
Leeds Metropolitan University: the impact of the Information Literacy Framework

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Introduction

Leeds Metropolitan University chose the theme of learner support and centred our objectives around information literacy skills. This is because of our recent work in developing an Information Literacy Framework which articulates what information literacy is and how we can integrate it into students' learning. It was developed by Learning Advisers in response to the growth in the amount and availability of information, the need for information literacy in engaging effectively in independent learning and the great diversity in the level of students' information skills.

Importance of the topic for Leeds Metropolitan Library

The Information Literacy Framework was endorsed by the University's Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee and is linked to the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, widening participation initiatives and the Library's own Action Plan. It was therefore important for us to assess its impact on academic staff and students. We wanted to investigate academic staff awareness, the extent to which information skills were integrated into the curriculum and whether this made any difference to students' work.

Application of the Impact Implementation Methodology

What the service was trying to achieve

In introducing the Information Literacy Framework, the Library had three main objectives:

- To raise awareness of the importance of information literacy amongst students and academic staff
- To equip students with the skills to become independent seekers and discerning users of information in their studies
- To integrate information literacy into the student curriculum

Success criteria/Impact measures identified

For each of these objectives, we identified success criteria and selected three which would help us to assess impact:

- Academic staff are aware of the Information Literacy Framework
- More diverse range of information sources cited in bibliographies
- Evidence that information literacy is increasingly integrated into the curriculum

Evidence collected

We decided on practical ways of collecting and evaluating evidence. Part of our strategy to promote the Framework was the distribution of a new booklet entitled 'Information Literacy at Leeds Metropolitan University' which was sent out to all academic staff. We decided to contact a sample number of academic staff after the booklet had been sent out to assess its impact in raising awareness.

For our second objective, we decided to analyse the quality of student bibliographies before and after a particular cohort had received information skills teaching.

The third objective focussed on the integration of information literacy into the curriculum. Each learning adviser began an audit of their information skills teaching to assess the current level of integration into the curriculum.

Methods used

We followed up the distribution of the Information Literacy Framework booklet with face to face or telephone interviews to gauge how effective the booklet had been in raising awareness and to get further feedback from academic staff. Learning Advisers each contacted about ten members of staff in each School, a total of about 150 academic staff.

It was more challenging to assess whether the acquisition of information skills improves the quality of students' bibliographies. Learning advisers in three schools began reviewing a sample selection of student bibliographies in partnership with academic staff in areas where further integration of information skills teaching was planned. The subject areas are History and

Politics, Economics with Business, and Business and Computing. A baseline 'before' review took place in 2004 with follow up reviews in 2005 and 2006 which may reveal if the implementation of the Information Literacy Framework had made any impact on students' information skills as evidenced by better bibliographies.

For the cohort of Business and Computing students, the Learning Adviser delivered a research session on Company/Business sources the content of which was agreed and discussed in meetings with the Module Leader. The Module Leader and the Learning Adviser analysed 10 random bibliographies and examined the quality, currency and balance of references against the agreed criteria. This exercise will be repeated in 2006 and 2007 with a further 10 bibliographies from the same group of students and any changes or improvements noted.

In partnership with the Course Leader, the Learning Adviser is analysing the bibliographies of a cohort of students of History and Politics over a period of 3 years, starting this academic year 2004/5. They began with an essay which the students completed before formal information literacy sessions took place. For subsequent assignments and bibliographies the students will receive information skills training and so these can be compared with the bibliographies of the initial assignment.

For students on the Economics for Business course, information skills sessions to prepare students for their dissertation have not been as well integrated into the curriculum as for Business Studies students. Together with the Course Leaders, the Learning Adviser has conducted a comparison of student dissertation bibliographies from 2003 between the two different courses. The Learning Adviser is analysing 10 dissertations from each group. In this academic year dissertation research is timetabled into the curriculum so any improvements in the standard of bibliographies can then be monitored on a yearly basis until 2006. It has been suggested that it would be useful to identify any correlation between

classification of the dissertation and the breadth of the bibliography. The Learning Adviser will attempt to do this in partnership with the course leader and possibly feedback this type of information to students at the start of their final year.

All Learning advisers began an audit of their information skills teaching in 2003 to assess the current level of integration. The individual audits and action plans were completed in December 2003. These baseline audits will be followed up annually by the Learning Advisers to monitor progress and improvement.

Particular research instruments of interest

We used a simple questionnaire for the interviews conducted with academic staff to assess their awareness of the Information Literacy Framework. We asked if they had received the brochure, if they had read it and if so what they thought of the brochure and its content.

A checklist of criteria for analysing the quality of bibliographies was discussed and agreed with both learning advisers and academic staff.

Following discussion with the learning advisers, we produced a pro-forma to help them analyse their information skills teaching sessions. Each learning adviser then drew up an individual audit and action plan to address issues in their own area.

How the results have been used

The results of the personal interviews with academic staff have been the most immediate, showing a marked difference between the Schools in terms of how many academic staff had actually read the booklet. Over 50% of the academic staff contacted had received and also read the booklet but around 20% of those who had received it had not yet read it. We were able to analyse the data on a School/Faculty basis and identify those where there is further work to be done in promoting the Framework.

The interviews themselves were very significant in raising awareness of information literacy and encouraged those contacted to read the Framework who otherwise might not have done so. We were of course able to identify staff who had not received it, or who had mislaid it. A great many of the interviews resulted in a discussion about the importance and relevance of information literacy in students' learning and how learning advisers and academic staff could work in partnership to support the integration of these skills into the curriculum.

Analysis of the comments has also been significant. There were a few negative comments both about the appearance of the booklet and its contents. For example, a very few felt that students already had information skills or were not hopeful that students would engage with information literacy teaching. One or two other comments suggested that the information in the booklet had not been fully understood. However the majority of comments were very positive indeed. Most academic staff liked the presentation of booklet, commenting that they thought it was well produced and made important points clearly. A number of academic staff asked how we were going to implement the framework stressing that it needed to be incorporated into course design. Some commented that they were already integrating information skills teaching but it was a good idea to formalise this.

Initial results from the analysis and comparison of student bibliographies suggest that teaching information skills does make a difference to their quality. For example the Business Studies dissertation bibliographies do appear superior to the Economics for Business ones when matched against the criteria. Analysis of student bibliographies in the two other subject areas is still at a preliminary stage in terms of comparison and progress.

The first teaching audits and action plans were completed in December 2003. These baseline audits are followed up annually to monitor progress and improvement and this process is

now embedded in the Learning Advisers' yearly cycle. Overall our teaching audits showed that Learning Advisers are well advanced in many areas in integrating information literacy into the curriculum and their action plans show where further work is necessary.

What was learnt from participation?

Convincing *all* academic staff of the importance of information literacy has always been challenging. Equally practical implementation and integration of information skills into the curriculum is also a challenge. Participation enabled us to understand how to use the impact process model to engage with these challenges. It also provided us with an opportunity to develop an effective methodology which can be extended to investigating the impact of academic libraries on other areas of teaching, learning and research. We also learnt a great deal from sharing the outcome of our work, and the problems and issues raised, with the other participating institutions involved in the initiative.

Interviewing academic staff reinforced the message of the Information Literacy Framework brochure, but it was also clear that the message needs to be as succinct and as targeted as possible. The negative comments made us aware of those criticisms which we need to address, such as the practical implementation and integration of information skills teaching. A small minority will never be impressed by glossy brochures! Analysing student bibliographies is a long term exercise which is already yielding interesting data and an ongoing partnership with academic staff. The teaching audits have given us a much clearer picture of what we have achieved and what we still need to do in integrating information skills into the curriculum.