

---

# International networking and staff development EU-style: Cardiff University's library service and the Erasmus staff mobility scheme



Sonja Haerkoenen  
Subject Librarian for European  
Studies and Psychology,  
Cardiff University  
Tel: 029 2087 5691  
E-mail: HaerkoenenS@cardiff.  
ac.uk

---

Staff development and international networking have always been highly valued in Cardiff University's library service. We have a strong staff development programme and pilot new ways of training and motivating our staff, for example through job rotation and shadowing.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly over the last few years, we have developed links with colleagues abroad and have had the pleasure of hosting a variety of international visitors. In response to enquiries for staff training we have recently set up the Cardiff University Erasmus staff development programme. This short article provides an overview of the development of this programme.

## BACKGROUND: SCONUL'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

In 2007, Michael Breaks introduced members to SCONUL's work on developing an international strategy.<sup>2</sup> This international strategy has recently been finalised under David Ball's leadership and was approved by SCONUL's executive board in February 2010. A corresponding action plan will also shortly be finalised. The international strategy<sup>3</sup> recommends that we should:

- mirror in SCONUL's culture and activities the move towards globalisation in the higher education (HE) sector
- help to enhance global awareness among member institutions and their staff
- strengthen existing international links and build new networks
- facilitate support for staff and students of member institutions abroad
- facilitate support for international students of member institutions, wherever they are located
- facilitate support for international research of member institutions
- identify best practice, wherever it occurs, and disseminate it to the widest possible audience
- monitor and influence global trends in the provision of and access to information
- play a leading role in the development of the profession globally.

## INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING AT CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

In line with SCONUL's commitment to fostering international relationships, we are keen to share our knowledge and expertise with colleagues outside of the university. We have developed a strong partnership with the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS) in Sierra Leone.<sup>4</sup> We also try to accommodate requests for training to the best of our ability.<sup>5</sup> As we have seen a rapid increase in requests for training by foreign library colleagues and library degree students, I was given responsibility for international partnerships and have become more closely involved in coordinating visits.

In 2008, a group of Finnish librarians visited Cardiff to share experiences of information literacy teaching (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> They introduced us to the EU's Erasmus staff mobility scheme,<sup>7</sup> then newly established, and invited my colleague Nigel Morgan and myself on a return visit to Finland to present an information literacy seminar and workshop to their colleagues. We were successful in receiving funds from the scheme and travelled to Finland in April 2009.<sup>8</sup>

Having gained some experience with the Erasmus staff mobility scheme, I started looking into the possibility of piloting a programme that would streamline the individual training requests we were receiving in order to use our staff time more efficiently and to allow our international colleagues to benefit from EU funding.



Figure 1. Nigel Morgan (left) with Finnish visitors at Cardiff in March 2008

#### PROGRAMME IN DETAIL

In February 2009, we trialled a four-day training programme for European librarians. Four modules were created, enabling visitors to sign up to training in an area of particular interest to them. Module 1 concentrated on information literacy, outlining the background to information literacy developments at Cardiff and introducing the range of current local initiatives. Module 2 focused on library buildings and self-service borrowing/RFID, and visits were arranged to several of our newly refurbished libraries. Module 3 covered the areas of library management as well as information discovery and delivery projects at Cardiff, such as our institutional repository and developments in electronic journals access. The final module, Module 4, introduced visitors to the European Documentation Centre (EDC).

Six visitors from three European countries attended, with all of them signing up for the whole programme. The visitors used the training to gain an insight into the British library system. They gathered new ideas for services and management with a view to using this knowledge to improve library tasks and processes within their own institutions. (See Figure 2.)



Figure 2. The 2009 cohort with European Documentation Centre Director Ian Thomson (centre)

The programme was such a success that it was offered again this year. A few minor changes were made in response to the trial:

- As all the attendees had taken advantage of the full four-day training programme, it was felt that a modular set-up was not necessary – thus providing more flexibility with the scheduling of themes to be covered.
- Secondly, to ensure that attendees were eligible for the maximum amount of EU Erasmus funding, the programme was extended to five days.
- This enabled us to incorporate a new session into the programme. As well as attending training sessions, the delegates themselves contributed to the programme, giving presentations to other workshop attendees and Cardiff University library staff, based on their own backgrounds and expertise. This allowed visitors and hosts alike to participate in a truly international knowledge-sharing experience.
- Finally, a grant from the university's international office gave the librarians an opportunity to visit libraries and buildings beyond the university, including the Cardiff public library, the St Fagans National History Museum and the University of Glamorgan's Atrium Building.

Attendance almost doubled, with eleven delegates from the Czech Republic, Finland, Poland, Spain and Sweden participating – most of whom had secured funding via the Erasmus staff mobility scheme (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. The 2010 cohort with programme organiser Sonja Haerkoenen (second row, 4th from the left) and University Librarian Janet Peters (second row, 1st from the right)

The week was very successful,<sup>9</sup> with 100% positive feedback and comments such as:

- 'I would like to come back another year.'
- 'Thank you for great organization ... I will never forget this week!'
- 'It was my first time at Erasmus programme and now I'm encouraged enough to take a part again ...'.

Director of Cardiff University libraries, Janet Peters, agreed: 'This has been a valuable opportunity to meet with and learn from our colleagues across Europe. The genuine two-way exchange of knowledge and expertise throughout the week has provided us all with plenty of ideas for the future enhancement of our library services to meet the changing needs of our communities.'

An unforeseen benefit of arranging training in this format has been the social dimension of international networking. Some attendees organised evenings out to the theatre and local attractions, and seven of the eleven attendees are now friends on the Facebook site and have issued visit invitations to each other. The idea of training international colleagues together in a group also seems to have caught on in other countries. At least two other European institutions have already decided to offer a similar week of library training to international colleagues.<sup>10</sup>

Due to the positive feedback received from delegates and colleagues alike, we are hoping to be able to repeat this programme again next year. We are currently exploring the possibility of joint sessions with other higher education institutions in the area.

## REFERENCES

- 1 See S. Earney and A. Martins, 'Job rotation at Cardiff University library service: a pilot study', *Journal of librarianship and information science*, 41 (4), 2009, pp 213–26.
- 2 See M. Breaks, 'SCONUL's international strategy', *SCONUL Focus*, 42, Winter 2007, pp 74–5, available at <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/42/26.pdf> [accessed 22 March 2010].
- 3 The international strategy was recently circulated to members via e-mail and will shortly be made available on the SCONUL website.
- 4 See <http://www.dental.tpmde.ac.uk/partnerships/sierra-leone-partnership> [accessed 22 March 2010].
- 5 For example, a summer placement of a Spanish library-degree student in the arts and social studies library; see her blog entry at <http://mobilsbid.blogspot.com/2008/08/car-diffejant.html> (in Catalan) [accessed 22 March 2010]
- 6 See <http://amkit.wordpress.com/2008/03/31/cardiffissa-on-infoluku-taito-kunniassa-britannia-212/> (in Finnish) [accessed 22 March 2010].
- 7 See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc898\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc898_en.htm) [accessed 22 March 2010].
- 8 See <http://amkit.wordpress.com/2009/04/24/sonja-and-nigels-busy-week-in-finland/> [accessed 22 March 2010].
- 9 For a summary of one visitor's experience, see his blog entry at <http://ludvigholmdahl.blogspot.com/2010/02/en-kort-sammanfattning-av-cardiff.html> (in Swedish) [accessed 22 March 2010].
- 10 See University of Bergen, Norway, at <http://biw.b.uib.no/>, and Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, at <http://czs.muni.cz/en/in/others/staff-training/must> [both accessed 22 March 2010].