Developing staff and student digital literacies in the context of careers and employability

Subject area

The focus of this initiative was developing the digital literacies of staff responsible for providing Careers and Employability services at Cardiff University and undergraduate students participating in the Cardiff Award scheme.

Scope and context

Approximately 40 staff are involved in providing careers and employability related services at Cardiff University. Many come into regular contact with students and academic and are therefore well placed to promote the development of digital literacies in the context of careers and employability advice and support. This would be carried out through face-to-face meetings, presentations, running workshops and the provision of more extensive programmes of study such as the Cardiff Award Scheme.

The initial aim of the Digidol project was to raise the awareness and understanding of careers staff about the importance and value of developing their own digital literacies. The intention was to help staff improve their work practices through more effective use of available technologies. Investing in the developing staff digital literacies was judge to be a necessary first stage to help them embraced their future role in helping to develop the same literacies in students as an integral part of their service provision.

A number of separate but related initiatives were undertaken to help careers staff identify and establish sustainable approaches to developing digital literacies through their staff development initiatives. Support was also provided to develop and embed digital literacies into careers and employability related resources and activities for academic staff and students.

The project team met regularly with service managers to design and coordinate staff development opportunities and resource development. These included a digital literacies workshop for careers staff at their away day. An online community for was set up using the university's internal social media platform IBM Connections. The project team worked with service managers to setup and managing the community. All careers staff were registered and plans were made to run short lunchtime sessions to help familiarise everyone with its functions and features. It was agreed that the initial purpose for making use of the environment was to be to improve the dissemination and sharing of information between staff and also investigate its potential for improving the practice of meetings.

Rationale and aims

The purpose was to establish and sustain an approach to developing the digital literacies of careers staff through introducing new relevant digital practices. And by doing so enable

improved information exchange and collaboration with other professional services, for example with the Library and IT Services. In addition, there was agreement to collaborate in the design, development and embedding of digital literacy related resources and activities provided by the careers and employability service.

As a direct result of running workshops with Careers and Employability staff there has been continued information exchange and dialogue with senior managers and, despite a disruptive period of organisational change, this has resulted in firm plans to delivery further short staff development sessions and web resources for academic staff and students.

Information resources detailing digital literacies for students are now available on the Careers Central website (http://cardiff.ac.uk/careers/students/career-central/). Importantly, these were co-developed between the project team and careers staff. Further work is underway to develop additional resources, e.g., detailed descriptions of specific kinds of digital literacy, case studies and video of employers explaining the relevance and value of digital literacies in the context of their business. The aim is to make explicit the nature of digital literacies, explain their value and importance and provide examples that communicate to students how they can be developed and evidenced, for example, through the use of e-Portfolios. The intention is to further enrich this information source with relevant multimedia resources and link through to the Knowledge Hub to encourage further exploration and discovery.

Digital literacies addressed

A workshop at an Away Day for all Careers staff used a modified version of the Beetham and Sharpe (2009) Learning Literacies framework (incorporating 'Awareness') to explain the various aspects of digital literacy and how learning activities should ideally seek to develop them in combination. Staff were presented with two exercises. The first encourage them, in small groups, to discuss their understanding of each level of the model from their own perspective, i.e., in terms of their appreciation and use of digital technologies for personal learning, work and social activities. This was followed with them doing the same exercise but from the perspective of the students they are providing their services to.

A number of workshops have been developed and run with undergraduate students arranged through the Cardiff Award scheme. For example, sessions have been run on using PowerPoint and Prezi for presenting. These opportunities enabled resources to be embedded and linked through to the Knowledge Hub for subsequent exploration and use (http://prezi.com/yu-8hlox-khb/using-prezi-to-present-on-presenting/).

Careers staff have been introduced to the internal social media platform IBM Connections, but so far (June 2013) only those directly involved working with the Digidol project are currently active users. There are plans to run short training sessions for all staff to familiarise them with the use of Connections for common work tasks, for example,

encouraging staff to move their practice away from using email to circulate documents to using Connections to store and share them.

Overview

From the perspective of the Digidol project, the positive response and engagement expressed by senior management in Careers and Employability has allowed a range of initiatives and ideas to continue to be explored. The revised Careers and Employability strategy made explicit reference to the need to develop learning literacies and this continues to drive forward work in this area.

Although significant organisational change has taken place during the course of the project, a constructive working relationship has been maintained senior managers in Careers and Employability. There are plans to run future staff development sessions. There is particular interest in further exploring the potential of Connections as a way to improve communication and collaboration between staff with different roles and who work in separate areas. Its potential for improving how meetings are conducted and for task devolment and management has been identified as a potential area for investigation.

Digital resources and know how used

The Learning Literacies development framework has been used extensively to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach to understanding and putting into practice the provision of services.

A number of senior managers in the Careers service are using the internal social media platform IBM Connections to share information, communicate with their staff and are actively planning to run staff development session to encourage wider adoption and use.

Benefits and impacts

There have been tangible outputs from working with the Careers team. Digital literacy information and advice is now provided through the Careers Central website (with further enhancements planned). Staff awareness and understanding of the value of developing their own digital literacies and of their future role in promoting and enabling the development in students has increased significantly. Information exchange and communication continues to take place online between staff within the careers service and with staff in other professional services. Although only a small number of people regularly make use of the forum, they are mainly senior managers who are enthusiastic about promoting its use more widely across the service. The online community has directly impacted on the availability of information and how rapidly people are made aware of relevant and useful resources, particularly between different services.

Increased use of Connections has helped facilitate communication and collaboration between the Digidol project team and those leading the digital literacy initiatives within

the Careers service. It also has the potential to improve information dissemination and communication with the Schools and Colleges.

Links to further information
Cardiff University Career Central
http://cardiff.ac.uk/careers/students/career-central/

The Cardiff Award Scheme
http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/careers/students/the-cardiff-award/

Further opportunities
Work with the Careers and Employability service continues, with plans to further develop digital literacy related resources, activities and skills assessment for students on the Careers Central website (see above). A series of video interviews with employers have been proposed, with the expectation that hearing the 'employer's voice' will help impress upon students the importance of dedicating time and effort to developing and evidencing their digital literacies. It is also planned to explore the options for promoting the development of digital literacies for employability through the university's e-Portfolio initiative.

The intention is to design and develop a step-wise programme of staff development to introduce Careers staff to a range of potentially useful digital practices and thereby seek to develop appropriate digital literacies. For example, there are plans to work with staff to develop the use of Connections and other tools/services to explore how internal meetings can be improved. The expectation is that as their technology related knowledge and skills evolve they will be better placed to promote the awareness and development of academic and students digital literacies through their everyday service.

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