



Working together to move the profession forwards (Academic Librarians and Learning Development)

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Abstract

What happens when you cannot get the buy-in from your colleagues and the workload is driving you mad? In this presentation we showed what we do to disrupt and rewrite the game. Using a fictional scenario, the wise three guided you through the trials and tribulations of embedded support for key academic skills. You were invited to share your experiences in advance of the conference so our agony aunts could come up with ideas and suggestions to help you succeed in your role.

Academic skills are most successful when embedded within the curriculum (Wyatt, 2011; Coulson, Loddick and Rice, 2021). However, in our experience getting buy-in from academic staff and professional colleagues can be difficult. Engaging students with an active teaching approach can be even harder (Armellini, Teixeira Antunes and Howe, 2021; Hicks and Sinkinson, 2021). Using the model of Integrated Learner Support (ILS) developed at the University of Northampton for undergraduate support (Library and Learning Services, 2022), the workshop highlighted different approaches that can be used to navigate through difficulties and offered potential solutions to collaborative working between Learning Developers and Academic Librarians.

Keywords: integrated learner support (ILS); Learning Development; academic librarians.

Community response

This presentation began with a powerful statement and a commitment to promoting collaboration between Learning Developers and Academic Librarians. This is a much-needed practice in Learning Development in order to optimise students' skill levels, as well as to create a supportive and sustainable working environment for Learning Development, Academic Librarians, and students.

Some of the ingredients for optimal student support were discussed and summarised as follows:

Figure 1: Presentation slide about critical friend relationship.

Critical Friend Relationship



These are some of the areas that Learning Development and Academic Librarians share in their work with students, but much of its impact can be 'invisible' despite its complexity and intrinsic value. The potential of exploring the convergence/interrelationship between the two professional roles could therefore draw greater attention to the educational gains provided through an integrated approach.

Next steps and additional questions

With the sector increasingly recognising the need to treat students individually and provide new forms of tailored support, better models are very welcome. The presentation offers new insights into the potential for greater collaboration between Learning Development and Academic Librarians, and provokes several questions for further discussion and exploration, including:

- What would be the most tangible student benefits from greater co-operation between Learning Developers and Academic Librarians?
- What are the key areas of crossover between these two professional roles, and what strategies or processes might institutions adopt in order to optimise student outcomes?
- How might we work together to make 'critical-friend' roles and their benefits more visible?

Authors' reflection

The session looked at how we can design sessions that are student focused and included a range of expertise from Academic Librarians and Learning Development tutors. Character cards were used to represent the different roles involved and to reduce the potential for naming individuals or sharing personal experiences. There was good engagement from the small group who attended, who were keen to share their experience and practices. The session was valuable in providing a platform for individuals to share their experiences. However, the individuals did occasionally get side-tracked on the minutiae of the activity, rather than taking a holistic view of the team around the student.

Whilst individuals were keen to share the benefits and successes they have had collaborating with Academic Librarians and Learning Development tutors, an issue that arose was that academics are not always keen to support or engage with the preparation for the sessions and would rather just hand over the brief. This links well with the focus of the workshop as it gave us an opportunity to share strategy and ideas for engaging with academic staff in session development.

Reflecting on the workshop, the attendees in the session focused on the Learning Development input, which was understandable given the individuals in the room. When asked about the Academic Librarian involvement, they said they were included but had not verbalised this during any of the activities. As workshop coordinators, we need to consider how to facilitate and bring the Academic Librarian support to the forefront in further discussions.

Acknowledgments

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The authors and contributors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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