

BEING A ROUTE A SUPERVISOR, OR HOW TO CREATE A CHALLENGE FOR YOURSELF!

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Humberside College of Health was created in 1990, from an amalgamation of Schools of Nursing, Midwifery and Radiography located in the Humberside region. The College has three Centres, at Hull, Grimsby and Scunthorpe, and provides education and training in the fields of health and social care.

The Learning Resources Department has a library at each College Centre, and until October 1994, there were no junior professionals on the staff. However, during that month, the librarians in charge at Grimsby and Scunthorpe retired and were replaced by two newly qualified professionals who wished to undertake a Route A training programme. As their manager, it was my role to create a training programme and be their supervisor, so I obtained the relevant information from the Library Association, including the 'Routes to Associateship' booklet. The size of this and the time it took to digest were the first of many revelations to come! I decided from the start that in writing the training programme, I was not going to re-invent the wheel, so contacted a former colleague at the University of Humberside who is in charge of staff training. She gave me general advice, and supplied a copy of their standard training programme. This was invaluable as a model on which loosely based my own programme. The main difference between the two stemmed from the fact that the College libraries are relatively small, and therefore limited in the experiences they can offer. Provision therefore had to be made to broaden these via a programme of visits to other local libraries. To my great surprise, the training programme was approved by the Library Association's Registration Board on first submission.

The hard work then began! Translating the standard training programme into individual programmes for two people with different work experiences and therefore varying levels of expertise was time consuming. For each individual, a checklist was produced with the following headings, taking into account their work experience, and the duties of their current post, whilst making sure all requirements of the training programme were met:

Meetings to be attended, e.g. user groups, course management teams, the Staff Consultative Committee, College-wide staff meetings and conferences, and other ad hoc meetings as opportunities arose. Briefings were given by myself before each meeting and the necessary papers supplied. Permission was also obtained from chairpersons for the candidates to attend non-library based meetings.

Visits to be arranged, e.g. to other College libraries, local university libraries, the British Library at Boston Spa, local special and industrial libraries, other NHS libraries, and the local public library. All visits were arranged by myself, using a network of informal contacts built up over the years. Guidance as to what to look for and what to find out about was also given.

Issues to be discussed with myself (as supervisor), including College policies (the Business Plan, Academic Strategy, financial procedures, human resources etc), and departmental policies and procedures (mission statement, aims and objectives, budgeting, stock maintenance and development, statistics, special collections, marketing, staffing and accommodation constraints, administrative procedures etc). The necessary documentation was provided by myself in advance of discussions.

Opportunities to look out for - the 'catch all' heading, to ensure that no requirement of the programme was omitted. It therefore included items which did not fit in anywhere else, such as study days, conferences, and possible projects the candidates could manage. The latter included the implementation of the computer circulation module, a library move and the introduction of a current awareness programme.

Progress was monitored by monthly meetings with each individual, in a pre-booked room where there would be no interruptions. An informal agenda was produced for each meeting by myself, and would normally include reports on meetings attended and visits made, as well as one or two items from the 'To be discussed' list. The candidates were expected to be critical and analytical in their thinking and observations, both for self-development and to give them 'fodder' for their professional development reports.

This had immediate repercussions, in that both candidates responded well, and either longer or more frequent meetings had to be scheduled, or shorter agendas! In addition, I found the meetings invaluable, as the candidates often offered different perspectives on issues, both from each other's and my own. In this way, my policies were sometimes brought into question, and revised as a result. The learning process was two-way, and the exchange of ideas is now automatically built in to our working practices.

Being a Route A supervisor is as time consuming and challenging as being a candidate, and a form of self-development on both sides. If you have any doubts as to whether you can do it, my advice is to go for it - you might just enjoy it!

Since this article was written, Humberside College of Health has merged with the University of Hull. Chris is currently on secondment from her post as Health Library Team Leader at the University of Hull