

Executive Summary

'It is as absurd to try and solve the problems of education by giving people access to information as it would be to solve the housing problem by giving people access to bricks' Diana Laurillard, THES, 2002

This report provides an opportunity for the post-16 and higher education communities to focus on a vision of the future where the importance of information skills is recognised and embedded as a mandatory element across all curriculums.

In commissioning this project in early 2001 the JISC recognised that 'many employers consider information literacy as a key core skill'. The purpose of the project was to survey current practice in information skills training in higher and post-16 education and make recommendations to ensure a coherent approach to the development of an information literate student population in the UK. The project has been jointly managed by Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds. Through an audit and case studies the project has revealed many instances of good practice within individual institutions. However, until the recognition of information skills as an essential graduate attribute has been recognised/addressed at a national level, the inclusion of information skills in the curriculum will continue to be patchy.

During the course of the project, the project team has revealed a considerable volume of interest in its area of research. This can be illustrated by the oversubscribed attendance at most of the dissemination events, and the level of debate generated on the topic on discussion lists, in publication and in person. In particular one of the most heated debates focuses on the preferred use in the UK of 'information skills' as opposed to 'information literacy'. The project team has retained the use of information skills to ensure consistency, while recognising that in many instances the terms can be used interchangeably. The taxonomy demonstrates effectively the various similarities between the terms used to describe the acquisition of information seeking skills, irrespective of whether the collective description is 'information skills' or 'information literacy'.

This report, which forms the final project report, is structured to enable readers to select their preferred level of detail. It follows the project through its stages of the information seeking process, illustrates in detail the main findings at the end of each of the stages, and includes, as appropriate, recommendations for further research and/or action. The report is accompanied by appendices which include the full text of the case studies, the toolkit and all other deliverables. A separate document is dedicated to expanding on, and contextualising the recommendations made in the main body of the report.

One key aspect of the project's research has been to highlight the need for the education community and associated professional bodies to take action to make information skills training a high priority. The project team would see it as evidence of their success, if the output and recommendations from this research were to provide the impetus to move towards achieving this goal.