Time travel with WebEx?

Kingston University's partner college conundrum

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Background

Like many other universities, the Kingston University (KU) library and learning services subject teams have moved away from a physical induction tour of the learning resources centre (LRC) and its resources. We have replaced it with an informal and interactive presentation in a teaching area outside the LRC. It takes place during Freshers' week and, if at all possible, is delivered by the relevant subject librarian. Our aim is to ensure that the students are aware of our existence, know where to find us and have had the opportunity to find out the basics about using the LRCs.

Reinforcement of this basic information, along with guidance on more specialist resources available and general information literacy training, are delivered in a variety of ways during the course of the year. We aim to provide this when it is relevant to the students, ideally just before they start on an assessed piece of work so that they can discover for themselves that using our resources can have a beneficial effect on their marks.

In order to ensure parity of experience, and to guarantee that all students who attend an induction session receive the same basic information, we developed a generic library induction presentation for the 2012–13 academic year. This covered four main areas: learning spaces (e.g. physical LRCs), computing, resources, and advice and support. Additional information specific to a subject team or to a site (we have four, which are very different from each other) was added, as required by the subject teams. This works very effectively *if* you are on a KU campus.

KU partner colleges

I work in the Science Engineering and Computing (SEC) library team as the librarian responsible for resource provision and information literacy teaching in the School of Aerospace and Aircraft Engineering. This School has the largest number of partner colleges associated with it, especially in the field of foundation level aircraft engineering degrees. The majority of these students' resources are supplied to them as hard copy by their college, as required by EASA (European Aviation Safety Agency) regulations. However, these students are also able to make use of our learning resources and, like our full-time students, need to be made aware of what is available and relevant to them. As they can opt for a final 'top-up to honours' year, taught at KU, it is important that they are aware of the resources we can offer to help them achieve their desired qualification.

One of the comments in the annual LRC user survey from partner college students has been that they sometimes do not really feel part of KU, and do not know how to access and make use of our resources. Obviously, we are keen to change this experience, and having built up relationships with our partner college administrative and teaching staff, I offered to visit as many of them as possible to offer an induction session. The college staff were keen for this to happen during Freshers' week so that the students hit the ground running.

Calendar clash crisis

Last year the three members of the SEC library team delivered 26 induction sessions over the five days of Freshers' week, to approximately 948 students, that is, 88% of SEC students. In order to provide access to the material for those who did not attend an induction session, and to reinforce the information given to those who did, the presentation was made available on the student intranet at the end of Freshers' week.

All was running smoothly until there was an unforeseen clash – I had arranged to visit one of our partner colleges, the AeroAcademy, which is part of Marshall Aerospace and Defence Group based in Cambridge. As the session was due to start at 08:30, it involved an overnight stay and a whole day on site. Having done this last year, I was happy to visit again to develop further the relationship with the AeroAcademy. However, we also had a departmental stall at our Freshers' Fayre, which took place on the last two days of Freshers' week. Cover was needed for the stall for

the final session of the Fayre and as no one else could be free, I had to provide that cover. As teleportation remains a science fiction dream, something had to change. I then had a weekend followed by four working days (in Freshers' week) to try and resolve it in conjunction with library team colleagues and the AeroAcademy staff.

The staff at AeroAcademy were sympathetic to my dilemma and we explored ways of running a webinar, which could take place at the same time as the planned session. As the college does not use Skype (my preferred option), we used their preferred system, WebEx.

This proved easy enough to use at a basic level, after I had had some practice with the Education Officer based in Cambridge. I rehearsed with her how to set up the webinar. We ensured that the students would be able to hear me as I was using a phone line rather than a dedicated microphone, and that I could see them, even if they were unable to see me as no webcam was available.

I redesigned our generic induction presentation to incorporate specific advice on relevant resources, something I had already intended to do. The content of the session was developed in consultation with the AeroAcademy staff and included guidance on the use of our library catalogue, the easiest way to access our e-books as well as a section on plagiarism and citation and referencing. The correct procedure for dealing with KU username and password questions was also explained, as this is a frequent query.

On Friday morning I was at work by 08:00 (much to the amazement of my colleagues who know I do not do mornings), and at 08:30 I opened up the webinar and started. By 09:15, the session was over and the information had been delivered. I was relieved that it had gone smoothly from a technical point of view and the AeroAcademy were pleased that it had taken place, albeit not exactly as planned. If you would like to have a look at the content of the session, it is available on the SEC library team's blog, at http://blogs. kingston.ac.uk/seclibrary in the help and advice section under aerospace and aircraft (Butcher, 2013).

Feedback

To obtain some initial evaluation, I asked the Education Officer and academic staff for feedback on the content and delivery of the session. The Education Officer responded on behalf of the AeroAcademy as follows:

> The content of the presentation given has prepared our students well for their time here in partnership with Kingston University; they now have a very good understanding of how to access Kingston's online learning resources. How to access and log in to the university's network was also covered, including how the students are to access their emails. Referencing and plagiarism were also covered and clarified. As the presentation was forwarded to me I was able to upload this to our display screen for students who were unable to make it to the conference… We would like to be able to have more connection with Kingston University in this way. (Tillett, 2013)

Some preliminary conclusions based on feedback

It appears from the feedback that the webinar was at least as good as the previous year's personal visit, and maybe better in that it provided a more time-efficient way of passing on the necessary information. It has definitely whetted both our and our partner's appetite for more contacts of this type in the future and demonstrated our flexibility in the support we can offer.

Learning points

Technology
The opportunity to become familiar with WebEx while practising with partner college staff was invaluable. However, foreknowledge of the conferencing facilities used by our partner colleges would make the process more straightforward. Alternatively, it could be beneficial to use Black-Board IM (available to our partners as well as to us) in future sessions.

Feedback
It would be very helpful to discuss with the partner college students how they felt the session went, and if they had any key questions which were not covered. This could take place immediately after the session, or at a future follow-up session. Making the session available to the Aero-Academy to place on their intranet ensured that students had the option to view it at a convenient time for them.

Content and timing of presentation
As I was not an entirely confident operator of WebEx, I used screenshots of the KU intranet and library catalogue searches rather than demon-

strating them live. This may have had an adverse effect on the students' engagement; although I several times invited questions, there were none, possibly because of the lack of a webcam. This was no doubt part of the reason why the virtual session was shorter than the one-to-one session, when several students asked why we do not have e-books covering all the titles they needed to use, for instance.

Other pros and cons
Although there was no face-to-face time at this meeting, there were valuable travelling time and expenses savings as well as the chance to reduce my carbon footprint by not travelling at all! These savings are not to be taken lightly, and the potential value of offering a larger number of webinars across all our partner colleges is clear.

Future plans
I intend to make use in future of live demos and shall ensure that a webcam is available – this will require further practice well before the start of Freshers' week. I also plan to build in some specific interactivity opportunities for the students. As an example, this could involve challenging them to locate resources for a future piece of work and then providing feedback on their search methods and discoveries. Using the guidance about WebEx available on Lynda.com will help me to develop these opportunities further.

It will be interesting to see how students and staff respond to these planned changes. In consultation with our partner colleges, I would like to see if it there is a requirement for an induction webinar from our other aerospace and aircraft engineering partners. Ideally, I would like to offer sessions other than induction at relevant times in the students' year.

I am keen to share the concept of an induction webinar with members of our other library faculty subject teams and develop it further in accordance with their partners' stated needs. This is likely to require further investigation with the partner colleges as well as collaboration with my colleagues. The library and learning services teaching group, where approaches to information literacy and other teaching are discussed and developed, is an ideal forum for this.

References

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