Функционирование национальных и международных партнерств Службы информационного обеспечения Университета Хартфордшира на основе системы StudyNet, на примере партнерства с Центром информационных ресурсов Британской высшей Школы дизайна в Москве

Partnership Success Enhanced by StudyNet: Partnership Working Between the University of Hertfordshire Learning and Information Services and National and International Partners, in Particular the Information Resources Centre of the British Higher School of Art and Design, Moscow

Функціонування національних і міжнародних співробітництв Служби інформаційного забезпечення Університету Хартфордшира на основі системи StudyNet, на прикладі співробітництва із Центром інформаційних ресурсів Британської вищої Школи дизайну в Москві

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В докладе дается представление о том, как сотрудники Службы обеспечения информацией Университета Хартфордшира работают в партнерстве с профессорско-преподавательским составом своего Университета и другими организациями в рамках национальных и международных партнерств. Целью данных партнерств является содействие эффективному использованию информационных и учебных ресурсов. В докладе анализируются основные признаки партнерства такого рода, а также точки зрения непосредственно занятых в партнерстве специалистов. Оценивается роль и значение системы StudyNet (электронной образовательной среды и системы Интранет Университета Хартфордшира) для развития данного типа деятельности. Делается прогноз путей развития системы StudyNet в будущем. Основное внимание уделяется оценке функционирования и перспектив развития партнерства с Британской высшей Школой дизайна.

This paper describes how Learning and Information Services (LIS) staff at the University of Hertfordshire (UH) work in partnership with academic staff and national and international partners to promote effective use of learning resources relevant to their needs. The article considers some key features of partnership working and then gives the viewpoint of some of the members of staff involved. StudyNet, the University's on-line learning environment and intranet, has been an invaluable tool in enabling this type of working, and its use and future development is also explored. The conclusion evaluates how the partnership with the British Higher School of Art and Design is developing.

У доповіді подається огляд того, як співробітники Служби забезпечення інформацією Університету Хартфордшира працюють у партнерстві із професорсько-викладацьким складом свого Університету та іншими організаціями у рамках національних і міжнародних співробітництв. Метою таких зв'язків є сприяння ефективному використанню інформаційних і навчальних ресурсів. У доповіді проаналізовано основні ознаки партнерства такого ґатунку, а також точки зору безпосередньо залучених до партнерства фахівців. Оцінено роль та значення системи Studynet (електронного освітнього середовища й системи Інтранет Університету Хартфордшира) для розвитку цього типу діяльності. Подається прогноз шляхів розвитку системи Studynet у майбутньому. Основна увага приділяється оцінці функціонування й перспектив розвитку партнерства із Британською вищою Школою дизайну.

1. Partnership working

The University of Hertfordshire's Strategic Plan (2007) places a high priority on its engagement with international and European partners. The University's successful history of working with both national and international partners has been enhanced by the development of the University's Managed Learning Environment, StudyNet. StudyNet has allowed Learning and Information Services (LIS) staff to work with partners, such as the British Higher School of Art and Design, to deliver information resources to staff and students on University Programmes both in the UK and overseas.

Regarding partnership working, Cornish (2002:152) states that 'Cooperation, whether local, national or international, should be of benefit to all those taking part' and from our experience all those involved in partnerships should be able to gain from it. Key features in partnership working are identified by Wildridge (2004) as clear consistent communication and a strong level of mutual trust. There is a need to include all the affected stakeholders and maintain good relationships with the constituents. Special skills in working across boundaries have also been identified as being characteristic of 'boundary spanners'.

Austin (2000) refers to the seven 'C's of partnership working which are: Clarity of purpose, Congruency of mission, strategy and values, Creation of value, Connection with purpose and people, Communication between partners, Continual learning and Commitment to the partnership. Wildridge (2004:14) adds a further two elements: trust and time. In the context of our work in library and information services, the need to work together, in partnership, to achieve our goals was also stressed by Alex Byrne (2007) in his opening address at the IFLA Council General Conference. From our experience described below, these elements are all vital for successful partnership working.

2. Background to Key Partners

University of Hertfordshire:

In our particular context, the University of Hertfordshire (UH) has a student community of over 24, 000, including more than 2, 000 international students from over 85 different countries and a global network of over 100, 000 alumni. In addition over 2, 000 students are studying on UH International Programmes at our partner colleges overseas. The mechanism of working with partners for particular programmes is through a link tutor who makes regular visits to the partner institution.

British Higher School of Art and Design:

The British Higher School of Art and Design (BHSAD) is based in Moscow and offers three UH degree Programmes. These are BA Programmes in graphic design & illustration, interior and spatial design and product design offered in partnership with UH's School of Art and Design, Faculty for Creative and Cultural Industries. In June 2007 the BHSAD CPD programme in product design (CPDPD) was validated as well.

3. UH Support for Partners

StudyNet – the University of Hertfordshire's Managed Learning Environment (MLE):

StudyNet is the on-line learning environment and intranet developed at UH to address the specific needs of both students and staff. It grew out of the earlier development of a fully integrated student desktop and a number of challenging multimedia projects. It has also taken account of the support needs of distance learning students, a group that has a distinctly different set of requirements from students who physically attend the campuses. StudyNet was created by a small team of two developers and a project manager. When released in 2001, it quickly became a great success at UH and attracted national interest, due to the integrated services it provides to students.

The provision of an MLE to all students and staff, available 24 hours a day, is beneficial to both groups. Staff are able to place relevant resources in a single place and are assured that students will be able to obtain those resources and services at a time and place that is most appropriate to them; whilst students have an increased feeling of security from knowing that the resources will be made available online and accessible on demand as required. StudyNet operates on the basis of a default 'Open Access' policy; this means that most of the information placed on StudyNet is visible to anyone with an authorised user account regardless of which programme they are studying or whether they are studying in the UK or on UH International Programmes at a partner organisation. The intention of this is to promote cross-discipline and cross-institutional collaborations, as well as to allow students to investigate subject areas that they may not have previously considered.

Development has continued and StudyNet is now a fully integrated part of the learning and teaching process for the majority of programmes at UH. There are over 25, 000 live user accounts at the current time, along with websites for every module taught on all UH programmes since 2001. However, StudyNet has also moved in directions other than purely providing an online repository for teaching materials. The services available through StudyNet have expanded to encompass: electronic journals and books; group work, discussion areas and instant messaging to facilitate interactivity and communication between users; information skills tutorials; staff, student and module weblogs (blogs); student support; staff and student administration, including the delivery of exam results; and social features to help promote a sense of community among the student body. Individual portals and the learning resources area on StudyNet can be customised and personalised. An example of the customisable Learning Resources page on StudyNet is shown in Figure 1.

2008 is a year of significant change for StudyNet with some major new developments being released to support the strategic direction in which UH is moving. This includes the development of an Alumni system that will provide access to StudyNet for life for all former staff and students, as well as improved support for employer engagement, work-based learning, short courses and continuing professional development programmes. It is expected that over the next 3 years the number of users will grow to some 250, 000.

It is possible to see some areas of StudyNet by logging onto the open access site at http://www. studynet. herts. ac. uk/open_index. html.
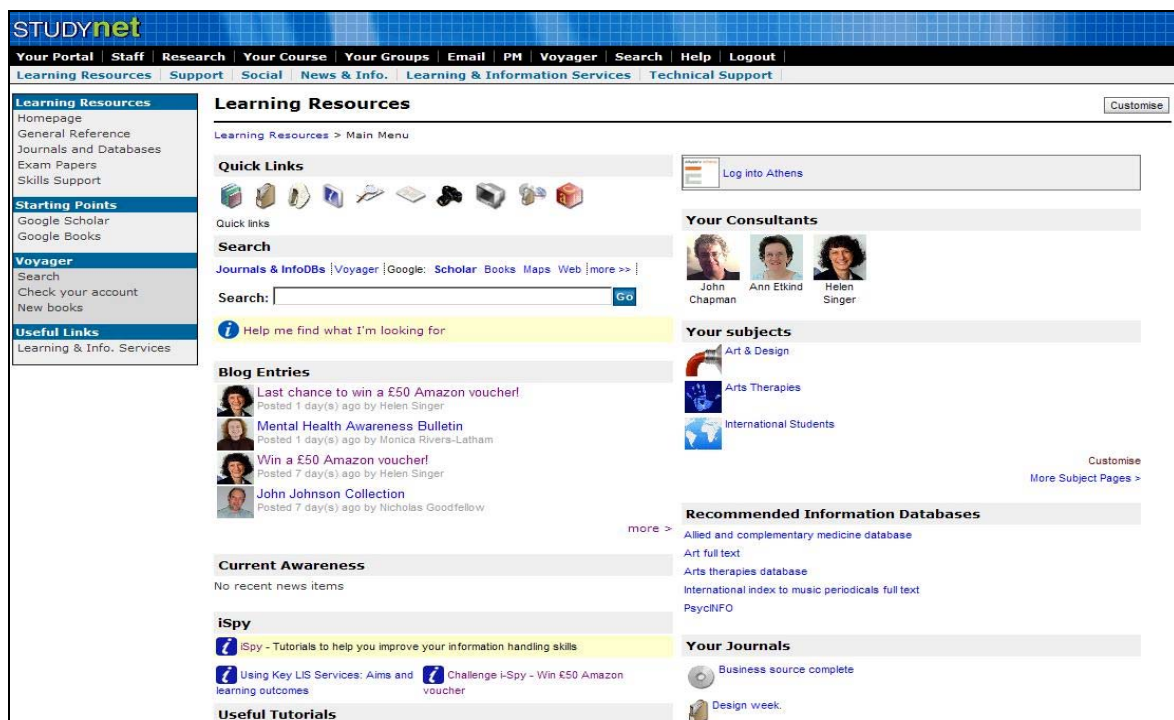

Figure 1.
Example of Customised Learning Resource Page.

StudyNet workshops:

The rollout of StudyNet to staff and students involved with UH International Programmes delivered at our partner colleges overseas was implemented during 2006/2007. LIS staff Helen Singer and Ian Glover ran training workshops for the academic staff delivering UH International Programmes and providing support for the UH students on these programmes. These workshops took place at partner colleges in Malaysia, Greece and Moscow.

4. Reflections from Key Staff

Ann Etkind on working with academic staff:

«Within the Learning and Information Services Strategic Business Unit at UH, partnership working underpins much of what we do. This is something that is relevant to our work at many different levels both within our Department and our Institution and in our relationships with the wider community.

At UH we have a successful model of named LIS consultants working in partnership with each Faculty. Similarly specific LIS Consultants support those involved in our strategic widening participation, international and research developments

To give an example, in my role as one of the three information consultants supporting our Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, I liaise with members of the academic staff teams on both formal and informal levels. I am regularly invited to the Programme Committee meetings for each course, which gives me an awareness of relevant issues for that group of staff and students. We are also involved at an early stage when new courses are being developed so we can ensure that the appropriate learning resources are available when required.

On a more informal level, I am in regular communication with academic staff who often contact me directly if they have information resource queries, or to discuss the content of the skills sessions and online training materials we design for their student groups. Our system of having a named contact within LIS who has specific responsibility for a particular Faculty works well for both parties. This partnership theme is further developed when LIS consultants then liaise with other LIS teams to resolve specific issues.

An example of partnership working in my area is the link between UH, the UK Ministry of Justice and the London Probation Area. Our University has a formal arrangement with the Ministry to provide the academic part of the training for all probation officers in the London area, and the majority of this training is delivered in an e-learning format via StudyNet. Students on this Programme are not based on campus, so they mainly use our electronic books and journals as well as our online information skills tutorials which they can access easily from off campus. Some materials are held for them in the London Probation Area's library in London and I have developed links with the librarian there so we can co-operate in information resource selection and training.

An example of partnership from the Health area is our new MSc degree in Health Psychology. We are intending to run this both at our UK campus in Hatfield, and at one of our partner colleges in Greece. It is intended that the UK and Greek programmes will run concurrently, and students in both countries will be able to use the «class discussion» facility on StudyNet to communicate and exchange views on the course modules.

Other LIS information consultants working with different University faculties have similar partnership arrangements. Working this way helps us to provide the best service for our users, and on a personal level enables us to keep in touch with developments outside our own area. From here, extending our working to international partnerships is a welcome step.

One factor that is key in enabling us to extend our partnership working in learning resources, is our information resources strategy and its emphasis on electronic resources. This, combined with a self-service ethos, successfully supports our members' use of learning resources both on and off campus, 24 hours a day, in the UK and internationally. StudyNet has enabled a new way of working, and by making our information resources easily available this way, we can ensure that our members have access to the materials they need for their studies wherever they are based. «

Helen Singer on UH International Strategy:

«As LIS Consultant International Strategy part of my role is to support UH International Programmes overseas. To facilitate this, I set up some pages on StudyNet specifically for staff and students studying on these Programmes. This involves links to an induction presentation showing the StudyNet portal, as well

as links to two simple Self Help Guides which explain to staff and students how to manage their LIS accounts. Because the LIS pages on StudyNet contain a lot of help that refers to local facilities in the UK, a second guide highlights only those features which are relevant and of interest to staff and students on UH International Programmes.

Since returning from Moscow I set up a group on StudyNet as a forum to share good practice between link tutors and those involved with using StudyNet at the partner colleges. This has links to the StudyNet pages for UH International Programmes, and tips on using learning resources. It is hoped that this group area can be used by link tutors to check for any updates before they make visits to the UH partners where StudyNet is available.

Authorised remote access to databases and journals is supported through a virtual private network (VPN) service and where appropriate Athens authentication. Students in the UK use these systems already to access our resources from off campus and our self-help guides explain how to do this. Athens authentication is handled through devolved authentication via StudyNet so students just need to click a 'login to Athens' box.

Students at BHSAD on UH International Programmes are also able to utilise the online i-skills materials on StudyNet developed by LIS Consultants to encourage effective use of the wealth of resources available. In addition, the University's information skills framework i-Spy may be used to further develop students' information literacy skills.

5. British Higher School of Art & Design (BHSAD)

Victor Zverevich on interlibrary partnerships:

«In the paper I presented on the BHSAD information resource base at the Crimea 2007 Conference (Zverevich, 2008: 3) I promised that «new adventures» of British design would occur in Russia in 2008. As noted previously (Zverevich, 2008: 3), as of June 2007 only members of administrative and academic staff involved in delivering UH International Programmes had access to StudyNet. Throughout the year StudyNet accounts were issued to all staff and students involved with UH International Programmes at BHSAD. The issues encountered in providing access to StudyNet have been minimal with the only problems being related to the creation of user accounts and sending the details of these accounts from UH to BHSAD. But this problem was successfully resolved. Due to both parties' efforts the delivery of user names, passwords and e-mail accounts was developed and successfully implemented.

Students and staff on UH International Programmes at BHSAD have the same privileges and responsibilities as staff and students physically located on the UH campuses in UK. Upon obtaining access to StudyNet BHSAD staff members are required to register on their academic modules via StudyNet whilst students are automatically registered. Completion of registration gives students the opportunity to access not just information resources but also the full range of academic materials (course outlines, lectures, lists of required and/or recommended literature, others), which tutors place on StudyNet within their respective modules.

Already by the end of the current academic year delivery of exam results and the students' final marks will be delivered via StudyNet. From Semester A of the 2008-09 academic year all communication between tutors and students will take place in the electronic environment. This means that tutors will be required to place all assignments and project briefs on StudyNet (within their modules) and students will be required to submit all written and creative work, either current or final to their tutors in electronic format.

Staff and students at BHSAD now have access to the thousands of electronic resources such as full-text and/or index databases, e-journals and e-books where licences allow, all of the information that exists on StudyNet, as well as UH personal e-mail accounts. Beside information resources and access to academic materials StudyNet offers other support to students, for example in finding, evaluating and using information, writing essays, submitting assignments/projects in electronic format and planning and managing their time. StudyNet also offers special communication options (personal messages, discussion groups, forums, etc.).

Certainly, students and tutors will need to be prepared for this. So, running regular workshops on working with StudyNet for students and tutors, as well as other activities to improve the users' information literacy and/or culture are a very important component of BHSAD IRC information work. The purpose of these workshops is to make users familiar with StudyNet in various aspects, what is it about,

what is it needed for, how it works, which communication options it offers, etc., as well as to give them a chance to practise working with StudyNet. Information flyers and helpsheets are distributed at these workshops as well. This practice was launched in September 2007. By this time the user accounts had been set up on our student record database, and so LIS were able to create user accounts on StudyNet. Two UH LIS Consultants, Ian Glover and Helen Singer visited BHSAD and delivered 3 days training for administrative and academic staff on site. Training involved showing staff how to create teaching materials on StudyNet, how to access electronic resources to support the UH International Programmes delivered at BHSAD, how to create personal messages and blogs, etc. Prior to the visit the trainers were in close touch with me about electronic services, journals, databases and e-books, which would be available to the staff and students involved with UH International Programmes where licences allow.

Beside routine activities in user library services including cataloguing new acquisitions and collection development activities the Information Resource Centre (IRC) undertakes regular activities to obtain feedback from its users and analyze the results. The activities of this kind (written questions, personal talks with users at the workplace, reference interviews, etc.) are carried out on a regular basis. Finally, the strategic goal of these activities is to make the BHSAD IRC a more customer focused unit. The IRC's current and strategic action plans are to a great extent formed on the basis of respondents' comments and/or suggestions. The majority of respondents indicate the importance of improving StudyNet skills. In this respect we at the BHSAD IRC keep thinking about improving the dissemination of information about StudyNet and assistance in working with it. For example, in our plans we have the creation of an on-line collection of success stories related to working with StudyNet.

So, the interlibrary partnership between the UH LIS and BHSAD IRC was developed in the past year, is continuing and, more importantly, has a future. The expected «new adventures» of British design in Russia actually occurred. And this is not a final destination point ... «

6. Evaluation and next steps

So how does this partnership measure up against our criteria? Wildridge (2004:7) points out some useful critical success factors which we would like to use to evaluate and further our partnership working:
- all partners must feel involved if they are not to become disengaged
- celebrating and publicising success can counter scepticism
- appropriate seniority of commitment can help particularly if key decision makers establish personal connections that help develop trust
- continuing, visible and joint commitment from individuals in positions of leadership and influence is always important

Now that the first steps have been taken to make StudyNet available at BHSAD, and at some of our other partners which deliver UH International Programmes, we need to make sure that, as Wildridge identifies above, senior management at the partner institutions recognise the value of this work and encourage academic staff to use StudyNet in their teaching. We found that students actually began to lead the demand for this when StudyNet was introduced in the UK. We would like to bring together the partners who use StudyNet at the next Partners Conference to be held in the UK in the summer of 2008. This will allow those involved to share good practice and encourage the wider use of StudyNet in making both learning and teaching resources available to all parties concerned and build on this successful model of partnership working between institutions.

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