From information literacy to the learner journey: aligning academics and librarians through pedagogic research

Abstract

Definition – the learner journey is here defined as the study, information and research skills that a student brings to university with them and develops throughout the course of their degree programme

Scope & methodology – research on academics' perceptions, expectations and assumptions about the learner journey was conducted via semi-structured interview, in order to underpin a refreshed library teaching 'menu' at the University of Worcester

Results – consistencies and differences in approaches to levels of study, and a number of common themes, including student independence, transition, and technology were revealed

Outcomes – from the evidence base, the project yielded both tangible outputs (the teaching menu, a self-audit tool, a PGCert session) and less quantifiable ones, such as positioning Library Services as pedagogic partners and researchers

Introduction

The University of Worcester has the strategic aim of being an outstanding university at which to be a student (University of Worcester, 2013, p. 4). The 2013-18 Learning and Teaching strategy expands on this aim, including strategic goals which focus on 'progressive and inspirational curricula' and 'academic progression and achievement' (University of Worcester, 2015, p. 2). Central to these aims is the development and scaffolding of students' study, research and information skills to support their development as independent, lifelong learners. In 2016, Library Services at the University of

Worcester began a project designed to refresh the teaching offer in line with this and an associated with a strategic priority from the 2016/17 operating statement:

> Develop a clear policy and programme of scaleable teaching for on and off campus-based students, integrated in the curriculum and delivered face to face and online as appropriate. (University of Worcester Library Services, 2018a, p. 3)

The Academic Services team responsible for delivering this initially proposed a teaching 'menu' that would articulate exactly what teaching was on offer, in order to help academic colleagues understand what could be taught, with the ultimate aim of delivering more embedded, timely and collaborative information literacy teaching. A menu approach has been adopted at a number of institutions (Drill Hall Library, 2016; Royal Holloway Library, 2018; University of Birmingham Library Services, n.d.). Like these other menus, an early draft was very library-centric, offering such sessions as 'planning the literature search' and 'the principles and basics of referencing' (University of Worcester Library Services, n.d., p. 18). At this stage, the University Librarian challenged the team to develop a more student-centric model, which aligned library skills with student and curriculum need.

Although we had some ideas ourselves about what these needs were, the team decided that the best way to identify and articulate them was to speak to academic colleagues, and thereby develop an evidential base that could underpin the new menu. This developed into the learner journey project, a piece of pedagogic action research that aimed to uncover the expectations of academic staff about the learner journey, or rather, the study, research and information skills that a student brings to university with them and develops throughout the course of their degree programme. Although the ultimate menu or toolkit to be developed would focus around Library Services' information literacy offer, the research undertaken spoke to the full set of skills and capabilities that students require at university, setting information literacy firmly in context.

Setting the learner journey in context

The definition of the learner journey in these terms sets it apart from other works on the student journey which take a holistic approach, covering every element of the student lifecycle. For example, an special issue of the New Review of Academic Librarianship documented 'the extended role of academic libraries (and their staff) in developing and supporting students across the entire student lifecycle—from pre-entry to post qualification' (Weaver, 2013, p.99). JISC uses a similar definition, defining the student journey 'from first thoughts about choosing a course through to leaving and looking for a job' (Lincoln, 2018). Such definitions cover everything from wellbeing to academic success to interaction with learning spaces, enabling librarians and other practitioners to deliver interventions and programmes of work aligned to stages in the lives of students (Weaver, 2013, p. 100).

The learner journey research conducted at Worcester takes a different tack. First it focuses specifically on the learning that is expected to take place, in terms of skills and capabilities development, enabling students to become independent learners. This is, perhaps, a more traditional approach and Weaver, for example, argues that the 'institutional drivers to attract, retain and progress students across their entire lifecycle' means that a more holistic view is needed (p. 103). This is not to suggest that Worcester is not interested in this more holistic viewpoint, as initiatives such as Study Happy - a programme of light touch wellbeing events - indicate (University of Worcester Library Services, 2018b). For the purposes of the proposed teaching menu, however, a focus on the learning and teaching experience on courses was key.

Second, the research maps the learner journey as seen through the lens of academic expectation and assumption, rather than interrogating the student viewpoint. This was to develop a evidence base to underpin the teaching menu aimed at staff, to ensure that Library Services were meeting expectations. However, there was also an interest in uncovering whether staff articulated their expectations amongst course teams and to students, as there was a suspicion this was not the case.

These have now been proven to be accurate, spurring conversations at all levels throughout the university about how to address this, and thereby improve the student experience. A third reason for working with academic staff was to highlight the roles that librarians play as both teachers and researchers, raising our internal profile with our academic colleagues.

Librarians have long been interested in faculty's understanding of information literacy and the expectations and assumptions they hold about what students understand, and what librarians can do to support this (Bury, 2016; Dubicki, 2013; McGuinness, 2006; Miller, 2010; Nilsen, 2012; Webber et al., 2005). This is valuable research, both in terms of the output and the research process itself, as academics play a vital role in facilitating student access to information literacy development (Boon, Johnston, & Webber, 2007; Bury, 2016) and such research highlights the role of the librarian directly to staff. In contrast, the learner journeys project deliberately covered a wider spread of study skills and academic literacies. The information literacy focus was re-introduced in the subsequent teaching menu that was delivered, but the aim of the initial research was to ensure that our information literacy work was set in the broader context of the student experience and complete learner journey. As Bury (2016) notes, 'faculty see IL as fundamentally intertwined with other academic literacies…Moreover, it is very common for them to speak of these literacies as linked to the ultimate goal of developing students' confidence and ability to navigate and work effectively in the scholarly information landscape' (pp. 237, 243). As such, although librarians tend to only deliver the information literacy component, it is difficult to separate this from broader academic literacies in conversation.

The student perspective is a valuable corollary to this research and was always intended to be undertaken, though funding for the project was sadly lacking. Subsequently, one team member undertook her dissertation research on the topic of mapping student perspectives of the learner journey (Devine, 2018) and found that students themselves reflect on similar themes to those raised by academics, considering their transition to and general preparedness for university, progression

and scaffolding of support (or lack thereof) within curricula, and the need to take personal responsibility for learning (pp. 40-41). Unlike the staff who participated in the research at Worcester, students also discussed employability and 'real world' readiness and expressed a need to communicate who is responsible within a university for which elements of support that are available to them (Devine, 2018, pp. 40-41).

The learner-centric approach to the learner or student journey favoured by Devine is seen elsewhere and, as might be expected from a more personal approach, brings an emotional element to the proceedings. For example, in work undertaken behalf of the Scottish Government, Snook (2012) proposes a web application for post-16 education, designed to make transition from secondary option an easier process, reducing anxiety and drop-out rates, through mapping user stories, emotional responses and decision-making processes (p. 4). Meanwhile, Poultney (2008) maps the journey from novice to expert at MA level alongside an emotional journey.

Many studies exist which focus on some of the individual elements of the learner journey, often focusing on particular educational transitions. Transition into Higher Education and work around pre-entry is a key area of research and action, with studies indicating that those who struggle with the transition process may disengage from university life, not meet their academic potential, or withdraw completely (Ertl et al., 2008; Gibney, Moore, Murphy, & O'Sullivan, 2011). This is of particular import in the UK since the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in which both student satisfaction and retention and continuation metrics play a key role (Office for Students, n.d.). A number of studies focus on the expectations of first year students and how well these meet reality (Borghi, Mainardes & Silva, 2016; Cook & Leckey, 1999; Leese, 2010; Lowe & Cook, 2003). Some of these take a particularly consumerist approach to Higher Education in which students are framed as consumers whose expectations need to be satisfied (Borghi et al., 2016). Others look at specific interventions that libraries and/or institutions have put into place to facilitate transition and reduce the risk of attrition, such as the Head Start programme at the University of

Cumbria, an online course designed to develop student understanding of key academic literacies prior to entry (Fraser, Shaw, & Ruston, 2013). Devine also identifies a set of transitional literature around the second year or sophomore 'slump' (2018). Deriving primarily from the USA, these studies focus on a 'forgotten year' (Tobolowsky, 2008, p. 59) which rang true for many of Devine's student focus groups. Much effort is put into first year transition and final year success, but scaffolded support for second year groups can feel absent. The learner journeys research aimed to capture data on all of these elements, allowing staff to comment freely on what they saw as important academic literacies and educational transitions, before filtering these through an information literacy lens to develop a well-evidenced menu of teaching options.

Methodology

As a piece of action research, the project had two distinct phases. The first was the pedagogic research element, designed to gather data to inform the second stage, the production of a menu or toolkit designed to facilitate dialogue and understanding between academic colleagues and liaison librarians (University of Worcester Library Services, n.d.-b). Following the research, a second element of the toolkit was also created, a self-audit tool for course teams to use to reflect on the learner journey of their students (University of Worcester Library Services, n.d.-a).

Following the methodology of others who have researched academic staff perceptions of information literacy (e.g. Bury, 2016; McGuinness, 2006; Webber, Boon, & Johnston, 2005), semi-structured interviews were used to elicit feedback from teaching staff. Academic Liaison Librarians were tasked with conducting informal one-to-one interviews with individuals and, in some cases, were also invited in to course leader forums or institute Learning and Teaching committees (at the time of research, institute was the structural division at the University of Worcester; as of 2018/19, the University has since restructured into Schools and Colleges). The aim was to conduct research with representatives from as many subject areas across the seven academic institutes as possible, to ensure that information reported back to the institution was representative, not selective.

The interviews took the form of open conversations, allowing academic staff to lead the conversation rather than the librarian. However, a number of prompts were used, where needed, to stimulate discussion. These included:

- What skills do students have / are they expected to have upon entry?

- What are the stress points for students? E.g. times when they're more likely to drop out

- What skills are developed throughout the programme and when? Is there a framework that each department/institute tries to work to?

- What skills are taught by academic staff / professional staff / self-taught?

- Is there a difference for non-traditional students? E.g. at a distance, not here 9-5 etc?

As described above, these questions were designed to allow staff to reflect on the full learner journey and the academic literacies it contains. However, some interviewees retained a library and information literacy focus in their answers, and it is assumed the fact that they were interviewed by a librarian implicitly influenced their focus and understanding of the research.

Data analysis

Although there are a significant number of studies on faculty perceptions of information literacy, many focus on the differences between library and academic staff perceptions about information literacy and student skills and capabilities (e.g. Boon et al., 2007; Bury, 2016; Cope & Sanabria, 2014; McGuinness, 2006). Yet the learner journeys research made clear that there were differences in those expectations both between different subject areas, but also within departments and courses. These centred on what skills students should have and develop, at what point in curricula this should occur, and where the responsibility lies for developing and delivering those skills. Despite these fundamental differences, there was broad agreement from all members of staff that students are at university to become independent learners. This accords with much of the literature that focuses on faculty perceptions of information literacy, where staff reflect on the need for students to develop

higher level cognitive skills and advanced academic literacies (Cope & Sanabria, 2014; Webber et al., 2005).

In total, 61 interviews were conducted, both individually and at meetings, representing subjects from all seven academic institutes. Data from each interview was inputted by Academic Liaison Librarians into a spreadsheet stored securely on a local drive (University of Worcester Library Services, 2016), and was analysed thematically, in terms of trends that arose across the whole dataset, and by considering commonalities and differences across levels of study.

Trends across levels of study

Questions were framed within the context of levels 4-7 of study, excluding level 8 research. This was a deliberate choice, reflecting both the relatively small size of Worcester's research community, and the variation within it. Students embarking on a PhD at Worcester include those transitioning directly from level 7, experienced teaching staff, and those returning to education, often from professional practice. These emerging researchers have a huge variety of needs and experiences, skills and capabilities upon entry, but there is much greater clarity on the expectations for that level of study. Information literacy sessions are embedded into the Researcher Development Programme for these students, but often their requirements are individualised and would not necessarily benefit from our teaching menu approach. However, in practice very few comments were offered in relation to level 7 and those that were, were not particularly in-depth, and so have not been included for analysis in this paper.

Pre-entry/starting level 4

On entry, staff have few expectations about students' capabilities, making such comments as:

> [Students] have little or no academic or reflective skills (Institute of Health & Society course leaders)

> They don't have much idea of who they are and what they're doing…They are generally very excited and enthusiastic, but academic study is often not their first priority (Cricket Coaching and Management)

> There is no expectation that students will be able to use a library, find information or understand the questions they need to ask or the information they are missing (Creative Writing)

Overall there is a sense that students lack basic academic writing and critical thinking skills, with such comments being made across all 7 institutes. Other studies report similar perceptions, with lack of critical thinking, a need for spoon-feeding and a lack of independent thought (Barnes, Slater, & Rojsa-LeBouef, 2010; Hanna, Hall, Smyth, & Daly, 2014; Keane, 2011). However, a few staff have higher expectations for students entering at level 4, stating that:

> Students are expected to have a basic understanding of academic writing (Education Studies)

> I hope that students [have] a basic understanding of how to 'tell a story', i.e. basic structure of an essay (Environmental Science)

Some colleagues used these beliefs as a springboard to reflect on strategies that are in place to support student transition into Higher Education (see Transition, progression and developing skills in the curriculum). Many recognised the importance in fully supporting students to make the transition into Higher Education, which has been researched elsewhere (Gibney et al., 2011; Mayes, 2013).

Level 4

The majority of comments around skills development were made in relation to level 4, with a need to provide students with an entire skillset they do not have upon entry, scaffolding and support learning. In some cases, it was clear that this was made explicit to students and communicated amongst course teams:

Level 4 is about skills building, finding literature, learning how to paraphrase the evidence within it, ethics, APA style, looking at statistics…Staff try to make sure that it's clear to students that these are core skills, and front load the introductory modules with sessions on them to ensure students get them early on…complete overhaul of the two main modules …which previously were too "ad hoc" in their approach to skills development (Psychology)

The marking criteria in first year all cover students' arguments, research, writing and comprehension (Media and Culture)

In other areas, it was unclear whether level 4 development was discussed and articulated, with many staff talking about their own personal expectations rather than those agreed within course teams.

Although most staff reflect on the need for students to develop critical thinking, essay writing and referencing skills during their first year, and the accompanying need to build student confidence to achieve this, there was a significant amount of variation in what was expected. For example, in relation to accessing and using resources:

I expect students to be reasonably proficient in searching online and probably to be able to find a book in a library. I would like it if they were able to use a small amount or secondary materials or criticism in their assignments but many can't (English Literature)

I use resource lists a lot to guide students to materials…a one stop repository, a pocket library (History)

I encourage early use of journals, to encourage independence of learning (Biochemistry)

Or in relation to referencing and library use:

Students should know the difference between reference lists and bibliography and how to use the library (Education Studies)

[I don't] expect people to be able to reference or know how to work a library (Drama)

Many staff articulate core academic literacies that apply to all modules throughout the degree programme. Some reference the challenge in delivering these skills:

> Lack of engagement in study skills sessions is a big problem - students see it as dull and dry (Forensic and Applied Biology)

> Staff are increasingly being asked to deliver study skills-type sessions, but this can be tricky to do and still fit in the module content (Cricket Coaching and Management)

> More skills work needed and to be tested, instead of assumed to be increasing. Do not have mechanisms to do this…Staff don't really know what skills students have on entry, and often the students themselves don't really know - they are not very self-aware (Sports Coaching)

Level 5

Staff in most subjects tend to reflect on this as a year in which students are building on skills learnt at level 4, with students developing curiosity and independence, becoming more critical in their reading and writing, able to synthesise information and develop a critical argument. Some specifically mention the transitional nature of level 5 study:

> Level 5 is about skill expanding - becoming more critical, improving APA style. There are no study skills sessions offered at level 5 but what they study is designed to map onto skills they should have gained at level 4 (Psychology)

> Transition is the keyword. Supporting first years to make the transition to Level 5 and understand the expectations placed upon them (Primary ITE)

> The gradual transition continues. Teaching sessions become less instructive, students are more and more encouraged to explore and discuss, i.e. apply their subject knowledge and develop it further (Maths)

Others reflect on level 5 as a preparatory year for level 6 and independent study (the term used for dissertations at Worcester). Some staff change their teaching style to enhance this independent

approach. For example, Archaeology and Geography become less instructive and encourage discussion and exploration, whilst Coaching & Physical Education report trying to 'let students loose a bit' at level 5. Similarly, Dance students are given much less guidance:

> This is intended to motivate them to acknowledge the need to develop independent learning skills. Even though, students seem to perceive this as being 'left alone' at the time, they appreciate the effectiveness of the learning experience later on (Dance & Community Practice)

The students interviewed by Devine noticed this step change between levels 4 and 5 to some extent, though they couched it in terms of 'tutors becoming less responsive to student questions' (Devine, 2018, p. 24). In the student-focused literature, this is part of a second year (or sophomore) 'slump' in which students entering their second year 'experience motivational and goal setting difficulties…including underperformance and withdrawal' (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 4). More research is needed in this area to map student perceptions of level 5 study and the support they receive with the strategies that academic staff are putting in place to support transition to independence.

Unsurprisingly, with these variations in practice between scaffolding and 'letting them loose', staff report variations in expectation and attainment of student skills at this level. Some staff note that the quality of writing does improve, though it is often still too descriptive rather than discursive or critical. In some areas, it remains problematic:

> Academic writing can be a problem ... and many don't understand how to formulate an academic argument or how to analyse (Computing)

Staff tend to agree on their expectations around use of resources, noting that students should make use of a wider range of resources and critical materials. However, some note a 'disinclination to

read' (Drama) whilst others comment 'they are told at level 5 that textbooks no longer any good and need to get into journals - and this scares them!' (Forensic & Applied Biology).

Differences also lie in the expectations around referencing, from expecting students to understand the tenets but still make mistakes and ask questions, through to expecting 'perfect' referencing:

They should be able to reference 'to a point' and I still expect to give a lot of guidance with referencing at this stage (Drama)

By the end of level 5 students should largely be getting referencing correct…would dock marks from students for consistent referencing errors (English Literature)

Referencing is expected to be perfect by now (Education Studies)

These variations in expectation pose challenges in creating a coherent information literacy offer, and for the liaison librarians tasked with delivering embedded sessions. Collaboration with course teams and modules leads to ensure sessions are pitched at the right level is vital. Library Services have also been able to highlight the need for more consistency across courses and departments.

Level 6

There were few surprises in the responses regarding level 6 study, with the focus being on having developed sufficiently to successfully complete the independent study. Many colleagues also noted that the independent study is a 'stress point' for most students. Expectations across the board included the ability to:

- Find and access a variety of source materials and critique and analyse them, including evaluating their trustworthiness and value

- Refine and put into practice the skills taught in levels 4 and 5

- Demonstrate a high standard of writing and synthesis

- Formulate, articulate and answer a research question, critical awareness and application

- Employ appropriate academic and technical language,

One respondent event replied that they would 'expect a publishable standard of writing from the most able students', which was quite unique amongst the data gathered.

However, some staff reported that the expectation of independence is not being met by many students, with some surprising responses:

> Some students still appear to not understand what the differences are between peer reviewed journals and magazines. Some still struggle to understand that what they think of as their original has to be referenced as someone has had that idea before them (Computing)

> The student focus is too narrow, they don't have curious minds…Lots of surface learning, no interest in the origins of what they are doing (Graphic Design)

> Some students who really struggle here have previously been excellent students, and the struggle comes as a surprise (Cricket Coaching & Management)

Some comments are probably less surprising though, with one respondent stating that 'they have "done the library session" but don't embrace the skills taught' (English Literature).

Common themes

Alongside data on development across years of study, a number of themes clearly came through from the data. These were common across all institutes and subject areas.

Student independence and staff frustration

As above, staff across the institution are united in their expectation that students are at university to develop as independent learners. The words 'independent' and 'independence' feature 35 times in the responses recorded, higher than any other word, probably an unsurprising result given the focus This is unsurprising given that this is perhaps one of the dominant narratives within Higher Education in the UK (Leese, 2010, p. 243). Students themselves expect to spend more time working

independently at university, with some 95% assuming that they will do more independent work at university than at school (Wilkinson, Condell, Bagshaw, Boyd, & Mcintosh, 2017, p. 8).

Despite the desire to facilitate independent learning, staff frequently express frustration with students. Students are described as having a lack of curiosity, a lack of willingness to read, or a lack of motivation. For example:

> Issues with progression most often come from basic lack of engagement and/or willingness to put in the work required to do well. Students at all levels seem to lack a 'problem solving' mind-set, and also struggle with different assignment formats (Environmental Science)

> Students have to understand that they are there to learn and put the effort in (Leadership Management)

The analysis of responses to levels of study suggests that student and academic understanding of the concept of 'independence' and 'putting the work in' may well vary, and needs to be explained and developed (see, for example, Ridley, 2004), scaffolding in an explanation of how academic support and study is structured.

Assumptions and expectations

Responding to the learner journey research prompted some staff to consider how these skills are articulated to students, and reflected on the need for more discussion amongst course teams. For example, English literature noted that they needed to 'standardise what they were looking for' in their marking, while several spoke about the need to create a skills development framework, either specifically relating to information literacy or more broadly related to academic literacies. One argued that the lack of such a framework or agreement resulted in 'piecemeal', 'ad hoc' delivery and development, with a 'lack of strategic overview and planning as a team' (Geography). This kind of feedback has been invaluable in identifying people to whom Library Services can promote the

resulting teaching menu and provided a rationale for development of a self-audit tool for course teams to discuss this idea.

Anxiety and confidence

The concept of 'library anxiety' has long been recognised in the literature (Mellon, 1986), with the chief cause of anxiety often being a lack of key skills, such as locating resources and using online search tools (McPherson, 2015). Collaborative action research previously undertaken at Worcester reveals a strong link between embedding study skills in the curriculum and increased student confidence, which manifests itself in improved academic writing (Purcell & Barrell, 2014). The learner journeys research suggests that anxiety or lack of confidence is widespread and does not relate solely to information literacy or library use:

> University comes as something of a shock to them and their expectations have to be re-adjusted. They will email the smallest and silliest questions to academic staff rather than finding out for themselves - usually the information is all on Blackboard, but they don't look - or don't check university email (Physical Education)

> More confidence is needed in embracing academic debate rather than 'trying to find the right answer' (English Literature)

This concern comes through numerous times and, as such, the teaching menu is underpinned at level 4 with student development of confidence in themselves as learners in Higher Education (University of Worcester Library Services, n.d.-b, pp. 7-8).

Transition, progression and developing skills in the curriculum

Staff frequently reference two key transition points in the learner journey, from secondary to Higher Education, and from level 4 to level 5. As discussed above, the former is a more scaffolded and supported transition to the independent style required at university, with somewhat more variation

in the latter. Staff spoke at length about progression with the curriculum and a lot of good practice was shared:

Students are asked to self-assess their skills in four categories at the beginning of the first semester (research and writing, ICT skills, verbal communication, employability). Personal tutors use the results to lay out students' personal development plan and show them where to find support to develop their skills (Geography)

As part of the independent study, students have to do a progress report presentation…Second years are invited to hear these presentations. This benefits both - third years want to impress peers and second years get an idea of what they need to be doing…A positive form of 'peer pressure' (Biology)

First years are mentored by second years. Student Academic Mentors or 'SAMs' each have a group of first years for whom they are responsible (Sports Coaching)

However, there is huge variation across the university from Psychology who outlined a progression mode across a degree programme (BUILD – EXPAND – REFINE) to those who would like to be provided with a framework of skills development which they currently perceive to be lacking (History). Many noted the challenges in delivering information or other academic literacies with many comments stating that students find study skills modules 'dull and dry' (Cell Biology) or simply 'don't see the point' (Cricket Coaching).

Some staff reflected on the need to discuss development of academic literacies as a course team:

An individual might embed particular independent learning skills into their assignment criteria…but every module has its own criteria (Geography)

[I] assume that…lecturers agree on the basic needs of students…but we've never discussed it as a team (English Literature)

Part of the ethos being promoted by Library Services is a joined up approach to the student experience with consistency of experience and clarity of expectation. It is apparent that in some areas this is sorely needed.

Demographics

When asked about different student demographics and the impact on the learner journey, staff focus on two main areas: A levels vs BTEC entry students, and mature students, although a number of other issues were also touched on.

Mature students

Mature students were singled out for a great number of comments surrounding their experience and learner journeys.

Positive skills that mature students were felt to have include:

- Recognition of their own skills gap and therefore confidence to ask more questions

- Better at time management/organisation, with better preparation for seminars

- Greater engagement in seminars, and able to positively affect less engaged cohorts as a result

- More eager readers

Some staff even commented that mature students 'cope better with the course as greater life experience means a greater understanding of what there is to be researched' (Creative Writing). Some comments suggested that younger students are considered to be more demanding (Environmental Science) and more ready to disengage with any topic they are not interested in, or have short attention spans (Computing).

Conversely, mature students were felt to:

- Have an IT skills gap

- Be more anxious about study

- Struggle specifically with referencing

Entry level: A-level, BTEC or professional

Staff across the institution commented on the differences in skills between BTEC and A-level background students. BTEC were generally considered to have fewer academic skills than those with an A-level background, with one noting, 'BTECs are more practical and so students can be very nervous about writing. Students often feel 'rubbish at 'writing' and this persists throughout the course' (Drama). Similarly:

> Some students never manage to get themselves onto a journey of improvement. They all have capability, but often lack motivation, presentation, and organisational skills. Much of this possibly stems from school and low-aspiration family, where they have "learned" that they're not very bright (even when they are) and that they can't succeed (Human Nutrition)

Staff are clear that whatever their prior experience, 'all students need to be catered for' (Drama) and all are expected to attain the same level by the end of level 4 regardless of entry point (Health course leaders).

Other groups

Few staff reflected on other student groups during the research process. For example, students with disabilities were rarely mentioned, despite the fact that Worcester prides itself on its inclusive practice (Worcester, 2013. p. 18). Similarly only one member of staff mentioned BAME students and the attainment gap. This may well be due to staff feeling uncomfortable in singling out a particular group in this way:

> How can we best support [BAME students] without being accused of racism by other staff when [we're] actually just repeating back the concerns that BME students have shared with us because we want to help? (Human Nutrition)

Practitioner vs researcher

The most unexpected theme that emerged from the research was a tension in some subject areas between the practitioner and the researcher. For example, in subjects such as Drama, Graphic Design or Digital Media, some staff may be focused more on the creative process than the theory or background research:

> [Level 5] students are not always taught about the importance of the quality of the sources they find or different types of information. There is an increase in members of staff who are practitioners so there is less of a research focus (Graphic Design)

> There is an increasing shift towards the performance side of Drama…this brings less of an emphasis of the academic … [I am] perhaps more text based than colleagues (Drama)

Although this was only discussed within a few subject areas, it was clear that this is a real tension for some. This must impact on curriculum design and the provision of study and research skills throughout degree programmes. This was one of the drivers for the development of the self-audit tool that encourages course teams to reflect on their students' learner journey collaboratively, rather than as individuals.

Employability

Employability featured in relatively few discussions. This may be because of the nature of the questions asked, which had an education focus, rather than any true reflection of how employability relates to the learner journey. In practice, the skills developed throughout a degree programme are all vital in the workforce, and the students interviewed in Devine's follow-up research on the learner journey all reflected on the importance of employability as part of their journey (2018, pp. 57-59). Those that reflected on employability attributes referenced specific interventions including:

> [There is] an optional placement module at level 5 which includes teaching students to shake hands, make eye contact, and write emails in a professional manner (Physical Education)

> External professionals attend as guest speakers [at levels 4 and 5] to teach employability skills (Geography)

Others referenced employability strands at level 7 (PGCE Primary), mandatory project and career development modules at level 5 (Forensic & Applied Biology), and including consulting employers to embed a range of skills in the curriculum 'that are not normally taught in maths degrees', including presentation and communication skills, team work skills, academic writing skills, computing skills and problem-solving skills (Maths).

Technology

Only a few comments were made about students' digital skills, with basic ICT skills being the focus rather than higher level digital capabilities. Given the importance of this agenda, with a recent report from Jisc noting that nearly 20% of HE learners do not feel that digital skills will be relevant to their careers (Jisc, 2017), more work is needed to further unpick the attitudes behind these results. Staff who reflected on digital skills and technology tended to take one of two viewpoints. Some felt that students have rudimentary IT skills, but cannot search for information effectively, with Google and Wikipedia mentioned by several respondents, and often cannot use basic software such as Microsoft Word or PowerPoint. Others felt that students are 'generally internet savvy on arrival' and are skilled at working online. A third, related viewpoint is outlined by Bury (2016) who notes that faculty recognise student capabilities and confidence in using online tools, but not their capability to exercise critical judgement on the sources they use, relying on the first few hits on Google (p. 239). One of the academics in the research sample reflected on this simply stating 'students are not as good at IT as we think they are' (Physical Education).

Benefits and outputs

This data analysis was used to develop a teaching menu centred on curriculum and student need, e.g. developing confidence as a Higher Education learner, preparing for the first assignment, or preparing for independent study (University of Worcester Library Services, n.d.-b) (see Figure 1). This menu has been made available under a Creative Commons licence, so that it can be re-used and adapted by other libraries as desired. Recognising the competing demands on academics' time, one of the key aims of developing this menu was to help academic colleagues better understand what librarians can offer, and thereby develop and support their curricula. Organised by level of study, the new menu is designed to be user-friendly and makes use of Microsoft Word navigation tools, so that a busy academic can jump from the 'quick navigation' menu to the relevant point in the menu which provides more details. Here each student need is aligned to a number of suggested interventions and delivery recommendations. This is where the information literacy element is articulated, with interventions around searching, referencing, and so on. Delivery recommendations cover suggested length of sessions, timing in the curriculum, modes of delivery and so on. This structure is designed to be indicative, not prescriptive, recognising the need for librarians and academics to work in partnership to establish what will fit most appropriately into any given curriculum. There is no one size fits all approach.

<Insert Figure 1 here>

As a result of the inconsistencies revealed around academic expectations of student skills, Library Services also undertook to develop a self-audit tool, designed to help course teams assess and articulate their expectations of students at all levels of study, and identify actions to clarify and improve on this (University of Worcester Library Services, n.d.-a). At the request of academic colleagues, this tool contains a number of suggested expectations about skill level at levels 4-7 of study, which teams are free to add to, amend or delete as appropriate. Some are taken from the learner journeys research, others from the QAA Quality Code which outlines descriptors for

qualifications at each level of study (QAA, 2014). Subsequent columns offer staff the opportunity to self-assess how well these expectations are being delivered and met within their curricula, and identify actions to improve the student experience. The use of this tool is currently in a pilot phase and is planned to be used with course teams working on course (re)approvals. Library Services have offered facilitated workshops to help course teams work through this tool.

What started life as a Library Services' project has gained traction as an educational development project at the University of Worcester, stimulating conversations with a range of colleagues across academic and professional departments. For example, Library Services now deliver a regular session on the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education around the concept of the learner journey. This enables new teachers to reflect on and challenge their own assumptions and expectations and, hopefully, in so doing deliver a better student experience. Further, the project's outputs have potential implications for the next TEF submission and elements of our Office for Student Access and Participation plan. Work on delivering evidence of impact for these elements is ongoing.

Conclusion

The learner journeys project was originally undertaken to provide evidence to underpin a revived and refreshed library teaching offer. The research data gathered has more than done this, enabling Library Services at Worcester to deliver a substantial piece of work which is generating discussion throughout the institution. However, it also delivered more than was originally anticipated, both in tangible outputs and less quantifiable experiences. First, although the research questioned academic assumptions and expectations, it also challenged the assumptions being made by the researching librarian team. In particular, we felt we started with a clear idea of what skills and capabilities were expected of students studying at different levels, and had not realised the level of variation in how this was perceived throughout the institution. Second, an unlooked for benefit that rapidly became apparent was the value in talking to academic colleagues as peers, partners in the pedagogic process

and researchers in our own right. This is an intangible factor to measure, but it is recognised in the sector that the academic-librarian relationship can be challenging to navigate, particularly in ensuring that the power dynamic is one of peer-to-peer, rather than academic to support (Pittaway, 2018). Undertaking pedagogic research has raised the department's profile and reputation, and enhanced our role as players in narratives of institutional importance, such as student retention and success

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Table 1: quick navigation of the menu of teaching options

Level	Student need			
4	Developing confidence as an HE learner / supporting transition to HE	Preparing for the first assignment	Understanding feedback on the first assignment / developing resilience	
5	Consolidate skills learnt at level 4 / increase learner independence & confidence	Catch up on skills not learnt at level 4	Preparing for independent study	Preparing for transition to level 6 (top-up students)
6	Preparing for independent study	Develop confidence and familiarity for top-up students		
7	Familiarisation for those who studied elsewhere at L4-6	Understanding of expectations of level 7 study, particularly for international students, or those returning to study	Planning a L7 dissertation	