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Commonwealth Professional Fellowship 2005-2006 at UK: A Report



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Introduction:

This report narrates the program and activities under Commonwealth Professional Fellowship at United Kingdom for the period 1st November to 31st January 2006 and its contribution towards sustainable professional development. CPF is an extensive, multi-faceted and generally highly regarded (equivalent to US Fulbright Professional Fellowship) program, developed explicitly to fill a gap in the professional and career development opportunities for the young professionals working in Commonwealth countries. Under this scheme Commonwealth Commission support mid career professionals to update their knowledge in the sectors regarded as making an important contribution to the development of Commonwealth countries. It was indeed a rare opportunity and I was very excited to interact with librarians/ Information Professionals from London city and other parts of UK. I focused on two different programs, viz. Electronic Resource management in the Learning Resource Centres at Middlesex University and collaborative Library activities in UK. The programs were very intensive and challenging and I had to work very hard to complete successfully the visits, Online conference, workshop and staff training program within the time limit. I have improved my English language skills – particularly English speaking and understanding of British spoken English. Soon I adjusted to British culture, and of

course famous European Winter-the frost, slippery road! Under this Fellowship, I was able to visit the various Libraries/ Data centres and study the Consortia models used by libraries in UK as well as the collaborative library programs and online resource sharing activities. The overall program was exciting, exhilarating, sometimes exhausting; all the sessions required a high level of involvement and participation.

Description of the activities Performed:

I. Electronic Resource management in the Learning Resource Centres at Middlesex University

As a part of the introduction program on the first day, Ms Pauline Hollis the Learning Resource manager, Hendon campus took me for a visit to the entire campus of the University. Subsequently I was introduced to the various functions of the Learning Resource Centre, at Middlesex University, which works on different computer applications such as Horizon (Integrated library automated system), Talislist (reading list software), Athens (authentication software), web helpdesk, Win-Chill Inter Library Loan Software, CD-Rom Online Database, EBSCO's A to Z list of access to E-journals. I had the opportunity to learn about RefWorks web based Bibliographic management software, subject librarian's activities, RFID circulation system and 3M magnetic strip security system. I attended the orientation program delivered by Sue Hurley, System Librarian for the new comers, regarding the use of E-resources available in the

Learning resource centre. Also I looked at current trends in university library management at Trent Park and New Southgate campus of the University.

Inter-semester break training program and staff meetings at Middlesex University

For better understanding the functions of Learning Resources, I attended various meetings viz. meeting of Campus Librarians, Circulation Librarians, Library Systems team and was able to contribute through my experience in India. Every year Middlesex University organizes inter-semester break training program for the permanent staff intended for general staff development. University takes staff development more seriously than many similar institutions. Information and Learning Resource Services (ILRS) has a staff development group with representatives from different management levels. Through out the fellowship period being a part of learning resources library system team, I attended few selected training courses. The training on “Introduction to the Dreamweaver” a software used for web page creation, at the Trent Park campus of the Middlesex University was of particular interest! ‘Refwork’ bibliographic software, CDS/ISIS were the other session need a special mention.

II. Collaborative library activities in UK: a Study

Visit to Scotland

Scotland is a small country with a long and successful history of library co-operation, both within and across sectors. In a small country with limited resources, co-operation and resource sharing are particularly relevant. In looking at provision of Library and Information Services, geographical and demographic factors are preeminent. Scotland features rural areas often quite extensive geographically, but with small scattered populations. LIS co-operation in Scotland operates within three broad, and very much interlinked categories, viz. National bodies and initiatives, Regional and local consortia and Sectoral activities. Activities under cooperation are wide-ranging and include local and national access agreements, document supply, collaborative training, joint digitisation projects, and many more. Initially this was within sectors but in recent years, it has developed into true cross- sectoral partnership, particularly at local level where it is most relevant to learner’s needs. During my visit to Scotland I interacted with the people concerned to understand the collaborative activities and consortia initiatives and the bodies who are responsible for successful run of those system. The models used by libraries here particularly very useful for developing countries like India where libraries have to function under a tight budget.

I summarize few of my visits to prominent libraries/Information/data centres and discussion with person concerned:

The weather could not have been better when I reached Robertson Trust Library and Learning resource center, University of Paisley, at Glasgow on 6th December, 2005, morning for a visit from London. Mr. Stuart James, University Librarian, and Chairman, of Ayrshire Libraries Forum (**ALF**) seemed to be in an excellent mood enjoying the interaction we had and the overall discussion were very productive. He talked about ALF; its program and involvement in promoting resource sharing in Scotland. ALF involving Public and Further Education libraries and the University of Paisley Library to make joint effort in maximizing the access to resources available in the libraries. The gesture and hospitality offered by him was remarkable! Mr. James appraised me about the following projects/ activities:

Scottish Library and Information Council (**SLIC**)- is the advisory body to Govt. and a membership organization. SLIC has been playing an important role in the development of library profession. SLIC invites consortiums with a mix of library providers to bid for funding to investigate the practical issues involved in establishing resource sharing agreements as a national and local level. Over the last few years, SLIC has made significant investment in an interoperable network for resource discovery across Scotland. Resource Sharing Scotland (**RSS**) is a Project Promoting physical access to collections through local delivery of resources. Users are given direct online access to collections to place reservations-across all participating services.

Gordon Dunshire, Deputy Director in the Centre for Digital Library Research (CDLR) at Strathclyde University welcomed me on 7th December, morning and described the structure and functioning of CDLR. Based at the University of Strathclyde, The Centre for Digital Library Research (CDLR) is a joint initiative based in two departments - the Department of Computer and Information Sciences and the Information Resources Directorate. Key aims are to 'combine theory with practice in innovative ways' and be a centre of research excellence in the area of distributed digital information and learning environments. The Centre is also home to BUBL, SLAINTE, CAIRNS, SCONE, the Glasgow Digital Library, SAPIENS, and a range of other initiatives or services. Glasgow Area Libraries Together (GALT) is another initiative need a special mention, which allows members reciprocal reference access to each others' services.

CASS (The collaborative Academic Store for Scotland) is the collaborative storage facility which some research libraries in Scotland have created in order to release space in their own buildings. The National Library of Scotland has released a storage area in their Causeway side building for selected material to be deposited on a rental basis. Material in the CASS collection is listed in the CASS catalogue.

EDINA, is a JISC-funded national data centre based at Edinburgh University Data Library. It offers the UK tertiary education and research community networked access to a library of data, information and research resources. All EDINA services are available free of charge to members of UK tertiary education institutions for academic use, although institutional subscription and end-user registration are required for most services. **SUNCAT** (UK national Serials Union Catalogue)-has been developed by the EDINA National data centre, at the University of Edinburg, in partnership with Ex-Libris and is funded by JISC, working under two phases: Phase one ran from Feb 2003 to December 2004 and Phase two commenced in January 2005 and will continue till August 2006, and then the full service will be launched. Fred Guy, project manager explained SUNCAT currently contains information on serials held in twenty two of the largest research libraries in the UK. With over four million records SUNCAT now accounts for a critical mass of titles held in the UK. It is expected that by the end of 2006 a further 60 libraries serial data should be added to SUNCAT. It allows end users to limit a search geographically to a particular region city or library and tailor their search to meet information needs.

I met Dr Michael Breaks, librarian at Hariott Watt University, who is also the former President of IATUL (International Association of Technological University Libraries) had a wonderful discussion about the professional associations in UK and how the Hariott Watt library is promoting the use of e- resources available through EDINA.

Visit to INASP and MIMAS centre



INASP (International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications) is a charity organization established by the International Council for Science in 1992, that works with partners and networks around the world to encourage the creation and production of information, to promote sustainable and equitable access to information, to foster collaboration and networking and to strengthen local capacities to manage and use

information and knowledge. INASP is promoting worldwide access to information and knowledge with particular emphasis on the needs of developing countries. MIMAS (Manchester Information & Associated Services) is a JISC-supported national data centre providing the UK higher education, further education and research community with networked access to key data and information resources to support teaching, learning and research across a wide range of disciplines. Ross Mac, Service Manager spoke to me about 'ISI Web of Science Service for UK Education', 'ZETOC'- The British Library's Electronic Table of Contents database etc. I understood how the data centres are promoting the use of electronic resources in educational institutions in UK.

Visit to Loughborough University Library

Being one of the very reputed University, it was the purpose to see the University library system and visit the Department of Information Science, is ranked as the top institution in the UK to study Information Science and Librarianship. I was fortunate to get an appointment from Paul Sturges, University Librarian for a short meeting which was very informative. Additionally I had an opportunity to see the PhD theses submitted in the areas on latest technology application on libraries.

I believe, these were wonderful opportunities for me to meet various professionals of those libraries for having mutual professional discussions and observations. Eventually, now informal links have been created between P.K.Kelkar Library at IIT Kanpur, and these organizations. I am passionate about disseminating all these information among professional colleagues in India and assisting them to make the best of the opportunities available. The visits were important for me because, it helps to refresh my knowledge, renew personal contacts and get the insight of new techniques and technology. And back in India I plan to have sessions with fellow professionals in IITK and my earlier workplace at Mumbai to share newly acquired knowledge.

Membership at British Library

It is the national library of the United Kingdom. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The British Library's collections include 150 million items from 300 BC, right up to today's newspapers. (Library's website: www.bl.uk). I am thankful to the authority for offering me a one-year membership.

Workshop/Conferences

All the visits balanced well with seminars, workshops, conferences and staff training sessions during semester break at Middlesex university. The first workshop under this fellowship, I attended on 9th November at the Barbican room of Cambridge Shire County Council buildings, Cambridge University Campus entitled 'Portals and consortia'. The demonstration was superb accompanied practical examples. I was able to learn how to develop web-based portals for the Library and Information centres and the consortia of institutions that support them. It was organized by CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) and ANGLES. The presentations were insightful and thought-provoking.

The Online Information meeting, 2005* my first, was a three day international exhibition and conference with its theme "Take control of the information agenda", addressed issues related to online content and information management solutions.

CILIP/ILIG Talk

Invitation from CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional) at their ILIG (International Library and Information group) informal meeting to deliver a talk on topic "Digital divide in India: Role of consortia to bridge the gap" on 18th January, 2006 was a surprise to me. I made a special mention about 'Info-thela' project developed by IIT kanpur, for disseminating information to illiterate rural masses, who are unable to absorb it through print media. Subsequently, I have been proposed to write an article based on the topic of the talk, will be published in "FOCUS" journal (Published by CILIP three times in a year) as agreed by the editor Roger Stringer. Focus is as an excellent platform for

spreading awareness about convergence technology application to bridge the gap between information poor and information rich libraries in India.

Special memories

Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford campus, is the first systematic subject guide to the holdings of the oldest and largest academic library in Great Britain contains 400 years old collections, and a marvelous location for shooting films. Its gorgeous architecture attracts film personalities from all over the world. It was charming to meet genius filmmaker Shekher Kapoor the director of hit films namely Masoom, Mr. India, Bandit Queen and historical movie Elizabeth nominated for the Oscars; in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford on January 19th, 2006. We had small chat and have fun being photographed with him. Special presentations were given on Oxford Bodleian Library make the visit a learning experience.

Lessons learned

In spite of the two nations being geographically and culturally different there are lot of lessons, especially in the field of E-resource sharing and content development, which we can learn from each other. I strongly believe that the knowledge and experience gained from the visits to institutions and attending workshop and conference is definitely going to be transferred to the professional colleagues at India through various media. I do believe the insight about the online content development and management from the above said conference will help me at my organization for setting up the institutional repositories and in managing E-content of Engineering Literatures.

Acknowledgement:

The Commonwealth Professional Fellowship, awarded by the Association of Commonwealth Universities(ACU) and the British Council (BC) is one of the great achievements for me, which helped me to a great extent in improving my knowledge, and experience. The visit I made to the various libraries/data centres and institutes gives me the opportunity to have a long term relation with the organization in future and interactions I had with the professionals improved and broadened my networking at UK. Some of the organizations offered me collaborations in the near future on various topics such as sharing of resources, writing joint papers and make collaborative efforts to develop solutions for some unsolved issues of academic communities facing in both the countries. I am very much thankful to the ACU and BC for awarding me this fellowship and the selection committee for selecting me.

I am thankful to the Middlesex University who welcomed me wholeheartedly since the day I arrived at London and put me on their website available at: <http://www.lr.mdx.ac.uk/News/visitors.htm>. Staff of the University was very friendly and hospitable towards me; my special thanks to them from the bottom of my heart especially Sue Black, Alex Birchall, Sylvia Wood, Mike Bell, Mark Shilingis and Naveed I Khan. I would like to thank to the CILIP for inviting me for the ILIG-CILIP talk on “Digital Divide in India-role of consortia to bridge the gap” at their monthly ILIG meeting. My special thanks to my mentor Alan Hopkinson, Head of the Library Systems without his proper guidance and planning for the fellowship, I wouldn't have reached at this stage.

My report can't be completed without thanking to our Director at IIT Kanpur, Prof Sanjay G. Dhande, Dean Faculty Affairs Prof. Somenath Biswas and Librarian Mr. R. Mishra for allowing me to pursue this fellowship at Middlesex University, London.
