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Reading strategies: collaborating with academic staff to make recommended reading work

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the Faculty of Health and Social Care at UWE we have seen huge growth in the numbers of students on pre-qualifying programmes and an increasingly student centred and enquiry based approach to learning. The growing emphasis on enquiry based learning puts the

students' use of resources at the heart of the learning process. The final answer or completed assignment will reflect the access the student has to key resources and their research skills in identifying further material. (Markless, Streatfield & Baker, 1992)

1.2 "There aren't enough books in the library!" – The core reading problem

Academic libraries aim to develop resources and services in line with academic developments and student needs. Adequate resources need to be available at the point of need and support is needed in the form of developing information and study skills. A long standing problem is that academic libraries struggle to provide satisfactory access to core reading. The problem is exacerbated by rising student numbers, and students become increasingly frustrated in their attempt to access recommended titles.

Providing sufficient access to core reading is a "Holy Grail" that continues to be pursued by many academic libraries in the UK. Some have very complex mathematical models for working out the optimum utility of texts and how many copies are needed to achieve this. Factors taken into account include peak demand, numbers of students, measures of user satisfaction with regard to how long they might expect to wait and how much time they might expect to read an item. (Warwick, 1980 and Vautier, 1991)

The futility of supplying multiple copies is clearly illustrated when you attempt it with some of the modules that we operate in Health and

Social Care at UWE. For Adult Nursing we have cohorts of over 300 students, which would generate ~ 25 copies of any recommend texts under a model of 1 copy for 12 students. Not only would this have implications for the breadth and depth of the library collection as resources would be spent on a narrow range of key titles but it also still doesn't provide sufficient access to the text. Once the first 25 people have descended on the library the other 275 students are left waiting. We developed our own formula to illustrate the hopelessness of supplying multiple copies:

$$\text{Copies} = \text{No. of students} \times \frac{\text{No. of items students expected to read}}{\text{Total no. of items recommended}}$$

With 300 students and a reading list of 10 items of which they were required to read 5 of the items gives 150 copies of each item in order that everyone gets a fair crack at accessing the key reading.

Including a time factor over which they might access the reading is irrelevant as increasingly students have a limited period in which to access the reading and obtaining an item in week 7 of an 8 week module isn't solving the access problem. Short loan collections are also not a good solution as the patterns of curriculum delivery mean that students spend increasing amounts of time off campus so providing a key item in a restricted loan collection doesn't make it more accessible to them.

Library surveys and other student feedback through module evaluations and Programme Management Committees in the Faculty of Health and Social Care at UWE clearly illustrated that students

found access to core and indicative printed materials increasingly frustrating.

1.3 Solutions

Many higher education institutions are beginning to take innovative approaches to addressing the issues of student access to reading. The University of California began using IT as a solution and making reading available electronically in 1994. (Gordon, 1994) As we have seen an increase in the use of technology to deliver the curriculum through Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) other institutions have also begun to explore providing reading electronically. (Wall, 1999 and Stubley, 2002)

In the Faculty of Health and Social Care at UWE we have implemented the following new approach to reading lists in order to address the issue:

- Students encouraged to buy core texts. The reading list won't include any books other than titles that students are expected to buy their own copy of.
- Recommended reading to be provided for students electronically or as printed study packs.
- Library reduces multiple copy provision and develops range of collection. For the Faculty of Health and Social Care we buy no more than 2 copies per campus of any title.
- Students encouraged to explore the breadth of the Library collections and the wider literature.

- Librarians work with faculty colleagues to identify e-resources and plan information skills development.
- Module specification outlines strategy for providing access to recommended reading rather than listing specific resources.

These recommendations were discussed and endorsed at the Faculty's Learning and Teaching Committee. The new approach forms part of the Faculty's Learning and Teaching Strategy for implementation in all modules.

2. Investigation into the impact of the new approach to reading

2.1 Participants

An evaluation study was undertaken to investigate the impact of the new approach to recommended reading on students' access to and use of reading for assignment work. The study was carried out with a cohort of 1st year undergraduate Physiotherapy students and centred on a module taken midway through their first year, Introduction to Physiotherapy Studies. The study was carried out during the module run from November 2002 – April 2003.

2.2 Aims of the evaluation study

The evaluation of the new approach to providing recommended reading aimed to assess the possibilities and constraints introduced by the new approach, and to examine how this impacts upon students' reading strategies.

The investigation centred on the following questions:

- Do students find the reading accessible?
- Does the new approach improve student satisfaction with Library resources?
- What strategies do students employ for identifying further reading?
- What are the cost implications of this new approach?

3. Method

3.1 The reading

All of the items used for recommended reading were relevant to the assignment work for the module. The recommended reading for the module was provided as follows:

3.1.1 Hyperion

Nine items, all papers from journals, were copyright cleared for digitisation through the HERON (Higher Education Resources On demand) service and made available on the Library's digital media archive, Hyperion. The total cost for these items was £1,172. This gives a cost of £9 per student, or £1 per item / per student. The copyright charges varied greatly between publishers.

3.1.2 Electronic journals

A further fifteen papers were selected from the Library's electronic journal collections. All of these were accessible to students on the Internet via the Library Catalogue using their UWE Athens password. As this material was selected from the Library's current electronic collections there is no cost for these items.

3.1.3 Photocopies of articles

Finally two papers were photocopied and handed out to the students. The cost for these items was 2.5p x 28 pages x 130 students = £91.

Students were also encouraged to explore the library's collections and databases to identify further relevant reading.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Usage statistics from Hyperion

The Hyperion Digital Media Archive records all accesses to the articles stored so we have an accurate measure of the actual use made of the nine articles digitised for this module.

3.2.2 Module evaluation forms

At the end of the module the students completed their module evaluations, which cover questions relating to Learning Resources. The Module Evaluations were reviewed to gauge student satisfaction with resources and compared with the evaluations from the previous run of the same module.

3.2.3 Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed at the end of the module to explore in more detail the use students had made of the recommended reading and whether they had done any further reading beyond the recommended items.

4. Results

4.1 Usage statistics from Hyperion

The usage data showed that all of the digitised articles were accessed by the students. Eight of the articles were accessed by 90 or more of the students in the cohort. The average number of times each article was opened was 195.

4.2 Module evaluation forms

99 module evaluation forms were received from students undertaking the Introduction to Physiotherapy Studies module in academic year 2002-3.

110 module evaluation forms were reviewed from the previous cohort taking the module in 2001-2.

Satisfaction with Library Resources 2002-3

Total respondents	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
99	20	65	10	3	1
100%	20%	65%	10%	3%	1%

2001-2

Total respondents	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
110	5	63	27	12	3
100%	4.5%	57%	24.5%	11%	3%

There is a clear improvement in student satisfaction with Library Resources for the group using the new approach to reading. An impressive 20% were Very Satisfied compared with less than 5% for the previous module run. An overwhelmingly positive 85% were Satisfied or better compared with roughly 62% for the previous cohort. Only 4% were Dissatisfied / Very Dissatisfied compared with 14% last year.

Importance of Library Resources for this module

2002-3

Total respondent s	Very Importan t	Importan t	Neutra l	Fairly Unimportan t	Unimportan t
99	47	37	15	-	-
100%	47%	37%	15%	-	-

2001-2

Total respondent s	Very Importan t	Importan t	Neutra l	Fairly Unimportan t	Unimportan t
110	27	35	36	12	-
100%	24%	32%	33%	11%	-

The new approach taken to reading seems to have raised student's awareness of the importance of Library Resources to support their learning with 47% saying that Library Resources were Very Important compared with 24% the previous year. No students in this cohort rated the Library Resources as Unimportant / Fairly Unimportant

compared with 11% last year. A much smaller group were Neutral this time too, 15% compared with 33%.

These results could illustrate the higher profile that is given to the recommended reading with the new approach to reading lists, rather than just being given a list of things to find in the library as in previous module runs this group were given explicit instructions both in their module handbook and through demonstrations in lectures.

Additional comments about learning resources for this module

In the 2001-2 evaluations no further comments regarding Learning Resources were made. For the cohort this year there were a number of additional comments as listed below. Sixteen students made positive comments about the electronic access to material through either the electronic journals or Hyperion.

Further comment :	No. of students
"Very satisfied with Hyperion, great help"	16 positive comments
"Hyperion has been useful, fantastic system"	
"Hyperion very useful as ltd books to go round"	
Hyperion good idea, benefits everyone"	
"Library excellent, especially electronic stuff"	
"Electronic journals are very helpful"	
"Electronic access is great"	
"Not enough books in the library"	

4.3 Questionnaire

Completed questionnaires were returned by 110 students from the cohort of 130 (85% response rate).

Section 1 – Hyperion articles

107 students (97% of respondents) accessed the digitised articles on Hyperion.

The numbers of articles that each student accessed varied.
 68 students said that they accessed every article. (62%)
 23 students said they accessed 6 articles or more. (20%)
 16 students said that they accessed up to 5 articles. (15%)
 3 students accessed no articles. (3%)

90 students printed the articles, 30 downloaded the articles and 26 read them on screen.

23 students rated Hyperion as Very Easy to use. (21%)
 61 students rated Hyperion as Easy to use. (55%)
 14 students rated Hyperion as Difficult to use. (13%)
 1 student rated Hyperion as Very Difficult to use. (<1%)

Further comments:	No. of students
"Guide provided was useful"	29
"Having access on the Internet was useful"	8
"Hyperion was longwinded to access"	5
"Demonstration in lecture was useful"	4
"Problems with opening the articles"	3
"I needed help to access these"	2
"Printing made this expensive"	1
"Printing wasn't straightforward"	1

Section 2 – Listing of articles from full-text electronic journals

106 students (96% of respondents) accessed the full-text electronic journals.

The numbers of articles that each student accessed varied.
 49 students said that they accessed every article. (45%)
 40 students said they accessed 6-10 articles. (36%)
 17 students said that they accessed up to 5 articles. (15%)
 4 students accessed no articles. (4%)

90 students printed the articles, 25 downloaded the articles and 25 read them on screen.

20 students rated e-journals as Very Easy to use. (21%)

51 students rated e-journals as Easy to use. (55%)

18 students rated e-journals as Difficult to use. (13%)

Further comments :	No. of students
"Having access on the Internet was useful"	8
"Not as easy as Hyperion"	3
"Easier than Hyperion"	1
"Expensive to print"	1
"I needed help"	1

Section 3 – Finding further reading

79 students did look for further reading beyond the recommended items. (72%).

How did you go about identifying further useful reading?

Students adopted a range of strategies for locating and identifying further relevant reading, as illustrated in the following table. Students were not articulate in describing their sources of further information, which perhaps indicates a lack of experience in having to describe their information seeking and handling. The majority of respondents just used a single further source as described below. No student gave a comprehensive strategy including a range of sources.

Strategy	No. of responses
Library Catalogue	24
Search engines on the Internet	18
Books in the Library	15
Browsed Library	9
Advice from lecturers	5
Searches	5
Help from other students	4
Journals	3
Database searches	3
BMJ website	2
Other libraries	2

Own books	1
Ovid	1
Didn't have much success	1
Used Athens	1
References in books and journals	1
Used Library computers	1

5. Discussion of findings

5.1 Did students find the reading accessible?

Both the hard usage data from Hyperion and the response from the questionnaires illustrate the high level of use that students made of the reading provided electronically. Over 90 students accessed eight of the articles on Hyperion. From the questionnaire results almost all students used the electronic journals and articles on Hyperion, 96% and 97% respectively. 76% of respondents said that Hyperion and the electronic journals were easy to use. Only a few comments were made expressing difficulty with access to the electronic material, without further follow up it is unclear whether these difficulties were down to student skills or technical problems. Further research through perhaps focus groups would reveal what was behind some of these comments. The accessibility of the new approach is further illustrated through the positive comments received on both the Module Evaluations and Questionnaire returns regarding electronic access. What we are missing is a control group to compare this improved access with. Ideally we would have comparable data from a module (preferably same module from previous run) using the usual reading list approach. We could have hard access data from Library Management System on numbers of people who borrowed the items

on the list during the module and have used a similar questionnaire for students asking how successful they were in obtaining the items. Essentially, other than anecdotally, we don't have hard evidence on how inaccessible the material is when using the traditional reading list approach. What we can conclude from this study is that the new approach does make material accessible to students and that they are positive about using the material.

5.2 Does the new approach improve student satisfaction with Library resources?

Student satisfaction with Library Resources is improved. This study did reveal a positive response from students to taking a new approach to providing recommended reading. This is illustrated through the high levels of usage of the recommended material and in the positive and enthusiastic responses to both the questionnaire and module evaluations. It must be remembered, however, that in the new approach there is much more emphasis on encouraging students to access the reading and the module leader made more overt attempts to raise student awareness of the recommended reading than previously.

5.3 What strategies do students employ for identifying further reading?

Encouragingly 79 students attempted to identify further reading beyond the recommended items. From the questionnaire responses it is difficult to identify anyone who did this in any organised or structured way. The responses illustrate that students find it difficult to

articulate their information seeking and handling and also have a limited understanding of information retrieval. This area would have been better explored through meeting with small groups of students and carrying out focus group style interviews. This would have given much better quality evidence to form judgments about student awareness and skills. The answers in the questionnaire illustrated that students rely mainly on using the Library Catalogue to find relevant books and search engines on the Internet to find useful web pages. The students on this module are first year undergraduates who are just beginning to find out about their subject and the nature of literature and information in their subject area. It is therefore not surprising that very few students used the bibliographic databases to identify further relevant material. It is important that students are given opportunity to develop their awareness of these resources and skills in making effective use of them as they continue with their studies.

5.4 What are the cost implications of this new approach?

The most cost effective option from those used for this study is to make use of electronic full-text material that the Library has already paid for as a subscription to an electronic resource such as a journal. This material is accessible to unlimited numbers of concurrent users on the Internet. Students just need details of the items to read and clear instructions for accessing the electronic resources. Where material isn't available in the Library's electronic collections then photocopying the material to give out to students is more cost effective than copyright clearing the material and digitising. The

findings from the copyright clearance pricing via HERON has led to us giving considerable thought as to how and when this approach might be the viable solution for providing access to reading, particularly in the light of copyright restrictions being lifted on printed study packs. Digitising material not only costs the provider there is also considerable cost for the student in printing the articles, a cost which is avoided with providing students with the material in a study pack.

5.5 Limitations of the study

The key limitations of this study were the lack of previous evidence from a comparable study using the traditional approach to reading lists and the use of a questionnaire to elicit information from students when focus groups might have given greater clarity and detail, particularly in relation to student information seeking and handling activity. The use of questionnaires and evaluation forms as the main evaluation methods is problematic as they are self-report methods and subject to potential bias.

The true test of the new approach to reading lists is the impact that it has on student understanding of their subject and their achievement. Does the new approach to reading lists enable students to read more and does this lead to better understanding and a greater level of achievement? This would provide a much more objective study into the impact of the new reading list approach rather than the subjective approach taken in this study. The assignment work would form a key piece of evidence in the study as it would be the evidence of the students understanding of the material covered in the module.

We are currently drawing up a research proposal to more fully evaluate the impact of our new approach to recommending reading at UWE.

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LfN news - committee changes

During 2005 we have said goodbye to a number of committee members. Sarah Greenley (website and marketing), Jenny Drury (LfN bulletin) and Kathy Cook (study day organiser) have all decided to stand down after many years of service. We would like to say a big thank you to them for all their hard work over many years on the committee and wish them well in the future. Rosemary Cassidy from