

CAPE HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARY NETWORK (CHELiN)

LIBRARY DIRECTORS COVID-19 SURVEY

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1. BACKGROUND

The impact of the national lockdown has precipitated the introduction of online/remote teaching and learning by universities and academic libraries have migrated to virtual services in support of the continued teaching, learning and research endeavours. This survey provides an overview of the effect on budgets, levels of collaboration and support during this time across the four universities of the Western Cape.

The survey was distributed online to the Library Directors at: Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch and University of the Western Cape using Google Forms. Responses were received from all the universities.

2. MANAGEMENT

2.1 Focus

The survey sought to understand how the libraries had responded to issues of management, staffing and services. The respondents provided a range of responses to the three management categories.

2.1.1 Management

The directors indicated that in their various environments strategies were developed to address the new challenges through revised staffing work plans, engaging on best strategies to provide online/virtual services and developing Business Continuity Plans which were based on the Emergency Protocols as determined and provided by central Government. The library directors also indicated that they dealt with issues of resources –reallocation, staffing management and strengthened their communication messages especially with regard to the COVID19 protocols and the delivery of online services.

2.1.2 Staff

In the spheres of staffing, the immediate responses of the libraries were to ensure that staff had enough resources to work from home, providing training to ensure that they are able to cope with the challenges of working from home, building capacity for them to meet the requirements of providing services virtually as well as providing professional and psychological support to staff.

2.1.3 Services

With regard to service, the focus was on partnering and collaborating with other universities to enhance online services, online support, website content, activating online facilities, providing easy access to resources, ensuring staff provide maximum online support to users, supporting physical access to libraries when it became possible and providing a virtual library for continued support for teaching, learning and research.

2.2 Institutional support

The library directors indicated they received some level of support from institutional management. Support ranged from the university providing equipment and data to staff, communication protocols and business and risk management plans to adjustment strategies based on changes in protocols as determined by central Government.

2.3 Relationships with other academic support services

The library directors indicated that relationships with academic support services at the institution were either developed or strengthened, with all agreeing that the relationship with Teaching and Learning divisions in their university was strengthened.

2.4 Developing further partnered services

Plans to further develop relationships with other academic support services include: online information literacy courses, partnering with services such as Writing Centre and Student Support services to provide a more holistic learning experience, embedding the library into online student spaces and Learner Management Systems, targeted library services, virtual programmes for teaching and research, training and skills development and templates for NRF rating process. One library director indicated that strategic funding for the acquisition of Leganto (course list management system from ExLibris) for 3 years was approved.

2.5 Comments on approaches to managing the national lockdown effects on the library

In their comments on approaches to managing the effects of the national lockdown on the library, the library directors indicated that the success of the virtual library service was premised on a team-based integrated approach for business continuity, the importance of review and redefinition as new ways of working were explored, the ability and flexibility in adapting to a changing world of work by challenging traditional thinking and ways of "doing", reviewing systemic staff development to incorporate all categories of staff for effective online work plans and ensuring that staff were supported throughout and take personal interest in their problems. It was further stated that at the beginning of the lockdown, the need for physical access to libraries and material was great, but this was addressed once access the libraries with permits was allowed. Some staff were not able to work from home at all which was difficult to manage.

3. STRATEGIC ISSUES

3.1 Future disruption of physical library services a threat

In response to the question as to whether disruption of library services was seen as a threat, all library directors agreed that it was not a threat, but rather an opportunity to build digital services, respond to issues of online learning, demonstrate the web-based environment of the library and preparedness of the libraries to move seamlessly to virtual services. A large demand for library resources and services was identified; as well as a demand for physical library space.

3.2 Dealing with future disruptions to physical library services

Library directors recognised a changing world of work paradigm, with two library directors indicating they would be strengthening their virtual library service and another indicating their library is strategizing on going fully digital. They further indicated they would be putting the following in place to combat future disruption of library services: improved workflows to source and access materials in alternate formats (including e-text books), acquiring and utilising innovative tools to enhance and/or complement Teaching & Learning, equipping staff with the necessary devices and technical skills to enhance their mobility and ensure they can work effectively from home, increase home delivery of physical books, digitise more material in special collections and reviewing staff development and reskilling plans.

3.3 Plans to continue offering and improving online support

All the library directors indicated their libraries would continue and improve online support, with two indicating such support would be enhanced and one indicating it would be the new normal. Individual libraries noted that online training would be continued, better ICT support would be adopted and that a focus would be placed on OA material.

4. BUDGETS

4.1 Library budget 2021

Each library director indicated how library budgets for 2021 would be affected as a result of COVID19. Two directors expected cuts with one indicating that the library resource budget would not be affected, but operational and capital budgets would be affected and another expecting a 5-10% cut. One library director indicates that there would be no increase in budget, but fluctuating interest rates and the VAT increase would be covered and finally one library director expects a small increase in budget.

4.2. Open Access, Open Education Resources, Open Textbooks

Mixed responses were received as to how budget restraints would influence Open Access, Open Educational Resources and Open Textbooks acquisition. One library director indicated that there would be no change, while another indicated that a stable IT infrastructure and high level of resource input may influence the ability to fully access these resources. Two library directors indicated that they are already looking at these resources, one incorporating them into existing offerings and the other as part of library strategy with staff were already being trained in support. One library director indicated there was an academic shift in mind-set with regards to OERs and that discussion was underway with Senate for the provision of e-textbooks.

5. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The following set of questions inquired after the ability and support of staff working from home as well as their well-being and professional development during the lockdown period.

5.1 Working from home

Two library directors indicated that staff working from home received support with regard to devices, dongles and data packages and one indicated that web-based campus systems were available for staff. While one library director indicated that a majority of its staff were able to work from home, another indicated that 60-70% of staff were able to do so. One library director indicated that limited resources were provided for staff who have to be physically on campus in order to perform their duties. Another stated that accountability, responsibility and self-leadership were being encouraged from staff and that there was a psychological shift in work from home scenarios.

5.2 Checking in with line managers

In response to the question on staff checking in with line managers, one library director indicated that this took place on a daily basis, two indicated weekly and another indicated that it depended on project or team structures.

5.3 Leave arrangements

With regard to leave arrangements two library directors indicated that institution leave policy was followed while one indicated that 14 days of free leave was granted to all staff along with flexible leave cycle extensions. One library director indicated that two options were in place, one for those who could do more than 20% of their work from home and another for those who could not work from home and needed to take 5 annual leave days a month.

5.4 Professional development around coping with work-from-home challenges

All library directors indicated that staff were encouraged to attend webinars and virtual services to assist them with dealing with the COVID19 health issues and coping mechanisms. These were largely

provided by the universities. One university indicated that staff were also provided with the necessary coping skills for working from home.

5.5 Supporting health and mental well-being of staff

All library directors indicated that they were either supporting health and mental well-being in cooperation with the university or that the support was being provided at institutional level via webinars and counselling with the library informing staff of the available options. Two library directors indicated they organised group training sessions for their staff. One library director indicated that library management staff had regular meetings and communication and one indicated that library managers have been equipped with basic counselling skills and that sessions are being scheduled to assist staff with re-entering the workplace.

5.6 Changes in staff compliment during lockdown

In response to the question around changes in staffing during lockdown, e.g. reallocation of duties, resignations, etc. two library directors indicated that some reallocation of duties had taken place and one indicated no changes were made. While one library director highlighted the need to revisit job descriptions, another indicated that vacancies have been filled and induction happened virtually. Two institutions experienced resignations during this period.

6. REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS

6.1 CHELiN support

The responses to three questions covering regional (CHELiN) support showed that most library directors felt that there was little support or cooperation among the institutions except for Inter-Library loans and the Directors' meetings. One library director indicated that the CHELiN operation plan was being continued.

Suggestions for closer cooperation with CHELiN colleagues included: re-looking at the existing model, coming up with better ideas which are more responsive to the new normal, targeted webinars, better collaboration for resource sharing, shared platforms, access to online services, and collection development.

6.2 Support from the CHEC Board

Suggestions on how the CHEC Board can support a strengthening of university libraries included: support for building regional online library facilities open to all students of the region, push for OA statements to central Government, lifting of copyright restrictions (Bill), host staff webinars and sharing sessions and explore areas of synergy for regional work, e.g. library leadership development and student experience.

7. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS / PARTNERSHIPS

Library directors were asked how they visualised future national collaborations/partnerships with academic and research libraries emerging as a result of COVID19 and the nature of international collaborations /partnerships likely to emerge. One library director suggested it was too early to determine developments.

7.1 National Collaborations/Partnerships

Future national collaborations and/or partnerships emerging due to COVID19 were seen to include: joint online training programmes, sharing of information resources, professional advice and sharing

of experiences, OA initiatives, RDM, staff development and competency building, support for new systems and resources, sharing of best practice, broadening of services, collective planning and problem-solving and use of online collaboration techniques.

7.2 International Collaborations/Partnerships

At an international level, the library directors suggested the following emerging collaborations or partnerships: joint online training programmes, sharing of information resources, professional advice and sharing of experiences, sharing of experiences and ideas, working together for research purposes, collective planning and problem-solving and use of online collaboration techniques.

8. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The library directors highlighted a number of successes, including: new working scenarios having awakened a renewed sense of trust in staff, energy for professional development and continuous improvement (strong learning culture), seamless migration to a virtual library service; agility of the library to adapt so quickly, significant increase in participation of webinars and training opportunities, many staff learnt new skills; increased visibility of the libraries as a partner in the remote teaching and learning environment, strong cohesion and internal collaboration; successful implementation of new tools and effective use of library resources.

The following challenges were noted: connectivity, utilisation of all staff and staff's anxieties and fear.

9. EFFECTS OF THE LOCKDOWN ON FUTURE LIBRARY DEVELOPMENTS AND STAFFING

While one library indicated it was too soon to comment as these will be determined by the direction taken by the university, the others provided a number of areas they felt were open to change or development. These can be divided into three broad categories:

9.1 Strategy

The library directors listed a number of strategic focus areas to be addressed, including: re-looking at existing library strategies and organograms, adoption of Library ICT for best service provision and support, spatial planning and analysis of the library statistics to better inform planning and development of the future library, metrics and target approaches to add value in the university, reviewing the risk and business continuity plans to ensure effective utilisation of all categories of staff, increasing the virtual footprint of the library; cognition of essential sustained services and layers of innovation to be adaptive and responsive, awareness of infrastructure and staff strengths, communication and transparency and adding value to research systems and resource development for a digital university.

9.2 Staff

The library directors felt that COVID19 has prompted some review staff competencies, the importance of leadership and diffused leadership across the library, the importance of differentiation of expertise and transfer of skills and expertise and the need for staff to be able to navigate different roles and spaces.

9.3 Student support

With a view to support of Teaching and Learning better digital training opportunities, digital and video production systems and platforms, Open Access and online access to resources, improving the

student learning experience and digital literacies frameworks and their adoption into the online platform were seen as areas for development.

10. CONCLUSION

While library directors had to develop strategies and implement changes to enable the library to continue providing services during the COVID19 pandemic, staff adapted to working from home and developed their skills enabling them to support teaching and learning activities using online platforms and the virtual library environment. However, these developments are seen as largely positive, providing a platform for future planning and increased online support.