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# 'If the library is the heart of the university, then information literacy is the brain': promoting 'Information literacy week' at Salford University



Sue Barker-Mathews  
Academic Support Librarian  
University of Salford Library  
Tel: 0161 295 3301  
Email: [s.c.barker-mathews@salford.ac.uk](mailto:s.c.barker-mathews@salford.ac.uk)



Maggie Costello  
Content Developer  
University of Salford Library  
Tel: 0161 295 6524  
Email: [m.r.costello@salford.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.costello@salford.ac.uk)

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## INTRODUCTION

The University of Salford's Information Literacy (IL) Strategy has evolved over the past twelve months, and aims to ensure that all our students have the opportunity to become information literate by embedding IL-related intended learning outcomes into all programmes. The strategy is co-ordinated by LEaRN<sup>1</sup> and led by the library, and its key objectives will be delivered over the coming year.

To raise awareness of the importance of IL amongst both academic staff and students the university hosted its first 'Information Literacy week'. This article is an overview of our five-day event in March which provided a number of activities for academics and students, the promotional cam-

paign and the launch of the IL website [www.infolit.salford.ac.uk](http://www.infolit.salford.ac.uk).

The IL week was organised within six weeks – a challenging deadline, but it was deemed too good an opportunity to miss when a slot became available in the university's busy calendar of events. This was the first time we had dedicated such resources to promoting IL, so we decided to use it as a pilot for a follow-up event in October/November 2011. Given these factors, a number of ideas were quickly discarded early on, because they were not achievable due to a lack of time or because they were too costly.

We collaborated with Student Life, the university's Internal Communications team, academic staff, the Academic Development Unit (ADU), and the Estates Division during the planning of the events, thus making valuable contacts across the university.

## MARKETING

Our marketing strategy had to attract the attention of both students and staff, and needed to stand out amongst the plethora of other campaigns on campus. The design evolved naturally from the IL website and was based around a word-cloud logo made up of key IL terms.



Fig 1 The word-cloud featuring key IL terms

This was all brought together through posters, computer screensavers and internal pull-up stands. We purchased external display flags and positioned them outside key buildings in order to capture the attention of students and staff as they walked about campus.

We were able to promote IL week using a number of university online channels. The IL week brand was amended and tailored to suit various websites, including that of the library (naturally), the Students' Union, the university's VLE, and the Student and Staff Channels. It also featured on university plasma screens, and in two issues of the student e-newsletter.



*A wind-dancer flag on campus*

### THE PROGRAMME

We felt instinctively that our programme should combine the opportunity for staff and students to attend both awareness-raising events and practical hands-on activities.

Compiling the programme of activities seemed a daunting task at first but, having sat down with a strong cup of coffee, we reviewed our standard timetable of drop-ins and workshops and decided that they would provide a good framework of events. An encouraging email to library colleagues provided ideas and volunteers for additional sessions. Colleagues from the Academic Development Unit and Student Life were eager to contribute to a 'good practice event', and it was decided to begin IL Week with an evening launch event and end with an informal gathering of the staff involved in the project to discuss the successes of the week.

### LAUNCH NIGHT



*Usman Ali, Drew Whitworth, Roz Howard, Huw Morris and Ricky Chotai*

Roz Howard, chair of the IL project team, hosted the IL launch event, which featured four speakers. Professor Huw Morris, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Salford, addressed the audience of staff and students, as well as colleagues from partner colleges. The theme of his discussion was 'If the library is the heart of the

university, then information literacy is the brain'. He gave an interesting personal account of how developing his information literacy skills had benefited him in a variety of situations.

We were lucky enough to book Drew Whitworth, Programme Director of MED: ICT in Education at Manchester University, as the second speaker. His presentation on 'Why collaboration in IL is so important – and so difficult' included ideas from his book *Information obesity*<sup>2</sup>, which discusses how to handle the information overload of today's world. He argued that IL is not just about improving student grades and retention figures – it is also a life skill that students can take forward into their lives and future workplaces.

The student perspective was also given a voice by Students' Union President, Ricky Chotai, and his predecessor Usman Ali, the NUS Vice-President. Their presentations were particularly well received, with a number of university colleagues at the reception afterwards commenting that it was unusual and refreshing to hear the student voice represented at such an event. The Salford student direct newspaper followed the event and an excellent and timely article<sup>3</sup> was published the following week.

### THE ACTIVITIES

The workshops and drop-in sessions held during the week took place within familiar training rooms in libraries, with larger events sited at key buildings on campus. These sessions included Endnote Web, Turnitin and literature reviews by our Academic Support Librarians. Using sessions from our existing training programme proved very convenient as it meant that we did not have to organise additional trainers and venues.

Despite some of the slots not being during the lunch hour, they proved very popular, and several were fully booked two weeks before the event. There was a good mix of undergraduate, postgraduate and international attendees. Another first was an e-library drop-in session for distance learners via Elluminate, which was very well received, particularly by students studying in Canada; more of these sessions are now being planned.

The student focus groups, which took place simultaneously at three library sites, spanned the lunch hour so as to attract custom and also offered a light lunch, plus Amazon vouchers. Students gave

some very constructive comments, which we shall certainly consider when developing our services.

#### LESSONS LEARNT

Our deadlines did affect how the event was organised, and did impose certain conditions. The project team have now decided that IL week will be an annual event, and so...Next time:

- begin planning much earlier
- be clear about what the campaign is to achieve. Our next IL week may have different objectives as the IL project develops and intended learning outcomes are embedded.
- expand marketing and adopt a more innovative and proactive approach
- marketing should explain clearly the importance of IL to students and why they need it – they only want to know how it will benefit them
- contact academic staff earlier in the planning process through a series of brief but engaging emails extolling the benefits of IL
- encourage collaboration with academic colleagues in the participation and delivery of events
- advise library colleagues during IL sessions to contextualise IL for students as an invaluable tool for life

#### WHAT NEXT?

It is difficult to measure the benefits of IL week; however, we have certainly raised awareness of information literacy at Salford. We intend to capitalise on what we have achieved by various means. Staff profile web pages are being developed for our Academic Support Librarians, and this will be followed up by a marketing campaign so that staff and students will know who their contact person is and what support and guidance they can expect. As resources are developed and added to the IL website there will be publicity drives within the libraries, with dedicated pull-up stands, posters and flyers.

If you would like to know more about the LEARN project and the information literacy strategy at Salford University please visit <http://www.infolit.salford.ac.uk/project/> or contact Roz Howard [r.m.c.howard@salford.ac.uk](mailto:r.m.c.howard@salford.ac.uk).

#### NOTES

- 1 LEARN (Literacy Education and Resource Network) is a cross-university initiative led

by the library and involving four other divisions and academic colleagues;

<http://www.infolit.salford.ac.uk/project/>

- 2 Andrew Whitworth, *Information obesity*, Oxford: Chandos, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84334-449-0
- 3 *Salford student direct* article reproduced at <http://www.informationliteracy.salford.ac.uk/news/launch/>