

M25 Consortium Annual Conference 2020: The Future of Libraries

The future of academic library services, based on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Commentary) Olga O'Connell, Duty Librarian; Rachel Dollimore, Library Assistant , Student Journey, London Metropolitan University

This project looks into the future at how our needs may change and whether we can integrate innovation and technology into everyday library processes.

COVID-19 challenge - where are we? In a couple of months, the pandemic has prompted unprecedented change in working lifestyles. Working remotely has been successful in terms of staff satisfaction, facilitated by virtual video conferencing and online library services. Universities are considering how and when they might return to their buildings, we are all looking at the same information and share the same concerns. We can see the impact remote working has had on staff including the emotional and social implications. Our Keeping Busy web page set up in response to the lock down situation, is full of ideas on how to take a break while studying or working from home, with activities which are free and available online.

The University knows that staff want to get involved in planning for the future and have set up virtual focus groups involving staff in plans to reopen the Science Centre, decide delivery modes and patterns for the Autumn term, and shape clearing and enrolment. They will include sessions on how we can ensure staff and student wellbeing, support our community and continue to act as an engine for social mobility.

Conclusions:

Working remotely in the academic library has become the norm, rules for business and social interactions are changing daily. Is remote working the future of library work? Definitely yes, as a part of academic library work. Academic libraries have a special atmosphere, are eternal and of individual value, libraries on campus will continue to be in demand in the future.

It is important to consider the wellbeing of library staff members. In these circumstances, without proper efforts, mental and physical health can suffer – with increases in stress and sickness.

The first London Met Festival of Learning this summer is an online programme of learning events for our staff and students and is an opportunity to celebrate the knowledge and insights we have in our community. Through these events, the skills, knowledge and expertise of our community will be shared and celebrated.

There will be sessions focused on online delivery to ensure we are prepared for a range of different delivery modes in the Autumn term.

If remote work is to be continued in the future, Library spaces freed from use as offices can be used to improve the quality of education and well-being of students, for example, to organize a winter garden or a gallery of works by graduates of creative specialties.

What seems strange today may become common in the future. It is a brighter future for University libraries when they can overcome inertia of thinking and implement new forms of Academic library service that did not previously exist.

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London Metropolitan University Library Services and Special Collections have active accounts on: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. Social media posts need to be visual, topical, engaging and interactive. A 'throwback' post for Mental Health Awareness Week with photos from our therapy dog visits, shared on the Pets As Therapy Facebook page, reached an audience of 2019 and garnered 71 engagements.

#InternationalArchivesDay
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including London Metropolitan
University's Archive:
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