



Who are you, where are you based and what do you do?

My name is Robert Atkinson, and I am the Director of Library Services at Birkbeck, University of London. Until the pandemic, I was based in our Malet Street library in Bloomsbury and since then I have been working remotely, but will be returning to the office soon (hopefully). I arrived at Birkbeck from UCL in 2002 and have not left. I became Director of Library Services in January 2013.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

I am surrounded by people who have the interests of our students at heart. The Library staff are truly dedicated to working with our students to get the best possible outcomes for them. Birkbeck students are time poor so we feel we need to provide them with excellent support in the limited time they have to ensure they can succeed, often against the odds. Our students are often working during the day and studying in the evening. Many have family commitments. So, they need our help, and we recognise this and try to deliver for them.

What motivates you in your work?

I probably answered this in the question above (maybe I should have planned this more carefully!), but it is about helping our students to succeed. They are prepared to work extraordinarily hard to achieve academic success and working hard to help them seems like the right thing to do.

How has/can the M25 Consortium support you in your career?

I have been involved, in some shape or form, with the M25 for more years than I care to remember. I first got involved in a cpd25 task group to improve my networking skills and make useful contacts outside of my immediate place of work. I was on a task group for a few years and eventually chaired it. I did that for a few years. I was co-opted on to the Steering Group of M25 and did two terms on that as well. I always found my experiences with M25 to be stimulating and practically useful. If you want to learn how to organize an event join one of the cpd25 task groups – you will be an expert within months. All of the people on the different groups I was on were great and I thoroughly recommend getting involved in M25 as a way of widening your horizons and meeting some wonderful people.

What would it surprise people to know about you?

This wouldn't surprise anyone who knows me really well, but I have a deep love of sport, which started at a very early age. The funny thing is I was never really blessed with any sporting prowess, although I did show some promise at cricket early on. I have always loved football, a lifelong Man City fan, I remember all the lean years, before we got money. Watching the artistry of great players like Messi brings out an emotional reaction in me and I have often been brought to tears by sporting exploits. My son plays golf competitively and he quite often brings me to tears!

I should also say that I love the novels of Scott Fitzgerald and the last page of "Tender is the Night" is so beautiful it even beats the last page of "The Great Gatsby", and that is saying something because Fitzgerald was great at last pages.

Complete the sentence:

If I wasn't working in a library I would be... I might be working somewhere in the Civil Service **because...** I started out in the Lord Chancellor's Department in 1985. I did about 15 months at Bow County Court, in Stratford in East London, and then left to go to Birkbeck as a library assistant

(Birkbeck has been a key player in my life). If I had not got the job at Birkbeck I might have continued on in the Civil Service, although not in the Lord Chancellor's Department as it no longer exists. I might be a Permanent Secretary by now, although I somewhat doubt it.

Robert Atkinson, Birkbeck, July 2021