

Information Literacy seminar – 4 June 2007

Outcomes from discussion groups

The groups of attendees were requested to address the following issues:

- Identify and discuss your own conceptions of IL/teaching information literacy
- Identify the conceptions of staff with whom you work
- Identify ways forward/strategies appropriate to these conceptions.

The groups were then requested to feedback on the following:

1. An issue that emerges from the discussion as most difficult or contentious
2. An issue on which there is most agreement
3. An unanswered question

The following is an amalgamation of the responses from all 4 groups to each area of discussion:

1. Issues that emerged from the discussion as most difficult or contentious

There are potentially opposing views, indeed, these views may also be seen along a continuum, e.g. Information Literacy underpins everything and belongs everywhere versus IL does not belong in some modules/programmes.

There appears to be an uncritical acceptance that IL supports the lifelong learning “agenda”, but this really needs to be challenged, unpacked and thought through to ensure this is not limiting the potential of IL.

It is difficult to define IL and also to “separate it out” from all the other aspects of learning. As such, it is difficult to “sell” to colleagues as it can be so intangible.

It takes a lot of time to try to engage both staff and students in appreciation of IL.

2. Issues on which there is most agreement

IL is potentially life-changing as it involves ethical issues amongst others.

We need to recognise and work with different conceptions of IL within and between groups.

It would be useful to undertake workshops for staff within particular subject areas to open up debate about IL and encourage staff to identify their conceptions of it. Such workshops would also include sharing of practical skills in relation to aspects of IL.

In terms of students, it is important to establish expectations of IL as early on as possible within their university life, e.g. perhaps through formative assessment. This might reduce the shock, for example, of discovering, in their final year, that they are expected to consult and reference high quality sources or that suddenly they are being penalised for plagiarism.

There is definitely a need for IL, i.e. to recognise it and to facilitate it.

3. Unanswered questions

Is there a suitable definition of information literacy, or even a consistent definition of what we mean by information?

What is the best way to continue to develop relationships between faculty academic staff and librarians?

How do we communicate that IL is helping lifelong learning, students' professional careers and has other strong benefits?

How do we “deliver” information literacy?

Suggestions coming out of the discussions

- Take the opportunity of “key moments” to introduce ideas to students, e.g. in early discussions about learning, perhaps as part of the Graduate Development Programme.
- Propound the idea that IL is wider than just academic sources and library.
- Take into account the “parallel lives” of students and staff.
- Librarians often tend to see IL as merely “access to resources” which is a rather narrow view. This conception needs to be broadened by working with academics.
- Time pressures are evident both for teachers and students and therefore prioritisation is required. This raises the question of what should be the content of IL teaching/learning and how would it be assessed? Preferably, it needs to be viewed from a subject perspective and related to relevant assignments
- We need to aim to understand the value, i.e. **why** IL, and to help to join up all the different elements that constitute it. To audit and review the curriculum in order to identify gaps and to provide balance would be ideal.

Points from closing plenary about possible next steps:

- IL needs to be presented as an important part of what we are all here for (students and staff)
- So students need to be taught to value information, even if they haven't given much thought to why they have chosen to participate in HE (perhaps just perceiving it as the next step, just “what you do”)

- IL concepts are best presented as part of “learning to learn” and learning to manage and make effective / creative use of the broad range of information we encounter (rather than feeling overwhelmed or constrained by it)
- Need to be aware of the limitations of the (overly) orderly ‘skills’ view of IL, since this is not a good match with real experience
- There are so many different ideas and parts of IL to explore so it will be important for students (and staff) that IL sessions are focussed with a good balance of practical and conceptual content
- Ongoing partnership / collaboration between library and academic staff will be key.