

## July 7th 2005 and its Aftermath

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### INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to give an account of the effect of the London bombs in July 2005 and how UCL library Services responded. In describing UCL's libraries I shall deal with service continuity and the effects on staff. I shall then show some of the outcomes of our subsequent review of emergency preparedness and the follow-up we have initiated. I do not intend to provide too much detail on what actually happened but will give some where it sheds light on subsequent review and planning. Despite the grim nature of these events I intend to end with an optimistic note.

### JULY 2005 - SETTING THE SCENE

Most library services have plans in place to deal with disasters such as flood, fire, mould and theft. Before July 7<sup>th</sup> I expect that few libraries in London were well prepared for the effect of terrorist bombs, although in our hearts we all knew that London was a target after the UK's support for the USA in the Iraq War. I would call this kind of event an emergency and suggest that the crucial difference from a disaster is that an emergency largely affects people.

July 2005 brought many significant events to the UK. The Live 8 concert just and the G8 Summit on the July 7<sup>th</sup> were two high profile events. But for Londoners July 6<sup>th</sup> was a day of great happiness and rejoicing, even for the sceptics, as London was awarded the 2012 Olympic Games. A general mood of euphoria pervaded the journey home - a mood to be shattered the next morning as 4 suicide bombers attacked public transport. Just two weeks later a similar attack failed and on July 22<sup>nd</sup> an innocent person was mistakenly shot dead by police on an underground train. July became a month of fearfulness.

### UCL Library Services

UCL Library Services operate in many different buildings in London. Apart from the main iconic building in Gower Street and its nearby companion science library we have 13 (14 at that time) other sites across London north of the river Thames. Eight of these sites are based in hospitals. We have around 200 staff. A map of the sites where the bombs went off on July 7<sup>th</sup> indicates that during the morning rush hour our staff was likely to be on public transport affected by the bombs. This was equally true on the 21<sup>st</sup> although other points were targeted.

### Multi-site matters

Operating a multi-site service with staff dispersed across London, and in one case in the middle of moving a library, I had to work hard to communicate with everyone. On July 7<sup>th</sup> we had variable ability to do this. Landline phones were only intermittently working and by around 10:00 mobile phones reached capacity and were taken off air. Email worked well for us on July 7<sup>th</sup> but not on the 21<sup>st</sup>. For our subsequent management review of July 7<sup>th</sup> I printed out over 100 emails from my own account on that day.

### Service continuity

During the morning of July 7<sup>th</sup> all our libraries were open, though thankfully it was a time of year with few students studying. Advice from the UCL centre was somewhat slow and not always the same as that given by police. In consultation with a senior colleague I decided to close the libraries at 13:00. This is not as simple as it sounds. Some libraries, which were in hospitals taking casualties, stayed open. Some staff in libraries I closed came to the main library to shelter until transport was available. Some staff continued to work behind closed doors. Many staff, accompanied by those who knew the way above ground, walked considerable distances to the edges of London where transport was running.

Since the computing services were operating well on July 7<sup>th</sup> remote access to our e-journals was unaffected. It was noticeable that library users outside London were unaware of the situation and some were surprised by curt responses to telephone enquiries.

As staff went home the advice I gave was that we intended to open as normal the next day but that if they were in any doubt they should telephone. We needed to ensure a senior staff presence for the 'days after the bombs'.

### **STAFFING ISSUES ON JULY 7<sup>TH</sup>**

Travel to work on July 7<sup>th</sup> was affected for nearly all library staff. The tube network closed down quickly after the first bombs at 08:50. Travel home was more difficult as transport in the centre of London did not return. Some employees that live very near work were actually unable to go home as police security units cordoned off their streets. Some staff, including myself, stayed in nearby student residences. Even this accommodation took a long time to reach on foot as police closed off streets around us.

Many staff heard the bus bomb blast - some staff were very nearby and saw it. Emergency sirens were loud and prolonged all day. It was this continued noise that caused me to contact my immediate family and warn them not to come into the centre of London. This was before we had any idea what was actually going on.

We did not know what was happening. UCL centre did not invoke its major incident plan. The police declared a major incident by 09:29. The BBC news website received more than a billion hits on the morning of July 7<sup>th</sup>. Staff desperately needed to make contact with families. A compulsive need for news continued all day.

### **STAFFING ISSUES AFTER JULY 7<sup>TH</sup>**

There was serious disruption to travel after July 7<sup>th</sup> and the final restoration of all tube lines was not until August 4<sup>th</sup>, almost a month later. Staff were nervous about travelling and while some were forced to use different routes, some abandoned their usual tube travel and even made plans to leave London altogether. Everyone was nervous on Thursdays after July 21<sup>st</sup>. We were, however, very heartened to receive messages of comfort and support from elsewhere.

#### **Review**

Following the major events of July 7<sup>th</sup> it was decided to review our procedures at Senior Management Team level. One of my colleagues wrote a detailed report of the day and, taking this as a basis, we worked to make changes to procedures and policy. Our aim was to support management and staff and to work on an 'emergency checklist'. We were very fortunate that the attacks happened when not many students were around, but we need plans on how to cope with them and their anxious relatives if another such emergency should happen.

#### **Management needs**

We recognised quite quickly where management information was lacking on July 7<sup>th</sup>. For the future we have decided to regularly have an up-to-date staff list printed, since computers may not be accessible. Plus a print made of our complex daily staff diary each day. We have a 'Duty Officer' system for senior staff and now alert people ahead of time both verbally as well as by email.

The Duty Officer, as do all members of the Senior Management Team, needs to be able to access these lists, and our printed emergency policies and all keys. They also need to be able to operate the loudspeaker system. While it is fine to agree this, it is another thing to remember, so we have now instituted a regular revision process for the Senior Management Team to remind ourselves of the whereabouts of policies, lists, keys and necessary equipment.

### **Staff needs**

Various measures have been put in place to support staff. We devised and now give to all existing and new staff a 'phone card'. This is a credit card-sized card with information about telephone numbers to use to contact UCL in an emergency and a special lib-emergency email address to use too. The card also provides basic advice on what to do in an emergency.

Addressing the need for news and the possibility of power cuts we have provided wind-up radios and wind-up torches to all library sites. If communications fail, the possibility of providing runners between sites is now part of our policy. Our revised policies are on our Library Services intranet. We are also working with UCL at the centre to link in with their policies.

### **CHECKLISTS FOR AN EMERGENCY**

Working through our reports and our policies, and considering measures taken elsewhere, using best practice, we have effectively worked on three checklists; one for management, one for supporting staff and one for future follow-up.

Management checklist, which supports action on the day:

- Decide who is in charge send this message to staff and institution
- Provide information on how to contact person in charge
- This person needs several assistants to staff phones
- Their normal work is completely suspended
- Contact all workgroups with information and to review current situation
- Do not send out unverified news
- Determine safety / whereabouts of all staff
- Keep staff inside buildings if that is advised
- Ensure staff can contact family members
- Collect and disseminate institutional information
- Collect and disseminate police information

Our second checklist provides advice on how to support staff:

- Staff must check email regularly
- Organize "runners" between sites in case communications are down
- Decide when to close
- Make sure information gets to library users and staff
- Get up-to-date information on travel possibilities
- Arrange "guides" for walkers
- Record names of staff that leave work
- Arrange emergency accommodation
- Organize senior rota for the following day

Our final checklist looks at follow-up to an emergency situation:

- Need for a timely review of procedures
- Make necessary changes – incorporate best practice
- Continue to review and revise procedures
- Listen to staff's continuing concerns
- Check on those particularly affected
- Thank staff for their support in difficult times
- Recognize fatigue

## CONCLUSION

Even after the horrible events of July 2005 we were heartened by various things. The Mayor of London Ken Livingstone, made a speech decrying the attacks and celebrating London. He said:

*...even after your cowardly attack, you will see that people ... will arrive in London to become Londoners and to fulfil their dreams and achieve their potential. They choose to come to London ... because they come to be free, they come to live the life they choose, they come to be able to be themselves. They flee you because you tell them how they should live. They don't want that and nothing you do, however many of us you kill, will stop that flight to our city where freedom is strong and where people can live in harmony with one another. Whatever you do, however many you kill, you will fail.*

On the library side of things we were delighted to open our newest library on time in August 2005 and this when the staff had been extra burdened as the streets through which the library stock was moved were closed off to traffic at different times. Keeping our services running has been a good experience for all of us.

This paper has been informed by discussion with colleagues at the LIBER Conference in July 2006 and at the Royal Library Copenhagen in August 2006. It could not have been written without the support of my colleagues at UCL during and after July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005. On the anniversary of the bombs various reports have appeared in newspapers and elsewhere on how the emergency and other services reacted to the events and these reports have also been fed into our thinking. Planning for such an emergency is not very enjoyable, but sadly it seems to be essential.