

Current Issues affecting information literacy promotion in the FE sector.

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The following are issues that are influencing the FE community of practice. They raise questions which might provoke thought and discussion for practitioners from any sector.

Placing the skills

Information literacy often has uncertain status in teaching and learning strategies, so FE library services tend to take pride in their ability to grab opportunities to deliver in a whole range of contexts, such as:

- Group tutorial time, e.g. by interpreting the QCA framework of personal learning and thinking skills.
- Formal qualifications for study skills and critical thinking.
- Specific embedding within courses - particular tasks or assignments
- Themed drop-in support sessions
- Help desk/enquiries strategies
- Skills for employability sessions
- E learning and digital literacy sessions.
- Reading promotion projects such as the Six book challenge
- Online support and tutorials.

Partnerships are not only with teaching areas. Sometimes opportunities are seized to develop information literacy through relationships with wider college support, such as careers or IT, for example through CV writing or e-safety.

How important is it to have a service information literacy strategy and define our objectives?

The role of functional skills

In many colleges there is an expectation that Functional Skills (English/Maths and IT), will cover Information Literacy. The current funding emphasis lies with English and maths. Yet, although Information literacy appears in the FS English criteria for reading and writing and in specifications for IT, this is in a very specific context.. Functional skills assessments are workplace/scenario based and so teaching often does not cover the information gathering needs of the main course or academic writing.

How to raise the status of information literacy within teaching and learning strategies?

HE in FE

It is generally easier to argue the case for IL in academic pathways, as here, teachers are more likely to understand the role of study skills and academic writing. Colleges with significant HE in FE provision are often able to create mutually supportive relationships with their HE counterparts to provide information literacy development for learners who are in transition.

However, HE in FE provision generally does not have the consumables/information resources funding that universities provide, and this leads to particular challenges, most significantly in providing effective experience of relevant online academic sources. Also, HE provision is sometimes isolated, particularly if the numbers of learners are small, or the qualification validated by an examining body such as Excel. Regardless of validation, services are increasingly involved in delivering academic writing support and sessions that develop research skills.

How can the overlap between schools, FE and HE be used to mutual advantage?

Measuring and maximising impact with few resources

FE librarians are working to maintain information literacy support despite rapidly changing roles and/or reduced staffing. Some colleges have used data to demonstrate how the development of information literacy affects the success rates of their learners

How can FE librarians best share the methods that demonstrate the impact of their work?

Role in funding and quality assurance

FE funding is directly linked to the success rates of learners, so impact measures are essential to justify information literacy support. The funding and quality assurance system directly affects teachers' and managers' attitudes to information literacy.

Should we seek to influence the curriculum and quality assurance systems? If so, how?

The increasing attention being paid to academic standards and plagiarism, at all levels, is prompting a change in attitude. The current changes in course work submission rules for BTEC courses, for example, or the introduction of plagiarism checking software in some colleges, can drive interest in wider issues about information quality and learner skills.

Progressing the skills - learning them step by step

Within the curriculum, the most visible test of this skill set commonly appears at level 3 (A level equivalent) and in its progression to level 4+ (foundation degree/HNC). It is not

surprising therefore that this is where most attention is paid to developing it - by both librarians and teachers. This can lead to an impression that earlier levels are not so important. Some important work has been done at looking at progression between all the levels e.g. Welsh information literacy toolkit but this has not had the attention that, for example, the progression of English language skills has been given.

What is the role of information literacy at lower levels and how should this be addressed? What is the impact and role of reading promotion? Is there a role for the English language teaching profession to support us further analyzing the pedagogy of this skill set?

Teacher training and liaison

Teachers are increasingly trying to address the skills we call information literacy, perhaps because they recognise their importance in a digital environment. Yet it is all too easy to use unsupported testing as a teaching method, by simply asking students to research. Many services do work with teachers to create sessions, and teachers often welcome the support provided by librarians. All too often, librarians remark that teachers do not understand these skills - but there will never be sufficient library staff to teach each learner directly.

How can we best support teachers to develop information literacy within their own lessons? Should we seek to develop liaison between professional groups?

Added to this is the issue of librarians as teachers. The relationship between the professions is an important factor, and one symptom is the number of dual qualified staff, both in the profession and in this sector.

What should be the role of librarians in teacher training?

E resources and impact of technology

Further education libraries do not have the funding that HE libraries receive for online resources and do not always benefit from the customized resources available to schools. This affects how they are adapting to the speed of change being generated by technology. There is a creative response and increasingly the use of open source software.

How can FE libraries further their use of technology for IL and share best practice?

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