

How to optimise relations between Library, Administration and Teaching Staff?

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Abstract

As a consequence of implementing the Quality Reform of Higher Education, the Universities and implicitly their libraries undergo a process of positive change. An edifying example to this purpose is constituted by the University Library from Bergen, which has been successfully implementing these steering principles and is confronted to the progress compelling challenges, mainly the ever-increasing orientation towards electronic text channels. The Library is also preoccupied with the conservation and preservation of archival documents, consisting in text on printed format and texts as historical sources. It also actively participates in the students' life, through organizing orientation meetings upon the provided courses and services. It has likewise restored its physical surroundings and has been supplied with facilities such as Internet, reading rooms and open access. The library strategies, its answers to late-day challenges and the pending issues are dealt with and managed by the library management, represented within the University Board of the University of Bergen.

Keywords: *university library; quality reform; higher education; research librarian; workshop*

Ca o consecință a implementării reformei calității învățământului superior, rezultată în urma Procesului de la Bologna, universitățile și, implicit, bibliotecile lor urmează un proces de schimbare pozitivă. Un exemplu edificator în acest sens îl constituie Biblioteca Universității din Bergen, care se află în plin proces de implementare a acestor principii călăuzitoare și care se confruntă cu provocările progresului, în special cu orientarea crescândă spre canalele electronice de comunicare a textelor. Biblioteca este de asemenea preocupată de activitatea de conservare și preservare a documentelor de arhivă, constând în texte în format tipărit și în texte ca surse istorice. De asemenea, ea se implică activ în viața studentescă, organizând întruniri cu scop de ghidare și informare asupra cursurilor și serviciilor oferite. Pe de altă parte, biblioteca și-a restaurat locația și a fost dotată cu facilități precum conexiune Internet, noi săli de lectură și acces direct la raft. Strategiile bibliotecii, reacțiile ei la provocările timpurilor actuale precum și chestiunile stringente sunt analizate și soluționate de conducerea bibliotecii, care este reprezentată în Comitetul de Conducere al Universității din Bergen.

Cuvinte-cheie: *bibliotecă universitară; reforma calității; învățământ superior; bibliotecar de cercetare; workshop*

1. Introduction

The three main responsibilities of the universities are research, teaching and dissemination of information. In order to carry out and take care of these responsibilities in a satisfactory manner, good, solid and relevant infrastructure for information and knowledge must be in place at the universities. The university libraries are an integral part of this infrastructure. Previously the university libraries were, on the whole, a clearly delimited and homogenous arena with a clear profile. Here there were texts written or printed on paper: i.e. mainly books and periodicals or manuscripts and old written sources. The users were teaching staff, researchers or students who came to order or collect books or who sat in the library studying literature that had to be read on the premises. The reading rooms in the libraries were also used by students as the universities were insufficiently equipped in this department. Today the tasks and functions of the university libraries have changed a lot. I will focus on the theme *How to optimise relations between Library, Administration and Teaching Staff* in relation to the changing functions of the university libraries and I will in this connection provide some examples from the University library at the University of Bergen. At the University of Bergen there are six faculties: The Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, The Faculty of Law, The Faculty of Psychology, the Faculty of Social Sciences and The faculty of Humanities. Each faculty has its own special library and these libraries constitute the university library in Bergen. Last year the Library of the Humanities and the Library of Social Sciences merged and now share the same administration. They do, however, still constitute two separate physical collections. I will mainly provide examples from the Library of the Humanities.

2. The function of the library in the field of humanities

The Library of the Humanities differs from the libraries of the other faculties at the

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University of Bergen with regard to archival documents: texts written or printed on paper (books, periodicals etc.) and texts as historical sources. Firstly, printed books are an important source in research carried out in the humanities. Secondly, printed and handwritten sources are important historical documents in research in this field. A handwritten source from 200 BC is as central, important and interesting in research in the humanities as a contemporary text.

These two features characterise archival documents found at the Library of the Humanities. The Faculty of Law also has texts printed on paper. The second feature; printed and written texts as historical documents, is more or less uniquely associated with the Library of the Humanities. The other libraries are less interested in books and texts printed on paper. Their interest in digital texts, on the other hand, is great. In research in philology and in the humanities the interest in and use of books and texts on paper is great. Consequently, it is important that the Library of the Humanities continues to buy books, to preserve old texts and to develop its archives. The archives of the Faculties of Humanities are closely connected to the University Library. We are currently discussing how the connection between other archives such as archives of names, dialects and diplomas and, subsequently, other collections of texts and the University Library can, shall or should be in the future. In this context competences related to texts and corpora and the use and accessibility of electronic media are important.

3. Optimisation

3.1 The subject specialist arrangement

The subject specialist arrangement is an important link between the library and the faculty/the academic environment. The subject specialist is in charge of certain fields and should at all times be updated on periodicals, book catalogues, reviews and central publications related to particular subjects. The library is consequently able to add new publications to its collection of books in an informed manner. The subject specialist is an expert employed by the

library who holds a Master's degree or a PhD. In addition to the task of building a collection of books, the subject specialist should keep in touch with the users, e.g. students, PhD candidates and academic staff, and should be able to answer difficult questions related to bibliography and references within his or her field. A subject specialist is usually in charge of subjects that are related, such as Spanish linguistics, English linguistics, general linguistics and humanistic informatics etc. Books are bought by the library on the basis of advice given by these experts.

The subject specialist often has the title Senior Research Librarian. The subject specialist actively participates in the academic environment and is therefore an important link in the cooperation between the library and the academic communities. This arrangement works well with regard to subjects, yet is less satisfactory with regard to others. The arrangement does not work very well with regard to a few. There is a great potential for progress here. Cf. Leerintveld and Otegem 2003.

3.2 Teaching offered

In recent years the University Library has developed excellent courses which focus on central topics related to the use of library sources and information in text production. These courses concern for instance quotation and reference techniques, the treatment of information and information ethics. In recent years the problem of using reference texts and reference ethics have increasingly become a challenge at all academic levels; from the graduate level to the post-graduate/ doctoral level. The university library has been actively involved in this department, offering tailor-made courses for our academic users of the library. Today there is a great need for this kind of competence, which is still not met, and there will be an increased need and demand for this kind of teaching in the future.

We are presently integrating these courses in the programme descriptions/curricula so that they become an integral part of the teaching offered at the faculty and in the respective subjects. Cf. Landøy and Repanovici 2008a, 2008b, 2008c.

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3.3 Academic Board representation

At the University Board of the University of Bergen there are academic board members. Here there is a good formal integration of the academic environments and the management of the library. Through this integration information is given reciprocally and this lays an important foundation for the academic function and practice of the university library. Of especially great importance is the development of steering documents and strategic plans for the library and comments on these issues related to the steering documents and strategic plans of the faculty. This contact with the top level of management at the library has proven very fruitful, especially in the current period of time which is challenging in two major ways; the difficult financial situation and the significant change towards electronic text channels.

3.4 The University Teaching Committee

The University of Bergen has a central teaching committee in which the university library has an observer status. In this teaching committee the library takes part as an observer on a permanent basis. In this way the library obtains good information on recent developments in the strategic teaching profile of the university centrally and the challenges related to strategies and principles of teaching within the faculty. It is within the educational sector in particular that the university library has been granted added responsibilities in recent years. Students nowadays use the library more actively than before in connection with the preparation and writing of coursework. Following the implementation of the Quality Reform of Higher Education at the University of Bergen, new methods of teaching and evaluation have been introduced, such as process-oriented text production at graduate and post-graduate level. This approach to text production has imposed new requirements on students as they are asked to gather information and critically judge the information found.

3.5 The specialised collection

At the traditional university libraries there are so-called specialised collections which mainly consist of special collections of old historical documents, facsimiles of such documents and literature related to these sources. At the University of Bergen there is a specialised collection which mainly contains literature related to medieval texts and literature and to non-fictional texts dating from this period of time until the turn of the 19th Century. This collection is an example of a specialised collection which is an asset to the expertise possessed by the faculty within this field. This collection is frequently used by experts at the departmental level and employed with enthusiasm by experts at the Centre for Medieval Studies (CMS), a Norwegian Centre of Excellence (CoE) run by the Faculty of Humanities. The specialised collection is in this respect a good example of the manner in which the library keeps in touch with and provides expert knowledge to our very best internationally-oriented academic communities.

3.6 Orientation meetings and meetings between the faculty and the library

At the beginning of each semester there are orientation meetings which provide information about every subject taught at the various departments of the faculty. A member of the library staff attends most of these orientation meetings in order to inform the students about relevant courses and services provided by the library. This is in many cases the first time the students meet an expert from the library, a meeting which is directly relevant for the teaching offered by the department. In addition to these meetings, the library gives additional information to students and experts on request, or provides information about new services introduced at the library. The library may, for instance, organise events for a particular subject, the departments or the faculty. The contact between the management of the library and the faculty has been flexible and good, and the manager of the library has attended several Faculty Board meetings in order to both give

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advice and receive information.

3.7 The library as meeting place and workplace

As a consequence of the new curricula following in the wake of the Quality Reform of Higher Education, students have tended to visit the library more than was the case earlier in order to get information about and use the services provided. In addition to this, students work in the library as there are facilities there such access to the Internet, reading rooms and open library shelves. The Library of the Humanities has recently been renovated, and this has resulted in very well-adjusted physical surroundings, and conditions and services very much appreciated by the students. They use these facilities from early in the morning until the library closes in the evening. The new physical surroundings have, in fact, contributed to the creation of a material frame around the academic student environment and activities organised by the students. The library café located in the renovated Library of the Humanities has contributed to consolidate the student environment at the library both socially and academically. Cf Garnes, Landøy and Repanovici (eds.) 2006.

4. Challenges

The relations between the library, the faculty and the administration are already good today- all things considered, but much remains to be done before we attain the ideal level. These are the most important and pressing challenges in the years ahead:

- We must continue to develop formal meeting places for the library, the administration and the academic communities. Much has already been achieved, and there is, on the whole, an attitude of flexibility, optimism and motivation with regard to the continuation of this work. We do, however, need more formal meeting places at a central level, at faculty level and at departmental level.

- The library should be represented (as an observer) in the central research committee. This

is a good and functional way to supplement the observer representation in the Central Teaching Committee as it will enable us to see the strategies related to research and teaching that are directly linked to the library in a holistic perspective.

- A permanent arrangement where the library is given observer status in research and teaching committees at the faculties would also be very useful. In this way one would be closer to the academic environments, and equally important is the possibility to obtain information centrally (through observation status in the central teaching committee) in addition to information from the faculties.

- One of the most important tasks that one is currently facing is to integrate the tailor-made student courses offered by the library and the technical and esthetical issues related to the respective curricula at the faculty. We have embarked on this project, but much remains to be done before these courses are fully integrated in the curricula.

- Closely connected to the integration in the curricula is the implementation of the offers in the teaching portfolios of the various departments. Much remains to be done in this respect. It is important that these offers become an integral part of ordinary and obligatory subjects taught at the faculty. Today students are under a lot of pressure due to a host of tasks, so unless these offers become a part of the compulsory subject portfolio, the effect will not be as good as it should be.

5. Summary

We currently have many qualitatively good, effective and developmentally oriented relations at different levels between the library, the administration and the academic environments:

- The subject specialist agreement
- Tailor-made courses
- Academic Library Board representation
- The observer status in the central University Teaching Committee
- Regular orientation meetings and ad hoc meetings
- Practical and physical conditions

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- Books, texts on paper and various specialised collections are prioritised.

There are many challenges ahead - in addition to a great potential for further development and improvement of these relations:

- More formal and informal meeting places for the library, the administration and the academic environments - at a central level, at faculty level and at departmental level

- More observer positions at different levels

- A permanent arrangement according to which observer status is granted at the teaching and research committees at the faculties

- Better integration of the tailor-made courses offered by the library

- Implementation of these offers in the teaching portfolios of the departments.

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