The Library Association of Ireland Task Force on Information Literacy: An Overview of Objectives and Progress

Philip Russell, Claire McGuinness, Jane Burns, Brenda Carey, Monica Crump, Keith Young, Katherine Ryan and Muireann Toibin

The Library Association of Ireland Taskforce on Information Literacy (TFIL) was formed in 2011 and includes representatives from all library sectors in Ireland and representatives from the teaching and learning industry. Chaired by Philip Russell (Deputy Librarian, Institute of Technology Tallaght) the group came together to progress the work of the LAI Working Group on Information Literacy (WGIL), which in 2008 produced a report that provided a cross-sectoral analysis of information literacy (IL) programmes and activities in Ireland. This report was entitled

Library Association of Ireland: Working Group on Information Literacy: Review of Cross-Sector Activity 2006-2008 and Initial Recommendations for Further Action [unpublished report]. The WGIL report was updated in 2010 by students in UCD's MLIS programme, who delivered a similar report which provided a snapshot of current IL activity entitled *Building IL in Ireland (BILI)* (Connolly et al., 2013). These reports depicted the IL landscape in Ireland from a best practice perspective and have provided the foundation for the work of TFIL. The reports identified a series of measures and challenging recommendations for TFIL to act upon in terms of supporting the development of information literacy in Ireland. TFIL has undertaken a review of the recommendations made, with a view to implementing the goals, some of which can be achieved in the short term and others which will need more long term work.

Since these reports were undertaken, the importance of acquiring digital literacy (DL) skills and the need to increase digital capacity for all learners has increasingly come to the fore at national level. Digital literacy is seen as a key graduate attribute for employability and a key strategy for Government is the development of students' digital capabilities. Phase 1 of the National Digital Strategy for Ireland, *Doing More with Digital* was launched in July 2013, and sets out the Irish government's vision for a digitally enabled and empowered society, to be achieved through the implementation of a series of strategic measures, grouped under three key strands. These are

- Trading Online & Entrepreneurship for indigenous businesses;
- Securing more Citizen Engagement;
- Education and Learning.

Objectives

Our approach aligns with the objectives of Strand 3, Education and Learning, which addresses eLearning, the provision of across-the-board access to high-quality online educational media, teacher training in educational technology, and the fostering of digital literacy at all levels of education. This is especially relevant to our mission. The report highlights the growing

recognition of digital literacy in primary and post-primary education (Junior and Senior cycles), noting the inclusion of explicit learning outcomes relating to the use of digital technologies to communicate, create, collaborate and manage student learning in revised curricula at both levels of education (pp.27-29).

TFIL will align its strategies with national policies. One of the key objectives is the development of a national digital and information literacy framework, to include standards for these competencies across all sectors and all levels of education. This framework would provide support and guidance to Irish educators in terms of module / programmes / qualifications and what levels of digital and information literacy can be mapped to learning outcomes and graduate attributes. The development of this framework would be similar to what has been achieved at national level in Scotland (http://www.therightinformation.org/framework-home/) and Wales (http://welshlibraries.org/skills/information-literacy/national-information-literacy-framework/). An Irish framework for digital and information literacy would also facilitate the development of coherent institutional strategies for developing these skills and provide a more coordinated approach for the teaching and learning of these competencies from the earliest stages of education.

Coherence at national level is a key requirement in terms of achieving an integrated strategy for DL/IL. TFIL actively collaborates with other LIS groups such as the CONUL Teaching and Learning Group to work cohesively to achieve a national policy for digital and information literacy. The group is committed to advancing a policy driven approach and will continue to lobby policymakers, Government and employers with regard to the strategic importance of digital and information literacy to education, the economy and society. TFIL will continue to lobby for funding and highlight the need for small allocations of monies to be made available to further progress the work of the group.

TFIL plays a leading advocacy role, helping to create awareness within the LAI and the profession in terms of the value of digital and information literacy through promotion, dissemination and lobbying. The group actively

encourages research and development activities across all sectors in Ireland which help to inform ongoing development and encourages information and digital literacy initiatives from the primary stages of education. To support all this, TFIL is engaging with LAI groups and sections to ensure IL training and CPD opportunities are prioritised.

TFIL is also examining DL / IL initiatives outside of Ireland to garner best practice, ideas and expertise in terms of supporting the work of the group. Through the recent attendance of TFIL members at various national and international conferences and seminars, TFIL is forging relationships with cognate groups such as CILIP Ireland and the CILIP Information Literacy Group in the UK.

TFIL is developing an active presence on the LAI's website and has set up a Google Drive which collates reports, case studies and websites of interest. TFIL meets three times a year and is currently collating a detailed action plan which outlines its vision for the advancement of information literacy in Ireland, targeting a draft national framework, key priorities and achievable recommendations. Resource requirements for ongoing work have also been identified.

Developing an Irish Information Literacy Approach

The work of the Task Force on Information Literacy is both timely and necessary, as Ireland responds to the imperatives of the digital revolution. As mentioned previously, our activities are also informed by two major librarian-driven collaborative initiatives in the UK, which were completed during the past five years: The Information Literacy Framework for Wales (2011), and the National Information Literacy Framework Scotland (2010) were broad in scope and ambition, with project partners seeking to produce clear developmental structures and guidelines to assist educational practitioners in the provision of opportunities for embedded information literacy learning activities at all stages across the formal education system and beyond, incorporating workplace and lifelong learning. Both projects involved the consideration of existing curricula, and skills and qualifications frameworks in each country,

as well as the identification of suitable information literacy models, to serve as a template for the development of the national frameworks; for example, the SCONUL Information Literacy Pillars (2011), which "defines the core skills and competencies (ability) and attitudes and behaviours (understanding) at the heart of information literacy development in higher education" (p.3). In the Scottish and Welsh frameworks, information literacy learning objectives were developed and mapped to the different learning levels contained in the relevant national curricula and frameworks, offering an integrated, scaffolded approach to the fostering of information literacy skills in context. In each project, case studies of information literacy activity across all sectors were included to provide insight into the current state-of-the-art and identify key issues, as well as examples of best practice. Other initiatives, which offer a foundation for the Irish digital literacy framework, include the UK-based JISC Developing Digital Literacies project (2011-2013), which was undertaken to "promote the development of coherent, inclusive approaches to digital capability across institutions of further and higher education," and the Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework, which was published in 2004.

To develop a framework that is flexible, sensitive to local context and scalable, we also draw on a selection of the myriad Information Literacy models, standards and guidelines that have emerged in the past decade to support the integration of learning activities in educational curricula and other sectors. In addition to the SCONUL Seven Pillars model mentioned previously, three frameworks that we consider to be relevant are the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (currently undergoing revision, 2013-2015), the ANCIL New Curriculum for Information Literacy model developed by Coonan & Secker in the UK (2011), and the digital literacy Developmental Process framework, created by Beetham & Sharpe (2010), which was a key element of the JISC Digital Literacies project referred to previously. In recent models there is a move away from the application of prescriptive and generic information literacy standards and objectives. The move now is towards a conceptualisation of the individual

as a unique information user operating in a range of contexts, and the progressive development of skill and ability through engagement with meaningful and transformative learning activities. The creators of recent frameworks emphasise the importance of flexibility, responsiveness to individual scenarios, and of providing opportunities for students to develop the capacity "to generate their own strategies for dealing with new information contexts" (Coonan & Secker, 2011). These approaches will be critically evaluated by the TFIL to determine the optimum strategy for development of the Irish framework.

Relevance to Irish LIS Professionals

Colleagues may question why there is a requirement for the LAI to develop a policy on information literacy, surely it can be argued that this falls under the remit of educators and policy makers. Our research (O'Brien and Russell, 2012; Connolly et al, 2013) and experience as practitioners has indicated that LIS professionals do indeed play a role in the development of this national policy. Our role is one of partners alongside educators and government policy makers. LIS professionals work with a range of end users and in many different environments. We have colleagues whose involvement with information

Meet the TFIL Committee Members

- **Philip Russell:** I am actively involved in advancing information literacy education at institutional and national level and previously chaired the LAI's Working Group on Information Literacy (WGIL). TFIL is committed to working cohesively across all sectors to achieve a national strategy for digital and information literacy, which will facilitate the coordinated development of these skills in education, the workplace and society. I am Deputy Librarian, Institute of Technology, Tallaght.

- **Claire McGuinness:** I am a part-time lecturer in the School of Information and Library Studies, UCD. I have been teaching, researching and writing about information and digital literacy for more than a decade, obtaining my PhD in 2005. I was a member of the original Working Group on Information Literacy, and I am pleased to contribute to the important work continued by TFIL, in ensuring digital literacy for all in the 21st Century.

- **Jane Burns**: My interest in the TFIL comes from my experience as a volunteer literacy tutor at Fighting Words. Being able to see first-hand the positive impact this type of literacy support provided for children and

their development was incredible. Information literacy and, in particular digital information literacy, is significant in my role in the Health Professions Education Centre at RCSI and as an Occasional Lecturer in SILS, UCD.

- **Brenda Carey**: My interest in information literacy is from a personal and professional level which started when I qualified as a librarian at UCD and in my public library role. I am based in DLR LexIcon.

- **Monica Crump**: I am Head of Information Access and Learning Services at NUI Galway, where I lead the team responsible for library support of teaching and learning including information literacy. I am a member of the CONUL Teaching and Learning Group and through membership of the TFIL I hope to ensure ongoing coordination of approach between the two groups.

- **Keith Young**: I am a PhD candidate at Maynooth University Education Department. My research is looking at mobile learning and the role of the teacher. I am an Apple Professional Development Consultant and Microsoft Partners in Learning Teacher Trainer and deliver CPD courses to teachers across the

country. My interest is in helping students and teachers develop information and digital literacies to equip them to live and work in a modern information world.

- **Katherine Ryan:** I am College Librarian at St. Andrew's College, Booterstown, Co. Dublin where I teach a 'How to Research' Module.   I am interested in the provision of information literacy in Irish secondary schools and look forward to the integration of the national information literacy framework into the school curriculum. I contributed to the UCD SILS 'Building Information Literacy In Ireland' (BILI) Report and presented 'Teaching Information Literacy in Irish Secondary Schools' at the 2014 Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) Seminar 'Demonstrating the Value of Information Literacy to Staff and Students'.

- **Muireann Tóibín**: My interest in information literacy has developed from my current role in the Revenue Commissioners where information and digital literacy are crucial. Staff in government departments and government bodies need to source and interpret the best information possible to guide them in developing policies, drafting legislation, and in advising on crucial issues.

literacy spans a range of environments from mother and toddler library groups, to University libraries. LIS professionals encounter people at various stages of their lives and information requirements. As a professional body we recognise the significant number of requirements coupled with the limited amount of resources. It is from this perspective of understanding and ingenuity that are able to bring significant, relevant and timely input from our professional body to the national framework. This perspective is representative in the constitution of the TFIL committee. Members of the TFIL Committee work in a range of library and information environments and their details are on the previous page. Each of the members has highlighted their reasons for engagement in this endeavour.

Next Steps

Going forward, TFIL will continue to promote its work and will actively engage with other groups to work collaboratively to achieve a national policy for digital and information literacy. TFIL will ensure ongoing advocacy and awareness at national level of the strategic value of information literacy and will continue to lobby policymakers, Government and employers. The group will endeavour to strengthen relationships with cognate groups nationally and internationally – in December 2014, Philip Russell was invited by the European Network on Information Literacy (ENIL) to act as Country Correspondent for Ireland in the network. For more information please contact Philip Russell at philip.russell@ittdublin.ie.

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