 **Customer Services Group UK**

 **Annual Conference 2022**

**Recruit, Develop, Thrive: staffing in library customer services**

 Conference Speakers & Abstracts

**STUDENT CONNECT - A step change in library and university customer service culture at Staffordshire University**

**Paul Mahoney, Head of Library and Learning Services, (****paul.mahoney@staffs.ac.uk****) and Kirstie Brookes, Customer Experience Manager (kirstie.brookes@staffs.ac.uk)** **University of Staffordshire**

During a full library service re-design completed in March 2021, ‘digital on demand’ was fully adopted as a principle to improve the way library and wider university customer services is delivered. Until 2021, the customer support culture in the library and the central university centred around ‘information gatekeepers’ being physically available at set times at set locations on campus.

The new approach involved positioning the University’s digital assistant app ‘Beacon’ as the first port of call for combined library and front-line customer service enquiries. This includes AI generated responses to FAQs and self-serve access to services developed with professional and academic departments. A new combined library and front-line customer service team ‘Student Connect’ was formed to promote and support this digitally driven approach alongside the servicing of the university library spaces.

By putting this personalised assistance service in the hands of students for access when and where they want, it has helped to flip the culture of reliance on information imparted by staff. This improved and personalised service is also encouraging students to be advocates for Student Connect and Beacon, further supporting the mobilisation of knowledge.

**Recruiting tomorrow’s leaders today: Teesside’s approach to succession planning**

**Jackie Oliver, Assistant Director (Learning, Teaching & Research), Student & Library Services, Teesside University (****j.oliver@tees.ac.uk****)**

Three quarters of our existing Customer Services Assistant pool and immediate supervisory tier are over 50. This presents challenges in terms of outdated skills, experience and energy and willingness to develop. As colleagues retire, it left gaps in an already pressured service and very little talent to nurture for future roles. We have struggled to attract applicants to our front facing roles and had to review our approach to recruitment and progression.

We increased our pool of student workers and recognised that this was a talent pool we could draw on. We have already successfully recruited some former student workers into our front of house team, bringing a youthful perspective to our service offer as well as cultural diversity to our wider team. We are now looking to nurture that talent and support them to develop into the supervisors and managers of the future.

We also work closely with our Careers and Employability colleagues to tap directly into the graduate market to promote our department as an employment destination of choice e.g., offering internships and work experience opportunities that we hadn’t really explored before. We have seen an increase in applications to our posts as a result.

**Accessible recruitment at the University of Westminster**

**Helen Rimmer, Head of Library and Archives Service (****H.Rimmer@westminster.ac.uk****) and Deepa Rathod, Customer Services Supervisor (****D.Rathod1@westminster.ac.uk)****, University of Westminster**

This presentation will show how, along with the rest of the University of Westminster Library and Archives Service, the Customer Service Team have built on our work reviewing job descriptions to make them inclusive and now have removed barriers in our interview processes.

Our approach was in line with the University’s EDI principles -

1. Creating an inclusive culture which enables people to reach their full potential
2. Promoting equality of opportunity and furthering social inclusion and mobility, within and beyond the university
3. Placing diversity, inclusion and equality of opportunity at the core of how we engage with applicants.

This presentation will explain how we created a Recruitment Welcome Pack, gave interview questions in advance, included a statement on the adverts stating that we welcome candidates from neurodiverse backgrounds and underrepresented minority groups. We also stated that we are committed to inclusive hiring practices. We will share feedback from both panel members and candidates on how the process has worked for candidates along with how we have developed it to suit Customer Service roles.

We took inspiration from Employee Autism and a member of our team who came through the programme to successfully get a permanent role within the Customer Service team, but it has improved the inclusivity of the process for all candidates from all backgrounds.

**Students supporting students: creating recruitment opportunities within the library customer services team**

**Rosie Napier (****R.T.Napier@salford.ac.uk****)** **and Sara Wadee (****S.Wadee@salford.ac.uk****), Customer Services Team Leaders, The Library, University of Salford**

One of the main strategic goals at the University of Salford is Enabling Student Success (ESS), with one strand of this focusing on academic success and student employability. Customer Services were tasked with developing and piloting a student recruitment drive to provide viable and supportive work opportunities within our team.

We created six regular roles for students which were designed to be flexible and take into account individual academic milestones (for example, term dates and assignment deadlines). We were successful in appointing to the roles by using innovative recruitment methods, such as asking our existing customer services team to speak about and promote opportunities directly to library users.

Having reviewed the success of the trial, we plan to run a similar programme again at regular intervals throughout the academic year to maximise available opportunities. We will be working with our Careers service to ensure that recruits are gaining useful employment skills which can be translated to future roles, and plan to build in regular development reviews to give each student an opportunity to demonstrate and reflect on their learning.

**Have you ever thought about working in a Library? - attracting diverse candidates to Customer Service roles**

**Mark Laws, Customer Service Coordinator, University of Manchester Library (****mark.laws@manchester.ac.uk****)**

In 2021 the UML Customer Services team looked to employ 20+ staff. Recruitment creates the foundation of a diverse and inclusive team, so it was important to attract a broad range of candidates. This can be challenging, especially from people with no previous library experience but who do have customer service skills.

We reviewed our approach to recruitment and changed how we advertised the role and organised a series of Open Days. These sessions gave prospective candidates the opportunity to learn about available roles, see the Library spaces and meet the team. We wanted to break down any perceived barriers that people may have and share information that would give them useful context for their application.

Through surveying attendees, we know people who attended were from a broader age range and there were more people from the LGBTQIA+ community. We feel the changes we made have been successful, but there is still work to do. We are reviewing our content and looking for ways to make the Open Information Sessions even more effective in future.

**Value based recruitment for professions allied to medicine and its transferability**

**Dr Julia H Wood, Nurse consultant in practice improvement and dementia care (****julia.wood@rocketmail.com****)**

The Department of Health mandated Value Based Recruitment (VBR) for all students on NHS funded healthcare programmes & new NHS employees from 2014, including nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, paramedic science etc., although not medicine. This was prompted by the findings of the Mid-Staffordshire Inquiry which found a culture failing to put the patient first and tolerating poor standards.

VBR aims to select students and new employees whose values align with those of the NHS Constitution; Commitment to quality of care, Compassion, Improving lives, Everyone counts, Working together for patients, Respect and dignity. VBR involves Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs), Situational Judgement Tests (SJTs) plus group discussions and aptitude tests alongside academic achievement and experience.

In this session I will briefly discuss:

* What are the desirable values to measure?
* Do the MMIs & SJTs measure these values?
* Does it predict behaviour?
* Are values consistent over time?
* Do good people do good things and bad people do bad things or is it just about the situation?

This will be illustrated by examples of MMIs & SJTs and consideration of whether these may be transferable to environments outside health & social care.

**Engendering a culture of service innovation, improvement and empowerment within Library Customer Support**

**Teresa Jordan, Head of Service Delivery (****t.jordan@bham.ac.uk****) and Andrea Kellett, Customer Services Manager (a.l.kellett@bham.ac.uk), University of Birmingham**

At a time when Library Services are experiencing changing demand here at The University of Birmingham we have developed an approach to change that focuses on involving front line staff in service improvement and innovation. We will share with you both the successes and challenges of engendering a culture of staff empowerment, trust building, and service improvement within a large frontline team. We will outline the tools and techniques that we have utilised and talk through our philosophy and expectations.

The presentation will focus upon:

* How we engaged staff in the improvement process and thereby worked through change collaboratively.
* How we established a system of effective Service Improvement working groups.
* The golden thread from strategic objectives to frontline practice.
* Taking the rough with the smooth.
* The outcomes of this work: influencing practice: Good to Excellent.

You will hear from those who led and supported the work alongside those from the frontline who will share their experiences of being part of the journey. Evidence of the success of our approach will be presented, drawn not only from staff and student satisfaction surveys and feedback in relation to the improved service we now provide, but also in terms of the increased level of professional development and engagement of our team which has resulted in staff being confident to seek new roles and opportunities within our team and beyond.

**As you like it … empowering colleagues to flex and create their own rotas**

**Jade Gilmore, Student Hub Manager (****J.Gilmore@westminster.ac.uk****) and Indu Kuttan, Customer Experience Manager (****I.Kuttan@westminster.ac.uk****), University of Westminster**

The University of Westminster Library and Archives service has expanded to include all first line student customer service for the University both physical and virtual. This has presented an opportunity to explore new ways of working and a challenge in preserving existing flexible working.

We empowered a group of colleagues from across the Customer Service team to explore how to run a service within the parameters which had been agreed by the overarching Student Centre project board, most of whom were not involved in day to day running of services. Some of the points the group had to work out -

* To analyse the needs of the new student centres and create a rota plan accordingly
* To think of creative ways to ensure a flexible rota
* To identify any other areas for flexibility or working from home
* To create fair and equitable policies for the service.
* Review minimum staffing and leave embargoes

We will present how the group worked with differing viewpoints and experiences to create policies that directed how the teams would work. It will show how empowering the colleagues affected by the rotas to create them and the policies around them led to improved balance in the teams but will also cover the areas of difficulty.

**Empowering front line staff to support students’ wellbeing**

**Fiona Pringle, Evening Services Supervisor, University Libraries & Museums, University of St Andrews (fcp4@st-andrews.ac.uk)**

During this post Covid period attitudes have changed. We have all learned a little more about the importance of supporting each other. We have made positive changes within our setting to make things “a wee bit better”.

After some discussion surrounding the challenges and accomplishments of the building operations post-COVID we are now in the process of providing mental health awareness training to our library attendants. As a team we feel this is a massively important aspect of our skills set that is missing. We all wish to be a strong reliable team ready for anything but for those of us unfamiliar with mental health crises it can be a daunting prospect to offer aid to a service user in distress.

A few of our library attendants also expressed concern about making any fragile situation worse by doing or saying the wrong thing. With all of this in mind the decision has been taken to provide a basic level of training for our attendants. Coordinating with Student Wellbeing Mental Health First Aid Training has started to support the Library Attendants. Supported by real world examples provided by the front-line staff, the training is held by people qualified to deal with a student in a mental health crisis. It will empower the front line staff to deal with the escalating cases coming into libraries and help triage before someone fully trained can arrive on scene. This is in line with the proactive stance that we take in the library and genuine connections we have with our students.

**Sally Earney from Cardiff University will introduce our final session: “a discussion on hybrid working in customer services” with a summary of practices and the views and experiences of staff within their Customer Services Management Team**.

**Sally Earney, Library Customer Services Manager, Cardiff University.** **earneys@cardiff.ac.uk**