



Workforce skills development: the professional imperative for information services in the United Kingdom.

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Introduction

This paper is based on the background research for Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, (CILIP), undertaken as a first stage in developing the new Continuing Professional Development, (CPD), Certification and Validation of qualifications framework. It is written against a background of new professional imperatives and at a time when it is critical to the future of the profession to meet government agendas, organisational aims and objectives and user requirements. Making strategic impact is always important but, with the emergence of a new breed of information brokers, Knowledge Managers, the position of Library and Information Professionals (LIPs), is challenged. The first imperative to redress this situation is to create the opportunities to acquire a full range of professional skills and to promote the role of our profession in the business of the parent organisation. The skills acquisition should be done by a combination of education, personal achievement and work based opportunity. This must be followed up by regular development and training activities. Individuals will then be equipped and able to develop services and facilities that meet all the criteria set by the user, the public, the employer, and the government.

Background

When the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists merged in April 2002, to form the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, one of the first challenges was the creation of an agreed framework of skills for professional practice to represent the existing and perceived needs of the employers of LIPs. The two pre-existing outlines required broadening and merging and the result had to provide for the future by accommodating known and perceived changes in modern professional practice.

The Framework would have to support new roles for LIPs within an information literate society. This society is both IT and media aware, but the early adoption and use of IT within information work provides an excellent foundation to forge new roles with a strong emphasis on quality and accountability.

The new Knowledge Managers are seeking positions at the heart of organisations, where the power is seen to rest. Our role in providing and organising information to assist others to succeed must now be extended. In addition to acquiring, organising, exploiting and using information, LIPs need to create organisational information management systems, constructing knowledge or information architecture and deal in data for digitising records for future access. These roles will be enacted with a range of colleagues. LIPs will work in multi-professional teams, as has already been recognised in many organisations where Human Resources, finance, technical, marketing and administrative personnel add their skills to the information service. Much of this work is carried out within projects and initiatives. Bidding for funds to support developments is a challenge, but it adds a discipline to regular working and can also bring new colleagues into the working environment.

Accountability

Another common feature of the modern working environment is the adherence to quality systems for measuring, monitoring and enhancing the quality of the services and facilities. The value of a library and information service has to be confirmed by its users, and those who supply the funding to maintain it. In UK Public Libraries the emergence of Best Value reviews and in Higher Education libraries the peer assessments by the external Quality Assurance Agency, or internal quality enhancement teams, have focussed attention on effective planning to meet organisational aims and objectives.

Changes and Challenges

Some of the changes that have been experienced in the past decade include the move towards 'products' and their 'application' in developments. These appear as projects to be integrated and 'mainstreamed'. These terms may not be everyday parlance, but they do represent a dynamic or changing environment. The opportunities that technology has provided constitute the major professional development. LIPs have had to meet the competition of 'GOOGLE' searching; accommodating users who wish to communicate by mobile telephones within library buildings, bring in their own laptop, and learn information seeking skills. The 'New Opportunities Fund' (NOF) created the need for public librarians to not only have IT skills themselves, but to be able to assist others to access the technology effectively. This new role of learner support is a critical one in all library and information environments. Training and development is essential and is the way in which LIPs can and have met this challenge.

Scenarios faced by staff and employers responding to Life Long Learning

One of the most important questions in the UK at the moment is that of the role of the Public Libraries. Some will have read of the debate about a report claiming to give trend analysis for the Public Library Service throughout the country based on a report of one local authority in Hampshire.¹ More significant are the steps that many authorities are being encouraged to take under the lead of the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council (MLA). The Framework for the Future² and the initiative 'Inspiring Learning for All'³ will identify outcomes to be aimed for in the development of learning for personal and social progression. This will require new services to be introduced and this is the opportunity that staff need to develop appropriate skills to ensure success. A good example of this comes from the North East of England in a project led by the North East Museums Libraries and Archives Council. The agency has embarked upon an extensive development programme to support basic skills across the region. Funded through the DfES Need to Read programme, a basic skills development officer has been able to set up awareness training for frontline staff from libraries, museums and archives. Some staff have undertaken adult learner support training at Level 2 which involves placements to work with students in basic skills classes. It has also been possible to set up a literacy project in Tyne & Wear which will allow professional writers to work with students in order to produce high-quality reading resources. Importantly, the projects undertaken within this initiative deal with social inclusion and affect those who may have experienced access problems with regular library services.

E-information is particularly important within government. The British Government has a vision for seamless access to all government information. The Office of the e-envoy, within the Cabinet Office has developed UK Online⁴ as a way for all citizens to have access to the information. Use of the service has only been successful through the use and application of information architecture skills, notably vocabulary tools, such as thesauri and taxonomies. The taxonomy developed is a sophisticated tool; one that will take the user beyond the simple operations that Google is so good at. The UK Government Category List (GCL) is an exercise in creating a Google antidote.

Librarians can promote some of the best practice in the dissemination of information about health and wellbeing. When the Head of Library and Information Services for the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) was asked to lead the development of the RCN's Communications Policy, there was some surprise. The ability to bring diverse people together into an effective working group and to deliver outcomes that requires the delivery of high-quality and consistent information and knowledge with relevant users seem to be the essence of good information work. Other skills that Jackie Lord had acquired, included transferable skills, expertise in knowledge management and communication systems and a reputation as an honest broker, plus the belief that the library and information service has a pivotal role in any organisation.⁵ What has been provided as a result is not only a better internal system of communication but also a better external profile of the RCN, and its work in raising the status of nursing.

All of these situations offer LIPs the opportunity to promote the skills they have in the interests of the organisation in which their service is situated.

From the research: The professional imperatives for skills acquisition and development.

From a mixture of interviews and desk research a picture of new professional practice began to emerge. The general trend was signalling less routine and more innovation. This innovation was to be encouraged by targeted research or funding opportunities and would be managed alongside existing services and facilities.

The areas that emerged as those requiring significant activity and, therefore, skills development were as follows.

- Knowledge Management
- Project management and project skills
- User focus and support
- Leadership and management
- Strategic thinking

LIPs must acquire skills and also understand their role within an organisation if they are to meet the challenges from knowledge managers. This involves being immersed in the business of the organisation, and placing their library and information services as a central function, not a discrete part of it operating to its own agendas. Many libraries would not exist if there were not a 'parent' organisation where others bring in the money and funds to support the service. Organisations need people in their information and knowledge management area who can not only create funding for development projects, but who can also manage the information that it needs to run effectively and perform in the appropriate industry market. The information managers must create and sustain services and facilities that are developed to meet user needs. They should be expert facilitators to assist and teach users to exploit services effectively. Regaining the ground of information architecture is critical to this.

The analysis of employers' needs put project work as a priority. Opportunities to engage in projects bring opportunities for the leadership and management of staff and resources. The use of creativity and imagination in everyday work is also essential. This can be in association with service development as well as more obvious links with web design or artistic flair in publications. Corporate understanding, impact analysis and lateral thinking all link to the findings in Recruit, Retain and Lead⁶. It is not enough to get on with all the regular work, it is important for LIPs to be able to show that they make a difference. As one head of service in an academic library put it, LIPs need to have the skills to persuade the most senior managers of the difference that we make in the library to the student experience. It is also important to think creatively in planning and 'eventualities'. Scenario planning or trouble shooting can constitute a considerable proportion of daily work. Good lateral thinking and the ability to use evidence based practice should come easily to the empirical professional group of Library and Information Practitioners.

Traditionally LIPs work with a highly developed focus on users, providing advice and support in the finding and using of information.

Many job specifications will list strategic thinking among the essential criteria, and there is evidence from employers that critical and analytical thinking may be under-developed by some LIPs. We are a graduate profession and this is an issue that must be dealt with within the curriculum at university and followed up by opportunities to develop within the workplace.

To do this the services require leaders and managers. The library and information profession is not alone in identifying leadership as one of the most under developed and unavailable of skills. Anecdotal evidence indicated that management appeared to be an unpopular aspect of working in LIS. Reports from Sheffield University and from University of Central England provide evidence that management development must be an essential feature of CPD for LIPs.

A brief look at two important developments

1. Project skills.

A decline in the most traditional of all the skills of our profession, cataloguing and classification became a mini-crisis during the roll out of a significant national initiative that aimed to make more accessible the information about significant collections in the Arts and Humanities. As a consequence the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) established a steering group to commission research into the human aspects of running this project. This group was chaired by Dr David Baker, then Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of East Anglia.

In 2002 John Fielden authored the final report of this group that highlighted the human issues, in recruitment, development and retention of project staff in UK HE libraries and archives projects. It followed the experience of staff employed in over 500 projects initiated by the findings of the Follett Report⁷ of 1993. Subsequent to that report a 'Concordat' was agreed between the Research Councils, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (now Universities UK), the British Academy and the Royal Society. (www.universitiesUK.ac.uk/activities/rci.asp) Following this the concordat was strengthened by a Research Careers Initiative (RCI) in association with the relevant trade unions. One of the commitments was to provide contract research staff with specialist or generalist training and career guidance. The staff employed in the RSLP projects were surveyed and found to have a wide variety of technical and professional skills. One significant finding was that of the 138 staff questioned, the following specialisms were identified.

Cataloguing	63
Retrospective catalogue conversion	56
Web content	55
Infrastructure/access	20
Digitisation	17

All other advanced technical skills were only offered by numbers less than 20 and so are not significant.

What is significant for this paper is the evidence from employers, those organisations that were successful in bidding for projects, about the lack of skills they found in candidates for project posts. Specific skills shortages were found in the areas of cataloguing, archive work, and linguistics. Unfortunately the nature of such projects meant that there was little time to spend on making training programmes available. It may be expedient to request a high level of skills in all recruitment documents, but the reality is that in many cases people with the requisite skills are not easily available. This experience and best practice would indicate that it is a necessity to build training and development opportunities into all employment opportunities.

2. Leadership development

This issue could be the main subject of a number of papers. The issue is multi-faceted; too few candidates for Director posts in all

sectors, reluctance of young professionals to opt for management and posts with responsibility for staff and services, a lack of skills in newly appointed managers, and a lack of regard by those in charge of the parent organisation in which the library sits. Equally there are a vast number of initiatives to deal with leadership. In the UK the report by Professor Bob Usherwood, 'Recruit, retain and lead'⁷ written in 2001, and the report from Dalton and Nankivell⁸ were both sector specific. However, with the advent in the UK of a more cross domain organisation, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), many people believe it is more likely that a generic leadership development initiative will succeed. Whatever is selected as appropriate for the sectors it remains true that different organisations with different cultures, require different leadership models. Equally, individuals need different methods for developing into leaders. What is clear is that good visionary leaders are essential to advocate for the roles that the modern LIP can undertake and the value to organisations that information and library services can add.

Skills in demand – a summary of the employers needs.

An analysis was undertaken of the advertisements placed in the Guardian, Times Higher Education Supplement and the CILIP Appointments pages. Common positions asked for skills or experience as knowledge managers, or information architects requiring digitisation skills, knowledge of standards and quality, a user focus, team working and leadership.

Table 1 represents a summary of the skills of the 21st century; it defines the work related skills that LIPs need to acquire and although is not exhaustive, is based upon the analysis of job descriptions, interviews, report analysis and professional reading that constituted the research work.

Professional Information skills	Generic skills
Knowledge Management Information architecture ICT skills Technical (traditional) professional skills	Project management **Planning and evaluation People management Research skills Bids and proposals
Subject expertise Collection management Collection description Technical (traditional) professional skills	Critical skills Thinking **Planning and evaluation Analysis Problem solving Research
Information technology Design Application Systems User support (problem solving)	Leadership General management Communication skills Strategic management People skills Financial skills
Service Development User information Surveys Service impact analysis Planning and evaluation** Promotion and marketing*	*Promotion and marketing Design appreciation Presentation skills Multi-professional appreciation

Table 1. Summary of skills for the 21st Century.

Even with such skills, LIPs will need to continue to acquire experience to meet with other professionals and update qualifications. These are all functions of a professional body such as CILIP. One of the values of undertaking this piece of research was to find out from practitioners what they believed would be

needed to ensure that LIPs keep the position of information managers in the workplace. Many wanted 'CPD with teeth'. This phrase was used to denote that in undertaking arrange of continuing professional development (CPD) individuals would like it recognised by the professional body. Many courses, seminars and workshops take place within and beyond the immediate work place. What is needed is a system that enables individuals to obtain credit for doing this and make it count towards a professional qualification or standard.

How to achieve skills development.

1. Links between employers, educators, individuals and the professional body

Table (2) indicates the roles and responsibilities that the various parties play in the creation of a workforce able to meet the government agendas, and assist in organisational security.

Individual	Motivation	Credits Qualifications	Experience Skills Competencies
Educator	Curriculum	Standards Quality Relevance	Awards
Organisation	Development & Training	Experience	Opportunity
Professional body	Educational and Professional Qualifications CPD	Accreditation of courses Certification of experience	Linkages Advocacy

Table 2. Roles and responsibilities for the development of Library and Information Professionals.

The involvement of employers.

The involvement of employers is critical, and where there are local departments of library and information studies (or similar) strong links should be forged to enable courses to reflect employer needs. This should be at professional and para-professional level. One opportunity that exists currently is the emergence of the regional Museums, Libraries and Archives Councils. These agencies can be used to provide an effective regional forum for collaborative working, staff development, training and projects and initiatives.

Who provides the education?

The emergence of a range of regional or local courses that provide a contextual framework for library and information work is welcomed by such individuals. The courses are very successful and provide additional networking opportunities for those who currently sit outside the professional network that being a member of CILIP provides.

Personal responsibility for a career.

Essential to the development of a successful career are education and qualifications, work based development opportunity and, importantly, personal motivation and aspiration. Individuals must believe that learning and development makes a difference to their future and also to the performance of their department. Many of our service developments, for example the development of new learning centres, mixing information, education and technological support, are only obtainable with relevant and timely staff development. The profession is a leading example of how investment in development can mean return for the organisation.

How to achieve skills development.

2. The agenda for the Professional organisation.

Professional Qualifications and knowledge that are fit for purpose.

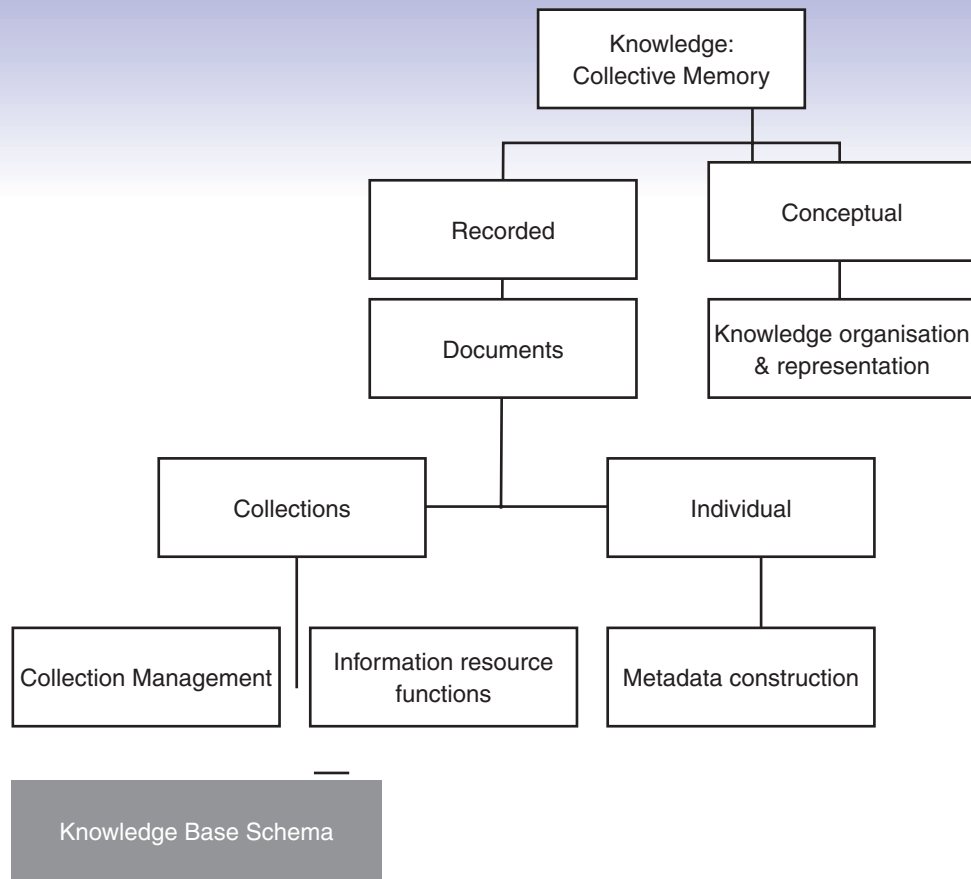
There are issues for the professional body about finding ways to be inclusive to those who have not got a professional qualification at all but do possess a high degree of professionalism in their work.

CILIP New Qualifications framework has been drawn up following a period of consultation of over a year. Advice from the membership was to formalise new routes to professional qualifications. The aim is to 'provide members with the means to ensure that their expertise is recognised by the wider community and to enable them to extend that expertise so they can remain abreast of new developments and compete effectively in the employment market-place.'⁹ By adding a certification scheme and a process of revalidation (CPD with teeth") the professional body is seeking to assure information users of the integrity and currency of the workforce. In providing an award for each stage of the qualifications process, individuals are offered a position and a status within the professional body. This progresses the previous situation whereby only two levels of member were acknowledged, Associate and Fellow, often the mature member. The evidence base for the award is a portfolio of evidence that meets the criteria set out and a reflective commentary on individual professional development.

While assessment for Chartered membership and Fellowship will continue to be undertaken within the Chartership Board, a more distributed package is envisaged for Certification and Revalidation. Assessment Panels will be set up using the well established CILIP Branch network in the regions (mostly based within the English Counties') and the Home Nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Handbooks for these schemes will be available in the autumn of 2004.

Body of Professional Knowledge.

The new arrangements brought into close focus the existing 'Body of Professional Knowledge' and under the direction of Past President Sheila Corral and the Leadership of President Margaret Watson, a special task group was set up to outline what the 21st Century BPK comprised. The knowledge base that we acquire during our professional careers is formed by our education, our training, our experience and our professional development. We will each have our own version, but there is also a base for this knowledge and the CILIP BPK includes the generic areas of knowledge where they are integral to the core concepts. The schema that emerged is represented below.



Explanation.

The knowledge acquired through the collective memory is the originating conceptual framework for the profession that encompasses the shared belief and understandings of society.

The Knowledge organisation and representation is the unique traditional/technical/professional knowledge that comprises information architecture, conceptual schema, indexing language (systematic; hierarchic, analytico-synthetic and hybrid classification schemes; alphabetic: subject headings, thesauri), taxonomies, ontologies, knowledge of metadata standards.

Documents are the knowledge artefacts that comprise that part of collective memory that is recorded in any medium.

Collection management is the set of processes associated with the acquisition, storage, organisation, preservation, catalogue construction, classification, exploitation and provision of access to collections of physical and virtual documents maintained by memory institutions and other organisations in the public and private sectors.

Information resource functions represent the knowledge of public domain information sources, principles and practice of information retrieval, content analysis and evaluation, information brokerage, information literacy, information resource mediation, intranet, website and portal content provision and maintenance.

Metadata construction requires the practice or application of the data into a process. Thus, cataloguing, subject indexing, classification, abstracting, content evaluation, content representation, document (re)structuring, application of mark-up language.

Context for practice.

CILIP has also summarised the ethical, legal and policy issues that provide the context for practice and which have to be understood

by all practitioners. An ethical framework would include professional standards and codes of practice, an understanding of the proper relationship between information providers and their clients, the acknowledgment of personal responsibility for professional actions, conformity with the law, both generally and specifically and respect for human rights and lifestyle of clients and colleagues.

The legal dimension relates to the law of data protection, freedom of information, intellectual property, libel, obscenity and defamation, the right of access to information, the right of privacy, aspects of the law for example, employment, equal opportunities, health and safety that impinge on information workers and the organisation(s) concerned.

Public policy is determined by the social milieu in which work takes place. It will include information policy, policies that determine or delimit access to information and information media, those policies designed to facilitate or prevent the dissemination of information and those policies that relate to information law.

Opportunities.

The importance of the regional organisation of CPD is beginning to be realised. The volume and complexity of continuing professional development requires quite a sophisticated analysis of what activity is most suited to what need. However, the balance that staff wish to see in their lives, between work and home, can conflict with career aspirations. Time away from home on staff development activities is not always possible and locally based continuing professional development options are becoming more popular. This fits well with the CILIP agenda for regional assessment of certification and re-validations. The involvement of the CILIP Branch network will have a re-vitalising effect on regional professional activity as it becomes less London dominated and distributed around the UK.

The new Museums Library and Archives Council provide an excellent regional basis for professional practice. In addition these organisations, which are part of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), formerly Resource, are linked to other agencies that deal with specific workforce planning issues within any of the nine regions of England. In Yorkshire, the specific region economic agenda includes special funding for those sub-regional areas that have been impoverished by the passing of traditional industry based employment such as coal mining or steel production. Each region will have a Regional Development Agency that will set out objectives for training and development of the whole workforce. Funding for employee development in IT or service industries is available and LIS staff can participate in schemes that match education and training such as the 'Foundation Degree' offered in a variety of subjects.

Conclusions.

The profession needs those with ideas and vision to make their employing organisations successful. The workforce needs to be flexible and develop skills in a range of traditional/professional as well as generic areas. Some of the most valuable skills are in short supply and may be obtained through working in projects. Individuals must be prepared to work outside the Monday to Friday 0900 – 1700 'norm', (not difficult for those providing public services). Professionals need to understand income generation and work with a range of people to develop income streams that support development projects. Planning is essential in all areas of our work. Services need planning to develop, staff need plans within which to develop appropriate skills for their work, and finance and income depends on the creation of plans to secure funding. Adhering to the principles of innovative planning, aligning services with organisational as well as departmental objectives and providing a valued and effective service to users have never been so important.

This reflects on employers and all must provide the essential ingredient that makes the difference between a good and an excellent service. It is not always possible to recruit those with existing skills for LIS posts. What is possible is to find development opportunities that prepare staff for their roles.

In the past it might have been acceptable to run a good service, but now it is really important to make a success of working with others. This can involve having to negotiate with computing colleagues to provide the appropriate service to run and maintain the IT network on which library services depend. It could also mean working with academic staff in colleges and universities or with other services in collaborative ventures such as one-stop-shops in public libraries.

The UK Freedom of Information Act, passed in 2000 will become fully implemented by 2005 and with it the responsibilities for information to be correct, timely, authoritative and available. Librarians may feel that all information they control is accessible, but even if that is the case, members of the public must be able to access the freedom of information publication scheme for public organisations. LIPs have a responsibility to apply appropriate strategies to ensure that sensible answers are provided to regular questions, but that less straightforward requests are examined for the implications of the act. The profession has to engage in a training strategy at strategic, awareness and practitioner levels. It is particularly important that we adhere to codes of professional ethics in such areas.

Finally there is no clearer illustration of how the profession must present the very best image of itself than by rehearsing the issues

raised by those who consider themselves to be Knowledge Managers, but who do not have the training and education that library and information professionals offer. It is a threat, but can be met with active challenge if our skills in information organisation, exploitation and use are kept honed and sharp. This takes commitment from our employers but it also requires attitudes that capitalise on opportunity and make good the investment made in our education and careers.

Keywords:

Continuing Professional Development, Professional Body, Skills, Qualifications, Education

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Footnotes

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