

## **Can we show we make a difference? Yes, we can.**

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Every good trainer wants to know that their training has an impact – that those who attend actually remember and use the skills that are so carefully delivered. EEHIST are not exception.

The East of England Health Information Skills Trainers (EEHIST) is a subgroup of the East of England Confederations of Library and Knowledge Service Alliance. It was formed to encourage collaborative working and share best practice, knowledge and expertise in the area of health information skills training between the 31 NHS and joint NHS/HE libraries in the region.

Healthcare professionals are becoming increasingly aware of their need to access up-to-date, high quality information for Evidence Based Practice and their own CPD. Trainers within the group had been asked to show evidence that training delivered is effective, and for proof of impact on learners work, CPD, patient care etc. We realised that our existing feedback sheets were not collecting the information we wanted as they were collecting immediate responses after training

Following a limited project in the Essex group of libraries to evaluate training in 2005-7, EEHIST developed pre- and post-training assessment questionnaires. The aim was to establish the extent to which learners retain information and skills, if they make use of the resources and techniques that are the focus of the session, and whether they feel the training has had an impact on their work.

### **Background**

This Essex group of trainers were well placed to pilot the evaluation questionnaires because they had worked collaboratively prior to the Strategic Health Authority reorganisation in October 2006, and were already delivering uniform courses across their region. They had been using a "happy sheet" style of feedback gathering, which was completed immediately after the session had ended.

In April 2005 this group produced "Delivering Skills – Informing Practice"<sup>i</sup> – a paper based on the analysis of these feedback forms. Several recommendations arose from the paper, one of which was to redesign the training courses and review the format and method of evaluating these courses.

EEHIST as a group attended the CILIP Teaching Skills Training course facilitated by Sharon Markless in early 2006. Evaluation was briefly discussed as part of this course, as well as the merits of different types of questionnaires. These discussions evolved into a trial of the pre- and delayed post-training questionnaires which was carried out in Essex from April to September 2006.

These questionnaires were made available across the region from September 2006 onwards, but more universal take-up was not achieved till September 2007 by which time a policy of delivering more uniform training sessions across the region was realistic. The trial of the paper copies had highlighted a major problem with non-return of post training surveys, so the paper-based pilot was transferred into a web-based format using [www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com). we decided to use Survey Monkey so all responses could be collected, and of course analysed, electronically. This has certainly helped in gathering post-training forms.

We also learnt that even though we trialed the paper copies of the survey, transferring them to electronic copies revealed different issues in the layout and sequencing of questions that we need to address. It's also important to ensure SurveyMonkey is set to accept multiple responses from IP addresses – particularly relevant if a training room is used on a regular basis.

It was also important for each trainer to be able to access the feedback from their post-assessment forms in order to review and improve their own training practice and share knowledge and information with EEHIST colleagues.

### **The method**

All learners attending a training session between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008 must complete the appropriate (ie localised) pre-training questionnaire. Training sessions can be formal courses (ie group sessions) or more tailored one-to-one sessions which cover database searching. This meant the database available via Dialog Datastar, Pubmed, Cochrane Library, and Social Policy & Practice (a locally purchased resource). The pre-assessment questionnaire is either emailed out days before, or completed as part of the session, depending on the preference of the trainer

Anyone familiar with delivering library services to the NHS in recent times will be aware of the fatal flaw in this method: the fact that on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 the NLH launched Search 2.0. This meant that many of the trainers involved were scaling down their delivery of training in Dialog Datastar between January and April, and there was quite a long period of “transitional issues” around confident delivery of training in Search 2.0. However, we persevered.

Six weeks after the training session, learners were emailed with a link to the appropriate post-training questionnaire. This of course required that each trainer should keep adequate records of who attended the training and a valid email address.

Post-training questions focus particularly on whether learners feel the training they received has impacted upon their work and, ultimately, patient care. We were not trying to turn trainees into “expert searchers”, but we did want to know whether they

retained any learning once they returned to their workplaces, whether they then used any of the resources or techniques, and whether they felt the training had had any impact on their patient care and CPD activities.

We are aware that there are drawbacks to our method. The sample was "self – selecting". It was made up of people who had voluntarily attended training and so there was some desire to learn amongst respondents. In addition, the questionnaires were, by definition, a self-rating system. In an objective test, their skills might not be so well remembered as they believe.

The training sessions attended also varied – some people may have attended a half-day Finding the Evidence Course, others a more specific, targeted course, such as one covering Pubmed, or the NLH. This also meant not all resources mentioned in the pre- and post- surveys would have been covered in all training sessions. Drawbacks with regard the timing of this first run have already been acknowledged.

The six-week delay was selected specifically because we believe that any real learning of information skills happens over a long-term basis, and is reinforced by practice. Two systematic reviews (Brettell 2003<sup>ii</sup>; Garg & Turtle 2003<sup>iii</sup>) have already concluded that there is only limited evidence that training actually improves search skills. We hoped that the delayed completion of the post-training questionnaire would demonstrate that learners in the East of England retain sufficient understanding/knowledge/skills to build on their future

needs, and show that training has indeed made a difference to learners in the short term.

### The results

Preliminary results, which were presented at HLG in Cardiff in July 2008<sup>iv</sup>, have been encouraging. We had a 34% response rate (230 pre-training questionnaires completed, 78 post-training questionnaires returned). Not only had 71% of learners actually done a literature search after attending the training session, but their use of key search techniques such as use of subject headings, Boolean logic, truncation and major/explode features increased dramatically (anything from 74% increase for use of subject headings to an increase of 230% in use of Major/explode).

Since there are only so many conclusions that can be drawn from 74 responses, particularly during this very turbulent period, we have continued to gather data since the end of the initial six month project. We intend to review our results again in January 2009, so watch this space – we hope to have even more convincing evidence of the fact that our training sessions can make a difference.

<sup>i</sup> Essex Electronic Library Trainers. "Delivering Skills – Informing Practice" 2005. Accessible from: <http://www.eel.nhs.uk/eel/skillstraining.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Brettell, A. Information Skills Training: a systematic review of the Literature. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 2003, 20(1 Suppl): 3-9

<sup>iii</sup> Garg, A Turtle, K. Effectiveness of training health professionals in literature search skills using electronic health databases – a critical appraisal, *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 2003 20(1): 33-41

- <sup>1</sup> Evaluating your training - a pragmatic approach: the East of England experience  
– available from <http://www.cilip.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/9215F57C-605E-4DCE-B882-7109958CD633/0/Evaluatingyourtraining.ppt>