the greatest impact, and thus isolate exactly where research impacts on the decision making process.

Conclusions

It is anticipated that the results of this project will have the following benefits:

- Awareness will be raised about the true impact of research on decision making. This will be invaluable for all those involved in such research, funding bodies such as the British Library, and practitioners who stand to benefit from research findings.

- The methodology when proved successful, should be transferable to areas outwith the information skills area of library and information science. Moreover, the methodology will translate to decision making at different levels. This has encouraging implications for the value of future research.

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The Continuing Vocational Education training needs of records management practitioners

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Background to the study

Continuing professional development is a term regularly used and accepted in today's professional environment, and a concept recognised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). In 1995 it established its CVE initiatives, and made funding available to organisations wishing to pursue related research and activities.

The Department of Information and Library Management (DILM) at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (UNN), was successful in attracting some of this funding, over a four year period. The first year's funding was used for this survey of records management practitioners in England, to assess their training and education needs in relation to CVE and to begin planning for training provision to meet the needs identified.

Aims and objectives

The aims of the study were:-

- To identify the training and education needs of records management practitioners
- To plan and develop training programmes to meet the needs.

The specific objectives were:-

- To carry out a survey of people currently working in records management
- To identify and review existing materials for content and format
- To develop a framework of training programmes.

Sample selection

As the research was being funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) the scope of the sample was limited to England. The target population was defined as existing practitioners of records management, with an acknowledgement that there will be people with records management training and education needs who are not active practitioners, eg., the unemployed and women returners, those working in non-records specific, but related occupations and those who may be considering a change of career.

Because of this, the results of this particular survey can only be indicative of the wider needs as a whole, and is an area to be considered for further research.

Methodology

The methodology employed was survey by questionnaire. Ideally interviews would have been carried out, but due to various constraints, this was not possible.

The questions covered:-

- Personal and job information
- Training information
- Information technology competence and access to equipment, support, etc.
- Comments in relation to CVE

A definition of training was given at the beginning of the questionnaire as:- 'any activity or course, either formal or informal (e.g., on-the-job) which has helped you to acquire the knowledge and skills to do your job.' This was felt to be necessary to compensate for the fact that, according to Employment Department research[1], employees tend to understate training.

Results

A 36.2% response rate was achieved.

The geographic distribution of the respondents was not considered to be important when selecting the sample, but, for completeness, it was established prior to analysis:-

The South = 79.1%, Midlands = 13.4% and the North = 7.5%.

This reflects the distribution of practitioners within the Records Management Society and is a factor that should be considered by potential training and education providers.

Job-related/personal information

36.5% of respondents have records or documentation as part of their job title. This confirms that records management truly is an emerging discipline, when compared with a study carried out by Tomlin[2], and indicates organisations are beginning to see records management as a strategic business function.

A little over half (58.3%) of the respondents in the survey have had records experience at levels other than managerial, implying career progression 'through the ranks', although 79.2% hold qualifications higher than 'O' level which suggests that the career progression has been a combination of qualifications and experience. It will be interesting to note any changes as a result of development of records management as a discipline.

Whilst a high proportion of respondents (79.2%) hold qualifications above 'O' level a total of 87 different qualifications were identified! Of these, only 6.1% are records management specific.

With the existing availability of records management-specific degrees at UNN, Aberystwyth and University College London, the forthcoming introduction of the distance learning masters route at UNN, and the increasing recognition within organisations of the importance of managing their intellectual property, it will be interesting to note whether organisations place more emphasis on recruiting academically qualified people (qualified in records management) into the key managerial roles.

Medium of records

Paper is still the most utilised medium for records, although 69.8% of respondents are working with electronic records, which is the second most selected medium.

Records management training

67.7% of the respondents to this survey are aware of organisations who offer records management training, with only 12.5% of these not being members of the RMS. Perhaps there is a message here to those who market records management courses.

Only 12.5% of respondents are currently involved in any records management training, and of them only 7.3% are the recipients of training. The remaining 5.2% are trainers, ie., they are delivering the training to others. Those who are undertaking training as recipients are all from different

sectors and different age ranges but they all have other qualifications in archives and/or information areas, suggesting that they have identified a need to develop their knowledge specifically in relation to records management.

Approximately half of the respondents (49%) have received training in the previous 12 months, some having had more than one piece of training - 25.4% has been in relation to records management and 14% in relation to IT skills. This indicates that some organisations and/or individuals do see the need to develop and update their skills in relation to records management. As a high proportion (90%) identified that they would benefit from some records management training, it also suggests that the training currently available does not meet their needs. An alternative explanation could be related to available finance, but 47.9% who have undertaken training in the recent past have received financial support from their employer.

In the majority of cases of recent training, a consultant has delivered the training (20.8%) with a member of a professional association next (18.8%) and a lecturer from an academic institution next (15.6%).

Generally the respondents felt that the person who delivered the training had been the best person to do it. Interestingly though, the preferred deliverer for future training, based on previous training, is a member of a professional association (as opposed to a consultant).

Materials and format of course

The most utilised methods of training are handouts, lectures or presentations, video and on-the-job or practical experience. In relation to a ranking question on materials and course format, good quality learning material was ranked the highest, and taken in conjunction with the information gathered on preferred format for materials, suggests that production of good quality handouts is a prime factor in the design of any course, regardless of its format and duration.

Support and guidance prior to embarking on the training were ranked next in order of importance, suggesting that the marketing information in relation to courses is not always clear about the content and level of a course, and the type of individuals and/or organisations for whom it is suitable.

Access to support staff was ranked third within the scale (1-6), presumably due to the fact that the highest ranking was good quality materials, therefore, an assumption that the subsequent level of support would be less than that required with poor quality materials.

Access to equipment was ranked fourth, probably as the vast majority have access to a variety of forms of equipment (see later), although this may drastically change in relation to the unemployed, etc., referred to earlier as not being included in this study.

The format of the course ranked equal fifth, along with a qualification at the end of the training.

The majority of respondents would prefer the training to be delivered via short courses (77.1%). Of those who selected a packaged course (16.7%), there is not a clear indication of an overall preference. Some respondents selected more than one option, but the totals suggest that the option to study at a distance is very attractive, especially as none of the training and education already received by the respondents has been delivered by this route.

Training and education required

Records management training and education is required in all areas on the questionnaire. The average number of elements per respondent is 4. Details of training required, percentage, and sector are given in figure 1.

Element of Training	%age requiring	Sector
Managing electronic records	63.5	Agency, Broad/Media, Chem., Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Food/Drink, Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Mining, Museum/Art, Nat.Govt., Pharm, Prop.Mgmt., Public Lib/Amen., Public Util., Publisher, Res.Org., Suppl., Transport, Univ.
Role of RM within organisation	44.8	Broad/Media, Chem., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Food/Drink, Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Museum/Art, Nat.Govt., Pharm, Publisher, Res.Org., Suppl., Transport.
Strategic approaches to management	38.5	Broad/Media, Chem., Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Museum/Art, Nat.Govt., Prop.Mgmt., Public Lib/Amen., Res.Org., Suppl., Transport.
Managing active records	36.5	Agency, Broad/Media, Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Nat. Govt., Prop.Mgmt., Public Util., Publisher, Suppl., Transport.
Information storage & retrieval	35.4	Agency, Broad/Media, Comp. Serv., Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Nat.Govt., Public Lib/Amen., Suppl., Transport.
Mngmt of non-current records	33.3	Broad/Media, Comp. Serv., Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Food/Drink, Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Nat.Govt., Pharm., Public Util., Suppl., Transport.
Life-cycle approach	30.2	Broad/Media, Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Food/Drink, Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Museum/Art, Nat. Govt., Pharm., Public Util., Suppl.
Managing archives	24.0	Broad/Media, Comp. Serv., Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Gas/Oil, Legal, Medical, Museum/Art, Nat. Govt., Suppl.
Research methods	21.9	Broad/Media, Consult., Educ & Trg., Engng., Finan., Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Museum/Art, Pharm, Public Lib/Amen., Public Util., Suppl., Transport.
I.T. skills	17.7	Chem., Finan., Food/Drink, Gas/Oil, Legal, Local Govt., Medical, Nat.Govt., Suppl., Transport.
Time management	10.4	Consult., Engng., Food/Drink, Gas/Oil, Legal, Medical, Nat.Govt.
Report writing	8.3	Medical, Pharm, Suppl.,
None	10.4	Broad/Media, Finan., Food/Drink, Local Govt., Nat. Govt., Suppl.

Figure 1. Training required by sector

The fact that the most selected training and education options include the role of records management within an organisation and strategic approaches to management, could suggest that existing records management practitioners have identified the trend towards records management as a strategic business function, and that they have identified the need to respond to this trend in the form of training and education.

Outcomes of training and education

A high proportion of respondents selected both NVQ and a professional qualification as expected outcomes, both in relation to short courses and packaged courses, suggesting that they are not sure of the distinction between the two. Alternatively, it may be that the respondents view NVQs as a means of CVE after having obtained a professional qualification, or that a professional qualification follows on from an NVQ.

The professional qualification expected by 22.9% of those selecting the short course option is, perhaps, unrealistic, although credits towards a professional qualification may be an option, depending on the course content, level and the status of the training deliverer in being able to award appropriate credit.

Access and support

The majority of respondents (92%) have access to either a company or public library, suggesting that access and availability of any supporting training material from the public domain could be obtained by trainees, and 57% have access to either a staff development officer or a company training department which would offer them support. Only 5% do not have access to either a library or a training department or staff development officer.

Support actually received from employers in relation to previous training and education undertaken has generally been good, both in terms of practical and financial support. When these existing levels of support are related to expected levels of support, the results indicate that the expectations of respondents will be met. It is interesting that more expect time from their employer as a support mechanism, as opposed to direct financial support, eg., payment of fees, etc. This suggests that some respondents may be willing to fund their own training and education. With the tax-free status afforded NVQs, they may be an attractive option.

Computer access

The level of computer access is high (94.8%) with relatively high levels of IT skills. In addition, the survey does not indicate that age bears any relation to IT competence, quite the reverse in some cases, although the level of competence has not been established via this study.

Participation

The level of respondents who stated that they would consider participation in CVE (42.7%) indicates that there is definitely a need for CVE training and education in records management. Another factor to take into consideration here, is that the majority of the participants in this study are in the managerial bracket (70.8%), with their comments indicating that they also see a need for records management training and education for their staff, so the potential market is even larger than it would appear from the figures, albeit at a different level.

As a direct result of the analysis of this initial phase of the CVE study, an elementary training and education framework has been produced which will require redefinition and modification in the light of any further research. In addition, as the majority of the respondents were in the managerial bracket, it would not be appropriate to recommend a training and education framework for other levels.

Option 1 (Management level)

Packaged courses consisting of the core records management units, and separate short courses for the non-records management units, although there may be some direct overlap with records management, especially in relation to IT.

Option 2 (Management level)

Short 1-2 day courses for each individual element.

Option 3 (Management level)

Clusters of units offered over a longer period of time, based on the most selected combinations of units.

Interpersonal and IT skills are required in a variety of combinations, which, in most cases, do not fit logically together and may be difficult to provide in this way in an educational or training setting. Also the numbers requiring the various combinations are relatively small, therefore the most appropriate means of delivery would be via discrete training modules for each unit.

Although 17.7% identified that they would benefit from IT training, the type of IT training required is fairly wide ranging. Some of the IT skills could be incorporated in an appropriate records management unit . The benefits of the approach would be the opportunity to see the practical application of the technology, instead of, as in many cases, in isolation.

Further investigation

1   The majority of respondents to this survey are at the managerial level, and whilst expressing training and education needs of their own, a high proportion commented they would be interested in CVE training and education for their staff. Further investigations could be carried out to ascertain what the training and education needs of these lower level staff are; do they have the same training and education needs but at a different level or do they have different training needs altogether? Do they already hold any qualifications, or is there a need to develop a first degree (or other) level training via alternative delivery techniques eg. distance learning, bearing in mind the existence of records management NVQs and the obvious confusion surrounding the distinction, highlighted in this study?

     Also, during the course of this study, the results obtained made it possible to construct a profile of a 'typical' records manager. It may be possible that during the course of further research, such as that described here, a profile of different levels of staff can be constructed.

2   This study identified a definite trend towards the acceptance of records management as a discipline, via the inclusion of 'records' or 'documentation' in job titles. Is this trend reflected in the job titles of other levels of staff?

3   What qualifications and/or experience do organisations expect their records management staff to have at the various levels? This could be compared with the type of training and education currently available. Are there any differences across the sectors?

4   As the respondents in this survey were required to base their responses in relation to preferred media for material on recent training, it would be interesting to establish whether they would be willing to try alternative forms.

5   The ambiguity surrounding the issue of professional qualifications and NVQs requires clarification.

6   Survey the missing sample, ie., the unemployed, women returners, people in non-records management, but related occupations.

Conclusions

This study has shown that there is indeed a need for focused records management training and education, not only at a managerial level, but also at other levels within the organisation. If organisations are to continue what they seem to have begun, ie., a recognition that their intellectual property is a valuable information resource, they need to continue with this trend and manage the resource as a key business function. In order to be able to do this they need to either employ staff specifically trained in the skills and the knowledge of records management, or provide their existing staff, at all levels, with the opportunities of gaining those skills, and developing their existing abilities. This need has already been recognised by many of the practitioners within the organisations.

With the publication of the Hawley Committee report[3] and the subsequent Library Association campaign[4], existing information professionals need to rise to the challenge and identify areas where they need to develop their skills in relation to records management. Information professionals already have some of the basic skills necessary to be an effective records manager. Development of such skills and the addition of new ones provide information professionals with the opportunity of changing the focus of their career and responding to the changing business environment.

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