

## The role of the library assistant – a session at #libcampldn 2<sup>nd</sup> March

I pitched the session as a way to discuss library assistants' roles in libraries. Many library assistants are either studying for a master's degree in Library and Information Studies, have received their master's degree, or are generally capable of more than they can sometimes get recognition for.

A lot of different topics came out of the session, including view points that I was not expecting as they were the reverse of what I had experienced. A good mix of different people, with different roles and job titles also came along, which helped give alternative views to some of the experiences that were common among the library assistants.

The session was split into 3 groups to talk about the ideas. The group I mostly participated with was lucky enough to have someone who was in a management role, though I believe every group did end up with at least one member in a more senior library role.

The key topics that were discussed included:

- LA's were happy for experiences outside of their job description but found that there were hierarchical barriers that sometimes stop them from being either recognised for the work they do or contributing to a particular.
- Some LA's were doing the work of Senior LA's or Assistant Librarians without the pay, job title or recognition, which was great for their CV's but not so good in terms of rewards and benefits.
- Master's degrees:  
The market is saturated with many new professionals working in LA positions but who have master's degrees in library and information studies.  
Not everyone can afford to do the degree to advance themselves, but this is not always as essential as it can be perceived. Consider chartering with ALIP or alternative career development pathways  
Do library qualifications help or hinder the profession?
- Is there a difference in opportunities and development needs between LA's wanting to progress to becoming librarians and those who are happy in their current roles?  
Some LA's don't want the extra work or responsibility and are happy in the role.
- Librarians can sometimes look down on LA's. Maybe this is a form of job protectionism? Are librarians worried that they might lose out or be de-professionalised if LA's are willing and capable of doing their work?

- 1-2-1's and career development talks with managers can sometimes be perceived to be a tick box exercise without any solid benefit for the employee.

Some solutions and advice on how to further your career came out of the discussion too

- 'Shop around' for jobs. Sometimes a step sideways can be invaluable to getting extra or missing experience. You might move to another library assistant role but this one could be in a different department, or entail different duties. Not all progression is linear.
- Seize opportunities in whatever form they come in.
- Apply for jobs even if you do not meet every person specification. You could still be a very strong candidate for the role and staff can be trained in some aspects of the job if necessary.
- Remember that CILIP Chartership is a good path to consider for your personal development, but it is not essential for every job.
- Try 'soft' negotiations with your manager to gain more experience, such as coming up with solutions to a problem you have identified and presenting it as a whole, rather than just stating there is a problem.
- Use your 1-2-1's with your managers. Discuss and evaluate your role, what you can and can't take on, use it as a way to record the extra work you contribute to your team and feedback to the organisation.

Overall I believe people got a lot out of the sessions and hopefully some idea of how to move forward if they were struggling with a particular issue. I would like to thank everyone for coming along and contributing to the session. Please feel free to add and expand on some of the topics I highlighted added here. Also, thank you to the groups that took notes. I have tried to incorporate all of the ideas jotted down on the flipchart sheets in this write-up.