



JISC i-Skills for Staff Development

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August 2007

JISC

Background

From December 2005 to July 2006, Netskills delivered a JISC funded programme aimed at promoting i-skills amongst managers and administrators within HE and FE institutions. The programme built on previous JISC work in this area in the Staff Information Skills Set programme, in particular the two publications 'Improving Staff i-Skills' and 'Investing in Staff i-Skills'.¹ During this time JISC also funded a related project at Leeds and Loughborough Universities which researched information use by specific administrative job roles and explored the implications for staff development.

The Netskills programme involved research into the information use of managers and administrators, the delivery of a series of workshops and the creation of a self-evaluation tool. The evaluation formed a core part of the workshop and will be made available as an online 'toolkit' to download and use within institutions. Consultation during the programme involved key stakeholders within the JISC community and also the AUA (Association of University Administrators), the principal representative body for administrators within HE.

High demand resulted in the workshop programme being doubled. There was a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the topic and the toolkit in particular. The programme highlighted the need for a strategic approach for i-Skills development and demonstrated the potential of the i-Skills toolkit to encourage the development of individual skills – an essential factor in the success of strategic approaches to information and knowledge management.

The programmes identified key areas for further development, including:

- An enhanced self-assessment tool providing direction in terms of prioritising areas for development and more models of potential use
- A need for wider awareness raising with institutions in order to bring i-Skills onto the staff development agenda
- A need for wider strategic planning for i-Skills, including enabling institutions to assess their own capacity for developing i-Skills

The Workshop Programme

The 2006 workshop programme identified a demand and need for i-Skills to be addressed. This workshop programme aimed to take this forward by targeting those responsible for staff development decisions within institution, with a view to encouraging i-skills to become embedded in existing staff development processes.

The aims of the workshop were to:

- Disseminate the JISC work so far on i-Skills
- Provide guidance on the use of the i-Skills toolkit and how it can be tailored by institutions
- Enable those involved in staff development to plan i-Skills provision strategically by being equipped with appropriate strategies and materials to use back in the workplace
- Gather information on key issues relating to i-Skills for staff development to inform the JISC i-Skills agenda

The programme involved the delivery of 8 workshops in locations throughout the UK, providing a total of 96 places. Rather than offering free places, attendees were charged heavily subsidised rate of £45. This enabled more places to be offered and also tested the sustainability of training in this topic. The workshops were delivered between March and June 2007.

¹ JISC i-skills publications 'Investing in Staff i-Skills' and 'Improving Staff i-Skills', <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/cpdresources>, 2005.

Workshop Development

Publicity

In addition to using all Netskills usual publicity channels, the workshop programme was publicised via a mailout to staff development departments in all UK colleges and universities. A dedicated page on the Netskills web site was used to advertise the programme and for online bookings. The workshop was titled "Information Skills and Staff Development: are you doing enough?" and the full workshop description used can be found in Appendix 1.

A flyer was created for the programme to be used in postal distribution and at conferences, such as the AUA national conference in April. The workshop programme was also mentioned in the AUA Staff Development Bulletin and all past participants on the 2006 i-Skills workshops were contacted via letter and a follow-up email. The JISC Regional Support Centres received information on the programme and messages were sent to staff development related JISCmail lists, such as *staffdevelopment* and *seda* (the email list for the Staff and Educational Development Association).

Bookings were monitored throughout the programme and extra publicity sent if required.

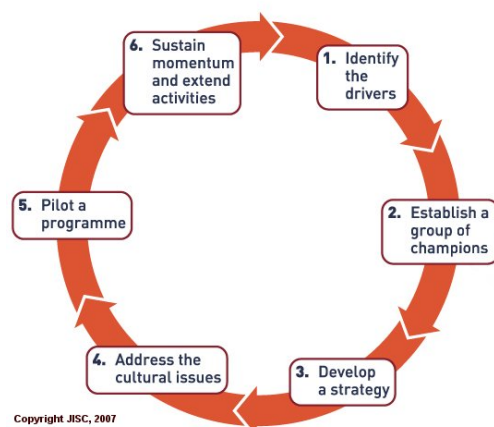
Scheduling

A total of eight workshops were scheduled in locations around the UK. Due to the limited number of workshops, they were not scheduled in all JISC regions, but locations were chosen provide a wide geographical spread.

Content

The content of the workshop was designed to provide a mix of activities: disseminating previous JISC work in i-Skills while providing plenty of opportunity for discussion of the issues relating to staff development. Findings from the Netskills programme were disseminated along with the research from the project teams at Loughborough University and the University of Leeds.

Attendees were given the chance to explore the i-Skills self-evaluation and then consider what their institution is currently providing in terms of staff development in a range of areas. A scenario was given where attendees would carry out a training needs analysis and identify i-Skills training interventions alongside other types of training need, such as IT training. The example training plan for staff within a Finance department, produced by the Leeds team, was given out as an exemplar. The final session focussed on strategic planning for i-Skills development and was based on the 6 step i-Skills Framework below:



The framework was introduced and a case study was mapped to the stages – the University of Leeds provided the case study.

The workshop content was piloted in Newcastle in late February, in time for the first workshop on March 8th.

Workshop Delivery

Attendees

The workshops booked up well. Some of the earlier workshops had lower bookings, perhaps due to a shorter lead-in time with publicity, but later workshops were fully booked or over-subscribed. A total of 90 bookings were taken, with only 3 people unable to attend.

At the time of booking attendees are asked for information on their sector and job area. (Note that some attendees did not provide this information therefore the numbers do not add up to 100%.) In terms of sector, 29% stated they were from FE and 53% from HE. This compares to the 2006 i-Skills programme where FE made up only 3% of the attendees, with 87% coming from HE.

In terms of job area, attendees had the following roles:

Job area	Number
Administration	6
Learning Support	5
Management	14
Library	18
Staff Development / Training	28
Teacher / Lecturer	5
Other	2

Managers and staff development were the target audience and the figures above show that these two groups made up around half of the attendees. Library staff were the other major group.

Workshop feedback

Feedback was submitted by 72 attendees. 78% rated the workshop as Very Good or Excellent (4 or 5 out of 5). 96% said they would recommend the course to others.

Generally, attendees were happy with the content of the day, however the most common suggestion for improvement was to include more practical examples and case studies of how institutions are providing for i-Skills staff development.

In terms of what attendees would have liked to hear less about on the course, some attendees found the emphasis on strategy less useful, echoing the many requests for practical examples mentioned above. Some attendees felt that the content was biased towards the HE sector.

Some quotes from the feedback are given below:

"A useful workshop helping to boost initiatives required at my college."

"Useful additional information to preliminary i-skills workshop attended last year. Intend to take ideas forward with admin and clerical team this semester in prep for next academic year."

"The course was excellent. Very thought-provoking and inspiring. The trainer was excellent at presenting and facilitating the discussions. I hope there are further workshops/information regarding this area as it would be very interesting to see how it grows and evolves."

"A really useful workshop. I've got lots of ideas for going forward with this: just got to put them into practice!"

Key issues

Several issues came up in discussion throughout the workshops and in the workshop feedback.

Differences between HE and FE

Compared to the 2006 programme, there were far more attendees from FE attending these workshops. Throughout discussions it became apparent that different issues affect FE as compared to HE and some attendees felt the workshop could have addressed these. When discussing strategic issues and the JISC i-Skills Framework (see above), some of the issues did not seem to be as relevant to FE, in particular the issues of fragmentation of provision. One head of staff development at an FE college in Scotland simply stated that if she wanted to implement i-Skills staff development at her college, she would just do it. Lack of resources was the most pressing concern for FE, to provide staff development and release staff to attend. Some other issues were raised that potentially affect FE, for example issues relating to unions and that any self-evaluation would have to be carefully approached and worded so as not to be seen to be related to performance review. A positive note from the FE sector was that the activities of the JISC Regional Support Centres mean that many colleges are actively engaged in addressing i-Skills for staff. There is scope for mapping these activities and gathering good practice.

Need for practical examples and good practice

Most attendees said that although they found the workshop interesting and useful, however some felt that it was too generic and that they would have liked more detailed examples of the implementation of i-Skills staff development.

The training plan produced by the University of Leeds project team was found to be very useful – it profiled a Finance department and detailed the different i-Skills training requirements of different members of staff and the department as a whole. It also suggested a number of training interventions, delivered or facilitated by a range of providers, for example the library, staff development or managers themselves.

Some attendees questioned the usefulness of high-level strategies to address these issues, preferring the attitude of 'just get on and do it'. Once again, the case study of the University of Leeds which outlined their attempts at embedding i-Skills into staff development provision was very popular. Further case studies of this type would be welcomed.

Auditing i-Skills provision

One of the steps of the recommendations from the i-Skills publications is to identify existing i-Skills provision and identify opportunities for embedding i-Skills in other training courses. During the workshop, attendees were asked to explore the existing i-Skills provision at their own institutions. Many attendees found this process quite difficult, due to the need to have a deep understanding of what i-Skills are and the fact that i-Skills appear in many different training interventions to some extent.

Drivers / marketing

The issue of reluctance of staff to attend i-Skills related training was raised in discussions. In terms of strategic drivers, some attendees felt that external drivers were important with 'sticks' such as the requirements to meet the Freedom of Information Act or more positive 'carrots', such as working towards Investors in People or Chartermark. In order to get buy-in from individuals, in particular to attend voluntary i-Skills sessions, attendees would welcome guidance and good practice on marketing i-Skills.

Terminology and 'visibility' of i-Skills

The issue of what 'i-Skills' should be called continues to cause debate. The 2006 programmes highlighted differing views on the term 'i-Skills' and this programme provided an opportunity to explore this further. At the end of each workshop participants were asked about terminology and what they thought of the term 'i-Skills'. If they did not like it they were asked why, and

what they would suggest instead. Once again, there were differing views, with most generally in favour of the term, some liked it as it was short and snappy, whereas others thought it was yet another 'jargon' term to deal with. When pressed to make a decision, the general consensus was to stick with the term 'i-Skills' as it is becoming a familiar term and no-one could suggest anything better.

Interestingly, several participants said they would not use any separate language at all when delivering i-Skills staff development – they would make sure it happened but embed it into existing provision so that it was not seen as a 'separate' issue. However, some felt that if i-Skills were so embedded as to be invisible, this would not address the issue that i-Skills are often not recognised as a development need.

Self-evaluation tool

Once again there was a high level of interest in the self-evaluation tool. One of the aims of the programme was to provide guidance on the tool and how it could be used. However, the online version of the self-evaluation tool was not available in time for this workshop programme. Attendees were shown the existing paper-based self-evaluation and many expressed interest in using the tool.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Once again there was a high level of interest in this topic. Although there was not such a high demand for the workshop as compared to the 2006 programme this could be for two reasons: firstly there was a charge for the workshops this year and secondly, they were aimed specifically at those with responsibility for staff development and not just managers and administrators as a whole.

The recommendations to the JISC from this project would be to:

- Support institutions in auditing their existing i-Skills provision through the development of case studies and a tool to help with the process.
- Explore issues specific to Further Education.
- Provide more practical advice and guidance on delivering i-Skills sessions.
- Gather together examples of good practice, liaising with the Regional Support Centres in this process.
- Develop a community of practice using the attendees at the workshop as a starting point.
- Deliver further subsidised workshops relating to information skills and using the self-assessment. In particular, more detailed case studies and examples would be welcomed.

The programme demonstrated that although there was interest in this topic, there is still limited activity within institutions relating to developing the information skills of staff. Many institutions are beginning this process and would welcome further advice and guidance.

Appendix 1 Workshop Description

Information Skills and Staff Development: Are you doing enough?

From getting the most out of Google to managing information overload - effective information skills ('i-Skills') are essential for anyone working in today's Information Age. Information skills are often neglected in staff development, but they can lead to improved sharing of information, reduced duplication of effort and time-saving. This workshop will provide the opportunity to consider how you and your institution currently address i-Skills staff development, and develop strategies for improvement.

Topics:

- Why effective information skills are essential for individuals and organisations
- Strategic issues surrounding the development of staff i-Skills
- The free i-Skills self-evaluation tool and how it can be used to guide development
- Assessing and improving i-Skills staff development provision within institutions

Who is it for?

The workshop is aimed at anyone involved in the development of staff in UK universities and colleges and has been subsidised by the JISC.

This is not a technical workshop although participants are expected to have basic computing skills and to have used the web.

By the end of the workshop participants will have:

- Used the i-Skills self-evaluation tool
- Discussed the opportunities and barriers relating to i-Skills staff development
- Audited their own institution's provision for i-Skills staff development
- Outlined a strategy for improving skills within their own institutions