

Digital literacy and employability activities

Introduction

At Leeds Beckett University, we have chosen to define digital literacy as “the confident and critical use of information and digital technologies to enhance academic, personal and professional development.” Formally adopted as one of three Graduate Attributes in 2011, this definition encompasses a variety of skills and capabilities which include information literacy, digital scholarship, media literacy, computer literacy, communication and collaboration, academic practice and professional development planning.

This definition was deliberately broad in scope and combines many elements of good practice taking place across the University. It is recognised that there is a need to ensure that students have a firm understanding of how the skills learned at University translate into a work context and that they are able to confidently state what it means to be digitally literate in an interview or to a prospective employer.

In the process of embedding digital literacy across the curriculum, Libraries and Learning Innovation (LLI) have run a number of sessions with students both embedded in the curriculum, and as part of the University’s employability activities, with the aim of raising awareness on how the skills developed as part of their work could be utilised in both searching for employment and in their career. This paper outlines some of the areas of good practice developed as part of this aim.

Employability skills in the creative arts

Our Academic Librarians for Art, Architecture & Design; Cultural Studies & Humanities; Film & Performing Arts, ran sessions during University employability events on taking forward research skills acquired during university into the workplace. This built on work previous sessions they had delivered around employability and research skills for the Design course. During the session they talked about what is meant by research or information skills and their importance in the workplace. They gave examples, featured in the media, of the consequences where companies, individuals and government bodies had failed to undertake thorough research. They also looked at examples of jobs in the creative industries, and highlight where these jobs mention research skills. A group work activity asked students to take a practical workplace scenario (e.g. a documentary pitch to a producer or landscape design brief to a client), do some research and demonstrate what they have found, where, and critically evaluate the quality of their information. Students were asked to discuss how to make information skills more explicit on a CV and also about an appropriate online identity with regard to social media.

The Music librarian also ran sessions during University employability events on researching for the right job in the music industry and having found that job, how to keep abreast of the fast moving world of the music industry.

Free legal sources

Our Law Librarians created a session on using free legal sources following graduation. Graduates might find their first job after university is with a small legal firm which does not have access to expensive databases, so the session was devised to give them an overview of the good quality freely available legal sources available to them even after they leave university. There was also opportunity to discuss with students how their digital identity might represent them. LinkedIn was highlighted as a good quality professional space, and guidance was given on how to manage their social media to reflect positively on them.

<http://www.slideshare.net/Jenloo82/free-uk-law-sources2015>

Networking for business students

This session showed how students can engage with professional tools like LinkedIn and Blogs to proactively research and widen their opportunities in the job market. The session covered how to approach specialists, how to promote yourself on social media, and how to make connections. It also covered useful sites for vacancies, and information about careers support and access to other libraries.

Investigating career choices through the use of business resources

Academic Librarians within the Carnegie Faculty ran a variety of sessions during University employability events on how they might utilise business information to research areas of interest and to identify potential employers. Advice on how to articulate digital literacy skills to an employer (through an application form, CV or in an interview) was given, as well an overview of where they could access quality information for their jobs after they had graduated from University.

Employability, Evidence Based Practice and Digital literacy in Health

Professional Resources

At a one-to-one student appointment with a Speech and Language Therapy student and one of the Health and Social Sciences Academic Librarians, the student highlighted that the whole cohort would benefit from a similar session. This led to discussions with academic staff regarding the library input into the Transition to Professional Practice module, and about establishing a connection between digital literacy skills acquired at University and the necessary core evidence based practice skills of health professionals.

Health professionals must be able to find appropriate information and possess the required research skills both at University and whilst in employment. Sessions were run to highlight the importance of being evidence based practitioners, finding the best evidence to support clinical reasoning and the benefits that this has in terms of continuing professional development, keeping up to date, patient experience and governance. The session delivered by the academic librarian had two learning objectives: to highlight University subscription resources available to students to help them prepare for their dissertation, and also to address the need to raise awareness of freely available, good quality resources which students can continue to use in their professional roles after graduation. Feedback from the session was very positive.

Students commented that they were unaware that resources such as TRIP and NHS Evidence Search, and Behind the Headlines, were available to use alongside the University Resource Discovery Tool. A quote from a member of staff stated, “It was an excellent session and I look forward to working more with you to integrate your excellent input into all levels”.

PICO – turning a clinical scenario into a searchable question

Sessions have also been designed around the need to formulate a good quality searchable question and translate clinical situations into a research question using the PICO formula (Patient/ Population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome). Discussions with health librarians in the community, and a recommendation from a student placement mentor, led to the development of a session which focussed around using PICO to formulate a research question. Students were asked to identify keywords in an assignment question. Then they were given a clinical scenario and were asked to identify the most significant points of a situation which formed the basis of keyword searching. The scenario was that of a patient with mobility problems who struggled to walk very far and as a result was suffering from feelings of depression and loneliness.

Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcome
Mobility problems & isolation.	Community exercise programme	Individual or other exercise programmes	Reduce loneliness & depression

Research question formulated were, for example, ‘Amongst patients with mobility problems suffering from isolation, does the use of a community exercise programme as opposed to an individual rehabilitation classes reduce feelings of loneliness and depression?’. When students had structured their question, they identified their keywords and used these as the basis to search in the same way as they would an assignment question.

Student feedback indicated that after the PICO session, the link between research skills and employment was starting to be established. The timing of the PICO session is crucial and often serves as part of a refresher session for Level 5 (second year) students. This is because students need to have basic searching skills as well as a developing knowledge of their subject and relevant work experience to get the most out of the session. In order to make the class more relevant, future discussions will encourage students to reflect upon a placement situation where they could use the PICO acronym to formulate a question.

IT skills and employability

Our Academic Skills Tutor for IT runs workshops on employability and online identity, some of which are situated within University employability events. The workshops stress the importance of keeping students’ personal online presence separate from their professional one and cover how to create an online identity to enhance employability. Students take part in activities and explore links to help them build a positive online identity. The tutor also delivers workshops on using Excel in the office and on mind mapping using the software package Inspiration. Mind mapping is a useful employability skill in solving problems or generating ideas and in organising information.

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