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## **Training Needs for Staff Competencies in a Quality Library Service: Relevance of the IMPEL Project**

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### **Introduction**

There has been a gradual recognition that providing a quality library service is dependent upon staff being well trained. It is also becoming apparent that a library will benefit from a well developed and resourced staff development programme. This is especially the case with the increasing use of information technology which necessitate having library staff who have current knowledge about appropriate software and hardware. In the United Kingdom the professional body for librarians, the Library Association, has produced a guide on staff development. (Whetherby:1994). When staff development is not in place, the guide indicates that a library will suffer through not achieving its objectives. There will be difficulties in managing change with a high turnover of underdeveloped staff. Quality management, the realisation of objectives and good morale and motivation will emerge when staff training programmes are in place.

There have been two recent reports in the UK which have had major significance for library staff training in academic libraries. The Follett report(1993) takes into account the expansion in numbers of students in UK higher education, the developments of information technology and the need for greater co-operation and sharing of resources. It has been very influential in the proposals to develop UK academic library services over the next few years. Central funding totalling £20 million over three years has been allocated to support the recommendations. Little attention is given to training but the value of having skilled staff underlines many of its recommendations:

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the LIBER Annual Conference, Leuven 1995.

"...failure to provide staff with adequate training and to deploy them effectively represents one of the single most important constraints on change and development in library and information provision, and can seriously undermine its effectiveness, especially when this depends on the implementation of new practices, or on information technology."

A further report (Fielden:1994), was commissioned to look at staff management in UK academic libraries. It has had limited impact as no resources were released from central government to implement the recommendations. The Fielden report indicated that £1million per annum for three years was needed for staff development in UK academic libraries.. Individual libraries will have to fund any staff training programmes. There was a recommendation that library staff should devote 5% of time to staff development and training. Training in the following areas was identified:

- development and updating of IT skills
- network navigation
- customer service and interpersonal skills
- support of management of change
- skills in teamworking
- quality improvement programmes
- learner support
- management skills

## **IMPEL Research Project**

### **Background**

The IMPEL Project has been run jointly by the Department of Information and Library Management and the Information Services Department at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. The project aims to establish the key factors in a library context for the effective management of the networked campus environment. The focus in the first instance is on the impacts on qualified library and information service (LIS) staff of working in an increasingly electronic environment. Part of the remit has been to investigate the training needed by library staff so they can function effectively in the electronic environment. A major stimulus for the work was the changing nature of Higher Education, in particular the rising and broadening student population, the

growing emphasis on a student-centred, project-based approach in teaching and learning, rising cost of books and journals and the rapid development of computing and telecommunication technologies.

As information and computing technology converge, resource-sharing by means of electronically held, often networked systems has been recognised to offer LIS an effective (and cost-effective) way of responding to the changes which are affecting them. The shift towards electronic information provision (access to information whenever and wherever it may be held), away from traditional print-based information provision (holdings of material within the library), however, has profound implications for LIS staff. They take on an increasingly instructional, guiding and advisory role; they spend larger amounts of time evaluating and weighing the benefits of different media; they rapidly need to acquire technical skills, often from a zero knowledge base, in order to perform effectively.

It has become clear that unless LIS staff are able to adapt to these new demands, they may not be able to fulfil the central role within the teaching and learning experience expected of them in Higher Education institutions. Libraries or Information Services at the end of the 20th century must not be isolated, inward-looking departments, but dynamic, creative and responsive departments. The IMPEL Project examines the strategic, institutional, management and training factors associated with these changes.

### Methodology

The project is based on case studies in the LIS of six UK universities. The sample of six was selected by means of a purposeful questionnaire issued to 98 chief academic librarians, which achieved an 83 per cent response rate.

The questionnaire was designed to indicate to the research team those institutions which had reached a significant level of electronic library development. Based on a study of the literature, those institutions were expected to have:

- A written IT strategy

- Substantial collaboration between LIS and computing services

- Special training provision to enable staff to work effectively in an electronic environment.

- Innovative use of electronic networks for delivering information

- Access to the Joint Academic Network (JANET) for all students

Out of 11 which fulfilled all the criteria, six were selected as providing a balance of age, type and size of institution. These were the Universities of Aston, Cardiff, Central Lancashire, Cranfield, Stirling and Ulster.

The researcher spent one week in each institution conducting semi-structured interviews with qualified LIS staff, library directors, computing service directors, institutional managers or committee chairmen, computing staff and library assistants. The interview transcripts (82 in all) have yielded a large amount of rich qualitative data. These were underpinned by questionnaires and scrutiny of documentation such as corporate plans, IT plans, management structure diagrams and training programmes. The triangulation of interviews, questionnaires and documentation is designed to increase the validity of the findings. Subsequently, participants from each site attended a one-day workshop which gave them the opportunity to validate the findings and exchange views and experience.

Figures 1-11 represent graphically the findings of one questionnaire which formed part of the study. This questionnaire (see Appendix 1) used the training areas identified in Fielden (1994) to ask respondents to assess the urgency with which they required training or development. The range was within 0(not required) up to 5 (urgent). Respondents were grouped into four categories, Senior Managers (of whom there were 15), Information/Subject librarians (31), Systems/Computer staff (8) and Other (library assistants and other services staff) (9). Figs 1- 11 present average urgency scores for each group for each area of potential training and development need. It is recognised that the size of the groups is unbalanced.

## Discussion

The value of the training questionnaire data is limited in two ways. The sample size is too small to represent views on training needs in higher education libraries. Another factor is that the respondents are only based in libraries which are already using technology in a planned and co-ordinated way.

For these reasons the qualitative interviews have to be the main source of data for the IMPEL project. It is possible to make some broad observations from the questionnaire results. They do show that all library staff at all grades need some form of training. Figures 1-11 indicate that developing IT skills, being able to navigate the Internet and managing change are areas that all levels of staff rate as needing urgent training.

With the IMPEL data being gathered at university libraries where IT has been used effectively and training programmes are in existence the outcomes cannot be seen as the same for libraries which are only starting to use IT. Their staff training and development needs must be significantly different. The library

staff at the IMPEL sites have started to address the steep learning curve. Other university libraries may not have started.

The IMPEL research team is at the initial stage of examining the qualitative data in conjunction with the internal documentation. It would appear that staff training and development was recognised as a priority in all institutions visited. Where technological developments had been recent and rapid, the demand for training was acute. In all cases, it was an ongoing problem requiring rolling programmes tailored to a range of skill level. LIS staff took advantage of university-wide staff development programmes but often these did not address their specific needs. There was criticism of the emphasis on soft personal development offered in these programmes, when LIS staff desperately needed hard training in the area of IT. Lack of basic IT knowledge among LIS staff was seen as a constraint upon developments as well as a source of frustration.

Needs ranged from basic levels to in-depth knowledge of software packages and networked sources. Shortage of time to devote to training and development of any kind was a significant constraint. Staff were encouraged to attend outside courses and conferences as budgets allowed; most felt that this provision was good.

Timing of training and development posed a problem. Any time-lag between learning a new skill and putting it into practice may mean the skill is lost. There was also much discussion about who should receive training, whether all levels of LIS staff should have at least an awareness-level of electronic systems and sources, or whether it should be limited to professional staff.

Training activity in the different sites visited included:

- Compulsory weekly training sessions (with library closed). Some sessions may be for self-paced learning.

- Weekly training sessions 'strongly recommended'.

- Policy of unrestricted access to training for LIS staff.

- Programme of outside speakers on general but relevant background topics.

- Ad-hoc sessions in response to day-to-day needs.

- Self-teaching.

- Joint training with computing staff.

- Cascading.

The urgency and necessity of training and development in an increasingly electronic environment was forcing the trend away from an ad-hoc training environment towards a more formalised one with a designated coordinator. One coordinator was constructing a programme based on a training needs analysis;

another on individual training logs. A great deal of in-house training fell to subject/information librarians, a significant change of emphasis in their role. Trainers were occasionally brought in from outside to deliver training specifically tailored to need. Computing staff were also involved in delivering training. Looking across the range of sites studies, the most commonly expressed desires were:

- A basic level of computer literacy
- Long-term IT skills training
- A structured programme for training linked in to the information strategy
- Training together with computer services staff
- Training geared to individual needs
- More interaction and exchange of experience outside home institution
- Training on a formalised basis
- Time to practice new skills

There was strong commitment to training and development in all sites visited. At its most sophisticated this commitment amounted to a 'training culture' inculcated in the library.

### **Conclusion**

Staff development and training is expensive. Time has to be freed up to allow effective studying to occur. The Fielden report (1994) suggests that 5% staff time should be in development activities. The natural follow-on would be that 5% of a library's budget should be committed to staff development. This may be difficult to justify in the light of increased demand for services, increases in periodical/book costs and limited funding. A very strong argument will need to be made to the institution to transfer resources away from journal and books to fund library staff development.

In organisational development terms, the future lies away from library staff relying on being taught and being passive recipients of information. Wetherby (1994) discusses the changes that need to happen. Staff have to be helped in developing the motivation and commitment to search out the answers to the learning needs they have identified for themselves. Active learning among librarians has to be encouraged. They will need to become skilled learners, continually looking for opportunities to upgrade skills and knowledge. In order for this to happen the library will need to provide the appropriate environment and resources.

The IMPEL project has received considerable attention among the academic library sector and has been welcomed by the participating institutions. Since the study was conducted, many changes have been reported to the research team, indicating that further monitoring work would be valuable. It would also be of interest to extend the scope of the study to examine the impacts on student and academic staff users of increased electronic information provision. As the Electronic Libraries Programme gets underway in the UK, it would be relevant for the IMPEL team to investigate the impact and effectiveness of major training programmes. With changes in the teaching and learning process in mind, the role of LIS in resource-based learning systems is also worthy of study.

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**Appendix 1 Questionnaire used in IMPEL Project to assess training needs**

The recent Fielden Report identified the following staff training and development needs for LIS staff. Please would you indicate your **personal** needs at this time, according to a scale where 0 = not required and 5 = urgent. (n/a = not applicable)

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |     |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 1. Development & updating of IT skills and competencies .....          | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| 2. Network navigation .....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| 3. Training in customer service skills & interpersonal behaviour ..... | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| 4. Training to support the management of change .....                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| 5. Skills in team-working .....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| 6. Quality improvement programmes .....                                | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| <b>7. Learner support:</b>   |   |   |   |   |   |   |     |
| Teaching skills .....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Course design .....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Development of teaching materials .....                                | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Development of Open Learning packages .....                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| <b>8. Management skills:</b>   |   |   |   |   |   |   |     |
| Recruitment and selection .....  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Financial management .....   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Staff management .....   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Leadership .....   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |

Thank you for your help

## Training and Development Questionnaire (Figs 1-11)

X axis 0 = not required 5 = urgent

Y axis - Senior Managers, Information Staff, Systems/Computer staff, Other staff





