

Making the vision a reality: the university-public library partnership at The Hive

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Introduction

Opening in July 2012, The Hive is the first of its kind in Europe. Alongside a fully integrated public and university library collection, the building contains one of the UK's largest children's libraries, the local Archives and Archaeology service, the Council Customer Service Hub, a Business Centre and a wide variety of community, learning, study, and exhibition spaces. The frontline team are fully integrated, sharing vision, values, skills, and customer service standards, and offering a seamless service for customers.

After just over three years, we are really starting to make the most of the benefits that the partnership brings, sharing knowledge and bringing our user communities together. Against a backdrop of cuts to public services and rising costs in higher education, The Hive offers so much more than a traditional library to all of our customers.

Success statistics since opening by August 2015

- NSS library scores for 2014 highest ever at 4.2 – the first cohort to have used The Hive throughout their studies
- 2.7 million visits
- Impressive increases in public issues at The Hive compared to the old Worcester library:
 - Almost double the number of issues for adults
 - 572% increase for Teens/Young People
 - 248% increase in issues of children's books
- Over 1/6 of Worcester City's residents are members
- 35, 615 new members of which 17, 500 are children or young people
- Over 10,000 school children have visited in 3 years
- Over 45,000 instances of children and families taking part in learning
- Over 3600 adults taking part in supported learning activity

Study Happy

In 2015, we trialled an initiative which provided academic and well-being support to students in the run-up to assessment period. Our 'Study Happy' programme included revision and exam tips, a pet as therapy dog, a smoothie bike, Pilates taster sessions and more! Although other universities offer similar programmes, ours differed in both our target audience and delivery. University, A level and GCSE students were all encouraged to attend, hopefully breaking down some of the barriers to higher education that younger students may face, showing them that university students face the same challenges and stresses that they do.

We also sought to involve our partners in the provision of the Study Happy programme creating an opportunity for students to use their skills in a real world setting. For example, nutritional therapy students could advise on the importance of eating well, sports therapy students could provide massages, and so on. This is an area we hope to build on next year and will be talking to the University's Student Wellbeing Team and the Students' Union.

Askalibrarian service

Although The Hive works on a roving model, shortly after opening we added a desk-based enquiry service called askalibrarian in response to student feedback. It is staffed by university librarians who offer higher level enquiry advice to all Hive users from university students, to independent researchers, sixth formers and college students.

There is much discussion in academic libraries at present about the merits of desk versus roving models, and the value of academic librarians spending time answering enquiries, many of which are quite basic. But for us, the desk is a means of making an added value services for all services far more visible than it would otherwise be, promoting the ability of The Hive to offer research support

to a range of users. It also ensures that academic library staff spend time with all users, not just the university community, enhancing our service integration. These staff also run a variety of 'bitesize' training sessions to upskill front of house staff.

New research opportunities

The Hive offers a unique environment in which to host and pursue cutting edge research from a range of disciplines. A longitudinal Social Return on Investment (SROI) study is due out in October, which was commissioned to evaluate the impact of The Hive. One of our Business School academics, Richard Nicholls, will be using The Hive to do research on customer to customer interaction, exploring how age, class and societal difference impact on the service environment. For example, how might an elderly person be affected by the behaviour of young people ahead of them in a queue and how does this affect the way they interact with services? Meanwhile, one of our Health and Society academics, Claire Bennett, is hoping to conduct a project about parent's understanding of and responsibility for their children's access to the internet. This is ideal in a library environment where parents are not usually present and their sense of responsibility is diminished by physical distance.

Working with students

A real strength of The Hive is the focus we put on students, both those from the University and the wider community. The Hive offers students the opportunity to work in real life situations, putting their skills to use and learning more. Examples include our Student Mentor project and Earn as you Learn schemes. Interactive storytimes known as 'Rat-a-Tat Tales' are enhanced by Performing Arts students who develop resources and deliver sessions, as well as helping staff gain confidence in performance. A partnership with the Centre for Early Years will bring students in to The Hive to evaluate the Children's Library for learning and play in the under-fives and provide opportunities for them to work with families in context. Student teachers have also been involved in the development and delivery of the schools programme at The Hive as part of a 'Beyond the Classroom' module. We employed students from Youth and Community courses (among others) to work with the large numbers of young people who frequent The Hive, providing signposting to other services and activity.

We are one of the sector leaders in the relatively new field of student engagement, with a post dedicated to working with university students, involving them as partners and working with them to evaluate and enhance service design and delivery. This is a very new area for us, but early wins have been new Student Ambassadors and our very own mascot, Reffie the Raptor, designed and created by students themselves.

University of Worcester students can use all these voluntary opportunities on their V-Record¹ and both voluntary and paid opportunities can be logged on their Worcester Award², an employability award run by the university's Careers department.

Events connecting communities

The partnership allows us to access expertise to provide a full and vibrant programme of events at a time when funding cuts challenge other libraries.³ The University of Worcester is able to showcase its work in a busy public environment which fits with the University's strategic vision to 'to make a transformational contribution to the positive development of the cultural, social and economic life of the city of Worcester and our wider region'.⁴

The University's professoriate lead public lectures on such diverse events as, 'Jam and Jerusalem', and 'Health and children's literature'. Exhibitions and performances have included final shows by university students, artist and musicians in residence, and public art. We have a very popular Code Club and Coding workshops for children, which provided another opportunity for university staff to try out their research on storytelling through code for the under-fives.

A recent success was a Dementia Awareness Day, run in partnership with the Dementia unit at the University and the NHS, combining practical advice with personal and moving stories from local people who had lived with loved ones with dementia.

And finally, the ever popular Beeline storytelling festival! Organised by the University for schools across the County for several years, The Hive now hosts popular public events for this growing

festival. Library staff have also benefitted from workshops with a professional storyteller alongside teachers in training which in turn invigorates our public programme.

The future?

We have only just started to scratch the surface of what we can achieve and hope to develop in the coming years. Just a few of our current ideas are:

- An Academic Reading Challenge to complement the successful public summer reading challenge, to encourage wider reading beyond subject for students and to provide a taster of academic reading to a wider audience
- MOOC cafés in which people can get some advice in getting started with MOOCs, get some technical support, and provide a learning space to meet and share with others
- Language cafes in which international students leading discussion groups in other languages

The opportunities for cross-over and integrated working that we anticipated from the partnership at The Hive have evolved during its first three years of operation. The challenges we have faced, integrating a university and public library space, stock and customer base are far outweighed by the benefits. In practice we are daily presented with new opportunities to innovate and work in partnership to create much more than the sum of our parts, for both members of the public and for the university community.

¹ <http://worcsu.com/volunteer/vrecord/>

² <http://www.worc.ac.uk/discover/the-worcester-award>

³ <http://www.thehiveworcester.org/events.html>

⁴ <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/documents/university-worcester-strat-plan-2013-18.pdf>