

## Recommendations to the JISC

### Introduction

Information skills can be defined as the ability to locate, access, evaluate, adapt and use information from a variety of sources to meet an information need. These skills are underpinned to a certain degree by computer literacy but are far more wide-ranging than just this one element. A challenge for the future will be achieving the successful inclusion of information skills across all curriculums in the post-16 and higher education communities. The following recommendations are designed to assist in delivering this goal.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

That a national forum should be established to promote information skills and to provide support and a consultancy service on all aspects of information skills to the library, academic and student communities. To assist this, the conversion of the Big Blue website, or the establishment of an information skills portal will provide a national resource.

A National forum on information skills should be formed by the JISC in conjunction with other bodies such as CILIP and SCONUL to promulgate and oversee work in this area. In addition, the conversion of the Big Blue website, or the establishment of an information skills portal will provide a central resource bank of information.

It was clear from the audit of information skills provision that there is a great deal of activity and interest in this area in both higher and post-16 education institutions in the UK. However there is very little literature published to reflect this activity, particularly in comparison to that from the USA and Australia.

We therefore recommend there should be greater encouragement from bodies such as the JISC for institutions to share their experiences, through the provision of publications on this issue as well as nationally based forums, meetings and events. In particular a model similar to the one adopted by FERL, which offers a small payment in return for a case study published on their website, may well encourage colleagues to more readily share experience and 'good practice'

Such developments would help to promote the importance of information skills to both the library and academic community at large.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

That a comprehensive, up-to-date contact list of staff, with institutional or library-wide responsibility for information skills, be formulated by the JISC in order better to facilitate communication between and within the higher and post-16 sectors.

The remit of the JISC has broadened to encompass the provision of information and resources to serve the post-16 sector, as well as higher education. Communication routes are well established for the higher education sector through other bodies and organisations such as SCONUL. The JISC RSCs were selected as a conduit for communication with the post-16 sector. However, responses to a message distributed through this means, requesting co-operation in the completion of the online questionnaire were particularly low for the post-16 sector. Further investigation revealed that the original message and questionnaire had not been

sent, or that the contacts were not library and information service personnel but instead were ICT staff, to whom the audit was not relevant.

In order to successfully communicate with the relevant members of the post-16 community and to further to work that is being carried out either by the JISC directly or through JISC-funded projects such as the Big Blue, then channels of communication need to be correctly identified, established and maintained.

**Recommendation 3:**

That assessments be carried out to examine the baseline skills of students and how these improve over time, following information skills training and the application of these skills to their academic work.

It appears that very little assessment of student skills is undertaken. Some recent findings in the literature on this topic reveal that students have very poor skill levels and even having undergone some significant training there is little evidence, in some cases, of any skills improvement. It is recommended that some further research in this area be carried out in order to assess the effectiveness of information skills training. The findings from a longitudinal study of students' information needs and skills development would enable more rigorous and effective programmes to be developed. Building on the work of the JUBILEE project a similar research model could be adapted and applied to assessing students' information skills progression.

**Recommendation 4:**

That further work be carried out into the nature and extent of information skills work that academic staff are engaged in. In addition the effectiveness of this training should be assessed in instances where this is the sole means of provision for students.

The results of the audit showed that information skills training is undertaken by both library and teaching staff. In some cases this is carried out by both parties in collaboration, but audit results showed this to be the exception rather than the rule. In most cases library staff are unaware of what teaching staff are doing, if anything, with regard to information skills and the work that library staff carry out does not have any link to the curriculum. Instead the majority of experiences seem to be that information skills training is offered as generic, non-compulsory, stand-alone course.

The literature on this issue clearly states that the most effective way of delivering information skills is for all stakeholders in the process to work collaboratively, and for information skills to be integrated into the curriculum. It is recommended that further work be carried out in this area to establish the extent to which this occurs and highlight examples of good practice. To some extent, this recommendation will be taken forward by a new AHRB-funded project "UK academics' conceptions of, and pedagogy for information literacy" starting in September 2002 at the University of Sheffield.

**Recommendation 5:**

That further research be carried out into whether and how academic staff receive information skills training, building on the work of, but looking beyond, the scope of projects such as tRISSt. (<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/ioe/trisst/>).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that academic staff can be comfortable with a small range of information resources which they use on a regular basis and they may direct their students to use these. However there is an issue of how they become aware of and promote other resources to their students. In addition, further evidence needs to be gathered into how academics gain their own information skills training and the impact that this has on the training they give to their student cohort.

The tRISSt project has looked at the ICT skills of staff which are clearly important in the development and exercising of information skills. However it is important that the two sets of skills are not confused.

**Recommendation 6:**

That further work be carried out into the question of who “trains the trainers”, and also into where providers of library and information management education and employers perceive the responsibility lies for work in this area.

As Peacock states, it is not sufficient for librarians to receive minimal or no training in educational methods if they are to work effectively with teaching staff. Increasingly librarians are undertaking teaching-related qualifications in order to increase their own skills and to gain some recognition of professional skills from academic colleagues.

In response to the audit question about membership of the ILT it was apparent that some staff in higher education sector institutions had become members of the ILT. However, results of the audit and case studies revealed that it is library staff working in post-16 colleges who have the most difficulty in gaining recognition of their roles within the teaching sphere. Greater encouragement should be given to staff from this sector to enable them to have some degree of parity in their roles with teaching staff. Work should also be carried out to promote the skills of library staff and foster a greater degree of respect for their professional training and standing in the education sectors. This could be achieved through working in conjunction with CILIP.

**Recommendation 7:**

That the theory relating to information literacy is included in the core curriculum for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the area of information and library management.

It cannot be stated too strongly that in establishing information skills within the population as a whole there is a fundamental role for librarians. Although the Big Blue has concentrated on the academic sphere, the work of librarians in all sectors, including public libraries and the workplace is of equal and key importance. As the idea of lifelong learning and its role in future national economic prosperity is increasingly recognised, then so too must the role of information literacy within this process. If librarians are to play their full and right role in this then they must not only be trained to carry out this work but understand its importance and the academic theory that underpins it.

**Recommendation 8:**

That investigations be carried out to evaluate the establishment of a programme of professional training, such as Immersion, in the UK.

The Immersion programme in the US comprises a rigorous selection procedure and an equally intense programme of study and training for its participants. The results are effective as is evidenced both by the testimony of those who participate and by the degree to which information skills has been embraced by institutions in the US and the importance attached to them. Librarians from Australia have attended the US programme and moves are being made to establish a similar programme there.

An analogous programme in the UK would enable deficiencies in the current training of librarians to be addressed, whilst issues such as the curriculum for courses in librarianship are updated. It would also allow the UK to make greater headway in this crucial area than is currently the case and gain some degree of parity with the US and Australia.

**Recommendation 9:**

That further work into the establishment of standards and performance indicators in information skills should be carried out.

The project has always acknowledged the advanced position of both the US and Australia in terms of information literacy, both in terms of their innovative approaches to information skills training and in the standardisation in the delivery of this training. This is evident in the development of Information Literacy Standards developed by both countries. In the US, the Association of College and Research Libraries was responsible for the production of the Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education: Standards, Performance Indicators and Outcomes (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardslo.html>). This is a series of 5 standards which exemplify the characteristics of an information literate person. These were first published in January 2000. They were then adopted and developed by the Council of Australian University Libraries in October 2000, who have included two additional standards. The standards are to be reviewed for a second edition in 2003.

We recommend that the standards should be revised and adopted in the UK. These would act as a point of reference for institutions that are developing information skills programmes and promote standardisation of provision so that students from different subject disciplines and institutions have comparable skills.

The project team recognises that this again would require co-operation and collaboration from a range of bodies such as SCONUL, Universities UK, QAA and HEFCE, but feel that the benefits to the academic community as whole would outweigh any difficulties encountered in the initial developmental stages.

**Recommendation 10:**

That the position of information skills within the Key Skills framework be examined during the next review (due 2003-4) and be added either as a separate qualification or as a recognisable section of another unit (e.g. an Information Literacy unit, encompassing IT and information skills).

The Key Skills framework provides an ideal setting for the teaching of information skills. However, evidence from the audit and case studies showed that in practice students were generally not receiving high quality training in information skills. These skills need to be recognised in their own right and library staff should be involved in the teaching of them.

**Recommendation 11: (see also Recommendation 6)**

That the resistance to Learning Resource Centre staff in the post-16 sector teaching be addressed through a review of the role of LRC staff by the JISC or through CILIP, with the aim that Learning Resource staff are accepted as part of the Key Skills teaching team.

The results of the audit revealed that the non-acceptance of LRC staff as 'teachers' was a significant barrier to the delivery of information skills within the post-16 sector. The reasoning behind this non-acceptance needs to be investigated further.

**Recommendation 12:**

That the Key Skills Support Programme is encouraged to include information skills more explicitly in its documentation, training and events, and to consider the role of Learning Resource Centre staff within the Key Skills programme.

The Key Skills Support Programme provides invaluable help and advice for Key Skills co-ordinators and others teaching Key Skills at post-16 level. The profile of information skills within the Key Skills framework could be raised if it were included in the training events and practical documentation provided to teachers. In addition, the programme should address the role of library staff within Key Skills teaching.

**Recommendation 13:**

That the system of proxy qualifications relating to Key Skills be examined in detail, to establish the level of information skills achieved by students who bypass the Key Skills units in IT and Communication.

Given that information skills are not identified as a single unit with the Key Skills framework, the issue of whether they are satisfactorily covered by the proxy qualification system needs to be addressed.

**Recommendation 14: (see also Recommendation 1)**

That the website should be maintained and developed to become less a project website and more an information skills portal that would provide a 'one stop shop' for users seeking quality information and resources.

As part of this recommendation we would suggest the following actions:

**a) Rebrand the website under national auspices:**

With support underwritten by national bodies such as the JISC, CILIP, HEFCE, Learning and Skills Council. One body would be required to take overall responsibility for the website and its maintenance.

**b) Extend the remit of the site:**

To include contributions from professionals with an interest in information literacy who would use the site as a main dissemination tool for developments in this area.

**c) Update site content:**

To look for resources and update current content including the bibliography; examples of information skills programmes, both in the UK and worldwide; and extend the taxonomy to reflect new developments in information skills.

**d) Update other project outputs:**

To include the Information Skills Toolkit, and to adapt and develop it to cover a range of user groups, such as research students, and learning scenarios, such as problem-based learning; and to include the Post-16 Toolkit, to adapt it to include future changes and developments in the Key Skills curriculum.

The project team recognises that in order to maintain the website issues such as ownership and financial support need to be resolved. It would also recommend that similar action be taken for other JISC-funded projects whose outputs have included the development of web-based resources which are of value to the educational community.

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