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The Cardiff Handbook for Information Literacy Teaching – a case study in sharing staff training materials

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Abstract

Purpose: This article describes and discusses the principles behind the preparation by staff of the Information Services Directorate of Cardiff University of the Handbook for Information Literacy Teaching (HILT). The Handbook aims to equip staff with techniques to promote information literacy, to prepare learning outcomes and to deliver and evaluate appropriate learning experiences within teaching schools in the university. The 2006 edition of the Handbook, which runs to 130 A4 pages and is available to subject librarians in both paper and web format, has been revised in the light of both internal and external evaluations. A number of higher and further education establishments and the library of a government department have taken part in an external evaluation and the results of this are presented. The findings on the transferability of the Handbook to organisations outside Cardiff University are discussed and presented.

Methodology/Approach: A largely chronological presentation of the development of the Handbook, with the results of the internal and external evaluations, each of which used a combination of questionnaires and focus group meetings.

Findings: The Handbook has utility for staff within Cardiff University and was well regarded by external evaluation even though major adaptation would be required to make it applicable within other institutions. Consequently, its value within the higher and further education and Government sectors was limited to use as a reference tool rather than as a staff development resource. It is possible to speculate that the Handbook may be more readily repurposed for similar higher education institutions, although this was not specifically examined in the external evaluation.

Practical implications: The results of the evaluation emphasises the different approaches to and levels of information literacy teaching in the higher and further education sectors. Tailored resources can not be easily transferred to other institutions without significant re-design or re-purposing of the Handbook for a wider audience

Originality/value of paper: The paper deals with a unique product and a unique method of evaluation. On the surface, the Handbook appears to be a transferable publication – the results of the evaluation indicate otherwise.

Background and aims

The Handbook for Information Literacy Teaching (HILT) is a concise, user-friendly handbook which supports the staff of the Information Services Directorate of Cardiff University by equipping them with techniques to promote information literacy, to prepare learning outcomes and to deliver and evaluate appropriate learning experiences within the university's schools.

To understand the rationale behind the Handbook it is necessary to describe the particular qualities of Cardiff University and the earlier steps taken by the library service to meet the challenges created by a large, distributed information service.

Cardiff University, founded as the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire by Royal Charter in 1883, is the product of the merger of several institutions: the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology and University College Cardiff in 1988 and the University of Wales College of Medicine in 2004. This major, Russell Group university now has over 22,000 students and more than 4,000 staff distributed across 28 academic schools set on two campuses over a mile apart, served by 18 libraries with more than 30 subject librarians having teaching responsibilities.

At each merger staff from different backgrounds, with different institutional cultures and approaches to and levels of expertise in user training and teaching, were brought together. The challenge has been to
- equip both new and experienced staff with appropriate skills and ensure commonality of approach,
- appreciate the varying cultures and needs of the 28 academic schools, to the development of high quality teaching practice across the Information Services Directorate.

The first step towards achieving these aims was the creation in 1996 of an Information Skills Teaching Manual, issued to all subject librarians. It was prepared by a group of four subject librarians (then called information specialists) who were experienced in teaching. Running to around 80 A4 pages, it contained guidelines and examples of good practice drawn mainly from within the organisation. The topics covered included curriculum development, promoting information skills teaching to academic schools, preparing lesson materials, creating appropriate teaching aids, developing lesson structure and content, ensuring effective lesson delivery, designing assessment instruments, evaluating the teaching process and setting general guidelines on training information skills trainers.

The teaching manual was not the only means of ensuring staff delivered quality instruction, for it was supplemented by a two-day 'Training the Trainers' event run at intervals for new or inexperienced staff with teaching roles. The course was devised and delivered by a team including lecturing staff from the university's School of Education and the library service. The manual acted as a permanent record of some of the skills and techniques explored and practised by those attending the training events.

Judging from the results of an internal evaluation carried out in 1997/1998 the manual provided subject librarians with the guidance and examples of good practice they required.

The manual focused on information skills teaching and was essentially practical, with a limited number of examples of good teaching practice.

Development of HILT

By 2004 three developments encouraged the Information Services Directorate to look again at the content and format of the manual. First, the increased emphasis by the university on skills training and particularly the acquisition of information literacy skills by students; second, merger with the University of Wales College of Medicine bringing a further 7 libraries and 9 siteheads/subject librarians into the Directorate; and third, the development of the internet for information databases, as a teaching medium through Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and its use for the storage and dissemination of internal university information.

The emphasis on skills development, including information literacy, was developed at the highest level within the university as a result of various policy documents created inside and outside the University. In May 2002 the Teaching and Learning Committee approved an Information Literacy Guidance Note.

Outside Cardiff, a number of national policy documents contributed to the movement towards information literacy forming a higher profile in the Cardiff curriculum:

- the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) developed Benchmark Standards for individual subjects (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. No date. *Subject benchmark statements*. Available at: URL: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/);

- the Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. 1999-2004. *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. Available at: URL: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp)

- the Research Councils/Arts and Humanities Research Board *Joint Statement of the Research Councils'/AHRB's Skills Training Requirements for Research Students*. Available at URL: http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/trainingskill_train_req.pdf).

In addition to these national policy documents, the results of the report of the Review of the University Library Service 2004/5 – 2014/15 welcomed more information literacy training (Cardiff University Directorate of Information Services. 2005. Review of the University Library Service 2004/05-2014/15, Available at <URL: http://libraryreview.cardiff.ac.uk/library_review_final_report.pdf>).

HILT is one element in the process to equip subject librarians to be able to deliver the information literacy strategy within the schools they serve. Other elements include

- the Training the Trainers course, sharing good practice training sessions;

- the development of a Teaching Materials Repository, where subject librarians can deposit their lesson materials and borrow and adapt those created by their colleagues for their own purposes;

- the Cardiff University Information Literacy Resource Bank of high quality learning objects.

It was as a result of this background of strategic support that a small working group of four subject librarians drawn from across the Information Services Directorate was formed in early 2005 with the task of developing the Handbook to provide a tool which subject librarians could use to develop information literacy within courses.

Contents of HILT

It was decided early on that the Handbook should include many examples of good teaching practice drawn as widely as possible from across the Directorate. Further, stress would be placed on guidance and the text would be written in a practical, concise and non-prescriptive style. The eleven sections of the Handbook are described below.

Section 1 provides commentary and web links to the key QAA and university policy documents which subject librarians might wish to use when promoting the concept of information literacy to Schools (further developed in section 4 of HILT).

Section 2 looks at three issues: how the internationally established competency standards for information literacy in higher education may be translated into 'levels' of practice at Cardiff University; second, guidance on the delivery of the library orientation programme, which is a precursor to information literacy teaching; and third, suggestions on how to promote the orientation programme to students. Translating the Association of College and Research Libraries standards and outcomes into practice has enabled individual subject librarians to assess their training provision and the University Library Service to conduct an annual information literacy audit for every course offered in the University. The audit identifies and measures progress in achieving the strategic aims for information literacy provision. (American Library Association. 2000. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. Available at: URL: http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf).

Section 3 looks at embedding teaching within the module and ensuring that the module learning outcomes and assessments include information literacy. Section 4 provides examples of methods employed successfully to promote the concept of information literacy training to Schools. Section 5 covers planning a teaching session and provides examples of a number of standard lesson structures used by subject librarians at Cardiff (off-the-peg models, if you like). Section 6 contains information on the materials a subject librarian needs to produce when planning and designing a lecture or teaching session: a lesson plan, instructors' notes and handouts – numbered or bullet-point checklists are supported by examples of good practice used by Cardiff subject librarians and are reproduced in Appendix 3. Section 7 covers guidance on the preparation and use of teaching aids including information on Blackboard, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used at Cardiff, the INFORMS software, and guidance and a checklist on stress-free use of teaching aids in lecture rooms.

Section 8 is concerned with lesson delivery and covers presentation techniques, managing the teaching environment and facilitation skills for workshops. Section 9 looks at the purpose, principles and forms of assessment. Section 10 contains information on the four main types of evaluation of teaching: reflection and self evaluation, student feedback, views of tutors and finally, peer review of teaching. The final section of the Handbook sets out a guide to the training needs of staff involved in teaching, including their continuing professional development, so that they become and remain competent and confident in the planning and delivery of training

sessions. The seven point guide has since been approved by the Board of the Directorate as a policy statement on training for teaching information literacy. The appendices provided more information on a) key university strategy documents, b) critical appraisal (a process used regularly in the medical schools, of systematically examining research evidence to assess its validity, results and relevance before using it to inform a decision), and c) 22 examples of materials used in teaching and learning by Information Services staff at Cardiff.

The Handbook was originally issued in 2005 in two formats: an A4 ring binder of 130 pages and a Word version placed on the shared drive of the Directorate intranet.

The Handbook was launched within the Directorate in summer 2005. A copy of the ring bound version was sent to each library site and a well-attended half-day launch event was held in early August.

Internal evaluation of HILT

Methodology

In November 2005 an internal evaluation was carried out, led by a member of staff independent of the group which developed the Handbook. Three channels were employed:

- a feedback form incorporated within the Handbook itself and sent in by one member of staff, recording typographical errors rather than opinions on the substance of the Handbook;

- a questionnaire survey sent to all subject librarians (see Illustration 4 for a copy of the questionnaire). The questions were piloted with thee subject librarians, the questionnaire amended and delivered electronically to all subject librarians with an information literacy teaching remit in Information Services;

- a focus group of staff who volunteered their names on the questionnaire.

Results

38 members of the University Library service responded to the questionnaire. This was an impressive 93% response rate, meaning the results are highly representative. Respondents were assured anonymity to enhance the likelihood of honest evaluation. 27 of the respondents had given teaching sessions between the launch of the Handbook and November 2005. 59% had used the Handbook during autumn 2005 and the view was that it had been 'generally well received'. The most common reason given by those who did not use the Handbook was that HILT was released too late during the summer recess to be used.

94% of the respondents who had used HILT said it had improved their teaching quality and 71% noted improved student feedback or comment as a result of using the advice and examples provide in HILT. The most used sections of HILT were, in descending order, lesson planning, examples taken from appendix 3, lesson materials and lesson delivery. The single most popular element mentioned by respondents was the web page evaluation exercise – this exercise required students to evaluate, compare and contrast two websites using a checklist of set criteria. Unsurprisingly, given the short time period covered by the evaluation, the least used sections were those on the promotion of information literacy teaching, the use of teaching aids and assessment. However, 38% of those who answered this particular question believed that use of the Handbook contributed to collaboration and/or

communication with academic staff. The paper version was valued but a web version was also requested (and provided in 2006).

The focus group evaluation was intended to gather qualitative data to assist in the first review and updating of the Handbook. Some of the suggestions were in conflict: create a condensed version down from the 64 pages of text to around 50 pages was contradicted by suggestions for additional features, such as an appendix summarising the major learning theories, a bibliography of further reading, each chapter to begin with an executive summary and include additional references and create an index to the whole work.

The demand for a Handbook beyond Cardiff University was highlighted at the Gregynog Colloquium for HE librarians in Wales in June 2005 (the colloquium is an annual 'exchange of experience' event). A presentation on various information literacy initiatives at Cardiff University initiated a reaction from other libraries and from CyMAL (Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales, a branch of the Welsh Assembly Government) which indicated that such a Handbook would benefit others. Information literacy is a strategic objective not only within higher education institutions, but is indicated in CyMAL strategic priorities for all sectors (such as through the Workforce Development Programme).

During spring 2006 the same group of staff who created the Handbook took up the challenge of incorporating into a revised version some of the suggestions, given a crucial time constraint. Cardiff University successfully applied for a grant from CyMAL, for four institutions to use and evaluate the revised version of the Handbook between June and December 2006. The institutions were two degree awarding universities, a further education institute and the library service of the Welsh Assembly Government.

The 2006 version of HILT was slightly longer than the 2005 version. Each chapter was reviewed, some material edited out and what remained re-designed into checklists and bullet points wherever possible. Some new examples were added to the appendices of lesson plans, handouts and feedback forms. Executive summaries were provided at the start of each chapter but it was not feasible in the time available to create an appendix of learning theories, lists of further reading or an index. For the first time the Handbook was published in three formats: in print within a ring binder, as a Word document on the shared drive and, in response to feedback, in a web version, using CourseGenie software, with the table of contents or 'navigation' at the left side of each screen and links embedded within the text to relevant web sites and to the examples of good practice filed in the Appendices of the print version.

External evaluation of HILT

Purpose
The purpose of the external evaluation was to
- further improve HILT as a tool for information literacy development, through feedback from project partners
- assess whether HILT was a transferable tool to stimulate other libraries to develop or enhance learning opportunities for their users
- identify what changes should be made to HILT to improve its utility beyond Cardiff and
- forge new partnerships through co-operative initiatives to enhance information literacy delivery in Wales.

An independent part-time project officer was recruited, unconnected with the group which devised the Handbook and external to Cardiff University. Since the project officer was completely independent of the university it increased the likelihood of completely honest evaluation by respondents.

Methodology

The methodological approach to this study was undertaken in a number of discrete steps:

- The selection of the learning organisations to be studied from South Wales
- The development of two questionnaires – the first to examine the initial reactions to the Handbook and the second to elicit responses regarding the practical application of the Handbook in the workplace
- Four focus groups carried out with those individuals who had completed the questionnaires in order to follow up and examine, in greater depth, the respondents' opinions regarding the usefulness of the Handbook and its applicability to their own organisational context.

Selection of sample

The use of the Handbook within other organisations was evaluated by selecting a small sample of library staff involved in teaching in a variety of learning organisations. A range of South Wales-based organisations was selected by the project team for the purposes of this study. It was decided to keep the number of Handbook evaluators selected small in order to ensure that, whilst a variety of organisations was being surveyed, the amount of data gathered would not be unwieldy. The institutions selected for the purposes of this study were Coleg Glan Hafren (FE), University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) (Post -1992 HE), Swansea University (Pre-1992 HE) and the Welsh Assembly Government's Library and Publications Unit (work place library).

Initial distribution of the Handbook

In order to ensure that the evaluators had access to the information contained within the Handbook, the project officer distributed the Handbook amongst those library staff involved in teaching information literacy in the four organisations selected. In total, 25 handbooks were distributed to the participating organisations at four separate launch events. The number of Handbooks distributed in each institution is represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Handbooks distributed to each organisation

Name of organisation	No. of Handbooks distributed
Welsh Assembly Government	2
Coleg Glan Hafren	10
Swansea University	7
UWIC	6
Total	**25**

A presentation was given by the researcher at the launch events outlining the rationale for the study and the anticipated role of the evaluators. Initial questionnaires were distributed at the launches to attendees in order to gain a preliminary overview of its impact. This initial evaluation stage asked for the evaluators to read the Handbook and consider how they may use it in the context of their own

organisations. The number of respondents who completed the initial form is represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of completed first evaluation forms returned by organisation

Name of organisation	No. of evaluation form 1 returned
Welsh Assembly Government	2
Coleg Glan Hafren	1
Swansea University	4
UWIC	3
Total	**10**

Evaluation of the Handbook

Participants used the Handbook, where appropriate, in the preparation of their teaching and library staff development from August-December 2006. Following on from this period of review and use, the evaluators were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire, which was similar in content to the questionnaire used in the previous internal evaluation at Cardiff University. Respondents were asked to describe an incident in which they used the Handbook and were asked for their general opinions on the applicability of the Handbook to their own organisational context. The number of completed second evaluation forms returned is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of completed second evaluation forms returned by organisation

Name of organisation	No. of evaluation form 2 returned
Welsh Assembly Government	2
Coleg Glan Hafren	5
Swansea University	5
UWIC	3
Total	**15**

Following receipt of completed forms, a focus group was carried out in each institution (Table 4).

Table 4: Number of respondents attending the focus group by organisation

Name of organisation	No. attending focus group
Welsh Assembly Government	2
Coleg Glan Hafren	4
Swansea University	5
UWIC	3
Total	**14**

It should be noted that the same core group of people completed evaluation forms 1 and 2 and participated in the focus groups with the exception of one member of staff from Coleg Glan Hafren.

Results and analysis

Data were gathered via the two evaluation forms and focus groups, and the results were analysed according to the topics covered in both the forms and the focus groups.

In the second evaluation form the 15 respondents were asked what sections of the Handbook they found most useful (question 11). Some of the respondents cited more than one section of the Handbook in their answer (Table 5).

Table 5: Most useful sections of the Handbook

Most useful section/s of the Handbook	No. of respondents
Section 5: lesson planning, structure and content	5
Section 6: lesson materials	3
Section 7: Teaching aids	3
Most of it is useful	3
Section 10: Evaluation	2
Appendices - evaluation form	2
Section 8: Lesson delivery	1
Section 9: Assessment	1
No preference	1

Some of the respondents had not used the Handbook in their information literacy sessions. One reason for this was that no information literacy teaching had taken place during the course of the study (as was the case with the Government respondents). Also, some of the focus group participants (from the FE and Government sectors) did not use the Handbook as they suggested that it was geared towards HE and that it was aimed at undergraduate level and above. In particular, the respondents from the Government sector considered that the Handbook was useful as a reference tool but that it was very much aimed at higher education, with one stating "*this is currently very Cardiff University and university in general-specific. It is geared towards the educational sector.*"

The Handbook as an aid for staff development

There was general agreement amongst respondents that the Handbook is a useful tool for staff development and induction purposes. Question 5 of the first evaluation form asked '*Do you think the Handbook could be used as a basis for staff development sessions in your library service?*' All ten respondents in the first evaluation form survey stated that the Handbook could be used as a basis for staff development sessions in their library service. One HE respondent wrote in response to question 5, *"(that) for staff new to presentation/promotion work, there is a lot of sensible information in here e.g. preparing to give a lecture etc".* An FE respondent wrote: *"I think it would be useful to all members of staff and particularly useful to new staff joining the Learning Advisers team for the theory behind information literacy and for new ideas."*

The second evaluation from did not ask a specific question about the Handbook as a tool for staff development, although one HE respondent wrote in reply to question 11 (which asked '*what was the most useful section of the Handbook?*') *"It would all be useful to a newcomer to Information Literacy training, and also useful to a team leader charged with staff development for a new member of staff to find everything written down in one handbook."*

The focus group respondents strengthened the earlier evaluation form responses in their view that the Handbook is a useful tool for staff development purposes. The Handbook was regarded by one of the HE focus group participants as providing a '*unified starting point'* as a staff development tool. One of the HE institutions surveyed for this project has an information literacy working group which is planning to run sessions by library staff for library staff. It was considered by the respondents from this institution that the Handbook would give a commonality to the way these workshops are organised. Those sections which were deemed to be particularly appropriate for this function were the checklists and appendices.

The Handbook as a teaching aid

8 of the 10 respondents in the first evaluation survey stated that they felt there were aspects of the Handbook that could be used when preparing information literacy teaching sessions. The remaining two respondents answered that they 'may' be able to use it, with one FE respondent adding: *"I am not sure that I would at present select particular aspects of the handbook but many parts of it effectively reminded me of what should be considered when preparing teaching sessions. It certainly encouraged me to reflect more on my teaching."*

Of the 8 respondents who stated that they would use the Handbook in their teaching, one said that he would use the Handbook for staff induction and two would use Section 9: Assessment. Three of the respondents stated that they would use all of it. One FE subject stated that he would use it as an example of what is done elsewhere: *"It's just good to see how it's been done well elsewhere and to have a guide on how that can be achieved."* One HE respondent stated: *"I would probably utilise sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 and examples in the appendix e.g. web page evaluation. Sections 4 and 10 I would use for long term aims."*

Despite the assertion by 8 of the respondents in the first evaluation questionnaire that they would use the Handbook in their teaching, disappointingly only 3 of them ultimately used the Handbook for this purpose, as the responses to the second evaluation questionnaire demonstrated. These 3 respondents were asked which parts they had used. They were able to tick more than one box from a checklist (Table 6).

Table 6: Which parts of the handbook did you use?

Which parts did you use?	No. of respondents
Evaluation	3
Assessment	2
Lesson planning	2
Lesson materials	2
Appendix	2
Teaching aids	1
Promotion	0
Other	0
Lesson delivery	0

Of those who did use the Handbook in their preparation of teaching sessions, there was unanimous agreement by them in the focus group sessions that it improves the quality of the session, both from the teacher's and learner's perspectives. This was the case in both HE and FE. One HE respondent stated: *"It provided a means of bridging the communication gap between library language and educational language."* The FE respondent stated that "*the students seemed more interested and*

participative and, most importantly, there was evidence that they reached the aims and objectives of the lesson."

For more seasoned teachers, the Handbook was regarded as a useful *aide memoire*.

Applicability of the Handbook to a wider audience

As stated earlier, the FE and Government respondents felt that the Handbook was geared more to an HE audience than to their own learners, but found it useful in part as a reference tool and as a general teaching *aide memoire*.
The first and second evaluation forms had asked many direct questions regarding the applicability and usefulness or otherwise of the Handbook to the institutions in which the respondents worked. The focus group sessions attempted to develop the theme of wider applicability of the Handbook by asking specific questions regarding respondents' perceptions regarding this issue. In these sessions, some HE respondents stated that they felt the material was very Cardiff-centric, as one would expect from a document that was originally intended for consumption by an internal audience. Overall, the focus group participants felt that some adaptation of the Handbook would be required to make it applicable to a wider educational audience and thus more commercially attractive. They stated that the authors of the Handbook would need to take into account the different levels of learners in the different types of learning organisations they are aiming to reach. They would need to simplify the material and take out some detail, particularly with regard to the strategic and theoretical aspects of information literacy teaching as presented currently in sections 1 and 2 of the Handbook. In addition some respondents, namely from one HE institution and the FE institution, stated that some consideration could be made of the wider e-learning environment and possibly a section could be included on Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs).

Finally, it was agreed amongst the focus group participants that both a web-based and paper-based version could be produced for the benefit of different audiences, some of whom prefer the physical presence of a printed handbook and some of whom who would rather use their computer to search an online repository of resource materials.

Future developments

Given the clear evidence that the Handbook would need considerable adaptation to maker it applicable to a wider educational audience, the University decided that the current, annual round of revision to the Handbook would focus on the needs of the primary audience, the subject librarians at Cardiff University, and that no work would be undertaken to make the Handbook of wider value to the educational and Government communities. The CyMAL–funded research study provided valuable criticism of the form and presentation of material. The HILT Working Group is now engaged on the 2007 revision of HILT and will be taking these aspects into account as well as revising and re-working much of the content.

Investigations are underway into the possibility of placing the entire Handbook on the web and make it freely available to all institutions to draw down, adopt and adapt for their own purposes, within the conditions of a Creative Commons Licence. This is seen as a much more effective way of making the considerable storehouse of ideas, skills and techniques contained in the Handbook available for all.

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