

## **Ronan O'Beirne (Workshop)**

'Embedding Information Literacy Within Public Libraries.'

**Theme: Information Literacy and citizenship**

Among the core services and many initiatives offered by today's modern public library there are considerable opportunities to deploy the principles and practices of information literacy. In so doing the result will be to empower the wide and diverse library user base. Three obvious areas where opportunity exists are: informal learning, digital skills and citizenship. The Framework for the Future document states a clear policy direction that seeks to embed these areas within the core activity of the public library.

"The following three areas of activity.....should be at the heart of libraries' modern mission:

"The promotion of reading and informal learning

"Access to digital skills and services including e-government

"Measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship."

Furthermore, in highlighting the potential of the public library the Framework suggests that "Libraries could become local mediators, helping people develop their information literacy skills, facilitators, aggregators and publishers of online content."

On the policy level and in terms of timing, public libraries are ripe for the introduction of information literacy. On an operational level some public libraries are already busy undertaking programmes either as part of a strategic effort to embrace IL or simply as part of some other activity for example, enquiry skills development, which may have the same ultimate impact on users and staff.

Much progress has been made in the recent past with IL programmes in the formal education sector. Therefore the key outcome of the workshop would be to establish a suitable vehicle for knowledge transfer between the two sectors. With this in mind the following would be the aims of the workshop:

To gather rich information from those working in Public Libraries (the need)

To explore how IL could operate outside a learning environment (the how)

To identify the operational barriers that stand in the way of IL implementation (the constraints)

To look at how IL fits in with the other literacies supported by public libraries (the fit)

To enlist the assistance of those who may be regarded as IL champions in PL. (the who)

A closing question might be:

"Who's responsibility is it to ensure that the UK's population is information literate?"

Methods:

There will be three phases to this workshop:

Phase 1 - Pre-conference. Those who indicate their wish to attend will be given a brief background paper (1-side A4) outlining the issues, a copy of the workshop aims (as above) and a short questionnaire. This will enable the attendees to hit the issues running on the day, in phase 2.

Phase 2 – Face-to-face conference 45minutes. The style of the workshop will be relatively informal. Ice-breaker. Three scenarios will illustrate the case for IL implementation in Public Libraries – and will form the basis of an open discussion. During this discussion various questions will be posed by the facilitator in order to tease out some relevant lines of enquiry. The session will end with some action planning in the form options (previously worked up by the facilitator) and suggestions on a way forward. There would be some thought on how the closing question "Who's responsibility is it to ensure that the UK's population is information literate?" could be used to raise awareness of politicians, high-level funding organisations and the information profession in general.

Phase 3 – will be to follow up the threads of the discussion with those interested either via email or through an online forum with a view to sustaining and widening discussion.