

## Work in Progress

# From secondary school to the world of work: the experience of evaluating Information Literacy skills development at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)

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## Background

The Department of **Learner Support** at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has a substantial background in survey, research and evaluation work<sup>1</sup>.

More recently this work has focused on the information literacy agenda as a result of the evaluation of the usage of electronic information services by staff and students at GCU<sup>2</sup> and as a result of the Drumchapel Project<sup>3</sup>. The original aim of the project was to evaluate the ICT skills of pupils there but the outcomes suggested the need for a strong focus on information literacy training among secondary school pupils.

## The way forward

The main finding common to all three studies was the strong emergence of an information literacy agenda and the need to develop strategies to manage and develop it. However what was equally clear was the need for a holistic vision. Much of the work being done in the HE sector is focused exclusively on the undergraduate but it is clear that what is needed is a strategy which links the secondary and the tertiary sectors and recognises the lifetime of work to come, an information literacy lifelong learning agenda in other words. This intimate link between information literacy and lifelong learning is recognised in the IFLA 2004 statement, *Information Literacy for lifelong learning*<sup>4</sup>.

The result of all this research has been to focus attention on an information literacy strategy which links secondary and tertiary education and encourages the secondary and tertiary sectors to work together.

## Overview of project

The **Information literacy skills – the link between secondary and tertiary education project** is an innovative national pilot to develop an information literacy framework with secondary and tertiary partners which, at the end of the project, can be rolled out to other participants. It will aim to produce secondary school leavers with a skill set which further and higher education can recognise and develop or which can be applied to the world of work directly.

The project started in December 2004 with a literature review<sup>5</sup> and although the literature did not indicate an overarching information literacy or skills strategy in place within the secondary or FE sector per se, there are a number of activities happening within individual local authorities, schools, colleges and public libraries that have been instigated by individuals, which reflected the increased activity on a national and international basis

### **Project objectives and outcomes**

- Identify student information literacy skills they bring to university
- Working with partners develop an information literacy framework extending from secondary into higher education
- Identify barriers to and constraints on the development of a national information literacy framework
- Test the link between information literacy, progression, and retention and the employability agenda
- Develop a viable, tested and piloted draft framework
- Creation of expertise which can be rolled out further in secondary and tertiary sectors
- Contribute to:
  - curriculum development in Scotland
  - the teaching and learning of information literacy skills within education
  - the understanding of the role of information literacy in the progression / retention and employability agendas
  - information literacy research within tertiary and secondary education
  - the development of the secondary / tertiary interface by encouraging partnership activity

### **Identification of information literacy skills, if any which students bring to university**

To achieve this objective the decision was taken to hold interviews with university subject / academic librarians plus run focus groups with first year students.

Interviews with seven subject / academic librarians from Glasgow, Strathclyde and Glasgow Caledonian Universities concluded that that the level of skills varied depending on the student, the course and the school they come from plus home life. With poor or limited skills generally in the following areas:

- Knowing the different types of information; where information comes from; how it is generated; published etc. and how to use it
- Search strategies, searching in depth or beyond what's available
- Evaluating information found plus critical thinking.

These findings concur with other research in this area<sup>6</sup> and therefore came as no surprise, reinforcing our belief that information literacy skills should begin at school.

Organising focus groups with first year students has proved problematic. Although universities have a large cohort of first year students, access to them is restricted by many schools particularly during term time. Fortunately a friendly academic gave us access to his second year full time and third year part time property management students. From these two focus groups we found the following:

- Information sources – have access to lecture material and reading list, plus pointed in direction of websites and other sources but tend to use the Internet / search engine with little or no use of databases.

(One group showed more knowledge of specialised websites and that independent use produced better results. Other group seemed to pick things up haphazardly and tended to stick to what they know.)

- Sources used at work (part time students) - different to those used at university.
- Evaluation techniques – e.g. matching / skimming for key words, ‘sort of know what you are looking for’
- Skills developed since coming to university – ethics i.e. the need to reference everything, copyright

Again the findings didn’t produce any startling revelations. A further tranche of focus groups have been set up with a group of first year students at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and 6<sup>th</sup> year pupils at two schools in North Ayrshire. It will be interesting to see the outcome of these focus groups and to compare them with the results of the research carried out on teachers<sup>7</sup> and lecturers<sup>8</sup> perceptions of information literacy.

### **Developing an information literacy framework**

The original plan was to map information literacy skills to the curriculum and then to an information literacy framework. However as a result of the current Scottish curriculum review<sup>9</sup> a meeting took place with the curriculum review team to investigate what was happening and to ascertain the role of information literacy within the curriculum.

The outcome was that:

- the curriculum was being fundamentally changed with the main focus being a move towards a 3–18 curriculum that will declutter the curriculum (which is currently very prescriptive) and have cohesion and progression
- we need to demonstrate a link between information literacy and cohesion and progression for information literacy to be considered as part of the new curriculum
- we need to clarify the confusion about study skills, library skills, information skills, information handling skills, information literacy
- those interested in information literacy need to input into the curriculum review, raise information literacy’s profile and lobby for its inclusion in the curriculum.

Welcome support has come from an unexpected quarter in a recent interim report by HM Inspectors of Education in Scotland on the Integration of Information and Communication Technology. Information literacy was specifically mentioned along with a definition of the term and its importance plus lack of application. The report identifies that 'Few schools had systematic approaches to developing *information literacy* to ensure that all pupils acquired this set of skills progressively as part of their passport of core and life skills.' As part of the conclusions relating to curricular planning it states that

Schools should ensure that:

- pupils ultimately achieve a cohesive ICT skills set, to prepare them for the world of tertiary education or work including information literacy skills;<sup>10</sup>

The report was published in advance of an invitation to Directors of Education and other senior personnel in education authorities by Learning and Teaching Scotland, SEED (Scottish Executive Education Department) and HMIE to an "ICT Summit". Hopefully it will as the Chief HM Inspector states 'stimulate thinking at that event and more generally among all with an interest and responsibility for this area.'

### **Discussions with SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework)**

As the project could no longer map information literacy skills to the existing curriculum alternative strategies needed to be identified and investigated. One alternative is that of the existing Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)<sup>11</sup>. A useful meeting took place with the development officer and discussions are ongoing regarding the possibility of using their framework to create our information literacy framework. SCQF partners include key players within Scotland, the framework is nationally recognised so it would lend authority to our framework.

Interestingly new guidelines have been produced for recognising prior learning (RPL) and having read over the guidelines we feel there are similarities with information literacy in that we see the SCQF providing the opportunity for:

- gaining recognition for learning that is happening but is not credited
- defining this learning in terms of statements of skills, knowledge and understanding (the provision of evidence to support this learning is already used for assessment purposes for the subject matter which in many cases has been provided through information literacy skills and competencies e.g. within learning activities, assignments, project work etc through information retrieval, research activities, bibliographies, references, evaluation of information, communication of findings)
- supporting a continuing learning process through identifying a learning pathway within the context of SCQF as part of an educational guidance or personal development planning process
- mapping the existing learning that is taking place within the context of SCQF allocating a notional level to learning outcomes utilising relevant reference points such as the SCQF generic level descriptors with the intention of providing a general shared understanding of each level which can then be linked to academic, vocational or professional practice

- the notional levelling process and outcomes becoming transparent and clearly understood by other learning providers, receiving organisations and or employers to meet the needs of the learner more effectively.

The majority of learning with reference to information literacy is taking place in all sectors – secondary, tertiary and lifelong learning as stated above without receiving credit for the learning. This learning is being achieved through sessions offered by librarians / learning resource co-ordinators within the sectors, material and online learning objects designed to facilitate learning e.g.

- Information Handling Skills online learning material cross sector project<sup>12</sup>
- Learning Teaching Scotland – information skills exemplar material<sup>13</sup>  
New information literacy skills material is being launched; this material will be available to schools via the NGfL (National Grid for Learning)
- North Ayrshire Education Resource Service – Information Literacy Toolkit (provides a progressive outline of the literacy and information literacy skills expected at levels A-E within the 5-14 curriculum and provides a range of generic classroom materials to reinforce skills being taught by teachers and the Primary Education Resource Co-ordinators in North Ayrshire Council.)<sup>14</sup>

There have been recent developments in crediting information literacy learning e.g.

- SQA's Information Handling Skills Intermediate level 2 national qualification (provides automatic certification of the Complete Core Skills for the Unit: Problem Solving Intermediate 2)
- University of Abertay's degree programme now has information literacy embedded within its degree course and students will graduate with information literacy included in the degree. Glasgow Caledonian University is currently looking at the development of a formal information skills programme for students and staff.

We envisage therefore that we could use the Information Handling Skills Intermediate 2 = SCQF level 5 as a starting point and develop the other levels from there using the skills and competences identified by CILIP information literacy group to develop the level descriptors and show progression. This progression would then be of relevance to the 3 – 18 curriculum which is currently being developed.

### **Identification of barriers to and constraints on the development of a national IL framework**

We have certainly come across barriers to and constraints on the development of a national information literacy framework. One of the main problems so far apart from the curriculum review has been the problem of funding bodies recognising the significance of this work and difficulties in attracting funding has resulted in the project running on a three day week.

In addition if information literacy is to gain the recognition we aspire to them we need to take it into the educational and political arena.

## **Petition to the Scottish Parliament**

This idea had been mentioned by Chris Milne (University of Abertay) and was subsequently investigated by the authors who identified that before you can petition the Scottish Parliament you need to raise your issue with the Scottish Executive department concerned or your MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament). The decision was taken to take the MSP route as there is no single department within the Scottish Executive with responsibility for information literacy. A very helpful committee clerk suggested a title for an e-petition

**"Petition by Dr John Crawford calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that the national school curriculum recognises the importance of information literacy as a key lifelong learning skill."<sup>15</sup>**

The e-petition as we write this article is up on the parliament website and the number of signatures from both within and outwith Scotland is encouraging (615 at the last count). The petition closes on the 16<sup>th</sup> December and the indications are good that it will be selected as one of six petitions (three of which can make personal representation if they wish) to be considered by the Petitions Committee which meets on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2005. In addition the MSP has raised a question in the Scottish Parliament. News of these activities will be circulated in due course.

### **As to the rest of our objectives and outcomes –**

Due to the cross sector nature of the project the exchange of information between the different education sectors has been welcomed by all the parties involved and has highlighted that there are common threads within all sectors and that sectors can learn from each other if there is dialogue and the sharing of experiences. The link between information literacy, progression and retention and the employability agenda is still to be tested and explored to see whether information literacy supports these agendas. Learning Teaching Scotland has promised some funding to undertake research within the work environment. This part of the project will be linked to one of the authors (Christine Irving) recent commencement of a GCU work based MSc in Lifelong Learning and Development.

While the original objectives of the project remain valid two new strands have emerged:

- Advocacy as evidenced by the petition to the Scottish Parliament
- The need to recognise the lifelong learning agenda. It is necessary to look beyond education and research how the information literacy agenda is carried over into the world of work.

We hope this provides you with a flavour and insight into the work we have been involved in with the project and would be happy to engage in discussions with any interested parties.

- 1 <http://www.learningservices.gcal.ac.uk/library/research/index.html>
- 2 J. Crawford et al. Use and awareness of electronic information services by students at Glasgow Caledonian University: a longitudinal study, *Journal of librarianship and information science*, forthcoming.
- 3 McLelland, Dorothy and Crawford, John (2004) The Drumchapel Project: a study of ICT usage by school pupils and teachers in a secondary school in a deprived area of Glasgow, *Journal of librarianship and information science*, 36, (2), pp. 55-67.
- 4 <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/papers/116e-Abid.pdf>
- 5 See Crawford, John & Irving, Christine (2005) The research agenda. *Library + Information Update*, 4(1-2), pp. 48-49
- 6 Susie Andretta. *Information literacy: a practitioner's guide*. Chandos Publishing, Oxford, 2005 p.p. 8-9
- 7 Dorothy Williams, Robert Gordon University  
Teachers' conceptions of information literacy in relation to their classroom practice  
<http://www.rgu.ac.uk/abs/research/page.cfm?pge=13088>
- 8 Universities of Sheffield and Strathclyde – Sheila Webber & Bill Johnston  
UK academics' conceptions of, and pedagogy for, information literacy  
<http://dis.shef.ac.uk/literacy/project/>
- 9 A Curriculum for Excellence <http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/>
- 10 October 2005 <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/EvICT%20Final%2018%20Oct.html> 4.14.  
see also 5.29, 8.1 and 9.9
- 11 See [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk) for information about the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- 12 <http://www.sfeu.ac.uk/defaultpage131bcd0.aspx?pageID=943> and  
<http://www.slainte.org.uk/infohandling/index.htm>
- 13 <http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/5to14/features/informationkills/resources.asp>
- 14 Contact Audrey Sutton, North Ayrshire Education Resource Service [nacers@netcentral.co.uk](mailto:nacers@netcentral.co.uk) for further information
- 15 See <http://www.learningservices.gcal.ac.uk/ils/petition.html> for information about the petition to the Scottish Parliament

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