

## Career profile of the academic librarian

**This profile aims to highlight the evolving role of the academic librarian and the way in which supporting research data management (RDM) is playing an increasingly important part. It explains some of the new roles which are emerging for academic librarians in the shifting research landscape and outlines some of the skills which may be required for future academic librarians to effectively provide support to researchers and students in this area. While this profile focuses on how the existing role of the academic librarian might be developed to provide RDM support to researchers, it should be noted that expectations for RDM support will likely affect many different roles within University libraries. RLUK and DCC may produce additional profiles as these roles evolve.**

### Becoming an academic librarian

The term 'academic librarian' covers a number of job titles, including subject librarian, liaison librarian and faculty librarian. To enter the role many individuals gain a professional qualification either through an undergraduate degree in Library and Information Studies, or an undergraduate degree in a given subject followed by a postgraduate Masters qualification in librarianship. Several courses are accredited by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). Alternatively, due to the changing nature of the post, an increasing amount of people are moving into the role from other support backgrounds, including teaching, research and IT. Here qualifications such as a PhD, PGCE or Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) can be highly valuable and indeed are often subsequently undertaken by those who have followed the more traditional path to becoming an academic librarian.

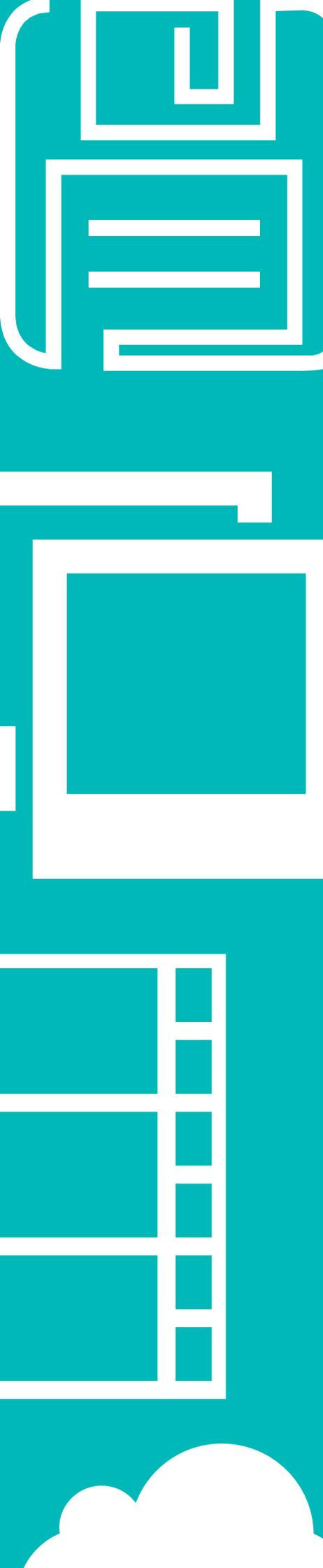
Once within a professional post, those with a librarianship qualification often work towards Chartered status of CILIP, which can be gained after one to two years professional experience. Certification through CILIP, which offers recognition for para-professionals who are working in an information role, also allows for progression to Chartered status.

### What academic librarians do

Academic librarians provide support to an academic community through managing, organising and disseminating information. This academic community may be in further education, higher education or various research institutes, and can consist of students, researchers and other institutional staff. The role of the academic librarian is diverse, but traditionally there are a number of core activities associated with the post. These can include managing and developing collections (often in a given area or subject), handling and allocating budgets, cataloguing materials, answering enquiries, producing guidance and reading lists for users, and developing and delivering training courses in information literacy.

The role is often highly user-focused, as it is constantly working to improve researchers' and students' ability to access knowledge to foster and promote a thriving research environment.





The daily duties and responsibilities of the academic librarian can vary greatly. A significant proportion of time is dedicated to answering enquiries from users, both in person and increasingly by email or social media. These can cover a broad range of topics from locating suitable resources through to correct citation practice. In relation to this, guidance documentation requires frequent revisions to support users as requirements change, and increasingly this is following an online format, such as webpages or virtual learning environments (VLEs). If they are responsible for purchasing then selecting stock or monitoring usage of collections can be a big part of the role. Increasingly much of the academic librarian's time is being dedicated to designing and delivering training sessions for users in information literacy and associated topics. Other typical daily activities include frequent meetings with library staff, other departments and suppliers, reading about developments in the field or even managing the institutional repository.

A clear set of skills are required in order to deliver these duties effectively. Academic librarians are working in a constantly changing environment, so the ability to be flexible and to apply their professional skills to new circumstances is vital. Good communication skills are essential as is a desire to work with and assist researchers and students. Effective advocacy skills and an awareness of the teaching and research process are valuable for those working in a liaison role. For those whose post focuses on educating researchers and students, teaching skills are increasingly significant and often as previously mentioned academic librarians study for further teaching qualifications to increase their abilities in this area. Academic librarians can be responsible for the supervision of assistant librarians and library assistants, so management skills are important. Finally some degree of technical knowledge (depending on the specific post) is increasingly useful as more library resources become electronic.

### **The changing role of the academic librarian**

As already indicated, recent years have seen notable diversification in the role of the academic librarian, with a move to a more varied set of duties, many as a result of technological developments. New responsibilities for areas such as electronic publications, Open Access, website management and institutional repositories have all been incorporated into the remit of the academic librarian. It is partly because of this shift that, coupled with their obligation to support researchers, libraries have become involved in research data management activities.

The academic sector, in particular higher education, has changed dramatically in recent years. Centralisation, tighter budgets and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment have led to an increasing focus on the research income and outputs generated by universities. The majority of UK funding bodies and research councils, keen to demonstrate value for public investment in the projects they fund, now require evidence of plans to effectively manage research data so that it may be shared and used as to further future research. Researchers are often required to produce data management plans as part of the grant application process and obliged to deposit their data into suitable repositories for longer-term retention. Moreover, the effective management of research data is beneficial to researchers themselves, and to other users such as policy-makers, commercial organisations and not-for-profit bodies, in that it helps to promote discoverability and re-use of valuable material. To ensure compliance with funder mandates and adherence to good practice, many UK HEIs are developing institutional policies on data management to ensure it is efficiently handled. As a result of these developments the university library is often charged with developing and delivering support services to help researchers meet institutional and funder mandates.

The potential role for academic libraries and the academic librarian in particular within these developments is significant. Their specialist

skills sets, ethos of providing advice and assistance and traditional links with other departments has meant that libraries have often been at the forefront of investigations into the implications of research data management within their institution, whether this be through smaller-scale projects or working with the university in the development of its policies. More specifically, the academic librarian is becoming more heavily involved in assisting researchers with RDM, and the focus is beginning to shift from primarily student support towards also advising researchers on how to manage and share their data. This new emerging role offers several opportunities for the academic librarian to increase their skills set and offer specialist support to researchers.

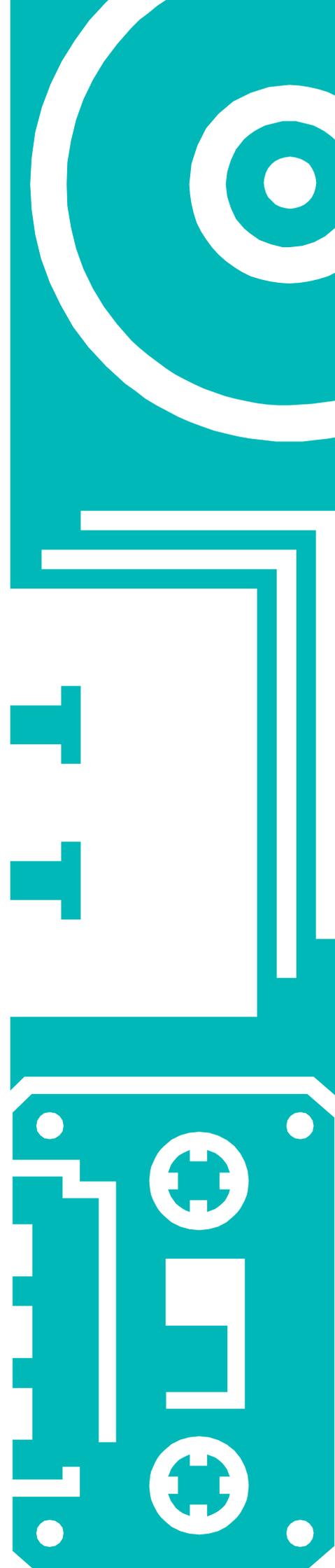
## Delivering research data management support

In order to offer support to researchers in managing their data, academic librarians need to gain further knowledge of this developing area. A clear understanding of the research lifecycle and the different stages of a researcher's career is fundamental in order to identify points where they may need support most. Research experience and qualifications such as a PhD can be highly valuable. Equally knowledge of the general principles of research data management, including data curation and preservation, and of more specific elements such as data management planning, is essential if librarians are to offer reliable advice. Alongside this a clearer idea of what the term 'data' actually encompasses within a given subject area is crucial. An understanding of open access and data sharing will be significant for advising researchers in depositing their data, and assisting in 'data reviews' for those wishing to access and assess data already produced will be a move from the traditional literature review which academic librarians frequently assist users with.

With regards to the skills required, many are those which the academic librarian already possesses, but which need to be applied to a new environment. Advocacy, negotiation and diplomacy skills are key to highlighting the importance of good RDM throughout the institution and also in encouraging other relevant departments to work together in supporting researchers. Librarians are well placed to produce guidance and training in RDM, whether including this in information literacy sessions or using links with institutional research centres to run new courses. They also have the capability to assist researchers in the efficient deposit of their data, in advising on standard procedures, and recoding sufficient contextual metadata to facilitate reuse. Skills in bibliometrics will become increasingly important in the context of the REF, with a stronger emphasis on librarians becoming involved in monitoring data reuse, citations and assessing impact. Above all, the ability to establish a user's requirements and to identify where and when help can be provided are skills which academic librarians excel in and which will be unrivalled within their institution.

### **The following is a list of typical duties and responsibilities for the academic librarian supporting research data management:**

- Supporting researchers and offering advice and guidance in the following areas:
  - data management planning
  - sources of research funding and compliance with funder mandates
  - discipline-specific standards and practices
  - applying metadata
  - data citation
  - curation and preservation of research data
  - selection and appraisal of what data to retain for the short and longer-term
  - navigating policies and legislation relating to RDM
  - data licensing
  - preparing data for deposit to repositories, and accessing data
- Managing data repositories and data catalogues
- Monitoring data reuse, citations and impact (especially in the run up to REF 2020)



- Developing guidance materials and webpages in RDM
- Delivering training in RDM to researchers, students and library staff
- Working with other departments such as the research office, finance and IT services to develop efficient RDM procedures and workflows
- Contributing to the formulation of RDM policies both within the library and the institution as a whole
- Attendance at conferences, briefings and relevant events to further knowledge and contribute to developments in the field
- Monitoring and contributing to social media to keep up to date (blogs, tweets etc...)

These responsibilities may not be the role of one person; it is likely that tasks may be spread across the library with different librarians contributing their varying areas of expertise. Training for academic librarians in RDM is therefore potentially important for all professional library staff and there are a number of projects which have developed courses to introduce librarians to the subject area.

The role of academic librarians continues to be challenging, but research data management has the potential to make them even more indispensable to the institution which they serve. Whilst the topic itself is one which requires further understanding in order for it to be incorporated into the academic librarian's daily duties, it offers the opportunity to extend the role further and to ensure that a library service continues to follow its overriding principle, that of supporting its core users in every way it can.

## Acknowledgements

The Digital Curation Centre (DCC) and Research Libraries UK (RLUK) are working together to explore the role of the academic librarian with regards to research data management as part of the JISC-funded Data Management Skills Support Initiative – Assessment, Benchmarking and Classification (DaMSSI-ABC). DaMSSI-ABC is a support project for several Jisc RDMTrain projects, some of which are developing resources to raise awareness of RDM amongst information professionals within the Higher Education environment.

[www.dcc.ac.uk/training/damssi-abc](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/training/damssi-abc)

## Further reading

### *Papers and case studies:*

**Auckland, Mary.** 'Reskilling for research: an investigation into the role and skills of subject and liaison librarians required to effectively support the evolving information needs of researchers.' *RLUK (2012)*. Available at: [www.rluk.ac.uk/files/RLUK%20Re-skilling.pdf](http://www.rluk.ac.uk/files/RLUK%20Re-skilling.pdf)

**Corrall, Sheila.** 'Educating the Academic Librarian as a Blended Professional: A Review and Case Study.' In: *ALSR 2010: Conference towards Future Possibilities (Session 1A)*, 11/12 March 2010, Hong Kong. Available at: [www.lib.polyu.edu.hk/ALSR2010/programme/pdf/Session1A\\_Corrall.pdf](http://www.lib.polyu.edu.hk/ALSR2010/programme/pdf/Session1A_Corrall.pdf)

**Guy, Marieke.** 'RDM Training for Librarians.' *Digital Curation Centre Case Study (2013)*. Available at: [www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/case-studies/Training-for-librarians-case-study.pdf](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/case-studies/Training-for-librarians-case-study.pdf)

**Lyons, Liz.** 'The Informatics Transform: Re-Engineering Libraries for the Data Decade.' *The International Journal of Digital Curation*, 2012, 7 (1), pp. 126-138.

### *Training resources:*

**DIY Research Data Management Training Kit for Librarians, MANTRA:** <http://datalib.edina.ac.uk/mantra/libtraining.html>

**RDM for Librarians, DCC:** [www.dcc.ac.uk/training/rdm-librarians](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/training/rdm-librarians)

**RDMRose:** <http://rdmrose.group.shef.ac.uk>

**SupportDM, TraD project:** [www.uel.ac.uk/trad/outputs/resources](http://www.uel.ac.uk/trad/outputs/resources)

