



Profile Stella Butler

Research Libraries UK (RLUK) recently had an away day to plan its new strategic direction, so we were delighted when its Chair, Dr Stella Butler, was able to find space in her busy schedule to be interviewed for *Insights*.

Stella Butler is University Librarian at Leeds but also delights in her additional title of Keeper of the Brotherton Collection. She began by telling me about the day job, explaining that Leeds is a research-intensive Russell Group university with a very large library system. She is responsible for three site libraries and a library that is part of the St James's University Hospital. Stella said, "I'm very lucky here in that we have outstanding special collections which provide a rich research resource both for Leeds scholars and the wider academic community." She went on to explain that the library at the University of Leeds is working on a 'stage two' Heritage Lottery Fund bid to create a new public gallery for the University's special collections so that they can be shared more broadly and deliver value to the University in terms of public engagement as well as academic research.

The University of Leeds also has a new £27.5 million undergraduate library under construction, which is due to open in spring 2015. It will be named the Laidlaw Library after donor, Lord Laidlaw of Rothiemay.

In addition to all these exciting projects, Stella faces the same challenges as all university librarians across the UK: dealing with the open access (OA) agenda, with above-inflation increases for subscriptions and developing new services for research data management. As Stella put it with quiet understatement, "I like being busy and my days here are certainly that."

Given the demands of the day job, your Editor asked Stella why it is important to find time to be not only a member of RLUK, but also its Chair. Stella was pleased to say that all 30-plus

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8 members very much value their membership of the organization. RLUK came out of a project to share catalogue data and as a result works collaboratively today with Jisc and Mimas to look after and provide web access to the RLUK database through the Copac service. It is important as a consortium providing a very practical resource through its database, but it also provides a meeting place and a combined voice for UK academic research libraries. Stella explained, "We want RLUK to be a leader in shaping the future of academic library services and our future strategy will be based around big common challenges ... So, membership of RLUK is directly relevant to the development of services here within my own university. I don't think you can divorce the day job from the role of board member of RLUK nor indeed being Chair of RLUK, although I think there has been a step change in activity for me from being a board member to being Chair."

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Your Editor asked Stella if the Finch Report has had a particular impact on academic research libraries in the UK. Stella explained that RLUK, and indeed many librarians, had long been advocates of open access so in that sense the Finch Report was and is part of a continuum. "The RCUK policy that followed from the Finch Report," she said, "has been challenging for most university librarians in terms of managing publication funds and linking those funds to the academics who want to publish in gold open access." The University of Leeds is participating in the Jisc APC pilot, a project that Stella sees as essential. RLUK members are also working hard to develop their institutional repositories and in supporting academics that are not using the gold OA route in ensuring they choose the shortest embargo periods and get their material into repositories.

Stella told us that an area of great concern to RLUK members is that of 'double dipping', whereby a university effectively pays twice for content in hybrid journals through article processing charges (APCs) and again through subscriptions. RLUK has recently issued a statement about this and its stance is that rebates for APCs should come back to the individual institution rather than be subsumed in any publisher's global subscription structure. "This is an important issue where RLUK can help at a national level working with partners such as Jisc, the Association for Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) and the British Universities Finance Directors Group (BUFDG)," said Stella. "RLUK will of course be keeping an eye on open access policies in other countries."

Stella explained that partnerships are very important in helping to position RLUK in a stronger place to be able to influence the information agenda. Such partnerships work not only within the UK but also at the European and international level. RLUK has recently joined The European Library, is working towards an institutional subscription to LIBER and has close relationships with partners in the United States, particularly OCLC.

Stella went on to explain that RLUK's current strategy has a number of key strands: redefining the research library model in the digital age, research data management, ethical and effective publishing and, of course (close to her heart), unique and distinctive collections. The latter is a defining characteristic in that many of the RLUK libraries have outstanding special collections.

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When asked to give a sense of the priorities that emerged from the recent RLUK strategy-planning away day, Stella explained that the new RLUK strategy would be based very firmly on the needs and priorities identified by its members. In preparation for the away day, members considered what their top concerns are and how RLUK has been useful to them in the past few years in terms of the direction of their own libraries. "We are currently still shaping the ideas," said Stella, "but already scholarly communications is emerging as a very strong theme because the open access agenda is impacting on every university librarian, every day. This is not only about journals but the wider UK policy issues around open science." Stella made clear that RLUK wants to be in the forefront of creating and supporting the broader open agenda. This includes research data management as well as other forms of scholarly

9 communications including open monograph publications and the new ways younger researchers are finding to communicate with each other often using social media.

“All RLUK members are concerned about the continued high level of increases they are seeing in journal subscriptions,” said Stella. “It is quite complicated because more research outputs are being produced and therefore there is more content to buy. Nevertheless, many of our UK libraries are in a financial environment where they are not receiving the same increases in their budgets. In these circumstances, they are keen to see price increases capped to as low a level as possible.”

“An important theme is reshaping the research collection for the digital age ...”

Stella explained that another important theme is reshaping the research collection for the digital age, for example, planning for the archive collections of the future, as fewer and fewer people write letters and live increasingly in a digital environment. At the other end of the spectrum is the management of low-use print collections, which may not be ‘special’ but nevertheless form part of the UK’s information capital.

“We’re delighted that Jisc is going to continue to support The Copac Collections Management (CCM) project,” said Stella. “We want to make sure that that it delivers value to our member libraries supporting the development of a distributed national collection, and uncovering the riches in our libraries. We know from the work we’ve done that there is still an awful amount of uncatalogued material and poor metadata. There is still a very basic library job – the bread and butter of librarians’ work – to be done, but very much couched in a digital national structure and framework.”

Stella went on to say another emerging strand is the development of RLUK’s role as a shared knowledge community so that it can provide a firm foundation for the innovation its members wish to encourage. “This is especially important as we are all required to do more with less. The more we can share good practice and experience across the consortium, the more benefit will come back to our libraries,” explained Stella, “and we are also concerned to help develop our staff to ensure the strong leadership that will be needed to take our research libraries into the next century”.

Stella told us that RLUK members think it is important to understand the research process, which in the digital age has changed considerably. Researchers, in terms of the practices at their bench or in the case of the humanities scholars at their desk, work in different ways now through their computers and iPads. “We need to understand that research process so that we can not only deliver to researchers the information they need when they need it, but to innovate too and develop new services,” said Stella. “We feel that is true not only for research but for learning. Learning traditionally hasn’t been a focus for RLUK, but we increasingly find with the development of four-year undergraduate courses which award masters degrees, and with a very strong offer of both research-led and research-based teaching, that there is often a shading between what is learning and what is research. Increasingly, students need to learn to become researchers as part of their undergraduate life so we are very much looking at where the riches we hold within our libraries can really enhance and increase the value of learning experiences.”

“... the library as a space remains incredibly important to our academics.”

The traditional research library is changing quite rapidly and this brings enormous and exciting opportunities. “Many felt that the electronic journal would cause the death of the library,” said Stella, “but in fact the library as a space remains incredibly important to our academics. Not just as somewhere quiet to work but also a place for the exchange of ideas – almost going back to the ancient role of a library where it becomes a knowledge exchange for our university”.

There is plenty to keep Stella and her colleagues busy but, amazingly, she also finds time to sit on the governing boards of the Seven Stories National Centre for Children’s Books in Newcastle and Chetham’s Library (the oldest public library in the English-speaking world) in Manchester! An historian of medicine by background, Stella also manages to “dabble in the

- 10 academic world". The journal *Medical Humanities* recently published her paper on Florence Nightingale, based (perhaps not surprisingly) on letters to be found in one of the special collections held at the John Rylands' Library, University of Manchester.



Stella enjoying some fresh air and exercise with Lily (left) and Charlie

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