

Scope for Inter-Library Co-operation

M. W. Hill

National Reference Library of Science and Invention, United Kingdom

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SCOPE FOR INTER-LIBRARY CO-OPERATION

by

M. W. HILL

Since this is a conference of librarians from technological universities, may I start with a disclaimer. This paper does not set out to give any advice on how to educate the users of university libraries. It would be quite inappropriate to offer any such advice to these who are every day concerned with students, with their education and with so many other colleagues also involved in the task of educating those students. What this paper does do is try to provide a forum for discussing solutions to the organisational problem which seems to arise from the high student : librarian ratio in universities.

The fourth IATUL Seminar, held in Delft in September 1969, was devoted to the theme of co-operation on an international basis, and to standardisation of practice.

When later in the year a SCONUL Seminar was held at Reading on "Human aspects of library instruction", the university librarians present raised problems to which it seemed that regional or national inter-library co-operation might provide not a full solution but at least a palliative.

The question asked in the title of the first paper of this present seminar "How far should the user be instructed, how far served directly?" implies either that there can be difference of opinion on the amount of instruction in library uses that the student should be given or, perhaps, that there is a difference in the amount needed for students of different disciplines.

Certainly, as retrieval techniques are today, there can be no doubt that the applied scientist and the engineer both need and can benefit from such instruction. Wood (1) cited evidence of this, and experience in the National Reference Library for Science and Invention (NRLSI), where so many university graduates come to use the large collection, confirms that instruction is needed.

At the Reading Seminar, the point was made repeatedly that there are two stages in the education process. First, there is the general introduction of the new student to the library. He learnt where it is, in which part his subject literature is housed and how to find a particular book, though according to Dr. Thompson, little other than the location sticks in his memory. The second stage is instruction to the mature student and to the post-graduate research worker on the effective use of literature combined, sometimes, with an introduction to other sources of technical information. Of these two stages, the first would seem to be entirely a local matter. However, may there not be sufficient similarities between some libraries to make it possible for them to produce jointly instructional tools such as tape-slide accounts of the very elementary principles of library use? For example, searching the author catalogues, the significant elements of a reference, how to find a reference, and an explanation that books are shelved separately from periodicals are possible topics for joint projects. Perhaps however, such tools are so easy to produce locally that there is no benefit in seeking another library, which is not too dissimilar from one's own, with which to share the task.

It is when we turn to more advanced instruction, particularly that given to groups of students from a single faculty, that it may be that libraries can more effectively help one another. There seem here to be two requirements. The first is to ensure that each teaching organisation has instructors able to give the discipline oriented tuition needed for each group of students. That is to say, instructors to cover physics, chemistry, electrical engineering, sociology and so on. Is the library staff large enough to provide from its own resources a tutor in each topic?

The second requirement is, of course, that even if tutors for each topic can be provided, have they sufficient time to be able to provide the extent of tuition needed?

To the second problem, the only solution that suggests itself is some form of mechanised instruction of the several types with which universities are now so familiar. Again, is there scope for co-operation in providing such devices, be they tape-slides, videotapes or something more complex? If each were planned to concentrate on the literature itself and on the published search tools and omitted matter relevant only to the organisation of literature within a particular library, then the same material could be used in several libraries.

To the first problem, providing a range of subject based tutors, co-operation again suggests itself as a solution but, if it is restricted to co-operation between university libraries, it may not be a practical one because of shortage of time.

Both the National Lending Library (NLL) and the NRLSI have found it necessary to provide instructional courses on the use of technical literature. The excellent ones provided by the NLL have become very well known and have inspired others to follow suit. The NRLSI's work is not known at all well and, since it is relevant to what follows, I would like briefly to describe it. Leaving aside the lecture-tours, for parties of students or trainee librarians and information officers, and the tailored working-courses, which we arrange for a limited number of individuals, the NRLSI staff provide instruction in access to scientific and technological literature generally, in searching special forms of literature, particularly but not exclusively patents, and in searching the literature of particular disciplines or topics. Virtually all this is arranged on request and the only courses to which the general public have been invited are those we call "An Introductory Course on the Use of the NRLSI", which are much less parochial than the title would suggest and, more recently, "An Introduction to the Use of Technological Literature".

Special seminars and lectures have been provided for parties of third year students from universities and technical colleges and for members of industrial organisations. We do not insist on providing instruction on our home ground, though, since all the literature needed is to hand, this is the most common way. From time to time members of the staff have travelled to the audience.

The scientific staff of the NRLSI cover a very wide range of disciplines from mycology and entomology through metallurgy and electrical engineering to analytical chemistry and mathematics. They can operate individually or pool their knowledge to enable us to run seminars on multi-disciplinary topics such as the one we are holding in the late Spring on "Technological aspects of pollution."

Most of this instructional work we do on request and we are quite willing to co-operate in this way with any organisation that wishes to make use of us. As I see it, one, if not the, major task of a national library is to provide a resource to which other libraries can turn, or can direct users, when their own or regional resources cannot meet what is needed. This can apply more widely than just to the provision of photocopies, loans or a reference collection, if there is a demand for such services. You may, therefore, like to consider, when you are planning your education for the library user, whether it is worth seeing if a national library can help fill any gaps you may have.

To summarise, this paper has briefly posed the problem of the availability of adequate resources to enable adequate user education to take place and has suggested that co-operation between libraries of similar type, between libraries in the same region and even between the university and national libraries might provide a means of improving the availability of educators.

REFERENCES

- (1) Wood, D.N. Library Education for Scientists and Engineers.
Bull. Mech. Engng. Educ. 1969, Vol18, pl.

DISCUSSION

J. FITZPAYNE: Does Mr. Hill consider that a lecturer on library use should have good subject knowledge as well as being familiar with literature sources?

M.W. HILL: It has been our experience that bibliographical lectures have held the students' interest much better when the speaker has been well versed in the subject. For example, when explaining the use of patent literature it is, we find, necessary to be able to put the topic into context and to be able to answer any queries arising out of that. Where scientific disciplines are concerned, the NRLSI now has 16 senior subject specialists who are available to undertake this sort of work.

L.J. VAN DER WOLK: In our library at Delft some technical work including student instruction is being done by subject specialists. We are now, however, transferring information instruction to departments instead of giving it in the Central Library.

A.J. EVANS: It might save considerable duplication of effort if the production of audio-visual aids could be co-ordinated. Is there any prospect of video-tapes, tape-slide presentations etc. being organised on a national basis?

M.W. HILL: This is a matter which might be discussed suitably with the National Library Authorities.

DISCUSSION (CONT'D)

R.A. WALL: The question of co-operation on audio-visual aids links with the discussion in Mr. Myatt's paper. Would it be possible for the NLL, NRLSI and interested universities to form an unofficial working party? There would seem to be no shortage of people in the universities wishing to lend a hand.

M.W. HILL: The NRLSI would be quite willing to co-operate with the NLL on this point and the strong interest in the universities would prove most helpful.

C.C. PARKER: Would Mr. Hill tell us of any particular services offered by the NRLSI which should be mentioned in lectures to students on national sources of information?

M.W. HILL: There are two which can be emphasised. The first is the linguistic aid service in which a member of the NRLSI staff will join forces with a reader and help him decide, for example, whether a foreign article is worth having partially or wholly translated. The second is that queries can be answered without a personal visit to the library. This type of query however is best made through a company information officer or a university Library.

H.A. CHESSHIRE: Would Mr. Hill indicate how much time is spent on an individual enquiry and whether a charge is made for an extended search?

M.W. HILL: There is no charge for searches but the extent of a search is limited by the time available to the person dealing with the enquiry. In practice many of the queries are answered in an hour or less but on occasions substantially longer periods have been allocated. The usual result is a short bibliography or reading list geared to the enquirer's available resources. The service is similar to that provided by the National Centre for Documentation and Scientific and Technical Information (CNDST) at the Royal Library in Belgium.