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Library and Information Education and Research in Great Britain

Some observations on the current situation and speculation on future trends

This paper reviews the context in which changes are taking place in education for librarianship and information work in Great Britain. It outlines the external drivers of change – the emerging job markets and the financial rewards available to library and information science professionals; and government expectations of growth in the University system, coupled with reduced funding for institutions and students. It points to some of the major current issues in course design and delivery: modular course structures; knowledge management, information literacy; and distance learning. The current situation of undergraduate and postgraduate education is discussed, as well as current activities to define academic standards. Finally the paper suggests some future trends, including a greater diversity in course provision and a greater emphasis on the education and employment of 'library technicians'.

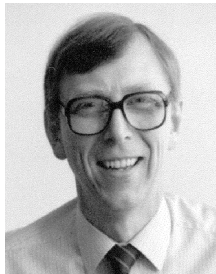
Bibliotheks- und Informationsausbildung und Forschung in Großbritannien: Einige Beobachtungen bezüglich der augenblicklichen Situation und Spekulationen über zukünftige Trends

Dieser Artikel untersucht den Zusammenhang von Veränderungen, die in der Ausbildung im Bibliotheks- und Informationswesen in Großbritannien vorstatten gingen. Er hebt die äußeren Faktoren der Veränderungen hervor: die sich entwickelnden Arbeitsmärkte und die finanziellen Auszeichnungen, die Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaftlern verliehen wurden, die Regierungserwartungen zum Wachstum des Universitätssystems, im Zusammenhang mit den reduzierten Fonds für Institutionen und Studenten. Er erwähnt einige der größten augenblicklichen Fragen der Kurse Design und Dokumentlieferung sowie Fernstudium. Die momentane Situation zurück- und vorgestufter Bildung wird diskutiert sowie die augenblicklichen Aktivitäten, die akademischen Standards zu definieren. Abschließend vermittelt der Artikel einige Zukunftstrends, die Probleme wie eine größere Vielfalt im Kursangebot sowie einen größeren Schwerpunkt bei der Ausbildung und Beschäftigung von Bibliothekstechnikern einschließen.

Bibliothécaires et documentaires: formation et recherche en Grande Bretagne: quelques observations sur la situation actuelle et des visions sur les tendances futures

Cette contribution fait passer en revue le contexte dans lequel les changements dans la formation des bibliothécaires et des documentaires ont lieu en Grande Bretagne. Elle met en évidence les facteurs extérieurs du changement – les nouveaux marchés de travail et les ressources financières accessibles aux professionnels des sciences de bibliothèques et de l'information; et les expectatives du gouvernement quant au développement du système universitaire liées aux ressources diminuées pour les institutions et les étudiants. Elle met l'accent sur les principales solutions actuelles des cours: structure modulaire des cours; le maniement des connaissances; compétence en la matière de documentation et la formation à distance. La situation actuelle des formations „undergraduate“ et „postgraduate“ est discutée ainsi que les activités actuelles pour la définition de standards académiques. Enfin, la contribution suggère quelques tendances pour l'avenir, y inclus une plus grande diversification des cours proposés et un appui plus fort sur la formation et l'embauchement de „techniciens bibliothécaires“.

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Education and Training from 1991 to 1993, and Chairman of the Professional Board of IFLA from 1993 to 1995. From 1993 to 1995 he was also Chairman of the (British) Library Association's Personnel, Training and Education Group. He is currently a member of the Council of The Library Association; a member of the Editorial Board of *Education for Information* and Chairman of both the Heads of Schools and Departments Committee of BAILER: the British Association for Information and Library Education and Research, and of the Executive Board of EUCLID: the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research.

Introduction

The general shape and structure of education for librarianship and information science in Britain has been well documented in a volume prepared on behalf of the

Heads of Schools and Departments Committee of BAILER: the British Association for Information and Library Education and Research (Elkin and Wilson, 1997). It is not a static field of knowledge, nor has there been any stability in the political and organisational context since that review was completed. As is now widely recognised, this is a discipline with a global relevance. Given that government Ministers and educational administrators appear to meet with each other to share ideas internationally at least as frequently as University teachers and researchers, trends in the management of higher education in one country soon appear to reflect developments in others. Aspects of the British scene seems likely to appear familiar to colleagues in other countries, e.g. the impact of Communications and Information Technologies, increased student numbers, reduced funding, changing course structures, enhanced quality controls, and greater emphasis on university rankings. In a number of respects, however, some initially unique developments are taking place in Britain. This paper aims to take stock of the present position, and to speculate about the immediate future.

The context of recent changes in Britain

There are now 17 Universities in the UK teaching librarianship and/or information studies. Most people are familiar with the changes in the names of the former „Schools of Librarianship“, which now offer courses with a variety of titles. Driving the name changes in the 1990s were changes in the job market for graduates with related skills, and in the funding model for Universities.

The jobs available were increasingly in specialised information services, in the private sector, demanding different skills and aptitudes, and financially more attractive. A clear picture of the financial rewards in the various sectors is difficult to obtain. Some estimates can, however, be made by examining such surveys as exist. In public libraries, the median salary grade for all posts other than clerical staff translates into an annual salary similar to the national white-collar average salary, currently around £20 000 p.a. In Universities and Colleges the median appears to be around 10-15% higher, and in special libraries another 10% higher. These figures appear to be confirmed by the Library Association's (LA) membership data, which reveals that the median salary level of members is in the £18k to £22k band. The data is, of course, distorted by the basis for its collection. The LA's membership is heavily based in public and academic libraries, which account for only about 50% of the library and information science (LIS) work force, and the proposed merger with the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS) will make only a modest impact on this factor. Together their members represent a large proportion of the currently practising graduates in library and information studies in Britain, but the extent to which they are representative of the information profession as a whole is not clear.

Top salaries and career potential earnings are more difficult to identify. Changes in local government have resulted in public library services being merged in multi-disciplinary departments, usually with education, cultural, or recreational services. In theory, the career potential for able managers is to become Heads of these larger

departments with substantial salaries. In practice, in all too many cases, the posts held by senior library professionals seem to be no higher than the third or fourth level in the hierarchy. In the Universities and Colleges, mergers (‘convergence’) of the management of libraries, computer services and other teaching support services have become common. The breadth of knowledge of the Librarians has already in the majority of cases resulted in them taking the most senior posts, with a wider range of responsibilities and commensurate salaries. Similarly in commercial and industrial organisations, the centrality of information to the management process and to the organisation's competitive success, acknowledged in the current interest in Knowledge Management, has seen significant improvements in the status and reward of some LIS professionals.

It remains the case that only 6% of the LA's members enjoy salaries above £27 000 p.a. With something like two-thirds of the LIS work force based in London and the South East, where the *average* salary for all occupations is around £30 000 p.a., the prospective financial rewards of a career in conventional library and information work can scarcely appear attractive to prospective, high calibre recruits.

The University funding model supports Universities on a *per capita* basis, and encouraged Universities to enrol more and more students in pursuit of the government's aim of creating a better educated workforce for the next Millennium. It also provided substantially higher levels of funding for students of ‘information science’ (i.e. computer-based courses) than for students of ‘librarianship’, reflecting the higher costs of teaching a subject which requires significant investment in equipment, software and support staff. In most cases, growth was achieved by the Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences (SLIS) by introducing new courses, aimed specifically at emerging sectors of the job market, rather than creating a glut of graduates with inappropriate skills.

Nonetheless, the Universities have come under severe financial pressure as the government not only expected them to increase student numbers, but also reduced the *per capita* funding each year. Estimates vary, but it is not difficult to demonstrate that the real funding per student has been reduced by at least 30-50% in the last 10 years. At a time when costs of teaching the subject are increasing because of the growing emphasis on the use of Information and Communications Technologies, such changes are not welcome. The impact on institutions and on individual Schools and Departments varies, but it has for example resulted in Staff: Student Ratios worsening from around 1 : 10 to between 1 : 15 and 1 : 28 in the member Schools and Departments of BAILER.

The Universities have sought to ameliorate the situation as best they can, in the same way which all other public and private organisations have responded to financial pressures in the last few years – flatter management structures, and fewer departments with a wider spread of activities. Thus, the former Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies, having begun to diversify their portfolio of courses to support the Universities' attempt to meet the government's expectations of growing student numbers, found themselves being merged with other units whose subject matter now appeared in some ways similar. The main links formed were – as might be expected – with business studies, with computer sci-

ence, or with communication and media studies, influenced by the nature of institutions or developments within the SLIS, and have brought new skills, expertise and attitudes into the SLIS. The changes and trends towards amalgamation of subject departments have been more evident in the 'new Universities' created from the former Polytechnics in 1992. Most of the older Universities' departments have been in a stronger position to maintain the *status quo* because of their strong research base and the associated income. The pressure to generate income inevitable brings the SLIS into more contact with the commercial world, possibly to the detriment of relations with the public services.

Issues in course design and delivery

An earlier paper (Johnson, 1998) identified six major challenges facing the information profession as the 'Information Society' emerges, and the response by some of the SLIS in terms of courses aimed at: assisting users to deal with information overload; the high level of technical skills required to manage the new Information and Communication Technologies; the competition with other professions for the management positions in converged library, information and computing services; the need to incorporate a broader range of knowledge and skills, drawn from those traditionally seen as separate sectors of the information industry such as communication studies, and publishing; the need to develop a higher level of skills in teaching and facilitating the use of information; and the need for a greater ability to work with other people. Many of the courses which have been introduced involve collaboration with other disciplines to produce the required depth of knowledge, and present new challenges in terms of ensuring that their teaching is of at least comparable quality.

Arrangements for financial support for students, for both tuition fees and living expenses have been changed by successive governments. State support for student maintenance was originally intended to provide sufficient funds for an independent student, but was reduced to take account of their parents' income. During the 1980s, the share of the cost borne by students and their parents was gradually increased, and government support was finally withdrawn in 1998/99. The students' financial situation has further deteriorated from another change that took effect from 1998/99. To further reduce government expenditure, undergraduate students entering University for the first time now also have to pay part of the cost of their tuition, again linked to their parents' financial circumstances. As might be expected, there has been a noticeable increase in the proportion of students with part-time jobs. Many now have paid employment for 20 hours or more each week. Such students are increasingly focused only on the assessed elements of their course, and the notion of student centred learning, „reading for a degree“, becomes more difficult to sustain.

The trend towards part-time study is supported by other measures, including courses based on modules taught and assessed in one Term or Semester rather than over a whole year. National systems for credit accumulation and transfer, compatible with the European Credit Transfer System, have been put in place. These changes are also intended to underpin the provision of conti-

ning education courses. The Higher Education Funding Councils now appear to be moving towards paying Universities on the basis of the number of credits for which students have enrolled, rather than on the expectation of a year of full-time study.

The need to reflect new developments in information management in the curriculum has not slowed down. The philosophy of 'just-in-time' information provision, as opposed to 'just-in-case', requires information professionals to be more pro-active. The necessarily greater emphasis on the understanding of user needs and behaviour, and on the effective management of services is reflected in course contents.

Knowledge Management has at last placed information on the corporate agenda at a high level. It has caught the attention of a variety of professional groups: medical economists, lawyers, engineers, and human resources managers who are interested in capturing, analysing, and making better use of information; and the computer scientists who are devising improved methods to store, retrieve, represent, and share it. It is already being taught in schools of business and computer science. Some of the current interest could be ascribed to short term challenges presented by changes in the economy, and the business community's continual fascination with new ideas for improving performance. However, perhaps more significantly, the committees concerned with standards for financial accounting in the UK are currently seeking to establish procedures for defining and valuing information as one of the intangible assets of an organisation. This will ensure it a permanent place in the corporate balance sheet and on the agenda of the Board of Directors. It thus becomes a development with a long-term future, and one in which the SLIS must invest. The Library and Information Commission has supported work to define the range of activities encompassed by the concept of Knowledge Management, the skills required, and the opportunities it offers to LIS professionals (TFPL, 1999). The first Masters degree to be offered by a BAILER member is the MSc in Information and Knowledge Management offered by the University of North London as a distance learning course (Coulter, 1999). Thames Valley University has renamed its undergraduate major subject as Information and Knowledge Management, and refocused the minor subjects with it may be combined in a degree with that title. The Robert Gordon University has established a Centre for Knowledge Management to undertake consultancy, research and training for external bodies on a commercial basis, and expects to have a new study programme in place for the Millennium.

Studies of Knowledge Management, and of the de-institutionalisation of the information transfer process through widespread access to the Internet, emphasise the need for the use of IT and information to be seen as a basic skill throughout society. Several of the Schools already have well-developed expertise in this field, and have a central role in teaching it across the whole of their institution; others have been involved in developing teaching programmes as part of the 'e.lib' electronic libraries programme in the Universities. This brings with it the expectation that the teaching will be from the perspective of the information user, rather than that of the information manager. Following the establishment of the National Grid for Learning and the Public Libraries Net-

work, which will link all schools and public libraries to the Internet and the World Wide Web, the government has allocated more than £200 million from the National Lottery to the New Opportunities Fund for training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. This should ensure that all teachers and librarians throughout Britain receive training over the next 3 years to prepare them to work with networked resources. Several SLIS have now approved by the New Opportunities Fund as providers of the necessary ICT training for both librarians and teachers.

The growth of the Internet also challenges the SLIS to think about the market for their courses on a global rather than a local basis. Distance learning programmes present new – and some unwelcome – challenges for educational institutions and for employers. There will be few providers, as distance learning programmes are expensive to prepare and deliver, and it seems likely that the SLIS will seek to differentiate their provision and focus on separate markets. It will, however, have a key role not only in delivering continuing education, but also in providing a response to the needs of specialist areas of the job market for education and training. Aberystwyth has already responded to a request for support (with an accompanying offer of development funding) to develop a distance learning course in music librarianship.

The overall impact of distance learning on the viability of conventionally taught courses has yet to be tested. However, it has been noted that in recent years, education delivered by foreign institutions through branch campuses has become increasingly common in Europe (Confederation, 1999). The development of a 'virtual campus' on the Internet does not require the same investment that has been necessary to establish these branch campuses, and courses in the English language are increasingly available. The current availability on the Internet of Masters degree courses in LIS from the USA and Australia suggests that the future providers of professional education in the UK are as likely to be Universities in other English speaking countries as the existing UK Schools and Departments. These courses lack a national context, and students may thus lack relevant professional insights. The process of accreditation of both courses and individuals by national professional bodies will need to be reviewed.

Undergraduate courses and student recruitment

Against this background, there have been significant shifts in student recruitment, most noticeable at the moment at the undergraduate level. Many of the SLIS are experiencing major difficulty in recruiting students to courses in 'librarianship', whilst at the same time finding abundant recruits for their other undergraduate courses. The reasons for this are by no means clear, but discussions with careers guidance teachers and advisers point to a negative image of careers in 'library' work, apparently emanating from the public and school library staff who are the main contact with the profession for most pupils and their parents. Whether this refers to the nature of the work, the working environment, the continual down-sizing and restructuring of the public sector, or its uncompetitive salary levels and poor career prospects is not clear. Its impact is.

Several Schools has already discontinued undergraduate courses leading to degrees with 'librarianship' in the title; in several others their future is under review. The School of Print Media, Publishing, and Communication at Napier University in Edinburgh established a new undergraduate programme in librarianship and information studies in 1998/99, but poor recruitment led to a decision to not enrol students in 1999/2000. In some institutions, librarianship survives only because there is a substantial body of students taking a broadly based programme with many common modules, and there remain sufficient students wishing to take the modules in library studies to make them viable. Meanwhile, degree programmes in subjects such as 'Information and Communication Management' flourish.

Table 1 Undergraduate courses in BAILER member Schools and Departments

	Institution	Degree title
England		
Birmingham	University of Central England	– Business Information – Information and Library Studies – Information and Media
Brighton	University of Brighton	– Information and Library Studies – Information and Media Studies
Leeds	Leeds Metropolitan University	– Business Information Management – Business Information Systems – Information Systems
Liverpool	Liverpool John Moores University	– Business and Information – Business Information Systems – Information and Library Management – Information Services Management
London	Thames Valley University	– Information and Knowledge Management with Business – Information and Knowledge Management with Data Communications Support – Information and Knowledge Management with Electronic Publishing – Information and Knowledge Management with Multimedia Computing – Information and Knowledge Management with Software Design – Information and Knowledge Management with Sound and Music Recording
	University College London	– Information Management
	University of North London	– Information Management
Loughborough	Loughborough University	– Information Management and Business Studies – Information Management and Computing – Library and Information Management – Library Studies Publishing with English
Manchester	Manchester Metropolitan University	– Information and Communications – Information and Library Management – Information Management

	Institution	Degree title
Newcastle	University of Northumbria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Art History and Information Studies – Information and Communication Management – Information Studies and French – Information Studies and German – Information Studies and Spanish
Sheffield	University of Sheffield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Accounting and Financial Management with Information Management – Business Studies with Information Management – Information Management
<i>Northern Ireland</i>		
Belfast	Queen's University of Belfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Computer Science and Business Information Technology – Management and Information Systems
<i>Scotland</i>		
Aberdeen	The Robert Gordon University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Computing and Information Corporate Communication Information and Library Studies Publishing Studies
	Queen Margaret University College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information Management
<i>Wales</i>		
Aberystwyth	University of Wales Aberystwyth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Studies – Information and Library Studies with another subject (choice from 20 + subjects) – Information Management, Accounting and Finance

One factor that has helped to sustain some undergraduate courses has been the number of mature people who have been encouraged to enter higher education. Now, however, some courses appear to be noticing a decline in the number of mature entrants. The potential market – people with the ability to undertake higher education who had not taken a degree immediately after completing their secondary education – was always recognised as limited. The recent government decision to introduce student fees may also prove a particular deterrent to this group of potential students. Interestingly, however, the distance learning undergraduate course in librarianship at Aberystwyth continues to recruit well, apparently largely from nongraduates who are already working in libraries.

Postgraduate courses and student recruitment

Recruitment to postgraduate courses has been generally buoyant, partly because of one unplanned consequence of the government's expansion of the Universities. There have been a growing number of graduates who have taken first degree courses with no vocational relevance, and they need to take a vocational postgraduate course to improve their employment prospects. Many of them, however, whilst they have a clear appreciation of the skills which they can obtain from a course in a „School of Librarianship“, are nonetheless making it transparently clear that they have no wish to work in ‚libraries‘. Increasingly, the range of careers that they wish to pursue within library and information work is re-

flected in the range of courses offered at postgraduate level by BAILER members. One interesting trend, reflecting the diversity of the discipline, is the growing number of specialised postgraduate courses which are aimed at professionals seeking updating or enhancement of their skills, such as Loughborough's MBA in Information and Library Management. Others, such as Sheffield's MSc in Health Information Management, and Robert Gordon's MSc in Information Analysis, can serve that purpose, but are also open to applicants seeking a first professional degree.

Table 2 Postgraduate courses in BAILER member Schools and Departments

	Institution	Award title (Certificate/Diploma/Masters degree)
<i>England</i>		
Birmingham	University of Central England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Studies
Brighton	University of Brighton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information Management – Information Studies
Leeds	Leeds Metropolitan University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Management – Information Studies
Liverpool	Liverpool John Moores University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Management
London	City University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Electronic Publishing – Information Science – Information Systems and Technology – Pharmaceutical Information Management
	Thames Valley University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information Management
	University College London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Archives and Records Management – Electronic Communication and Publishing – Information Science – Library and Information Studies – Library, Archive and Information Studies – Records and Archives Management (International)
	University of North London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Knowledge Management – Information Services Management
Loughborough	Loughborough University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Studies – Information and Library Management – Information Studies
Manchester	Manchester Metropolitan University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Management – Information Management
Newcastle	University of Northumbria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Library Management – Information and Records Management – Information Studies – Information Studies (Overseas) – Records Management
Sheffield	University of Sheffield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Health Information Management – Information Management – Information Systems – Information Technology Management

Institution		Award title (Certificate/Diploma/Masters degree)
		– Librarianship – Library and Information Management
<i>Northern Ireland</i>		
Belfast	Queen's University of Belfast	– Information Management
<i>Scotland</i>		
Aberdeen	The Robert Gordon University	– Electronic Information Management – Electronic Publishing – Information Analysis – Information and Library Studies – Information Management – Publishing Studies
Glasgow	University of Strathclyde	– Information and Library Studies – Information Management
<i>Wales</i>		
Aberystwyth	University of Wales Aberystwyth	– Archive Administration – Health Information Management – Information and Library Studies – Management of Information and Library Services – Records Management

It has to be acknowledged that, for at least a few students, part of the attraction of postgraduate study in LIS has been the availability of government support for tuition fees and living expenses. Changes in financial support for postgraduate study are now taking place that may impact widely on student recruitment and course provision in the near future.

Students enrolling for several Universities' postgraduate LIS courses have been supported by grants from the European Social Fund (ESF). The new government policy is to try to direct these funds towards the Further Education (FE) Colleges, to provide support for training at the technician level. In the absence of these scholarships, the number of students who can afford to enrol on postgraduate courses may be reduced.

For administrative reasons, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has transferred the Studentships and Bursaries for postgraduate study in LIS in England and Wales to the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB). This makes sense in bringing English and Welsh LIS students into a funding system similar to all other disciplines (in which postgraduate student support is administered by the Research Councils). Under the DfEE administration, institutions were allocated a fixed quota of studentships, and these quotas had changed very little during the last 30 years, despite changes in the subject field, in courses, and in perceptions of institutions' relative merits. The AHRB is, however, moving to a system in which the awards are made to students, selected on the basis of their intellectual ability. The new system is to be gradually introduced from 1999/2000. Under this system, the students choose which University to attend, and this implies a threat to the continued existence of those courses that do not attract students of a high academic calibre. Whether high calibre students, burdened by debts accumulated during undergraduate studies, will be willing to pursue postgraduate studies leading to careers in relatively poorly paid sectors of the economy such as LIS (and especially the relatively poorly paid sectors

within LIS) also remains to be seen. If LIS does not attract students of a comparable calibre to those attracted into postgraduate study in other disciplines, there appears the further possibility that the number of LIS students supported by the AHRB will be reduced.

Under the new AHRB arrangements, English and Welsh students will now, for the first time, be able to take their studentship to a University in Scotland or Northern Ireland. Scottish students have generally been free to take a postgraduate course in an eligible subject at any University in the United Kingdom, and LIS is an eligible subject.

Scotland and Northern Ireland have different arrangements for postgraduate student support, but these are also currently under review.

Continuing education

Hitherto, the potential market to which the SLIS might offer continuing professional development (CPD) programmes was perceived as small (Johnson, 1989), and there were numerous competitors, notably the professional bodies and the growing number of commercial agencies and private consultants. Several have offered part-time specialist postgraduate courses, such as Manchester's Information Management programme. Some SLIS have been amongst the pioneers of distance education, notably Aberystwyth which now has several hundred students taking its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in this mode of study. Most of the SLIS have offered occasional short courses to meet specific requests from local employers and professional groups. However, during the last few years significant changes have taken place in the nature of the Schools' staff knowledge and skills base, in the scale and importance of external activities relevant to their work, and in the need to generate additional income. The potential for CPD activity is now being generally re-assessed.

Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA)

Prior to their designation as Universities, the former Polytechnics had been subject to regular assessment of their teaching quality and academic administration by the Council for National Academic Awards. Much of this responsibility was transferred to the regional Higher Education Funding Councils in 1992, and became applicable to all the Universities. Initially the Funding Councils established their own methodologies and time cycles for carrying out the assessments. Thus, as the only SLIS in Wales, Aberystwyth was assessed without any comparison with other SLIS in the UK. In Scotland, for administrative convenience, Strathclyde University chose to submit its Department of Information Science as part of the TQA of Business Studies. In the following year, when the assessment cycle focused on LIS, various other factors led to a decision by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to not assess the 3 other Scottish SLIS. An assessment of LIS is to take place in the English Universities in 2001.

More recently, following the Dearing Report on Higher Education (Higher, 1997), a unified national system of Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) has begun to emerge under the auspices of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It will not be until the next cycle of assessments that the Scottish and Welsh Universities are assessed alongside the English.

NVQs and benchmarking of academic standards

Technician level education for library and information work (provided in Further Education Colleges) and staff training in libraries has enjoyed only limited support in the past. The government launched the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) scheme to improve the quality of *training*. This has had a mixed reception, not only within the library and information services community, but also in various other sectors of the economy. It requires a significant commitment on the part of employers. Nonetheless, pressures on staff budgets are leading to a growing recognition that much of the routine work that was previously considered to be the preserve of the 'professional' librarian could in fact be performed by a well trained technician working in a well planned and managed environment.

Difficulties arose because of attempts by some of the NVQ's supporters to try to relate it to professional qualifications based on higher education, and because of the different perspectives of professional bodies. Some bodies representing other professions indicated that professional status could only be compared to NVQ Level 5, whilst the LA and the Industry Lead Body for NVQs in LIS appear to accept that NVQ Level 4 represents professional levels. Defining Level 5 has proved a major stumbling block for the Council for National Vocational Qualifications. Repeated concerns have been expressed at the failure of the lower NVQ levels to develop the analytical, critical, and evaluative skills that have been the hallmark of university education, and thus the basis for admission into professional membership. The advocates of NVQ have attempted, so far unconvincingly, to defend their concept of 'knowledge' as being the equivalent of these graduate skills. However, there is some evidence that NVQs are delivering improvements in training, as they were intended to do (Parker, 1999). For a variety of reasons, the Dearing report pointed to the need for clearer definition of 'graduateness'. This recommendation has now been taken up by the QAA, which is approaching the task of defining academic standards on a subject by subject basis. This will form the basis for aspects of the TQA of LIS. The aim of the Benchmarking exercise now under way is to outline the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that are recognised by the award of a degree in Library and Information Management. It seems inevitable that this will clarify the distinction between graduates and holders of NVQs. It may raise some further issues. Will there be a substantial reevaluation of whether jobs need to be filled by graduates or by trained technicians? Will it encourage further changes in the structure of the workforce in those large library and information services where a division of labour is practicable? What will be the impact in 'one man bands' and other, smaller LIS units? How will this affect recruitment to the SLIS, and employers' approach to in-service training?

Professional accreditation

The LA and IIS will be consulted about the proposed benchmarks for academic standards. All but one of the BAILER members currently have courses accredited by the LA and/or the IIS. A number of the English institutions have indicated that they would wish their regular accreditation reviewed by the LA and IIS to take place alongside the TQA.

Recently the LA and IIS have agreed on a joint process and criteria for accreditation of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. They are now engaged in discussions with the British Computer Society (BCS) about closer collaboration in accreditation. There are countless universities teaching courses in „information science“ or „information management“, which have tended to look towards the BCS for professional accreditation, or are courses in business studies for which at present there is no accepted professional association offering accreditation.

An unknown quantity is the influence of the European Union on the future of professional accreditation as a part of the Union's aim to achieve mobility of labour between member States. The European Bureau for Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) appears to have taken little interest in this to date. However, the European Council for Information Associations has recently established a project to draw up guidelines for a European Certificate for Information Professionals. This draws heavily on a French model, and has secured funding from the Union's LEONARDO programme for research and development in vocational training (Graumann, 1999). Strangely, the one British professional body included in the project consortium is Aslib, the only one with no previous experience of professional accreditation. Its involvement may be attributable solely to its interest in the potential income from related training activities.

Issues in research development

The 1992 national Research Assessment Exercise was the first in which the new Universities took part. In 1996, the results continued to be dominated by the older Universities such as City and Sheffield, whilst Northumbria and Robert Gordon Universities emerged as the leading centres for research in the field developing in the 'new universities'. Many of the Schools are now engaged in their preparations for the next Assessment, in 2001. The impact on their activities has in some respects been marked. An unrefined analysis of the publications since 1996 abstracted in *Library and Information Science Abstracts* suggests that there may still be a correlation between the number of publications per member of staff and the results achieved in the last Assessment. However, it also suggests that there may be one or two universities whose rating could fall significantly. Within the discipline there exists well-established research support through public funding mechanisms (principally the research arm of the Library and Information Commission, formerly the British Library's Research and Innovation Centre). However, the emergence of a more active research community in the new Universities has placed pressure on its inadequate funds (Academic, 1999). The emergence of the Arts and Humanities Research Board as a new funding agency in the field offers some prospects for improvement in the level of financial support available.

League tables

The assessments of teaching and research quality have encouraged the publication of league tables in the national newspapers, which appear to indicate the relative

merits of universities. The tables describe the institution as a whole, rather than individual departments. They make little allowance for variations in the teaching assessment methods that existed in the 4 regions, and ignore the fact that departments are selective in their submissions to the Research Assessment. Some of the tables take account of factors other than teaching and research assessments, such as graduates' employment rates, expenditure on library and computer services, and the number of beds in student residences. The extent to which the publication of these tables in the national press influences the perceptions of potential students of LIS, and of the employers of LIS graduates, is not clear. Most LIS teaching has not yet been assessed. However, the implied endorsement by major national newspapers appears to be used, sometimes selectively, in University publicity. Nonetheless, the University authorities are sceptical and have persuaded the QAA that the results of future TQAs should not be presented as a numeric score or in a simple one word summary. This will make the compilation of league tables a more difficult task.

Collaboration and mutual promotion

The need for collective strength through voluntary co-operation has long been recognised. In Britain dramatic changes in the British government's approach to higher education led to the establishment in 1991/92 of a new organisation, BAILER – the British Association for Information and Library Education and Research. A Committee of Heads of Schools and Departments has a clear remit to guide policy and to lobby government, and an elected Committee of staff members was charged with organising staff development activities and with the general promotion of the Schools.

BAILER can identify a number of successes. To spread best practice, several staff development events have been organised, aimed at staff teaching in specific subject areas, and an annual conference includes invited papers on recent developments in teaching and research. A joint conference with Scandinavian colleagues has become a regular feature of activities (Library, 1997), and exploratory discussions are taking place about collaboration with the SLIS in Spain. The Heads' Committee has lobbied the government about a variety of issues, and is beginning to be recognised by government agencies as a body that should be consulted on relevant matters. In the initial period of the new government, proposed changes in policies and organisations has resulted in BAILER's involvement in numerous consultation activities.

Future trends?

Recent enrolments of new students suggest that, over the next couple of years, there may be a significant downturn in the number of graduates emerging from undergraduate programmes recognisable as courses in „librarianship“. The introduction of tuition fees for undergraduates seems likely to exacerbate this trend. Evidence from other countries points to the likelihood that prospective undergraduates will search for courses which will lead to careers where they will have some prospect of quickly eliminating debts accumulated whilst

studying. It also suggests that there may be a decline in students taking postgraduate courses because of their inability or reluctance to finance further study. The ensuing shortage may benefit new graduates as competitive pressures improve salaries, but this will place pressures on employers' budgets.

Universities are increasingly driven by market demand, particularly in terms of providing courses that will attract economically viable numbers of students. The Schools and Departments will inevitably focus their efforts on courses which will provide secure employment for the skills of their teaching staff, and which will sustain their contribution to the Universities' finances. There seems likely to be a greater variety in course content, more frequent changes in course titles, and more frequent discontinuation of courses that cease to be viable. There may be significant gaps in the curriculum, for example in covering the ethos and operations of public and school libraries, which will need to be remedied by distance learning courses. For the University departments, there could be significant problems in retaining traditional expertise and developing new skills to meet continually changing demands.

Recruitment into employment will need to become more sophisticated in matching graduates' knowledge and skills with job requirements. There is already a move in some Universities to implement a system of American-style transcripts specifying the titles of modules completed by individuals and the grades achieved. In-service training and support for staff development will have to be enhanced to make good any specific deficiencies.

There could be a general trend towards students undertaking full-time study at their local University, and towards part-time study where LIS courses are not locally available. A pattern of local study coupled with the high costs of accommodation and the potential deterrent of the social impact of relocation may exacerbate problems of recruitment in certain parts of the country where there are no nearby Universities offering LIS courses. There may be a growth in courses such as that in Bristol, where local library staff have successfully established a part-time course to meet needs in the region, or in distance learning courses aimed at local and global markets such as Northumbria's Masters degree in Records Management. Part-time study or distance learning will take students several years to complete, and will require much closer monitoring and employer support to ensure the quality of learning. It will also impact on employment patterns, as more graduates working towards vocational qualifications seek part-time employment at salary levels which will enable them to live at a reasonable standard, whilst paying off debts incurred as undergraduates. They may increasingly look towards their employers for financial support whilst studying for professional qualifications, and may expect some recognition in terms of status and rewards as they progress through their studies. This has implications for future staff structures in the larger libraries. Library work is becoming more challenging and demands higher levels of skills and better pay. Faced with the need to cope with these higher costs at a time of static budgets, employers seem likely to place more emphasis on the employment of technicians.

The experience of other countries where technicians have been introduced into the workforce has been mi-

xed (Johnson, 1990). All too often, the role of the technician is not clearly defined and there is some reluctance to acknowledge the capabilities of the technician. There is a noticeable potential for conflict with aspiring professionals employed in the same organisation whilst completing their education. Professional Associations can have a strong influence on development, and play a significant part in ensuring that technicians are adequately recognised. They can best do this through a system of accreditation of the training programmes which differentiates them from higher education. This does not necessarily imply the termination of professional accreditation for Bachelors degree programmes, but may call for a redefinition of the LA's grades of membership.

Central government agencies also have a part to play in ensuring a consistency in qualifications which enables proper recognition to be given to the education and consequent employment prospects of both graduates and technicians. Without guidance from government and/or professional associations, it is inevitable that there will be confusion about technician education and training, its aims and content, and about the capabilities of technicians. If employers are not clear about the benefits which they will derive from employing technicians, they are unlikely to provide incentives for their development, and the viability of education or training programmes is undermined. A major problem centres on the staffing requirements of small libraries and information centres where the employment of a full-time professional may not be justified, but where a technician alone would be inadequate. These are complex issues. The main current danger is that the profession will drift into a changed environment. What is needed is a clear policy for future development, unbiased by the interests of a membership based organisation such as the LA.

However, we do appear to be about to have a new government sponsored agency in the UK intended to monitor and encourage change not only in training but also in educational provision. The recent conditional approval for the establishment of a National Training Organisation (NTO) for LIS must be regarded as a welcome development. The Library and Information Commission is about to be merged into the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC). The MLAC Design Group has indicated that one of the Council's concerns should be education, and that its remit should encompass all kinds of library and information service (Establishment, 1999). However, MLAC's overall remit is so broad, it is difficult to see it playing the leading role in LIS education and training which we might have expected of the Commission. In some eyes, the NTO appears a derivative of the Industry Lead Body for NVQs, but its role is much broader and less partisan (Pluse, 1999). It will have access to government departments and agencies not only to influence policy across the whole range of education and training in the sector, but also to secure funds for the investigations and initiatives which will be needed to ensure that the educational and training qualifications are aligned with the structure of jobs and organisations to underpin successful recruitment to the future industry workforce.

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