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## Book reviews

**WALTON, Graham and BOOTH, Andrew (eds.).** *Exploiting knowledge in health services.* London: Facet. 2004. 274 pages. ISBN 1 85604 479 3 £49.95

The same editors' earlier book *Managing Knowledge in Health Services* (Library Association, 2000) was an essential practical guide for anyone involved in the management or provision of healthcare information in the UK. Described as a companion volume, this new book provides both an extension of the principles advocated in the earlier publication and an update on the fundamental changes in healthcare that have taken place in the relatively short period since it was published. In keeping with its broader perspective it employs a wider range of contributors with extensive experience in health-related fields, and assumes some prior knowledge of first principles and basic practices previously dealt with.

The difference between "managing" and "exploiting" knowledge is perhaps a fine one, and certainly there are aspects of both books that cover each of these functions. Graham Walton's opening chapter here gives a balanced and concise summary of the social, political and economic factors that are driving the rapid changes in the health sector in the UK. Subsequent chapters cover issues such as knowledge management, collaborative working and project management. David Stewart's chapter on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provides a useful summary of the rationale behind CPD, and explores the range of activities that might be considered by those managing information staff. Though referring here specifically to health information, the general principles could be applied to information professionals in any field.

Much is made throughout of the importance of evidence-based practice, and the need for information providers in healthcare to assist clinicians with knowledge management. A major recent innovation, covered in the chapter

by Alison Turner, is the National electronic Library for Health (NeLH), which supports evidence-based decision making by providing "access to research evidence, clinical guidelines and critically appraised resources". The author recognizes the importance of adequately marketing such a potentially invaluable tool, and of the role health libraries can play both in raising the profile of the service and in providing training and support.

Given the sheer amount of information now widely available, there is a vital role for librarians to play in analyzing, sorting and evaluating the knowledge base. In "Appraising the literature", John Blenkinsopp covers the principles of critical appraisal, and the means by which librarians can provide essential support and training for those involved in making clinical decisions. Taken to its logical conclusion, this results in the concept of "clinical librarianship", covered in an earlier chapter by Susan Childs, in which the specially trained health services librarian participates in clinical rounds responding quickly to the specific information needs of physicians dealing with their patients.

Together with the earlier book (now unfortunately out of print, but freely available online) this is an indispensable volume for healthcare librarians, and could be read with profit by information professionals in any field. Like its predecessor, it is extremely well organised, with key points enabling rapid appraisal of each chapter, and a comprehensive index. Sensibly, this time, the editors have chosen to append references to the individual chapters to which they relate, rather than gather them all together at the end.

The overall impression of health librarians given by the book is one of proactive information professionals who are providing essential practical support to those at the front line of medical practice. Whether this is an accurate picture or not, the contributors unquestionably provide a good many pointers for the various ways in which librarians in any field can respond to the rapid changes in information provision and ensure that their

skills remain relevant to the modern world. Highly recommended – and of much wider application than its title would suggest.

**Mike Sharrocks**

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**Brophy, Peter Professor (editor), *The New Review of Information and Library Research*, Volume 9, 2003. Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2003. 155 pages. ISSN 1361-455X**

There are two groups of people who immediately come to mind when reviewing this journal - students on library and information courses of study and candidates for Chartership. This journal is an excellent resource for both groups because of the nature of the articles, bringing together current research on international issues. I also feel that this particular volume of the journal would find its most appropriate readership amongst academic librarians.

The primary theme of this issue - which could now be considered to be slightly out of date being at least two years old - is the developments taking place in digital librarianship. Professor Peter Brophy provides a brief synopsis of each article in his editorial, a useful inclusion, allowing the reader to establish quickly which, if any of the articles meet their personal need.

As with all journals the layout of each article is typical, an abstract precedes the article text and articles are succinct, providing as much evidence based information as is possible within a short article. Usefully, as well as full credentials for each of the contributors, there are also contact email addresses allowing readers the option of following up any points of interest directly with the author of the article.

The contents of the journal include; evidence-based librarianship, collaboration between international library and information science schools, portals, digital library systems and research libraries, the JUBILEE toolkit, social science collections and services to postgraduate

students. It is a mixed collection of articles, examining the wide range of research-based activities that contribute to the future of library services for all users.

Of particular note is the article on portals; the discussion here centres on their function and development, primarily in academic libraries but also in businesses. Liz Pearce initially notes the proliferation of portals on many websites and the lack of a single definition. In her discussion on portals in institutions she emphasises the issue of information overload as a driving force and the ways in which portals and other techniques can be used to combat this concern. She continues the study with considerations of cost, efficiency, communication and user expectation. Context is given to the article through case studies and examples of parallel developments.

Following on from this article is the very positive discussion of digital library systems and online learning in which Margaret Markland discusses the growth and development of VLE's in UK further and higher education libraries. Case studies provide evidence of the technological and people challenges faced when implementing such systems.

Further articles in the journal include case studies and evidence based practice, for example Linda Banwell's article on the JUBILEE toolkit – JISC User Behaviour in Information seeking - Longitudinal Evaluation of Electronic Information Services - provides some important research considerations for higher and further education library services.

This edition of the journal contains a varied collection of papers that are concerned particularly with current technological changes affecting libraries in the further and higher education sectors. Each of the articles provides a useful overview of this research as well as excellent references for further reading. This is a recommended volume providing an insight into current research and the fast changing world of academic library services.

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**BAKER, David.** *The Strategic Management of Technology: a guide for library and information services.* Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2004. 306 pages  
ISBN 1 84334 041 0 Price: £55 (Hardback)  
£39 (Paperback)

The first thing that strikes home about the book is the depth of coverage of the topic. The author has vast experience in the management of technology in information and library projects, and this experience is presented very well within the text.

There is no doubt to me after reading the text that the key demographic for the book is senior managers within information and library services. The focus of the book is to communicate to the reader that managing technology is as important as all other aspects of the strategic planning process, and it is successful in this. More than that, however, the book gives a thorough background discussion to several theoretical concepts such as systems thinking, scenario planning and risk management. This is more than just a book evangelising technology, it is a highly practical, extremely well researched text of key benefit to any manager who needs to understand how to plan strategically for technology implementation and planning. In that context its readership could be seen to be wider than information and library professionals.

The book has a very logical structure, firstly taking the reader through the theories of strategic technology management, before discussing the importance of innovation when technology planning. It then moves on to the strategic planning process, from formulation to implementation. It then rounds off with useful case studies added to enrich the practicality of the text. These are very much library-centred, with the emphasis on the UK Higher Education (HE) sector (the author's background). Discussions include the eLib project and the future of document delivery in the HE sector. All four case studies featured are well presented and offer useful snapshots for some of the theories discussed earlier in the text. The

bibliography that rounds off the book is vast and offers useful avenues for those readers who wish to follow up specific aspects.

Overall this is highly recommended text for a specific reading demographic. It is not the kind of book you could recommend to every library and information professional, but for those at a senior level I could imagine it would be an invaluable resource in their forward planning. The over emphasis of the HE experience of the author could be seen as a negative by some, but overall it is a benefit, given that the HE sector has seen the convergence of library services and IT long before other sectors have done so, and in many ways has been the guinea pig for the development of the hybrid library concept. The author's experience is extensive and highly practical, and his words do carry some resonance for that.

On the downside, accessibility may be an issue for anyone not versed in management theories. Indeed it is the depth of the text that may see some readers struggle with it. While it is a text I would recommend for students, it would suit the postgraduate mind more than undergraduate and would be extremely useful on Information Management courses aimed at teaching Information Strategy more than perhaps a traditional Information and Library Studies degree.

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**BOOTH, Andrew and BRICE, Anne. (eds.)**  
*Evidence-based practice for information professionals: a handbook.* Facet Publishing.  
London. 2004. 304 p. ISBN 1-85604-471-8

Life is full of strange coincidences. When I was contacted to review this book, I was sitting at a 'hot' desk in Leicester. As I took the call I noticed a copy on the desk next to me! Its owner is the Knowledge Manager to the National Diabetes Support Team. My own copy was on my desk at home! This actually says it all about the book – it is such a core text for our profession that it is a desk essential and a topic on everyone's agenda.

This book is a comprehensive guide to the theory of evidence-based practice and its application to the library and information profession. The editors, both from the UK health library sector, have assembled a very impressive cast of international contributors, from all sectors of the library and information profession (although the majority are from the health sector), all of whom have direct knowledge and experience of evidence-based information practice. Whilst their definitions of EBIP may vary, they all subscribe to the core paradigm which is EBP: "the best available evidence, moderated by user needs and preferences, is applied to improve the quality of professional judgments" (McKibbin, 1996).

The book is in three parts. The first section of five chapters reviews the history and philosophy behind evidence-based practice, its origins in the health sector and the pioneers which helped it move into the information sector. Then, it explores the quality of the evidence base for the information sector and the reasons why library and information profession are not as active in using research to inform practice as some other professions.

The middle part of the book is why this book is called a handbook. Everything you wanted or needed to know about how to apply EBP techniques is covered in the 7 chapters. There is a chapter for each stage in the EBP process: formulating the research question, identifying the sources of evidence, searching the literature,

appraising the evidence, applying the evidence to practice, evaluating the changes in performance and disseminating the lessons which resulted. It is important for practitioners to understand and follow all stages in this process. We are often good at searching the literature, retrieving evidence and even at applying findings to our practice. However, making sure we are defining the right problem, collecting the right evidence, appraising this evidence properly and applying the best of it, is another matter. I was also pleased that the section did not stop with applying evidence but reminded practitioners of their responsibility to evaluate performance and disseminate what happened as well. The point of EBIP is to inform and improve professional practice overall, not just individual practice.

The third and final section gives eight chapters on how to apply EBIP to specific domains of professional practice e.g. reference and enquiry services, education and training, collection management, management, information access and retrieval, marketing and promotion. I thoroughly enjoyed reading these chapters. For each domain, there are one or more special topic sections which are either a digest of evidence or a guideline. For example, the chapter "Towards evidence-based management" has two special topics on measuring the impact of services (a guideline) and on charging for services (an evidence briefing). These are incredibly helpful and I particularly valued the review of research evidence and the review of appropriate methodologies which are clearly laid out in tables in these sections.

Overall, the book is easy to read and follow, well designed and laid out, includes comprehensive chapter reference lists and is well indexed. Facet and the editors are to be commended for producing the ideal professional tool – a comprehensive reference book and a practical handbook, accessible to students, practitioners and academics, and relevant to all sectors in all countries.

The importance of this book cannot be underestimated. One author suggests that this seminal work will be responsible for "a sea-

change in the way librarianship is practised by all but the most antediluvian information professionals” (Gorman, 2004). I could not agree more and I think that the fact it was reprinted within the first year of publication testifies to the interest it has generated and to a welcome shift in thinking within the profession. I can recommend without a single reservation!

### References

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