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## BULLETIN

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### INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to the very first “born-digital” edition of the Bulletin. Although (being of a certain age), your editors will miss the reassuringly tangible printed version, we won’t miss stuffing 1800-plus envelopes, sticking on the address labels, or lugging the finished product to our college post room in relays for dispatch.

Going digital was a reluctant decision, but it also opens up some new opportunities. No longer will we be constantly trying to edit everything to fit within a limited, and tightly-costed space. We can, at long last, do colour pictures and live web-links. Gruesome proof of the first of these lies within. As of now, please include your picture with any copy you send us, so that we can all see what you look like!

Some serious issues also arise from the shift into digital delivery. Firstly, we need to ensure that somewhere we maintain an archive of the Bulletin that will be accessible as the technology evolves. While we would not flatter ourselves that we are producing a timeless classic, it is surprising how often we delve into our file of old editions when issues come around again that have been covered before. It is in the nature of our work that college managers tend to think they are the first person to think of issues like learning workshops, blended learning or distributed resource provision.

Another more pressing concern is how few CoFHE members are actually signed up to the electronic mailing list. Despite giving the web

address in the last issue there has been no great rush to join it, and approximately 10% of our membership are on it. This raises serious issues about publicity for future conferences and events, and how we communicate in a digital age. Our collated feedback from the Norwich conference showed that 27% of respondents had heard about the event from the Bulletin, but over 40% had heard about it via e-mail or the website. This tells us that while we are clearly moving into the digital era we still have some way to go. Once again, to subscribe to the list, go to [www.jiscmail.ac.uk](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk), it really could not be easier.

In this issue, we revisit the hardy perennial topic of induction, look at biometric issue systems and crucially, you will find the booking information for our **2007 Telford Conference** within this issue. The conference is back at its traditional Easter slot, is centrally situated and very affordable, so please, sign up and support our West Midlands Circle to make this a successful event. There is also a bursary available for this event for someone new to academic library work based in the West Midlands, of which more details can be found within.

Finally, can we apologise for the late appearance of this issue due to circumstances beyond our control in our day jobs. We will not be making a habit of late issues, but sometimes events derail our plans. That said, if we don’t get more copy soon from members, we will have nothing to print, so may we suggest a new year resolution to write up what is happening on your patch for the Bulletin? I takes less time than you think.

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## Contents

<b>Editorial: Gradgrind lives?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Let their fingers do the talking:</b>	
<i>Biometrics at Southport College Library</i>	<b>4</b>
<b>A journey to the world of knowledge... just the ticket</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Conference Update:</b>	
<i>Telford 2007</i>	<b>8</b>
<i>Liverpool 2008</i>	<b>8</b>
<b>2007 CoFHE Conference Booking Form</b>	<b>9</b>

## EDITORIAL

### Gradgrind lives?

As 2006 ends and another year begins, it is time to reflect on the changes and developments that are affecting our professional lives. As always, change remained the only constant.

At those colleges I am in regular touch with, the fall-out from the Foster Report is being keenly felt. Any of us who were involved in enrolments in September will have noted the loss of many non-vocational courses due to the change in the government's funding priorities towards "skills for employability". All things in FE run in cycles, and it could be argued that large "community" and "adult ed." departments, had become a costly luxury in the present tough financial climate. For libraries however, it has meant the loss of many "regulars" who came on courses year after year, which made a difference to their lives.

I am not sure I am comfortable with this government's "Gradgrind" approach to further education, which seeks to define which bits of it are economically useful, and price the rest beyond the reach of many. The dividing line between vocational and non-vocational is not clear as the government thinks. It is a curious logic, for example, that sees the closure of classic car restoration courses in colleges that had become centres of excellence in that field. Many of their students went on to jobs in what remains a burgeoning industry. Meanwhile, we are paying 16-19 year olds EMA to stay off the unemployment register, and undertake successive courses which all too often end without a qualification being achieved or an exam sat.

Similarly, although one can understand why some colleges are dropping A-levels because they are being penalised for not producing results with students who have failed elsewhere, this leaves me wondering where the safety net will be in some areas for the late developers. Still, as it would cost most of them years of debt to enjoy the university education most of the Cabinet had for free, the government will soon be claiming to have done them a great service by pulling the ladder up behind them.

I am also struck this year by how many 16-19 year olds I have encountered who have been failed by 11 years of schooling, and who demonstrate an alarming lack of basic social skills. Notions such as "walk to talk" and adjusting the volume (and choice of language) to a level appropriate to context, seem alien to some students. One cannot help wondering if this government is tackling the skills deficits of such youngsters hind end foremost. Going to college to learn skills for "employability" is very fine, but if those skills are not accompanied by the ability to interact with others in a man-

ner appropriate to a workplace you are still unemployable. The concept of “lifeskills” is ripe for re-development as a necessary (and compulsory) precursor to yet more failed schooling, where it is clear that the lack of basic social skills has underpinned that failure.

The loss of many mature learners had other more subtle effects in libraries. In my own college we are seeing many more 16-19 learners undertaking work in large noisy groups, with less borrowing and more resources being used in the library. Too often these students lack the self-discipline for unsupervised study, and their behaviour clashes with the very different requirements of our remaining mature learners. Yet teaching departments simply do not have the staffing to supervise every group, and learning is often the first casualty.

In keeping with this government’s tradition of ever more new initiatives to create an illusion of activity, we now have the Leitch Report. This seems to suggest an even more mechanistic approach to further education, with a downgrading of the powers of the Learning and Skills Council, and the power to decide who is funded to teach what, vested in sector skills councils. Funding would accompany the learner through a massive expansion of “Train to Gain”, (another “initiative” which is only 4 months old). Colleges would have the “opportunity” to deliver economically viable, in-demand training. As the former head of a finance company it is unclear on what experience of the education sector Lord Leitch bases his suggestions, but he clearly has little idea of the logistics and costs involved in his model of “demand led” further education. He also tap-dances rather deftly around the uncomfortable truth that too many companies in Britain

regard training as someone else’s job, and damaging to their shareholders dividend. The financial pages lionise captains of industry who have increased profits, even when this has been done at the expense of not hiring a single apprentice for years. To be fair to Leitch, he warns in his report that the UK economy needs an additional 500,000 apprenticeship places by 2020. Until industry and commerce abandon of this type of short-term thinking, we will not see any revival of the local “techs” as vocational skills providers.

As the sun sets on Mr Blair’s premiership I have a modest proposal for his successor. Return the FE sector to local authority control, and for once, leave it alone to do its job. Place it back under the stewardship of democratically-elected councillors and governors working in partnership, who understand local needs. Then scrap the LSC, which in the 6 years since its inception has managed to waste a staggering £100m on re-organisations and staff redundancy costs, which alone total £54.4m. It is little wonder that this failed quango requires 110 staff just in its personnel unit. The DFES defence that this waste amounts to a small part of the LSCs £11bn budget will come as scant comfort to colleagues who have endured miniscule pay rises, (subject, of course, to affordability) standstill budgets or worse, redundancy with the statutory minimum severance pay after years of dedicated service.

The great experiment of removing FE from local control was motivated by the then Conservative government’s desire to reduce the role of local government, and it has been a failure. We have seen 15 years of meddling, instability, low pay, job insecurity, constant restructuring, reactive management and waste. This has been accompanied by millions of words of “quality”

## Let their fingers do the talking:



## Biometrics at Southport College Library

A student comes in to your library. They desperately want to borrow a book so that they can finish that vital assignment overnight but they've not got their library card with them. Sound familiar? Like most libraries, at Southport College we wouldn't allow users to borrow anything unless they produced their card, resulting in disgruntled users who really couldn't understand why. My stock answer to this was "It's the same principle as not being able to draw money out of your bank without your cash card or cheque book". It's a good answer but the student still went away dissatisfied. Southport College does not provide multi-purpose identity cards (for computer access, building access etc), which meant that students could function in their daily college routine without having to carry a card, except when they wanted to borrow from the library. Inevitably many of them forgot or lost the library card, and were unhappy when we charged £2 to replace it; so when I heard that IS Oxford, the makers of our Heritage library management system were producing a biometric module, it looked like the answer to our problems.

### Reactions to biometrics from librarians

Prior to purchasing the biometric module I tested the water by posting emails on COFHE-JISCmail and the Heritage user email group Marvin, asking for librarians' experiences of such a system and what reaction it had received. The COFHE-JISCmail email provoked a couple of semi-outraged librarians to ask why I wanted to fingerprint people. The simple answer to this is that it would vastly improve our customer service and remove the barriers preventing many students from accessing the resources they needed. Several users of the Heritage biometric module contacted me with reports of a very positive experience, although all were school or sixth-form college librarians.

### How does it work?

The biometrics software allows you to scan the fingerprints of library users. The fingerprint is scanned three times to ensure that the data is accurate.



The computer software uses random data-points from the fingerprint to generate a unique numerical code which is then stored on a secure database separate to the library management system; this ensures that the fingerprint code is stored separately to the user's personal details. The visual image of the fingerprint is not retained and the numerical code cannot be

re-engineered to reproduce a visual image due to the random nature of the data used from each fingerprint. Each time the library user wishes to borrow an item they place their finger on the scanner to facilitate the issuing of the item; the fingerprint database and Heritage then interface to retrieve the individual's details. It is possible to scan all ten fingerprints, although this would seem to be excessive and unnecessary. We decided to scan the index finger on each hand, in order that there be a backup fingerprint if a student had suffered an injury to the primary fingerprint.

### **Implementing the system**

The biometric module was installed during the 2006 summer vacation, allowing us plenty of time to test it and practice fingerprinting ourselves! The new intake of students were told about the system at induction and as their personal details were imported from the student records database to Heritage, we simply had to scan their fingerprint to activate their library account. We confirmed the identity of the person providing the fingerprint by asking them to confirm their address and date of birth. An information sheet was made available to explain how the biometric system works and to dispel any concerns that students may have. Existing students and staff were converted to biometric users the first time that they borrowed after implementation. In the first four weeks we scanned the fingerprints of over 2000 people, most of these at library induction. This sounds quite labour intensive but as it only took about 30 seconds to register each student, we actually found that it was less demanding on staff time than the old system of assigning library cards to each student. The scanning process also gave new students a chance to talk directly to library staff and gave the students chance to see

how the system works.

### **Student reaction to biometrics**

Almost 2500 students registered with the library in Autumn 2006; only two objected to the biometric system and continued using their existing library card. These objections were on the grounds of civil liberties but we found that everybody else was satisfied by the fact that the visual image of the fingerprint is not stored. Another student wanted to enrol in the system but suffers from hyperhidrosis, which causes excessive sweating of the hands and unfortunately we were unable to obtain an adequate fingerprint scan; in this case a library card was supplied. The general reaction from all age groups was hugely positive, with many of the 16-18 year old students showing particular enthusiasm. The library's street-cred certainly went up several notches, with comments such as "how cool is that?" and "it's dudey" (I think that meant it's great!). The response from older students and staff was also positive. The IT teaching staff were particularly pleased with it and hope to use the system as an exemplar in their teaching. The first student to register his biometric data was a seventy-year-old man who was delighted with it. We found that people who appeared at all doubtful about the concept of biometrics were reassured when we explained that there was no visual image of the fingerprint but simply a number, and readily showed people the screen so that they could see how the system works.

### **Positive outcomes for library staff**

We anticipate many advantages of the system in terms of library management. As previously mentioned the biometric system is less demanding on staff time, thus freeing up library staff to provide increased student support at the busiest time of year.

We are now able to devote more time to actually helping our users, rather than producing library cards for them.

We also hope that some of the problems arising from students borrowing on behalf of others will diminish significantly. Under the old card system we found that students would often lend their card to another student who had forgotten/lost their own card, resulting in problems if the items went overdue. The biometric system should negate the need to use another student's library account to a great degree.

Time will tell whether the implementation of the biometric system will result in an increase in borrowing. Certainly we no longer have a shelf of books awaiting collection by students who have forgotten their card. In the past these items were often not collected and thus were "lost" issues. The biometric system simply means that if a student wants an item they can borrow it, with the only restriction being the limit on the number of items they are allowed.

There are also economic advantages; the cost of installing the biometric system on our two counter machines equates to the cost of two year's supply of library cards. Interestingly some of our users assumed the system must have been extremely expensive so they were surprised and impressed when we gave them this cost comparison; of course the money saved in the future will be spent on resources, thus benefiting the students. One student also commented that the system was environmentally friendly as there would no longer be plastic cards to dispose of (I confess I'd not thought of that!)

There have been a number of negative reports in the national media concerning library biometric systems, particularly in the schools sector. These articles can be sensationalist and usually focus on parental concerns that their permission was not sought before children were "fingerprinted". As a library operating in the FE sector we have not experienced these concerns; our bor-

rowers are all at least 16 years old and the ethos of the college is that we operate as an adult environment, encouraging students to make their own decisions. Certainly we have not had any irate parents contacting us to complain that their teenager has been fingerprinted. If you're thinking biometrics could work for you, don't be put off by the media controversy; the reality is that virtually everyone is impressed by it and is happy to use it, seeing it as the next step in convenient customer service. In the future we will use biometrics as readily as we use the internet today, and at Southport College the future has already arrived!

*Kath Halfpenny  
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## **A journey to the world of knowledge... just the ticket**

Summer term and already the clock starts ticking towards that major event in the life of an academic librarian - induction.

What can we try this year?

We've used a video presentation, a version of the "Cephalonian" method, orientation tasks and assignment related tasks sheets including the use of I.T. Have any of these really worked?

For the first time there was to be a team of four of us to deliver induction sessions so we met to discuss our approach and the ideas just kept coming.

We agreed that our aim was merely to ensure that students knew Library+ existed, providing a range of resources and that the Library+ team was keen to work with them

and help them. We decided to avoid information overload, make the half-hour sessions busy and interactive and stress the support our team could offer.

The students would be taken on a journey to the World of Knowledge with the four of us acting as their tour guides and Library+ assistants working with us in each session.

To emphasise the travel theme we decorated the induction room with travel posters from our college travel shop and used “travel- speak” throughout our presentation E.g. “When can I check in?” to introduce opening hours, “What’s in the package?” to raise awareness of the mixture of resources.

On the first day of term our passengers arrived and the journey began. Students in the groups were given “passports” with questions that we asked them to read out and this took us through the PowerPoint presentation. Students were then asked to work in pairs or small groups and given five minutes to complete two “ticket tasks”. One question covered new knowledge not referred to in the presentation and the other question was reinforcement of information already given.

Most of the questions required the students to approach the staff and ask them for the answers, thus introducing the concept of asking for assistance and establishing a rapport. When the students returned to the room we asked them individually to share what they had learned, as an assortment of questions was issued each time. Finally, we gave the students cards, on one side a happy face and on the other a not so happy face and we asked them to vote “Ready Steady Cook” style to indicate whether or not they had enjoyed the session and found it useful.

I am delighted to be able to report that our experiment proved to be a resounding suc-

cess. The students enjoyed the sessions, gave us excellent feedback and liked the ‘Happy face’ cards so much that photos were taken of them and there were offers to buy them!

The feedback from teaching staff was also very gratifying and included comments such as:

*“It’s excellent. It makes the Library a fun place to be”*

*“Ideal, they thrive on something hands-on”*

*“I like it. It’s great!”*

At the end of the two weeks we could report mission accomplished. Student feedback was good, we had received terrific praise from the teaching staff and we had enjoyed delivering the sessions. We hope our success will be reflected by more extensive student usage of Library+ during the year.

Now what shall we do next year...?

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**COPY REQUIRED**  
**Deadline for next issue**  
**5th March 2007**

Please email copy to the editors in MS Word format.

Articles should be concise and acronyms should be used in full on the first occasion of use. Source documents should be referenced.

Capitalisation should be minimal.

Please remember to include your correct job title, full name of organisation, email address and daytime telephone number.

Letters not for publication should be marked as such. The decision of the editors is final.

## CONFERENCE UPDATE

### Telford 2007:

In addition to the information elsewhere in this issue, delegates to Telford will have the opportunity to undertake a Myers Briggs Type Indicator profile by completing a questionnaire in advance of the event. See the booking information for further details. The MBTI profile can be a very revealing way of getting to know yourself better, and appreciating what makes you and others around you behave the way that you do. Contemporary management theory emphasises the importance of understanding yourself before you try to manage others, so this is a timely opportunity. The profile does not typecast you, and people who have undergone the test have found the exercise a liberating one, so sign up now!

### Liverpool 2008:

The inaugural meeting of the planning group took place at Liverpool Hope University on 17<sup>th</sup> November, and preparations for the event are continuing apace. We have assembled a strong planning team drawing on the previous experience of both UC&R and CoFHE officers and key responsibilities have been allocated. Conference dates are 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008. We have the end of conference dinner confirmed as Liverpool Town Hall, where delegates will be welcomed by our Lord Mayor. The services of some excellent speakers are secured and others are being approached to provide a lively and provocative conference on the key theme of "Libraries Matter : Building a Learning Culture". All of the team involved are confident that this will be a conference to remember for all the right reasons, and we will be setting up a web mailing list soon for early expressions of interest.



### CoFHE West Midlands

New to academic librarianship and never been to a CoFHE Conference before? Do you work in the West Midlands? If the answer is yes to both these questions then here's an offer not to be overlooked.

The West Midlands group of CoFHE are looking to fund one lucky person to attend the annual CoFHE Conference in 2007 which will take place 2nd - 4th April 2007 at the University of Wolverhampton, Telford Campus.

The conference is entitled "Who do you think you are? How to be the perfect manager."

The cost of travel to the conference will also be funded.

What do we want in return I hear you ask. No such a thing as a free lunch and all that! Well on this occasion it's one lunch and two yummy dinners. Oh and all you'll need to do in return is write a report of your experiences for others to read in CILIP publications.

If you are interested in the above offer then contact:

*Jacquie Davies*  
*Secretary CoFHE WM Committee*  
*Head of LRC*  
*Worcester Sixth Form College*  
*Spetchley Road*  
*Worcester*  
*WR5 2LU*

Booking Form (to be returned by 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2007)

Name:

Address:

Telephone number:

Email:

Type of delegate?

Will you be bringing a partner? YES/NO

Please invoice my organization (for the attention of)

.....  
or\* I enclose a cheque for £  
(please make cheque payable to CoFHE West Midlands)  
(please delete as applicable)

Do you have any dietary/access requirements?

.....  
*Send your form to:*

Sue Bird  
Learning Resource Centre  
Henley College Coventry  
Henley Road  
Bell Green  
COVENTRY  
CV2 1ED

Tel: 024 76626300

Email: [Sbird@henley-cov.ac.uk](mailto:Sbird@henley-cov.ac.uk)



**Colleges of Further & Higher Education**

**Annual Conference**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

University of Wolverhampton  
Telford Campus

**Who do you think you are? How to  
be the perfect manager.**



3.00 – 4.00	Workshop 4
4.00 – 5.00	CoFHE AGM & Open Forum
7.30 – 8.00	Drinks reception
8.00	Conference dinner

Note: There will be an opportunity to undertake the Myers Briggs (**MBTI**) personality profiling assessment. If you wish to undertake this assessment, you will need to book workshops 2, 3 & 4 in advance, and return a questionnaire to the workshop leader two weeks before the conference. First come, first served!

Please tick here if you wish to undertake MBTI:

### Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> April

8.00 – 9.00	Breakfast
9.15 – 9.30	Registration for day delegates
9.30 - 10.30	Speaker 3 To be confirmed
10.30 – 11.30	Workshop 5
11.30	Coffee & depart

### Costs:

Full residential delegate	£180 + VAT
Half day delegate (without dinner)	£7.50 +VAT
Half day delegate (with dinner)	£20 + VAT
Full day delegate (without dinner)	£30 + VAT
Full day delegate (with conf. dinner)	£57 + VAT
Partner rate	

### Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April

12.00	Registration and coffee: <b>Conference Reception Desk</b>
2.00 – 3.00	Keynote address <b>Liz Hart</b> , Staffordshire University
3.00 – 3.30	Tea & exhibits
3.30 – 4.30	Speaker 1 <b>Olivia Spencer</b> , Staffordshire Libraries
4.30 – 5.30	Workshop 1
7.00 – 9.00	Dinner
9.00	Quiz <b>Student Union Bar</b>

### Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April

8.00 – 9.00	Breakfast
9.15 – 9.30	Registration for day delegates
9.30 – 10.30	Speaker 2 <b>Sally Curry</b> , Inspire
10.30 – 11.00	Coffee & exhibits
11.00 – 12.00	Workshop 2
12.00 – 1.30	Lunch
1.30 – 2.30	Workshop 3
2.30 – 3.00	Tea & exhibits