

## **P2000 and the Role of Libraries - the Story so Far**

*by Maurice Wakeham*

At the end of 1993 Paul Moorbath contacted the librarians of those institutions which were in the first tranche of Project 2000 asking for reflections on their experiences thus far. Only two responses have been received to that request; fortunately they are both very detailed and contain information that it worth passing on to a wider audience.

What follows is a summary which inevitably skims over details of setting and structure but does attempt to represent their views fairly. If their experiences are different from yours, either better or worse, why not let us know?

In order to preserve the anonymity of the two establishments that responded I propose to refer to them as the North and South Colleges of Health. This indicates nothing more than the part of the country in which they are located. It should not be taken to imply anything about any institution which might have a similar name or about institutions generally in those geographic areas of the country.

### **Library activity**

Both of our correspondents are clear that "the library plays a very significant role within the P2000 course" (S) and "has brought enormous changes and challenges for nursing libraries and their staff" (N). In North, issues of books have doubled in the last three years, "indicative of the increased workload without any additional staff", while at South one measure of inter-library loans has increased almost threefold. Both libraries have sought to improve the level of service available to their users and have produced Guides or Handbooks to services. Neither is fully computerised but both have CD-ROM stations. The premises are described as "inadequate" and "cramped" (S) or "very cramped" (N).

### **Users**

Both institutions are multi-sited and have increasing numbers of users visiting from other sites. In South College the library serves not only students but also hospital staff, health visitors, district nurses and practice nurses. "We also appear to provide the back up library service for students on health courses at our local HE college". Strangely funding is only received for the students. "I cannot understand why we are expected to run the service ... when no-one makes any financial contribution towards the cost of that service - it is a strange way to run a business". The correspondent from North College provides a multidisciplinary service and so receives monies from various sources.

### **Budgets**

Budgets seem to be an issue at both establishments. At South, the library works in "budgetary limbo", i.e. there is no budget, or at least our correspondent is not told what it is. At North the budget for non-staff items has increased by around two-and-a-half times over the last three years and the librarians can put in bids for their future requirements, though how much influence this has is "debatable". Additional money can buy more books or equipment but in turn puts extra pressure on staff. Both sites identify a need for more staff but express little hope of acquiring any.

### Place in the structure

Unfortunately the library tends not to be central to the delivery of education in terms of management structure. "The person who was in charge of resources admitted he had not given as much time to library issues as he should ..." (N). This situation has improved in North College as a result of press comments, pressure from students and a change in personnel, though there is still "no librarian within the College employed at a senior management level". In South College "the library service is not central to [the librarian's Directors's] function in the College, and ... is not a high priority for him". The librarian is not line manager for the library assistants, who are classed as clerical staff.

### Curriculum role

At neither College are the Librarians fully involved in curriculum developments. At South, the librarian, "nominally a member of course development teams, has never been invited to their meetings". The library therefore "has to react to change in the course delivery after the changes are established, instead of planning for that change". Tutors accept the importance of the library but do not acknowledge the educational role of the librarian. More positively the librarian is now a member of the Course Committee. Similarly in North there has been a "heightened awareness of library issues". The librarian has taken over chairmanship of the Committee which formally links tutors and librarians, and has been included on the College Resources Committee. As in South there is no inclusion in curriculum planning.

### Higher education links

Both Colleges have links with higher education but at the time of their responses these were still evolving. Planning for the future can be "very difficult" (N). "There is no long term view, and morale [in the College] is low" (S). It can be unsettling to live in a world of falling student numbers, institutional amalgamations, site closures and disappearing jobs.

### Positive developments

Our correspondents both feel that "the situation has improved for students" (N) or that "student nurses have met the challenges of the new style training and have developed a desire for knowledge" (S). Services are being developed or improved and usage, like library staff productivity, is increasing. At South College "we provide the best service we can" within the confines of limited facilities. The librarians at North College also feel they cope "by doing the best we can for the students". Tutors and management are slowly beginning to realise the importance of having an effective library system but the professional status of the librarian as a contributor to the educational process has still to be recognised and accepted.

The picture drawn by these two accounts, which may not be typical, is not all bad. Improvements are slowly being made, though they may not always be easy to see. If you recognise yourself and your working environment in the above description, write to Paul Moorbatch at the Editorial address. Even more important, write if the portrait looks nothing like you.