

## **Moving towards an information literacy agenda: recent and current work at Glasgow Caledonian University and beyond**

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Glasgow Caledonian University's interest in the information literacy agenda is informed by research and involvement in three areas:

- Evaluating the use of electronic information services (EIS) by staff and students at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)
- Participation in the LIRG/SCONUL Value and Impact study
- The Drumchapel Project - a study of ICT skills among school pupils in a secondary school in a deprived area of Glasgow

### **Evaluating the use of electronic information services by staff and students**

As with all other academic libraries spending on and usage of electronic information services has mushroomed in recent years and the study was originally undertaken as a use measurement, value for money type of study although the outcomes highlighted a rather more complex view. The various components of the work were undertaken between December 2001 and March 2003. The initial work concentrated mainly on staff<sup>1</sup>. This showed that although the majority of information searching was done through EIS the freely available Internet was the most heavily used service. Although staff valued passworded databases they doubted whether students had the necessary skills to use them effectively.

This conclusion was tested by a longitudinal study of students undertaken by means of two surveys undertaken in the Spring of 2002 followed by a second, more extensive survey, administered undertaken between October 2002 and February 2003. This showed an encouraging growth of usage in the short time between the two surveys. The second survey also indicated a large growth in off Campus usage with off Campus usage beginning to divide into home and workplace. More part time students were shown to be registered with Athens than full time students. Subject was the main determinant in EIS usage, followed by integration into the programme. Students studying in subject areas characterised by an innovative learning and teaching agenda were more likely to use EIS than those studying in more traditional subject areas, a factor which may prove to be important in developing IL strategies in the secondary sector. A clear link emerged between EIS usage and student progression and retention but there was no link between IT skills and EIS usage, a contradiction of most previous findings<sup>2</sup>

### **Participation in the LIRG/SCONUL Value and Impact study**

Glasgow Caledonian University was one of the first ten universities to participate in the LIRG/SCONUL Value and Impact study and, in conjunction with Leeds Metropolitan University, undertook to investigate the impact of EIS on staff, students and alumni and the development of an information literacy strategy. The outcomes from this are still in the course of production<sup>3</sup>. Two surveys were undertaken in early 2004 as part of the study, a survey of EIS/IL skills among undergraduates and a study of alumni. Data from these two surveys are still being analysed and written up. The undergraduate study, as analysed so far supports the previous view of steady if uneven progress but also cites as factors the pervasiveness of IT systems in the tertiary sector and their growth in the secondary sector. The alumni questionnaire data emphasises the growing importance of information literacy in the workplace and the important

role of the University in developing it. Considerable gratitude and respect for the role of GCU was expressed by respondents drawn from all over the world. Clearly information literacy and the employability agenda have been facilitated by the University and its services.

### **The Drumchapel Project**

The Drumchapel Project<sup>4</sup> was a joint exploratory project between Glasgow Caledonian University and Drumchapel High School, a secondary school in a deprived area of Glasgow. The initial aim was to explore ICT skill levels among the school pupils but an information literacy agenda emerged in the course of the Project. Both focus groups of pupils and questionnaires, administered to both students and staff, were used. The questionnaires were also administered to staff and students in a school in a more affluent area of Glasgow for comparative purposes (Hyndland Secondary School). Home computer ownership was found to be higher than expected and ICT skills levels were comparable to Hyndland pupils. Drumchapel High School was found to be where pupils learned most of their skills. The home and local learning centres were found to be much less important.

The school library was found to be a greatly underutilised resource due to staffing constraints. The need for an integrated information literacy/ICT Skills training strategy linking secondary and tertiary education was the main finding.

### **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>5</sup>. For the moment work at GCU is focusing on the link between the secondary and the tertiary sectors. In Scotland 50% plus participation in HE was achieved several years ago and information literacy developments, policies and practices in the secondary sector are more than a matter of academic interest to the HE sector. The information literacy strategies in the secondary and tertiary sectors are broadly the same but while strategies are emerging in HE there is no overarching strategy in the secondary sector and Universities do not know what to expect of new students. This is the inspiration for the Information literacy skills - the link between secondary and tertiary education project.

### **Examples of current information literacy related activities**

Although the literature does 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 reflect the increased activity on a national and international basis (see Figure 1). They are as follows:

### **Practitioner activities**

At the recent SETT conference in Glasgow, information literacy was a key theme with sessions from Cleo Jones and Marie Therese Taylor (Edinburgh City Council School Library Service) and Audrey Sutton (North Ayrshire Council) on 'Information skills within the curriculum'<sup>6</sup> and 'Learning and literacy in the twenty-first century – aka redefining literacy for a new century' by David Warlick (Director, The Landmark Project). Interestingly the Edinburgh schools are working on linking the curriculum to the School Support Project, raising the profile of information skills within the school library policy and making the most of the focus and resources for learning and teaching and the growing awareness of information literacy as a result of ICT. David Warlick highlighted the fact that the present generation is being taught for a future that is not clear and that we need to make them literate so that they ask questions and investigate. He called for the stopping of integrating of technology and the need to redefine literacy and integrate that.

### **Initiatives / Projects**

On a national level within Scotland, there are a number of information skills / literacy projects aiming to provide new specific course material, infrastructure and opportunity to develop the necessary skills needed in today's information society.

For post 16/lifelong learners there is an Information Handling Skills (IHS) interactive online course<sup>7</sup> and national unit qualification 'Information Handling Skills – Intermediate 11 (DF9J)<sup>8</sup>. Carol Stewart (St Modan's High School, Stirling) is currently carrying out a small pilot project using the IHS course material with an Intermediate 11 Modern Studies class with a view to them obtaining the IHS qualification. In addition a new initiative funded by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Government Unit will enable Scottish Libraries and Information Council (SLIC) to work with partners (e.g. schools, colleges, public libraries, community education, prisons) to equip 2000 learners with key skills for life in the information age, which should boost the uptake of the qualification.

Meanwhile Learning Teaching Scotland is working on material for the 5-14 curriculum which will be available through the NGfL. Another key development for the NGfL Scotland is the Scottish Schools Digital Network (SSDN)<sup>9</sup> which aims to connect all the schools in Scotland and provide links to FE and HE and the creation of a community of Masterclass ICT<sup>10</sup> local authority teachers and librarians who are developing their skills on from the NOF-funded training towards a CPD framework and then passing them onto their schools colleagues. Earlier this year a two day focused programme on Information Literacy was organised by SLIC, one of the key elements to come out of the two day programme was the need for further training in these skills for teachers, a finding reflected by previous research<sup>11</sup>. Teachers and pupils' information literacy skills are reflected in several research studies however it is interesting to note the level of these skills and how teachers use these skills for teaching purposes but don't generally transfer their skills to their pupils<sup>12</sup> and young peoples' information seeking skills in conjunction with the Internet - real and perceived<sup>13</sup>. Dorothy Williams (Research Co-ordinator for the Department of Information Management at Robert Gordon University) new research study<sup>14</sup> should hopefully throw further insight into teachers understanding of information literacy and the relationship between information related tasks and student learning. This in conjunction with Sheila Webber (Sheffield University) and Bill Johnston's

(University of Strathclyde) research into ‘UK academics’ conceptions of, and pedagogy, for information literacy’ should start to give us a clearer picture of the education professional’s information literacy outlook.

### **International declarations and national strategies**

On the international front at the end of last year we saw The Prague Declaration Towards an Information Literate Society<sup>15</sup> proposing basic principles on information literacy as a key to social, cultural, and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond<sup>16</sup>. Whilst in the UK in addition to the Scottish initiatives highlighted in this article there are initiatives being developed on a national level notably the work being carried out on a definition of information literacy for CILIP<sup>17</sup> that can be used by all communities (schools, further and higher education, home and leisure users, businesses, etc) and CILIP’s new Guidelines for Secondary School Libraries. The new guidelines are seen as setting out the future direction of the school librarian and the library at the centre of learning where the librarian is a learning librarian and co-educator who understands learning, collaborates with teaching colleagues and participates in staff training. This will involve the librarian acting as “information navigators by bridging the gap between students, teachers, online information and the curriculum”<sup>18</sup>.

### **Information literacy skills - the link between secondary and tertiary education project**

Currently the Project is focusing on reviewing the work listed above, together with some other initiatives with a view to identifying common themes and principles. Once this is complete we will proceed to seek additional funding for a project which seeks to develop an information literacy strategy for the secondary sector which can be integrated with work going on in higher education. We need to see whether the initiatives discussed above are having any impact on the emergence of a strategy for the secondary sector and we must also investigate relevant developments in the FE and HE sector.

Implicit also in the above text is the question of whether information literacy has a distinctive agenda in the home nations of the UK which reflects their historic educational traditions. This must be a big issue in Scotland where some of the factors in the lifelong learning/information literacy agenda has been recognised for over 250 years. Although we have some knowledge of what is happening in Scotland we need to do more research into what is happening in the rest of the UK to see whether there is any correlation or lessons that Scotland can learn.

We are also aware that good technical (IT) skills must not be equated with information literacy skills and this factor must grow in importance as IT skills improve. A rosy picture of IT skills levels must not be interpreted as meaning that information literacy skills are just as good. It will be interesting to see what impact the SQA’s PC Passport has on ICT skills and the IHS course material and national qualification on information literacy skills.

Although the Project has just begun it has already attracted a good deal of interest and partners should not be hard to find. Expressions of interest from both the secondary and tertiary sectors are welcome. You can contact us as below.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Crawford The use of electronic information services by students at Glasgow Caledonian University: background to the project and introductory focus groups, *Library and information research*, 27 (86) 2003, pp. 30-36; J. Crawford et al. Use and awareness of electronic information services by academic staff at Glasgow Caledonian University, *Library review*, 53 (8), 2004, pp. 401- 407.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> P Payne et al, Counting on making a difference: assessing our impact, *Vine: the journal of information and knowledge management systems*, forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> D McLelland and J Crawford. 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) 2004, pp. 55-67.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/papers/116e-Abid.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/sett/seminarprogramme/seminars.asp?guideResources=3172>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sfeu.ac.uk/projects.asp?pageId=5.11> <http://www.slainte.org.uk/Infohandling/index.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sqa.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/ssdn/aboutssdn.asp>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/projects/details.asp?id=2291>

<sup>11</sup> L. Coles. Teachers reluctant to use research. *Connected*, 10 Spring 2004, pp.22

<sup>12</sup> L. Merchant and M. Hepworth. Information literacy of teachers and pupils in secondary schools. *Journal of librarianship and information science*, 34, (2) 2002, pp. 81-89.

<sup>13</sup> J.F. Herring. Helping pupils make the best of the internet. *Library + Information Update*, 3(9), 2004, pp. 34-35. A. Pickard. Young people and the internet. *Library + Information Update*, 3(1), 2004, pp.

32-34. A.K. Shenton, (2004). Children's information needs why do we know so little? *Library + Information Update*, 3(1), 2004, pp. 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> RGU. Teachers' conceptions of information literacy in relation to their classroom practice [Online]. Available: <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/abs/research/page.cfm?pge=13088> [2004, September 9].

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.infolit.org/International\\_Conference/PragueNewsRelease.doc](http://www.infolit.org/International_Conference/PragueNewsRelease.doc)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ched.uct.ac.za/cil/Prague2003/Prague%20Declaration.htm>

<sup>17</sup> C. Armstrong. CILIP Information literacy definition – for comment (1/1). *LIS- INFOLITERACY@JISCMail.AC.UK* [Online]. Available E-mail: [lisqual@CIX.CO.UK](mailto:lisqual@CIX.CO.UK) [2004, September 2]. CILIP. *Information Literacy Group* [Online]. Available:

[http://www.cilip.org.uk/groups/csg/csg\\_ilg/index.html](http://www.cilip.org.uk/groups/csg/csg_ilg/index.html) [2004, September 14].

<sup>18</sup> L. Barrett, L. New guidelines, new challenges in schools. *Library + Information Update*, 3(9), 2004, pp. 30-31.