

2014-12

## Seminar report: Demonstrating the value of information literacy to staff and students

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### Recommended Citation

Russell, P. (2014) Seminar report: Demonstrating the value of information literacy to staff and students. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 8(2), pp. 141-144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/8.2.1944>

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# Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 8 Issue 2

December 2014

## Conference Corner

Russell, P. 2014. Seminar report: Demonstrating the value of information literacy to staff and students. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 8(2), pp. 141-144.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/8.2.1944>

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# Seminar report: Demonstrating the value of information literacy to staff and students

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## 1. Introduction

In June 2014, the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT Dublin), South Dublin County, Republic of Ireland, held a one day national seminar on information literacy (IL) – ‘Demonstrating the Value of Information Literacy to Staff and Students’. This was one of the first IL seminars in Ireland that included speakers and representatives from all sectors: the educational sector (second and third level), community organisations, and industry. The event was funded by the recently formed National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ireland.

The aim of the seminar was to help staff to develop the necessary strategies and skills to support the development of IL in students transitioning from second to third level. This reflected the National Forum’s overall theme of supporting the teaching of students making the transition into higher education (HE) and the first year experience.

The event aimed to highlight the importance of IL and provide an overview of some best practice IL initiatives in Ireland. The seminar aimed to review strategies and resources that could be used in IL teaching to help those students entering HE. The seminar also sought to equip participants with the skills to facilitate the development of students’ IL skills and enhance practitioners’ knowledge and understanding of IL, enabling them to demonstrate to students the relevance of IL competencies. The seminar included testimonials from ITT Dublin students and graduates on how they have developed their IL skills and how it has benefited their academic lives and their transition to employment and progression in society.

## 2. Preparatory work

The funding for the seminar was secured in January 2014 (from the inaugural National Seminar Series fund) and the event scheduled for June 2014, which provided sufficient time to arrange speakers and organise the logistics for hosting such an event. The project to run the event was administered using Google Docs.

The event was to be recorded and made available later via multiple platforms, which could be used as a resource to support ongoing initiatives in the area of IL. LibCal by Springshare was used to manage the online registration for the event, details of which were circulated via the relevant professional networks.

## 3. The day

Over 85 delegates attended the seminar, with local and national delegates from educational institutions, community organisations and the commercial sector. Speakers on the day included representatives from the schools sector, third level institutions, current students and graduates of ITT Dublin and industry.

All seminar presentations emphasised the need to develop IL as learners make the transition through the various stages of education. As one presenter noted, ‘*the teachable moment for information literacy is in transitions when the student is aware they need new skills*’.



*Speakers from left to right: Siobhan Dunne, Dublin City University; Margaret Phelan, ITT Dublin; John O'Neill, ITT Dublin; Philip Russell, ITT Dublin; Eoin Dunne, ITT Dublin; Cathal Goslin, ITT Dublin; Gerard Ryder, ITT Dublin.*

The school library presenter (Katherine Ryan, St. Andrews College, Dublin) reiterated this message, discussing innovative IL programmes for second level students that have helped to foster the development of students' IL attributes. Gerard Ryder, a lecturer in mechanical engineering at ITT Dublin, spoke about the value of a first year 'Learning to Learn' module in terms of developing a student's IL competencies. At ITT Dublin, IL is an explicit learning outcome of this module and the course has been the catalyst for imparting these skills and improving the first year educational experience.

Current students from ITT Dublin (third year management student and postgraduates in science and engineering), gave an overview of their experiences on the teaching and learning of information skills. They stressed how important it was to have these skills developed in their first year, which enabled them to progress academically and engage in ongoing independent learning and self-directed research.

Graduates of ITT Dublin offered their perspective on how IL has empowered them in terms of providing them with lifelong transferrable skills which will improve their employment prospects. The speaker from industry reinforced this, stressing how employers regard IL as a key graduate attribute and a skill set which is crucial in terms of ongoing progression in the work place.

The seminar put forward some best practice strategies and resources for educators in terms of how they teach IL, highlighting that any instruction needs to be focused on the student and support a range of learning styles.

Some of the key insights and suggestions from the day were:

- students transitioning into HE lack core academic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy and the ability to use information effectively and ethically;
- 'Learning to Learn' modules in HE are key resources to enable students to acquire IL attributes;
- it is important to include the student perspective in the design of IL programmes;
- more advocacy is needed amongst the library profession to promote the importance of IL;
- the need to increase awareness on a national level of the strategic value of IL in terms of the smart economy, transferable employment skills, social participation and lifelong learning;
- the need for guidelines and standards for IL and digital literacy to be developed – currently no national policy exists in Ireland for IL;
- the need for a more integrated approach to, and recognition of, the value of IL by policymakers, Government and employers.

Some useful feedback was garnered, with comments from participants including:

- *Perhaps there is a need to focus more on teaching IL skills right through from 1<sup>st</sup> to final years. We never really hear about second and third years.*
- *All presentations were very interesting – common themes but different perspectives, loved the student/industry input outside the academic input.*
- *I really enjoyed all aspects, particularly the 'Learning to Learn' presentation, will use this seminar to further develop our information literacy training particularly to support those students in transition.*
- *The event raised awareness of how closely second level and third level need to work together on information literacy.*
- *The event has encouraged me to reflect... I am going to redesign my class plans for information literacy teaching and lobby harder for collaboration with academic colleagues.*

*Speakers from left to right: Siobhan Dunne, Dublin City University; John O'Neill, ITT Dublin; Gerard Ryder, ITT Dublin; Philip Russell, ITT Dublin; Katherine Ryan, St. Andrews College, Dublin; Mary Antonesa, Maynooth University.*



#### **4. Future plans and lessons learned**

The seminar highlighted the value of IL skills for independent learning, academic success, employment and societal progression and underlined the need for these skills to be developed as learners transition through the different stages of education.

This seminar has helped to build capacity amongst IL practitioners across all sectors in Ireland, bringing together educators in the field to share ideas, knowledge and best practices. To develop this further and establish a community of practice, the aim is to ensure that this seminar takes place on an annual basis.

This seminar will help to inform IL development at national level in Ireland. The author is chair of the Library Association of Ireland's Taskforce on Information Literacy (TFIL), the goal of which is to achieve a national policy for IL and digital literacy to include standards for these competencies for all levels of learners. This seminar will further the work of TFIL and strengthen relationships with cognate groups nationally and internationally.

#### **Resources**

'Demonstrating the value of information literacy to staff and students' seminar details:

<http://millennium.ittallaght.ie/screens/il2014.html>

LibCal by Springshare: <http://www.springshare.com/libcal/>

National forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education in Ireland:  
<http://teachingandlearning.ie/>

Taskforce on information literacy (TFIL): <https://libraryassociation.ie/library-association-ireland/committees-panels-task-forces/information-literacy>