Promoting library engagement through employability (among other things)

Jennifer Wilson and **Laurence Morris** explain how a simple reminder about library resources at Leeds Beckett University developed into a service aimed at improving employability amongst students. Utilising existing resources and working in collaboration, the library has created a new way for students to discover and engage with employability skills and services.

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AT this year's CILIP Conference, during his presentation on 'Defining Value'[1], Stephen Philips of Morgan Stanley spoke usefully on how the services that organisations often value the most are those which assist with new tasks and challenges. This aspect of his talk was of particular interest to us, as it related to our own conference presentation,[2] on how assisting academic staff of Leeds Beckett University with specific issues – in particular, improving student employability – had enabled us to promote the university library more effectively.

For the Leeds Beckett University Developing Excellent Academic Practice (DEAP) conference 2015, we submitted a paper promoting the use of library subscriptions to enhance employability, the keystone of the university's 'Being Enterprising' graduate attribute. Initially, we regarded this as one opportunity among many to promote the library's resources. However, to our surprise, what we had badged as a straightforward refresher session was greeted with interest and enthusiasm by academics and members of professional support staff in the audience alike.

Independent skills
Consequently, we were invited to a meeting with our university's Associate Director of Services for Students to explore potential collaboration opportunities. At this meeting, it was decided that we would use the Libguides platform to create a guide on employability[3] within the library website. The guide was created by pulling together Leeds Beckett Library, Student Union and Careers resources, as well as external services and training. This would be a 'one-stop-shop', directing patrons to all sorts of complementary services and resources from around the university. As an institution, Leeds Beckett is committed to promoting education in the wider community (with both campus libraries open to the public), so it was important that the employability guide blended free and subscription resources, to assist our alumni and the general public, as well as the university's current staff and students.

We developed a skills level page to highlight to students a typical progression map, and how they could enhance their employability throughout their time with us. It was anticipated that the guide would enable students to develop their professional skill sets independently, so helping them to promote themselves more effectively in the job market.

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The guide also emerged as a convenient place to outline the tools available to PhD students, such as the diverse range of social media platforms now available as a medium in which to share research, collaborate or promote a specific institution or project.

Support for staff and students

Most importantly, it was hoped that academic staff would use the guide as a source of inspiration when considering how to use library resources to support specific subject areas, and that Careers Staff would benefit from having a centralised list of available services, information sources and training opportunities to recommend to their customers. Crucially, by gathering these disparate but related resources on one page, we were able to assist our students by contextualising them. The fact that this contextualisation, along with the rest of the guide, sat under the banner of the library website acted as effective advocacy – reminding students that practical support was available through our university library.

Once launched, the page also acted as effective advocacy to academic staff. After all, they had been the focus of the initial conference session, and were central to the uptake of the consequent guide – presented to them as a helpful resource they could use to ensure that their students were developing the right skills. We were aware that, as in all workplaces, staff struggle to find time to explore resources available to them; this had been highlighted by the audience reaction to the initial conference paper, which demonstrated the need for the guide to support the whole of the university community, and not just the student body. Providing support to staff as well as students acted as another reminder of the value which a library can add to an organisation.

To say that a library service should be advocated is something of a truism. However, this particular approach – initially going outside the library, to a broader staff conference – enabled us to engage potential new customers, rather than simply preaching to the converted.

Within the library

Practically, it should be stressed that an institutional conference and the Libguides platform are not necessary to replicate this type of project; an email or web page to promote the concept, and a Moodle, WordPress or even a Word document of links and suggestions would be just as effective! The aim of the project was simply to highlight the value of library subscriptions and librarians' professional knowledge in order to open up new opportunities for collaboration without necessarily requiring any additional resources.

Ultimately, the success of the approach was demonstrated by the 2,500 visits recorded to the guide in its first academic year of operation, despite an initial soft launch. Academic Librarians have also subsequently been invited to provide subject specific tuition sessions on employability resources, and have worked with academic staff to produce subject specific 'After Leeds Beckett'[4] guides to highlight the different opportunities and expectations facing graduates from different fields.
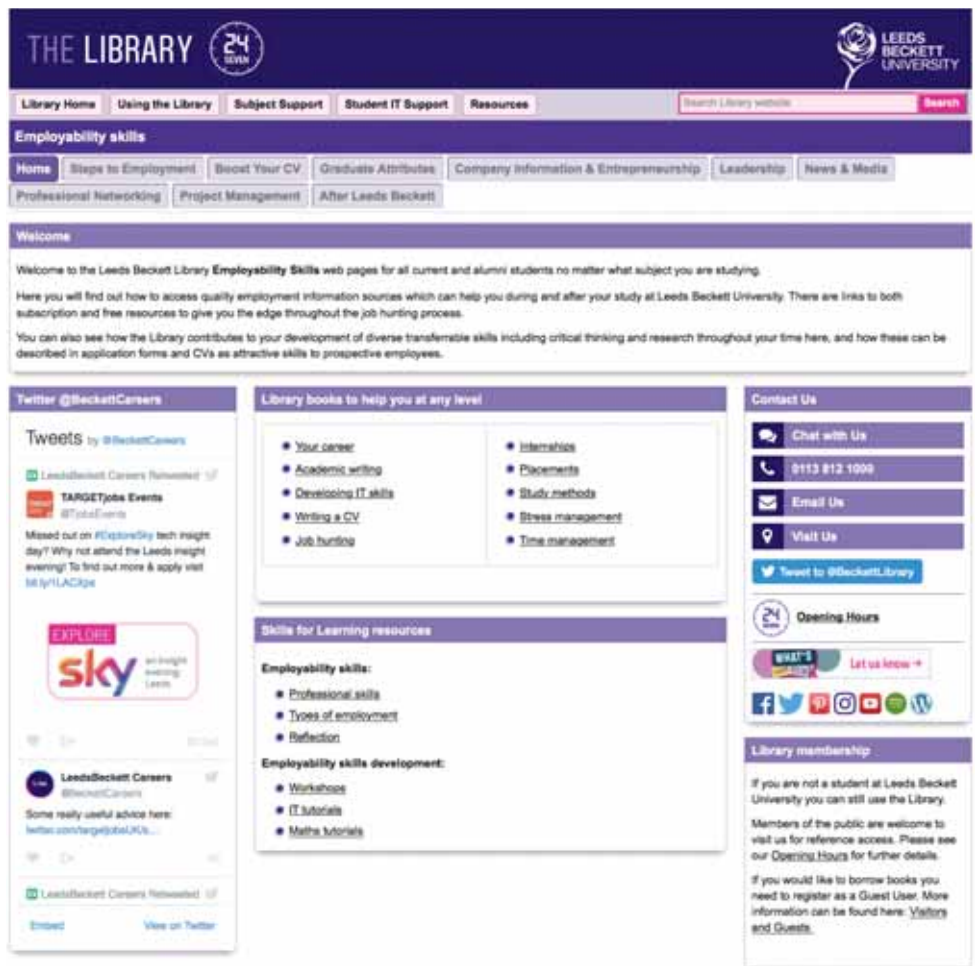
Employability Skills website.

Priorities

We have also used the principle of emphasising the ways in which a library can assist with contemporary priorities to advocate Leeds Beckett Library more generally. At the same DEAP conference, another academic librarian presented to academic staff on how to make effective use of the university's online reading list system. In this presentation, he emphasised how, as well as supporting the digital literacy of students, the system could also inform academic practice, by providing data on how students access and use recommended readings. Such data, he stressed, could assist staff with budget allocation, teaching strategy, and even applications for Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.
Equally, all of our Academic Librarians have worked hard to ensure that our everyday work with staff and students supports the themes emphasised at the DEAP conference, relating them to the library's other work. Subject specific support pages have been adapted to emphasise the relevance of the skills being imparted to graduate attributes such as digital literacy and employability. Workshops which we run on Open Access publishing have included sections on tools and techniques for improving the public visibility of individuals' research – through social media, and, for example, the use of the unique digital identification number offered to researchers by Orcid.[5] This last tool in particular has been a popular and easy sell to academic staff and research students, an example of their helpful library assisting them with the tedious admin-

istrative challenges of ensuring that access to their work is not adversely impacted if they ever change their name or their employer.

Time for reflection

Such activities have helped to promote an organisational culture where the library is seen as a forward-thinking and helpful partner, able to assist with whatever challenge is currently being faced. In essence, our work as academic librarians has emphasised some of the ways our library can help our community to respond to both local and wider trends – a general principle which we realise can be applied beyond our sector. By tailoring the presentation of both our new and existing services to contemporary priorities, without requiring any additional resources, we acted as successful advocates for the library, providing a practical demonstration of its continuing worth. Our ongoing task is therefore simple: to continue to find the time for reflection amidst everyday pressures, time in which to identify and highlight the areas in which the library's support will be most useful in future. [U]

Link to the employability guide:
http://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support/employability_skills/

References
1 'Defining Value' http://bit.ly/2d7S4IJ
2 Developing digital literacy skills in professional and academic staff http://bit.ly/2ctm4k6.
3 Employability guide http://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support/employability_skills/
4 After Leeds Beckett http://bit.ly/2d3QVWF
5 Orcid http://orcid.org/