

Old dogs and new tricks. Use of new technology to ensure post registration students have the information literacy skills to effectively use NHS and HE learning resources

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In 2004 the School of Health, Education and Community Studies at Northumbria University introduced a new curriculum for Continuing Professional Development. This curriculum has numerous pathways leading to specialised awards. Each pathway can start on a different date. There are no core modules incorporating information skills: an assumption was made that because these students are studying at level six they would already have the knowledge to successfully access and use learning resources.

There are approximately 3000 students participating in the programme at any one time. All are registered allied health professionals, nurses, midwives and social workers, the majority of whom are employed in the NHS. The Northumberland Tyne and Wear SHA covers the conurbation of Tyne and Wear but also rural Northumberland, where students may be a long way geographically from both the university and an NHS library. Many of these students have not studied for a number of years. Given the pace of

development in electronic resources, many students, even those who have recently studied, will have difficulty in keeping abreast of change.

A subgroup of the CiPD curriculum planning team, consisting of academic and library staff, was established to consider the challenges facing these students and how best to address them. As the majority of the students, in their role as registered practitioners, have access to library resources within the NHS and given that they spend more time each week in the NHS than HE, representatives of NHS librarians were invited to join the group. The Webmaster for the School of Health, Community and Education Studies was also invited to attend.

Concurrently the NHS Regional Knowledge Services Manager was working with Northumberland County Library service on a collaborative project to investigate ways of providing reliable patient information, both print and electronic. In view of their opening hours and location public libraries were also being used by NHS staff. As a result public library staff were trained to use both the National Library for Health and Northumbria University Library and Learning services to ensure that they could provide quality information to patients and their families and that they were aware of the resources students can access remotely.

Contextual issues

The students undertaking the framework are part time students in part or full time employment. Opening hours of NHS Trust libraries may make it difficult for these students to access them outside their shifts. Often distance from the university and family commitments make it very difficult for them to make a special visit to the library. The University operates a postal service of books and photocopied articles but this requires the students to have prior knowledge

of how to use the library catalogue to find books and databases to find articles. The students may lack confidence in using information technology.

Options

As part of the previous curriculum face-to-face sessions had been offered by the University library at the start of the programme. A series of drop in sessions were developed and jointly delivered once a month at different times of the day and week, including weekends and evenings, by NHS and university academic and library staff. These were poorly attended, presumably because of the constraints listed above.

Other options were considered:

- A printed workbook was rejected as expensive to produce and resource intensive to maintain.
- Northumbria University has an information literacy course within its e-learning portal. Access to this, however, is unavailable until students are registered with the University.
- Consideration was given to making materials available on the Internet but not all students have access to the Internet from home. Large files, especially those including video clips, are very slow to download.

Chosen Solution

In the light of the above, the group made the decision to make the material available on a CD. Content included introductions to the CiPD framework by a member of academic staff, University, NHS and County Library Services by volunteer members of staff. Microsoft Producer was chosen as this captures the presenter and the PowerPoint presentation, giving the students a friendly face with which to identify. Tutorials were recorded using Camtasia to guide students in the use of library catalogues, databases, the National Library for

Health and how to search the Internet effectively. Two tutorials for CINAHL were completed to ensure that students realised it was the same database from two different suppliers, the NHS subscribing through Dialog, the University through Ovid. Camtasia allows the presenter to talk students through using the catalogue etc whilst carrying out the actions on screen.

All the recordings were made in the University library where the software was available. Additional information about library opening hours, public library IT availability, and the University distance learning service was included. The CD was produced by the School Webmaster. Preparation of the materials within a tight timescale required a high level of commitment and enthusiasm from all group members.

Outcomes

- The production of the CD involved close working and collaboration between NHS and University library staff. This helped to strengthen cross-sectoral partnership working.
- All NHS libraries within the SHA, many public libraries and the University library hold copies of the CD, which can be used with all library users, not just CiPD students.
- Training materials on University resources are now directly available in NHS libraries. It would not have been possible to produce these without the use of University technology and expertise and time of the School Webmaster
- The tutorials are a useful tool for library staff training.
- The students have a resource which they can refer to whenever required.
- Students can be better supported in public libraries.

- Library staff across the sector have a better understanding and appreciation of each other's work and the role they play in improving the experience of the post-registration student.
- The County Library Service can direct the general public to evaluated websites

Challenges

The project entailed using software unfamiliar to us all. Particular thanks are due to one member of staff who undertook a steep learning curve to produce the tutorials. None of us had any voice training or experience in front of a camera so a lot of moral support was shared across the group.

Inevitably the group ended up working to a tight deadline. The project demonstrated how difficult it can be to work across teams where everyone has different priorities and demands on their time. The fact that the software and production facilities were only available within the University necessitated NHS and County library staff having to travel. Taking into account other commitments, it was difficult to find a time convenient to the parties involved. Obtaining funding for the production of the CD proved problematic and resulted in a delay. The timescale for the physical production of the CD was much longer than anticipated.

Evaluation

32 copies of the CD were distributed at the CILIP Health Libraries Group (HLG) Conference held in July 2006. An evaluation sheet was emailed to each recipient approximately three weeks after the conference. 20 responses were received (62% response rate). Initial evaluation indicates that information is required on the cover of the CD to indicate its purpose, content and the minimum specification PC requirements. Instruction on how to navigate the CD

should also be included. The feedback has provided extremely useful information on how to improve this e-learning tool. It has also been very gratifying to receive very positive feedback and praise from the majority of respondents, with several hoping to be able to replicate or use the idea in some way.

Future Collaborative Working

Three areas have been identified as a basis for future collaborative working:

- To ensure the material is kept up to date and new material developed.
- Further evaluation of the CD by library staff and students will be undertaken jointly by all the parties responsible for its development.
- To explore together the potential of using video-streaming as an alternative to producing a CD.

Conclusion

The benefits of working on this project have proved to be many. The production of a training tool to enhance the information skills of CiPD students is the most tangible outcome. However, the project has helped to strengthen the relationships between Academic, NHS and Public Librarians, including the sharing of expertise, technologies and training opportunities. Presenting the CD at the HLG Conference enabled this work to be shared with a wider audience and provided useful feedback. Plans for update and further development will help to ensure that the relationships, which have been built up, continue to strengthen.