UCL

ON THE MOVE

transitioning information skills into the workplace

Final Report

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INFORMATION
LITERACY
GROUP

This report summarises the activities and findings of the On The Move project, which was funded by the CILIP Information Literacy Group in 2016/17.

Brief introduction

Effective engagement with information, or information literacy, is increasingly considered within Higher Education to be a key attribute for students and graduates, and is mainly supported by academic libraries. There is growing awareness that collaboration between libraries and careers services, graduate recruitment, and workplaces could significantly enhance student experience and, particularly, employability.[1] Examining the disconnect between Higher Education and the professional world should help careers and related services to better prepare students for the path ahead. This project aims to foster engagement between stakeholders (librarians, careers staff, employers, job-hunters) and help them to understand the information skills graduates will need in their early careers. Here we introduce a pilot information skills resource designed as a discussion tool to help students, employees and support services more effectively design, develop and communicate transferable competencies.

Our collaborative work has examined an insurance firm in the financial sector. We hope that it will act as a pilot for wider cross-sectoral research in the future. The insights of careers services were integral to the project, enabling a new opportunity to develop a wider view of information literacy issues, which are currently strongly located within Higher Education library silos. Research on workplace learning was used to inform the project design and analysis, encouraging cross-pollination of ideas. Employability is becoming increasingly recognised as a graduate attribute. It is nearly impossible to avoid some level of knowledge and information work in today's job market. We hope that this research provides some support to people On The Move.

Beneficiaries / audience

The resource presented overleaf is designed to provide guidance for student-candidates on how the information and digital literacies they develop during their studies map to skills, competences and conceptions in their workplace setting (in this case, the insurance sector). This guidance will support CV-writing, for example, and identify transferability of information and digital literacies, and will enhance employability in a highly competitive market. Insurance employees and human resources staff may also benefit from using this in continuing professional development and appraisal. Additionally, careers advisors in Higher Education will benefit from the resource, which is designed to raise the awareness of the relationship between information literacy and employability. The work is also relevant to academic staff, particularly those involved in developing student employability, human resources professionals, librarians and other support services in Higher Education (e-learning, personal tutors). It has the potential to link the support they offer in the educational context to an effective development of employability and lifelong learning skills of students through use of the resource in discussions around information use in the workplace.

Why did we do this?

Information literacy is widely recognised and supported within education, particularly in universities. It is widely seen as part of a librarian's role to support students' development of information skills relevant to their studies, and it is believed by many that these are lifelong skills which are transferable into workplace settings. Although there was some interest from a management perspective by the likes of Drucker in the 1990s, the skills and attributes required to locate, identify, benefit from, and create information are not so recognised in work as explicitly as they are in Higher Education. However, a developing research base into what is known as workplace information literacy has identified that contextual differences significantly impact on practices, behaviours and beliefs around the effective use of information. Examples of relevant research here include: Cheuk's investigation of engineers,[2] Lloyd's work on firefighters,[3] and Forster's research on nurses.[4] The university quality assurance process led in the UK by QAA recently identified employability and digital literacy as key graduate attributes. These attributes are also recognised and supported through Subject Benchmark Statements and Higher Education Achievement Reports, cementing belief in their supposed transferable nature. Simultaneously, professional associations such as Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) recognise that information use should be considered an essential professional competency. On The Move considers the contextual nature of information practices and discourses and seeks to add to the evidence base that explores the differences between Higher Education and workplace settings.

What did we do?

On The Move is a collaborative project led by a Library and Information Studies (LIS) academic and a careers consultant, with supporting input from library and e-learning staff, and a LIS student, all from UCL. We approached a medium-sized global insurance firm in the City of London, who agreed to host the research. They gave us access to 18 members of staff, from new hires through to executive directors. We interviewed these participants for around 45 minutes each about their conceptions and experiences of what we called 'effective information use'. We also ran two focus groups with these participants, and then interviewed and ran a focus group with a small number of students to enable some comparison. We used a phenomenographic approach, which allows the researcher to explore the experience of a phenomenon (here, 'effective information use', or information literacy) rather than the phenomenon itself. The approach allowed us to identify a small number of variations amongst our participants in their experience. The phenomenon can be seen as these combined variations, or the 'collective experience'. Through a detailed text analysis we mapped the interview comments to a framework developed by Forster in his nursing research. This allowed us to make some comparisons between our participants and those from another sector, and to test his framework. We used this analysis to identify graded levels of information skills and behaviours, and then apply Forster's information personas (overleaf, where birds represent students, and sea creatures represent insurance workers). This was developed into a paper 'personality test' questionnaire which was subsequently developed as an online prototype. We demonstrated our work at various international conferences, and used feedback to make improvements.

What did we find out?

We found that most of the interview texts from the insurance firm mapped quite closely to Forster's seven themes (self-development, relationships, best practice, evidence-based practice, information-gathering skills, information-gathering concepts, and information conceptions). We were also able to identify hierarchical dimensions of variation (novice to expert) within these themes, although the contextual differences between our participants and Forster's meant that there were some visible differences here. We ranked words used by the participants in order of frequency and separated them into sets of unique usage depending on their theme. This allowed us to find terminology specific to each of the themes, and to use this terminology to create statements in the language of the participants which represent a wide range of their experiences. This allowed us to gain insights into the participants' experience of 'effective information use' within the context of the insurance profession. It also showed us that while on the surface we may consider information practices of nurses and insurance workers to be very different, the experience of these practices by the participants may be more similar than we would initially suppose. Further, the experiences of the students strongly suggested that they had only started to progress up the hierarchy of experiences, as they did not speak to each category in the framework.

What use is this?

These findings, which are presented in detail overleaf, provide deep and rich information on the experience of information within this insurance professional community, as represented by our participants. This is not quantitative data and we recognise that we cannot generalise more widely than beyond this group. However, with these insights we can make comparisons with Forster's nurses, and with the students who took part in this research. We can then use this information to help students work out how they can communicate their existing skills to a potential employer in a language which makes sense to them. Reading across each row in the graphic overleaf shows the connections and discrepancies between vocabularies. Students can use this to help identify information skills for CV writing, and librarians, careers consultants and academics can use this information to help them work out what they need to do to support students wanting to work in this area.

References

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4. Lloyd, A. (2007) 'Learning to Put Out the Red Stuff: Becoming Information Literate through Discursive Practice', The Library Quarterly, 77(2), pp. 181-198.

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I make the most of the resources provided by my course tutors e.g. reading lists ensuring I'm familiar with the curriculum.

I am good at identifying helpful experts who are able and willing to give me relevant information, support and advice. I seek guidance from people who know more than I do, like my lecturers, course mates, friends, and library staff. I ask questions and request feedback on my work from lecturers, in order to perform better.

I am aware of information sources and types needed to research and use data and information. I know which ones are considered credible – such as the FT, The Economist, JSTOR and special library resources, as well as articles recommended by lecturers.

I understand that there is a lot of data out there, but only some of it will be useful and relevant data. What my lecturers recommend is usually a good start when considering useful and important data.

I have been studying and researching the insurance information field and language. I develop key technical skills I need (e.g. MS Office).

I am good at identifying friendly experts who are able and willing to give me relevant information and advice.

I have good baseline skills which follow policy and protocols. I am willing to build on these skills and have an inquisitive and positive attitude to learning.

I seek out ways to understand the process of insurance. I follow guidelines, protocols and policy documents.

I confidently use software to help manage and interpret numerical data efficiently.

I have background technical knowledge of information sources and types needed to research and use data and information - such as professional subscription sources for the sector and internal databases.

I usually think about basic financial and insurance data and terminology.

As well as using resources provided by tutors, I've improved my skills, and learned new ones, by taking extra courses e.g. those provided by the library or online learning platforms.

I have discussions and debates with my peers, and sometimes with my lecturers. I share my ideas and knowledge around assignments, and benefit from theirs.

I know where the library is, and how to use it – both the online and offline resources. I don't usually have much of a search plan, but using these resources, I pick up what I need as I go along.

I often use and think about all the information that is widely available to me, online and though my university, as a means of improving my skills and performance.

I have developed my understanding of insurance principles from learning on-the-job, a professional qualification, and ad hoc support.

I participate in sharing knowledge internally and externally to provide clear information which benefits the business.

I can identify which information is relevant to use as evidence. I can communicate it in a straightforward way which is understandable and balanced, and reflects a plethora of views.

I use up-to-date and relevant evidence to inform business decisions.

I'm able to find relevant data and information from a range of sources.

I have the experience to understand the complexities, terms and structures of insurance information and research.

I understand useful qualitative and quantitative data including economic and technical data, metadata, trends and data from clients and internal sources.

The focussed, competent and evolving professional
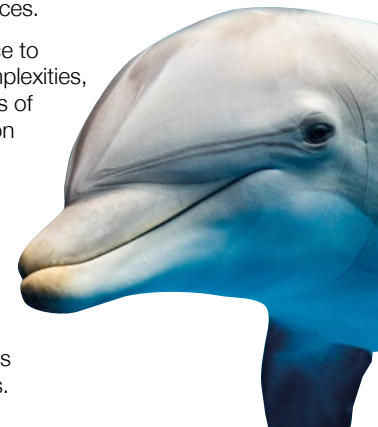
I am part of informal or formal peer networks with other students. We interact, collaborate and exchange ideas, supporting each other to keep our individual or joint work moving in the right direction. My peers value my input and ask for my help.

I use a range of libraries and search engines to gather information. I first gather an overview of the subject area and main concepts using appropriate high-level sources, then focus down on the specific details I need e.g. in journal articles.

I'm aware of the differences between different information sources, and their structures, and therefore which source to use for which purpose.

I appreciate that data and information have a context, and understanding that context through wider reading helps explain the meaning behind data.

I have gone beyond the training, and have practised complex processes. I have shared my experiences with others.

I interact with other team members to circulate a broad and deep stream of business information through the company.

I regularly check my work and the work of others. I can engage in the peer review process within tight deadlines to ensure accuracy and minimise business risk.

I search for new information, and integrate this with my existing knowledge. I draw commercial conclusions based on my own judgment and the evidence.

I enjoy the research process, and I have an eye for detail, which helps me to identify quality information.

I'm aware of technical functions within data analysis (e.g. pivot tables) and understand how to apply these effectively to explore large fields of data.

I appreciate the importance of agreed definitions of terminology.

The confident and trusted promoter of justifiable change

I participate in collaborative groups, and I make an effort to ensure my peers trust me to perform my role. I have my own opinions, and my peers and lecturers allow these to influence the direction of my work and the work of others.

I have a clear plan for my search that utilises a range of high-level and very specific sources e.g. textbooks to journal articles.

I am confident that I know when I have found all relevant information, and my search is finished.

My level of competence has been recognised formally through appraisals and informally through day-to-day transactions.

I reliably provide competitive service and prompt and accurate information to clients and colleagues. I present it in a focused way so it can be easily understood.

I'm involved in ensuring high quality of information which is audited and follows internal, industry and regulator guidance.

I understand the importance of comprehensive, accurate and relevant evidence. I have the ability to evaluate this to minimise financial risk.

I search varied sources to identify comprehensive information and data which presents a balanced picture.

I have knowledge of how to use keyword searching effectively.

I appreciate that data and information have a context, which can help investigate deeper.
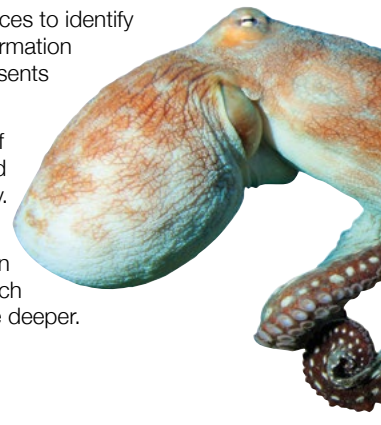
I am aware of ways to structure a search by breaking down a piece of work into specific problems.

My clear search strategy identifies all relevant information, which I am able to categorise, prioritise, and critique, so I use only the most appropriate information and techniques in my work.

I see data as a means to back up arguments and produce useful new points that can have real effects. Searching for extra details and doing my own analysis can help make a difference.

The teacher and promoter of an evidence-based culture

I have a deeper understanding of insurance information through higher level skills and experience.

I often act as a mentor or teacher for junior colleagues and other members of the team.

I am aware of the role data and information play in predicting financial risk and making business decisions.

I use internal data and information as an audit tool to develop insights and comparisons leading to developments in policy and protocols.

I scan purposefully and pick relevant data and information from authoritative sources. I can accurately and concisely analyse and summarise it for colleagues.

I understand how to structure searches when I need to gather information.

I think about the importance of information in terms of the contribution it can make to problem-solving and as a rationale for business development.

I have a clear understanding of my overall goal. My search strategy, and everything I do during my search, works towards that goal. The information I gather and use serves a purpose. I use it to inform and back up my own arguments, analysis, and ideas.

I understand that information gathering has an objective, and I'm aware of techniques that help pull arguments together with analysis of data to answer the question at hand e.g. PEST analysis

The leader, philosopher and strategist

I am equipped to critically reflect on insurance information that is passed to me. I use this to form arguments and develop wider business strategy.

I ensure processes are in place to allow the sharing of information and ideas with me and others.

I understand how best practice impacts the business. I recognise the vital role accurate information and data play in profitable operations, company performance and competitive advantage.

I creatively explore ideas. I draw from experience and reliable information to present a story which contributes to the organisation's reputation.

I understand the strategic and decision-making purpose of the data and information being gathered and the contribution it will make to the business.

I appreciate the ultimate purpose for the business in information gathering. I fully understand the need before I set out to do the task.

I see data and information as a basis for predicting future events, reducing uncertainty, and informing strategy development.