

## **Nursing and Multi disciplinary libraries Models of contracting from the NURLIS projects**

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There are three issues which were focused on time after time in the NURLIS projects, by every group of key players - library and information service managers, educators, educational contractors, validating bodies, the English National Board, professional bodies, accrediting bodies and nurses :

- Access
- Awareness
- Agreement

In each case, where the concept or the quality was lacking in library and information service provision, there was dissatisfaction, disappointment, dissension and mistrust.

The message was clear - that there was a need for discussion and communication, decision making and definition, co-operation and sharing of experience. In many cases these were not taking place because there were no structures and no-one willing or able to take the responsibility of setting up the structures.

Where people or organisations *did* take a lead, their motivation was often misinterpreted - as a wish to take over and to superimpose their own model. In an environment of uncertainty and change there are many hidden agendas and much suspicion of empire-building.

The structures most frequently referred to as being a solution were service level agreements and contracts.

Unfortunately, I was able to track down only a very few actual contracts applicable to Colleges of Nursing, although there are several for multi-disciplinary provision. South West Thames Regional Library service provided their model (which is reproduced in the Guidelines Section III p 15-16). Southampton Health Library and Information Service provided their "Library Service Agreement" model (p. 22-24) and "a college of health" provided a copy of a (real!) contract between them and a provider unit library (p 25-26). Oxford Regional Library Service and North West Thames RLU also supplied copies of the contract between the Post Graduate Medical Deans and the district library services.

The details of these contracts, the way they are laid out and the services agreed are obviously important, but apply specifically to the relationships which they support.

What is undoubtedly common to all Service level agreements and contracts is that they are essentially *processes*. They are "the means by which two parties communicate to each other their commitments in relation to the resourcing and provision of services to a given level, (over a given period)"

Talking to those library services which operate already with service level agreements and contracts, the following points stood out as very positive reasons for the exercise - and they are all *processes*, which stand independently from the details of the agreement or the contract.

A service level agreement or a contract:

- requires drawing up of specifications by 'client' and that 'provider' addresses these
- develops a closer relationship between client and provider, with full exchange of information
- requires a disciplined review of alternatives
- provides the basis for medium term planning
- provides the basis for fair measurement of performance

It was clear too that the effects of going through the process of service level agreements and contracts lead almost inevitably to a series of benefits to both 'sides':

- awareness of whole range of provision available
- dialogue between purchaser and provider on needs and required level of provision
- enhanced level of user education
- control of use levels
  - monitoring of use
  - categories of users
  - services accessed
  - levels of use

However, it was very clear that where service level agreements and contracts were in place, a great deal of work had gone on beforehand. I suggest that until quite a lot of the preparatory work has been done it would be very difficult to arrive at any contract of a meaningful nature. There are several essential prerequisites for agreement and

contract:

- state mission
- be *able* to identify users
- demonstrate awareness of users' needs
- identify and communicate current levels of use
- identify and promote services available or potentially available
- cost elements and levels of service
- appropriate skills to communicate, promote, challenge and negotiate
- appropriate opportunities to communicate, etc

However, there is plenty of evidence that service level agreements and contracts do not *only* depend on a lot of hard work by librarians.

The following list is just an introductory summary of the reasons given by librarians, *and* educators, for not being in a position to have service level agreements or contracts:

- lack of strategic planning
- lack of decision
- short term contracts
- lack of trust
- lack of confidence
- lack of investment

I cannot finish on that pessimistic note though!

Whatever the organisation structure and however uncertain the organisation structure is; whatever the balance of power and however uncertain the size of the library and information service budget, we have to focus on the *user's needs*.

This is the basis of one of the ideas that emerged from the NURLIS II consultation. It has been labelled as a *Passport to learning resources*.

The British Library Research and Development Department has allocated a small grant to look at the applications and implications. Two colleges have been selected as 'observation sites': Coventry and Warwickshire College of Nursing and Midwifery and Newcastle and Northumberland College of Health.

The idea is based on the need for library users to be more aware of library services to which they can or can't have access, through a library guide or directory; for them to be able to identify themselves and their library and information needs to the libraries they use; and for there to be an element of agreement - between the user, whoever is paying for their educational support and the library services - as to what can be expected, a form of users charter (if you want to take it that far).

Of great importance is the *process* by which the 'Passport' is put together.

In order to put together a directory of library services, it is necessary to do a survey of exactly what is available; in order to list services, it is necessary to discuss and agree with the different libraries what level of service is available to different users; in order to ensure that all users' needs are being considered it is necessary to reach agreement with educationalists - and there are other processes to be gone through if the passport idea is developed through information technology.

The features can be examined from both points of view, that of the user, and that of the college and specifically, library and information service managers:

<u>User</u>	<u>College/library management</u>
identify	Service level agreements
entitlement, choice(?)	channel and control
user education	
record of library use	management information
	use monitoring
payment/vouchers	re-charging

To conclude, (on a positive note), the key processes being examined in this feasibility project to develop the User's Passport are in fact the same as those embodied in service level agreements and contracts. These are the three issues on which I focused originally:

- Access
- Awareness
- Agreement