



Who are you, where are you based and what do you do?

I'm **Paul Johnson** and I work as the **Director of Library and Learning Services at the University of Surrey** in Guildford. I started my role in January this year (the first day of the winter lockdown) and so am one of the growing number of people who started new roles during lockdown. I have overall responsibility for all aspects of library and learning services at the University. I report directly to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, but I also have a dotted reported line to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research. I'm one of only two people in the University who sit on all the "big three" committees – Education, Research & Innovation and Senate!

What do you most enjoy about your job?

This is my first library director role, and so far, I'm really enjoying it. I'm always happiest when having a really good conversation which helps drive things forward, particularly one-to-one or in small groups. What excites me is doing this with different people – academics, students, members of the university executive board, and of course, library staff. When I started this role, I had good conversations across the University, but I also wanted to do this individually with library staff and offered everyone the chance for a one-to-one meeting. Lots of library staff took me up on this, and they probably don't realise how invaluable that was for me. I've been very fortunate this week in attending two in-person events, one to launch a new student-led reading collection, SurreyReads, and one for the opening of a new bridge at the university, named Shepard's Crossing, after the illustrator E H Shepard (Winnie the Pooh, Wind in the Willows, Punch etc.), whose archive the library holds. Both were great events, and it felt like a real treat to attend in person and engage with a range of different people.

What motivates you in your work?

My career has always been about university libraries, with equal emphasis on Higher Education and libraries. I've always been driven by the desire to enable independent learning, and for me that's what university libraries are so essential for. I'm enthusiastic about this role, and what has really struck me in my time at Surrey is how enthusiastic people are across the board, whether they are dealing with education, research, or as is the case with the library, both. In my previous role I spent a lot of time on refurbishment, and during that time, if I ever needed motivation, I'd go for a walk in the study spaces I helped create and watch students or researchers at work. This is always a great reminder of why we do what we do, and I would recommend it to anyone. If I want to motivate myself in a different way, I just have to think about the potentials of Open Access versus the current academic publishing situation!

How has/can the M25 Consortium support you in your career?

It's so important to be involved in regional, national and international organisations, and with every role I've had during my career I've got involved with different groups. The M25 Consortium is particularly great for those in their early career as it gives them real opportunities to get involved. In that stage of a career, it can be hard to find relevant groups, so when I joined one of the CPD25 task groups, it gave me the chance to organise events (a useful skill!) and gain a great network of people.

What would it surprise people to know about you?

Legend on the dance floor.

Complete the sentence:

If I wasn't working in a library I would be... in a man band **because...** I'd have blown all the cash I earned in my earlier career as part of a mildly successful boy band.

Paul Johnson, University of Surrey, September 2021