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Implementing INSPIRE in the North East

Final Report

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INSPIRE - Information Sharing Partners in Resources for Education

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INSPIRE is a set of access protocols agreed between public and academic libraries within a region. The implications are that (when appropriate and in the context of lifelong learning) an enquirer can be referred to another library in the region. This library will respond hospitably to a visit to use that library's collection. At a later stage the concept would allow authenticated access to virtual collections.

INSPIRE is based on the pathfinder project Libraries & Learners in London (LiLL) delivered by the London Libraries Development Agency. This concept has been rolled at a national level. The Inspire England initiative aims to provide a seamless cross-sectoral pathway for learning by adults across public, academic and national libraries *ref. 1* The ultimate aim of INSPIRE is to link 875 higher education, 4,620 public and 3 national libraries *ref. 2* SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) have been contracted by the Department of Education and Skills to deliver the INSPIRE England project *ref.3*

1.2 Within the North East of England there are two city based access arrangements (Newcastle/ Gateshead and Sunderland) between groups of libraries involving university, college and public libraries. At the national level INSPIRE has an action group chaired by Mary Heaney from Wolverhampton University but it is dependant on the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) for funding to move it forward.

1.3 NEMLAC (the North East Museums Library and Archives Council) commissioned this short-term project to introduce a North East INSPIRE which will negotiate access protocols and will establish supporting infrastructure. In August 2004, the Information Society Research Community at Northumbria University was commissioned to take on this project with Dr Graham Walton as a Project Leader.

This project is concerned with the preparatory work that needs to be in place for a successful roll out of INSPIRE in the North East. The stakeholders are NEMLAC at the regional level and SCONUL at the national level. Within the North East, the project has to engage primarily with the five local universities (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) and the 9 public library authorities.

At a secondary level, there needs to be engagement with the further education libraries and NHS libraries.

2. METHODOLOGY

- A series of questions (see Appendix 1) were developed as part of the telephone interview schedule, responding to the requirements of NEMLAC.
- A list of 25 contacts as potential interviewees covering public libraries, higher education libraries, further education libraries and others was also provided by NEMLAC. Three of these contacts were used for pilot interviews. Appendix 2 provides the broad details of those interviewed for this investigation.
- Individual case reports were produced for each of those organizations interviewed.
- These individual summaries were produced for internal use only by NEMLAC.
- Broad themes and perceptions to INSPIRE in the North East were identified from assessing and evaluating the individual case reports. These themes and perceptions form the basis of this report.

3. BROAD OUTCOMES / ISSUES AND RESULTS FROM STUDY

3.1 Current collaboration between North East libraries

3.1.1 Existing schemes

The following high profile collaborative schemes were identified in the North East:

- LASH (Libraries Access Sunderland Scheme)
- TWIRL (Tyne and Wear Information Resources for Learning)
- Newcastle and Gateshead Libraries Partnership
- SCONUL co-operative schemes.
- Hartlepool College and Hartlepool Public libraries
- Universities are also involved in national collaborative schemes including both the CURL (Consortium of University Research Libraries) scheme and 'UK Libraries Plus'.

3.1.2 Existing variance in library collaboration by sub sector

Within each library sub sector various themes and trends emerged.

In the further education sector, there is a particular range of collaboration in operation. All of the FE colleges had links with the local universities. Collaborative links with local public libraries and other FE colleges were present in 60% of the FE colleges interviewed.

Within the NHS, all NHS staff employed within Durham and Tees Valley have access to university libraries within that region. In the north of the region, NHS libraries also have links with universities. They collaborate with public libraries in the provision of consumer health information via health professionals (on behalf of patients).

Public libraries are engaged more with community based partners. This accounted for 60% of the public libraries interviewed. This collaboration is not relevant for the roll out of INSPIRE.

Wide variance existed in university libraries regarding collaboration. It was given different strategic emphasis by individual university libraries. This ranged from partnership work being established in one university as a major activity/ focus in comparison to another where it was seen as being of minor interest.

3.2 Awareness and attitudes to INSPIRE

3.2.1 Awareness

There was a wide variance in the level of awareness regarding INSPIRE. For example, one interviewee stated that their organisation had some knowledge of the project - they were aware of the concept and the pilots, but were keen to know more. Another interviewee had not heard of the project at all, whilst a further

contact was not sure whether the project was operating at a regional or national level. One interviewee had difficulty in locating documentation regarding the project, but successfully located some information via the Internet.

3.2.2 Attitudes towards collaboration and INSPIRE

All of the interviewees are positive to the INSPIRE work in principle. Despite the perception that public libraries and further education libraries having more to gain, universities' experiences of collaborative partnerships are positive. The interviews showed a sense of openness with the majority being enthusiastic about INSPIRE (particularly from public libraries and further education libraries). Two organisations were more in favour in principle. The NHS was also positive but felt there was need for prior discussion and consultation. The need for prior internal consultation was mentioned by other sectors.

The general view was that INSPIRE could be a positive move for the North East. There were some public libraries with very limited collaborative initiatives but they showed keenness to develop such links. Despite this low involvement, all 12 public libraries interviewed were involved in some level of collaborative practices.

3.3 Possible barriers to INSPIRE

An interesting observation was that barriers seem to be more attached to the culture of individual libraries and the staffs' attitudes. The reality according to those libraries currently involved in collaborative initiatives is that a fear of being overrun has been proven not to be the case.

3.3.1 Lack of electronic access

One university library was concerned that INSPIRE users will wish to have electronic access. This will be difficult as, for example, one university cannot currently offer Internet access due to network restrictions. Thick firewalls and the use of a net nanny are also an issue at one public library. In the NHS there was a lack of available electronic resources and the likelihood that NHS IT departments will not allow external access to NHS Net.

3.3.2 Cultural differences

Some providers do not have a tradition of access and reach out. Members of the public entering university libraries are likely to be faced with cultural differences in the services offered. The size of university library buildings and how they are arranged could be daunting. It may be that the nervous lifelong learner may be put off by the sheer scale of a university library.

3.3.3 Staffing issues

Having staff briefings prior to a public library user visiting another library might have staffing implications. Those users needing high ICT support might also affect staffing. Some public library staff queried whether university libraries would have

the time to provide public library users with the level of support they may need. The NHS also commented that staffing would be an issue (dependent on demand). Some felt that they would need to prioritise INSPIRE versus their own users' needs. Others had concerns that if high support was needed there would be an implication on staffing costs.

3.3.4 Pressure on collections

Many viewed this as an issue especially within the context of budgets already stretched. There might be pressure on demand for PC clusters. The NHS were unsure of the value of their collections to the INSPIRE user. If stock was to be increased to meet demand many NHS libraries were too small to expand.

3.3.5 User expectation

It was felt that user expectations had to be carefully managed. INSPIRE users would experience different levels of support depending on which libraries they used. If expectations are pitched too high, INSPIRE users could be frustrated. University users of further education libraries might have high expectations that might not be met.

3.3.6 Varying access procedures

There are likely difficulties with interoperability of systems and on-line catalogues. Smart cards have been introduced by University libraries which are meant to enhance access, but have actually become a barrier. User frustration would develop unless the variance in access procedures was well handled.

3.3.7 Costs

Some interviewees expressed concerns about economic implications. These could be potential requirements for extra staffing or increased resources (electronic and hard copy) could not necessarily be met in-house. This was a particular issue for the NHS.

3.3.8 Geographical limitations

For those libraries geographically isolated, the distances users might be required to travel within that region were seen as a barrier. The NHS felt that INSPIRE users may be put off by the location of libraries within hospitals (difficulties parking, within busy hospital sites, sometimes a distance from the central building).

3.4 Overcoming the possible barriers to INSPIRE

3.4.1 Staff training

The majority of interviewees identified staff training as crucial to the effective functioning of INSPIRE. Several libraries recommended that staff training should be arranged on a cross function basis. Various public libraries had staff training

programmes which could incorporate INSPIRE. It is important that all libraries understand the agreed systems. There also needs to be an awareness of collections/ access in other libraries. One approach suggested was to have a form of cascaded in-site training with initial representatives from all stakeholders.

3.4.2 Importance of organisational commitment

Interviewees argued that both the library service and the wider organization had to be committed to INSPIRE if it was to be successful. In order to have this commitment there has to be clarity about what is on offer. It has to be agreed by all stakeholders what level of service will be made available by individual participants. If there is any variance on services offered by different libraries these also need to be clear.

The vision of INSPIRE has to be communicated to library staff so they are all aware about what it is trying to achieve. This vision has to be flexible enough to respond and adapt to changes in the wider environment. Further, one interviewee commented that INSPIRE would need to place itself strategically against a range of other projects.

At a practical level the following will have to be done prior to INSPIRE commencing in the North East:

- talking to participants of pilot projects
- developing formal and unified agreements
- setting up stakeholder steering / management group
- developing clarity of protocols / mutuality.

3.4.3 Importance of low bureaucracy levels in making INSPIRE happen

Several of the interviewees stated that processes must be simple with very low levels of bureaucracy. Approaches with little paperwork were seen as useful and some questioned the value and purpose of an introduction letter. Where levels have existing varied access schemes the resulting complexity can be difficult for staff to administer. Systems have to be in place from the outset with formal procedures being followed by all the participating libraries.

There are some tensions around having low levels of bureaucracy whilst at the same time implementing effective systems. Standard access procedures have to be distributed before project start date. Advance warning is needed before INSPIRE commences. The monitoring/evaluation requirements have to be established prior to start of project. There may be some level of value in developing pilot projects so issues can be identified.

3.4.4 Importance of publicity

Effective publicity was considered an important aspect of the planning process by several interviewees. The converse was expressed by a few who felt that they could be swamped as a result of publicity, or that it might create a false demand.

Various libraries involved in collaborative schemes have produced publicity material around these schemes. There was also a sense of realism expressed by some libraries around how publicity is made available. The challenge for the publicity is it make clear to the INSPIRE user what exact services they are and are not entitled to. A website (along with a leaflet) could be developed to contain a model of service provision and detailing varieties in access procedures. The Library Learners London information was seen as a good model. Good publicity will also seen as an approach to allay unrealistic user expectations.

3.4.5 Importance of management processes

The communication processes between different stakeholders has to be well managed. There was a suggestion that the ability of libraries to cope should be assessed and that there should be joint staff development sessions so that staff need to feel part of the project. The NHS identified the benefits of an INSPIRE advocate visiting the NHS librarians group to disseminate information and outline the benefits.

There is a need to be involved as decisions are made and issues discussed. Potential INSPIRE participants need to be involved in preliminary discussions, looking at project protocols and organisation. Monitoring was also discussed by several of the interviewees but there was variance in how this could be most effectively managed. Some felt that monitoring would be difficult, whilst others stated that monitoring was part of their current system.

Common access agreements with services being equal across all institutions (ensuring a consistency of service) were seen as desirable.

3.4.6 Addressing information literacy needs

Having self sufficient users of INSPIRE was seen as important. One public library is seeking funding for HE/FE expertise to teach public library users. Specific help-sheets could be devised which are different in style to match different users' particular needs.

3.4.7 Electronic access issues

These could be overcome with generic passwords, sign up sessions, Internet cafes or open access IT areas

3.5 Reference access as baseline for INSPIRE

3.5.1 Attitudes to reference access being seen as INSPIRE baseline

92% of interviewees saw reference access as being straightforward as the baseline for INSPIRE. The NHS envisaged themselves as supporting public libraries and they also highlighted the need for consultation. Without exception university and public libraries indicated reference only access is happening already. Reference access is seen by most libraries as not problematical for the baseline.

3.5.2 Economic and ethical issues attached to baseline reference

A small number of libraries (3) had some financial concerns as they charge external users for access. Part of the NHS would probably not provide reference access, as it is not considered a good idea for patients to come into most NHS libraries (where the material needs mediating and is not specifically aimed at them). These concerns will need to be addressed as INSPIRE is developed.

3.6 Attitudes towards higher levels of access for INSPIRE above reference only access

3.6.1 Providing 1 to 1 support and detailed enquiry work

Public libraries interpreted this as the main higher levels of access. 3 of the 25 interviewees commented that staff time is an issue in terms of higher levels of access (e.g. meeting in-depth enquiries if excess demand was made, addressing potentially high level of needs with regard to information or study skills). One of these libraries has only one qualified librarian and therefore staff expertise is also an issue. However the experience of those already involved in this activity indicated that the resulting demands on staff time in supporting external users is not problematical.

3.6.2 Electronic access

5 of the 25 interviewees are prepared to allow electronic access as baseline (within the limitations of licenses). 6 of the 25 libraries interviewed stated that providing electronic access is very difficult because of licensing or password restrictions. The NHS will not allow electronic access as a Trust password is needed. Guest electronic log ins are seen as possible in the future by one of the interviewees and a further interviewee currently requires external users to sign a computer access and Internet policy.

3.6.3 Lending

25% of those libraries interviewed raised issues attached to lending (e.g. restrictions owing to set texts/short term texts in high demand, no lending of core textbooks, how to manage loans of rare texts), but those who do lend say in practice there is limited demand. One of these respondents indicates lending should be a long term project aim and another recommended lending should be trialed on a pilot basis.

3.6.4 Information skills delivery

One of the five university libraries interviewed commented that they do not wish to get involved in delivering the level of possible information/study skills required by non University users

3.6.5 PC access

3 of the 5 further education college libraries see PC. access as not happening or problematical, as they do not have enough resources for their own users.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 This study has generated a wealth of intelligence to inform the future roll out of INSPIRE in the North East.

Across all sectors there appeared enthusiasm for the proposed collaboration and the possibilities it will open up. Those charged with taking INSPIRE forward in the North East should be re-assured by this support level. This enthusiasm was grounded in reality as various barriers were identified which could impede its progress.

There appeared to be a view that having reference only access as the INSPIRE baseline was under ambitious.

It is highly likely that willing and committed partners can be found who welcome taking INSPIRE forward either in developing a model or in operating a pilot project.

4.2 This study has successfully established what needs to be set in place if INSPIRE is to be implemented in the North East.

There has to be effective staff training, organisational sign up, low bureaucracy levels, marketing and strong management processes in place before INSPIRE is rolled out. There is no doubt that user demand for collaborative electronic access will increase.

It would therefore be sensible to enter into further exploratory investigations regarding the likely implications of this demand.

References

1. INSPIRE What is INSPIRE? <http://www.inspire.gov.uk/> (accessed 20th July 2004)
2. Heaney, M. From Inspire England to Inspire UK Paper presented at INSPIRE Conference, 27th April 2004, Birmingham
- 3 . Empowering the learning community, Demonstration projects: Inspire England & Inspire West Midlands, Consultants brief and invitation to tender, 2004.

Appendix 1 Telephone interview schedule for INSPIRE project

Information about the project

The overall aim of the INSPIRE project is to produce guidance and direction for NEMLAC (North East Museums Libraries and Archives Council) on taking forward INSPIRE in the North East of England. For further information about the project contact Elizabeth Blenkinsopp, Research Assistant (email: Eliz41@hotmail.com Tel: 01642 653647) or Dr Graham Walton, Project Manager (email: graham.walton@unn.ac.uk Tel. 0191 215 6520).

Note

1. Personal details are used for administration purposes only. They will not be recorded in the results of the interview. They will be deleted after the end of the project. All publications resulting from the project will be anonymous.
2. With your permission, the telephone interview will be recorded. This is to allow for accurate capture of your comments. The transcripts will only be seen by the project researchers. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept secure and confidential. They will then be disposed of in line with Northumbria University's retention policy.

Questions

- a) What is the existing level of collaborative access work implemented by your organisation?
- b) What are the attitudes to the INSPIRE work in principle?
- c) What would be the base line (i.e. minimum) access likely to be offered to external users?
 - (Reference only)
- d) What are the attitudes to higher levels of access for external users?
 - Borrowing rights/ Electronic access
- e) In order to make INSPIRE function effectively, what process(es) will make that happen?
 - Letter of Introduction/ Staff training/ Publicity/ User feedback/ Monitoring/ organisational commitment
- f) Do you consider there to be any barriers to implementing INSPIRE? If so, how can these barriers be overcome?
 - User expectations/ Cost of implementation/ Adequate staff training / Information literacy levels of users/ Lack of electronic access/ Varying access procedures / Culture change/ Increased staffing levels/ Pressure on collections
- g) The intention is to make INSPIRE take place in 2005. Will your library service be 'signed up'?
- h) Can you explain or describe the process your library service wishes to see for managing and implementing INSPIRE?
- i) Any other comments?

Appendix 2

Interviews for INSPIRE in North East Project

*** = sites where interviews were piloted**

Library	Role of individual interviewed	Date
Public		
Darlington	Assistant Libraries Manager	9/11/04
Durham**	Assistant Director	2/3/05
Gateshead	Cultural Services Manager – Libraries and Tourism	9/11/04
Hartlepool	Borough Librarian	15/11/04
Middlesbrough	Chief Librarian	30/11/04
Newcastle*	Second tier	23/9/04
North Tyneside	Senior Librarian, Information and Learning	9/11/04
Northumberland	Group Librarian, Information & Central Services, Libraries, Arts & Archives	23/11/04
Redcar and Cleveland	Lending Services Officer	29/11/04
South Tyneside	Libraries Manager	23/11/04
Stockton	Performance Promotion & People's Network Manager	23/2/05
Sunderland	Assistant Head Culture & Tourism, Libraries, Heritage and Information	9/11/04
University		
Durham	University Librarian	23/11/04
Newcastle*	Deputy Librarian	13/9/04
Northumbria	Assistant Director University Library and Learning Services	16/11/04
Sunderland	Asst Director, Services – Information Services	8/11/04
Teesside	User Support Manager	29/11/04
Further Education		
Bishop Auckland	Learning Resources Manager	8/11/04
Middlesbrough	Learning Resources Centres Manager	16/11/04
Newcastle*	Librarian and deputy	21/9/04
North Tyneside	Learning Resource Centre Manager	23/11/04
Sunderland	Assistant Head of Facilities Management Division	15/11/04
NHS		
Durham & Teesside	Alliance Co-ordinator	17/01/05
Health Libraries Alliance		
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Strategic Health Authority	Knowledge Services Manager	19/01/05
Other		
Lit and Phil	Librarian	16/11/04

** Not available for telephone interview. Responses obtained by email