Library outreach to schools and colleges at the University of Bradford

Teaching students, networking with librarians

Jennifer Rowland
Subject Librarian
University of Bradford Library
j.rowland2@bradford.ac.uk

BACKGROUND

Bradford, like most British universities, carries out many school and college outreach events to accustom students to the idea of coming to university and to introduce them to the resources available here. Bradford's student body includes many first-generation students.

Until a year ago, the library did not formally offer any 'outreach' events – we were part of the university open day programmes and worked with academic staff doing school visit days. We treated individual NQF Level 3 students (that is, 16–18 year olds or equivalent) [1] who wanted reference access as ordinary visitors – giving them entry to the library and access to the books, but no support from library staff unless they asked for help. This model is fine for adult visitors who are used to using library catalogues and finding books by classmark, but school students often needed high levels of support from front-line staff. We were concerned about the disproportionate costs of this in staff time, as all our funding is for the support of our own students and academics. The library was also seeing an increase in requests from schools for group visits to the library to support their students' A-level and EPQ (Extended Project Qualification) studies. [2]

We wanted to

- reduce the load on front-line staff
- help Level 3 students to get more out of visiting our library than just looking at a lot of shelves
- give students the opportunity to develop research skills they need as they transition to university
- support the university's outreach programme.

CREATING TEACHING SESSIONS

We set up a library outreach group, with two subject librarians (Jennifer Rowland and Maria Introwicz) and the special collections librarian (Alison Cullingford), and decided to run two-hour library inductions at set times. Schools are asked to send their students to these instead of telling them that they can drop in for access. If schools send a group of students, they need to come with a teacher or librarian. We only offer the sessions at our less busy times of year. Customer services staff create reference-only user accounts ahead of the visit (from a list of proposed attendees sent by the school), then photograph students and process library cards on the day of the visit. The teaching is held in a small PC cluster in the library and taught by two library staff.

We created a web page setting out what we can offer and some links to resources. [3]

The induction teaching material was modified from the material we use for teaching our first-year students. The overall aim is to encourage use of good-quality sources in their study. We chose what to include based on the skills gaps we see in our arriving first-years. Our teaching material is available to download from JORUM, the UK's open educational resource sharing repository (under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-Alike licence). [4] Libraries outside the UK are welcome to contact the author for the material.

In the two hours of the induction, the students can do exercises covering

- awareness of who writes web pages and issues of bias on the internet
- improving web searching skills
- use of academic open access e-books
- use of our library catalogue
- finding books on our shelves
- navigating to useful information in a book.

We also draw their attention to our archives and special collections and encourage students who are interested in using primary sources to come in for an appointment.

We realise that making notes, using your notes to write in your own voice, and citing and referencing are also skills that students need to develop, but we do not have time to cover them. We point the attendees to already existing online resources aimed at helping them develop these skills, such as the University's Trans:it website. [5]

We have run seven sessions using this format, seeing around a hundred students in all. The workshop sessions have proved particularly popular with EPQ students, who are encouraged to visit their local university library. The induction workshop covers many of the skills they particularly need and could be counted as part of the guided learning hours they are required to log. A few other university libraries have put on sessions just for EPQ students,[6] but we feel ours are relevant to any student who is interested in taking their skills to a higher level.

The teachers who accompanied students to the sessions have said that the material will be very useful to the students, and most of those who attended have been very engaged and have done well.

Networking with local school and college librarians

A school librarian attended one of the sessions. She asked a member of the outreach group to a local school librarians' networking group to talk about the information literacy skills needed by students transitioning to university. Following this, the outreach group decided that inviting local school and college librarians to a meeting and workshop afternoon would be popular, and useful both for them and for us. (We wanted to check our assumption that what worked with our first-year students would be transferrable.)

We timed it for June 2014, after the end of our university term but before the end of the school term.

College librarians were fairly easy to locate, but we wanted to reach a good cross-section of the local schools. This was the most difficult part of arranging the event. We invited the members of the already existing local school librarians' networking group, asked one of our previous graduate trainees now working in a school library to send an invitation to her group of contacts, and then asked the university's Education Liaison team for a list of the schools they currently work with, on the grounds that people at these schools would be more likely to respond to a contact from an unknown person at the university. Hardly any

schools have contact information for their librarians on their websites, so we emailed the identified admin contacts and asked for the email to be forwarded to the librarian.

We had 29 expressions of interest, with 24 eventual attendees, including librarians from nine individual schools.

The programme included: a tour of our library, a long tea break to allow networking (as school librarians get fewer chances for meeting other professionals than college and university librarians), a talk on what we provide for the visiting students and what skills students need at university, and a discussion. We asked the attendees what information literacy was currently being taught at schools, what approaches work well with 16–19 year olds, whether there were any specific resources that they liked to use, and so on.

We created reference-only access library cards for any of the visitors who wanted one, and provided a delegate pack with slides from the talk, a promotional flyer for them to share with teachers, and a certificate of attendance for their CPD portfolios.

Feedback from the delegates was that this was a useful exercise for them, and it was certainly valuable to us. (For example, we had been wondering whether to modify the sequence of our teaching so as to start with books as a resource, but in the discussion the librarians felt that their students naturally turn to the web first when searching, so it was sensible to start there.) We were reassured that we are pitching the sessions at about the right level, and that the style of teaching, with plenty of tasks for the students, is appropriate.

Conclusion and future developments

We are pleased with how the induction workshops have been received by school students and teachers. The process of creating it has also been valuable in giving us better links with other areas of the university such as the Education Liaison team, and has raised the library's profile as part of the university's outreach programme. We plan to keep offering the sessions.

One issue that may arise as more schools hear that we offer the sessions is that the workload of people in the outreach group becomes too heavy. One school librarian who attended our meeting asked to send the whole of their incoming sixth form, which would have required 20 staff hours.

We are keeping an eye on this and if necessary will talk to our line managers about asking other colleagues to co-teach, or ask the Education Liaison team for someone to assist in sessions.
We would like to repeat the librarians' networking afternoon.

We will rewrite some of the teaching material, based on both our own experiences delivering it and the feedback from school and college librarians. For example, the worksheet on identifying good-quality websites currently involves a lot of reading before starting the task. We're planning to change it to a group task, with each member of the group reading some of the ways to evaluate a website and then the students pooling their knowledge.

REFERENCES

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