Platform alteration - all change! Creating an online exhibition at The King's Fund Library

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Introduction

In 2019, as part of our wider marketing and promotion plan, the Library team decided to develop part of our library space for exhibitions. We agreed this would help us to better promote our digital archive and library collection and encourage more King's Fund staff and external visitors to the library.

We decided to put together three exhibitions in 2020. The first looked at key points in The King's Fund's history and opened in

February 2020. The second looks at the history of nursing to coincide with the *WHO 2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife*. The plan was to launch on 12th May, International Nurses Day.

Our original aim was for this exhibition to be part of a wider programme of events and content for this celebratory year. This included a nursing themed book group for May, and the summer walking tours we run were to focus on nursing history. We also planned to write a blog to be published alongside the exhibition.

But due to the pandemic we had to have a rethink. The book group did go ahead — but as an online event, and the walking tours were postponed for this summer. However, with our exhibition we had a chance to try something new. Like our first exhibition in 2020, the nursing exhibition was intended to be a physical event in our library, and while we had talked about the possibility of creating some sort of online component we had not quite envisaged how this would work or what we wanted to do. However, in March and in the eye of the pandemic, we suddenly found ourselves working from home and we quickly had to change our plans. This article reflects on how we transformed our planned physical exhibition to a virtual one in just a few weeks.

Exhibition Content

The original plan for the exhibition was to include physical exhibits, books and photos from our own library collection and The King's Fund's corporate archive, held at the London Metropolitan Archive (LMA). However, as lockdown hit, we found ourselves restricted to what we had available online — our digital archive (https://archive.kingsfund.org.uk/) and the current content from The King's Fund website.

The first step was to explore what we had and think about the story we might tell. We initially thought we would try arranging the content by theme but settled on a timeline format where content was listed by decade. In the past The King's Fund has been involved in nursing recruitment, improving working conditions for nurses and offering residential training courses for nurses at the one-time Staff College founded in the 1950s. It is interesting to use a timeline to show how The King's Fund work has changed, and to use key dates in nursing history to provide context to the work we have done.

Using this format, we started to look at content by decade and pool the information together using a OneNote document. This meant that we could easily split the work between the project team members.
Once we settled on the content and order, we wrote captions to describe each item. This was followed by an online project team meeting (using Teams) to review what we had done. We ended up removing some of the items to shorten the exhibition. This involved some difficult choices but better to have too much content to choose from than not enough! We trust we chose material that best reflects the approaches The King's Fund has taken to nursing development over the years.

And none of the research will be wasted as we will save it for other exhibitions or events.

Our next decision was to find a platform to host our exhibition online.

Choosing a platform

Creating an online exhibition is something we had never tried, so exploring the vast array of sites offering exhibition platforms seemed a very daunting task.

Whilst searching for a platform, we came across quite a few products providing services for individuals and organisations to virtually share and display content. Each of these platforms differed in their approach to online exhibitions, with some requiring a fair amount of technical expertise and others allowing users to simply upload and input their work into pre-designed templates.

Through exploring these sites, we were able to expand our knowledge on the various methods and techniques we could potentially implement when we came to create our own exhibition. There were many ways we could have chosen to go forward with this project, but what mattered most was finding a service that truly met our needs and allowed us to showcase our collection in a way that suited the type of content we had to share. As much of The King's Fund's published content over the years has been predominantly text-based, we ultimately chose a platform equipped with the tools to design a timeline depicting the history of nursing publications released by The King's Fund.

The product we settled on was Visme — it is simple, straightforward and offers a range of design templates we could easily adapt to our needs.

The process of designing the exhibition has been a real learning opportunity, particularly as we had no previous experience of using this platform, nor were we particularly skilled at design work. But it allowed us to be creative in ways we'd never been before and to develop new skills that we can use in future exhibitions.

Marketing the exhibition

The library team has a Twitter account (@kingsfund_lib) which we used to promote the exhibition, together with the associated *WHO 2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife* hashtags. We would always have used Twitter to promote this exhibition but being able to link to it directly massively increased its reach to far more people than would ever have visited our physical library space.

We also worked with The King's Fund digital team who promoted the exhibition on The King's Fund's main corporate Twitter feed and Facebook group. Through working more closely with the digital team we were also able to refresh our library services web page to create a new 'From the archive' section to accommodate our exhibition and any future content we might produce. Something that would not necessarily have happened had we created a physical exhibition in the library.

Another plus was that while the physical library exhibition would have been a timed event and eventually taken down to make room for the next one, the online timeline is a permanent display that we can continue to link to on our website and promote in the future.

As well as building relationships with internal King's Fund teams, the exhibition has enabled us to reach out to other organisations such as the

Nightingale Museum and the Royal College of Nursing — both of whom kindly offered to promote our exhibition via their social media channels.

What we have learned

Working with our digital team has enabled our exhibition to reach many more people than it would have done as a physical exhibition. However, since we were publishing something that would appear both on the organisation's website and its corporate social media channels, the content and look of the exhibition had to be in-line with The King's Fund brand. This meant we had less control of the look and feel of the exhibition. We also found we needed much more time than we'd envisaged to accommodate proofing and editing of the exhibition before we could make it live. Unfortunately, this meant that it was not ready for our planned 12th May launch. But we were able to reschedule and relaunch at the start of June without this being too much of an issue.

Were we to do this again, we would allocate more time to researching and exploring the range of possible platforms. Although we were able to find one that largely suited our needs for this project, taking more time to delve into and learn about the different products and services available would ensure that we better understood how to design and produce online exhibitions that people can enjoy and return to.

However, creating this online exhibition was an overwhelmingly worthwhile experience. It gave us the opportunity not only to try something new but, more importantly, allowed us to share our work with a wider audience than would ever have accessed it otherwise.

This experience very much serves as a starting point for us — and hopefully what we have shared in this article will be helpful to other libraries who might be interested in pursuing something similar. As we look ahead to planning our third exhibition in November we are still unsure of how the work might look. However, with this experience under or belts we are looking forward to developing something new — perhaps with both online and physical aspects to open-up our collections and library to as many people as possible. You can view the exhibition at https://my.visme.co/view/q6jz4wre-the-king-s-fund-nursing-exhibition-2020

About The King's Fund Library

The King's Fund provides a unique and free source of information on health and social care policy and management. We provide help with information queries, maintain a library database and publish several current awareness bulletins. You can find more about what we do here: https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/consultancy-support/library-services

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