

Developing a teaching and learning programme for librarians at UAL Library Services

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University of the Arts London (UAL) is a specialist provider of art, design, fashion, communication and performance education and comprises six colleges: Camberwell College of Arts; Central Saint Martins; Chelsea College of Arts; London College of Communication; London College of Fashion; and Wimbledon College of Arts. Library Services is part of a broader Library and Academic Support service in the university that also includes a cross-college academic support team and Language Centre. The service shares an overall vision for academic support that embraces study skills, information and digital literacy, and English language, and aims to ensure parity of provision for all students (Christie, 2015).

Librarian involvement in delivering academic support

Academic support at UAL is framed in terms of an enhancement, rather than a curriculum-embedded model, which leads to a demand for academic support staff – including librarians – to provide ‘value added’ support to individual students and groups of students, and to whole curriculum areas where appropriate.

Each college has a team of academic support librarians, who have both a functional focus in their library team (e.g. collections, lending services, information services) and a subject specialism focus aligned with programmes and courses they support (reading-list management, stock selection and academic support). Academic support given by these librarians might include library induction, information skills and referencing sessions, and, on occasion, bespoke study skills sessions developed and delivered with academic support tutors. The onus is on individual academic support librarians to liaise with curriculum areas and develop the desired provision, and it is sometimes mistakenly assumed that they are either natural teachers or already equipped to fulfil this aspect of their role.

Formation of a teaching and learning programme

As the profile of the enhancement model of academic support has increased, so too has the demand for classes and sessions run by academic support librarians. In response, several colleagues requested customised professional development to equip them with teaching skills. Whilst participation in the university’s Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice is an option for librarians at UAL, this route is not for everybody, and some wanted something more tailored to their roles. A strategic partnership between Library Services and the Teaching and Learning Exchange (the department responsible for education studies and educational development at UAL) was established, and a bespoke teaching and learning programme was created.

The programme

The overall aim of the programme was to introduce librarians involved in teaching to some of the main features of art and design pedagogy in a context of providing library-based academic support. Specific objectives included:

- introduction to learning theories; contextualising theory into practice
- raising awareness of art and design curriculum design
- exposure to design techniques and teaching styles
- increasing confidence in teaching and presenting
- dissemination of technology-enhanced learning methods and strategies
- developing ways of evaluating teaching.

The programme included five stand-alone sessions, each offered twice to give flexibility around attendance. The design and delivery team included educational developers from the Teaching and Learning Exchange, learning

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technologists, the Head of Widening Participation (London College of Communication), Associate Director of Library Services, academic support librarians, academic support co-ordinators and guest speakers from other universities.

Academic support librarians were encouraged to attend all sessions, though some were only able to attend two or three. The final session included participant presentations designed to consolidate learning and develop evaluation and reflection techniques by evaluating the course itself.

Session 1 – Introduction to teaching and learning in the arts (3 hours)

Overview of approaches to teaching and learning in an arts context, and theoretical frameworks that can be used to inform these approaches

Aims

- to familiarise participants with the range of teaching and learning formats at UAL
- to explore theoretical positions to support understanding of teaching and learning in arts disciplines, incorporating inclusivity
- to relate these formats and theoretical positions to own practice

Content

- review of teaching and learning formats and spaces
- perceived and actual differences between written and practical work
- introduction to learning theories
- teaching for inclusivity
- cultural sensitivity

Session 2 – Approaches to teaching and learning (full day)

Approaches to curriculum liaison, and design of library-related teaching and learning support activities. To include review of curriculum planning aligned with Quality Assurance Agency and UAL regulations, and exploration and evaluation of alternative and complementary approaches to session design

Aims

- to understand key approaches to curriculum design that can be applied at course, unit and session level
- to introduce a range of alternative approaches to teaching design
- to identify ways of preparing learning and teaching support sessions
- to develop sound approaches to curriculum liaison, session design, and teaching and supporting learning in specific contexts

Content:

- contribution to programme, course and unit design and delivery (i.e. validation, early involvement in assignment briefs, librarian attendance and experience in lessons and lectures)
- learning outcomes-based curriculum design
- illustration and review of different approaches to teaching design from UAL librarians and guest presenters
- supporting those writing dissertations, including early engagement in discussions about preparing for dissertation and understanding dissertation format

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Session 3 – Presentation skills (3 hours)

Styles and techniques for presenting and public speaking

Aims

- to build confidence in presenting
- to identify the learning objectives of presentations
- to explore techniques for giving effective presentations

Content

- overview of public speaking
- confidence building
- skills (vocal, body language, etc.)
- reflective exercise

At the end of this session, participants are asked to prepare a short presentation or micro-lesson to be trialled with colleagues at the final session.

Session 4 – Educational technology (3 hours)

A round-table seminar at which participants and invited colleagues demonstrate or outline technologies they have designed, used or plan to use to support teaching and learning activity

Aims

- to enhance awareness of current trends in educational technology
- to disseminate ways of using technology in academic support contexts
- to learn from practical experience of using learning technology
- to evaluate advantages and disadvantages of particular technologies

Session five – evaluating teaching (4 hours)

Giving prepared peer presentations or micro-lessons, approaches to teaching evaluation, and individual reflection for professional development

Aims

- to provide a rationale for taking a reflective approach to professional practice
- to identify a range of reflective techniques, including peer observation of teaching
- to encourage reflective approaches to practice
- to identify individual and collective next steps for professional development

Content

- peer presentations or micro-lessons
- approaches to evaluation, and evaluation of programme
- models of reflective practice and how to use them
- professional recognition with the Higher Education Academy

Evaluation of the programme

UAL Library Services has forty academic support librarians across the six colleges (including weekend and evening teams). The programme targeted this group of staff in particular. Of these, 28 attended four or five sessions

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and were in a strong position to evaluate the whole-programme experience. The remainder attended individual sessions, depending on their availability. Evaluation was completed by means of a collective reflective exercise and individual feedback via email. Whether the librarians attended all sessions or just a selection, feedback was very positive:

I thoroughly enjoyed the training, and I'm glad you encouraged me to attend although I'll be studying on the PG Cert this coming year. I found that the sessions in the CDP programme gave me a really good idea of what to expect from the actual PG course. (Academic Support Librarian, London College of Fashion)

It was excellent to have the opportunity to talk to librarians across the department, sharing good practice, challenges and anxieties. There are a number of practical things I hope to explore further: using games, screen recording, using learning outcomes more formally, using observations, increasing interactivity and fun especially in lecture based sessions. (Assistant Academic Support Librarian, Chelsea College of Arts)

Sharing the sessions with so many colleagues from CSM [Central St Martins] and other sites has given me the confidence and reassurance that I can now approach other academic support librarians to discuss the planning and delivery of information skills sessions. Sharing ideas and discussing our role in teaching and learning was the most valuable part for me. (Academic Support Librarian, Central Saint Martins)

Evaluation also revealed some of the personal realisations resulting from engagement in the programme. These included 'epiphany moments' when librarians realised, for example, that they 'really are teachers' and that they can experiment with and 'own' teaching design.

Impact

The programme has enabled Library Services to move forward with some of its student experience and transformative education strategic objectives. A year after programme delivery, academic support librarians are taking a more creative approach to teaching and learning support, which is manifested in a number of ways:

- increased variety in information skills sessions, incorporating different and creative approaches to session planning and design
- collaboration across colleges and departments, with more co-development and co-delivery with other librarians, tutors and / or academics
- integration of games and gamification into sessions
- increased use of object-based learning

A further impact has been an increase in confidence among academic support librarians, who feel more empowered and responsible for development and delivery of training and more valued as teachers within their academic teams.

Conclusion

The teaching and learning programme for Academic Support Librarians at UAL has been very well received by both those responsible for its design and delivery and those who participated. It has had the desired impact on the teaching practice of the librarians, and Library Services is in a better position to deliver some of its strategic objectives as a result.

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Next steps will be to offer the programme again to a wider range of Library Services staff, after taking into account evaluation of the first iteration and current operational and strategic demands. Colleagues from the Teaching and Learning Exchange are particularly keen to tailor the programme so that it fully reflects the kinds of teaching and learning support provided with Library Services and to enable its staff to gain more formal professional recognition for their professional practice through qualified routes or by gaining Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

Reference

Christie, P. (2015). Revisioning academic support as an innovative and inclusive offer for creative arts students. [online] *SCONUL Focus* 64. Available at http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/14_17.pdf [accessed 30 September 2016]

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