

## **OPPORTUNITY, COMMUNITY, INFLUENCE: A STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE – Mirna Peach, Co-chair CoLRiC**

CoLRiC has evolved and moulded itself to reflect the changing climate and needs of librarians working in this sector. We have celebrated real successes and have awarded those who have gone above and beyond within their roles whilst ensuring that quality service standards are not only met but recognised through our Peer Assessment Programme. This is a rigorous but fair service assessment programme which highlights the integral positive impact of libraries within education. Our waiting list for assessments demonstrates the dedication of library teams throughout the UK to provide excellent services within their own institutions.

Last year, even though we had already implemented some changes, we began to think about all of our services in terms of whether they are still relevant to current practice. We tweaked our surveys and extended our Awards scheme. We launched our members-only newsletter CoLRiC Impact. This content, written by our members for our members, creates ongoing discussions and facilitates the exchange of key information significantly at the point of need. Our website is also being updated so that it is more dynamic, relevant and responsive. Our advocacy led to a wider dialogue on e-resource pricing which in turn resulted in negotiations between publishers and brokers. We continue to provide a voice in this area. We will also be launching a new, more transparent subscription model for the next academic year which reflects Jisc's new bandings.

Throughout 2019 we gathered feedback on what our members valued about CoLRiC. We also had open and frank conversations with the CoLRiC Executive Committee, bringing together their thoughts about the organisation, both positive and negative. Interestingly, when all the information was gathered, there was clear consensus between member feedback and executive committee ideas.

**CoLRiC has been the voice of FE/Sixth form college libraries for over 25 years**

### **Building on our successes**

Our membership told us it valued the up to date information we provide and the opportunity to exchange ideas and information with other members, whether it be via member email messages, the articles in Impact, face-to-face events, social media platforms or the Jisc mail discussion forum.

We are seen as the voice of FE and viewed positively for the advocacy we provide and the work we do with key stakeholders to ensure our members receive the best possible pricing deal. We are knowledgeable about the sector and about the financial constraints experienced by those working in FE. The ever-changing climate has impacted negatively on the workforce, reducing some services to a small number of colleagues who are stretching their services across college operations.

We bring together our members, developing a sense of community through networking and creating a sense of belonging. Our members generally feel that they are represented by us. Our Peer Assessment programme (PAS) gained excellent reviews. The importance of having a system which benchmarks and raises standards whilst at the same time serving as a means of recognising excellent services within the sector received the highest level of positive response. The annual awards are also well regarded, and the development of one which celebrates individuals as well as services and teams has been well received. These areas are clearly ones we do very well in, and demand for the service continues to grow.

This view of CoLRiC, a respected, professional platform offering advice and guidance and bringing to the fore the importance of libraries and library teams within the education sector is one we are very proud of. CoLRiC is committed to raising the profile of the FE/Sixth Form College sector and advocating for those delivering vital library and learning resource services.

## **The future**

Throughout our consultation period, three clear themes emerged. These are explained in more detail below and form the tenets of our three-year strategic plan.

1. Opportunity
2. Community
3. Influence

## **Opportunity**

We need to do more work to encourage inclusivity. Whilst we performed really well in engaging with Heads of Service, there was a clear need to include library teams, offering them the space to communicate and to learn from each other.



It can be awkward speaking your mind when your boss is there, so creating a separate Jisc mail for teams seems to be an obvious step forward. For those new to the sector, it can be an invaluable lifeline for them and will, we hope, support their progress. There is still the opportunity to be a part of all Jisc mail lists, the difference now is choice. For those same colleagues we will look at providing opportunity through mentoring. The Executive Committee has agreed to provide online support to those needing it, and through agreed times, will give those in the infancy of their career, support and guidance. And once we are able to, we will also be offering a residency opportunity for someone who would like to progress their career through committee work.

## **Community**

A key change to how we work will be the way we support our community going forward. We have thought a lot about this, and although our conferences are well attended and greatly valued, we could be doing more throughout the year to ensure our members connect with and support each other locally. A key hindrance in the past has been the inability of some staff to leave their libraries for various reasons. We are all by now aware of and have mostly likely taken part in plenty of online meetings of some sort. Well before Covid-19, our plan included bringing local groups together, facilitating the online meetings to enable you to discuss key issues, provide mutual guidance and to support each locally, at a time that suits you. This is still our plan, but now it is an essential step needed to build local relationships from which we hope would feed into the wider CoLRiC community, through webinars, articles and discussion on the email forums. In the current climate we are also looking at putting together a digital conference, but we will continue to watch this space. Hopefully next year we can hold one physically.

## **Influence**

CoLRiC will ensure that it gathers the latest information and research to feed into and inform these discussions. Our Executive Committee members also sit on various boards, representing CoLRiC in key areas affecting the sector. We will continue to advocate on our members behalf, feeding back to them, gathering their opinion and at times asking for their participation. We will continue to publish key articles, for instance our paper 'Unlocking Libraries' has been shared by our sponsors, used in training, referenced and appeared in key publications. The document contained information harnessed from our membership, and never has it been so important to pull together. Our membership has been a significant factor in developing our strategy and moving the organisation ahead. Our strategy will enable CoLRiC to remain the voice of FE, providing opportunity, developing communities and influencing the sector through its advocacy and inclusivity.

CoLRiC is committed to raising the profile of the FE/Sixth Form College sector and advocating for those delivering vital library and learning resource services. As always, we value your thoughts, ideas and feedback.