



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

I'm Christopher Cipkin, Director of Library, Learning Support, & Culture at Royal Holloway, University of London and have been in the role since June 2019. After a 'honeymoon' period – which I used to the full by getting to know my team, other key people within the institution, and the campus – I was then plunged into leading the team through the completely uncharted waters of the covid pandemic.

Although hybrid working is becoming the new normal, my campus base is the distinctive Emily Wilding Davison building on our beautiful campus in Egham. Named after a leading suffragette who studied at the College in the 1890s, the library building opened in 2017 and offers amazing study spaces with prime views towards the iconic Founder's Building. It also contains impressive modern facilities for our nationally recognised heritage collections, including our archives, an exhibition space, and an art store. We share the building with a range of other student-facing services, including a newly opened Innovation Hub. The Founder's Building opposite contains the original Library of the College, which still serves as an unstaffed reading room. Nearby is the Victorian Picture Gallery containing a permanent collection of outstanding paintings, also curated by my team.

I have responsibility for the strategy and service delivery of the whole department. The role requires me to be both outward and inward-facing, ensuring that what we're prioritising in the library is supporting the College's strategy, and fits with the broader plan for professional services.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

I enjoy the key task of my role – the challenge of connecting the direction of the service with the strategic ambitions of the College's senior team and student representatives. Understanding other people is what makes that happen. For me, job satisfaction comes particularly from delivering something which supports a bigger whole and having that recognised – whether it is reviving the return-to-campus student experience, being key players in the institution's Research Excellence Framework submission, developing an exhibition which fosters strategic collaborations, or providing new skills and volunteering opportunities for student success and employability.

It's a pleasure to work with a fantastic library team who show such keen dedication to our students, academics and researchers. I also enjoy collaborating with many supportive colleagues in the College's professional services who enable us to deliver all we offer.

As somebody with a particular interest in history, I really enjoy working for an institution with a long and distinguished past. Bedford College, which merged with Royal Holloway College in 1985, was founded in 1849 as the first higher education institution for women. Consequently, we hold nationally recognised heritage collections which speak to the value of education, its role in empowering people and changing society's values. There's always something new to discover and learn about our collections.

What motivates you in your work?

Helping our users towards academic success is key. Nothing makes my day more than getting what I call 'good news feedback' – the email from a grateful student or member of academic staff to say thank you for the service they've received and the difference we've made.

I'm also driven by seeing others in the team develop, taking on challenges outside their comfort zone and coming up with ideas and solutions.

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

I've had a long association with the Consortium as I worked for the University of Reading in my first few professional roles. I attended several visits to libraries in the region, especially during my time as a trainee liaison librarian. We are fortunate that our region is one of the most library-rich in the world, and M25 events provide great opportunities for networking, building confidence and broadening horizons. I also have M25 to thank for supporting my first step up into leadership and management. cpd25 ran the first management course I attended.

I temporarily relocated to work for the University of Birmingham for 6 years before returning to take up the job at Royal Holloway. Since moving back to the area, I've taken up the opportunity to shape the Consortium as a member of the Steering Group, contributing to Consortium planning and events. It's also helping me build my network with other library directors in the region.

What would it surprise people to know about you?

I am a keen organist, so most Sundays I'm to be found seated on the organ bench accompanying worship in my local church. I also enjoy giving recitals, and try to always have a new programme of music to learn. I like having a musical challenge to aim for and it helps me wind down at the end of the day.

Complete the sentence:

If I wasn't working in a library I would be... doing something that speaks to my underpinning values and interests, perhaps touring the country giving organ recitals, interspersed with work for a nature or heritage conservation charity.

Christopher Cipkin, Royal Holloway, University of London, December 2021