Teaching & Learning: Innovation and Development in Information Services

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Introduction

The Module "Innovation and Development in Information Services" for MA in Information Management course at the London Metropolitan University takes a novel approach to providing additional learning opportunities to students. While students are normally encouraged to be "publishing-active", few take up the challenge. It was therefore decided to include writing a short piece for ISJ as a coursework requirement. Selected ones could then be submitted to ISJ. This issue of ISJ carries two such pieces.

The coursework requirement was:

> A project proposal (c. 3,000 words including summary), based on a workplace situation or a case study, to develop a new service based on principles of social justice as a way of meeting emerging needs. It should include a 500 word summary of the proposal for publishing the in-house electronic journal "Information, Society and Justice".

Lusted, Catherine: Establishment of a Library Youth Board

This proposal outlines the aim to establish a Library Youth Board, consisting of young people to advise senior management on library service design and delivery. To be successful, a new policy framework will be created to set out the practicalities of the project, such as the number of members, length of term served, selection (or election) processes and rewards and accreditation given for involvement. The policy will also document the remit, power, responsibility and budgetary control of the board. This policy will be devised by library staff, in consultation with young people, to clarify what participation will entail. An evaluation system will be created and built into the policy to ensure young people have a channel through which to communicate concerns. Through this staff will check that members feel they are being heard and that participation is worthwhile.

The outcomes of the board will be detailed in the policy. These are:
- To "youth proof" policies and practices
- To establish the library needs of young people
- To design services to meet these needs
- To improve the knowledge of what library services offer to young people
- To develop the skills of board members
- To increase young people's involvement in local democracy and their community

- To improve the credibility of libraries
- To increase young people's access to and use of libraries

To be successful, the organisational structure will need to change. The current organisation is hierarchical. Decisions made by senior management are cascaded down via middle managers and implemented by front line staff. A youth board would need the expertise of front line staff to work with young people and enable it to run effectively. However, passing information from the board back up to senior managers will be difficult where front line staff act as messengers. The current structure also has no advocacy voice for young people. Children's librarians recently had the word 'youth' added to their job titles to mark the growing interest in supporting this client group. However, young people should be represented by qualified and experienced staff that prioritise their needs over those of children. A change in the organisational structure to create a team of youth librarians would overcome this problem.

At a time when young people are increasingly alienated from democracy and their community (as seen in decreasing turn-outs in UK elections), the youth board would encourage involvement and develop members' skills for future participation. Without access to these processes young people are denied citizenship. To achieve social justice principles, the board must operate in an inclusive way. The board will be as informal as possible centred on offering participants a fun experience as well as power. In this way, attempts to encourage the socially excluded are more likely to succeed. Recruitment to the board will be conducted through promotion within libraries as well as through links with youth workers and outreach work to build relationships with socially excluded young people to encourage their involvement. In this way, the board will be a diverse and representative sample of all young people locally.