

Raising Professional Standards – The role of the Professional Institute

Dr Aileen Wood

Introduction

In the UK, there are many opportunities available to staff to gain academic, professional and vocational qualifications. In educational terms, these training activities are subject to formal curricula set by national organisations such as universities and professional associations. The award of such qualifications is normally subject to examination or formal assessment. Although some professional societies operate on a global scale, the range of qualifications available varies between countries. Within the higher education sector, international schemes exist that give equal status and recognition to university degrees taken in other countries. Some professional associations have reciprocal agreements recognising each other's academic and professional qualifications, e.g. Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, American Library Association, Australian Library and Information Association recognise each other's qualifications.

CILIP

CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers in the UK. It has around 22000 members working in all sectors, including business and industry, science and technology, further and higher education, schools, local and central government, the health service, the voluntary sector, national and public libraries.

This paper looks at three roles that CILIP has in defining and maintaining professional standards. These are a) professional qualifications, b) accreditation of university courses and c) seal of recognition for training programmes

Professional Qualifications

CILIP operates a framework of professional qualifications – these are Certification, Revalidation, Chartership and Fellowship. Application for all qualifications is by the preparation and submission of a portfolio. This is a rigorous process that can be readily accommodated into existing staff appraisal schemes and other development activities. The focus at all levels is on evidence-based practice ensuring that staff reflect on their own learning and applications of new knowledge and skills that are specific to their workplace. Anyone wishing to complete a CILIP qualification must be a fully paid-up member of the Institute.

The professional qualifications comprise 4 levels.

- a) **Certification** recognises the contributions made by library and information staff working in a para-professional capacity. This scheme acknowledges that staff may not hold academic qualifications but do have experience, expertise and experiential learning. Although a qualification in its own right, the Certification Scheme enables successful candidates to progress to Chartership Membership through work-based learning. Successful candidates are entitled to use the post nominals ACLIP
- b) **Chartership** Chartered Membership (MCLIP) is the second highest professional qualification awarded by CILIP and is considered the 'gold standard' for the information professional. It is recognised throughout the world. Chartered Membership is not an academic award but recognition of the highest standards of professional practice and a commitment to undertake continuing professional development. Throughout the training period, candidates are supported at local, regional and national level. This takes the form of mentoring, training courses, networks, reading lists, discussion lists and meetings. Successful candidates are entitled to use the post nominals MCLIP
- c) **Revalidation** The Revalidation Scheme offers formal recognition of a 3-year period of continuous professional development. It is important that practitioners demonstrate that they

are regularly updating their knowledge and skills. Chartered Members can use a wide range of activities to gain official recognition of their professional commitment and achievements. On successful completion of the 3-year revalidation period candidates receive a Certificate of Revalidation.

- d) **Fellowship.** Fellowship is the highest professional qualification awarded by CILIP. It signifies that a Chartered Member has applied an increasing level of professionalism through personal professional practice and through the contribution made to the profession at large. Applicants for Fellowship must have 6 years at Chartered Membership (MCLIP) level or 2 successful Revalidation cycles (equal to 6 years). The achievement carries the right to the designation Chartered Fellow and the right to use the post nominals FCLIP, Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.

Accreditation Board

Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental and collegial process of self-review and peer review. It assures students that accredited courses meet the standards of the profession they are about to enter. CILIP has a role accrediting these and other related courses for approval and make decisions on their acceptability. This means reviewing each course curriculum to ensure that it meets the minimum standards required by the Institute and addresses the elements in CILIP's Body of Professional Knowledge (BPK). Increasingly.

In the UK there are around 20 universities that offer library and information degrees at foundation, undergraduate (BA / BSc) and postgraduate levels (Diploma / MA / MSc). In addition there other universities that offer related courses e.g. health informatics, pharmaceutical information or information systems.

In assessing a course CILIP is primarily concerned with relevance to current and developing practice in librarianship, knowledge management and information science. Courses should provide students with a theoretical framework for research and practice in the field of information. CILIP does not stipulate the exact content but expects the aims and objectives of the courses to be consonant with the Body of Professional Knowledge. T

The learning outcomes for the core content of the course should address a significant proportion of the BPK. Generic management and transferable skills, including project management and research skills are expected to be included in the course. CILIP expects all students to be exposed to current professional practice and courses submitted for accreditation must show how this is achieved, either through student placement or some other appropriate way.

Successful courses are accredited for a 5-year period.

Seal of recognition

A further role of the Accreditation Board is to award the CILIP Seal of Recognition. This acknowledges the important contribution made by the many excellent providers of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the library and information community. The Seal of Recognition recognises high standards in the content and relevance of a wide range of training and development activities, and is awarded to CPD providers that directly address an element of CILIP's Body of Professional Knowledge (BPK). This new award offers training providers an additional incentive to support and enhance CPD opportunities for LIS practitioners at all stages of their careers

CILIP's Seal of Recognition guarantees the relevance of training and development courses offered by commercial, public, not for profit and academic organisations to the library and information community in its broadest sense.

The Seal of Recognition will enable CILIP members to choose training and development activities with confidence, knowing that the content has been independently assessed and reviewed in terms of its relevance to specific learning needs, within the overall context of the Body of Professional Knowledge (BPK). This defines the core Library and Information Science (LIS) knowledge base and also includes environmental and transferable skills, for example policy and governance, law, computer literacy and management.

Holders may be institutions or organisations providing relevant training activities. The Seal of Recognition may be applied to a one-off activity: recognition ceases when a particular learning activity is no longer offered. For the purposes of recognition, a learning activity is a training and development session where the outcome is relevant to the work of the information practitioner and seen to be part of a programme of continuing professional development (CPD). There is no minimum period of duration, nor does recognition require a minimum number of delegates to be registered: activities may last from a few hours to several weeks and may range from one-to-one to group sessions for a whole student cohort. The emphasis is on the content and its relationship to the CILIP Body of Professional Knowledge (BPK). If a provider can successfully demonstrate that the course specifically addresses one or more areas of the BPK and that it will contribute to enhanced professional practice in the sector it will be considered for approval.

Providers must have a system in place for monitoring and evaluation of each activity

All applications will be assessed against the following two criteria:

1. The activity is relevant to the specific learning needs of librarians, information professionals and knowledge managers by addressing at least one element of the Body of Professional Knowledge
2. The course provider has agreed to meet the requirements outlined in CILIP's conditions for authorisation as a CPD provider.

Successful applicants are entitled to display the Seal of Recognition logo on their training material

Conclusion

CILIP welcomes applications from the UK and international information professional whether for Professional Qualifications; Accreditation of university courses or Seal of Recognition for training and developmental activities.

Aileen J Wood
PhD MA BA (Hons) FCLIP MITOL ACMI AssocCIPD

9 July 2007