

Skills for a globalised world: relevant skills for public library staff

Brief project information

Linking London Lifelong Learning Network (Linking London), the London-wide learning network that supports vocational learning and re-engagement with higher education, has awarded to London Metropolitan University's Department of Applied Social Sciences (DASS) a grant to develop relevant progression opportunities for library staff.

Linking London's aim is to improve the coherence of progression opportunities into, and through, higher education and to support the development of new curriculum to address both progression gaps and skills gaps within the public and community service sector workforce. It places great emphasis on both the needs of the learner as well as the needs of the employer to ensure that relevant skills are developed whilst giving staff the opportunity to progress professionally and academically.

Linking London has shown great interest in the approach taken by the Quality Leaders Project – Youth (QLP-Y), which was developed and administered by London Metropolitan University, and the award will enable DASS to develop new courses for library staff, based on work undertaken during QLP-Y. QLP-Y incorporated a number of key agenda set out by HEFCE in 2007 in *Personalised plans in lifelong learning networks* and included leadership and management development achieved through service development; reflective learning; support from mentors and peers and collaborative working between participating local authorities and with the profession and the University.

QLP-Y will inform the development of new learning opportunities that will be designed at London Metropolitan University in consultation with prospective employers, professional bodies and members of the Linking London Network.

In broad terms, the project seeks to develop a relevant and innovative learning programme that meets the needs of learners and employers in programmes at universities. There are few courses that provide not only coherent learning opportunities but also incorporate progression opportunities for staff who do not wish to, or cannot, attend an MA course, which is where the emphasis has been placed in recent years. This project aims to expand the scope for those who may be at different levels and who may have different learning needs and for whom there have been few avenues to develop their learning and the necessary skills.

The project aims to give staff the opportunity to develop further as reflective practitioners, via an experiential learning approach, whilst providing progression opportunities that address current skills gaps.

Rationale for the project

Local authorities are at a crossroads. A raft of public services reforms, the new duty to involve and the need to work more closely with the third sector in the delivery of public value mean that many public libraries need to deliver their services in different and more innovative ways to meet a wider range of needs. New and enhanced services require new skills and know-how, including new management know-how. However, traditional library, and in-house training courses do not address, or do not address adequately, the need for such skills. The result is that many library staff find themselves ill-equipped for service delivery in line with current government agendas. This is particularly the case for library staff without formal library qualifications who are likely to get “left behind” in a rapidly changing local government environment. Courses are therefore needed to address this skills lack but must, at the same time, address the need for learning opportunities that meet individual learner dispositions and learner identities.

The project aims to address the development of students as reflective practitioners within their local context, an approach especially suitable for the vocational learner. The focus will be on developing the skills needed for the workplace by developing key skills within it, thus work-based learning, supported by university-based learning will be a feature of learning opportunities developed as a result of the project.

The QLP experience suggests that the combination of work-based learning, supported by an academic approach, will lead to a significant level of skills development, unlikely with an entirely work-based or entirely university-based approach. By supporting staff to develop services/management skills within their own work-based context, learning opportunities aim at enhancing staff motivation and confidence and re-engaging workers with a learning agenda, facilitating further progression both academically and professionally.

The approach taken by the project will aim to address the following overarching strategic objectives from MLA’s Workforce Development Strategy:

1. A workforce fit for purpose with the challenge of diversifying the workforce composition
2. Enhancing leadership and workforce skills by addressing skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours
3. Empowering learning and change – the biggest barrier to change being identified as a lack of a learning culture in the sector

Interest in this approach was shown by those attending the Employers’ Forum at London Metropolitan University on 1 May 2008. The presentation given at this Forum, entitled *Social aspects of information: modules, short courses and projects*, was very well received by attending professionals and employers. A representative from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) indicated further interest in working with this proposal and exploring the possibility of having new learning opportunities developed within this framework further accredited by CILIP’s Seal of Recognition, which makes it “simpler for framework candidates to identify courses that will address aspects of the body of professional knowledge and be applicable for them in their workplaces.”

Recent policies, legislation and developments in Britain place an urgent need for skills development in Britain. They include personalisation and public value, the regeneration agenda and innovation. In addition, following the Leitch Review (2007), employers are urged to ensure the education system delivers what they need and a move to a skills system that gives employers “the strongest possible voice” is seen as vital.

At the international level, the World Summit on the Information Society's (WSIS) Action Plan "sets time-bound targets to turn the vision of an inclusive and equitable information society into reality." AT WSIS Geneva in December 2003, world leaders declared

"Our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Such targets demand learning opportunities that address the need for a new range of skills to sit aside more "traditional" library and information skills. It is in such a context that the project will operate, with the aim of developing skills that will enable public library staff to respond confidently to challenges posed by changing national agendas within a globalised working context. The current recession imposes a new urgency on public libraries to develop a more relevant social and economic role. Such requires both a fundamental review of the skills and experiences needed by professionals and of how these skills and experiences are acquired. The Skills project aims to address this need.

Project development thus far

A number of modules have been drafted and an initial "Skills chart" has been developed. This is informed by the IFLA/UNESCO manifesto and the World Summit on the Information Society. The Project is currently in the consultation stage, which will include consulting professionals, national policy makers, Heads of Libraries and Chief Executives across London for their views on the initial proposals. A questionnaire, based on the Skills chart and in Word format, is available on this website under the Project Consultation link. Views are welcome from all until the end of July 2009.

Expected outcomes

The final report of the Skills Project will be available by the end of September. It will include recommendations on the skills that library staff need in order to deliver services, possible teaching modules to ensure these skills are acquired by staff, and possible methods of delivery, which schools of librarianship and the professional body can use.

Contact details

Please contact the following for further information and also to send any feedback on the project and the Skills chart:

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