

Petition PE902: 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, presented to the Petitions Committee on 21st December 2005.

Comments on the responses sent to the Petitions Committee and forwarded to me in a letter dated 7/6/06. Text written by John Crawford and Christine Irving, both of Learner Support Department, Glasgow Caledonian University and Chris Milne, University of Abertay.

Background to our comments

Our petition was a consequence of our research project: Information literacy: the link between secondary and tertiary education. See URL <http://www.learningservices.gcal.ac.uk/ils/index.html>. The project set out with the original intention of developing an information literacy training framework which would link the secondary and the tertiary sectors but we early recognised that it was vital to include the post education situation because of the important role of information literacy in the workplace. It is therefore an ‘all through project’ which takes account of lifelong learning as well as scholastic education. It is important to emphasise this point as it does not seem to be fully understood by some respondents, notably the Educational Institute of Scotland (See below). A feature of the project is that we have established cross sectoral partnerships with most library sectors and educational activists in this area. This includes school librarians and we passed the responses to representatives of school librarians and their thinking is reflected in our comments. We would emphasise that the school librarians views are the same as those of Christine, Chris and myself as laid out below. We offer comments on specific respondents and conclude with overview comments.

Comments on specific responses

Scottish Executive Education Department

This statement is identical to those we have previously received from the Scottish Executive and shows no evidence of new thinking in this area.

1 The curriculum is non statutory – this offers the opportunity to make information literacy a core skill but this opportunity has not, in practice been taken up.

2 Whilst the Information and Communications Technology 5-14 guidelines do contain a searching and researching strand relating to elements of information literacy (where to search, how to search, how to extract information, how to evaluate the results). Research and comments from our partners within all education sectors along with those of HM Inspectorate of Education show that the above strand is not addressing the issues of information literacy. Pupils and students in general do not search in depth or beyond what is available nor do they critically evaluate the information they find for bias, accuracy, relevance, currency etc. and plagiarism is a major problem particularly in relation to copying and pasting from websites. In addition as this relates solely to ICT sources of information it creates an over reliance on the Internet solely as a resource and ignores print (books, newspapers, journals etc.) and people, which are still invaluable sources of information.

Response from HM Inspectorate of Education

This is the most supportive and positive of responses and we note the following ‘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’. We note the reference to a *Curriculum for Excellence* but must emphasise that because information literacy can be intermittently identified in the curriculum this does not mean that it is recognised as a core skill.

Educational Institute of Scotland

Factual inaccuracies and incorrect assumptions:

3 ‘The petitioner ignores the role of primary and nursery schools’. Whilst our project originated with the link between secondary and tertiary education we are, through our research and partners (North Ayrshire and Edinburgh), fully aware of work in this area and indeed said so while presenting our petition on 21st December.

4 ‘Without considering the contribution or responsibility of higher education.’ This is wholly incorrect. HE is a key component of our work. See URL listed above.

5 ‘Secondly the development of information literacy as described by the petitioner is already central to practice at most levels of education in Scotland’ Under para 9 the EIS evidence lists in detail components of the curriculum where information literacy appears but this is a tacit admission that it is not recognised as an explicit skill. *Central* is certainly not appropriate. (See below).

14 ‘it appears to be the petitioner’s implicit view that school is primarily a preparation for later study and learning’. We consider information literacy to be an essential core skill which can be directly applied in the post school education and or work situation. This understanding is a consequence of our work with our partners both in secondary, tertiary and lifelong learning.

15 ‘a great deal of work to extend and develop practice... which relates to information literacy’. We are familiar with all the activism in this area and indeed those active and we consider this an overstatement. We would welcome a list of the bibliographical references which give objective support to this statement.

17 ‘It is surprising that the petitioner... makes no reference to such sources as SEED or Learning and Teaching Scotland.’ We have been in touch with SEED and the Curriculum for Excellence Team and are in regular contact with Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and indeed others. We have just completed research on information literacy in the workplace funded by LTS and are in regular touch with staff based there. We have also had discussions with SQA and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. We have recently been awarded funding by Eduserve to develop an information literacy framework linking the secondary and tertiary sectors and will be working with SCQF. We have been closely following HM Inspectorate positive attitude to information literacy and will be in contact with them shortly. EIS does not mention learndirect Scotland for whom we have undertaken contract work in relation to the development of an information literacy learning principles paper (best practice guide) for their branded learning centre’s learning principles toolkit

(<http://www.lds4partners.com/Resources/Our+publications/Learning+Principles/Learning+Principles+Toolkit.htm>).

18 'very selectively informed about the current position in Scottish schools'. I hope the corrections above refute this 'interesting' statement. With regard to 'his proposed solution is unnecessary given policy and practice... and the opportunities available'. The 'opportunities' may be available but all the evidence collected by us and that supplied by our partners shows that these 'opportunities' are not being taken up.

Points of substance

10 'Information literacy is also central to the Standard grade programme...' While this is true in general terms information literacy is not specifically recognised as such.

11 'S5/6 National Qualifications... inclusion of such skills... also *possible* to develop these skills. Many pupils, especially in non academic schools, do not progress to these levels of work. While it is 'possible to develop these skills' in practice it only happens in a few schools.

12 *Curriculum for excellence*. a-j. While these are information literacy skills they are implicit in the Curriculum, not explicit. **This is a significant barrier and one of the central pillars / motivation behind our submission.**

Summing up EIS evidence

Essentially what the EIS evidence does is to identify where information is implicit in the Curriculum and claims that this means that information literacy exists as a discrete teachable skill which is not the case. In practice what is happening is that a few school librarians are working with sympathetic teachers to exploit the opportunities which currently exist by driving ideas forward. These initiatives represent the exception, not the rule and certainly should not be confused with a policy.

As Dorothy Williams at Robert Gordon University's recent research study into – *Information Literacy in the classroom: Secondary School Teacher's Conceptions* (<http://www.rgu.ac.uk/files/ACF4DAA.pdf>) show:

'The results of the study indicate that teachers understood information literacy to be important for lifelong learning but do not feel able to effectively support the development of information literacy in their students within their current curriculum environments.'

She also notes that:

'The current educational context was seen as a further barrier to information literacy development. Teachers felt constrained by overloaded curriculum content, with timetables too tight to allow time for information literacy skills development. They felt pressured by formulaic structures for exams and were reluctant to take risks that would they would not be able to justify in terms of assessment grades.'

indicating that the current curriculum structure is inimical to information literacy skills development.

Learning and Teaching Scotland

We welcome the positive tone of this response: specifically:

1 'The on-going curriculum review provides opportunities for engagement with education professionals and interested parties.' We are actively engaged in this as indicated above including North Ayrshire with whom we have been working since the beginning of the Project.

'not yet a single commonly accepted definition of information literacy' We have been using the one proposed by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) which we presented to the Petitions Committee last December (<http://www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/informationliteracy/definition/>). Using the contacts we have built up we are raising awareness of what information literacy is and taking account of other views on the subject. This includes recently developed contacts with Ofcom in Scotland.

'A basic understanding... is probably best gained during the primary school years. We fully support this and again draw attention to the work of our partners, North Ayrshire and Edinburgh, in this area.

'This could then be reinforced and extended as the student progressed towards tertiary education and working life'. This is exactly what our research project is about.

'Information skills 'learning objects''. Whilst there are some excellent material available, take up has been patchy due to a number of factors including the varying standards of technology within schools resulting in schools being unable to access the material (SSDN should hopefully resolve this problem), the pressure on teachers to cover the present curriculum which does not explicitly recognise information literacy and therefore not generally included within their learning and teaching.

Professional development. We agree with this. Our research on information literacy in the workplace, funded by LTS, has shown the importance of information literacy in CPD and has contributed to teachers CPD.

Universities Scotland

While we warmly welcome this general statement of support we would have appreciated a little more detail.

Scottish Qualifications Authority

Information Literacy in Existing Qualifications

'SQA has already recognised the importance of information literacy as a key lifelong learning skill' They have through their participation with the Information Handling Skills cross sector project which developed online material for post 16 and lifelong learners (<http://www.slainte.org.uk/Infohandling/about.htm>) subsequently with the development of an SQA national unit qualification at Intermediate Level 2 (DF9J 11 http://www.sqa.org.uk/files/nu/DF9J_11.pdf), this unit provides automatic certification of: Problem Solving Intermediate 2; Critical Thinking Intermediate 2; Reviewing and Evaluating intermediate 2; Planning and Organising Intermediate 2. In addition accompanying assessments (NAB) to the qualification were developed however with little or no promotion of the qualification the take up has been minimal and only where librarians have instigated initiatives.

Rather like the EIS evidence much of the evidence from SQA is a recitation of where information literacy appears within the context of subject specific teaching. The references to Advanced Highers and Latin and Greek are largely irrelevant as very few pupils study at this level and certainly not, in non-academic schools.

English 'Use of sources would be an *option*' - therefore not compulsory.

The general point is that both school pupils and students have difficulty with skills learnt in one subject which they can transfer to another which is why discrete skills training is needed. There is also in practice a skills gap between age 14 (School librarians often teach basic skills to S1/2) and entry into FE/HE and skills previously learned are forgotten or considered irrelevant as they are not reinforced throughout their studies.

School Library Association in Scotland

We welcome this evidence and would ask the Petitions Committee to note the following sentence. 'The development of information skills policies and lessons is currently haphazard and disconnected.'

UNISON School Librarians

Again we welcome this evidence and would particularly draw attention to the lack of continuity, assessment, and assumption that each curricular area assumes that information literacy skills have been learned elsewhere. 'pupils... do not know how to carry out a task involving information literacy skills in a methodical and successful manner'; pupils need to be taught learning skills overtly.

Summary comment

Critical comments are characterised by the view that information literacy should be taught implicitly in the context of curricular subjects, not as a discrete subject on its own although research evidence shows that pupils/students do not transfer information skills learned in one subject context to others. The most serious consequence of this approach is that information literacy training is, in practice optional rather than obligatory and implicit, rather than explicit and obligatory. In a few cases enthusiastic school librarians and teachers take advantage of the opportunities the curriculum offers or drive ideas forward but this is the exception, rather than the rule.

The criticality of the current situation (i.e. information literacy training is, in practice, optional rather than obligatory and implicit, rather than explicit and obligatory) is dramatically reinforced when considering the approaches taken in other educational settings. The United States and in Australia are notable examples. In a direct attempt to improve the competitiveness of the work force in the emerging knowledge economy information literacy skills are recognised as core skills within national education standards. This level of recognition exists to develop a core skills set identified as necessary to secure and develop future employment opportunities. The Scottish economy will become increasingly vulnerable where our workforce does not possess core information management skills and competencies.

Final 10.8.06

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