

## OULDI-JISC Project

### Narrative 15

Sam Thomas is a Learning and Teaching librarian who works primarily with the Faculty of Education and Language Studies and the Social Sciences faculty in her university. Over the last three years, Sam has noticed a significant shift in the role of Learning and Teaching librarians, in part due to the increased use of online technologies, including the virtual learning environment (VLE) as platforms for learning and teaching:

*“I think [our role] is definitely moving much more towards being involved with the pedagogy. For a lot of courses that I’ve been involved with, you were seen much more as someone who sorts out the [University’s] external website database, links and the access to resources rather than the actual learning and teaching as it were [...] For a very long time the library was marginal to the business of the University in that everything [i.e. learning and teaching materials] came out of the box, and so it was very limited what we could contribute but now because the technology’s moved on, there are so many online resources we can use and we can generate really exciting, brilliant activities online. I think that has made a real difference to what we can actually contribute as well.”*

The Library Services unit has responded to this significant shift in role by running a series of workshops to ‘up-skill’ Learning and Teaching librarians to enable them to respond to new requirements. These workshops included sessions on learning theory, assessment and learning design. These sessions led to Sam deciding to trial the use of a learning design approach to support the integration of IL outcomes, activities and assessment into a module she was working on.

In addition the unit has developed a series of tools and resources for Learning and Teaching librarians to use in their work with module teams, and has seen the OULDI tools and resources as complementary to these. In particular they have developed an Information Literacies Framework, and a set of Library Information Literacy (LIL) activities and resources for module teams to integrate into new and existing modules. Sam says of this initiative:

*“I think [Library Services] have adapted to the online environment really well though. You were talking about the links but the Library Information Literacy website – the LIL site – that’s been relatively recent. That’s been two years we’ve been working on that and that’s been an absolute revelation for us in lots of ways. It means we’ve got a database – in effect – that’s got all these activities that we can go and show module teams that “this is what we can do and you can take something from here, and we can amend it if you want it in a different way” and I think that that has really had an impact on how we work with our module teams. The fact that they can see there and then what we do and how it can work for them”.*

Sam decided that the tools would work well with a module she was working on where the module team had already decided to use a number of the library's resources, such as dictionaries and thesauri, and it was clear that the development of students' Information Literacy skills would be an important feature of the module. Sam used the Library's Information Literacy framework to structure discussions with module team about level and progression, and then used a representation to map activities and Library Information Literacy (LIL) resources to the chosen outcomes from the framework:

*"Having the framework was really good because it meant that I could go to the module team and say that this is what we recommend that students work at this particular level and we can identify the sorts of skills that they may be using and how we might address those skills - so the sorts of activities that we may want to incorporate, but it also meant that we could identify the gaps in our provision so the framework was really valuable and the module team could see the value too".*

When asked why she thinks she adopted a learning design approach and was able to embed it into her practice so successfully Sam said:

*"I think it's partly around structure, and around wanting that framework in a way. I'm quite organised - and you'd expect a librarian to say that really - but I like things to be mapped out, I like things to be orderly and I like to be able to say "right, we've covered this, this and this so we know what we're doing" [...] It gives me that confidence I think, when I go into a module team, to say "Look this is all based on previous work that's been done, and the experience of other module teams", and I think if you have that evidence then that really backs you up. And I think that's why I really like using it."*

She also suggests that the positioning of Library Services across the faculties has a positive impact on her ability to work effectively with module teams, in that she has a breadth of knowledge and experience to share:

*"I think [Library Services] are one of those few areas that have that broad knowledge of the way that different areas are using the VLE and that pays off as well. You can go to module teams and say "Well we've seen it done this way and we've also seen it done this way" So you can offer those options as well because it isn't all clear cut. There are different ways of doing things. I think because we get involved in so many different modules we do have that breadth of knowledge"*

Changes in the role and practice of the Learning and Teaching librarians have also positively impacted on relationships and working patterns with other support professionals from other units.

Sam warns that there are significant challenges for Learning and Teaching librarians in working with some module teams who have a more traditional approach to module design,

especially where they are working on revisions (remakes) of existing modules rather than on brand new modules, and sees Learning and Teaching librarians in having a role in changing the design thinking of module teams in these cases:

*“Sometimes the activities online, whatever those activities might be, are seen as an add-on, an afterthought [...].the academic writing is [seen as] the actual content, everything else is just peripheral. When actually it’s about trying to shift that sort of thinking. Pedagogy has changed and it’s about a holistic view of all the activities, the readings, everything is part of that experience. And how do we convert that knowledge into what we actually do? Well there seems to be a gap in how that actually works. But I think we are contributing to remedying that with our activities and certainly with LIL because it has that structure and that foundation of evidence, I think we can say “Look this really works” and learning design as it becomes more common will eventually bed-in, but it just takes a long time”.*

She believes that being involved in early design discussions can significantly help with the integration of Information Literacy outcomes, activities and assessment:

*“I think getting in very early is key. I think if we can have those discussions very early on in the production process that really helps. So that is what I’m intending to do with the modules I’m currently working on – to introduce the Information Literacy framework very early on so they can incorporate that into their thinking right at the very beginning of the learning design stage[...] and that means we can develop a module which is a really good learning experience for students”*

*This narrative is one of a series of case studies published by the OULDI-JISC Project between 2011-2012. For further details visit the project website at: <http://ouldi.open.ac.uk/>*