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Putting a Library Assessment Culture into Practice

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Hello everyone, my name is Selena Killick and I'm delighted to be able to present at the library assessment conference 2020, even if it is from a very socially distant location here in the United Kingdom. My presentation today is about how I've been putting a library assessment culture into practice to form our strategy at the Open University Library. For those of you who are following on zoom live, you can ask q&a now or throughout the presentation and I can pick them up at the end. For those of you watching this as a recording, I'm available on Twitter @SelenaKillick if you want to ask me anything. Alternatively, if social media is not your thing, I've got an email address coming up to the end of the presentation.

For those of you who haven't heard about us, the Open University is the UK's largest higher education provider. We were formed over 50 years ago with a mission to open up education for everybody. In that time, we've had over 2 million people choose to study with us. At the moment, I've got about 170,000 students, predominantly in the UK and Ireland, all over the country studying with us online. That's always been our model. As my Vice Chancellor put it, we were the world's first online university waiting for the World Wide Web to be invented. 27,000 of our students have got to declare disability. We don't insist that they declare a disability to us, but if we need to make learning adjustments, we know that information for those purposes. That makes us the largest provider of higher education for people with disabilities, and accessibility of information and learning is business critical. They can choose to study a range of qualifications, 180 at last count made up of 600 modules of study. When I say we're open, we really mean it and we're passionate about it. OpenLearn is our free platform of learning materials available to anybody on a Creative Commons license. When lockdown the first edition happened in the UK we were quick to move courses into that space to help the whole world. We launched courses on how to teach online, how to cope with mental health and some learning materials aimed at school children as the UK schools were closed. In that period close to 800,000 courses were completed.

The Library is very digital, 80% of our books are electronic, and 100% of our journals are too. For those of you who like your gate counters statistics, my equivalent is unique visitors to my website. Half a million every year come to our website to use our content and resources and skills materials. We make all of our content available open if we can within in terms of our license. That results in about 10 million page views per annum on the Library website. We are 24/7/365. For those of you who take part in the Springshare web chat, my team and I are very grateful, as are our students, for your help when our team are asleep. We've had a very strong strategy for digital capabilities at the Open University Library. We've worked well with our faculties to embed library content and skills into the curriculum. 91% of our students now study on a module where there is library content and skills embedded into it. The value in that is known; students who use library resources and attend library tutorials get a better class of degree at the end of the day. That work is part of our library learning analytics research, which I've presented on at this conference before I'm not going to dwell on it too much today. We are multi award winning and very passionate about what we do. We also practice what we preach. On OpenLearn this year we relaunched our digital skills badged open course *Succeeding in a Digital World*. Feel free to use it if you want to.

My presentation today is about how we use our library assessment culture into forming library strategy at the Open University Library. Our approach combines three key elements. The overall University Strategy, Insight, which is a term I use internally to talk about library assessment because library assessment isn't a common term in the UK; and Expertise. I'm going to cover these three elements; University Strategy, Insight and Expertise in this presentation.

Talking first about the University Strategy, I'm not going to dwell too much on this because I know this audience well enough to know that insight is the interest of the day. But it's vital that we

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recognise that we don't exist in a vacuum. We are always accountable to our university stakeholders. It's our role to understand the university's strategic aims and missions and interpret that into designing our services aligned to what the university is aiming to achieve. Conversely, it's also our role to convey what the library does and how it supports the university endeavour so the senior stakeholders can see a clear tangible link between what they want to deliver and what we are doing. I call it strategy interpretation.

Moving on to insight. Insight for me is an umbrella term that I used to talk about all the various components of insight into my users to understand the service and design it to support student success. For example, the library helpdesk uses a customer relationship management system. We know who's asking for what information, on what topic, when, how frequently. Is it an isolated request for help? Is there a problem with one module where they're consistently asking for the same thing, at the same time? Would a training session be more useful? Is there a consistent problem with one publisher and we want to talk to them about changing their platform? It provides insight into our customers and when they're contacting us for help so we can understand what we need to change to help students succeed. We also look at closely our resource usage, counter statistics, I'm sure you do similar. We have data on our systems about where content and skills have been embedded into the curriculum. We know who's using what, when, and how. We look closely at our statistics on training attendance and combine these with student attainment to understand that our training is providing a successful learning experience for our students. Within the UK we also have the National Student Survey. This is a compulsory survey that goes to all undergraduate final year students in every university in the UK, and it is benchmark between each university. We know if we are improving and getting better compared to somebody else. It is business critical and strategically aligned. We are trying to improve our scores in the survey, which we are, which is nice. Underlying all of this is user experience research and understanding what our customers want from us and what our service needs to offer next. For example, we ran a library needs project a few years ago into finding out what ~~is~~ our students want from us which we did through a directed storytelling approach.

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Core to making all of this work is our award-winning library student panel. This was something we developed in 2012. It was lovely to see Lara Miller's presentation at the previous session in the library assessment conference, sharing that the University of Arizona libraries has similar. Back in 2012, we were concerned we were hearing only from a very minority group of students. They were either very satisfied with us, or very unsatisfied. For those of you who are library assessment professionals, you know that these tend to be the people that want to talk to you. We were hearing from the same vocal minority of students and we were concerned about the people in the middle. We wanted to hear from them, how are we doing and what we could we do be doing better? We don't have the same fortune as you, with people walking in the door to offer them pizza too, so we set up the panel. We send out an invitation to take part to 4,500 students twice a year; that normally results in about 500 people agreeing to be on the panel at any one time. We've committed that they will never have to do more than four studies in a year. They are members for one year and they can leave at any point they want to. We send them a welcome pack. When they take part in any research we tell them what we found out and how it's going to use be used to improve our services. We send regular newsletters to all the panel members so they know what's going on, we don't always sample every panel member for every piece of work. We don't tend to incentivise too much; we've worked with the panel to understand what works for them and what doesn't. If they're doing something around 30 minutes, we will send them an Amazon voucher, but generally it's on goodwill.

The representativeness is an interesting point. When we started, we want to make sure the panel was composed of a population similar to the university. In the last few years we've started to weight the sampling to specific criteria to increase students from a BAME community and also those with a

declared disability. BAME is a term that's very commonly used in our cultural setting in the UK university sector, it's not necessarily one that I'm always comfortable with, but it is what my institution and a lot of UK universities are talking about. Equality and diversity is a huge strategic priority for us; we want to do more in this area, and we want to be better. We've weighted the panel to try and understand what more we could do.

The methods that we use with our panel vary, everything from surveys and focus groups through to directly storytelling, touchstone tours, observational studies, love letters and breakup letters which was quite fun. A variety different creative techniques to try and understand what's going on with them. All of this is at a distance; that has required some creative thinking from us on how we can do some of these things. We're always going to be innovative in this space.

For example we have had a project looking into the information architecture of the library website. To do this, we set the panel members a number of different challenges and tasks and ask them to find where they would look for this information. We use an online package called Optimal Sort for Tree Testing. That's just one of the providers in the space, not necessarily the only one, feel free to find who works for you if you want to do similar. It helped us to refine the library website structure, and work out which terms are more successful, which words resonate more with students, and which phrases were tripping them up.

From a more qualitative point of view, we also do diary studies. This has been a lovely piece of work into understanding how our live training sessions could be better and what works well. We sent panel members a simple sheet of paper to print out and have alongside them when they were taking part in a live training session with one of our librarians. Throughout the session at various intervals they made a pencil note of what they were thinking and how they were feeling about what was going on. They ~~then~~ took a photo of it and send it back to us, for us to have a rich idea of what's going on with the training sessions and how they can be improved.

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All of this insight comes together. A variety of different sources and methods to help us improve our services ~~and~~ to improve student success. It is important that you never look at any one thing in isolation, it is the whole collective. What are your users saying to you? What are you hearing from them? Going back to my model, we had University strategy, we've had the insight.

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The most important thing and the one thing we're not loud enough about in our sector, I feel, is our expertise. We are professionals. We are library professionals. I've been advocating for loud librarianship for years now. We're not book stackers; we're not working in an oversized Amazon warehouse. We are the ones that take that insight, and that university strategy and turn it into a library strategy. Without us, there's nothing. We're the most valuable resource a library will ever have.

So that brings me around to our model. How I build the library strategy is working with the university strategy, insight and our expertise. If you have just the university strategy and our expertise, but no insight from our users, that this is something that they want and need, you're not going to have any interest in service, and it's not going to get any take up, you have to have all three elements. Similarly, if you have the expertise and the insight, but it doesn't align to the university mission, you're not going to get the resources, whether the direct or indirect, you need to drive that strategy forward. Everything costs, and you need to be aligned to what the university wants you to do. Finally, if you don't have the expertise, but you have the university strategy, the insight, you won't have the capabilities to deliver on what your university wants from you. You'll need to build that capability within the team to drive that strategy forward. We are professionals, we are continually

improving ourselves and our services. Capability is something I always see grow within every university library I've ever worked for.

I have a lovely team at the University and I'm very proud to be one of them. I would like to just acknowledge a few of them that have helped me with this presentation. Thank you very much team!

...and thank you very much participants if you have any questions, Selena.Killick@open.ac.uk is my email address. These slides and my presentation is also available on my website, SelenaKillick.com. Thanks very much.