

Designing and delivering e-learning for health librarians: the UK FOLIO experience.

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Introduction

Health Librarians, working at the frontline delivering information support to health service staff, often find it difficult to get away from the workplace to attend training. This may be because of staff shortages, limited budgets, travel time or other difficulties. In 2004 the National Library for Health (NLH) commissioned ScHARR to deliver the Facilitated Online Learning Interactive Programme (FOLIO) to UK National Health Service (NHS) Librarians. The FOLIO programme is a series of 18 courses aimed at meeting the continuing professional development needs of health librarians.

What is FOLIO?

FOLIO courses are characterised by their capacity to provide low cost, flexible e-learning in the workplace. FOLIO courses equip librarians with support for moving into new roles, focusing on the development of skills in health informatics and knowledge management especially related to digital libraries. Typically, a FOLIO course lasts 6-8 weeks and all course material is delivered online.

Topics for FOLIO, decided through discussions between ScHARR and the NLH, target new and developing areas, providing skills and expertise within the overall context of continuing professional development. Some of the courses to date include: Courses to date include:

- An introduction to e-learning (e-folio)
- Designing and Delivering Information Skills Training (Infoskills),
- Breaking out of the Box: Extending the health LIS professional role - skills and strategies (BREAKOUT)
- Management Skills for the More Experienced (ExFiles)
- PACINA : Planning and Conducting Information Needs Analysis (PACINA)
- The FOLIO Customer Care Course (FRONTIER)
- Managing for Service Quality (MSQ)
- Evidence Based Library and Information Practice: Delivering Services that Shine (EBLIP-Gloss)

Creating a FOLIO course

At the initial planning stage the FOLIO team produce a storyboard and timetable. A range of different teaching methods and assessments are utilised so there is considerable variety in each FOLIO course. Effort is made at this planning stage to balance the workload throughout the course.

Once enrolled, participants (typically 50 librarians per course) are assigned to “buddy groups” of 2-3 members. The buddy group system provides participants with peer support throughout the course. Buddy group tasks are also set to allow facilitation of group work. The level of interaction with buddies is an important criterion taken into account when marking completed FOLIO portfolios. An alternative self-directed route has recently been included to allow participants to work on their own if they prefer. For each course one member of the FOLIO team acts as facilitator. The facilitator sends out the approximately 30 daily emails via a Jiscmail discussion list. Each message has instructions for that day’s task. The facilitator also deals with any queries that course participants have.

Course content

A FOLIO course begins with a buddy icebreaker to introduce buddies to one another. This is light-hearted and the facilitator leads with an example to get the ball rolling.

For e.g. The ExFiles course facilitator provided the following icebreaker:

"As this course is for the more experienced manager you will likely have encountered an "Employee from Hell". For today's exercise we would like you to think of someone on TV, radio, in a book or a famous person who would make an awful employee and to explain why.

One participant responded that "My fictional employee from hell would be Mister Grumpy from the Roger Hargreaves children's book series. Mister Grumpy is always grumpy whether he's too busy or hasn't enough to do, whether he's just about to go on annual leave or just come back and he is especially grumpy when asked to do something which he doesn't think is in his job description. Sometimes he will barely say 'good morning' to his work colleagues."

Course delivery typically blends buddy and group interactions, case studies, briefings, guided readings, interactive PowerPoint presentations, quizzes and stories. A competition is included for light-hearted relief. For each course a website is developed to provide "anytime, anywhere" easy access to course materials.

Method of assessment

During the course participants complete a portfolio. The FOLIO team mark the portfolios against predefined criteria. The grading system is: distinction, honours pass, standard pass or fail. All participants receive a certificate and feedback on their portfolio. As an example, on the ExFiles course 12 distinctions, 29 honours passes and 1 standard pass were awarded. Course participants complete evaluation forms and feedback is used to develop future courses.

Conclusion

The FOLIO programme demonstrates a successful model for delivering continuing professional development for the health library community. Its low-cost, low-technology approach makes it suitable for adoption by other communities. Recently, a FOLIO programme, "FOLIOz" has been introduced in Australia, receiving significant positive feedback.

Reference

Sutton, A, Booth, A; Ayiku, L; O'Rourke, A (2005). e-FOLIO: using e-learning to learn about e-learning. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 22 (Suppl 2): 84-88.