

To Helicon and Back

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Introduction

Many libraries in the NHS have achieved Helicon accreditation (National Library for Health, 2005) but not many in higher education institutions have applied. In 2004 two colleagues and myself at Northumbria University decided that our institution should apply. We felt that this would demonstrate our commitment to working with colleagues in the NHS, provide us with an opportunity to look at our standards, identify areas of good practice and where weaknesses could be addressed.

The School of Health, Community and Education Studies occupies a separate campus from the remaining Schools within the University and is situated about four miles from the main city campus. The School has approximately 6500 full and part time students, with about 350 academic staff delivering courses in education, pre and post registration midwifery, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and social work. Consequently we have a separate campus library serving the School. This campus library occupies a three storey building, incorporating a learning café, facilities for individual and

group study, has approximately 110,000 books, over 500 print journals, access to several thousand electronic journals and over 80 open access PCs. Library staff are structured into teams across the two campuses e.g. circulation, subject and liaison, learning support, with some staff campus based and others alternating between the two. Only this campus library serving the School of Health, Community and Education Studies was considered for accreditation. This is probably more straightforward than accrediting a section of a larger library serving a wider academic community. Being one of the first HE institutions to apply meant that there were few tips we could pick up from others' experiences.

Preparation

The date for the accreditation was agreed with the lead coordinator for June 2005. What we didn't know was that the colleague leading our application would depart for pastures new in February 2005, leaving two of us to "carry the can". Whilst no date is ever perfect, June 2005 coincided with the implementation of a major restructure of the library service in addition to our regular workload of ensuring library services ran as normal.

Our Assistant Director agreed in March that we could have part time administrative support, without which we would never have met the submission deadline.

Many of you will be familiar with the standards required to gain accreditation. We found it challenging to apply some of those standards to a large institution. Having scrutinised the standards document, we realised as part of a large institution that we had no

shortage of evidence to support our application, but were in danger of overwhelming the accreditation panel with paperwork. In the end each member of the panel received two bulging A4 ring files, accompanied by a USB stick with electronic versions and weblinks of the material wherever possible. A colleague and myself fed our administrative assistant with material for each heading and she collated it and made it presentable. It was interesting that some panel members were happy to return the ring binders, surprisingly no one returned the USB stick!

The School of Health, Education and Community Studies is undergoing major QAA review in spring 2006. A Major Review Coordinator (MRC) had already been appointed and the support we received from her and her administrative assistant proved invaluable. Having agreed with the Lead Reviewer the programme for the day, the MRC invited academic staff and students to meet with the panel. All senior academics who were available on the day agreed to attend. A cross section of teaching staff and students was acquired. Briefing sessions were held with them, the students being bribed with lunch! Library staff were also briefed about the day and for their meeting with the panel. We took the opportunity in the briefing sessions to explain that they would meet with the panel on the accreditation day and asked them to think about areas where they felt the library was good, issues which they felt needed addressing and where improvements could be made. Above all we asked them to be honest. The Director and Assistant Director of the Library and Learning Services both made themselves available for the day. Accommodation and catering for the day was organised.

Accreditation

The day itself was very stressful and a bit fraught. In fact it passed in a blur and we have only hazy recollections of exactly what happened.

Our panel consisted of four members – two NHS librarians, one higher education librarian and a member of the nursing profession. It was difficult keeping the panel to the timetable, which we felt we had to do when we had academic staff and students giving up their time to support us. Over twelve senior academics met with the panel and the teaching staff and students all attended.

Our Director generously agreed to provide lunch for everyone involved in the day. In the end because of overrunning, the Panel had a working lunch with the library team, which meant we were unable to join the academic staff and students in a separate room. Fortunately we had arranged for someone else to meet and greet.

As the day wore on we became less and less confident of the outcome, particularly when the panel took over an hour for their final discussion.

Outcomes

We were very fortunate to receive a Stage 3 accreditation, which means that we meet the essential criteria with significant evidence of excellence and innovation. This has obviously coloured our view of the whole process and made it a very worthwhile experience!! Any higher education institution should not be aiming to achieve less than this grade.

It brought the staff of the campus library together at a time of restructure where we were all working towards the same goal.

Everyone shared in the success. The whole library from the Director down supported us in providing time, staff and morale support. The gathering of evidence afforded us the opportunity to look at our documentation, our webpages, our services and resources and to reflect where we could improve.

We were taken aback by the willingness of the academic staff and students of the School to support us and by the congratulations which we received afterwards. The accreditation highlighted the importance of the role of the library to the success of the School and the very good working relationship between the School and the library and between the university and NHS libraries within the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Strategic Health authority.

The accreditation achieved by both ourselves and our local NHS colleagues has been documented as part of the Self Evaluation Document for the School Major Review.

The feedback from the Panel was very constructive and highlighted areas of good practice e.g. our in house database to onsite journals and government publications. We have been able to follow up several issues and implement recommendations e.g. we now talk to pre registration students just before they qualify and explain how they can continue to use the university library as NHS staff and promote continued access to electronic resources through the National Library for Health.

We learnt that on the day of the visit it is essential to have a member of staff not involved with meeting the panel to ensure the programme runs smoothly.

Overall the gain was worth the pain and we continue to strive to improve our services in preparation for reaccreditation in 2008.

National Library for Health (2005) Accreditation of Health Libraries
<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/librarian/accreditation.asp>

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) library and information service wins top award

The RCN library and information service was awarded the Best Public Sector Team Category at the International Information Industry Awards, (hosted by Online Information and Information World Review magazine) on the 30th November 2005. This was in recognition of their achievement in aiming to meet their users' needs. The recent RCN survey of nurses library and information needs was cited by judges as a key reason for achieving the award. LfN would like to congratulate the RCN library and information service and staff on gaining this award. Well done.

More information can be found on the RCN website at:

<http://www.rcn.org.uk/news/display.php?ID=1808>

and

<http://www.rcn.org.uk/news/display.php?ID=1810&area=Press>