

# Multi-site Management of Library and Information Services

## Introduction

The following articles were written by law librarians employed by a variety of organisations in response to a questionnaire sent out by the Editorial Board. The aim of this brief survey was to try and find out what the key issues are facing librarians who operate in such situations. We were unable to get a contribution from an academic library operating a multi-site system. Some of the articles have followed the format of the questions posed in the survey and others are more discursive, but the Editorial Board hopes that readers will find useful nuggets of information in these different accounts. They certainly offer interesting organisational schemas.

It is difficult to draw any general conclusions from the accounts we have received as, despite some similarities in geographical reach, each organisation appears to operate its library, information and knowledge management services quite differently. We naively thought when we began this survey that the big four firms would offer a much more uniform approach to provision of these services than in fact they appear to do.

We have contributions from four of the leading large commercial firms which began life as provincial firms with offices around the country and have subsequently grown into large international firms with offices in London and around the world – Zoe Wright from DLA, Bridget Buxton and Alison Johnson from Eversheds, Sue Carey from Hammonds and Vicky Fordham from Pinsent Masons. It is interesting that two of the four have recently undergone restructuring of their library and information services divisions and a third is currently considering it.

The results of their restructuring are that DLA have merged the work of their library and information services with that of their professional support lawyers in a new department, reporting to the National Head of Knowledge Services, which is divided into two teams known as Research and Resources. Eversheds' Information Services have also been restructured recently and the Information Services team no longer reports to the Head of Knowledge Management but to the Director of Quality. (In another article in this issue by Rochelle Rawlinson of Lovells, yet another restructuring model is featured).

DLA is focussing on providing information via the subject specialist route by physically locating information professionals within the practice areas whilst the core library administration routines have been centralised.

Eversheds have appointed regional managers who are responsible for all sites within particular areas, and whose functions include line management, service provision and collection development. Procedures are standardised across the firm but tasks such as cataloguing and library housekeeping are done by individual sites, whereas budgeting, purchasing and library management systems are organised on a firm-wide basis.

Hammonds have not restructured recently but are thinking about it. They have an overall head of LIS who has responsibility for all UK offices and "dotted line" responsibility for overseas offices. Most of their library systems are organised nationally but their library services are offered using a mixture of national and local provision.

Pinsent Masons operate on a national team basis with an overall head of information services. This article was written before the recent merger with Masons, which may well have an impact on library provision. They appear to have a close working relationship between PSLs and the library staff in areas such as stock selection and current awareness. They do not appear to have any connection between knowledge management and library and information services.

The articles by Janice Edwards and Isabel Hood reflect their experiences running medium-sized multi-site Scottish commercial law firm information services and give us a very different lifestyle. Both are solo librarians trying to run cross-site libraries without the back-up of the large teams available to the previous firms mentioned. It is interesting to note that they both emphasise that the most important part of their work is operating an enquiry service, whilst at the same time disappearing behind mountains of mail and loose-leaf filing in Isabel's case!

The College of Law is another organisation which underwent significant change relatively recently. It now operates a mix of centralised and local services though historically the branches were largely autonomous. The new working methods have allowed much closer collaboration and team working and are judged to have been a great success.

The Editorial Board hopes that this collection of articles will provide food for thought for those of you caught up in, or about to be caught up in, a takeover or merger, or considering a restructuring of your library and information services.

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