

to academic librarians – those working in NHS libraries could not share the workload with anyone else.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in group discussions about the pros and cons of different types of measure, along the lines of the comments above.

The SMARTAL Project: St MARTin's College health students Access to Learning resources whilst on placement

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Background and objective

The publication of the report of Northumbria University's Health and Education Northumbria Students Access to Learning resources (HENSAL) project¹ in 2002 prompted St Martin's College (SMC) Library to investigate access to learning resources* for its own health

* Within the remit of the project, 'learning resources' was defined as

- printed and electronic books and journals
- databases and information from the web
- access to computers for the web, e-mail, word processing and other applications
- access to study space

students while they were on placement. St Martin's College is a multi-campus college of higher education, spread over a wide geographical area and is accredited by Lancaster University. The total number of FTEs for 2004/05 was 7122.5, of which 18% were pre-registration health students (1289.4 FTEs in 2004/05). These students spend up to half their course on placement, mainly in NHS venues, and need access to learning resources to support their placement practice and their academic coursework.

One of the HENSAL Project's suggestions for further research was "to establish whether the patterns and trends emerging with the HENSAL health students was replicated in other universities' health pre-registration students (both within the same geographical areas and elsewhere in the United Kingdom)". By running a similar project at SMC, information could be gained to support the development of our own services to placement students and to contribute to the wider evidence-base. The SMARTAL (St MARTin's College health students Access to Learning resources whilst on placement) Project started in December 2004 and reported in March 2005, with the objective to look at patterns of use and access to learning resources for health students on placement.

Methodology

A preliminary literature search was conducted using the CINAHL and LISA indexes and the web to find evidence of any other research in this area. The only relevant research found was the HENSAL project^{1,2} and Leeds University Library's Liquid Library Project³. The SMARTAL Project was also aware of the University of Teesside's

THESAL (Teesside Health Students Access to Learning resources whilst on placement) Project⁴, which reported in 2005.

The methodology used in the SMARTAL Project was closely based on that developed by the HENSAL project (as was that used by the THESAL Project). The printed questionnaire for students provided quantitative data on the students' access to and use of learning resources, with space at the end for literal responses on their experiences. Semi-structured interviews with five Practice Placement Facilitators (PPFs) from three local NHS trusts provided qualitative data on their views of the student's access to and use of learning resources while they were on placement in their trusts. Using an existing tested methodology enabled the project to be completed in a shorter timescale and produced results which could be triangulated with those of the HENSAL and THESAL Projects.

The target group for the questionnaire consisted of pre-registration students who had recently returned from a clinical placement (n= 444 students). This included second and third/final year students taking a BSc degree in diagnostic radiography, nursing, occupational therapy or physiotherapy, a Diploma in Higher Education in nursing or a Graduate Diploma in Occupational Therapy, as well as first and second year BSc midwifery students. The questionnaires were mainly handed out in teaching sessions with the permission of the lecturers. There was a 60% return rate (n=268), with all professions, apart from midwifery, being well represented.

The relatively short time span of the project precluded the inclusion of all health students. It was thought that second and third/final year students would provide the most valuable data as their

placements were longer and the students were more experienced in using learning resources. All midwifery students were included as there were only two small cohorts who had already been on placement.

Results and discussion

The vast majority of students (72%) had spent their most recent clinical placement in a hospital setting. 68% of these were based in the two local hospital NHS Trusts, with the rest mainly in other hospitals in the North of England. 18% had spent their latest placement in a primary or community care venue.

The most significant findings by theme were:

- 96% of students felt that access to learning resources was either 'very important' or 'important' whilst on placement. This was reinforced by the PPFs, one of whom commented that access "really is essential", particularly to provide the evidence base for the students' academic work, to link theory and practice.

Availability of and access to learning resources

- Most students had access to learning resources in their placement venue: 63% had available study space, 70% a library or resource centre and 77% a computer with internet access. A small percentage of students indicated that they did not know if these facilities were available.
- Access to a library was a significant problem to students on placement outside a hospital, with only 59% having access if they

were on placement in primary or community care and 35% in other venues (compared to 80% in a hospital). 44% and 58% respectively indicated difficulties accessing a library (compared to 31% in a hospital).

- Study space was fairly equally available over all types of venue, but caused difficulties for 30% of students. Several students commented in the literal responses that access to quiet study space was a problem.
- Availability of networked computers was generally satisfactory but was poorest in venues outside hospitals and primary and community care.

Library use by placement students

- Students used placement libraries and the College library fairly equally, with little use of other university or public libraries. 69% of students used the College library at least monthly, with 56% using their placement library at least monthly.

Use of specific learning resources whilst on placement

- When asked from which locations they used various learning resources, 65% of students replied that they accessed books in their placement venue and 75% books in the College library. The use of printed journals was spread fairly equally between placement libraries (47% of students) and the College library (56%). Students commented on the usefulness of small local collections of books, e.g. in a ward office. This raised concerns about the quality and currency of the books the students were using.

- Electronic resources such as e-journals and the web were accessed mainly from home.
- The majority of students (80%) had access to a PC at home and 45% access to a laptop. There was very little use of PDA/palmtops or tablets. 82% had access to the internet at home. Students with no internet access at home were obviously disadvantaged if they had problems with access in their placement venue.
- Most students studied at home rather than in their placement venue or the College library.

49% of students reported having difficulties accessing or using learning resources whilst on placement. The open questions provided more detailed insight into the difficulties faced by the students:

- Some reported that they were unable to borrow books from their placement library. They were rarely given out-of-hours access.
- A number of students reported difficulties accessing the College library because of the opening hours and their working patterns. Distance of the College from their home or placement venue was also a problem.
- Many students would have liked more time to use learning resources, visit a library or study, but their work schedule did not permit it.
- Denial of passwords to access the placement IT network and too few computers were important issues. However many students commented on good access to PCs and the web as being one of the positive experiences of their placement.

- Responses indicated that students were often unaware of the services offered by the libraries and IT services in their placement venue and in College.

The College library web site and National Core Content

- The College library web site was fairly well used, presumably mainly for accessing databases and other electronic resources, and renewing books.
- Only 33% of students were aware of the electronic resources available through the NHS National Core Content.

Staff support

- When asked whom they contacted for support in using learning resources, 76% of students cited NHS clinical staff, including the PPFs and clinical mentors. 55% asked their College tutors for help, 37% asked College library staff and 32% consulted NHS library staff. Comments were made about the helpfulness of the clinical staff and NHS library staff in providing and advising on suitable books and journals although many of these staff would not be familiar with resources and services offered by the College library.

Conclusion

The findings of the SMARTAL Project closely reflected those of the HENSAL and THESAL Projects and the issues raised by Marriott⁵ in his recent article on access to learning resources for students on placement. It provides the major stakeholders (SMC Faculty of Health and Social Care, SMC Library and IT services, the local NHS Trust

libraries and the local Strategic Health Authority) with evidence of the problems experienced by the students. The final report made several recommendations which, if implemented through cooperation between the College and NHS bodies, will improve resources, services and facilities to enhance the students' learning experience whilst they are on placement.

The full report is available on the SMC Library web site at www.ucsm.ac.uk/library.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank St Martin's College for funding sabbatical leave to conduct the project and the academic and administrative staff in St Martin's College Faculty of Health and Social Care for their assistance and cooperation. I would also like to thank the Information Management Research Institute at Northumbria University for permission to use the HENSAL project methodology and particularly Graham Walton for his help and advice. None of the above is responsible for the content of this paper.

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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