



The library
and information
association

CILIP Policy Inquiry into the Further Education Sector and FE Library Services:

Summary Report

April 2017

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1. Introduction

In our Action Plan 2016-2020 we committed to deliver a programme of activities intended to promote the interests of information and library professionals and information users. The policy inquiry into the further education sector and FE library services was part of this programme.

Between July 2016 and March 2017, we undertook this Policy Inquiry to answer the question:

What is the role of Library, Information and Knowledge professionals and the services they provide in helping FE leaders and teaching staff meet the challenges of the next 10 years?

The evidence gathering stage of the inquiry was based on the following stages:

- Desk research
- Online survey
- Face-to-face roundtable sessions
- Questionnaire to College Principals and Senior management teams

The planned outcome was an advocacy framework for the sector to be used by FE libraries and library staff. The advocacy framework would set out the key drivers currently evident in FE and how FE library services and library staff contribute to the overall aims of the FE college and, more generally, national policy objectives for FE.

2. The FE sector

There are 371 colleges in the UK (209 general FE colleges in England) which cater to 2.7 million students. 1.9m students are adults studying or training in colleges.¹

Our recent workforce survey² showed that 4,405 people work in FE libraries in the UK. This inquiry was a chance to engage with our members working in what is regarded by many as an unloved and neglected sector within our profession.

The FE sector is going through a period of protracted change. 2016 saw 10 mergers take place in England. A further 17 are scheduled for 2017. These changes are similar to those that have already taken place in the Devolved Nations. There is uncertainty about what this will mean for CILIP members working in the FE sector.

In today's world people need to be not only literate but information literate. To know how to access, evaluate and create information is a critical skill across all employment sectors and throughout people's lives.

Our inquiry demonstrated that digital and information literacy and the ability to be an independent learner and a fully participative citizen are core skills that are being taught in FE colleges by library and information staff.

These key skills enable and encourage students to progress to the next stage of life whether that is on to higher level apprenticeships, HE or employment.

Library and information professionals add value to the planned outcomes and objectives within their own institutions but also to other education and learning institutions and ultimately, employers.

3. Key findings of the inquiry

In this inquiry we found that a high degree of differentiation exists within the FE sector making FE library services broad in scope and reach. This is evidenced by the many different partnerships and programmes (national and local) that UK FE librarians work on. In addition it was found that:

The role and interventions of FE librarians

- There was a consensus amongst FE librarians as to their main roles and responsibilities. This could indicate the existence of a core FE library service.

¹ AoC, *College key facts 2016/17*.

² UK Information workforce – sector factsheet: Further education sector

- The main interventions were around resourcing learning by creating, updating, disseminating and managing electronic and printed resources as well as teaching information literacy and digital literacy and working to increase basic skills.
- As well as the more traditional roles, Safeguarding, e-safety, promoting "British values", and PDHW (Personal, Development, Health & Welfare) type activities were seen by FE librarians, and the Principals who were interviewed, as core activities.
- The promotion of reading for pleasure is a major way in which college libraries and librarians contribute to improving a student's learning outcomes. The broader education ethos, of the library being a place where behavioural issues can be identified and interventions made, is another valuable role recognised by FE leaders.
- Actively promoting equalities and diversity, managing the college licences for TV, film etc and coach/ teach staff in creating content for the VLE, e-safety training, building Moodle courses for the curriculum, providing support to students to achieve their personal goals as well as academic, work with HE students especially helping with transition to higher level studies and help supporting English and Maths were all mentioned more than once.
- Change is a constant throughout the sector and FE library staff are finding innovative solutions to the various challenges faced by FE colleges. This includes partnership working with HE institutions and public libraries in particular.

Innovation of FE librarians

- The work of FE librarians is proactive. Thought is given to new activities which add value and not just to new ways of delivering existing interventions. This innovation is especially visible around initiatives to enrich the overall teaching and learning experience of students and of the teaching staff. This often involves reaching out to stakeholders not necessarily considered to be traditionally theirs. For example public libraries.
- The library was home to a vision of the broader objectives of teaching and learning encompassing personal development. In our survey this was referred to as "citizenship" and "British values". This came through strongly in comments of "other activities" not specified under the 20 broad headings given in the survey and in comments by college principals. FE librarians develop networks and relationships both within the college and with external partners, particularly with public libraries and HE. The partnerships are not just around resource sharing but in recognition of the importance for students to have the transferrable skills necessary to continue their academic career.
- Anecdotal evidence and completed questionnaire's from Principals and senior management teams show that services provided by FE libraries and library staff are in the main understood and valued.

4. Next steps

The Advocacy Framework and its supporting evidence is the main output of the FE inquiry. CILIP will continue to actively seek out and collect evidence to support the Advocacy Framework and we encourage staff working in FE libraries to contribute their evidence to support the framework.

We will revisit the Framework in 2019 - or sooner in light of upcoming changes in the FE sector in England.

CILIP will continue to advocate for FE library services and the vital role and contribution FE library and information staff make to achieve better outcomes for FE colleges, their students and the wider stakeholders.

If you would like to contribute to our evidence then please contact policy policy@cilip.org.uk

5. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people who have helped produce the draft Advocacy Framework:

Members of the expert advisory group which was set up at the beginning of the inquiry.
Members of CoLRiC Executive Committee who made me very welcome at their executive committee meeting in Birmingham. The FE librarians we met in Brighton at the CILIP 2016 conference and all those who took the time to complete our survey and who interviewed their College Principal.