Researchers of Tomorrow: A three year (BL/JISC) study tracking the research behaviour of 'Generation Y' doctoral students

The Longitudinal Tracking Study

Education *for* Change (E*f*C) is managing this research study for the British Library and the JISC to investigate the information-seeking and research behaviour of doctoral students born between 1982 and 1994 – commonly dubbed 'Generation Y'.

One part of the research is a longitudinal study over 2½ years of about 70 full-time UK doctoral students from all subject disciplines, which will track these students' information-seeking behaviour and their changing attitudes to their research.

In this study a range of creative and student-focussed qualitative research techniques and methodologies will be used to find out how doctoral students do research, how and when they use libraries, information and research resources both online and off. We will, for instance, be asking our research subjects (our 'trackers') to record their research and information-seeking activities on a regular basis in short 'journal' form. We will conduct in-depth interviews with our enlisted students at intervals throughout the 2½ years, face-to-face or by phone or skype. We expect to be able to stimulate and facilitate interesting discussions between the trackers themselves, within and across subject discipline groups, which will enable students' own learning and sharing and shed light on attitudes to information access and research resources.

We are likely to provide some standard tools (e.g. checklists of information sources for trackers to indicate preferences and short multiple-choice questionnaires), but we believe it will be important for the students to have a hand in shaping the ways in which they contribute evidence to this study, and to have choices between different ways of addressing the same research questions. We expect to work with them to develop ways and means of capturing information about their research experiences without over-burdening them. We think that being involved in this study will offer interesting and valuable opportunities to share experiences and exchange ideas with other doctoral students in the study.

We assume that our trackers are likely to be familiar with a range of web-based communication technologies and will enjoy using these to feed us their views and to get to know their fellow trackers. We will, however, be ready to accommodate those who are less inclined to technology solutions.

While web-based methods will allow us to overcome constraints of location and time in communicating with the trackers, we are also planning periodic get-togethers for the study group at the British Library in London, where they will meet each other and have an opportunity to become familiar with the facilities and services of the world-renowned British Library.

Ethical statement

In this study the information and data we gather from the recruited doctoral students will be held and treated in confidence. Trackers will be identified in all study outputs only with a code number or name; access to their records, contributions and comments in the study will be password protected and accessible only to them and the research administrator. Their

permission will be explicitly sought if E*f*C wishes to quote them directly or share their contributions and views with anyone else or any other body.

In recruiting doctoral students for this tracking study E*f*C undertakes absolutely to conform with the principles of data protection, so that personal data shall:

- Be obtained and processed fairly and lawfully.
- Be held only for lawful purposes which are described in the research agreement.
- Be used or disclosed only for those or compatible purposes.
- Be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose for which they are held.
- Be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date.
- Be held no longer than is necessary for the purpose for which they are held.
- Be accessible to allow individuals to have access to information held about them and, where appropriate, correct or erase it.
- Be surrounded by proper security

E*f*C is registered as a Data Controller under the DPA 1998.