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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 traditional, virtual and transitional ways and to creating an open route to the information and resources that users are seeking, wherever it may be found.

It was instituted in 2004 under the energetic leadership of Mary Heaney (formerly Director of Learning Centres at the University of Wolverhampton) and the Director of Services at Manchester Metropolitan University (Andrew Green). In 2006, the role of Director of Services was taken up by Martin Burton (formerly Head of Libraries & Information Services, Coventry City Council) and the role of Head of Library and Heritage Service, Wandsworth Council was taken up by Mary resigned her role in inspire in 2006 and was replaced by Philip Payne, Librarian, Birkbeck College. Sally Curry is his Special 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 (COLICO), the National Library of Scotland, the National Library of Wales, the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals, and the Colleges of Further & Higher Education.

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 they 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 agreements with key organisations and the further development of the Findit web presence.

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

Findit
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 pillars of the Inspire programme to support learners and learning and allows anyone to identify, quickly and easily –
  • which library holds 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.

Background
Inspire has two Directors who are also members of the Management Board viz., Andrew Green, former Head of Libraries & Information Services, Coventry City Council and now Head of Library and Heritage Service, Wandsworth Council (nominated by the Society of Chief Librarians). They are supported by a Management Board representing the interests of all the members and a wide range of libraries in the United Kingdom and its membership includes also:
  • Inspire Support, Sally Curry, Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne
  • British Library, Stephanie Kenna, Manager Regional & Library Programmes
  • Develop Administrations and SCOUR, Chris Pincher, Director of Learning and Information Services, Napier University
  • Northern Ireland & ULSCN Inspire, Elaine Urquhart, Assistant Director, University of Ulster, COLICO Chair Libraries and Information East Midlands and The Combined Regions (TCR), Lynn Hodgson, Regional Librarian, LUMS National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Richard Crab Society of Chief Librarians, Martin Burton, Head of Libraries & Information Services, South Gloucestershire
  • Society of College, National and University Libraries, John Lancaster, Director of Computing & Library Services, University of Huddersfield
  • South West Regional Library Service (SWRLS) and TCR, Lynne Osborne, Director SWRLS

The future
From vision to reality
Two pilot schemes were run in 2004 and these were followed by a two year programme of sustained resource 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 Accounting to Zoology, 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 in 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
• Their work, having fulfilled key aspects of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council’s Framework for the Future 2015 vision which had as one of its objectives that any member of the public library can access holdings in higher education (HE) and further education (FE) libraries. The programme also relates directly to many Government initiatives on widening participation, life long learning and social inclusion.

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Some of the library co-operative schemes linked to Inspire:

Access Salford
Access to Learning Libraries and information in Northamptonshire

Access to Learning Libraries and information in Northamptonshire

Funding
Inspire’s 2004 pilot projects were funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in co-operation with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The 2004-6 Inspire Programme was funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the Regional Libraries Advisory Group (sponsored by the RL, CIUFF, MLA Council), and through the DCMS Action Plan supporting Framework for the Futures, the public library strategy in 2013. At the end of 2006, the MLA and other sponsors allowed the Inspire Directors to continue to use remaining funds to further improve access to services.

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