

Developing a new co-ordinated approach to information literacy at the University of Chester



Charlotte Gleeson
Senior Librarian
Learning and Information Services
University of Chester
c.gleeson@chester.ac.uk



Paul Verlander
Senior Librarian
Learning and Information Services
University of Chester
p.verlander@chester.ac.uk



Jon Hardisty
Site Librarian and Subject Librarian for Science & Engineering
Learning and Information Services
University of Chester
j.hardisty@chester.ac.uk

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Introduction

To enhance the quality of our information literacy provision and engagement with the taught curriculum at the University of Chester, our subject librarians completed a year-long project during 2015–16 to review our contribution to teaching and learning in the faculties. This article describes the different elements of the project, which has culminated in developing a new framework for information literacy at Chester.

Background to information literacy teaching at the University of Chester

Academic liaison at Chester is provided by seven subject teams supporting our eight academic faculties. However, provision is dispersed across our nine campuses in the north west of England, with subject teams operating out of nine different libraries. Library staff have a long tradition of contributing to the taught curriculum at Chester. During the academic year 2014–15, over five hundred taught sessions were delivered by library subject teams. Taught content ranged from basic inductions to new undergraduates through to workshops on complex literature searching and reference management. The majority of sessions delivered were integrated into the timetabled curriculum. Despite the wealth of good examples of engagement with teaching and learning by our subject teams, the fact that these teams are so geographically dispersed has, over time, made it difficult to take a co-ordinated approach. As the university has expanded and the department has become more dispersed, the risk of inconsistencies developing in terms of our offering has increased. In order to improve the standing of information literacy teaching in the institution, it is important to develop an institution-wide understanding of what skills all students, irrespective of discipline, require at each level in relation to their effective use of information.

The need for a co-ordinated, embedded approach to information literacy will be more pertinent in light of the requirements of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate how engaging students with library resources can make a positive contribution to the institution's teaching and learning. Equally, it is incumbent on the library to demonstrate how our learning resources contribute to the wider learning environment.¹ The effectiveness of learning resources is dependent on student engagement with those resources, not just whether or not they are provided, hence the need for a more co-ordinated approach to information literacy.

Information literacy projects 2016

Commencing in November 2015, all thirty staff from our library subject teams were assigned to one of three project teams. These were self-managing teams in terms of appointing their own team leader and team secretary and drew their members from different subject teams. Each team was tasked with looking at our information literacy provision for different academic levels:

- first-year undergraduate students new to university
- progression in skills required from second-year undergraduate through to degree completion
- support for postgraduate and research students

An overall project manager was appointed from the subject teams and was tasked with ensuring that the three teams took a consistent approach and delivered outputs on time. Each team was tasked with delivering three work packages over an eight-month period:

- a review of best practice
- a collection of shared, standardised learning objects

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- a series of agreed specific learning outcomes for information literacy at that level

The project documentation was administered through a new team site on our departmental intranet to which all project teams could contribute.

Review of best practice

This work package consisted of reviewing best practice in terms of information literacy in our own institution and developments in the wider sector. The first step towards developing a more co-ordinated approach to our teaching was to audit what input to the curriculum was currently taking place across the faculties. Therefore each team audited the sessions delivered across the different faculties at their assigned academic level. This enabled them to identify both good practice currently employed and gaps in provision. Each team was also tasked with developing case studies of innovative practice at other institutions.

Shared learning objects

A key tangible, practical output of the projects was the development of a repository of learning objects, which was hosted on the information literacy intranet site. In total, the teams compiled fifty learning objects across eight topic areas that could be reused or repurposed for information literacy teaching in any discipline. Learning objects came in a variety of form and media and included a wide variety of content such as YouTube clips, interactive games, worksheets and quizzes, diagnostics and lesson plans. This repository is continually being added to and is a tangible and practical legacy of the project that can assist our staff with their teaching.



Andy Mitchell, Fruit stall at Barcelona market, 3 Oct 2008, (CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



Metadata proforma for learning resources.

| Name | | Fruit slide |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Level | | Suitable for all levels |
| Theme | Highlight as appropriate | Distinguishing between sources Evaluating information on the free web Searching the web Selecting keywords Database searching tips Copyright Peer review/journal publishing Reference management |
| Duration | In minutes | Less than 5 |
| Preparation time/ equipment | | Already prepared, just needs to be added to a presentation |
| Group size | | Any |
| Instructions for use | | Can be used with or without the slide showing alternative keywords. It is intended as a questioning resource. Ask the students what they see. This then allows you to expand on this and talk about synonyms. |
| Object type | Highlight as appropriate | Game Interactive group exercise Worksheet Quiz Video |
| Learning outcome mapping | Paste full text of appropriate learning outcomes | Strand 5 Understand importance of keyword selection in producing effective search results. |
| Originator's initials | Person to contact in case of queries about the learning resource | |

An example of a learning object and metadata

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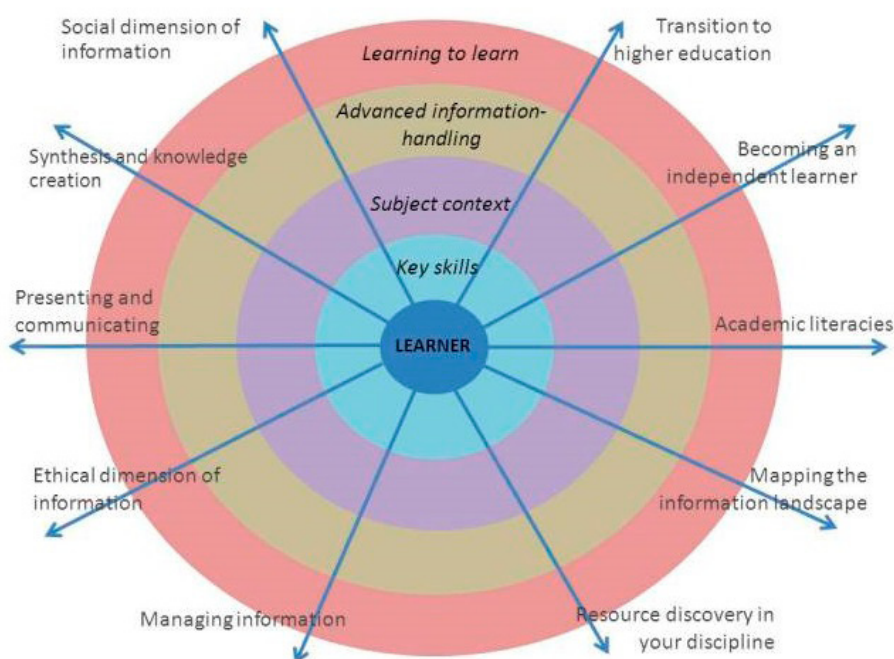
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Learning outcomes

The aim of developing a framework of cross-disciplinary information literacy learning outcomes was not only to provide better co-ordination and consistency in our own teaching practice, but also to present the wider university with a joined-up departmental approach that aligned our offering more closely with the learning and teaching requirements of the TEF.

Developing a new framework

Learning outcomes were developed for academic levels 4 – 7 (first-year undergraduate to postgraduate taught). For reasons of academic credibility, it was important that what was developed was transparently mapped to best practice in the wider sector, in the form of national frameworks for information literacy. Both the SCONUL Seven Pillars² and A New Curriculum for Information Literacy (ANCIL)³ were considered. In the end it was decided to develop learning outcomes explicitly mapped to ANCIL. However, the framework can also be mapped to the Seven Pillars model if required.



ANCIL Framework. Secker & Coonan (2011)

Ideas for learning outcomes were generated by teams for each of the academic levels. This work was then consolidated in a workshop of project team leaders where the learning outcomes generated by teams were fitted together and mapped appropriately to the ANCIL framework. The framework is designed to build students' skills incrementally throughout the academic levels. At level 4 (1st year undergraduate) this starts with developing an understanding of credible sources for degree-level academic work. As students progress they will understand more complex concepts such as searching for a literature review. By level 7 (taught postgraduate), it is expected that they will be highly information literate and able to manage complex information effectively and understand concepts such as information ethics and intellectual property.

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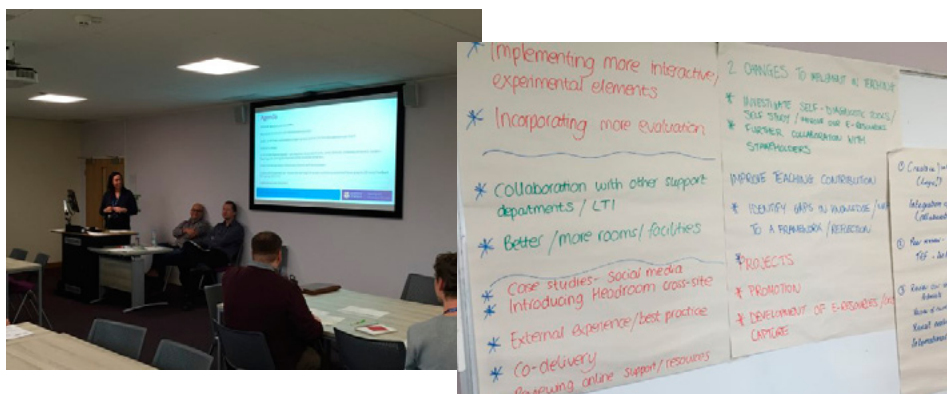
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| ANCIL | | Our learning outcome | | | |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strand | Strand content | Level 4 | Level 5 | Level 6 | Level 7 |
| 5 | Finding and using specialist forms of information | Understand importance of keyword selection in producing effective search results. | Analyse your topic and be able to identify an appropriate range of keywords to inform your search strategy. Construct advanced search strategies to deliver appropriate sets of results. | R | R |
| 5 | Going beyond the key finding aids | n/a | Identify the most appropriate subject specific resources. | R | R |
| 6 | Storing information effectively | Develop basic strategies for managing the information sources you collect for your work. | Decide on and implement appropriate information management techniques suitable for your discipline. | R | R |
| 6 | Develop appropriate strategies for current awareness in your field | n/a | n/a | n/a | Develop a range of strategies to keep up-to-date with the current literature in your discipline. |

Information literacy learning outcomes framework (extract)

Chester Information Literacy Conference 2016

The culmination of the information literacy projects was a one-day internal conference in September 2016. All subject teams attended and presented the findings of their case studies, the new learning outcomes were presented to the teams and an external speaker delivered a workshop. We used this time and space to plan how we would integrate the learning outcomes into our practice and generate ideas for our second series of information literacy projects, which are running this academic year.



Chester Information Literacy Conference 2016

Next steps and implementation of the framework

During the academic year 2016–17, all subject teams have been tasked with auditing their existing taught sessions to ascertain the extent to which they are aligned to the learning outcomes in the new framework. It is anticipated that by September 2017 any taught sessions that library staff deliver as part of the curriculum will be explicitly mapped to the central framework. Having started to establish better patterns of collaborative working across our dispersed subject teams, it is important that this new more co-ordinated approach does not lose impetus. As of winter 2016 we are in the process of launching a new series of information literacy projects for the current academic year. These will be directly based on the aspirational areas that our subject teams identified at our own internal staff conference.

We hope that both the framework developed and our continued information literacy projects will make tangible improvements to the quality of our teaching. We are also keen that the central framework will provide an opportunity to boost the importance of information literacy teaching at institution level and prepare us to support learning and teaching in the post-

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TEF environment. To this end, the new framework was presented at the university-wide staff conference in September 2016 at a session very well attended by academic staff. Using this as an impetus, we are now working with the university's careers and employability department to map our information literacy framework explicitly to the employability skills framework. The learning outcomes framework is being developed into a refreshed information literacy strategy for the department. We seek to integrate it formally into the curriculum baseline in the future.

References

- 1 SCONUL (2016). SCONUL response to TEF technical consultation for year two [online]. Available from: http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/SCONUL_Response_TEF_technical_consultation_June2016.pdf [accessed 28 November 2016]
- 2 SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy (2011). The SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy: core model for higher education [online] Available from: <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/coremodel.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2016]
- 3 Secker, J. & Coonan, E. (2011). A new curriculum for information literacy [online]. Available from: http://ccfil.pbworks.com/f/ANCLIL_final.pdf [accessed 28 November 2016]

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