

Demystifying research support roles in libraries

SLIDE 1: How do you become a Scholarly Communications Assistant? What even is that?!

SLIDE 2: I'm Justyna Burzynska and I work as a Scholarly Communications Assistant at University of the Art London.

SLIDE 3: Where I support researchers and assist in managing UAL's online collection of research outputs on our digital repository UAL Research Online (UALRO). UALRO is the largest Open Access institutional collection of scholarly research in arts and design.

SLIDE 4: But the Scholarly Communications team is extremely small. consisting of me, and Scholarly Communications Manager Cassie Bowman. We sit between Library Services and the Research Management & Administration office.

SLIDE 5: UAL consists of 6 distinct colleges across London - Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins, Chelsea College of Arts, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Arts. With a total of 8 library sites.

SLIDE 6: I completed a BA in Illustration at Camberwell College of Arts. While studying I worked in the library in the evenings. [My final year show commemorated the end of cassette tape production and celebrated mixtape cassette culture (apologies for the stupid photo)]

SLIDE 7: After graduating I started working full time as a Library Assistant at London College of Fashion, at it's previous site in Oxford Circus. [With some of my former colleagues on the purple stair case / Illustration used on LCF tote bags]

SLIDE 8: Working at an arts institution, specifically within library services has kept me close to the arts in a creative and dynamic environment. I've found supporting artistic research to be personally rewarding and very inspiring. Putting together displays from our special collections was one of my favourite parts of the job. [Rave ephemera from London College of Fashions' Special Collection]

SLIDE 9: I've continued my own art practice contributing illustrations to magazines, independent art journals, artist's promotional material, small press publications, exhibitions and my own personal projects. [JB Hairboll visual novel character / Cover of Writing Around Sound, vol 2. 'In Whose Tradition? / The Lovers for the Sleepless Tarot]

SLIDE 10: During my time at London College of Fashion I completed a Masters in Arts Policy and Management at Birkbeck, University of London. There was a distinct learning curve going from a practice based BA to my Masters, which involved having to adapt to more advanced theoretical and practical demands. Working in library services certainly helped develop my research skills during my studies.

SLIDE 11: I specialised in Curating Sound. I presented a paper on Curating Sound Art in London at the Methodologies of Sound Art Curating conference at the ZKM in Karlsruhe. This paper was eventually published in a special Sound Curating issue of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac.

SLIDE 12: This led me to curating London: A Sonic Fragment at the Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery in Christchurch, NZ. [Installation shot of GPUD's Fragmental Machine greets you at the top of the gallery stairs, a standalone instrument using sampled field recordings with interactivity via light sensors and distance sensors. And me banging on about something...]

Sonic Fragment is an ambitious group show that brings together contemporary sound artists congregating in London, England. Despite tough living conditions, for artists especially, the capital still attracts and fosters a rich sound art scene. Their sonic concerns are varied as they are broad, travelling across spaces: galleries, nightclubs, squat parties, academic institutions and site specific work. Sonic Fragment aims to provide a glimpse of the cross disciplinary activities and shifting terrain of sound art emanating from the capital. London's vibrant scene is installed into and pouring out of the Auricle.

SLIDE 13: Wondering how to progress my career in art libraries and utilise my masters, the role of Scholarly Communications Assistant was advertised at UAL. After reading the job description I thought...I can do this! And luckily my interviewers thought so too.

Although I didn't have required Library qualification, I believe I fell into the 'or similar' category: with my extensive library experience, overlapping skills in cultural management, understanding of arts policy and having a miniature research career of my own.

And so, I entered the world of Scholarly Communications...

SLIDE 14: Simply put, Scholarly communication is the process by which researchers create, evaluate, share, and curate their research output. Scholarly Communications helps research staff to broaden the reach and impact of their research, worldwide.

A key element that underpins our work is advocating for and supporting Open Access. Open Access research refers to scholarly work that is freely available online to the public, without subscription or payment barriers.

SLIDE 15: The constantly evolving landscape of scholarly communications and research support includes, but is not limited to:

- **Supporting Open Access**, assisting with the implementation and promotion of open access policies, ensuring compliance with funding mandates.
- **Managing an institutional repository**, overseeing the submission, curation, and dissemination of digital research outputs.
- **Outreach and training** on topics such as open access, copyright, and research data management.
- **Advocacy**, liaising with researchers, library staff, and external stakeholders to advocate for best practices in scholarly communication.
- Make sure researchers are **aware of and comply** with institutional, national, and funder policies related to their work.
- Support the preparation for the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- Develop and maintain resources, guides, and documentation to **support researchers** in their scholarly communication efforts.
- **Keeping up to date with** developments, and best practices in scholarly communication to inform and improve services.

SLIDE 16: I find the work particularly rewarding because:

- **Promoting Open Access** makes research freely accessible to a global audience fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.
- **Supporting researchers** in navigating complex publishing and data management requirements and helping them maximize the visibility and impact of their work, is highly fulfilling.
- **Interdisciplinary engagement** by working across various disciplines offers a diverse and stimulating work environment.
- The field is dynamic and continually evolving, providing opportunities for continuous learning and **professional development**.
- Working with a wide range of stakeholders, including researchers, librarians, publishers, and policymakers, fosters a sense of **community** and shared purpose.
- By ensuring compliance with best practices in scholarly communication, I can help improve the overall **quality and integrity of research**.

SLIDE 17: A work day could include

- **Open Access Support**, eg Assisting researchers with queries regarding Open Access publishing options and compliance with funder mandates.

- **Content Management**, Maintaining the digital repository, including uploading new research outputs, theses, and creative works.
- **Meetings** across departments for research support, collection management and technical infrastructure projects etc.
- **Training and Workshops** on Open Access, practically using UALRO, scholarly publishing etc.
- **One-on-one sessions** for researchers needing assistance with publishing processes, depositing their research to UALRO
- **Research Promotion** eg Creating content highlighting notable projects and achievements within the institute

SLIDE 18: Professional development can take the form of attending and/or presenting at conferences that cater to the niche concerns of the sector.

SLIDE 19: I attended the inaugural Scholarly Communications Conference held at the University of Kent, 2019. The conference addressed:

“The evolving nature of Scholarly Communication roles means that no two roles are the same. They can have many elements including repository management, some open data, some responsible metrics, some REF management, some copyright and licensing, some working with the media, and some all of the above. This event is bringing together all aspects of Scholarly Communication, to hear about the practical approaches being taken, to share ideas and resources, and develop new networks”

SLIDE 20: More recently I had the pleasure of attending the DARTS8 conference at the beautiful Dartington Hall in May 2023, the theme was ‘Research Culture’ and it explored fully how we can support and positively influence research in our institutions. My glowing response to DARTS8:

- An ideal catalyst for conversations about our issues and concerns, as there tends not to be formal training for the very specific work carried out within Scholarly Communications.
- Ad hoc conversations with research support professionals were invaluable - especially how teams are situated, structured and funded within their institutions.
- The different approaches teams had to supporting researchers and advocating for Open Access research.
- Responses to the continually changing terrain of scholarly communications and research support - Transformative Agreements, UKRI mandates. REF etc.

SLIDE 21: It also drew out that coming from an arts institution we have a very unique research culture, that does not adequately fit within support structures set up for STEM. Delegates from more research focussed institutions were really interested in how we present practice based research.

SLIDE 22: As aforementioned, working at an arts institution means our research outputs not only include traditional outputs such as journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters, but practice-based research, which is both exciting and challenging.

SLIDE 23: Practice Research is where practical work and creative activities are central to the research process. The outcomes can include both the practical work and a reflective component that provides insights and understanding derived from the practice.

SLIDE 24: Here are a few of the unique challenges we face in capturing practice-based research:

- How do we **digitally represent** research outputs that can be transient and ephemeral, such as performances, installations, or design processes?
- It can be difficult to **document**, in a standardised format, the wide variety of outputs produced by practice based research, such as visual, auditory, and tactile elements.
- Traditional peer review processes may not be well-suited to **assessing** the creative and practice-based elements of Practice based research.

- Defining and protecting **intellectual property** rights in practice based research can be complex, especially when the outputs are non-traditional or collaboratively produced.
- **Disseminating** non-textual outputs such as performances, artworks, or prototypes through traditional academic channels can be challenging.

SLIDE 25: In response to global discussions about practice research, The Practice Research Report was published in 2021 to clarify the debates, discussions, and potential of the practice research community in England. The scholarly communications team at UAL contributed to this report.

SLIDE 26: An example of how with collaboration with our researchers we have endeavoured to capture a rich digital picture of practice based research can be seen in Anna Troisi's Méiyǒu shālù [MEY-I-YOU SAH-LOO] (Without Killing). The research item has been deposited with high quality images of the performance

SLIDE 27: a detailed description

SLIDE 28: and audio visual of the performance itself

SLIDE 29: Throughout this presentation, the constantly evolving nature of Scholarly Communications has been highlighted.

Factors that contribute to this, such as Technological Advancements, Policy and Mandate Changes, Data Management Practices, Funding Models, Interdisciplinary Research, Ethical Considerations, Metrics and Impact Assessment and more.

This combined with the specificity of the role has fostered a supportive community of scholarly communications and research support staff, and as champions of Open Access sharing and openness are central to our work.