

# Editorial



## Challenges and Opportunities for Academic Libraries in Supporting Researchers

After sixteen years at Griffith University specifically and four decades in librarianship and information science generally, my recent retirement from the Library has given me an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned. In many ways, the successes and challenges at Griffith reflect what has happened / is happening within our profession.

For the purposes of this editorial, I have used the term “university” to encompass all higher education institutions. Notwithstanding the importance of learning and teaching to universities, given the nature of my own experience, the focus in this opinion piece is on library support for research.

Support for researchers has become an ever more important focus for all universities given two critical drivers: (1) the importance of research performance as one of the key criteria in the major global university ranking schemes, and (2) the increasing complexity of research itself, as evidenced by the so-called Fourth Paradigm (Hey, Tansley & Tolle, 2009). As the Manager, Academic Engagement Services at Griffith Library and I recently have said: “A university’s aspirations to increase both its research activity and impact rely not only on the outputs of its researchers but also on the quality of the research support provided by a range of key service elements within the organisation. It is here that the library can make a valuable contribution” (Weaver & Richardson, in press).

Understandably, there is often some confusion in researchers’ minds as to where to turn for advice. In order to lessen a “siloed approach” to researcher support, Griffith University Library has established a strong relationship with other units who support research and researchers within the University, especially the Office for Research, which manages research grants and research development. Grants recipients are now referred to the Library for support around data management planning, and the Office refers staff to library-created guidelines on this topic.

Another important relationship is with the University’s eResearch Services, which support researchers in the use of advanced information and communication technologies (ICT). Some material is co-taught, including workshops on Software Carpentry, which is an international approach to teaching basic computing skills to researchers; both units collaboratively organise and help deliver an annual “Research Bazaar” for early career researchers; and staff have regular contact and conversations regarding services, tools, plans and projects.

More generally, taking an active role in professional communities, including writing articles and presenting at conferences, is a challenging but rewarding way for librarians to improve their own skills. Constructive feedback from colleagues as well as through a more formal peer review process can provide valuable insights and lead to a better understanding of the research / publishing lifecycle. Along with professional development, this approach should ideally assist librarians to provide better advice and training to higher degree research students, for example.

Lastly, but perhaps of most importance, is the need for the library to demonstrate its contribution to the strategic goals of the university... and in a way that senior management can understand. This includes the effective use of data, particularly through visualisation, to tell broader stories about the library and its impact. Considering the current pandemic, the need for the library to ensure that it aligns with the strategic goals of its parent institution is of paramount importance. Even before the advent of Covid-19, Griffith University Library had already embarked in late 2019 on a major reconceptualization and restructure of its research support services, in alignment with the University’s strategic research goals.

In conclusion, beyond Covid-19 lies a new normal—and new opportunities. Universities are having to reconsider their priorities and what they can realistically fund from 2020 onwards. Libraries have an important opportunity to demonstrate that their services are aligned to need and are evidence-based, thereby supporting the very researchers to whom the world is looking to help solve the big challenges.

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**References**

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