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Providing effective continuing professional development to United Kingdom academic librarians in the further education sector: outcomes from a national survey by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)

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Abstract

With more than 5 million adults engaged in learning, the further education sector is by far the largest education sector in the United Kingdom.

Changes to educational delivery; the development of a socially cohesive society engaged in lifelong learning; the need to build a competent workforce to promote economic growth; and the importance of the development of the UK within the global knowledge economy have had a significant impact on the way post-compulsory education is delivered in the UK. These changes have had a significant effect on the political landscape of the further education sector and the information needs of students. As a consequence there has been an effect on the skills and competencies required of librarians working in further education colleges.

As part of a recent CILIP (The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) survey, UK Survey of Library and Learning Resource Provision

in Further Education Colleges, Kathy Ennis (CILIP) and Dr Graham Walton (Northumbria University) have investigated the issue of access to continuing professional development for librarians working in the sector.

The paper will identify why continuing professional development is currently crucial for further education librarians and also why specific barriers prevent easy progress. It will use the data from the survey to produce a model that informs how different staff development stakeholders (library associations, library schools, internal deliverers etc) need to work collaboratively. There are major challenges currently being faced by United Kingdom further education librarians and effective staff development needs to be in place for them to cope effectively.

Context

Post compulsory education in the United Kingdom (UK) is divided into two sectors; further education and higher education. However, changes to educational delivery, the impact of lifelong learning and the necessity to build a competent workforce to support a knowledge economy have made significant differences to the way post-compulsory education is delivered in the UK. These changes have had a significant impact on the delivery of library and learning resource services in colleges and universities and, as a consequence, to the skills needs of academic librarians.

Post-Compulsory Education in the United Kingdom (UK)

In the UK parents are required by law to send their children to full-time education until the age of 16.

After compulsory education is finished, young people can chose to stay on at school, attend college or take part in work-based learning. About 70% of 16 year olds continue in full-time education in school sixth forms or further education colleges.

At the age of 18 about a third of young people in the UK enter universities or other institutions of higher education after gaining a number of advanced level qualifications either in a school sixth form, a sixth form college or a further education college.

Further education in the UK developed because of the need for a competent and effective workforce. Colleges were established to teach mainly, though not exclusively, vocational subjects such as mechanics, construction, business studies, hospitality management or engineering. The sector has an important role in promoting economic development and social inclusion, and has strong ties with commerce and industry.

Further education colleges cater for young people who decide to leave school and undertake their qualifications in a more 'adult' environment and for adults of all ages on all manner of work related, technology and arts courses.

Higher education admits predominantly, though not exclusively, 18 year olds onto undergraduate courses after completion of their advanced level qualifications and

more mature students on to postgraduate, Masters and other higher level qualifications.

A change to the delivery of education in the UK in the past ten to fifteen years has had a significant impact on the compulsory / post-compulsory structure. These changes have created a further education sector that it is large, amorphous and difficult to delineate. For example:

- There are currently 5 million learners studying in further education colleges (as opposed to 2½ million in higher education)
- The development of sixth form colleges – a 16 to 18 year-old, half-way house between school and ‘adult’ education
- Further education colleges now cater for school pupils from the age of 14 on vocational programmes
- Further education colleges offer an extensive range of higher education courses, including foundation degrees and Masters qualifications
- Devolution and regionalism in the UK has created significant differences to organisational structures, delivery and funding in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Survey / Statistical Background of the Further Education Sector in the UK

CILIP: The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals was concerned at the lack of information on library and learning resource provision within further education colleges in the UK. Higher education institutions have an excellent tradition of data collection via the annual SCOUNL (Society of College, National and University Librarians) statistical survey. Since the cessation of Department for Education and Science surveys in the late 1970s the only statistical surveys of further education college libraries were those undertaken by The Library Association*.

A Library Association survey in 1989 revealed a worrying disparity of library provision in further education colleges. The results of this survey were used by the Colleges of Further and Higher Education (CoFHE) Group of The Library Association to determine best practice within further education college libraries.

* CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals was formed in April 2002 following the unification of the Institute of Information Scientists and The Library Association. Website: www.cilip.org.uk

The data was used within the published *Guidelines for college and polytechnic libraries*¹.

In 1992 all further education colleges in England, Wales and Scotland became corporate bodies, outside Local Authority control (colleges in Northern Ireland followed a few years later). As a consequence of Incorporation The Library

Association carried out two surveys. The first survey took place in 1993/4 (published 1995) and covered the 18 month, post-incorporation, period. The statistical data obtained in this survey was comprehensive enough to inform specific recommendations for further education college library provision in the 5th edition of the CoFHE *Guidelines*²

The second survey took place in 1996/7. However, the nature of libraries in further education colleges had changed significantly in the years since the 1993/4 survey in that many colleges no longer had anything that they could identify specifically as a 'library'. It is thought that this change in the nature of libraries in the sector led to a very poor response rate to the questionnaire, as the questions being asked were no longer relevant in many situations. The lack of response to the questionnaire, and the subsequent chasing, led to a delay in releasing the survey results (June 1999). Although an executive summary was produced the statistical evidence was insufficiently robust to allow for recommendations to be made in the 6th edition of the CoFHE *Guidelines*³

Methodology

The study was not specifically intended to explore just continuing professional development concerns in the U.K. further education sector. The intention was to gather intelligence on a range of current issues being faced, including CPD. In devising the questionnaire there were three factors that influenced its design and focus. There was a need to ensure there was a relatively high completion rate. The survey also had to cover the key areas in further education sector in the United Kingdom. Another key factor was for the need for the outcomes to be of practical benefit to the further education library practitioner. The full questionnaire is included as Appendix 1.

Previous similar surveys have been completed but they had suffered from a low response rate. This low rate immediately questions the value and the relevance of the resulting data. Within this context, various approaches were taken to ensure there would be a high response rate. The questionnaire itself was compiled by librarians with extensive experience in the sector. This ensured that individuals completing the form could see that the questions were relevant and appropriate. The pilot questionnaire was circulated to about 12 librarians.

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1. Guidelines for college and polytechnic libraries, 4th ed., LAPL, 1990
 2. Guidelines for college libraries: recommendations for performance and resourcing, 5th ed., LAPL 1995
 3. Guidelines for learning resource services in further and higher education: performance and resourcing, 6th ed., LAPL, 2000

Feedback was gained which resulted in some changes in working and focus in the final questionnaire. A covering letter was sent with the questionnaire highlighting the importance and value of the study for the individual. Support was pointed to where the individual could receive assistance when completing the questionnaire. A further strategy was to monitor non-respondents. After the completion date, those further education colleges and sixth form colleges that had not returned questionnaires were identified. Individual colleges were contacted by telephone to establish why completed forms were not forthcoming. A pro forma instruction sheet was produced for people making the reminder calls to help them elicit returned forms. Out of the 461 further education colleges sent questionnaires, 214 had been returned

representing a response rate of 46.4%. There is every indication that this will increase. There were 43 returns from the 110 Sixth Form Colleges sent questionnaires (39% response rate). Again there is every indication that this will increase.

If the questionnaire was to have credibility and value to the sector, it had to cover the areas relevant to practitioners. Various aspects of continuing professional development were covered in the study. The research team had a concern that CPD was not given high profile in further education colleges. The questioning therefore focussed on whether there was a college staff development budget and how much was spent on staff development for library/ learning resource staff over the most recent year. It was also ascertained whether the budget was devolved and whether the college supported the attendance at external professional courses. Further information was required on attendance at in-house courses, external courses, professional meetings and conferences for a range of different staff categories. Other aspects of CPD were covered in the questionnaire. The final question asked the respondents to indicate what were the three major issues facing the library/ learning resource centre in the immediate future. These outcomes from this question have allowed an accurate map to be produced of the future CPD needs for the sector. Other aspects of CPD were explored such as involvement in professional/ college committees, profile of the librarian/ centre manager in the institution and their level of college responsibility.

Various approaches were taken to ensure that the questionnaire covered the relevant key areas. The team from the Information Management Research Institute at Northumbria University included practitioners and researchers with substantial experience in the sector. Particular emphasis was placed on effective communication with CILIP whilst the questionnaire was developed. A key strategy was to establish a project Steering Group that had significant influence in ensuring relevance. The Steering Group was made up of experienced, senior practitioners from across the United Kingdom. Apart from CPD issues the questionnaire also covered general college information (including student numbers and budget), number of college sites, library opening hours, library system, range of library services, uses of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the electronic and paper library collection.

The survey outcomes were always intended to have practical significance and application for practitioners. It was important for the survey to show that it was reliable and valid but it was equally important that practitioners could use the findings. From the beginning of the work, careful consideration was given to how people could benefit from the outcomes. It was established that there was a need for data that people could use which highlighted where their service was positioned compared with others. The study therefore had to produce data that could be used for benchmarking. After consultation with the Steering Group that the benchmarking had to allow comparison at two levels. Practitioners wished to be able to compare their college with colleges that were a similar size or with colleges that were in their same country (i.e. England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). They also indicated that the outcomes should be easily accessible, be in tabular format and be appropriate for internal college use. These influences resulted in the report being made available electronically on the CILIP web site to allow downloading and data manipulation through cutting and pasting. Wherever possible bar charts, pie diagrams were used to make the findings clear and easily assessed. Key areas such as staffing levels and

expenditure were also presented by both college size and country location. These approaches ensured that college librarians could use the data easily within the local setting to support the cases that needed to be made.

Conclusions

At the time of writing this paper (May 2003) the survey results are not fully known, however, from the data analysed to date a number of worrying threads are emerging.

Staff development budgets in further education colleges are very limited and very rarely devolved to department heads. Therefore librarians are not in control of the staff development budget for their service. It is also clear that most access to CPD activity is confined to professional grades leaving support staff in library environments in need of significant development if they are to assist students effectively.

The results of the CILIP survey will be widely disseminated and will be available in electronic format via the CILIP website (<http://www.cilip.org.uk>) from the end of June 2003.

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