Information literacy is for life, not just for a good degree: a literature review

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Introduction

The concept and practice of information literacy has been widely discussed in library and information professional literature in recent years. In the main, these discussions have focussed on practice in Higher Education (HE), specifically on how librarians may be involved in developing the skills of students to enable them to maximise the use of academic resources, predominantly library-based, in order to meet the requirements of learning outcomes of their courses. More recently this focus has widened to examine transition from school and Further Education (FE) into University but also into the workplace, recognising the UNESCO assertion that information literacy is a process for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2006) (eg Antonesa, 2007, Julien & Barker, 2009). The identification of information literacy as an attribute of employability and the concepts, policies and practices of workplace information literacy is the subject of this review. Here, key texts are drawn from academic theoretical and practice-based research and official reports from stakeholders including government, professional associations and industry and commerce in order to provide an overview of the main issues around workplace information literacy, focusing on **employability and transition**, **context and theory**, **practice** and **policy**. The purpose of the review is to inform CILIP members of the wide range of issues in this developing area in order that they may contribute to its development at all levels in an informed manner.

Background

There are numerous definitions of 'information literacy', a term initially proposed in 1974 in a report by Paul Zurkoswki for the (US) National Commission on Libraries and Information Science discussing *"universal information literacy by 1984"* (1974:1). Information literacy, then, meaning *"being able to find what is known or knowable on any subject"* (1974:23). Zurkowski was writing about workplace information literacies:

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> *"People trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems"* (1974:6).

Since then there has been much discussion in the library community, generating numerous slightly varying definitions of information literacy (ACRL, 2000; ANZIL, 2004; CILIP, 2004; SCONUL, 2011), although Owusu-Ansah (2005) suggests that there is more consensus than disagreement, recommending a focus on developing literacies rather than revising definitions. Generally it is agreed that information literacy is about recognising that in an information society we are presented with a multitude of choices of information sources and that navigating these sources and their content in order to maximise the benefit of the information conveyed therein is a literacy in itself as important as reading and numeracy. This is now recognised as a basic human right (UNESCO, 2006).

Employability and transition

When considering workplace information literacy it is appropriate to consider the current delivery of information literacy, which is located predominantly in Higher Education institutions. Questions arise in the literature about how this type of information literacy may connect to the work environment, and the level of its relationship with employability of students entering the workplace.

Despite claims to the contrary, 'workplace information literacy' – the effective use of information in the workplace – is nothing new. However it is important to distinguish it from 'workplace literacy', a concept which benefitted from much attention during the 1990s relating to wider literacies such as reading levels in workplace learning (eg Hollenbeck, 1993; Perkins, 1993; Stapp, 1998; Hull, 1999; Burnaby & Hart, 2001; Hicks et aL, 2007) and also from the challenges presented by the increase in use of information technologies (ICT) since that period (eg Mabrito, 1997; Mikulecky & Kirkley, 1998; Grabill, 1998; Haas, 1999; Muir, 2002; Panell, 2005; Spitler, 2005; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006;

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Cooke & Greenwood, 2008, etc). While these research areas provide some context for workplace information literacy they are not examined in detail in this review.

Prompted by information overload issues such as email (eg Peckham, 1997) discussion started to examine the workplace. A general move from 'library instruction' to 'information literacy' in academia started to consider employability outcomes (eg Abbott and Peach, 2000; Candy, 1995; Calderhead, 1998; CBI, 2009). Cheuk (1998) looked at auditors and engineers using Kuhlthau's Information Search Process model (Kuhlthau, 1991). The Kuhlthau user-centred model is a frequently used theoretical approach in this research (Limberg (2000), Gasteen and O'Sullivan's *"information literate law firm "* (2000), and most recently applied by Lawal et al, 2014 in their study of Nigerian legal information literacies). Cheuk's later work in this area (2008) considers the importance placed in business on value and the challenges of information overload. She recommends the wider adoption of information literacy concepts and approaches from education in the workplace environment. Business students and their employability is returned to by Costa (2009), who notes the importance of networks and context and raises the importance of HE information literacy provision in considering these employability needs when preparing students for the workplace. The repeated appearance of the importance of networks and communications with other people are key aspects of workplace information literacy literature (Crawford & Irving, 2011).

This user information needs approach to information literacy and the introduction by Wenger (1998) of a communities of practice approach to learning reflected a shift from a library / resource-centred approach to user education to a more user-centred approach. This shift significantly accelerated the growth in attention paid to information literacies during this period.

Although, as demonstrated above, there is generally considered to be a link between information literacy and employability (Crawford & Irving, 2012), until recently there was little research into this

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area at national levels. UNESCO identified this gap and recommended the identification of workplace applications of information literacy in wider surveys (Catts, 2010).

Transition from school to the workplace was also being considered in the light of the information society (Alves, 1999). Herring (2011) found that when school students compared their school information literacy skills with those required in their work experience there were differences in terms of sources and types of information and that their teachers *"lack knowledge of these workplace information environments"* (Herring, 2011). This is supported by Brage et al (2012), Jeffryes & Lafferty (2012) and Eyre (2012) who suggest that although information literacy taught in HE is relevant during their time at university it does not always translate into useful workplace skills. It was recommended that librarians consider the wider context when designing and delivering programmes, (Eyre, 2012; Sokoloff, 2012). Collaboration between academic and workplace librarians may lead to insights in terms of work context that can be reflected in information literacy programmes (Waters et al, 2012). In an attempt to develop a curriculum for the workplace which reflected employers needs but would reside within an academic framework, The Open University iKnow project (Soma, 2010), referred to De Saulles (2007) investigation into information literacy amongst SMEs which monetized time wasted through poor search skills. D'Angelo (2012) built on this by identifying a difference in information literacy outcomes in a comparison of coursework between students who are practicing professionals and students do not have workplace experience. It is suggested that interventions such as work experience (or '*youth internship*' (Hoyer, 2011)) could address some of the issues around preparing young people for the workplace information setting. A recent study of undergraduates transition from university to the workplace (Head, 2012, 2013) reinforced the arguments around the difference between HE and workplace contexts, stressing the importance in work of access to physical documents and people networks in resolving information problems successfully, and noting the disconnect between graduate abilities and approaches and employer expectations. An example of an initiative designed to bridge this gap, which identifies a

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key workplace information literacy skill of critical thinking, attempts to meet the swiftly changing information landscape in business (Gashurov & Matsuuchi, 2013). This is a continuing issue of interest to library practitioners (Anderson-Story et al, 2014), however there is still work to be done in this area (McClure, 2013). Transition was also the focus in Wales of the JobMatch programme (Welsh Libraries, 2009), which linked information literacy skills to employment opportunities.

Although the precise term 'information literacy' does not appear in the 'Delivering a Digital Wales' report produced by the Welsh Assembly Government (2010), a National Information Literacy framework for Wales was launched in September of the same year (Welsh Information Literacy Project, 2011), informed by the Seven Pillars of Information Literacy (SCONUL, 2011) with plans in Phase Two to do *"a benefits analysis of information literacy in the workplace"*. (Head & Jackson, 2011). Their infographic (Welsh Information Literacy Project , 2012) is an accessible summary of key workplace competences linked to evidence relating to skills gaps in workforce information literacies. There is further evidence of this type of wider view, from school to work (possibly via higher education) in the US Framework for 21st Century Learning (P21, 2011) which attempts to provide a *"comprehensive framework for 21st century learning"* (P21, 2011:2) which reflects the needs of employers as well as education.

Context and theory

The work of Christine Bruce (1999) draws together the issues of user-centred information literacy development in Higher Education and the context of the developments in technology in the workplace – and their relative emphases. She suggests different ways of describing information literacies (such as environmental scanning, information management, research and development) that map to the HE view of information literacies, and reinforce the simultaneous link and disconnect between information literacy in education and in the workplace:

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> *"Information literacy is about peoples' ability to operate effectively in an information society. This involves critical thinking, an awareness of personal and professional ethics, information evaluation, conceptualising information needs, organising information, interacting with information professionals and making effective use of information in problem-solving, decision-making and research. It is these information based processes which are crucial to the character of learning organisations and which need to be supported by the organisation's technology infrastructure."* (Bruce, 1999:47)

The tension created by this link/disconnect is a key issue still manifested in the current literature and is a fundamental problem which continually undermines attempts of the engagement of the library and information profession in the development and delivery of workplace information literacy. One of the main challenges facing librarians in developing opportunities to develop information literacies in the workplace is through lack of recognition at an organizational level that these literacies are not relevant. Kluseck & Bornstein (2006) reviewed job profiles of US job descriptions drawn from a government database and found that many jobs recognized the importance of information skills – under another name. Similar conclusions were drawn by Conley & Gil (2011) in their research into business professionals, who only recognized information literacy elements when identified separately from the umbrella term. Hart Research Associates (2010) report for The Association Of American Colleges And Universities on employers opinions of skills of college leavers supports this finding (although *'locate, organize, and evaluate information'* (2010:2) comes sixth in a ranked list of seven *'intellectual and practical skills'* (2010:2)).

In business, for example, critical thinking is a key attribute, considered to be an element of information literacy (Heichman Taylor, 2008). This attribute was not addressed in Australian government librarians' definition of information literacy (Kirton et al, 2008), which reinforces the contextual nature of this concept. A link between information literacy and person-job fit (and subsequent job-performance) was identified by Li (2010) suggesting an employer-focused rationale

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for identifying these literacies. Environmental scanning is another workplace attribute which connects to information literacy (Zhang et al, 2010). Networks and informal sources are identified by Travis (2011) and even within HE the difference may be noted in non-academic staff, where it has been noted that information literacy is less clearly defined, and is related to networks, time and organizing information (Hepworth & Smith, 2008) while O'Farrill (2010) noted the importance of other people in the process of gathering and evaluating information in a Scottish NHS call centre.

The tension may be caused by the difference in context: in the workplace, Cheuk's observations include *"information seeking is not always necessary; is often by trial and error; is not 'getting the answer'; is not linear; is not a one man job; and that relevance criteria change"* (in Bruce, 2000). Bruce discusses these differences in terms of her Seven Faces of Information Literacy, thus:

Information Technology Experience	Environmental Scanning
Information Sources Experience	Becoming Familiar with and using information sources and services
Information Process Experience	Information processing; packaging for internal/ external consumption
Information Control Experience	Information management
Knowledge Construction Experience	Corporate memory
Knowledge Extension Experience	Research and development
Wisdom Experience	Professional Ethics

Seven faces and workplace processes (Bruce, 1999) (from Bruce 2000)

An extension to this comprehensive analysis is supported by library practitioner Smalley (2001), whose workplace research raises the issue of a close relationship between workplace information literacy and knowledge management ("*employees and knowledge workers*" (2001:689). This connection is strongly supported by the work of Annemaree Lloyd (2003), who, along with Christine Bruce, has made significant contributions to research in the area of workplace information literacies. Lloyd calls for a shift in thinking by librarians in order "*…to realign their roles from providers and organizers of information, to facilitators and educators of clients' information access and process.*

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This requires librarians to develop partnerships with workplace communities so as to understand the role that information plays in the knowledge economy; and to develop a new language that is relevant to workplace communities and ties information literacy instruction to the authentic situations of the workplace." (Lloyd, 2003:87). Lloyd goes on (2005a) to discuss how the unstructured nature of workplace learning, based on informal and collaborative communities of practice is likely to impact on delivery of information literacy in HE, which is more focused on systematic skills which reflect institutional and academic requirements. Although it appears that there is a connection between the information literacies acquired by students and their benefit in the workplace (Crawford, 2006; Crawford & Irving, 2007), the contextual approach is an important element of workplace information literacy research, which Lloyd discusses in detail in her work around the information literacies of firefighters (2005b, 2007b). This requires research into various contexts rather than relying on a generic approach (Lloyd & Williamson, 2008). Her view that information literacy is more appropriately discussed within a framework of 'practice' rather than 'skills' (Lloyd, 2011) has major implications in how libraries may successfully develop and deliver information literacy in the workplace. If it is required that a much clearer understanding of both the context (including the wider context such as level of industrial development (eg Jinadu & Kaur, 2014)) and the theoretical models behind information literacy then more research needs to be done in both of these areas.

Although some issue is made of the skills required of library staff to develop and deliver resources (notably Wilcocks & Walker, 2000; Mackenzie, 2005; Somerville & Howard, 2008; Alakpodia, 2010; Anyaoku et al, 2012; Inskip, 2013), and the contribution which could be made by library schools (Clyde, 2002; 2005), apart from the CILIP (May, 2013) survey of members' information literacies there is little evidence of substantive research into the area of Continuing Professional Development of professionals involved in information literacy, focus being more on users (including faculty – Graham & Semich, 2006; Abram, 2013).

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In terms of theoretical approaches to workplace information literacies, although these are far-outweighed by practitioner reports there are some important examples of academic research in addition to Bruce and Lloyd. Tuominen et al (2005) respond to Webber and Johnston's (2000:359) call to researchers involvement and discuss how *"studying and understanding the interplay between information technologies, workplace learning, and domain-specific knowledge formation processes is necessary for the advancement of information literacy initiatives"* (2005:329). Their view of workplace information literacy as a sociocultural practice is supported by Lloyd (2007a) who builds on her work with firefighters looking at ambulance officers, reinforcing the contextual nature of these practices and the importance of communities of practice. This complexity requires a paradigm shift away from information literacy as a list of skills to be acquired and towards an understanding of the information environment in which the practice sits. Additionally, the meaning of 'literacies' and the development of this to encompass a wider meaning than the traditional language-focus, would recognise the multimodality of modern forms of communication through the development of technologies. The workplace nature of this modality, which affects teachers and creative practitioners (New Media Consortium, 2005) as well as firefighters (Lloyd & Somerville, 2006), requires a recognition of a development of these literacies.

Practice and policy
In addition to many of the workplace analyses referred to throughout this document, in the UK much of the research in the area of workplace information literacy has been done around the National Health Service (NHS). Various examples of research within NHS (including Arri & Khalid, 2004; RCN, 2005) in the mid-2000s identified a need for development in this area in order to facilitate the drive to evidence-based practice (Ayre, 2006). The influence of evidence-based practice in terms of workplace information literacy is supported by various authors: Lin & Vaska (2009) consider the importance of critical thinking over search skills in relation to healthcare problem solving, while Gannon-Leary (2006) discusses social care professionals' contextual community-based

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preferences in information gathering. They argue that there is a need to raise skills and update knowledge because established practices do not facilitate evidence-based practice. The NHS focus significantly informed work in Scotland (Crawford & Irving, 2008) on the Scottish Information Literacy Project, which led to an Information Literacy Strategy for the Scottish Government and, ultimately, to policy in Scotland (Foreman & Thompson, 2009, Crawford & Irving, 2012). Another health report, which considers the context around nursing and related professions information literacies (RCN, 2011) adapts the ANZIL (2004) principles to recommend seven competences which map to the professional competences in nursing with a view to their use as evaluators and a learning and development framework. In the area of law, Choolhun and Bird considered employability issues around law graduates where legal research skills were not meeting employers expectations(2012). This research was used to inform a government review recommending legal education address research skills in training (LETR, 2013).

In addition to identification of conflicting discourses the development of workplace information literacies in the corporate setting also requires a recognition of how to embed these literacies. It is suggested that these may best be delivered through liaison and collaboration with other departments, namely Human Resources (Oman, 2001), counselors (Poole, 2003). Recognition that this may vary across professions and levels within the organization is also of relevance here. Kirk (2004) discusses information use at senior management level, identifying two main challenges to information professionals: the shift "from a technical- and process-focus to a more people-oriented focus" (2004:6), and the shift from acting as service provider to "being part of the core business of the organization" (2004: 7). These shifts again link to the skills and competences of library and information professionals, particularly in terms of networking, communications and relationship-building (Irving and Crawford, 2009). Macoustra (2004) considers law firms, again making the connection with knowledge management, a popular idea at the time (Abell & Skelton, 2005). This comparison arose subsequently through O'Farrill's work in Scotland looking at the NHS24 service

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(2008, 2010), although Ferguson argues that conflating them "may cause confusion" (2009:6) as they intersect but exhibit differences as well as similarities.

The importance of policy recognizing the need for information literacy cannot be underestimated, requiring theoretically framed research-based evidence which is linked to practical consequences (Weiner, 2011a). Bruce et al (2012) support this finding, identifying the importance of "*using information to learn*" or informed learning (2012:524), a process embedded in information literacy which widens and builds on the view from the functional skills-based approach and recognizes the challenges presented in the workplace. They use this approach to develop nine principles for developing policy in this area:

> "*Foster Informed Learning; Promote Critical, Creative, and Reflective Information Use in Learning; Recognize That the Experience of Information Literacy May Vary across Different Cultures and Communities; Explore and Celebrate the Diversity of User Communities in Order to Support Their Information and Learning Needs; Advocate for the Disadvantaged and Disempowered; Develop Informed Learning Environments for People of Diverse Generations, Learning Styles, and Cultural Heritages; Pursue the Potential of Technological Innovation and Learning Space Design for Informed Learning; Collaborate to Support Informed Learning; Broaden the Recognition of Educator to Include Information Professionals such as Academic and Public Librarians, Museum Curators, and Others.*" (Bruce et al, 2012)

They suggest that adopting these principles would allow the development of policies that reflect the context and enable an *"informed use of information and technology"* (2012:543).

There is very strong evidence of current initiatives taking place at a national level that are related to the development of information literacies, some in the workplace. In pursuit of bridging the 'digital divide', the Carnegie Trust report "Making Digital Real" (2014) discusses work in Liverpool by charity Go On UK initiating a multi-agency partnership approach to encourage and facilitate access to online

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skills and resources – this broad project includes disadvantaged people, the unemployed and SMEs with the aim of encouraging growth, diversification and social inclusion. SMEs are also the focus of Lloyds Bank's "Benchmarking the digital maturity of small and medium-sized enterprises and charities in the UK" (2014) which announces that *"almost 1.7m organisations have a very low level of digital understanding and capability – many make no use of the internet at all and do not have any web or social media presence"* (2014:7), suggesting four possible interventions, which indicate a need for information (or, specifically, digital) literacy development for these types of small businesses. The Carnegie Trust and the Lloyds Bank reports findings link to the Tinder Foundation's report A Leading Digital Nation by 2020 (McDonald, 2014) which monetizes the cost of digital inclusion of individuals. The monetization approach to determining value of online access is a strong argument to business and government of how much could (eventually) be saved by successfully meeting this objective in order to strengthen the economy.

At government level, there is significant activity in the organization of the government website Gov.UK (2014a) in terms of developing the information skills of civil servants, which is informed by the 26 criteria, some of which relate to information literacies, listed in the Digital By Default (Gov.uk, 2014b) element of the Government Digital Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2012). Although the Government Service Design Manual (Gov.uk, 2014c) focuses on service design, there are various literacy issues addressed therein which would be of value of exploration for research. The Digital Skills Charter of Go On UK (Go On UK, 2014) aims to serve "*staff, customers and communities*" in the development of their online skills, including a specific focus on staff in workplace environments. Again, in their digital skills web resource (Digitalskills.com, 2014) there is a focus on digital, rather than information, literacies, a regular aspect of resources being generated outside the world of academia. The Government Digital Inclusion Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2014a) launched in April 2014, refers to the economic benefits of *"full digital takeup"*, which *"could add £63 billion value to the UK economy"*. This link to workplace information literacy is key to its adoption as policy, summarized in

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the Digital Inclusion Charter (Cabinet Office, 2014b) published at the same time, in response to Action 66 of the European Commission's Europe 2020 initiative, which recommends member states to support SME and other disadvanted groups through policy (European Commission, 2014).

Conclusion

This review has considered the published literature from a range of source over a lengthy period. The value of this approach is that it provides a context showing the development of recognition of the challenges of workplace information literacy. Despite the very term 'information literacy' being located in a text relating to the workplace it is only in recent years that attempts have been made to extend the lifelong learning element of this literacy from Higher Education to the workplace. This is a difficult transition. What were initially thought of as being generic skills and competences do not successfully transition from education to the workplace, and do not sufficiently enhance job seekers employability. There is current evidence of significant developments in policy and practice at national level in the UK in terms, particularly around enabling digital inclusion and employability of job seekers, and of engaging SMEs in the use of online information resources. It is through recognizing the contextual nature of workplace information practices, and through bridging the attendant semantic gap, that library and information professionals may successfully contribute to the development of these practices in a meaningful way.

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