

CoFHE/UC&R 5th Joint Conference – June 21st-23rd 2010

Welcome and Keynote Address

After the general housekeeping we were introduced to Michelle Shoebridge (Director of Academic Services, University of Exeter) for a 15-minute overview of the redevelopment work being undertaken at the UoE. The fly-over visuals were very impressive and it was interesting to see what ambitions the university has about creating new spaces e.g. sunken gardens to bring light into the library. It was a great introduction to our home for the next three days and it was nice to be encouraged to explore the grounds.

Next up was Professor Steven Smith (VC and Chief Executive University of Exeter and President Universities UK). He focused his keynote address around the student journey, library support and the new government agenda. Talking about the future of higher education (specifically) Steve discussed the relationship between reduced budgets (a 20-25% decrease over the next four years) and the student experience, emphasising the student journey as a driver for the future.

Workshop One: Attention Students: Creating induction materials for generation y

Sharon Potter and Heather Parsonage from Nottingham Trent University led this session by introducing delegates to a redesigned induction guide and [bite sized welcome video](#) used during induction (a crucial time in terms of student experience and engagement) to capture today's 'generation y students'.

First off Heather gave an overview of their 'repurposing induction materials' project and discussed some of the problems they encountered during the preparation stages – mainly bureaucratic procedure and change-reluctant management.

A group of students were presented with a range of materials in leaflet form (A4 handouts, credit card sized samples and double sided A5 pamphlets) and asked to comment on which they'd be most likely to keep. The overwhelming majority went with the credit card sized snippet (or concertina as it's called) of information they could keep in their wallet or tuck away in a pocket. And so this is what they decided to run with.

Next Sharon Potter described the process of making their introductory [video](#) before showing it to the group. They didn't mention costs, which would have been particularly interesting, but they did talk about having an official cameraman, editor and I guess producer. The content was also scripted, although the broadcast journalist students who feature in the video were encouraged to use their own words.

Workshop Two: *Barriers to learners using electronic resources*

During this fast-paced interactive 50-minute workshop participants had the opportunity to engage with a digital audience response system (Quizdom), suffer the pains of speed dating and provide feedback during group discussions before presenting ideas back to all attendees. It also featured a cow bell!

Karen Foster and Amanda Issac of Yeovil College conducted a research project to assess the barriers learners perceive in accessing eresources and came up with some really alarming and surprising results. Some of the key findings included:

- Only 33% of 18-25 year olds described themselves as 'very confident' in their general IT skills by the end of their two year foundation degree;
- Over their two year course most 26-35 year olds lost confidence using the internet in year one but gained it again in year two;
- 88% of 36-45 year olds described themselves as 'confident' or 'very confident' in searching the Internet by the end of year two (this doubled

- from year one results);
- 55% of 18-25 year olds said they were ‘confident’ in assessing the reliability of online information.

During the speed dating part of the workshop delegates were split in half and asked to identify a number of barriers we thought learners faced when accessing electronic resources. None of my input was particularly original and included things like access to computers/the Internet, Athens/shibboleth issues, software compatibility, download speeds, not knowing where to look or how to construct searches etc. Bog standard stuff but it was useful to discuss these problems in small groups and suggest ways in which we could work to overcome them. One FE college went as far as cancelling subscriptions to difficult services, which led on to further discussion about some of the differences between HE and FE institutions. Solutions raised, again, were nothing new but there to reiterate our need to market what we do and how we contribute to learning and teaching.

Workshop Three: *The bright and dark sides of the web*

Linda Jones (the dark) and Timothy Collinson (the bright) from the University of Portsmouth ran this unusually interactive tag-team extravaganza to showcase practical examples of their creative engagement with web 2.0, whilst highlighting some of the pitfalls/dangers of web applications. Participants were also encouraged to share experiences and some of the innovations happening within our own institutions.

Examples – Wikis:

- Subject specialist/scholarly material (e.g. [Scholarpedia](#); [Northstar](#); [Lawbore](#) – although this is more of a portal);
- Procedure manuals (see Huddersfield University’s [Library Info Desk](#));
- Project database;

- Staff directories.

Following a discussion about the uses of wikis in learner support we were warned about the issue of copyright or ‘the dreaded C word’ and the ephemeral nature of non-permanent public works of art (Flickr/YouTube).

Examples – ‘Lifhacks’:

- Make use of mobile technology by producing smart-phone compatible tours for open day attendees (a time when library staff might not be able to offer guided tours);
- Introduce [Delicious](#) to students as a way of sharing bookmarks between the class and each other;
- Try out [Doodle](#) to schedule events;
- Create themed information with tailored RSS feeds through [Yahoo Pipes](#) (e.g. [ticTOCs](#)).

But be warned about the dark side of mobile apps, the ‘rouge apps’. One example Linda used within the discussion was that of a College of Law student providing a free app for iPhone users looking for current/up-to-date law ([iLegal](#)). Sounds great, but when investigated further it turned out the law was neither current nor in fact correct.

Examples – Induction:

- [PrepUP](#) (log-in required) used to offer pre-entry students virtual tours of the library;
- Facebook pages introduced as a space for students to meet other students before their arrival at university;
- Interactive PowerPoints to bring resources together ;
- The [Body](#) project – helping distant learners to get to grips with eresources.

The key message of the workshop was to use materials that are engaging but blindingly simple, interactive but not over the top! Apply **creative synergy**:

- Get involved with the Freshers' Fairs – dress up as pirates if you have to;
- Artistic reuse of material (mash-ups) e.g. 'The Google, the Bad and the Ugly';
- Design plasma screen rotating visuals and drive home the key message.

Workshop Four: *Your library brand and the student experience*

This session facilitated by [Emma Illingworth](#) and [Jo Alcock](#) concentrated on effective branding and the need for strong strategic input to create a brand that maintains and promotes awareness of services that our users easily recognise.

The Library Brand

When asked to think about what our library brand is, what this conveys to the student and how we communicate it questions were raised about what kind of message do we want our brand to promote and how can we market this. For Jo the brand is who we are and what we offer and the most authentic brands emanate from what the organisation does (see [Starbucks](#) – coffee, people and places).

Branding is the process of defining a library story. Distilling that into a short appealing sentence... then visually conveying the story (Doucett, 2009).

It's a three-tier approach that creates a visual representation of your value, which your users find meaningful. The example Jo used to highlight this was Wolverhampton's [Infobites](#) (see slide 6 of the [presentation](#)).

- Visual – Information skills workshops at Learning Centres;
- Value – Development of information skills;
- Emotional – Library can help you develop skills important to students.

The session's aim wasn't to provide participants with a how-to guide about creating library brands but rather to get us thinking about what a library brand should be and how this impacts the student experience.

Points to note

- Offer clear, meaningful, unique messages;
- Make the message consistent;
- Get staff onboard and ensure their commitment to the message;
- Don't back away from the constant effort needed to maintain your brand;
- Include visual elements to complement the message.

Some more branding examples:

- Visual – The [Information Literacy logo](#);
- Message – The [University of Huddersfield](#);
- Library spaces – The [University of East London](#);
- Consistency – The [University of Warwick](#).

The Student Experience

Emma moved on during the next part of the workshop to discuss the elements that make up the student experience – their needs, how our services meet these needs (schools and services) and the brand perception. It should be the aim of the library to supply services that target student needs (academic, social, recreational or rejuvenating) wherever applicable – determined not by what the library has but rather by what the users need.

The student needs, schools and services and the brand perception each contribute to the overall student experience and in recognising the relationship between these we can begin to focus on marketing library services and showcasing how these fit within the lifestyles of our users.

Workshop Five: To e or not to e? eBooks are the question but what is the answer from foundation degree students and teaching staff?

During this workshop Lee Bryant and Sue Capon (City of Bristol College) presented results from their investigation into how ebooks can be used to support foundation degree students.

Project background and methodology

The small-scale research project, funded by Plymouth University's [Help CETL](#) award scheme, aimed to explore the usage patterns and attitudes towards ebooks in order to identify barriers and inform training. Targeting three subjects – Childhood Studies, Business and Administration and Business Technology - Lee and Sue surveyed students about their IT skills, confidence and knowledge of ebooks and compared results with a second survey conducted after an ebook workshop showing students how to access material.

Results

Results from the first questionnaire suggested that more students would prefer to use ebooks over print material (54%) with 17% of these (18-24 year olds) saying they'd happily read the whole book online. Over 80% of the participants thought that a training session on using ebooks would change the ways in which they study and that their confidence in using online material would increase.

Six weeks later (and post training workshop) students were asked about how

many ebooks they used for their assignments, where they accessed them (from home/on campus) and whether they'd be likely to use them again. 14 of the 24 respondents (half the initial sample size) said that they had used ebooks, accessing them remotely (86%) via the LRC catalogue in the VLE (64%).

Generally we assume most students prefer to print pages to read them yet astonishingly 86% of students indicated that they read these from the screen at least some of the time.

Of the departments targeted, Business Studies students seemed to embrace ebooks moreover the other departments canvassed. Whether this is because they're more likely to encounter information technology on a regular basis than Childcare students is unclear but it could be taken into consideration during the discussion.

Some of the perceived advantages of ebooks included:

- 24/7 access;
- searching content;
- no need to visit the library
- no need to carry heavy books around;
- ease of referencing;
- additional source of information to supplement print.

Some of the perceived disadvantages of ebooks included:

- difficulty reading from the screen (even though most students said they did read from the screen);
- not enough texts available;
- technical issues;
- print restrictions.

Other comments also suggested students preferred the physicality of print books over the ease of locating information in electronic formats.

Workshop Six: New professionals: Build your network using social media

My final workshop of the conference was another of Jo Alcock's sessions, this time focusing on social media – blogs, Twitter and social networking in particular.

Social media

The term 'social media' really refers to any 'user-created content' we find online (it doesn't even need to be online – it just is in this case as we're focusing on 'virtual' networking). Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Linked In etc are all included in this and Jo began by presenting a short overview of what each of these are.

When asked to think about the benefits of professional networking we got talking about our current uses of social media and came up with a list of examples not too dissimilar to those Jo had already prepared (with the help of Ramsey, 2004). These included:

- crowdsourcing;
- virtual attendance at events (through #tags etc);
- sharing best practice;
- getting expert advice;
- receiving moral support;
- marketing yourself and your skills to other people.

As most of the group was/is already quite active with their use of social media the

most useful part of the session was our discussion about the pros and cons of creating an online presence and the range of tools out there used to promote your social spaces:

- [UK Library Blogs Wiki](#);
- [UK Library Blogs custom search engine](#);
- [New Professionals bloggers bundle](#);
- Social networks – Facebook/Linked In;
- [British Librarians on Twitter](#);
- [More British Librarians on Twitter](#);
- [UK Library Bloggers](#);
- Twitter Lists – see [#exeter10](#) and [#npc2010](#).

Some of Jo's other top tips included:

- Adding links to your email signatures;
- Including usernames etc on your business cards;
- Linking your accounts;
- Engaging in conversation;
- And keeping your content up-to-date.

Plenary and final address

The closing address came from Len Closs (Northampton College Principle) and was a nice contrast to the doom and gloom of Steve Smith's budget cut introduction. Instead of reiterating Steve's 'valley of the death' metaphor Len was much more optimistic, encouraging educators to regard challenges of the economic climate as opportunities to find new ways of doing what we do.

He championed libraries as the future of universities and colleges and despite

barriers – senior management priorities, teacher attitudes, closed doors (literal and metaphorical), resource constraints and accommodation – was positive about their value of libraries and the creativity of library staff in developing new ways to support learning and teaching.

Read more:

- [Slideshare](#) presentations;
- Twitter archive – [exeter10](#);
- [Conference homepage](#).