



A day in the life of *a librarian at a national* *statistics office* **Catty Bennett**

Five years ago, Catty Bennett relocated from London to the Titchfield site of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the body which collects and compiles a range of economic, social and demographic statistics relating to the United Kingdom, including the Census, which is carried out every ten years. At that time, the Titchfield library had been unstaffed for a couple of years, so it took a while to re-establish the service.

Here, Catty gives *Insights* a flavour of a typically varied day in the Titchfield library.

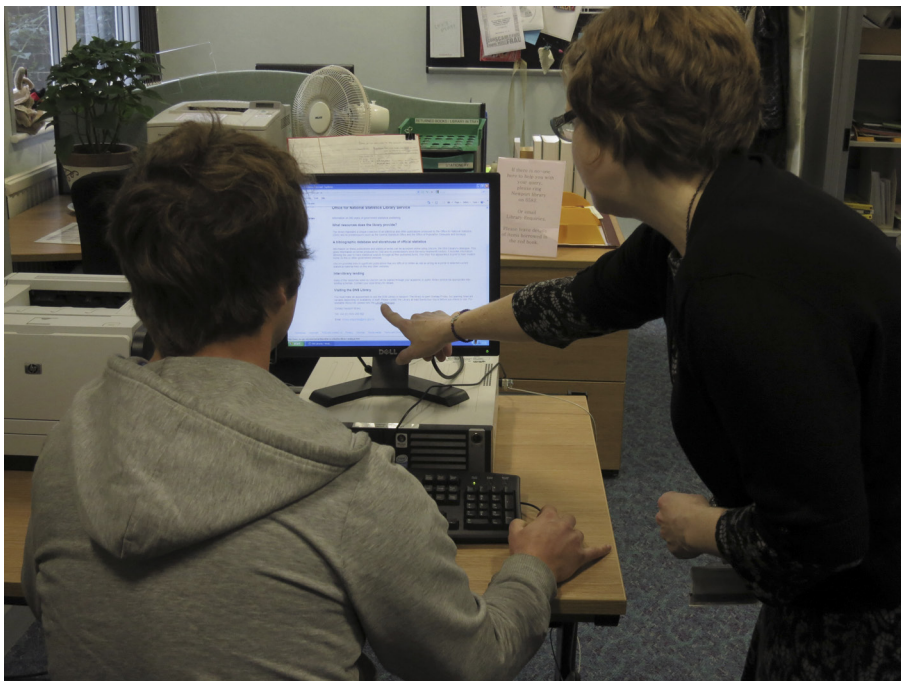
On this typical Tuesday I start work at about 9.15 am, since the traffic after the school run is not too bad. As I don't work on a Monday, the first thing I do is ring my line manager, Helena, in Newport, South Wales, as I wait for my PC to start up. I work on my own in Titchfield and the rest of the library team are in the Newport office, which is the corporate headquarters of the ONS. Helena and I will have a quick catch up, but as we have weekly meetings (usually by video-conference), we don't talk about too much on the phone. I am the line manager for the remainder of the library team, which includes two part-timers, and I make sure that staff meetings are scheduled so that everyone gets to attend at least once a month; plus I do timetable visits to Newport so that I can see everyone face to face.

Once my PC has woken up, I open up my e-mails and look for anything I can delete. Next I look for anything that needs an immediate response; even though we have a library mailbox, people do still send mail directly because they know me. There are a couple of queries from colleagues, one regarding an inter-library loan and another involving a book purchase so I forward these on to the library mailbox for action. The ONS is a vast organization and

86 we can get information enquiries on just about any subject; although the main focus of the business is on the production of population and economics statistics. Most people are familiar with the ONS because we carry out the decennial population census, but few people are probably aware of the other statistics we produce, the many surveys we carry out or the role we play in the development of good practice in the production of official statistics.

I then write my daily to-do list, although it nearly always takes a week rather than a day to complete everything on the list! Queries and ad-hoc pieces of work come along frequently and I am always juggling these with routine tasks such as stock maintenance or writing articles for our intranet. Top of today's list is the preparation of training materials for my next round of library training courses. Each month either in Titchfield or Newport, I run three different courses on the same day: 'Introduction to the online library catalogue', 'Research skills for online databases', and 'Advanced internet searching skills'. The courses are aimed at all ONS employees, whether new starters or experienced researchers, and the feedback has been positive and encouraging. Occasionally, I have been asked to run a bespoke internet searching course for a specific business area that relies on the web searching skills of its staff, so I have customized course materials before. I like finding out about the different work that takes place here at ONS and it's nice to be able to support colleagues in making better use of their time when carrying out online research.

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When I have updated my slides and printed out handouts, I look towards the next task on my list. This is a reminder to update the paperwork for a forthcoming Library User Group (LUG) meeting. The LUG was set up in response to a review on library services within ONS and is made up of representatives from most business areas and library staff. We discuss new projects and pieces of work that the library could assist with and report back on promotional work that we have undertaken. Some interesting ideas have come out of the LUG, such as a suggestion that we could write an article for *ONS Life*, which used to be our in-house publication, showcasing how the library service assisted someone taking an ONS-funded course.

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Throughout the morning, I am visited by people wanting to borrow books or use the broadband internet PCs and before I know it, it is lunchtime. On Tuesdays I play beginner's bridge with colleagues of mine in our on-site coffee lounge. We started learning a few months ago and are slowly getting to grips with the nuances of the game, I think! It is through informal networks such as this, as well as on training

87 courses, that I get to meet a wider range of colleagues. I like being able to meet people from all different business areas as I don't get to meet all of our library users. Although we do have a physical library on two sites, we also provide remote access to all of our services so not all of our colleagues need to come in to the library.

After lunch, it's back to my desk to carry out some research on behalf of a colleague in the Survey Methodology Division. The latest piece of work I am doing is looking for literature on the impact of questionnaire colour on response rates for an Assistant Methodologist. One of the suggestions she has come across is that response rates to business surveys could be improved if the questionnaires were printed on different shades of paper, rather than white. By sifting through various bibliographic databases and the web, I am hoping I can find some papers that will assist her in making a recommendation to change our questionnaire design.

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Once I have compiled a list of resources she might be interested in and sent it off, I carry on with my online work. Next summer, our subscription to a newspaper database comes up for renewal and we are very keen to establish whether we are using the most suitable source for the information we require. I have set up a couple of free trials to alternative databases and am working my way through some of the regular searches we carry out to see whether we should subscribe to one of these instead. Unfortunately, one of the databases, although easy to use, would not allow the results to be manipulated the way we need them to be in order to send them on to our colleagues. Hopefully the other database will suit our business needs (and our budget).

Finally, it's 5 pm and I need to tidy my desk and turn off all the equipment and lights. The room is always left unlocked so that staff working longer hours, or on shifts in the Telephone Operations Unit, can come in and read the papers or log in to the broadband machines. I collect my daughter from the childminder's and so my second job begins.