

Impact of the Royal Society of Medicine Library Review



Background: the Royal Society of Medicine and its Library

The Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) is "an independent educational organisation for doctors, dentists, scientists and others involved in medicine and health care"

- Its origins date back to the 18th century, it received its royal charter in 1834
- An organised library has served the RSM and its predecessor since 1805
- The RSM and its library have been in their purpose built, central London location since 1912
- Key library stats. include:
 - 110,000 books
 - 500,000 journal volumes
 - 4,000 (unique visits) Members per week access their e-collection of books, journals and databases.
 - 19.5 fte staff

Background: why the review

- Concerns about sustainability of supporting the library
 - £1.2 million per year annual budget
 - Large physical footprint
- RSM council agreed that a Library Services Review Group (LSRG) should be created to:

"Review in depth all aspects of library services, including the range of services provided, usage, cost,..funding model, income generation, staffing space issues...look at the changing trends in medical library usage and provision of library services in general..."

The Review: participants

- Dr John Scadding (Vice President, Chair LSRG)

Dr Bill Cattell (Honorary Librarian)

- Dr Guy Wood-Gush (Member of Council)
- Professor John Betteridge (Associate Dean; Dean since October 2011)
- Mr Nigel Perks (Chair, Academic Board)
- Miss Kaji Sritharan (immediate past Chair, Trainees Committee)
- Mr Wayne Sime (Director of Library Services)
- Mr Mark Johnstone (Finance Director)
- **Mr Ray Phillips (Head of Information Service, King's Fund; former Chair of London Health Libraries Strategy and Development Group, 2005-2006)**
- Mr Richard Osborn (Strategic Library Services Development Manager, NHS London; London SHAs Strategic Lead for e-Learning; Programme Lead, NHS England e-Learning Repository)
- Laishan Yip (in attendance, providing administrative support)

The Review Begins: key questions

- 1) Strategic objectives
- 2) Income generation
- 3) Partnerships
- 4) Funding
- 5) Digitisation
- 6) Closer integration with key RSM activities
- 7) Off-site storage
- 8) Fund raising
- 9) Information literacy
- 10) User data
- 11) Electronic archiving

Focus: Closer integration with key RSM academic activities

- Desired objective:
 - Ensuring RSM Library adds value to core RSM activities
- Activities:
 - Production of bibliographies to support of the 430-odd academic meetings
 - Provide support for RSM's 'Global Health' initiative, e.g. by purchasing a global health database
 - Provide dedicated support for new RSM press publication ventures
 - Support the RSM Medical Innovations programme, e.g. by: providing bibliographies for meetings; developing a Medical Innovations blog...
- Recommendations:
 - Continue with activities such as those above
 - Forge even closer working relationships with the relevant departments

Focus: Partnerships

- Proposal:

- To form an alliance of UK based organisations owning medical libraries and form a new charity ... Benefits might include:
 - Scale benefits which could enable Library services to become more attractive for funders...
 - Economies of scale in the operation of library services
 - Greater purchasing power with publishers and database owner

- Discussion:

Several potential issues were identified, including:

- Finding a large enough number of suitable library partners willing to engage in such a scheme, to make it viable, could be a sticking point
- Perceived loss of identity and autonomy could be a disincentive for some potential collaborators

Potential 'selling points include:

- Possible cost savings through reduced duplication of administration and journal purchase (subject to careful negotiation with publishers!). The range of services available to members would increase.

- Recommendations:

- The principal characteristics of a scheme of Library partnering [along the general lines described in the report] should be developed and refined, in discussion with potential partners, as soon as possible.

Focus: Public benefit

- Issue:

- Organisations with charity status must be able to demonstrate, explicitly, that their aims are for public benefit. How does RSM library support public benefit?
- A discussion between the Chair of LSRG and the CEO of Directory for Social Change took place in June 2011; the CEO made several key points including
 - The role of the RSM, in providing educational opportunities to a wide range of health professionals, with the aim of enabling them to improve the practice of medicine to the benefit of patients, clearly demonstrates (indirect) public benefit.
 - The RSM's programme of involvement of patients and the public, through the 'Medicine and Me' meetings demonstrates direct public benefit. Plans for Library Services to develop, jointly with the Academic Department, a dedicated public resource based on these meetings, will increase the RSM's direct public benefit
 - Loss of stock / services in the Library could result in reduced capacity to deliver public benefit from Library Services

- Conclusion:

- The LSRG addressed this matter in depth and were able to satisfy themselves (and subsequently Council of the RSM) that public benefit was being delivered. However, the LSRG recognised the need to do more by way of direct public benefit (hence the exhibitions, open to the public; and the development of an accessible public resource based on the Medicine and Me meetings).

General Outcome and Impact

- No cuts to the library space, staff, or budget
- Incorporation of the report's main recommendations into the new Library Services 5-year strategy to run from 2013 to 2017
- Significant new investment in electronic resources, e.g. their e-journal collection for next year will be increasing by around 650 titles
- LSRG alumni not complacent, however. Realise delivery of objectives and vigilance around new opportunities/threats is key

What I learned

- Positive involvement of stakeholders, users (i.e. a 'customer-led approach') and knowledgeable outsiders is key:
 - very extensive input from members / library users employed to help examine what the library was doing, and to guide thinking about developments in the service
- Dexterous chairing – and good administrative support - makes a difference
- Library reviews, done well, need not be feared: they can be a spur to creative growth rather than a prelude to oblivion

Further Reading and Contacts

- Read the full report:
https://www.rsm.ac.uk/librar/strategy/library_report.pdf
- Ask further questions: contact Wayne Sime, Director of Library Services, RSM - wayne.sime@rsm.ac.uk
- Contact Ray Phillips, Independent Information Professional - raygood7@gmail.com