

For many of us working in a cataloguing or metadata team workflows are taken for granted – they may have been instigated before we took up our role, and people may do things in the way they do, because they always have done. However, when some kind of change is on the horizon, the workflows may suddenly come into focus – maybe there is a new team leader, a change of location, or a new LMS. At Cardiff University we are currently in the process of implementing Alma, as part of the WHELF (Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum) consortium which includes all the Welsh universities, plus the National Library of Wales, and the NHS Wales libraries. Cardiff University are in the third cohort of implementation, so many of our fellow Welsh colleagues have already paved the way for us. We are however one of the largest institutions, and bring with us the NHS Wales libraries – who already use our current LMS, Voyager.

Early last summer the project lead instigated a thorough dissection of our workflows in preparation for a week with a member of the Orbis Cascade Alliance – another large consortium who had previously implemented Alma.

We were all asked to set down, step by step what our role consisted of, and the project lead would draw everything together and create the flowcharts needed. It is an interesting opportunity to think about how you do your job on a day to day basis, and which order you take certain steps or make decisions. One ‘problem’ I had was in deciding just how detailed this description needed to be; as a cataloguer who likes to focus on minutiae I was torn between putting far too much, or being far too generalised. Should I put “catalogue book according to accepted standards” or should I detail what I was doing or checking for each field? Of course the answer lay somewhere in the middle – there was no need to detail every single field, but it was necessary to note that certain fields needed authorities checking for validation, for example.

We have six cataloguers in our department (two of whom are part-time); and although we didn’t quite have six variations on a theme, we offered the project lead several versions of what we do, and some more specifically focussed, for example one person wrote the workflows for working with e-books, another wrote the workflows dealing with the differences in the two campuses. It was interesting to see how we had all described our roles, some (like myself) probably putting in too much detail, and some variations in how we work (although achieving the same objective). The project lead amalgamated what we had all contributed, and then listed all the workflows for the particular areas – e.g. print books, print journals, e-books, e-journals, donations etc etc. We all had the opportunity to look at the spreadsheet and to offer corrections or amendments. I went through it and tried to make the descriptions of the same or similar processes match. It was just a case of language, but with different people describing the same action, it didn’t sound homogenous, and it was far clearer to take the best description and apply it to all relevant processes.

As the project lead does not work in the department it was of great benefit to her to have all the processes laid out clearly so that she could understand how our department works; it was also of benefit to us to think about how we work; and couch it in a way that a non-cataloguer might understand.

During the week we had Sion Romaine from the Orbis Cascade Alliance with us, there were sessions arranged for different parts of the collection management processes, so there were acquisitions sessions, e-resources, cataloguing etc. These sessions weren’t just about looking at our workflows, but they provided a basis to start from so that Sion could see how we currently work and offer advice from a department that had already been through a major implementation. It was also very useful to have an outside voice questioning why we did things – as we knew this person had no ‘agenda’ and sometimes it would literally be “why do you do this?” – “Ok, now I understand” – whilst other times it would be “But why do this this way, how better can you do it/should this be happening at a different point in the process?”

In general I think most of our workflows were ok. As a collection management department as a whole the workflows in the physical space proceed reasonably logically. Boxes of new items arrive at the end of the room by the doors, they are opened and items put on trolleys. The trolleys are taken by the staff who receive the

items and deal with the invoices. The trolleys then move up the room to other members of the collection management team, any items that do not need to be seen by a cataloguer are dealt with, whilst those that do need cataloguer attention are added to shelves at the end of the room where the cataloguers are based. Once books have been catalogued they move to the processing area, and then, when tattle-taped and spine labelled, they move back to shelves at the entrance end of the room and await to be boxed up by the couriers and distributed to the site libraries.

Of course it is rare to find a set of workflows that are perfect, over recent years with several changes in staffing (retirement, unexpected bereavement, long term sickness absence, new staff, etc.) we have noticed a few areas that don't seem to work as well as they used to. This is due to a couple of factors – the disappearance of long term accrued knowledge as old staff go and new staff come in, and changes in processes (a new ordering process which has speeded up the initial placing of orders, but caused a greater work load further down the chain). I believe there is a bit of a whirlpool effect in one area, where initial responsibility seems to be unclear – and whilst the work gets done people aren't too sure who should really be dealing with it and in what order. This is an area I would like the team to discuss, but we are unsure whether to deal with it now, or leave it until Alma has been implemented, in which case maybe the confusion will disappear.

I believe we are a relatively large collection management department, certainly in comparison to many of our Welsh colleagues, but even we have shrunk over the last 5-10 years (with natural wastage), however it is great to see that in general we work well together with people having different responsibilities. I have worked in a smaller place where myself and another colleague ended up doing all the collection management roles – from ordering items, receiving them, dealing with invoices, cataloguing and classifying the items, and applying any processing that needed doing – I would even, on occasion, have to take items in an old shopping trolley across the hospital from the medical library to the nursing library - no couriers for us! I think if you have to do it all it is easier to prioritise your workflows, but when there is a team working together there is a need for much clearer processes as you have to ensure there are no blockages.

To summarise, I believe it is of benefit, if you have the time to spare, to sit down and actually work out what you (and your team) do. By writing down your processes they are easier to clarify, and it becomes more obvious where problem areas lie. It is also useful to have someone from outside the department look at your processes, as quite often they can spot something that is superfluous, or that could be moved to a different part of the chain. They might need certain aspects explaining to them, but in doing so you understand better yourself what is being done.