Establishing a culture of research practice in an academic library: an Australian case study.


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Establishing a culture of research practice in an academic library: an Australian case study

Abstract
Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to describe the establishment of a Research Working Group at Flinders University Library, a mid-sized teaching and research university located in South Australia. The group was founded to encourage staff to develop a more reflective, research-oriented and evidence-based professional practice initially for a three year term. This paper comes at about two years into the pilot and provides an interim report of the group’s experiences and achievements.

Design/methodology
As a case study, this paper describes the introduction and background of the Flinders University Library Research Working Group, its purpose, the selection of projects, and its work to date.

Findings
The paper reports on the management-driven practical supports that have been implemented to assist practitioners undertaking research at Flinders University Library.

Practical implications
The paper can be used as an exemplar for other academic libraries with non-tenured staff which lacks a culture of research.

Originality/value
This paper adds an Australian perspective to the existing literature on support for academic librarians undertaking research. The literature is dominated by US and Canadian experiences based on academic status.

Keywords
Practitioner-researchers, Academic libraries, Staff development

Article classification
Case study

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Introduction
The importance of practitioners undertaking research is well acknowledged in many different professions (Jarvis, 1999). In library and information science (LIS), engagement with research by practitioners has long been seen as desirable (Hall, 2010, Klobas and Clyde, 2010, Luo, 2011, Powell et al. 2002, Watson-Boone, 2000). It is also increasingly being recognised as a core value in academic libraries (Schrader, 2012). Nevertheless, much of the literature focuses on those countries - notably the US and Canada - where academic librarians are eligible for faculty status and are required to undertake research and publication in order to gain promotion While academic librarians in Australia once were employed as faculty, this is now largely historic.

There are few examples of how librarians are supported to undertake research in their workplace where it is not required for promotion. This paper examines how librarians are supported in undertaking research at Flinders University, South Australia. The Research Working Group (RWG) was established in late 2010 with the brief to support the development of a culture of research and professional reflection amongst the professional library staff over a three year pilot period While publication and presentation of research outcomes form part of the RWG’s goals, and are an expectation of involvement in the group, this is an interim report that focuses on supporting the practice of research.

Context
Flinders University is a research and teaching institution based in the southern region of Adelaide, South Australia, with regional and interstate locations ranging from Hamilton in Victoria to Darwin in the Northern Territory. The University’s student population is approximately 19,000 and comprises 13,000 undergraduate and 6,000 postgraduate students studying in a wide range of disciplines including most professions. Its academic population is approximately 900.

Over the last decade Flinders University Library has, in support of institutional priorities, vigorously engaged with university teaching and learning. Developments ranging from the adoption of the university’s learning management system as the key mechanism for service delivery for students to the development of large ‘learning hubs’ in all branch libraries have changed the Library’s operations. The success of this can be demonstrated in ways ranging from high rankings in the nationally benchmarked ‘inSync’ user satisfaction surveys to high per-capita levels of utilization. We have however struggled to engage with the research process in new ways.

All universities in Australia have research assessed through the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) process and Flinders, like its counterparts, is seeing this reflected in a shift in priorities. The renewed emphasis on research outcomes that has driven ERA
has provided opportunities for the Library to engage with researchers and research managers around issues such as bibliometrics and research repositories, but the imperative is to find new ways to engage with researchers that demonstrably adds value to the research process. This imperative is one of the underpinnings of the RWG. There is no one strategy that will achieve an enhanced engagement with researchers but the RWG will, if successful, produce a cohort of librarians who have personal experience in undertaking research, and presenting and publishing research outcomes. We hope that this personal experience will drive linkage and change.

**Staff profile**

In Australia, the majority of librarians employed in universities are appointed as non-academic staff members. At Flinders University, library staff are appointed as Higher Education Officers (HEO), where HEO1 is the lowest and HEO10 is the highest. Entry level librarians are usually employed at HEO5 or HEO6, depending on their previous experience (Walkey Hall, 2010, p11). Unlike their US or Canadian counterparts, the majority of academic librarians in Australia are not employed as faculty.

Flinders University Library has around ninety staff located in four branch libraries. Approximately 40% of these staff are librarians in the HEO 5 – 10 classifications. The age profile of the librarians is balanced with a significant number of younger professionals coming from a long-running trainee programme. Schrader, Shiri and Williamson’s observation of Canadian academic librarianship that “the practitioner service model largely overshadowed the research culture model” (2012, p149) is certainly true at Flinders and is broadly accurate across Australian academic librarianship.

**Literature Review**

This literature review focuses on support mechanisms for LIS practitioner-researchers undertaking research and publication. Examples from the US and Canada are well represented in the literature (Blessinger et al, 2010, Fennewald, 2008, Fox, 2007, Lee, 1995, Neville, 2006, Powell et. al. 2002, Sapon-White et. al. 2004, Stephens et. al. 2011, Tysick and Babb, 2006), due to the publication requirements of their faculty status academic librarians. There is no similar motivation for librarians to undertake research and publication in Australia, as they are employed as professional staff members rather than faculty (Bradley, 2008). This is also the case for the majority of librarians in Ireland and the UK. Hence, examples have been sought from these geographic locations as well as the US.

In analysing support mechanisms for LIS practitioner-researchers, many authors also address the barriers they face. Clapton (2010) found that a lack of time to undertake research was consistently reported as the greatest barrier by UK LIS practitioners, followed by practitioners’ lack of confidence in research skills and processes (p16).
Similarly, Klobas and Clyde (2010) discovered that proportionally more practitioners than researchers regarded a lack of time as a barrier to research, and that practitioners were also more concerned about their lack of skills (p243). Bradley (2008), in her survey of new professionals presenting at an Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) New Librarians’ Symposium, found lack of time to be the greatest barrier for respondents, and that writing and research is “additional work, even if encouraged by their employers” for the majority (p733). Fox (2007) surveyed Canadian academic librarians and found that “time conflict is a major obstacle to greater participation in scholarly activities” (p453).

There are many examples in the US and Canadian literature of the role of a group in supporting academic tenure-track librarians undertaking research. These range from management-instigated committees (Sapon-White et al 2004, Stephens, et al 2011) to more informal peer support groups (Tysick and Babb, 2006). Some have concentrated solely on writing up the results of research, offering “internal peer review” and writing workshops, such as that at Louisiana State University described by Blessinger et al (2010). Other groups have funding responsibilities including the allocation of release time, payment for conference attendance, and purchase of any necessary hardware and software; for example, the Research Committee at Texas A&M University Libraries (Stephens, et al 2011). Whatever its derivation, and by whatever means it operates, an organised group sanctioned by library management has been described as “essential” by Gratch (1989, p997), and “necessary” (Sapon-White et al 2004 p145) in supporting research by librarians.

Outside of the US and Canada, there are examples of support mechanisms from Ireland and the UK. Fallon (2010) wrote of a writing support program for Irish academic librarians undertaking research, describing it as “the first formal writing program specifically for librarians in Ireland or the United Kingdom.” (p35) This consisted of a writing workshop, blog and peer feedback day. The model was then expanded to include online support (“e-mentoring”) and specific tasks designed to encourage participants to write a paper (Fallon, 2012, p12-13). While it is too soon for publication impact to be assessed, Fallon described a number of positive soft and hard outcomes from the project (p19-21).

In the UK, the DREaM project (Developing Research Excellence and Methods) has been established with the aim of “developing a network of active researchers, both in academia and amongst LIS practitioners.” (Hall et al, 2011). As this has only recently been established, it is also too soon to evaluate its impact but it is expected that the development of research skills for practitioner-researchers will be measurable (Hall et al, 2011, p48).

In Australia, there has been some discussion around the role of librarians undertaking research. Indeed, it is not a new subject. Maguire’s 1973 essay referred to “practitioners...
with research on their minds ... should not be deprived for want of opportunity” (reprinted 2010, p. 301), and Allen (1986) also noted that, “[t]he existence of motivation [to undertake research] can be instilled and nurtured in some individuals if the leadership of the library is enthusiastic for research, determined to achieve results, and patient.” (p45). More recent publications also examine motivations of library practitioner-researchers (Bradley, 2008, Haddow and Klobas, 2004) as well as the role of professional associations in fostering research (Smith and Harvey, 2006). However, the role of institutional and management support – while noted as being beneficial to practitioners in undertaking research – has not been examined fully in an Australian context.

Organisational support has been shown to have a positive impact on practitioners undertaking research. Powell, et al (2002) found positive correlations between conducting research and time to do research during work hours, and between internal and external support for doing research (p65). Bradley found that support and help of others, including both colleagues and supervisors, was a strong factor in writing for the profession (p734). Lee (1995) concluded her examination an academic Library Research Advisory Committee by saying “as long as librarians have research and writing expectations, they will also need both administrative and peer support.” (p114).

**Background and the development of the RWG**

Fostering staff involvement in professional research through the development of the Research Working Group is, for Flinders University Library, a staff development exercise. It is one of the strategies being used to ensure that the Library has staff with the understanding and skills to drive change in a time of uncertainty and to ensure that staff are able to engage with the University’s researchers and their developing agenda.

The RWG developed from reflections on the culture and future of the Library by a new senior management team following a generational change in leadership. As part of the generational change the Library was subject to a thorough external review. The 2009 report described an organization that is user focused, well regarded, well networked into the institution, competent and effectively managed. This is evidence of a strong, value driven service culture pragmatically and effectively implemented. These are key values and practices for the future of the library and need to be valued and developed.

There are, however, limitations in the present approach. Some programmes and actions are not being effectively assessed and analysed. Professional reflection and a contribution to the wider development of professional ideas and discourse have not been major features of the actions of the Library. We have not engaged to the extent that we might in evidence-based librarianship. However, this is changing since the introduction of the RWG. Two members of the group have already reported their research at a conference, and one has had their paper accepted for publication.
Publication and presentation are very much a part of the RWG’s expected outcomes for its members.

We had worked very hard over the previous decade in engaging a rapidly changing teaching and learning agenda and our success in this regard highlighted the fact that our engagement with research has been less successful. When the reasons for the limited engagement in research and reflection were considered a few key factors were identified. Firstly a management culture driven by service delivery and pragmatism has reproduced itself by filling the organization with effective pragmatic “doers”. We need these people and this will not change but we need to round them out. Secondly the service imperative has ensured that staff are fully occupied, and only the provision of extra resources has the potential to change this. Thirdly there has been no clear and consistent statement from management that they value research and reflection. Developing and beginning to implement the RWG began to change this message. Finally there is a lack of skills and experience in conducting research; this can be addressed with resources. This self-analysis is strongly supported by the professional literature.

To begin to crystallize the RWG the University Librarian wrote a discussion paper which was canvassed with the executive group and then informally with librarians at various levels and stages of their career. These discussions changed and focused the paper and it was then presented to and endorsed by the Library’s Senior Staff Committee. The process of developing the ideas was quite time consuming but it formed a backdrop to an extremely interesting and useful discussion of the Library’s culture and future. The RWG has been strongly supported by the senior staff and buy-in created by the consultation has contributed to this engagement. It was notable that this group was established at a time when other processes and committees were being rationalized and discontinued.

Following its formal approval, the paper, which now included the agreed terms of reference and the details of the resources available for the process, was forwarded to all professional staff and they were invited to a meeting convened by the University Librarian to discuss the initiative. There was near universal attendance at these sessions and lively discussion of the reasons for the initiative and its potential implications. The discussion paper is available in Appendix A.

**Establishment of the RWG**

The RWG was established for an initial three year term with a review in mid-2013. This both mirrors the model of action, evaluation and reflection driving further action that the RWG aims to foster, and the Library’s strong commitment not to build up unproductive processes and committees.
No firm Key Performance Indicators have yet been established for the review but the goals are clearly set out in the terms of reference and these will form a large part of the review. It was always recognized that having this process running might enable us to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise (some have already occurred) and any review will have to take these into account at the time.

Finding an inaugural chair that combined diverse talents was crucial to the successful establishment of the RWG. The role called for a leader who could mentor the members, deal with the uncertainty arising from pursuing a new agenda, who had an engagement with research and who had credibility with the other managers to enable the resources the allocated to the process to be deployed without generating friction and territoriality.

The Library was very fortunate when Helen Culshaw, the Law Librarian agreed to chair the RWG. As well as her core responsibilities in Law, Helen had been the Library’s Staff Development Co-ordinator and was used to mentoring staff. This was apposite as the paradigm of the RWG is staff development. Helen also had relevant experience from leading a significant, externally funded research project. Crucially her experience as a Branch Librarian and staff manager gave her credibility when negotiating with other managers for buy-out of time for staff.

To support the group Liz Walkley-Hall was added as a consultant. Shortly before the process commenced she had presented a paper at a major international conference. Liz added both knowledge and experience of research to the RWG and her achievements are a valuable model.

The initial discussion paper regarding the establishment of the RWG canvassed the reasons why staff engagement in research was limited. Some factors were identified that could, at least partially, be addressed with resources. These included lack of skills which could be addressed with training and through support in things like research design and with statistical consulting. The most significant issue identified was however simply busyness and pressure of work which could be addressed with funding to allow some buyout of time. To address these issues a budget of $10,000pa was allocated to the RWG to be managed by the chair.

Separately to the $10,000pa allocation the Library also undertook to fund the attendance of members of the RWG, or other staff, at relevant Australian conferences at which they were presenting a paper. Relevant conferences may not be ‘Library’ conferences. A commitment was also made that, subject to budgetary conditions the Library would fund participation in an overseas conference every other year for a member of the RWG, or other staff member, who had a paper accepted at a relevant international conference. These commitments were nothing new in terms of the way that we operate but they had never been explicitly brought out into the open before.
Time release is an important contributor to research but it is impossible to fund complete time to undertake research, and staff engaging in the RWG still have to fit some research activities into their normal duties and use some of their own time. These resource commitments were discussed with staff at the consultative meeting and they were an important tangible indicator of management’s support for the RWG initiative.

Once the RWG is well established it may be able to identify external sources of research funding that staff might apply for.

**Selection of Research projects**

Following the consultative meetings, staff at levels HEO (Higher Education Officer) levels 5-8 were invited to express interest in joining the RWG for an initial term of two years. As mentioned previously, professional library staff at Flinders University are employed at levels HEO 5 and above. As involvement in a research project was considered a professional development opportunity, it was decided that staff working at HEO levels 5 to 8 would be eligible to express interest. As part of these expressions of interest staff were required to identify a research project upon which they would like to work.

These proposals were considered using selection criteria that were contained in the discussion paper and were discussed at the consultative meetings. Proposals were thus evaluated according to the extent to which they supported the University’s Strategic Plan and the Library’s goals. Linking the RWG to the same processes and goals that the Library uses to assess other projects and initiatives made the process clear to staff and emphasises it role as a development activity for the future of the Library.

There were seven research proposals submitted, with four finally selected for the program. Of the three which were not included in the program one became a pilot program on knowledge management in an existing library workgroup. A second was judged too similar in nature to one of the selected projects. In the case of the third, the proponent was contemporaneously promoted to a senior position and decided to withdraw for work related reasons.

The four submissions which were accepted provided a good cross-section of researchers. One comprised a group of three librarian practitioners. The second was a member of academic staff teaming with a librarian practitioner, whilst two were librarian practitioners who initially worked closely with senior management to fine tune their two projects to deliver the best outcomes for the library.

The group projects did well in terms of providing moral support and providing the capacity to assign different parts of the project to individuals at times when it fitted with other commitments. There were also all the advantages of teamwork. When one
member of the three person project took family leave, a staff member from outside the group was co-opted, and with the support of other team members was able to be absorbed seamlessly into the vacancy. For ethics approval documentation to remain current the names of all participants must be included so it was possible for the project to continue with the two original members working on the subprojects for which the approval had been given.

The projects led by individual staff members brought with them the advantage of enhanced staff development opportunities for the project leaders in the direct discussions necessary with senior management. Also other groups of staff were co-opted to the projects as necessary thus spreading both learning opportunities and enthusiasm for the projects.

It was a requirement that one member of a group-based project would be designated the RWG member and attend RWG meetings. Groups selected their own representative but were encouraged to give priority to providing new staff development opportunities through their selection, and also to consider the practicalities of attending regular meetings.

**Research projects**

Four projects were selected in the first round of expressions of interest. Each of the projects was different in both the composition of its personnel and the area of research.

Project 1 sought to undertake usability testing of the Library's new discovery layer interface. It was submitted by a single researcher, with the understanding that the project would need input from other library staff. The timing of the project was ideal, in that the researcher was able to attend as an observer at management level and technical meetings where selection of the software was discussed, and undertake evaluation of each stage of implementation with that background.

It was soon apparent that the support of the Research Working Group for this project was very important. Technical support was necessary for both the hardware and software which required liaison with the Library's systems team. The researcher also needed assistance with observation and note-taking tasks during the usability testing sessions. The RWG chair was able to assist with these negotiations, especially where supervisors’ permissions for staff time was needed. In addition, the support of the RWG consultant was also most valuable in this project, advising on research methodology and data analysis.

Project 2 undertook to explore student information seeking behaviours through a review and redesign of the online undergraduate library assignment. This was submitted as a group project from a team of liaison librarians, led by the senior liaison librarian. Again,
it was a timely project as the university was moving to a new learning management system via which the library assignment would be delivered and which provides the facilities used in its development. This project offered the opportunity to formally evaluate the assignment as part of its shift to the new platform.

The smooth development of this project was due in no small part to the leadership of the senior liaison librarian. She was in a position to direct other members of the team to undertake tasks as necessary. It also enabled the smooth turnover of the makeup of the project team: when one member took leave due to family care reasons, a replacement was able to be sought from within the liaison librarian team.

Project 3 sought to examine the institutional learning benefits of practical on-campus work integrated learning (WIL) projects. It was submitted as a collaborative project between a librarian and an academic staff member. Factors which influenced the selection of this project included the value of this collaboration its relevance to WIL, a university priority.

The project took the form of a practical graphic design task which was built into the coursework and assessed. It then sought to evaluate what and how students learnt about library resources through undertaking the task. A pilot of the project has already seen some very impressive promotional graphics developed. The need to fit with the academic year influenced progress in this project.

Project 4 sought to determine the gaps in library support for students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, and to explore ways in which the library might bridge these gaps. It was submitted by a single researcher, and was selected due to its alignment with the then recently announced federal government policies on equity of access to university education.

This project was put on hold after only three months, due to family leave circumstances. As it was being undertaken by a single researcher, and with only some preliminary work done, it was not feasible to seek another researcher to continue with it. Instead, the RWG chair’s half yearly report recommended that a new project should be selected instead. This would then allow another staff member to benefit from the learning experience, to refresh the group, and to create an opportunity for the Library to explore a new research area relevant to its strategic direction.

Operation of the RWG
The support that the RWG receives from library management differentiates it from other institutions. It has an annual resource allocation of $AUD10,000 from the Library budget which is managed by the Chair. It has input from the Library’s executive in the selection of projects; these are then included on the Library’s annual operational plan in order to
ensure that assistance will be available from other members of staff if required. Finally, while the conception of the RWG was a management-led initiative, the voluntary nature of involvement for those undertaking research has meant a high level of motivation to ensure their projects succeed.

From inception, the RWG has had a clear structure, with meetings scheduled every 6 to 8 weeks. Each project provides a report to every meeting. The reports are discussed in depth and the learning freely shared. Experience gained in the research process, e.g. selection of research methodologies and preparing a literature review, is also discussed, as are administrative matters relating to the group.

A wiki on the staff intranet holds information on the progress of each project. Documents such as successful ethics approval applications are available there as models and available to all staff.

As the consultant to the RWG, Liz Walkley Hall had a very broad brief. She was not linked to any particular project, but attended all meetings and shared the benefit of her experience with the researchers. Liz and Helen often conferred outside meetings to discuss problem-solving strategies or to devise support mechanisms for the group.

Once the project teams had commenced work on literature reviews, requirements to enhance the Library’s holdings of research resources were highlighted. Liz volunteered to draft an application for funding from the Library Research Materials Program. The application was successful and funding was achieved for the Emerald LIS Journals package. Other journals or software packages were also bought at various stages during the year as they were required for individual projects. These resources potentially benefit both all professional staff and library patrons generally.

The RWG budget allowed members to apply to the chairperson for buyout time at critical points within their projects. The chair, following consultation with the researcher’s supervisor and with Library executive, made recommendations for buyout funding. Often there would be a combination of buyout using casual staff together with loans of staff from other sections.

Other minor expenses connected with the research projects such as refreshments for focus group members or small honoraria like bookshop vouchers for students participating in usability testing were also funded from the RWG allocation.

Staff who worked in open plan areas reported having difficulties in undertaking project work whilst at their usual workstations. They needed a quiet environment unconnected with their regular duties in order to concentrate for a few hours on the project. To assist these staff, a vacant office was allocated for the use of RWG members. This could be booked in half day blocks.
Assistance of library systems staff was required in three of the four current projects, and Flinders Learning Online staff provided advice on the Moodle environment. Additional professional librarians were needed to assist researchers in focus groups for the Online Undergraduate Library Assignment project and the Discovery Layer project. They also contributed to Discovery Layer usability studies. By including the projects in the operational plan, and through the chair negotiating with supervisors and team members, it was possible to staff these operations whilst simultaneously giving staff development opportunities.

There were various instances of peer support demonstrated in the program. In the Online Undergraduate Library Assignment project, which was undertaken by a liaison librarians’ team, there were many peers involved by virtue of their work as liaison librarians. The lead researcher in the Discovery Layer project needed to liaise with management and staff of a range of levels, but also worked with peers in focus groups and usability studies. In the Work Integrated Learning project the lead researcher from the Library worked with a member of academic staff and groups of students. The researchers were constantly aware that as their projects were officially supported and funded and took confidence from this. The consultant whilst supporting all members of the RWG, also provided advice and support on a regular basis to individual team members.

**Continuation of the RWG**

In early 2012, after its first year of appointment, the structure of the committee changed due to the pending retirement of the founding chair. Liz Walkley Hall, who had been the consultant to the group, assumed the role of chair and Dr Gillian Dooley assumed the role of consultant. As well her role as Special Collections Librarian Dr Dooley holds an honorary academic appointment and has a significant research profile.

At this point there was also a call for new members and projects. This was done as one of the initial projects was discontinued due to family leave circumstances. As with the initial round, more applications were received than places available in the group. Two submissions relating to e-book acquisition and acceptance were received and, with a little negotiation, these were brought together. This renewal happened very smoothly reflecting the developing maturity of the group.

A third round of a call for a new project was subsequently arranged in the second half of 2012, due to the near-completion of one research project. It was always intended that the RWG have a changing membership, in order to maximise opportunities to undertake research for all professional staff. In this round, four proposals were put forward and two were accepted. More recently, the Science Liaison Librarian was approached to work
on a collaborative research project with academics from the School of Biology. This was an unexpected opportunity that could not be passed up, and with some negotiation this project has also been brought into the RWG.

An evaluation of the RWG is in the planning stages, to be completed before the trial period has ended. This will seek to measure and document the professional library staff’s involvement in research since the implementation of the RWG, as well as exploring the motivation of those staff that have chosen to undertake research. The impact of the RWG on both their motivation and subsequent research project will also be examined. Publication and conference presentation will also be used to measure the group’s achievements.

Conclusion
After about two years of operation, the RWG is two-thirds of the way through its pilot period. This paper is an interim report of its experiences and achievements to date: one project has been completed - the usability testing of the library’s discovery layer product; another - the library assignment redesign - is in its final phase of data collection, with analysis and write-up of results to commence soon; and a third project has undertaken a pilot of its methodology, and has commenced the formal data collection phase. Furthermore, two of these projects have presented at a conference and one has had a paper accepted for publication.

There are also outcomes of relevance to all professional staff as a result of the RWG. These include the purchase of relevant professional journals due to a successful bid for the Emerald LIS ejournals package. A body of internal documentation has arisen from various projects, including ethics approval processes, literature reviews, and reports, which have been shared on the library’s intranet for the benefit of all staff. In addition, the RWG has conducted a seminar series, open to all professional staff, on various research-related topics. These have been run as an adjunct to the library’s regular staff development program.

However, the benefits to the library are a lot greater - but less tangible - than a simple count of the number of completed research projects. The RWG has impacted many of the professional staff, not just those actively undertaking a research project. Indeed, we conservatively estimate that, when including all those who have assisted with various processes, about half the professional staff have been involved in a research project in some capacity.

It is the perhaps most intangible element that may be the most important: that of building research capacity and an understanding of research processes across all
professional staff. It is hoped that those who have been involved in the RWG do go on to act as role models, mentors, and advisors for other staff members interested in developing their own research projects. Furthermore, as the role of the academic library evolves, the ability to understand the practice of research from firsthand experience will be invaluable. All of the projects have created discussion and professional reflection within the Library. The value of this ‘buzz’ is very great indeed.
References


Appendix A

A research initiative for Flinders University Library

Background
The report of the review of the library conducted in 2009 reported on an organization that is user focused, well regarded, well networked into the institution, competent and effectively managed. This is evidence of a strong, value driven, service culture pragmatically and effectively implemented. These are key values and practices for the future of the library and need to be valued and developed.

There are however limitations in the present approach, some programmes and actions are not being effectively assessed and analysed. Professional reflection and a contribution to the wider development of professional ideas and discourse have not been major features of the actions of the Library. We have not engaged to the extent that we might in evidence-based-librarianship.

When the reasons for the limited engagement in research and reflection are considered there are probably a few key factors. Firstly a management culture driven by service delivery and pragmatism has reproduced itself by filling the organization with effective pragmatic doers, this will not change. Secondly the service imperative has ensured that staff are fully occupied, only the provision of extra resources has the potential to change this. Thirdly there has been no clear and consistent statement from management that they value research and reflection, this initiative begins to change that message. Finally there is a lack of skills and experience in conducting research; this can be addressed with resources.

This paper proposes an initiative to begin to develop a culture of research and reflection to supplement the present pragmatic and managerial culture.

Proposal
That the Library establish a Research Working Group (RWG) of 4-5 members plus a chair.

Terms of Reference
The purpose of the RWG is to support the development of a culture of research and professional reflection in Flinders University Library. It will achieve this by supporting its members to undertake a research project thus acting as a model for future developments and by arranging training and similar activities that benefit the whole professional staff. With a new initiative these terms of reference will be necessarily be fluid.

Membership
RWG members would normally be in the classification range of HEO 5 – HEO 8 and hold a continuing appointment. Members will be selected by the chair and the Library Executive
following a call for expressions of interest. Part of the call for expressions of interest will involve identifying potential research projects. Expressions of interest will be evaluated according to the extent to which they support the University’s Strategic Plan and the Library’s goals. Some proposals may come from groups of staff and this could be a valuable way of mentoring staff and broadening engagement, how such group proposals might interact with the operation of the RWG will be determined case by case.

Members will normally stay in the group for two years. A third year may be possible at the discretion of the chair. As terms expire replacement members will be sought following expressions of interest.

During the time that they are members of the RWG staff will be expected to be undertaking a research project. Furthermore they are expected to share the results with their colleagues through process such as the Library’s staff development programme and if appropriate with the wider professional community in SA though such things as ALIA and ULSA PD events.

The chair will be nominated by the University Librarian from amongst the senior staff.

**Resources**

A budget of $10,000pa will be allocated to be managed by the chair to facilitate the research activities of the members of the RWG. Purposes for which this money might be used include buyout of members’ time from their routine duties in units, research design and statistical consulting and research training. Travel and conference expenses, as set out below, will not be charges against this allocation but will be met from other sources.

If members of the RWG, or other staff, get papers into relevant Australian conferences the library will fund their attendance. Relevant conferences may not be ‘Library’ conferences.

Subject to budgetary conditions the Library will fund participation in an overseas conference every other year for a member of the RWG, or other staff member, who gets a paper into a relevant international conference.

Once the RWG is well established it can investigate external sources of research funding that staff might be able to apply for.

**Reporting**

The Chair of the RWG will report to the Library Senior Staff group, via the University Librarian, twice a year on the group’s progress.

**Review**

At the end of three years of operation the RWG will be reviewed by the Library Executive.

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8th July 2010