Business and health librarians in cross-site collaboration at City University London

Jacqui Gaul
*Head of the Learning Resource Centre,
Sir John Cass Business School,
City University London*
Tel: 020 7040 0204
E-mail: j.r.gaul@city.ac.uk

During the spring/summer of 2009, information services at City University London underwent a staff restructure. This resulted in the reorganisation of some teams. The library team serving the school of community and health sciences (SC&HS) was one of the teams most significantly impacted upon. Here, three existing training and support posts were disestablished and replaced with a new team of three learning and teaching support coordinators. These learning and teaching support coordinators provide library and IT training and support in the three different university sites in which the school operates.

Only one of the original post-holders became a member of the newly formed team. Two additional members of staff were taken on (initially for a period of three months) to cover the other two posts. One of these was a colleague who moved over from another area of the library service and the other was a new appointment to the university. Following the restructure, the position of head of library services for SC&HS also became vacant, which meant that there was no direct line manager for the new team. There was therefore serious concern within the school about the delivery of its detailed library/IT training support programme for the autumn term. It was critical to address this issue, provide reassurance to the school and demonstrate that there would be no loss in service as a result of the restructure.

Along with my colleague, Carolyn Smith (electronic resources manager at the Sir John Cass Business School) I was therefore asked by the director of information services and libraries at City University London (Máire Lanigan) to lead a 'task and finish' group to support and coordinate the activities of the new learning and teaching support coordinators team over the autumn term.

Meeting fortnightly, the group therefore comprised myself, Carolyn Smith, the three learning and teaching coordinators for the school and the e-resources and radiography academic liaison librarian.

There were a number of hurdles to overcome at the outset. The group was set up at a very busy time (the quiet summer break is definitely a thing of the past), making simple diary-coordination challenging. Although Carolyn and myself have extensive training experience, we had limited knowledge of the school and the subject areas it teaches. Over the summer the university's student desktop PC build and IT network were also upgraded, so workshop material from previous years had to be quickly updated and lab upgrades timed accordingly.

Additionally, two out of three of the group members were new to running training programmes within the school. In order to run the timetabled workshops and offer effective one-to-one support, team members needed extra training that had to be organised within a very tight time frame.

Training was provided for the team members in a variety of ways. Working with IT colleagues from City University London, a customised training session was given on MS Office 2007. External trainers were brought in to provide voice coaching and enhance MS Excel support skills.

The training offered by the learning and teaching support coordinators ranges from basic IT skills workshops to advanced sessions in searching specialist databases. The training schedule itself is very intensive, providing 56 library/IT inductions and 104 workshops during August–October alone. In order to ensure that all these sessions were run efficiently, a detailed spreadsheet was set up on a shared network drive giving full information for each training session. A task list was also compiled and loaded onto the shared drive to ensure that all training tasks were prioritised and completed on time. Team members liaised with key contacts within the school to keep them informed of the programmes being offered and to provide reassurance regarding the continuity of service.

Formal feedback was collected at the end of each training session and the team is also creating a more evaluative online survey where users can reflect on the value and applicability of the training they have received. This survey, which will run towards the end of term, will be used along with feedback from the school to inform future training programmes.

The task and finish group has not only delivered on its original remit but has gone beyond it in developing new training possibilities for the school. For example, all members of the team have been trained by the Cass electronic resources manager in the use of Adobe Captivate and are busy producing online tutorials that can be made available via the web or virtual learning environments. Members also plan to set up a resource-alerting service to ensure that users are reminded of relevant resources at key points throughout the year.

The group has been an excellent example of colleagues from different parts of the service, with different perspectives and skills, working together to achieve a common service aim. This group has helped facilitate change by ensuring continuity of service to the school of community and health sciences whilst putting in place a programme of development for library and IT training. This has been achieved in the face of a number of challenges and against tight deadlines.