Article:

Supporting the employability agenda in University Libraries: a case study from the University of Sheffield.

Structured abstract
Purpose: This paper outlines work to support the employability agenda in the Library at the University of Sheffield, set in the context of debates about the nature of employability, employability skills and information literacy in the workplace.
Design: The paper starts with a brief review of literature on employability and student skills in the UK HE sector, the place of information literacy as an employability attribute and information literacy in the workplace. It goes on to outline work done in the Library at the University of Sheffield to support the employability agenda. This includes the development of a commercial awareness workshop in collaboration with other services, and the incorporation of student and alumni voices in an employability guide.
Findings: The literature reviewed highlights differences between information literacy in the workplace and academia. This could present challenges as well as opportunities in promoting information literacy as an employability attribute. The case study highlights the benefits of working in collaboration with students and services beyond the Library in the employability arena.
Value: The approaches taken in Sheffield may be of interest to other institutions looking to develop support for the employability agenda.

Keywords: employability, skills, information literacy, academic libraries, workplace literacy, commercial awareness

Introduction
Student employability and skills are a key priority for the HE sector. The forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework will include as a core metric "the proportion of students who are in highly skilled employment or further study six months after graduation". (Blyth and Cleminson, 2016, p.5). The University of Sheffield Learning and Teaching Plan (University of Sheffield, 2016) states that "We want to ensure we equip our students effectively for their chosen path, recognising that employability is an important dimension to our education…". Support for developing employability is offered by the University of Sheffield Careers Service (2017) and this will be common across other institutions. The University of Sheffield Library has been working to develop a new vision for information and digital literacy (IDL). The resulting University-wide framework, currently in its final stages of development, states that IDL is "for education, employment and citizenship" (University of Sheffield Library, 2017b). More specifically, the development of IDL throughout a student's time at University will

> position them well for graduate level employment and will equip them with life skills which are transferable to the demands of an increasingly complex digital world. (University of Sheffield, 2017b).

Broadly speaking, employability can be defined as "the ability to get, keep and succeed in jobs you want - both now and in the future as the economy shifts." (Rich, 2015a). However, there are debates around what constitutes employability. Rich (2015b) points out that Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education statistics are often used as a measure of success for employability, but warns against confusing employment with employability, and proposes a new framework of employability embracing knowledge, skills and social capital. A systematic review by Williams et al (2016) identified a range of conceptualisations and components of employability, including three overarching dimensions: capital components, career management and contextual components.
Research by Higdon (2016) challenges views of employability that focus on skills acquisition, and suggests that the views of students and graduates on employability have not been sufficiently considered. The research considered the views of students and graduates

primarily from the creative industries, and suggests that "opportunities and activities that allow students and graduates to meet the gatekeepers of potential work are seen as far more important than skills development." (Higdon, 2016, p.185). The research also suggests that "it is social capital that is the crucial factor which opens up work opportunities, not the acquisition of competitive skills". (Higdon, 2016 p.191).

There is evidence to show that skills are considered highly significant by graduate employers. A report by Universities UK (2016) suggests:

> there appears to be coherence among graduate and employer views: both rated skills/aptitudes and relevant work experience as the first and second most important factors in attaining employment. (p.30)

There is also evidence to suggest that "many businesses are satisfied with graduates' basic skills and general readiness for employment". (Confederation of British Industry, 2016, p.46). Information literacy is rarely recognised explicitly as an employability skill. It does not appear on a list of 48 transferable skills drawn up by Universities UK (Universities UK, 2016, p.35), although related skills, including analysis and critical thinking, data handling, problem solving and effective IT use are included. This may be a question of terminology. As a Universities UK report points out, "terms such as 'entrepreneurial skills', 'problem-solving', and 'team working' may be interpreted differently across education providers, industries and occupations." (Universities UK, 2015, p.2). The report goes on to recommend that "Universities and employers should jointly develop a 'skills translation' exercise to help all parties understand how and where these 'soft skill' principles can be practically developed and applied." (Universities UK, 2015, p.2). This could present opportunities for Universities and Libraries as they continue to develop digital and information literacy strategies. (JISC, 2014)

Efforts have been made to demonstrate the role of libraries in employability, and the place of information literacy as an employability attribute. A literature review commissioned by SCONUL (Wiley, 2014) aimed to identify the contribution of libraries to employability, and was revisited in 2015, outlining key messages for information professionals for supporting the development of employability skills. (Wiley, 2015). A graduate employability lens for the SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy (Goldstein, 2015) has been developed and includes chapters on employability attributes and information literacy in the workplace.

There is research to suggest that there are differences in information literacy in academic and workplace contexts. Stephen Abram (2013) identifies some key differences in information literacy needs between workplaces and the education sector, and takes a broad view of information literacy, subscribing to the idea of transliteracy which encompasses a range of skills and competencies. He goes on to talk about "the challenge of workplace literacy, where the ability to search, retrieve and use information is rarely sufficient to be a competent and successful employee". (Abram, 2013, p.207). He concludes:

> Workplace literacy is different. It builds on the skills we see taught and experienced in the consumer and education space but it focuses on the needs of the enterprise and aligns with the mission of the organization to succeed. (Abram, 2013, p.220)

Crawford and Irving point out that the higher education perspective of information literacy "fosters the development of individual learners through the use of published and explicit sources of information" whereas "information literacy workplace activity is generally collaborative" (Crawford and Irving, 2011, p.50). Workplace information problems are more likely to be "messy and open ended" (Crawford and Irving, 2011, p.57) and people rather than publications are the principal sources of information.

Lloyd (2011) suggests that there is insufficient understanding of information literacy in the workplace, and that the practice of information literacy is contextual.

> Our continued insistence of [sic] information literacy as a text-based information skill that promotes specific attributes will result in continued failure to promote and advocate the practice to those outside (and even inside) educational settings. (Lloyd, 2011, p.294).

The view that there is "a strong disconnect between academic and workplace information literacy" is also mentioned by Quinn and Leligdon (2014, p.241). Their research with Executive MBA students, who were all professionals with significant work experience, identified issues around understanding and transferability of information literacy, although the students were aware of the importance of information in the workplace. Academic librarians must therefore try to understand the information landscape of different workplace contexts to provide effective support. The new IDL framework at Sheffield considers what is required to live and work in a fluid digital world, as well as to learn in one, and is based on the understanding of a postmodern information world as typified by "uncertainty, fluidity and dynamic and continuous change", with students positioned as "active learners, rather than passive consumers of information". (Grant, Little and Horn, 2017).

The Sheffield case study
Employability guides
As employability has become more prominent, a number of University Libraries in the UK and globally have developed employability guides, with most using Springshare LibGuides software. Bell and Asman (2015) describe the employability project at City University, which resulted in the development of their guide (City University Library Services, 2017). Some institutions have combined careers and employability in their guides (Queen Margaret University Edinburgh 2016, University of Melbourne Library 2016) and the University of Hull (2016) guide was developed in collaboration with the Careers and Employability Service, with the title "The Employable Digital Student". These joint approaches reflect the recommendations of Cole & Tibby (2013), emphasising that

> employability is a university-wide responsibility...requires combined effort, working in partnership with other institutional services and departments, e.g. all schools of study, careers centre, enterprise and business departments, placement support, students' union, student support services, library and information services, etc. (Cole & Tibby, 2013, p.12)

University Libraries have recognised that the business information resources they provide have a value for students in job seeking and in developing business and commercial awareness, and this is reflected in the employability guides they have produced. Many employability guides also include material on skills development opportunities, and guidance on the use of social media.

The Sheffield Employability LibGuide (University of Sheffield Library, 2017a) builds on the strategic importance of employability, which is is a key feature of the University of Sheffield Learning and Teaching Plan (University of Sheffield, 2016). The Library is a key contributor to the plan, particularly in respect of information and digital literacy, which are recognised as Sheffield graduate attributes (University of Sheffield, 2017). One of the key themes of the Library Strategic Plan is student learning and success, aiming to " prepare students with the research skills and the information and digital literacy skills they need to be at the cutting edge in their discipline and influential digital citizens" (University of Sheffield Library, 2015, p.4)

To help demonstrate the significance of information literacy beyond academic contexts for employability and business, the Sheffield guide includes links to clips from television programmes such as The Apprentice and Dragons' Den. It also signposts resources developed by the University Careers Service about use of social media in job seeking, developing a personal brand, and the significance of digital footprints.

The Sheffield guide also highlights the Join Up Your Skills (JUYS) initiative. This is a collaboration between the Library, the Careers Service, University of Sheffield Enterprise (USE), and 301: The Student Skills and Development Centre. This initiative promotes the different opportunities available to students for developing a range of skills to enhance academic, personal and professional development, and demonstrates the university-wide approach outlined by Cole & Tibby (2013). Students participating in four of the workshops delivered by 301 and the Library are awarded an Academic Skills Certificate if they submit a piece of reflective writing on their skills development, and this is included in their Higher Education Achievement Record.

Student and alumni voices
A distinctive feature of the Sheffield employability guide is the inclusion of student and alumni voices. A short video features a student giving his views on information literacy, employability and commercial awareness, and this arose from a conversation with the student at a University of Sheffield Enterprise event. He was interested in talking to Library staff about his perceptions of commercial awareness, and when we were able to secure some funding for a video for the guide, he was happy to be involved. We formulated a number of areas for discussion for the video, including his understanding of information literacy, commercial awareness and employability. In the video, he talks about the steps he has taken to develop his skills in these areas, including using Library resources on a regular basis. The project demonstrated the value that can arise from engaging with students by attending events beyond the Library.
The guide also incorporates alumni voices in a series of stories about information literacy in the workplace. These have been developed over a period of time, and the impetus for them arose following a discussion between library colleagues about the transferability of information literacy from the academic context to the workplace. Some colleagues felt that this is clearer when working with students who were likely to enter professions such as law, medicine or architecture. However, colleagues working with students whose career paths were likely to be more diverse found it harder to make the link.
One colleague had the opportunity to attend a careers event where Arts Faculty alumni were talking about their job roles, including a languages graduate working at a global risk management company. She realised that aspects of the role he was describing were clearly related to information literacy, and followed this up with the graduate afterwards. The result was the first of several case studies that have now been included in the employability guide as alumni stories.
The Library originally approached the Careers Service for help to identify alumni who would be willing to talk about the information literacy aspects of their jobs. They were very supportive, and helped to identify a list of alumni who had volunteered to support University initiatives, but the generic email that was sent did not generate any replies. Using personal contacts with former students proved to be more successful, such as a former law student who had worked closely with the Library as a student associate for a legal database, and a former student intern who had introduced Library staff at an Enterprise event. We devised a series of prompt questions about the information aspects of their jobs to help our volunteers draft their case study, and made sure we had their permission to post the information on Library web pages.
The case studies have been promoted to key employability contacts in faculties and professional services, including the Careers Service, and are used by Library staff in

information literacy workshops and presentations to show that information literacy skills can be transferrable to the workplace.

Commercial Awareness workshops
Commercial awareness is an attribute that is valued by employers. Isherwood (2017) discusses a gap between the skills that graduate employers want, and the skills that graduates hired can offer, and refers to data gathered by the Association of Graduate Recruiters which indicates that only 15% of graduate hires have commercial awareness, and that 79% of graduate employers expect to offer training in this area to graduate recruits. Isherwood goes on to say that

> Commercial awareness can be demonstrated though [sic] an understanding of what drives a potential employer's organisation...if a graduate is not motivated by the core business of an employer they will struggle to persuade them to invest in them.

Further advice on getting commercially aware includes regularly reading a broadsheet newspaper and the trade press. (Isherwood, 2015). Universities UK use the terminology business and customer awareness in a list of transferable skills (Universities UK 2016, p.35) and suggest that these are skill areas that would be "more naturally developed in the workplace" (p.33) than in a degree course.

At the University of Sheffield, the Careers Service, University of Sheffield Enterprise and the Library have worked collaboratively to develop a commercial awareness workshop, building on the recommendations of Cole & Tibby (2013) on the need for institution wide responsibility for employability. The workshop has been integrated into the curriculum in a Careers for Biologists module in the Department of Animal & Plant Sciences, and has also been delivered as part of the Library Information Skills Workshop programme, and in a Career Management Skills module run by the Careers Service.

In the workshop, students are introduced to commercial awareness, and consider how businesses and organisations work using a business model canvas adapted for commercial awareness. This encourages students to think about an organisation they would like to work for, considering factors such key activities, customers/clients and external influences. They are encouraged to use freely available web sites to help them do this. They are then introduced to business information resources provided by the Library, and asked to consider what value these resources add to their research. Finally, they have the opportunity to reflect on how they can apply their learning in the job seeking process.

Feedback from the different iterations of the workshop has generally been positive. The workshop was delivered to 120 Animal & Plant Sciences students, and 74.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident in their understanding of commercial awareness and its importance. 87% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident in searching for and evaluating commercial information.

This collaboration has strengthened relationships between the services involved, and reinforces the Library as a partner in the employability agenda. It also raises the profile of the Library's work on information and digital literacy, and helps to promote company and business information resources.

Concluding remarks
Promoting the use of information sources for job seeking is probably the most common contribution to the employability agenda currently made by University Libraries. There are also opportunities to promote information literacy as a skill set that is transferable from academia to the workplace. However, this could be challenging, given some of the research conclusions about the differences between information literacy in the workplace and academia that are outlined in the introduction to this article. To have an impact in this space, it could be relevant for librarians in the HE sector to familiarise themselves with the literature on information literacy in the workplace to help develop an understanding of the different

contexts. Making links with information professionals in sectors beyond the education sector could also be of value in understanding the contexts of those workplaces. Building relationships and collaborating with students and colleagues from Careers Services and other relevant professional services can also contribute to an understanding of different workplaces, and bring wider benefits for the Library.

The work described in this paper is relatively recent and it is too early to assess in detail the impact of the activities undertaken, although, as described above, feedback from activities such as the commercial awareness workshops has been very positive. However, this case study helps to illustrate some of the key points on value and academic libraries included in the editorial for this themed issue:

- Clearly linking library activities to the student experience, to the key strategic aims of the organisation, and to university strategies such as those for learning and teaching.
- Seeking to understand the student perspective and incorporating student input.
- Ensuring libraries are involved in cross-university approaches to important strategic issues.
- Seeking to make information literacy provision relevant and more valuable to students by linking it to the employability agenda.

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