European accreditation of Library and Information Science Studies

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Introduction

In this paper I will review the development of professional accreditation in the Library and Information Science discipline in the UK, outline the changing model of accreditation currently under development and consider some of the challenges and opportunities for the development a collaborative process for European accreditation of library and information science. Some of the content appeared in an article written for the Portuguese Library Association in 2003 (BAD 2003), but it has been revised and updated for this presentation.

Professional accreditation in the United Kingdom

Professional and statutory bodies have played a key role in ensuring the quality of standards in professional and vocational education in the UK and the USA for many years, and for the certification of new entrants to the profession. This has led to a system in which universities and professional bodies work in partnership on the development and provision of professional education. The successful completion of accredited courses is linked wholly or partially to subsequent entry to the professional body and admission to the professional Register.

Currently, accreditation within library and information science applies only to undergraduate and postgraduate courses at UK universities: the development of vocational and paraprofessional education has not been accommodated within the traditional higher education accreditation framework operating in the UK.

In the UK, USA and Australia there has long been a tradition of professional accreditation of courses in the Library and Information Science discipline. Up to now the intention of course accreditation by the professional bodies has been to exercise quality control

over admission to professional membership and, as a side effect, to define the conceptual landscape of the discipline without prescribing the content of library and information science courses.

Within Europe, the practice of professional accreditation has been largely absent. However, the challenge of globalization, especially the General Agreement on Trade in Services and the Bologna process, has created a growing interest in accreditation and quality assurance within Europe. These challenges, coupled with the proposed changes to professional library and information science qualifications in the United Kingdom, make this a timely moment to look at the opportunities for closer collaboration and partnership across the wider professional community

Higher education in the UK

When the Library Association was founded (1877) there were only seven fully established universities in the UK teaching traditional, academic, subjects. The Association was one of a number of Chartered Professional Associations formed during the late nineteenth century that assumed the role of examining bodies. A syllabus was developed and examinations were held from 1885 onwards. For many years professional education remained in the hands of practitioners with courses being provided by a number of colleges and also large employers, particularly in the public sector.

Vocational education remained firmly linked to the requirements of the traditional professions such as law and medicine. Indeed it is largely the traditional professions that still determine approaches to issues of harmonization and reciprocity of academic qualifications across Europe. From the late nineteenth century the range of subjects increased but remained focussed on the traditional professions, which did not at that stage include librarianship. The dramatic expansion of further and higher education during the twentieth century included the creation of a number of polytechnics that offered courses in both academic and vocational subjects to degree level, including librarianship.

Library and information science education in the UK

CILIP, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, is the United Kingdom's professional body for those working in library and information services. It was founded in 2002

through unification of the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists. Under the terms of its Royal Charter it has a duty to promote the knowledge, skills and qualifications of its 24, 000 members, including around 800 members who work outside the European Union. It is currently responsible for accrediting 63 courses at bachelors and masters level at 18 universities across the UK. *(Slide 2)* Normally, undergraduate level courses are completed after 3 years full-time study, whilst postgraduate level courses are completed after one year full-time or two years part-time study.

The first library school, University College London, was established in 1919, offering a two-year programme that was open to both graduates and non-graduates. The number of library schools increased rapidly after the Second World War. All of them offered a curriculum that followed the Library Association's own syllabus and the students sat the Library Association's sub-degree examinations. However, during the 1960s and 1970s the introduction of full-time undergraduate and later postgraduate courses at UK universities, contributed to a move to a graduate profession, with the responsibility for determining syllabi completely removed from the professional body.

The Library Association ceased to be an examining body after 1985 and efforts were directed at creating an effective formal mechanism of accreditation. From the outset the intention was not to be prescriptive about detailed course content but was instead intended to encourage the academic community to ensure that their programmes were relevant to both current and emerging practice.

The subjects that the Association believed were essential to successful practice across the domain were identified in a Body of Professional Knowledge. (Library Association 1977)

Current practice in library and information science accreditation in the UK

By the 1980s the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists had both developed accreditation processes and procedures, known as accreditation instruments, which were merged in 1999 to form a joint Accreditation Instrument. Following unification this was adopted as the CILIP accreditation instrument

and is applied to all LIS course reviews in the UK. The accreditation instrument provides what Peter Enser has described as a "conceptual map of the discipline against which the content of each submitted course could be compared" (Enser 2002).

As library and information science is a practice-based discipline CILIP does not seek to prescribe course content. Rather, it seeks reassurance that any course submitted for accreditation is relevant to current and developing practice and that it provides students with appropriate knowledge and skills for entry into the profession. The list of accredited courses demonstrates that this may be obtained through more traditional courses, or through specialist or technical courses in emerging fields, either of which may be delivered through the real or virtual environment.

At the heart of the accreditation process is a course content checklist that sets out the specific subject areas that should be addressed in all accredited programmes. *(Slide 3)*

At this point I feel that it is crucial to stress that CILIP does not believe that completion of an accredited course is sufficient to provide all the formal learning opportunities that practitioners in our dynamic and rapidly changing discipline require. Thus career planning and development, more commonly referred to as CPD, is also considered essential for those wishing to keep their knowledge skills and understanding up to date in the increasingly competitive global marketplace in which library and information workers operate. Indeed admission to the professional Register at the levels of both Chartered Membership and Fellowship is based on submission of evidence of CPD against specified criteria.

Outwith the statutory professions accreditation is carried out at the invitation of the university. The process provides an externally assessed and verified stamp of quality for courses: something that many universities wish to feature in their marketing and promotional activities, as the competition to recruit and retain students grows.

The current accreditation procedures give equal consideration to the following aspects of a course:

- the relevance of the course to the whole or part of the profession

- the professional commitment of the teaching team
- the relationship with the parent institution and its wider role in society
- the experience and expertise of the staff
- the span and quality of the course offered
- the caliber of the students as evidenced by assessments and subsequent employment

A range of documents are supplied in advance of the visit to help the visiting panel, made up of senior practitioners, undertake an initial assessment of the course against these criteria and to identify areas for detailed discussion and investigation, during a series of face-to-face meetings with academic staff, senior administrators and students.

Although the requirements may seem a little daunting most universities find that much of what is required has already been assessed and validated by the independent quality assurance body, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (http://www.qaa.ac.uk), which is responsible or external quality review within UK universities. I will return to the impact of this duplication when outlining the drivers for change. As part of their work the QAA apply a subject benchmark when assessing courses in all disciplines: that for librarianship and information management is largely based on the CILIP course content checklist.

The CILIP Framework of Qualifications

One of the difficulties faced by CILIP in its accreditation role is the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of the discipline: it just will not stand still! The insubstantial nature of the boundaries which separate library and information science from other cognate disciplines have been recognized for a long time. New and emerging key competencies for information professionals have been identified by a number of reports, both in the UK and throughout the world. Huge challenges are posed by the continuous advances in information and communication technology, which have given greater emphasis to both social and technical dimensions of the discipline.

It is against this changing climate that CILIP is currently conducting a review of the accreditation process, and of the Body of Knowledge that underpins that process. This is just part of the task

of designing and implementing a new framework of qualifications, which will introduce access routes for members from non-traditional backgrounds, including those from Europe with historically different traditions of professional education. For the first time in the UK LIS practitioners will gain recognition for both certificated and non-certificated learning, including work-based learning. Detailed work on the development and implementation of the framework is ongoing, details of current activity and consultation can be found on the CILIP website, (www.cilip.org.uk/framework).

A key partner in this work is BAILER, the British Association for Information and Library Education and Research, that currently represents the accredited library schools but which hopes to expand to welcome members from other universities and departments teaching in cognate subject area.

Why CILIP needs to reconsider its accreditation function

The material in the following section contains material taken from an unpublished discussion paper prepared by Peter Enser, Chair CILIP Accreditation Board, in which he set out the present position and outlined some ideas for change.

There are a number of the reasons a new approach to accreditation is needed. Principally they are:

The current procedures reflect a set of assumptions about the delivery of courses in LIS, which relate to past, rather than present practice in the Higher Education sector. Traditionally, universities have submitted whole *courses* for accreditation. The widespread adoption of modularised programmes of study, and the emphasis placed upon enabling students to navigate pathways of their choice towards a specific named award, means that a course, although identified by a title (e.g., MA Information Management) and overall course objectives, may not be a well-defined entity. Thus CILIP can no longer be certain that any cohort of students has been exposed to a consistent body of knowledge.

The prospect of applying accreditation to modules or units, whilst daunting, offers considerable scope for future development, both nationally and internationally.

Increasingly the visiting panel is, in part, replicating quality assurance procedures which are more properly the remit of both the university itself and the previously mentioned Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

The university community within which CILIP undertakes accreditation is a small subset of the organisations that deliver learning opportunities pertinent to the LIS community, and specifically to membership of CILIP. In reality we must recognise a plurality of courses, which deal in 'information', the majority of them in contexts distinct from those traditionally associated with LIS. Furthermore, all but a few of the 'library schools' have evolved into more broadly-based academic units, only part of whose curricula engage with the LIS discipline.

Work is currently underway to compile an authority file, or database, of LIS course and programmes within both educational and commercial organisations that meet the needs of LIS practitioners at different levels and stages in their careers. The first stage of the investigation has been limited to a UK survey: I suspect that if, or possibly when, it is extended to other European partners it would become a very daunting and impressive document indeed!

As a new professional body for the 21st century CILIP aspires to make itself hospitable to a broader membership base: this is evident in the new Framework of Qualifications. This challenges the rationale for limiting the accreditation function to the university community – a rationale that reflects earlier aspirations to make librarianship a graduate-entry profession.

I have already mentioned that accreditation visits are undertaken by senior practitioners and academics, whose professional lives have become much more pressure-filled in recent years. The demands made upon their time in reading and assessing pre-visit documentation, and in conducting visits to geographically scattered universities, has become a matter of concern.

The emergence of computer based and web-enabled information delivery and the development of digitisation are also difficult to assess using the current accreditation procedures, which are increasingly out of step with new modes of study and of service delivery. As a consequence it has become increasingly difficult to

recruit appropriately qualified colleagues to undertake the work. Current procedures also effectively restrict participation and contribution to members based in the UK.

Future directions in CILIP's accreditation function

The following proposals have not been confirmed as CILIP policy; they are being considered and developed in consultation with stakeholders and partners. However, I think it is likely that the new model of accreditation will incorporate most, if not all of these elements. Thus they might provide a useful starting point for further debate in the issue of a pan-European accreditation process.

The course content checklist will be replaced by a *Body of Knowledge*. The Body of Knowledge is the formal specification of the knowledge and skills for which CILIP seeks recognition as the responsible professional body. It is a work in progress. However, I have reproduced the outline of the current core areas of knowledge here and would be very interested in the views of colleagues about its overall relevance to our changing and developing discipline. *(Slide 4)*

The new Body of Knowledge will also be the mapping tool by which those who have come via academic, vocational or work-based learning routes will assess their progress and identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding. It will be applicable to LIS workers at different levels of vocational and professional understanding. The final document will carry descriptors to indicate the expected knowledge and competency at the defined levels.

Accreditation function will be applied to a series of *learning instruments*, instead of solely to university courses. A learning instrument can be defined as any organised formulation of material which seeks to develop knowledge and skills within the framework of the Body of Knowledge. It will encompass deliverables such as modules which form part of undergraduate or postgraduate schemes of study within the Higher Education sector; modules which form part of sub-degree schemes of study within the Higher and Further Education sectors; short courses delivered by private sector organisations or by the HE/FE sectors. Potentially, this

process will enable non-UK based providers to seek recognition for courses.

The *modus operandi* of the CILIP Accreditation Board will be amended, to become a *virtual community* of assessors, instead of a conventional forum to which members contribute their physical presence at a number of meetings each year. Potentially this change will enable non-UK based members of CILIP who may have expertise and experience in new and emerging areas of our discipline to participate in the process and help to create a more inclusive professional community.

Organisations will submit learning instruments to CILIP for accreditation. The exact nature of the requirements has yet to be determined, however, submissions are likely to take the form of a detailed specification of the learning objectives associated with each instrument, and a mapping of the syllabus content to those objectives. These will then be considered by a nominated member of the Accreditation Board. It has been suggested that assessment will be undertaken solely on the basis of documentation, This would be particularly significant as, currently, an important element of any accreditation event is a face-to-face meeting with students who are invited to comment on their learning experience and the practical relevance of the course. In my view, if on-site visits no longer form part of the accreditation process there is still likely to be a need to obtain this feedback by other means.

The *accredited learning instruments* will be identified by a 'CILIP seal of accreditation', which the deliverer may display in advertisements or prospectuses.

Further development of the proposals is closely linked to development of a new process for assessing and admitting members to the professional Register, which is the responsibility of the CILIP Chartership Board. In consultation with the Chartership Board, consideration will be given to the metrication of the accreditation process. Should the Chartership Board determine that an applicant must have accumulated a certain number of credit points in order to seek admission to each grade of membership of the Institute, or to meet a CPD requirement, then types of learning instrument, and/or their content in terms of contribution to the Body of Knowledge, may be mapped to a short scale of credit points: again this has resonance with current

practice in both the UK (through the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme) and with Europe (ECTS).

Library and information science accreditation in Europe

I am sure that many of you here today will have much greater familiarity than me with the aims and objectives of the Bologna process, which proposes the rationalization of programme duration and title in all disciplines, as part of the larger goal of widening participation in higher education and lifelong learning, and the establishment of a European Higher Education Area by 2010. All theses measures are intended to support the larger goal of improving workforce mobility within the European Union.

As an aside let me say that this has is likely to be particularly challenging in the UK. There the principal of progression from initial university education to masters study in the same vocational discipline is not well established: indeed within LIS the majority of professionals are individuals who have completed a first degree within another, not necessarily cognate discipline, before embarking on masters level study in LIS.

In order to achieve this comparability there is an implicit requirement that universities and other providers should develop and implement quality assurance processes to safeguard standards, similar to those already in place in the UK. These processes should ensure that the learning outcomes of courses are well defined and that they are at a level that is appropriate for the award. One immediate challenge is the rationalization, or accommodation, of the different conventions that are applied in the member states in marking student's work.

With the exception of the Library Association of Ireland the various European library associations have no tradition of accrediting courses or individuals. However, those that are within the European Council of Information Associations (ECIA) have been working on a model for the certification of individuals, the DECIDoc and CERTIDdoc projects that are of considerable significance in the context of accreditation. Many of you will no doubt have more familiarity than me with these projects, indeed a number of you may have been directly involved in the project.

As you know the European consortium that launched this project has made great strides towards identifying both core competencies and levels across the information-documentation domains. Full details are available on the website (xxxx). The type of certification being set up will essentially be geared towards "professional experience" (CERTIDoc 2004) and the 2004 edition of the Euro Competencies Guide will be at the core of the evaluation process. There is remarkable synergy between the work being undertaken in the UK and that ongoing in Europe: the challenge is to harness and enhance it so that we create a tool or process that serves both the LIS community and wider society in this complex, expanding global market-place that we all inhabit.

It is also important to note that EUCLID, the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research has published a position statement on its willingness to contribute to the creation of a European Higher Education Area and will work in a number of specific ways including:

- the promotion and development of a European curriculum and comparable degree programmes in LIS throughout Europe
- the implementation of quality assurance and credit transfer systems

The model proposed by CILIP for it future accreditation role is very much in tune with all these projects and may provide a useful model for other European Associations as they work to develop their own accreditation roles and procedures. One possible difficulty would be the refusal of the UK government to adopt the proposed European definition of a Masters degree as one that is normally gained after a first degree in the same subject. In the UK the main entry route to the profession has been through the conversion masters programme. Although there has been some evidence of a slight resurgence of interest in Bachelors courses many of these graduates are not looking to the LIS community to provide their first career.

Another possible scenario is that EUCLID may develop an accreditation role in future. Currently it is still probably too small to act as an accrediting body as only 30 – 40 of the approximately 200 schools and departments teaching library and information science and related subjects are members: it has not yet the status

or sufficient resources to influence either the European Commission or national governments to accredit courses outwith the statutory of traditional professions.

As I said in my introduction this is a timely moment to look at the opportunities for closer collaboration and partnership across the wider professional community. A considerable amount of relevant and exciting work has already taken place: the creation of an EBLIDA Working Group on Professional Education could provide an appropriate and effective vehicle to coordinate and take forward this work.

As a first step I would like to suggest the following areas for a strategic action plan for EBLIDA to facilitate the design and development of European accreditation of LIS. You will see that this is a very sketchy plan: I hope that discussion and debate here today and in the future will help populate the outline! *(Slide 5)*

Strategic actions

1   Conduct a scooping exercise to identify all current practice in relation to LIS accreditation in Europe and map it to current practice in the UK, USA and Australia
2   Research and map the core areas of knowledge and understanding that characterize the LIS subject to create a European Body of Knowledge
3   Devise and promote a European model for LIS accreditation, to be built on the best of national and international policies.
4   Develop partnerships and networks that understand and meet workforce development needs within and across national boundaries
5   Support and promote the provision of 'learning instruments' by a range of providers, which will enhance workforce development and skills at all levels
6   Lobby for support for this programme from national and European government

Despite its brevity this is a challenging and ambitious programme. I believe that much of the crucial underpinning work has already been achieved: the question that we may wish to consider is this, "can we afford not to do this?" I look forward to listening to and

participating in both formal and informal discussions and debate as we answer that question.

Thank you.

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