



## **CyMAL Marketing Innovation Awards 2014 Application**

**Category:** Further Education Libraries

**Title of the Project:** 'Your Choice, Your Library'

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**Project dates:** 6<sup>th</sup> September 2013 – 27<sup>th</sup> June 2014 (academic year)

### **Project Objectives:**

1. To engage students with their campus library and to create a sense of ownership by encouraging them to actively participate in the selection of stock.
2. To promote reading for pleasure by developing a varied, interesting and relevant collection of fiction and general interest non-fiction titles chosen by and recommended by students.
3. To develop a reading community amongst students by encouraging them to rate, review and recommend books and authors to one another.

### **Target Audience:**

This project is open to all students within the NPTC Group, with particular emphasis on engagement with those aged 16-19.

It does not seek to actively convert reluctant readers into keen book borrowers; its purpose is to encourage existing users of the library to engage in new borrowing activities, to explore new authors and to support them in the development of their reading habits.

## **Rationale for the project**

Members of library staff routinely create displays and carry out activities promoting reading for pleasure in order to support the college's literacy strategy. A proportion of the library book budget is allocated to the purchase of fiction and general interest titles each year to support these activities. However, despite these efforts, the number of fiction titles borrowed by students has remained stubbornly low. In order to determine possible reasons for the low borrowing levels, members of library staff began informally questioning students about their reading habits. Feedback from these conversations clearly indicated that, despite prominent displays, many students remained unaware that the college libraries had fiction and non-curriculum collections. Comments from those who did know about the stock suggested that they did not use them because the range of titles available did not reflect their interests and reading preferences.

By talking to the students it was obvious that there are plenty of young people who are enthusiastic about books and reading. However, in many cases, even though they are regular users of the college library, they do not consider using it as a source for anything other than course related reading materials. It became evident that a marketing exercise was required to promote the fiction and general interest stock and that the procedures for stock selection needed to be reviewed to ensure that the books provided appealed to the students' age and interests. The project team concluded that the students themselves are the best people to recommend titles to their peers and that we should tap into this group of interested readers to find out what they like to read.

At a time when library budgets are being squeezed, concerns were being raised that speculative expenditure on fiction stock may no longer be sustainable. It was agreed that the responsibility for choosing new fiction should be passed to students; either to request books they wished to read or ones that they had read and enjoyed and wished to share with others. With limited funds available we would, from now on, purchase only those books that we knew at least one person wanted to read.

Feedback also suggested that even keen readers sometimes find it difficult to identify new books that they may enjoy. Better promotion of individual titles and improved display are required to help readers to discover new authors and titles. Shelf cards and displays of recommended titles are an obvious way to promote stock but the project team agreed that reading recommendations made by library staff would probably have limited appeal as younger students were unlikely to identify themselves as having similar interests to a group of (mostly) middle aged women. Students needed to be encouraged to talk about their favourite books, to share their reading experiences and to recommend books to one another.

## Project Description

The project consists of several activities to promote the availability of the fiction collections and to encourage students to make requests and recommendations. The college has libraries on its 4 largest campuses in Neath, Port Talbot, Brecon and Newtown; the project has been promoted in all four campus libraries.

### Activities:

- An advertising campaign based on the concept of 'Your choice, Your library'. Staff worked with the college's marketing and design team to develop an eye catching design and logo that includes elements of the college's house style for promotional materials but also provides a unique brand for the project. The design has been used on a variety of posters, postcards and library signs. Materials are produced in English and Welsh. The campaign was launched and heavily promoted by staff during induction week and Fresher's Fair.



- A request postcard was designed on which students can provide details of up to three books and their personal contact details. These are displayed prominently in the libraries along with a box in which they can be deposited.

- A small amount of money (£100) was awarded to the project from an internal project fund. This money was used to purchase prizes (10 x £10 Amazon vouchers) to be used in a monthly prize draw intended to encourage students to write reviews of books that they borrow from the library. A standard

form was created on which reviews can be written and submissions are also accepted by e-mail. Students are allowed to submit as many original reviews as they wish and all students who submit reviews in a given month are entered to a draw to win. The more reviews submitted, the higher the chance of winning.

- Reviews are used to promote books in the library. Each one is made into a poster and / or shelf card and is uploaded onto the library catalogue.
- Books requested by students are displayed prominently in desktop displays or on face out shelving.



## Project Outcomes

When compared to participation rates in other reading promotions, the overall response on this occasion has, so far, been extremely positive. The opportunity to request books has proven to be very popular; request cards started to come in within days of launching the campaign and there has been a steady stream of requests received throughout the first term of the academic year.

During the Autumn term, a total of 54 individuals requested 87 different titles. Most were fiction but the requests also included biographies and some curriculum related material. In comparison, during the whole of the 2012-13 academic year, only 24 items were requested for the libraries by students.

The review competition has also attracted a higher number of participants than expected. To date, 38 reviews have been submitted. The reviews are displayed in the libraries and on the library catalogue. Whilst it is difficult to prove that students are making reading choices based on the reviews, their prominence helps to embed the concept of 'Your Choice, Your library' project and helps promote awareness of the availability of the stock.

The most significant and pleasing indicator of the success of the project is the increase in the number of fiction titles borrowed. From September to December 2013 there was a **100% increase in the number of fiction titles borrowed** from the Neath and Afan campus libraries when compared to the

same time period in the previous year (comparable data are not available for the Powys campuses). Although fiction loans remain relatively small as a proportion of overall loans, this is the first time for several years that there has been an increase in fiction borrowing activity. This suggests that the campaign has succeeded in its aim of raising awareness and of providing stock that students actually want to read.

In addition to the quantitative measures, library staff have reported that there has been a noticeable 'buzz' around some fiction series, authors and individual titles. For the first time that staff can remember students have been asking for books recommended by their friends and we have had waiting lists for popular fiction titles; several of the books that have been purchased during the project have barely made it to the open shelves as they have been in such heavy circulation.

## **Evaluation**

The popularity of the book request postcards suggests that the campaign has longevity and has the potential to become part of standard library procedures rather than a 'one off' promotion. Frontline library staff often pass on requests to the acquisitions team when they have been asked for titles that are not in stock, and there has always been a suggestion box provided in each library, but this is the first time that the process has been formalised and promoted. The campaign has succeeded in raising awareness of the fact that students can make requests for the books that they want.

Some students have requested just one book, others have made multiple requests. Early on, members of staff voiced concerns that some students may begin to abuse the process by requesting an excessive number of books. The option of placing limits on the number of requests allowed was discussed but, in fact, this has proven to not be necessary; the number of requests per student has not been excessive or unmanageable. Much of the success of the campaign has been down to word of mouth and it was agreed that we did not want to dampen the enthusiasm of those who were participating by setting limits.

The project has been deliberately low key. Whilst its aim was to promote borrowing and interaction with the students we were conscious of the fact that it could become a victim of its own success and that, if it took off too much, there would be insufficient budget available to meet student demands and expectations. It needed to be piloted to assess how popular and manageable it would be. Publicity was largely limited to print and word of mouth, with just a couple of posts on the library's Facebook page and college VLE. This was a deliberate choice; previous attempts by library staff to establish online book clubs and blogs had failed so they decided to go back to basics and *talk* to students face to face. The success of the project can be largely attributed to this approach. On the sites in which there was most engagement, the project

was driven by very enthusiastic members of staff who took every opportunity to strike up conversations about reading. Whenever a student borrowed a fiction title they would give them a review form and point out the request cards; this naturally led to students opening up and talking about the books that they enjoyed in a way that may not have been possible using social media or an online learning platform. However, there is probably scope to extend the project to those who do not use the library on a regular basis and the team will be exploring ways to develop the project further, possibly online.

There has been some variation in the success of the project on the different campuses. This is partly due to the fact that on the Powys campuses problems with internal procedures meant that staff were unable to order new stock for several weeks. Request cards were available in the libraries but staff made the decision to not promote the project during this period as they did not want to create expectations that could not be met. These issues are now resolved and the project will be re-launched on these campuses.

Overall, this has been a successful project that has helped to engage students with the library and library staff in new ways. The project relied heavily on staff to initiate conversations with students and to encourage them to discuss their reading likes and dislikes. Whilst discussions such as this could take place anyway, the project provided a conversation opener that naturally led to further discussions about books and libraries in general. As well as promoting our library, staff have taken the opportunity to use some of these discussions to promote the local public library and the availability of the Welsh e-books and e-magazines collections.

## **Sustainability and future development**

Promotion of the book request process has quickly become part of library routine and will be continued and developed in the future. This project is the first small step towards increased involvement of students with the library. It is hoped to build on this initial success to develop ways in which students can make a greater contribution to stock selection for curriculum related materials as well as fiction and general interest stock. Suggestions for this include: the creation of a panel of interested students who, under the guidance of library staff, will be allocated a budget to spend on library resources and increased engagement with course reps and the Student's Union.

From the outset, this was a project that targeted students who were already keen readers and regular visitors to the library. The initial success of the project suggests that there is an appetite for reading amongst many young people; the project now needs to reach out to those book lovers who are not already regular library users. For the remainder of the academic year, and in the future, the book request postcards will be promoted more widely on campus and library staff will seek the support of teaching staff to signpost the book request process to their students.

The book review competition has been well received by those who have participated but there has been less take-up than we have seen for the request post cards, despite the offer of a prize. Wider promotion of this aspect of the project is required. The reviews also need to become more visible and available to students via different channels. Library staff are currently working with the college graphic designer to compile the reviews into a magazine or newsletter format; it is hoped that seeing the reviews in print may encourage others to contribute as well as further promoting the project. It is unlikely that there will be money to purchase prizes in future years so staff are considering alternative ways to encourage students to continue 'talking' about books. These may include a book club or social media presence.

**Supporting materials:**

- Book request postcard (English)
- Poster (English and Welsh)