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INSPIRE: a proposal for its future development

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Inspire is a project that has been established to support "libraries in working together to improve access to information and learning for all. Participating libraries are committed to supporting learning in their areas of expertise and to providing an open route to the information and library users are seeking, wherever it may be found."

Inspire was instituted in 2004 under the energetic leadership of Mary Heaney (formerly Director of Learning Centres at the University of Wolverhampton and now Director of Services at Manchester Metropolitan University) and Andrew Green (then Head of Libraries & Information Services, Coventry City Council and now Head of Library and Heritage Service, Wandsworth Council). Mary resigned her role with Inspire in 2006 and was replaced by Philip Payne, Librarian, Birkbeck College, Sally Curry is its Inspire National Partnerships Manager.

Funding was provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, the British Library, SCONUL, and the Society of Chief Librarians. Inspire is also supported by the Committee on Library Cooperation in Ireland (COLCID), the National Library of Scotland, the National Library of Wales, the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals, and the Colleges of Further & Higher Education.

Findit

Findit is e-learning and allows anyone to identify, quickly and easily -

- which libraries hold resources on specific subjects
- where those libraries are
- what the terms are for accessing those resources

Inspire is effectively creating a distributed national library available to everyone.

Findit was funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the British Library, and SCONUL, and is currently supported by a number of libraries and library authorities.

To make access to this information easier, the Findit website was created as part of the Inspire programme. The website is one of the central/panes of the Inspire programme to support learners and allowing anyone to identify, quickly and easily -

- which libraries hold resources on specific subjects
- where those libraries are
- what the terms are for accessing those resources

Inspire is effectively creating a distributed national library available to everyone.

The future

Inspire is a wonderful resource that has an important role in supporting education, employability, enterprise and employment. More specifically Inspire has a role in supporting life long learning, CPD, the public library service, the HEFCE shared services agenda, widening participation programmes, community development and much more. Individually many libraries and information services are modest in size - but collectively are a remarkable resource of great diversity and richness. Some of the ideas we are discussing include a national Inspire card, a national virtual library for the general public, the development of partnerships with key organisations and the further development of the Findit web presence.

Nevertheless our funding is gradually being depleted and a sustainable funding arrangement is now urgently required.

From vision to reality

Two pilot schemes were run in 2004 and these were followed by a two-year programme (Inspire Libraries to Libraries from all sectors across the whole of England). There are now over 3000 Inspire Libraries throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Inspire libraries include public, higher education and national libraries plus further education libraries, health-related libraries and a wide range of specialist libraries. Together they provide an extraordinarily rich and varied resource of information on every subject from Acupuncture to Zoology, in the process facilitating access to the universal collection of knowledge - and they are open all the time.

- Extended existing networks of successful access partnerships and added new ones so creating a single national access route to information, irrespective of geography
- Ensured that learners can have access to the most appropriate learning materials irrespective of the status of the learner or the location of the materials
- Provided greater opportunities and access for socially excluded individuals and groups

Through this work, Inspire has fulfilled key aspects of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council Framework for the Future 2013 vision which had as one of its objectives that any member of a public library can access a library held in higher education (HE) and further education (FE) libraries. The programme also relates directly to many government initiatives on widening participation, lifelong learning and social inclusion.