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**Inspired Ideas from the Front End**

**25 March 2021**

**Outputs from the Breakout Discussion Groups**

**Lessons Learnt / Positive Experiences over the Last Year**

**Use of MS Teams**

Big move to MS Teams – email seems old fashioned now, less used. Online staff communication now easier.

Teams also much easier for 1-2-1 meetings and for staff training sessions (makes presenters take more time over content and makes attendance easier).

Teams allows different institutional campuses to be brought together more. Helps connect student advisors who previously worked on different campuses more.

Teams has been a huge success – a feeling that everything is at your fingertips and you are better able to reach out to colleagues than before (particularly via the message function).

**Enquiry Services / Chat**

Big use of Chat. Often using LibChat with the user and Teams for the staff answering enquiries to support each other and seek help with answers. Sometimes making use of one channel for important announcements which will need to be referred to, and another daily channel where only those staff working that day see that chat – that way people aren’t overwhelmed with chat but important messages which come up can be moved into the announcements channel if needed.

Institution that didn’t yet use chat had move to a centralized single email – made it much easier for users to know who to contact, and speeded up response time as rota to constantly monitor that channel. This is an example of something they were moving towards anyway which lockdown accelerated.

Move away from enquiries by phone – or at least diverting phones to Teams voicemail then responding via chat/audio and video call that way rather than sharing physical phones due to covid.

Chat had made teams across different sites, who normally wouldn’t know each other, work as one team. Would like to keep that going forward.

LibChat has also been a big success and will be continued and perhaps resourced more than before – this includes consideration of out of hours support that some Libraries are already using.

Continuing with chat and virtual support - enquiries more varied than before pandemic.

Live Chat. This was universally acknowledged as a positive introduction – some had never used it before and others had a live chat service but it wasn’t run by the frontline staff. It has now been handed over to them exclusively.

Some institutions having to upskill staff to support IT enquiries as more students using devices from home, and as explaining some IT issues can be trickier when not face-to-face. Conversely one institution found IT queries dropping as what would have been face-to-face enquiries are being diverted to their IT services dept in the new online environment.

**Staff Skills / Development / Wellbeing**

Some institutions in light of the move to home and online working now implementing rules for wellbeing on staff having to clock off at end of day – hours when they should not be looking at teams.

Also increased use of online application for social activities eg quizzes.

Remote video training sessions were very useful and should be continued.

Able to attend more virtual events.

Some staff had enjoyed the opportunity to attend *more* training than usual, hosted by institutions all over the world, and hoped that this would continue. For many, by necessity, the past twelve months had been a great learning opportunity, for example learning to use Teams.

Events like this CSGUK one have also been a benefit from last year – with moving to online webinars people have been able to attend events with others from across UK and world. Also makes prospect of presenting at an event less scary than in person.

Staff flexibility in taking on new tasks, working from home, onsite or both was something to take forward.

Made colleagues more supportive of each other, flexible and agile - Continue virtual meetings as these were a good support.

Another had really enjoyed the opportunity to do different things and to have more involvement with “behind the scenes” teams – before the pandemic who she barely knew the teams and understood little of the work they did. She’d also undertaken some project work for Subject Librarians. A number of delegates expressed the hope that the cross-team approach would continue.

One delegate had welcomed the opportunity to work with relatively senior managers more closely with than usual, and a chance to influence decision-making re services and procedures during the pandemic, and to get involved with “break out projects” over the summer, working with small online group to review and refine processes.

A particularly nice partnership had arisen at one delegate’s institution whereby Library Assistants teamed up with ESOL tutors to offer online reading groups to students learning English – some LAs were running up to 3 or 4 such groups every week! Although they’ll have less time once they return to campus, they hope to be able to continue the project in some form (possibly face-to-face, post-pandemic) once staff and students return to campus.

Cross team working. With frontline staff being the only ones on site, they have done a lot more cross team collaboration (liaison, purchasing etc) and have grown skill sets by supporting these other teams.

**Service Profile / User Awareness**

The group felt that the Library service has been given a higher profile as a result of the pandemic with access to resources (print or electronic) and study space further up the agenda at an institutional level.

A greater feeling of value. This came across really strongly. Some felt in the past that front line services were ‘looked down on’ but this year has shown the really value of what they do, particularly being classed as essential workers.

Move also to encourage our users to use online content more – not all students realised the extent of what there was so we’ve done more publicity and education esp for mature learners who may not have been so comfortable online.

**Flexible Working**

One delegate wanted working from home to continue. He works in a blended IT/Library team, primarily on IT enquiries, and their small team had successfully handled a significant increase in enquiries (from 4/500 per month to c1,800) from home. He also commented on how his institution had recognised the need to invest in both IT infrastructure and digital resources.

Some would like 50/50 or 70/30 for campus vs home.

Acknowledged that in smaller library teams, this may not be possible when all students return.

Had proved that staff will work from home.

Would like to be able to take a day at home when e.g. the boiler man is coming. Senior/non-frontline staff can already do this without using leave – feels like it should be more equitable. On those times could be doing chat and email.

Flexible working. Most staff are alternating between working from home and on site, they would like to see flexible working patterns going forward. However, some have already been told no, and are being brought back on site full time.

Home working doesn’t work for some people because of poor tech set up/lack of space.

Blended working has shown this approach can work.

Being able to work from home - good to have some days working from home - blended approach to working going forward would be good, downside - don't know what we are missing from working on campus - missing not being in the Library and having a helpdesk...some institutions will be going forward with virtual helpdesk rather than physical, but questions here raised about the less confident students getting in touch so there are some down sides.

**Additional Challenges**

Remote cataloguing of resources.

Implementing a new library management system remotely in the first few months of the first lockdown.

Being a trial for their University and requiring students to evidence a recent negative covid test before allowing their access into the Library.

Student behaviour and expectations regarding compliance with wearing face coverings, social distancing and no-go study areas.

Institutions will be making some library sites self-service after the pandemic, not a constant desk presence or staff presence in general - some places felt they were heading in that direction anyway - already trialed study space only - Positives and negatives of non-staffed space, too. People like to see a face, see staff...so might be better to have some rotated staff presence.

**Agreed that students would like to keep**

Click and collect - especially for those with disabilities + free postal issues and returns.

Bookable study spaces. Many libraries have found this a valuable tool during this period, however there were divided views about it continuing long term. Students with exemptions given a rainbow false book at one institution so they wouldn’t be bothered by patrols.

Scan & deliver. This again seemed to be universally popular with students and many staff hope to continue to offer this service going forward.

**Expect / would like to continue (also in discussions above)**

Blended approach i.e. interactions with students and staff and library colleagues will be a mix of face to face and remotely online.

Enjoying using technology.

Using Chat /Learning about Chatbots.

Online support sessions for staff and students.

Online cross site team meetings– save on travel time.

Working together cross teams on projects e.g. CSE etc.

No meetings on Friday.

Reviewing our procedures and processes.

Start to build a better appreciation of what is going on.

Hybrid/flexibility around home working so long as the onsite work doesn't disproportionately fall on the same people.

Converge service-all staff (IT and Library) answering all user queries.

Universally the use of Teams was seen as a very positive development.