The BIALL/Lexis Nexis Awards for Excellence

The Awards

The BIALL/Lexis Nexis Awards are a new set of awards designed to honour the work and achievements of the UK's top law librarians. Following online voting, the inaugural awards were presented at a ceremony at Lincoln's Inn in October 2005. The categories of the awards are as follows:-

1   **Legal Information Professional – Large Law Firm**

2   **Legal Information Professional – Medium/ Small Law Firm**

3   **Legal Information Professional – Academic Institution**

4   **Legal Information Professional – Special Library**

5   **Best Use of Technology in a Library Project**

The Winners

The winners and runners up were as follows:-

Legal Information Professional – Large Law Firm

Winner – Gail Sanderson, Davies Arnold Cooper
1st Runner Up – Jennifer Barrow, Baker & McKenzie
2nd Runner Up – Emma Freedman, Olswang

Legal Information Professional – Medium/ Small Law Firm

Winner – Michael Oberwarth, Matthew Arnold & Baldwin
1st Runner Up – Brian Thomas, Fox Williams
2nd Runner Up – Gill Leslie, Biggart Baillie

Legal Information Professional – Academic

Winner – Emily Allbon, City University
1st Runner Up – Cathie Jackson, Cardiff University

2nd Runner Up – David Gee, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies

Legal Information Professional – Special

Winner – David Sparrow, Disability Rights Commission
1st Runner Up – Chris Wares, BPP Professional Education
2nd Runner Up – Janet Horslen, Law Society Library

Best Use of Technology in a Library Project

Winner – Kate Stanfield, CMS Cameron McKenna
1st Runner Up – Emily Allbon, City University
2nd Runner Up – Jennifer Crossley, University of the West of England

Fig. 1 Kate Stanfield with her award

The Interviews

It was agreed at BIALL Council that it would be a good idea to interview the winners, so that we could share their achievements with the rest of the membership and find out more about their innovative projects.

Gail Sanderson

Gail Sanderson won the award because the judges recognised her "commitment and achievement at the forefront of introducing new technology not only to Davies Arnold Cooper but also to the library profession as a whole. They praised her idea for Intrafind - a web-based software tool that enables intranet users to locate relevant material easily [and] which is now used by many information professionals – and for her contribution to the firm's commercial success.

Unfortunately it has not proved possible to interview Gail for this article.

Michael Oberwarth

Fig. 2 Michael Oberwarth

Michael is the Librarian of Matthew Arnold & Baldwin in Watford, Hertfordshire and he won the award for small/medium law firm librarian "in recognition for his achievements in transforming the firm's legal information service in just one year"…

Background and qualifications

Michael grew up in Hertfordshire and then studied English and Politics at Leicester University, graduating in 1995. On graduation he was uncertain as to what career he would like to follow. He worked in retail and accounting for a while but not finding this his ideal career path he went to the careers office in Watford, where he had a good look round and, after reading the information they had there, decided to pursue librarianship.

He applied for pre-library school positions and was offered jobs at both Clifford Chance and Nabarro

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Nathanson and decided to go to Nabarros, having had a talk with Lyn Orsborn, starting there in 1999. They offered him the chance to continue working for them on a part-time basis whilst he did an MA in Information Services Management (the MA was 2 full days a week) which he completed at the University of North London between 2000 and 2001. Michael's dissertation was on the provison of legal research training to LPC students and trainees in law firms.

This was an extremely busy time for Michael as he also became a father in this period. He was then offered a permanent position at Nabarros as an information officer, where he concentrated on real property information, authoring their property bulletin and also gaining valuable experience on the busy enquiry desk.

In 2002 he moved to Baker & McKenzie where he became the Professional Support Lawyers Librarian, working with Jenny Barrow and Jessica Magnusson. This position involved further enquiry work and providing support to the PSLs for their research functions.

Matthew Arnold & Baldwin

In September 2003 a job became available at Matthew Arnold & Baldwin in Michael's back garden, so to speak, as he lives in Watford, and to his surprise he was offered it. MAB is an old established firm, tracing its roots back over 100 years and taking its name from two of its founders – Matthew Arnold and Allan Baldwin. Since 1982 it has developed its commercial practice in order to offer a full service to local and national businesses including banks and financial institutions. It has recently opened an office in Milton Keynes and has another in the City near the Law Society. There are 24 partners divided into the normal departments – company commercial; private clients; employment; banking; insolvency; IP/IT; debt recovery; family; residential and commercial property and litigation. The firm does not undertake criminal or personal injury work. Over 150 staff are based in the Watford office, of whom approximately 85 are fee earners.

The Library

When Michael arrived the normal "library" which exists in a law firm where there is no librarian greeted him. A messy room full of books shelved in no particular order, duplicate books, looseleafs and journals, out of date books, a pile of unfiled loose-leaf supplements and a book signing out system which was not in use.

Michael set to to organise this random collection into a serviceable library, undertaking all those clearing up tasks which are dear to us. He discovered lots of duplicate subscriptions to journals and loose-leafs with the concomitant overspend. He has catalogued and classified the material using a simple home made classification scheme. He has built a fully searchable catalogue which is available via the firm's intranet and set up a new book issuing system. He has also set up a series

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Fig. 3 MAB Library

of departmental libraries which have their own issuing systems.

He undertook an information audit, setting up interviews with all the departmental heads and attending as many meetings as possible to try and identify the knowledge gaps.

He has instituted a budget which is signed off by the partner in charge of the library and which he monitors monthly. He continually tries to find the most cost effective method of purchasing resources whether that is online or hard-copy. MAB is a member of the LawNet Group which has negotiated a groupwide subscription to Westlaw and Lawtel. He takes various of the Lexis Nexis Butterworths offerings. He also subscribes to some of the PLC databases. Michael takes the usual practitioners' journals and also uses the Law Society document delivery service, and he has introduced a copyright compliance programme.

Services offered

He runs a popular enquiry service and has shared the experience of those of us who have been in at the beginning of a library service – the incredulity of lawyers that we can actually help them with their research and save them time. He finds that everyone is now using his services so the enquiries cover the full range of legal topics which Michael finds challenging and enjoyable. He also helps the marketing department to prepare for beauty parades by undertaking research on potential clients.

Michael has started a weekly legal developments bulletin which has been very well-received. He covers the press, articles, news releases etc plus material of local interest relevant to the firm's clients. He also produces a bi-monthly bulletin for clients covering legal developments in various industries (eg property, leisure, retail manufacturing, construction) including new regulations and cases, which has proved to be

very popular. He writes an employment law bulletin which is e-mailed to subscribers via the firm's website. Michael has also sorted out and indexed all the company commercial bibles.

He has set up an introductory programme for trainees where he has individual meetings with them all to find out the level of their legal research skills and then gives them the necessary database and skills training.

Plans for the future

Michael has accomplished a huge amount in a very short time, but he has ambitious plans for the future. At present the firm does not have a knowledge management system so this is one of Michael's priorities. Nor is there a document management system in place, or a central bank of precedents, so he is working with the business manager to implement a suitable system in the future.

With the firm recently opening two new offices, he is looking forward to the challenges of providing a multi-site information service.

He also plans improvements to the firm's intranet to give fuller details of material, information sources and services available from the library. Michael has a good relationship with the IT department, so he is confident that he can carry out these projects with their full support.

Personal development

Michael has found the job a great challenge and has really enjoyed his work developing the information services. Because it is a relatively small, though rapidly growing, firm Michael has got to know everyone and this adds to his sense of job satisfaction. He finds that many of the firm's new lawyers arrive from big City firms and they expect to find the same level of service at MAB. Michael has nothing but praise for the firm and says they have been extremely supportive of all his initiatives. They have encouraged him to go on courses and he attended the Law for Librarians Course, whilst working at Baker & McKenzie. He hasn't yet been to a BIALL Conference but is hoping to in the future in order to expand his network of contacts.

Michael has a wife, who is not a librarian, and a five year old daughter. In his spare time he is a fanatical supporter of Watford Football Club. His family all live nearby and he loves to spend his holidays walking in the Isle of Wight countryside.

For someone who by his own admission fell into law librarianship by chance, Michael has made a huge success of the challenges which faced him in bringing MAB into the twenty-first century in terms of information provision and is a worthy winner of the award.

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Emily Allbon

"Emily Allbon was the acclaimed winner in the Best Academic Legal Professional category for her innovative and user-friendly LawBore website, which is extensively used within and beyond the academic law library community"

Emily also came 1st Runner-Up to Kate Stanfield in the Best Use of Technology in a Library Project Category.

Fig. 4 Emily Allbon

We have featured articles on LawBore in previous issues of *Legal Information Management*:-

LawBore: a Legal Gateway for City University 3(2), Summer 2003, 86–89 (With Andy Bromley).

Its Alive! The Birth of LawBore and the Indispensability of the Law Librarian 5(4), Winter 2005, 211–215.

For this reason we are not concentrating on LawBore in this interview but talking to Emily about her career to date.

Background

Emily grew up in Wiltshire and studied for a BA in English Literature at the University of Hertfordshire between 1995 and 1998. There was a job available as a SCONUL trainee at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies as Emily completed her degree which she was offered. At this

stage she knew she wanted to go into information work but she wasn't sure what type. At the Institute she gained much valuable knowledge of legal sources and it was whilst she was here that she got the legal information bug. She then went to City University to study for her M.Sc. in Information Science which she obtained in 2000. She took Tamara Eisenschitz's course in Information Law and Business and Legal Information (which she now teaches students about legal research on!). In August 2000 she got married and had to complete her dissertation, so had a very busy summer and, just as she was completing the course, two jobs came up which she decided to apply for: one at Deutsche Bank as an Information Officer and one at City University as Law Librarian. Emily admits that it was one of the most difficult decisions of her professional career, as the financial rewards were the same, but she decided to go for the City University job as it seemed to offer more autonomy and responsibility than the Deutsche Bank job.

City University

Emily is the sole law librarian and the sole subject specialist at City, so can feel slightly isolated at times. The law library is situated on its own floor in the main library and there are around 550 law students. It was a big job to take on as Emily's first professional post. Emily reports to Brendan Casey the University Director of Information Services and she is also responsible to Professor Peter Kunzlik who is in charge of the City Law School, which is the "first law school in London to educate students and practitioners at all stages of legal education" and which comprises the Faculty of Law, which teaches the LLB to both undergraduates and postgraduates and runs specialist LLM's in Human Rights; International Law; Criminal Litigation and Environmental law and also runs the Common Professional Examination course. The Inns of Court School of Law became part of the City Law School in 2001 and teaches the Bar Vocational Course and the Legal Practice Course. Emily is not involved in information provision for the latter courses.

Emily's job as Law Librarian involves a variety of tasks. She is responsible for collection development and teaching and much of her time is taken up by the latter especially during the Autumn term when all new undergraduates have to participate in a legal skills course. Emily delivers three one hour sessions to her 140+ undergraduates in small hands-on groups of 12 students, covering the hard copy and electronic sources of nformation Some of the course work is delivered online using a VLE. Because she is based physically within the law library, Emily also spends a substantial amount of time answering enquiries and acting as a go-between for the students and law faculty whenever any issues arise.

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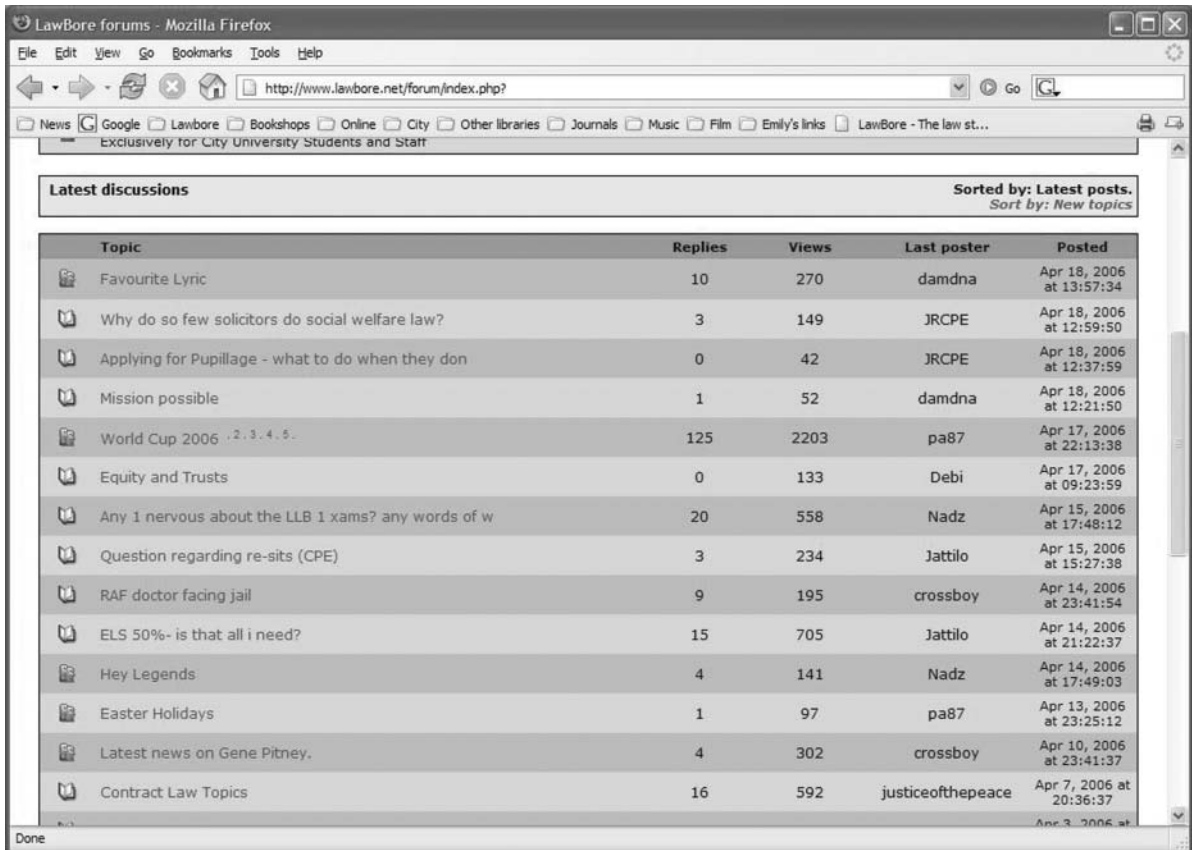**Christine Miskin**

Fig. 5 LawBore Forum

Fig. 6 LawBore Forum Discussion Page

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Emily was also appointed as Head of Information Literacy in Summer 2005. This means that she manages the three learning support officers employed by the Library to deliver training courses on various databases, not legal, throughout the student population. They are not professional information workers and this aspect of her work has proved challenging for Emily.

LawBore

The lecturers have been very supportive of the LawBore concept where Emily is trying to alert students to all the free legal information that is available on the internet, but she is still encountering problems with the community element of LawBore. The idea behind this was to offer a chatroom where students and staff could exchange information about ongoing projects and pieces of work. Emily hoped that the lecturers would post pre-lecture information to make their lectures more accessible, but unfortunately there has been little if any input from the academic staff.

The students are using it themselves to talk about very varied topics whether for fun ('best song lyric', 'which new young player will be discovered at the World Cup 2006') and law-related ('what to do when you are turned down for pupillage again and again', 'how to revise for constitutional law').

Emily is hoping to start a legal skills section on LawBore which would include teaching videos and other tools for legal research. She is planning to participate in a project with other academic law librarians this summer to develop video based learning objects to using both electronic and hard copy sources. The project will be carried out in association with the media development officer at Birkbeck who has the technical expertise. This will build on the experience Emily gained last summer on making some teaching videos for use on the CPE course.

LORD database

Emily is also involved in the BIALL LORD database which monitors electronic resources. She is responsible for attempting to find authors to write product reviews. She is slightly disheartened with the project as she has approached lots of people with little success. She is about to have additional help on this in the form of Meral Seyfried from Allen & Overy and Emily would be very grateful for input from anyone who is reading this article!

Legal Information Group

Emily is Vice-Chair of LIG and has spent some time over the past year or so working with James Mullan the Chair on developing the BIALL Code of Good Practice for Law Publishers (Printed at p 109 of this issue).

Personal development

Emily is planning to attend the centennial AALL Convention in St Louis Missouri this summer where she has been accepted to give a paper on LawBore.

Emily completed the Legal Practice Course at Nottingham Law School from 2003–2005 by distance learning, which she found extremely hard as she continued to work full-time but she has found it hugely beneficial in her work both at City and on LawBore. She was very fortunate as City paid for her to attend the course.

When not working, Emily is keen to get into the garden in her home in the country on the outskirts of Swindon.

Emily was a very deserving winner of the Award and we wish her all the best in her efforts in the future to develop the LawBore database further, and in whatever challenges she is bound to take up.

David Sparrow

Fig. 7 David in his library

David Sparrow won the award for "creating the DRC electronic library and pioneering the dissemination of information to staff at the Commission".

David is based in the heart of Manchester in the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), which is located in the refurbished Arndale Centre, with huge scope for lots of retail therapy. David is not well-known to BIALL members, but by the end of the interview I was extremely impressed with his information service and in particular the electronic services he has set up for the DRC.

Background

David has an interesting and varied background having worked in various institutions in the public sector. He

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grew up in Burnley and then studied International History and Politics at Leeds University, achieving a good degree. He therefore had thoughts of joining the diplomatic service or going into the legal profession, but whilst he was musing on which career path to take, a job came up at the Brotherton Library for a one year SCONUL traineeship. David had been a school librarian in his youth and had always been interested in librarianship, so he decided to apply for it, was successful, and the rest, as they say, is history. Librarianship became David's career of choice.

Having completed his year at the Brotherton, where amongst other tasks, he was given responsibility for the Chinese collection, he decided to do the MA in Librarianship at Sheffield University in 1985. He was particularly interested in working in the public library service and his first post-library school job was at Watford Central Library. David's early memory of this period is of working on the mobile library service around Hertfordshire for a short spell, which involved stopping at Barbara Cartland's residence (she was a great user of the public library service) and being offered silver service tea by the butler!

Public sector library service

David then moved to the St Albans district of Hertfordshire Libraries, which was a well-resourced service under the then leadership of Max Broome. David Chartered in Hertfordshire in 1989 and then decided to move back home to the North and took a job as Branch Librarian and Community Centre Manager at Old Trafford in Manchester - probably a bit of a culture shock! Old Trafford is an area of great deprivation with lots of social exclusion, crime, poverty and a multi-ethnic community. David found running the community centre enriching and rewarding experience and it contributed towards his heightened sense of the need for social inclusion. He stayed for two and a half years until the continued vandalism and petty crime got too much of a challenge! His next post was in the criminal justice sector as the Information Officer with Greater Manchester Probation Service from 1992–2000. He found this to be a good place to work – he was initially a solo librarian so had to build up the service from scratch - and he was heavily involved in using new electronic techniques of information delivery. During his time here David was Secretary of the National Probation Research and Information Exchange which worked on a national scale to advise and support members, agencies and other organisations in the development, use and provision of research and information in the pursuit of objectives. He was also on the Council of the North West Branch of the then Library Association.

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Disability Rights Commission

The Disability Rights Commission is an independent body established in April 2000 by Act of Parliament to stop discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. Link.http://www.drc-gb.org/whatwedo/aboutus.asp

Fig. 8 David helping a reader

He joined as the Information Officer in October 2000. He found being in at the start of a brand new organisation a great challenge, as he has helped to shape its aims, objectives and direction. When he first arrived there was half a shelf of books and little else apart from a limited presence on the corporate intranet. Now nearly six years on there is an much enlarged stock (of nearly 3,000 items), proactive, customer oriented service and a very impressive range of Intranet-based electronic resources, plus two additional members of staff.

David was able to undertake an information audit to try and identify the corporate information needs. He spent the next year to eighteen months building up the library's services and systems and marketing them within the organisation via site visits, a slot at corporate inductions and 1:1 user education.

Services currently offered

David has a key role in content management and internal communications for both the DRC's website and intranet. He also deals with user requests, undertakes literature searches and gets involved in some of the DRC's wider initiatives including its government information compliance duties such as FOI publication schemes. In addition, the DRC is currently undertaking a formal investigation into health inequalities in which David has played a key role in researching the evidence-base for the necessary information and then drawing it all together.
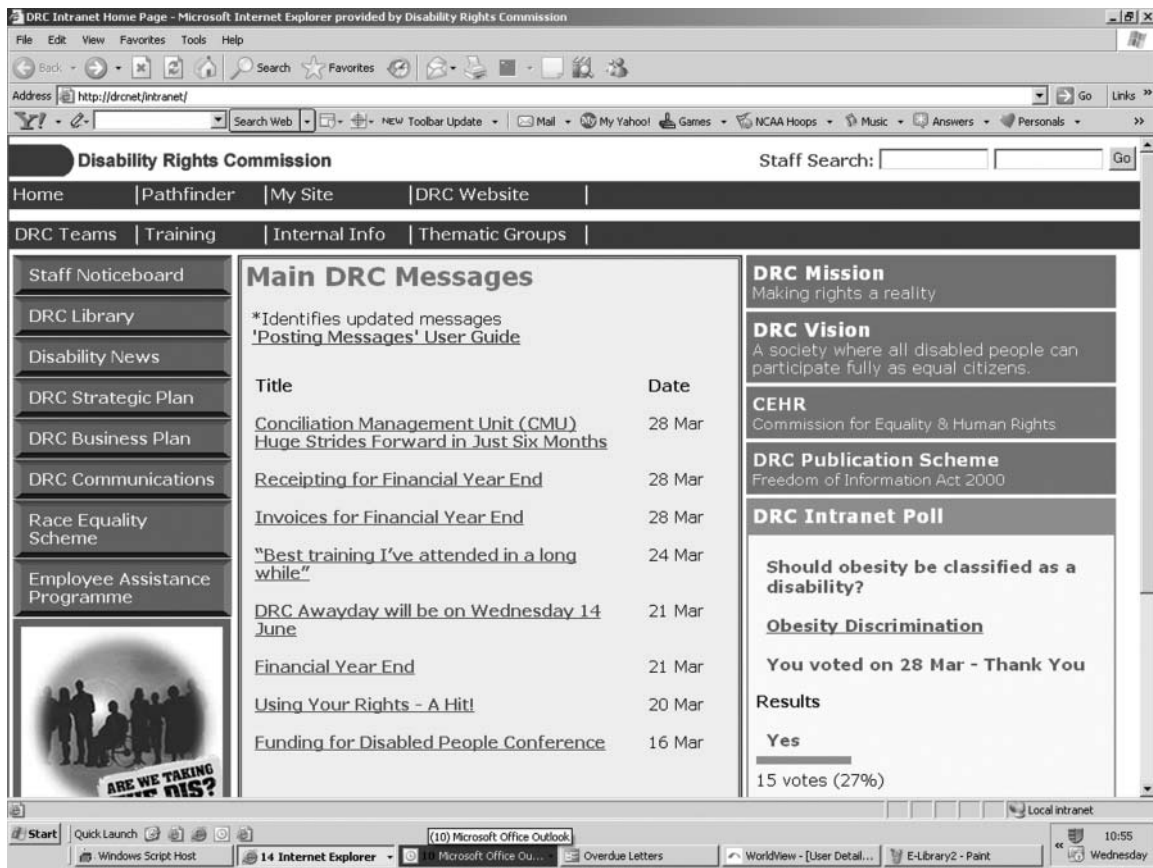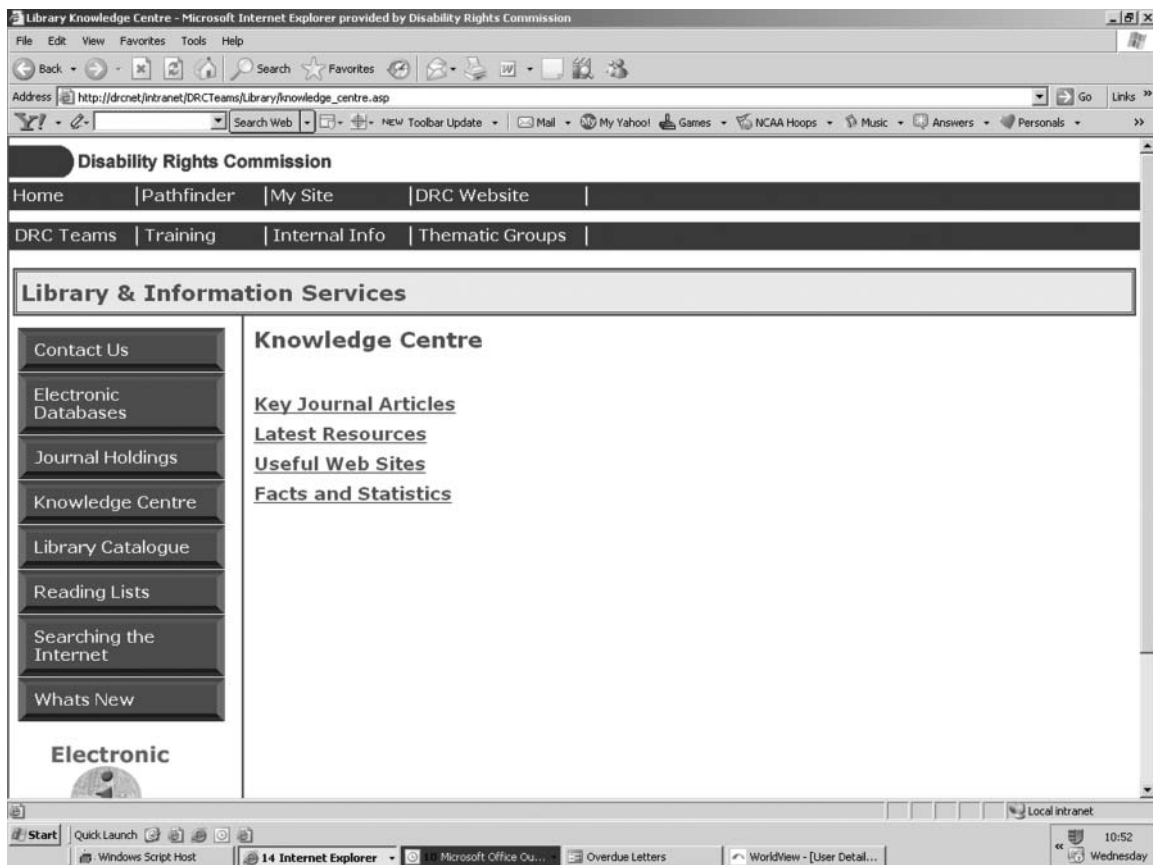
Fig. 9 DRC Intranet Home Page

Fig. 10 DRC Intranet – Knowledge Centre Home Page

Christine Miskin

Electronic services

The intranet

The DRC intranet is very impressive. The Library's presence (Electronic Library) is largely David's own project working with IT colleagues and his Assistant Gillian Smith. David's main focus is the content management, planning and promotion while Gill provides valuable technical support. It is constantly evolving and the Library's pages are never static. David is responsible for its content management, planning and strategy.

The library pages on the intranet contain a wealth of useful information and are very clearly laid out. They include a knowledge centre containing recent key articles, useful websites, key facts and statistics. There are also reading lists; journal holdings; electronic databases and what's new – the material for each of these categories being sourced entirely by the library staff.

The internet site

David is not responsible for the website, but provides content in the form of a monthly journal articles bulletin highlighting key disability/discrimination articles. This is the outward facing side of the library's work as it is aimed at researchers, academics etc.

The Legal Department

Eight people are employed in the DRC's award-winning legal team, in July 2005 winners of 'The Lawyer' magazine's 2005 **Employment Team** of the **Year** Award, seeing off strong competition from corporate lawyers. Legal provide the bulk of David's enquiry work. They are involved in policy making and research and in key legal cases enforcing disabled people's rights under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The DRC has had many successful legal victories and the Library is often called upon to provide analysis, commentary and case law.

David uses Westlaw, some of the Lexis Nexis suite of services; Justis and Casetrack. He was also full of praise for the high quality of the subscription service offered by the Manchester Incorporated Law Society Library.

Disabled access

David is particularly interested in how the new electronic formats cater for disabled users' information needs and believes that government departments still have some way to go in this arena in providing accessible information. For example, lots of government documentation available for the public is in PDF format which is a poor medium for those with visual impairments – HTML or RTF or Text are much to be preferred.
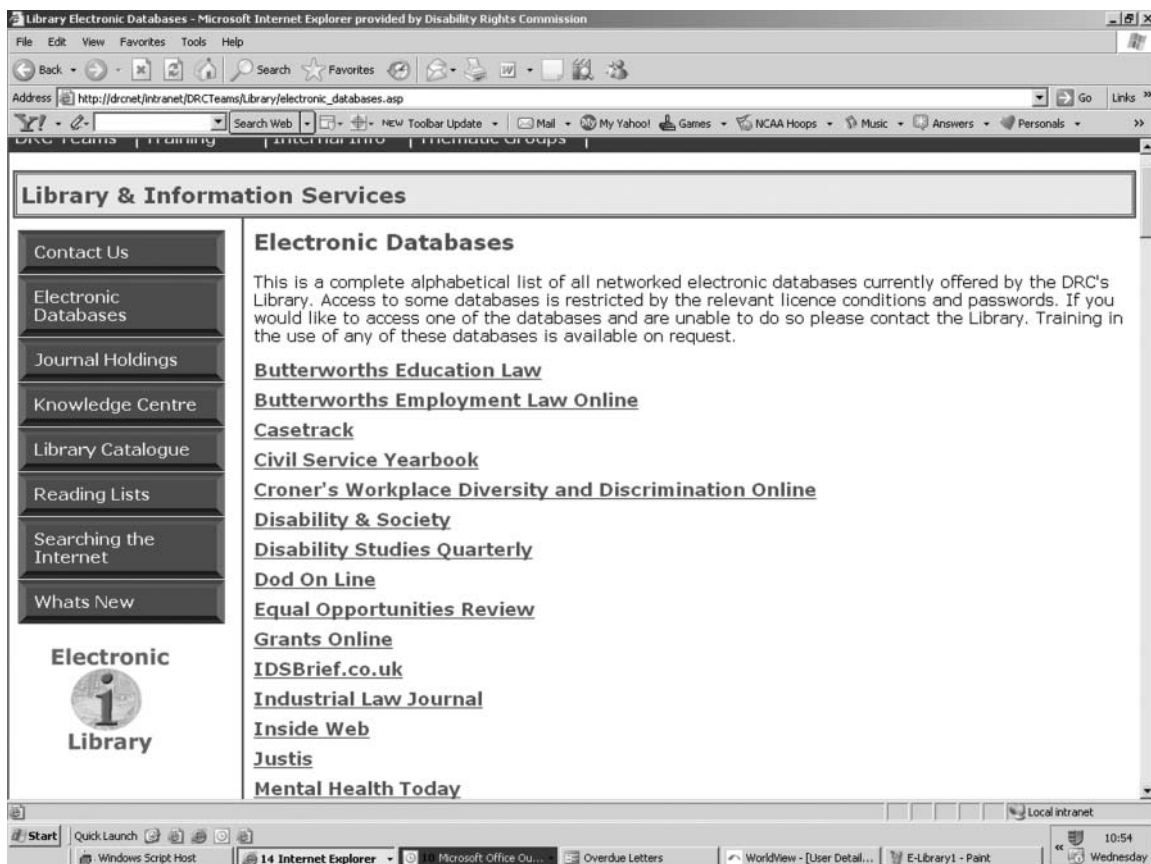

Fig. 11 DRC Intranet – Electronic Resources

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Freedom of Information Act Publication Scheme

David is also responsible for the Freedom of Information Act Publication Scheme. It is reviewed every six months and is as transparent as possible. In publishing as much unpublished information in the scheme the DRC does not as yet get many enquiries under the scheme.

The future

David and his team face an interesting future as in October 2007 the various equality Commissions and new strands will merge into the Commission for Equality and Human Rights to be headquartered in Manchester with a large office in London, and devolved offices in Cardiff and Edinburgh, with the exception of the Commission for Racial Equality which has secured an opt out till 2009, which could cause major issues of compatibility when attempting to merge systems and services, including intranets and websites. The Equal Opportunities Commission has been based in Manchester for thirty years and has a large library with two staff. David believes that because his service has a good reputation and high customer ratings it should have a high profile part to play in the future library and information services of the merged organisation.

Relations with other professionals

David is a member of the Northern Network of Government Information Services and has recently joined BIALL. He is an active member of the OLIB User Group and he is planning to join the Manchester Legal Information Group shortly.

…and away from it all

When not at work, David majors in moving house, having done so three times in as many years. He is now happily settled with his wife Jillian, who works as a Housing Benefits Officer for Hyndburn B.C. and his children Molly, 10 and Harry 4, in Burnley. David and Jillian nearly met each other many years ago as they were born in the same nursing home in Burnley!

David has a strong sense of social responsibility and is involved with his local Liberal Democrat Party. Some years ago he stood for the local council in Rawtenstall, coming a close second!

The DRC library and information service is very impressive and I came away thinking that David was a very worthy recipient of the first BIALL/Lexis Nexis Special Librarian Award.

BIALL/Lexis Nexis Awards for Excellence

Kate Stanfield

Kate's citation for winning the award read as follows:-

"[Kate is] 'living proof that library skills are transferable to the wider information needs of the modern law firm' in acknowledgment of her almost single-handed development and subsequent world-wide launch of a portal that links together internal and external sources"

Background

Kate has a BSc in Geography, with a main interest in Biogeography – plants and the landscape. She decided to go into library work originally to combine her interests of biogeography and information. Kate worked at Essex County Libraries where she was a graduate trainee based in Harlow for twelve months, before going to Aberystwyth to complete her Post Graduate Diploma in Librarianship in 1986. Kate returned to Essex County Libraries after qualification, joining the interlending and cataloguing teams at HQ in Chelmsford, before moving on to work in the Business Information Service (CIU) and the Local Government Library. She was employed in public libraries for a total of eight years. Kate has been at CMS Cameron McKenna in a variety of roles since 1990.

Fig. 12 Kate Stanfield

The Firm

CMS Cameron McKenna is an international law firm, the result of a merger between McKenna & Co and Cameron

Markby Hewitt in 1997. It has offices in Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Hong Kong; Hungary; Poland; Romania; Russia and Slovakia.

It has over 1,000 employees, including 134 partners and 509 lawyers and the lawyers work in one of the following practice areas:-

• Banking and International finance

• Energy, Projects & Construction

• Commercial (Financial Services, Competition and EC, Pensions, Immigration, Employment, Technology, Litigation, Safety, Health, Environment and Products)

• Corporate and Tax

• Real Estate

• Insurance and reinsurance

The Firm's management structure

Kate emphasised how important it is to have management support for a project of this nature. She reports to the People and Development Director, Keith Pearse, who was the Knowledge Management Director at that time. Kate was Library and Information Services Manager before moving across to become Knowledge Projects Manager, and Project Manager for this project, which was called Spark (Sharing Practice and Relationship Knowledge). She is now Head of Knowledge Management.

Knowledge and Information Services Department

There are 15 people including Kate working in KIS, of whom seven are qualified librarians. There are two Library Assistants; one company search person and two people supporting the portal, intranet and the client relationship management system. Kate is also responsible for two HotDocs developers and one knowledge manager who works part-time dealing with after-action reviews and other knowledge based activities.

The LawPort Project

What is LawPort?

Lawport is a portal which has been deployed in many law firms in the US but had not been purchased before in the UK. It is supplied by SV Technologies who are based in San Francisco (which can cause difficulties with time differences). Kate's implementation was pioneering in the

UK. The aim of LawPort is to integrate the many sources of data to supply the information needs and outputs of the various activities which take place in a large law firm and make them easily accessible to the lawyer via his or her desktop. The departments which are likely to be involved in such a project include all of the legal practice areas, information services; IT; marketing; finance; billing, HR and business development.

Lawport utilises taxonomy to link disparate types of data, everything from a matter to a document and therefore a global segmented taxonomy covering not just legal subjects, but also industry sector type; geography and jurisdiction, languages and other segments has to be constructed and deployed. The important thing is to describe any data in the same way, so that contextual associations can be made and information be drawn together around any taxonomy term, be that a subject, a matter, a client, an industry etc.

Lawport is a legal object model, and can display information in a series of "views" of information on the screen, according to the requirement. For example, the view at Fig. 13 below should hold information relevant to the firm as a whole.

The Views are as follows:-

• Client view – a dynamically created view for every client.

• Matter view - a dynamically created view for every matter, as soon as a new matter is created, a view will be automatically created overnight.

• Team view – both for legal teams and support teams

• Office view – a view for every office.

• Personal view

• Category (Taxonomy) view

• Plus any cross functional 'custom' view that may be required within the firm

Client view

This pulls together relevant information about each client and the work being done for them, which includes a snapshot of the WIP (work in progress), and details of fee earners working on this client. All of which is displayed alongside relevant know how, external documents, legislation, links to relevant websites etc.

Matter view

The Matter view also pulls together relevant internal and external information, documents, fee earners, links to websites, commercial databases, know how etc. Because the matter was categorised when it was opened, information can be pulled together in this way – so data
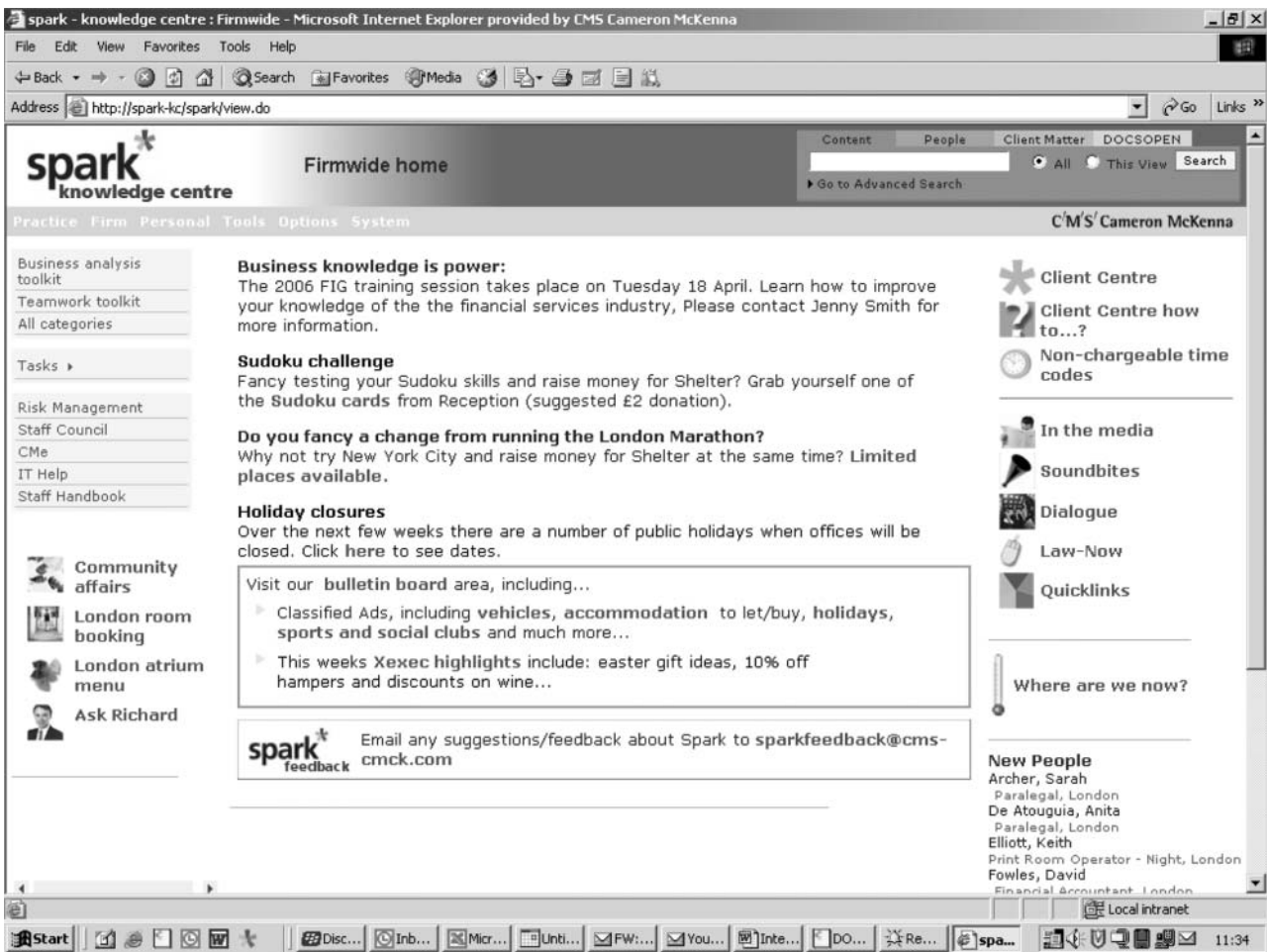
Fig. 13 Spark Firmwide Home Page

is created once and linked to many times according to the context.

Team view

This displays information relevant to a particular team. For example there are five banking teams in London that will need information relevant to their specific requirements, plus banking teams in every office that will need both access to the other banking team information, and their own jurisdiction specific information. Within any view links can be made to specific areas of commercial databases and websites.

Office view

This displays information both about the different offices, and for the use of each office. Each office has its own page giving everything from details of location, where to stay, what visas are needed, how to find a taxi, the best restaurants etc. through to the secretarial rota for that office, websites and addresses.

Personal view

This view is tailored to each individual and can show whatever that individual would find useful. It could include details of their ongoing matters; email inbox; clients; recently edited documents from the document management system; and subject-based know how consisting of recent publications, useful websites etc on their specific areas.

Category view (taxonomy)

Every term (category) in the taxonomy enables a dynamic view to be created for that term. I.e. If 'Facility Agreements' is a term in the taxonomy, a view of 'Facility Agreements' will be created, which will automatically be populated (according to whatever template has been designed), with any information that has been categorised as to do with 'Facility agreements'. This allows a large number of comprehensive views of information.

The portal holds material in different languages but each piece of information is posted with an English

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language title and keywords, and each office has a series of delegated authors. The infrastructure is also in English but there is facility within the taxonomy to use synonyms to link between the different languages.

The portal is the first image that members of the firm see when they logon to their PC. It opens with a firm-wide view. This was a strategic decision taken to enhance the visibility of the project and enable firm-wide communication.

How did the project start?

Historically CMS Cameron McKenna had a good collection of know how in its London office, and has had a central knowledge system since 1989, but as the firm grew it began to be realised that there was much more knowledge in the international firm that needed to be shared, collected and disseminated.

After a survey of the tools available, it was decided to purchase LawPort and in October 2002 the project began. Roll out started in March 2004 with completion at the end of July 2004. Kate acknowledges her huge debt to James Mullan who was her right-hand man through out the project. She also received enormous help and support from her IT department, without which the project would not have been possible.

There was partner support at a high level for the project right from its inception, and the project supported the firm's strategy, which Kate believes is absolutely crucial to the success of such a high risk and complicated project.

The aim of the project

To provide a one-stop shop for finding any piece of information regardless of its derivation.

The Project Team

The Steering Group consisted of the Managing Partner; the Directors of the Support Departments and Practice Group Managers.

The Project Team was multi-disciplinary and comprised of representatives from every support department, professional support lawyers from every practice area; key partners in various teams as required and key authors from each practice area according to their requirements. For example, Business Development Managers may need to publish data in some practice teams, but not in others.

The project was divided into four project streams, which were closely tied in to the strategies of the firm –

- Technical – both at Cameron McKenna and SV Technology.

- Content – knowledge management and information management teams, PSLs, and fee earners
- Change – learning and development team
- Communications – marketing team (internal and external)

There were two practice area pilot groups in the UK and one in the Prague office.

The Project Plan

The project began with Kate and James spending a considerable amount of time with each team on an information audit with individual fee earners, working out what they did on a day-to-day basis and then identifying their information needs. For example they found out from the project finance lawyers which agreements and precedents they used; which particular tool kits of information were especially useful; and which best practice guides they used. After-action reviews are also undertaken at the end of particular deals to identify the information resources used in that matter, and these are still ongoing.

They discovered that there were many documents in existence but that knowledge was often not being shared well either within London or between London and the overseas offices, nor were pieces of related information linked to each other in any way. A useful test was to ask trainees what they had struggled to find during their first few weeks in a practice area seat. When they had built up their own silos of information it was easier, so that indicated what key experience/information/knowledge was not being shared.

At the same time, the PSLs worked on the firm's standard forms and precedents and other documents, identifying gaps in provision, confirming currency and eliminating duplication.

The key challenges

Knowledge sharing
They realised that the key to the success of the project was going to be enabling individuals to share their knowledge. In law firms there are natural barriers to knowledge sharing which need to be overcome. In particular client relationship information can be subject to potential conflicts of interest. Also there is a traditional reluctance among lawyers to share information for a variety of reasons which are well rehearsed in the literature.

Ease of access
A key challenge for the team was making the information available clear and allowing the lawyers ease of access to it.

The results

The most important win from the project has been the growth of knowledge sharing. The lawyers have overcome their initial reluctance and the demonstrated utility of the system has given them the confidence to start posting material to it. This means that people in different offices dealing with the same client can communicate with each other.

Some very practical information was gathered and disseminated via the portal. For example domestic office information which, whilst it is knowledge, is not the sort of knowledge typically held in a knowledge management system.

Post roll-out

After the project was rolled out, it became obvious that some of the pages needed to be simplified. Also in some teams, the way that information was required turned out not to be by type of material, (e.g. precedent, toolkit) but by subject area, so the data was then re-arranged to suit the way that they actually work, instead of the way that they expected to work. The search functionality needs improving and this is work that is currently ongoing.

Training

Kate and James designed the training with input from all of the PSLs, and it was then implemented with the help of the IT training team. It was tailored to each practice area with relevant questions, search strategies etc and involved an hour of hands on training – a huge amount of work. It is also available as an elearning package using TutorPro.

Training was carried out by practice area and then by teams within the practice area and all fee earners have now been trained. James, Kate and two IT trainers undertook all the hands on training which involved going out to all the foreign offices.

Kate and James also attended focus groups and team meetings and carried out "floor walking" to enhance the visibility of the project and help with initial problems.

The future

There are some improvements to the software that would be helpful, especially to aid the sharing of people expertise and to improve the benefits of search functionality, as well as importing more commercial/ external data.

Kate is also experimenting with the WIKI concept to encourage more collaboration amongst the lawyers. They can submit information which can then be worked on and amended. At present a pilot project is being conducted amongst the trainees to find their views on various topics – what information and resources were hard to find; how they went about the task etc with the ultimate aim being to produce a toolkit of useful tips and documents. This information would then be shared firm wide via the portal.

They are still looking for good software in the "collaborative space".

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kate found the project stressful but overall enormously enjoyable and satisfying. While there will always be issues with a firm wide portal, the firm is delighted with the results and it has proved that librarians do have the skills to move into other areas and make a huge success of the task in hand.