interviews with focus groups of Swedish academic librarians revealed a willingness to get involved with providing advice about open access, copyright, and journal metrics, but a reluctance to provide training or support in writing for publication that went beyond these areas (Hansson & Johannesson, 2013). At the same time, there has been a proliferation of articles, opinion pieces, and editorials within library/information science publications questioning whether librarians are best placed to educate on the dissemination of research (Bradley, 2018), whether non-librarians with research experience (perhaps operating from a scholarly communication department or similar) are driving librarians out of research support (Sewell, 2019), or whether current librarianship degrees provide librarians with the skills required to support researchers in writing for publication (Sewell & Kingsley, 2016, 2017).

However, there are benefits to moving into this area, as long as steps are taken to ensure librarians have built up their skills and confidence in order to teach researchers effective ways to disseminate their work. This article represents a case study of the process by which the teaching team of an academic library within the University of Cambridge developed the skills necessary to teach courses on writing for publication, reflective writing, and creating and presenting conference posters as well as the impact of these courses, and proposed next steps.

The two authors of this article are assistant librarians with responsibility for research support, teaching, and learning at the University of Cambridge Medical Library. The Medical Library serves University of Cambridge students, researchers, and teaching staff, and the NHS in the East of England, principally Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Both librarians were recruited for the newly-created teaching/research support posts in early 2015, inheriting a training curriculum from a colleague no longer responsible for this area of library services.

The two authors both had different routes into librarianship. The first author followed a conventional path into health and academic librarianship, with an undergraduate degree in zoology followed by a year as a SCONUL trainee at the National Library of Wales. After this, she completed a Master’s degree in information and library studies at Aberystwyth University. Since then she has worked in either academic or health libraries.

The second author’s path into librarianship has been slightly less traditional, and she does not have a degree in library or information science. She entered librarianship as a career change following a PhD in medieval Irish literature, which provided relevant experience in teaching university students. Both librarians have achieved chartered membership of CILIP, and the second author also has a teaching qualification.

As assistant librarians the pair are responsible for delivering the library’s training programme, which consists of a mixture of scheduled group training sessions (open to any current Medical Library users, regardless of stage of studies, job role, or institutional affiliation), and ad hoc one-to-one research or academic skills support. The library also offers bespoke training to groups of people and departments (either from the University or the hospital) when requested.

The training programme inherited stuck very much to the conventional areas of library support for university studies and research: resource discovery (in the form of literature searching techniques), and information management (in the form of instruction in the use of reference management software). There was an expectation that this existing training be expanded to cover other areas of the research lifecycle – principally those concerned with the dissemination of research outputs. However, moving into this area represented a significant leap into the unknown – the conventions of scholarly publishing, particularly within the sciences, being an unfamiliar subject for both librarians.

**Methods**

The two authors used a range of techniques to develop teaching material for the new courses. In some instances, it was possible to draw on the librarians’ own experiences. For example, reflective writing is fundamental to personal and professional development for information professionals within the United Kingdom, and is a requirement for Chartership with CILIP, the professional body, and Fellowship of Advance HE (AdvanceHE, 2019; CILIP, 2019). The teaching material for this subject, therefore, involved some adaptation to make it appropriate for students and staff in a healthcare context, but was essentially drawn from models of reflective writing that both librarians had utilised when working towards professional accreditation. Likewise, the first author’s undergraduate science studies meant she had some familiarity with the structure of scientific writing, while the second author had experience of the publication process from her PhD studies. Both librarians therefore mined their respective experiences when developing the library’s writing for publication course.

The librarians were aware of colleagues working elsewhere within the University of Cambridge, or in other institutions, who had delivered similar training courses, and these individuals were contacted in order to make use of their expertise and experiences. The Medical Library’s reflective writing course was adapted from a course developed by a colleague within the University of Cambridge (Sewell, 2017), while the course on creating conference posters was developed in consultation with a librarian at another health library within the NHS, who had experience delivering similar material (West Suffolk Library and Information Centre, 2016). It was helpful to work with these colleagues when developing material for the Medical Library, as they were able not only to provide guidance regarding content and structure, but also advice regarding pitfalls to avoid. The fact that colleagues working in comparable institutions had run courses along similar lines also provided something of an evidence base that these courses were needed by library users, and would be a welcome addition to the Medical Library’s suite of training.

The end result was three new courses, all with a focus on the dissemination stage of the research life cycle – writing for publication, reflective writing, and creating conference posters – with techniques in place to develop new courses in the future,. These courses are open to any attendees from the University of Cambridge, and the NHS in the East of England region, and are generally attended by participants from both institutions. It was important that the existing courses not remain static – the changing academic publishing landscape necessitated constant adaptation of course materials. These adaptations included the incorporation of new resources and advice to attendees,

**Discussion**

Total attendees at these three courses in 2019 numbered 137, with 96 of these coming from the University of Cambridge, and the remaining 41 from the NHS. Capacity per session is 10 as this the capacity in the library’s IT suite used for training The training sessions on creating conference posters and writing for publication have proved to be the most popular offered by the Medical Library, and are almost always fully booked. On occasions there have been long waiting lists necessitating extra sessions to be scheduled to cope with demand. This would suggest that training on these subjects was, and is needed. Post-session course evaluation feedback is largely positive, although the occasional piece of critical feedback has been used to adapt the course material. For example, feedback requesting the inclusion of examples of good quality conference posters led to the incorporation of this content into the existing training material, highlighting downloadable slide templates (Purrington, 2019). A project to create an online repository of high quality examples of conference posters is ongoing, and is among the next steps to be taken in developing this research dissemination training material. Attendees at the writing for publication course have also pointed out relevant writing resources they use, and these have been incorporated into the training material.

As the Medical Library is one of the few places offering training of this nature within both the University of Cambridge and the East of England NHS region, the attendees at this training come from a number of different departments across the University of Cambridge and NHS, not only the Clinical School. Their research encompasses a variety of disciplines and approaches. However, as they are generally attending the courses with the same aims (to get published in a peer-reviewed academic journal in their field, or have their poster make a good impression at an academic conference), it has not been necessary to separate attendees on either an institutional or sub-disciplinary basis. Indeed, the wide range of attendees has been one of the courses’ strengths, as they have brought into contact researchers who would not otherwise have been aware of each other’s work. There have been occasions when the training has served as a networking event for attendees, allowing them to connect with researchers working on similar topics in different departments. This has even led to research collaboration among attendees (Barker & Phillips, 2019).

These have also facilitated collaboration with colleagues in other libraries, who were keen to develop similar training for their own users. As well as forging stronger relationships between colleagues in other institutions, this indicates that research dissemination is an area where information professionals are looking to improve their training provision. These collaborative relationships continue to develop, enabling both the Medical Library and libraries in other institutions to share knowledge and develop the information literacy training provision they offer.

**Conclusion**

In the Medical Library the expansion of the training offer is an ongoing process. Currently in development are courses about writing a protocol for a systematic review, and literature searching for the literature review component of first-year PhD reports. These two new courses are likely to be followed by a course on writing medical guidelines. As the research environment changes the training and support that is offered must continue to adapt and develop to keep up with these changes. These sessions have shown that there is demand for training in various types of writing for publication, and delivering this training has meant the library has increased its visibility in research support. The authors’ advice to other librarians wishing to expand their training offer into these areas is to draw on their own experiences, and the expertise of colleagues as much as possible. A lack of direct experience in the subjects being taught does not mean a lack of relevant knowledge.

These sessions have shown that there is demand for further training and support in writing for publication and the research cycle. The library is in a position to be able to add to its suite of training and increase its visbility in research support.

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