

CILIP Accreditation: Ensuring students are prepared for professional practice

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Abstract:

This paper outlines the changing environment for both LIS education and professionals in the UK. Recognising the need to respond to these changes, the discussion focuses on the role of CILIP in accreditation and the strategy used by the professional body to create a revised accreditation process that was fit for purpose. It identifies key themes that arose from research undertaken as part of the CILIP's Future Skills Project to review and revise the model accrediting Academic and Vocational qualifications in the UK and overseas. The paper also provides an overview of the new methodology for accrediting academic and vocational programmes implemented in 2013 and the impact this has made.

Keywords: UK, Accreditation, Academic, Vocational, Qualifications

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers in the United Kingdom.

CILIP has a unique role to play in accrediting learning provision. The Royal Charter (CILIP, 2014) requires the professional body “to foster and promote education, training, invention and research in matters connected with information science and libraries and information services” and “to promote the improvement of the knowledge, skills, position and qualifications of librarians and information personnel”.

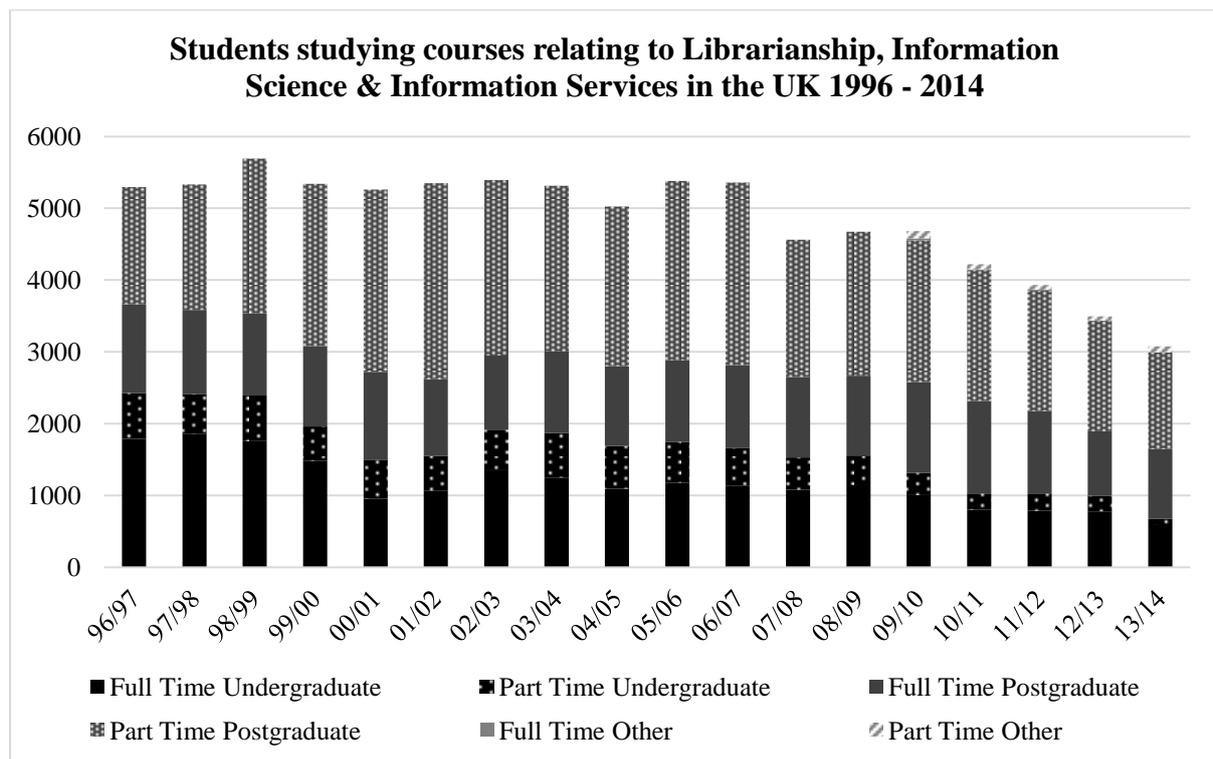
CILIP accredits academic and vocational courses both in the UK and internationally as a way of helping individuals identify programmes of study which will best prepare them for professional practice.

This paper outlines the changing environment for both LIS education and professionals in the UK. Recognising the need to respond to these changes, the discussion focuses on the role of CILIP in accreditation and the strategy used by the professional body to create a revised accreditation process that was fit for purpose; ensuring courses reflect the changing needs of employers, the profession and students.

Changing environment of LIS education

The LIS profession is currently undergoing rapid change in the UK. Cuts to funding is leading to reduced numbers of Library and Information Professionals, new business models and new areas for skills development within the public sector. Meanwhile, there is a rise in the importance of the managing knowledge and information in both the government and commercial sector.

Academic institutions need to adapt to this in order to survive. The following chart provides as analysis of data available on the Higher Education Statistics Agency website (www.hesa.ac.uk) and demonstrates a clear decline in those studying Librarianship and Information Science since 1996; from a high of 5692 in the 1998/9 academic year down to 3075 in 2013/4.



This decline is also evidenced by a reduction in traditional library education provision; 4 universities have ceased to run programmes since 2012. However, there has also been an increase in a new breed of academic and vocational programmes which aim to meet the needs for a profession whose boundaries are expanding beyond information and knowledge management to include informatics, digital asset management, digital curation, and data management.

In addition, educators have had to develop new modes of learning provision; reflecting employer and student needs and creating attractive packages which enable them to recruit potential students.

Defining our Professional Future

In 2010, CILIP published a major piece of research into the future of the profession and the professional body. With the aim of providing strategic direction for CILIP, *Defining our Professional Future (Research by Design, 2010)* provided in depth research into the changing environment and the needs of members. A presentation on key themes arising from the report highlighted that:

“Library and information professionals are found to be experiencing increased demands, coupled with a perceived fall in staffing levels. Financial restraints are seen as the key driver for those changes. The vast majority agreed that there is increased pressure to provide a high standard of service with a smaller budget, and 83% agree that there is an increasing need to act in a more commercial manner. Looking ahead, professionals expect their working environment to evolve significantly and 94% agree that technological developments have changed the way that people search for information and that their role is rapidly changing as technology advances.”

Research by Design, 2010

The report identified key areas CILIP needed to concentrate on to develop a relevant offer to members, stakeholders and employers. Following this, CILIP Council agreed the key strategic themes would be:

- Advocacy and Thought Leadership
- CPD and Skills
- Membership and Services
- Networking and Community

In response to this, CILIP Council initiated the Future Skills Project in 2011. The project engaged a wide range of stakeholders to create a new Professional Knowledge and Skills Base for library, information and knowledge workers, a revised process for the accreditation of academic and vocational qualifications, and a relevant and a revitalised offer for members to gain Professional Registration.

The Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB)

Whilst this paper focusses on the Accreditation strand of the Future Skills Project, the creation of the PKSB (www.cilip.org.uk/pksb) was an important step for CILIP in reflecting the changing knowledge and skill set of the profession. Developed following extensive consultation with members, learning providers, and employers, the PKSB outlines the outlines the skills base for the Library, Information and Knowledge profession.



The PKSB identifies key knowledge and skills areas that are required by Library, Information and Knowledge workers. Each of the Professional Expertise and Generic Skills sections breakdown into between 6 and 10 specific knowledge and skill sets.

This was a marked change for CILIP in articulating the scope of the Library, Information and Knowledge Profession and provided a solid base from which to discuss a new methodology for the identification of academic and vocational qualifications which could be accredited by CILIP.

Developing the PKSB was therefore an important step in the development of the new model for Accreditation.

Methodology and approach

The review of accreditation was completed by the Director of Professional Services who was new to accreditation and was therefore able to take a fresh look at the product, its value and the processes for delivering it.

The review was completed in two phases and utilised a variety of methods.

The first phase of the review ran from January to May 2012 and aimed to identify the issues with the current accreditation process and how it could be improved. This involved:

- **Desk based research** - All the paperwork for Accreditation was reviewed by the Director of Professional Services, starting first with the information available via the website. This was to ensure that the process could be seen from the point of view of the applicant. In addition, the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) team compiled a spreadsheet of CILIP Accredited and Non-Accredited courses related to

the Library, Information and Knowledge Sector and a literature search on the accreditation offer delivered by a number of other professional bodies.

- **Business Process Mapping** - Business process maps were completed for all elements of the Accreditation process. This was completed using the documentation available and in discussion with CPD Team.
- **In depth interviews** - An in depth interview was held with all learning providers with CILIP accredited courses; the majority of which were face to face at the University. Interviews were also held with institutions which had previously had CILIP accredited courses but did not have courses running at the time and a few who were developing or had courses running which were not accredited.
- **Questionnaires** - A further email questionnaire was sent out to six institutions that appeared to be running courses; some of which had previously expressed an interest in Accreditation. Of these, three responded. In addition, as the work of the Accreditation Board had been temporarily suspended whilst the review was being undertaken, board members were sent a questionnaire to complete.

The second phase ran from May – August 2012. This stage was used to refine the proposed model and undertake follow up research into areas identified by the first Phase. This was predominantly completed through desk research and focus groups. Two focus groups were held; one with an Employers Panel that ran throughout the life of the Future Skills Project (seeking the employer perspective on a range of skills related issues), the other with all learning providers with CILIP accredited courses.

Key findings

The research strategy identified an extensive range of issues that were assessed and addressed through the development of the new model. However the key themes that arose from the research are outlined below.

There is clear value in the Accreditation of learning provision for both Students and Learning Providers by the Professional Body

CILIP accreditation is important as it assures students that accredited programmes provide an excellent preparation for professional practice and will be a solid base for anybody entering the library, information and knowledge profession. Prospective students can therefore choose programmes with confidence, knowing that programmes and modules cover essential skills and knowledge, which have been rigorously assessed and approved by CILIP.

This is even more important as the growth of distance learning programmes and MOOCs provide further opportunities for students around the world to engage with UK provision. It is also important as emerging economies and learning provision provides opportunities for students to study at home and gain equivalent qualifications if they wish to study in the UK.

Through the Future Skills Project consultation it was clear that there was significant value for Learning Providers. Potential students use the list of accredited provision as a key method for identifying study options and learning providers identified that the majority of referrals to their websites had been from the CILIP website. Learning providers also identified that the

accreditation process is a useful way of demonstrating the value of their work to senior management and the wider university.

CILIP should widen the scope of accreditation

Previously CILIP only accredited undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Vocational programmes, Foundation degrees, Masters in research, Doctorates were not allowed to be submitted for accreditation; missing out a range of routes being used as pathways to the profession. In addition, the old Body of Professional Knowledge lacked clarity for learning providers; making it difficult to assess and select relevant programmes for accreditation.

Consultation with Learning Providers identified that there was an opportunity for CILIP to accredit a more comprehensive set of learning programmes supporting professional practice. This was supported by research conducted by the Professional Associations Research Network which identified that a significant number of Professional bodies are accrediting courses from Level 3 and above. The following table is an excerpt from that research. It shows that whilst the majority of Professional bodies focus on Masters level provision (Level 6), around a third accredit entry level vocational qualifications and foundation degrees (Levels 3-5) and a many accredit postgraduate and doctoral levels.

% of Professional Bodies accrediting qualifications at each Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) Level							
(based on a sample of 72 Professional bodies)							
QCF L1	QCF L2	QCF L3	QCF L4	QCF L5	QCF L6	QCF L7	QCF L8
10%	13%	31%	35%	39%	51%	47%	47%
<i>(PARN, 2012)</i>							

The benefits of accrediting a wider range of qualifications are clear.

- By widening the scope of accreditation to all academic and vocational qualifications (ie to include Diplomas, NVQs, Foundation degrees, Masters by Research, and Doctorates) it ensures that all courses relating to the Library, Information and Knowledge field must relate to the Professional Knowledge and Skills Base and the needs of employers; providing the same level of assurance for students no matter what level or type of qualification.
- This recognised more flexible routes into the profession chosen by members and employers.
- It will raise the visibility of CILIP to members that are accessing lower and higher level academic programmes. This provides opportunities to promote and increase membership.

It was therefore agreed that CILIP would accredit all learning provision relevant to the profession, no matter what level.

CILIP should consider accrediting courses sooner

There was significant discussion about the stage at which accreditation could be sought for a programme. Under the previous scheme, programmes needed to have been running for a year before they could apply for Accreditation. This hampered recruitment onto new programmes and further development as a result.

Research identified that learning providers have to go through an extremely rigorous process to get new courses up and running in the first place. It was also noted that at the point a new

programme is signed off, an estimated 90-95% of the evidence required for Accreditation is in place. It was therefore suggested that CILIP allow programmes to be accredited once they have been validated.

Supporting information, assessment criteria and the application process needed significant revision

Whilst Learning Provider experiences were varied, research identified a trend of growing dissatisfaction in the overall process. Many of the concerns expressed were linked to issues with the process, communications, clarity and transparency and timescales.

The most common complaints about the Accreditation process were that it was time-consuming and that the whole process took too long; predominantly because of:

- the volume of paperwork that had to be pulled together
- responding to requests for further information
- requests to re-format and change existing information

It was also found that whilst CILIP stated the assessment criteria to be used and provided a list of documents which should be submitted, there was no clear guidance for learning providers and assessors regarding what was actually being assessed. It was clear that this lack of clarity contributed to the number of requests for further information. When this assertion was tested, learning providers identified that they were unclear what was being asked of them and frequently received requests for further information without understanding the context for these requests.

The creation of business process maps also highlighted this problem. At three points within the process staff, assessors and the Accreditation Board were given the ability to ask for further information until they were satisfied with the answer before moving onto the next stage.

Employers should be more involved in the development of programmes

Whilst there was evidence of good practice in encouraging the involvement of employers in programme development and delivery across a range of current learning providers; it was evident that students, members and employers wanted to see a greater level of engagement with learning providers. This was welcomed by learning providers, though many identified that they do try to engage with employers with little response.

Accreditation visits should be re-introduced

There was a general feeling amongst learning providers and the Accreditation Board that the move from panel visits to entirely paper-based assessment had not delivered a more streamlined process or added value/effectiveness.

Many felt that there was a value in having visits, not least in having face to face contact between the learning provider and the Assessment Panel (including CILIP officers). Visits also add value in being able to see the facilities, meet students, showcase excellent practice and ensure the right questions are being asked as part of the visit.

A process for annual reviews should be implemented

It was clear from the consultation that there would be value in undertaking annual visits to all Learning Providers. This would facilitate better information sharing, planning for future

accreditation/re-accreditation activity, identifying new and emerging developments and further opportunities to engage with students; promoting and encouraging membership.

New model for Accreditation

The new model for the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications was introduced in May 2013. In November 2014, assessment criteria 1 was further revised to take account of further changes in the way that Learning Providers were having to structure their programmes to attract students; opting for a greater level of optional rather than core modules.

Whilst retaining rigour, Accreditation is now a more streamlined and user-friendly process with a clear focus on accrediting good quality learning experiences which will benefit learners and prepare them for professional practice. This incorporates:

Clear information and guidance

Learning providers are able to access a greater level of information and guidance about accreditation via the website and from the CILIP team. Guidance outlines accreditation requirements, assessment criteria, the application process and sets out the timescales for assessment (including process charts) so all stages and requirements are clear and transparent (<http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/products-and-services/accreditation-learning-providers/applying-accreditation>)

Programme and module-level accreditation

Whilst CILIP accredits at programme level, all modules that form part of that programme carry accredited status. This enables learning providers to offer CILIP Accredited Modules as CPD opportunities and learners to benefit from being able to pull together not just learning credits but accredited modules which could be pulled together into an accredited programme.

CILIP also assesses relevant standalone modules or modules which may be offered as part of a programme which would not be accredited by CILIP. Examples of this include modules in Palaeography, Latin and Rare Books at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Assessment criteria

Learning providers can apply for CILIP accreditation for new programmes or modules once they have been validated and approved by their usual internal procedures and the relevant approving body.

Programmes which are currently running can be submitted to CILIP for review at any time.

There are five assessment criteria, all of which must be met. They are:

1. The relevance of the programme to the Professional Knowledge and Skills Base

Learning providers use a mapping tool to demonstrate how programmes and modules map to the Professional Knowledge and Skills base. The following table identifies the minimum standards for awarding accreditation at each of the academic levels.

Professional Expertise	Vocational programme: 50% in 4 of 8 Foundation degree programme: 50% in 6 of 8 Bachelors programme: 50% in 8 of 8 Postgraduate programme: 50% in 4 of 8 Doctorate programme: see below*
Generic Skills	Vocational programme: 50% in 2 of 4 Foundation degree programme: 50% in 2 of 4 Bachelors programme: 50% in 4 of 4 Postgraduate programme: 50% in 4 of 4 Doctorate programme: see below*
Ethics and Values	100% coverage in all areas for all programmes Doctorate programme: see below*
Wider Library, Information and Knowledge Sector Context	
Wider Organisational and Environmental context	

* Doctorate programmes must be directly relevant to the PKSB. Learning Providers must demonstrate how they are grounded in a professional expertise(s).

2. The learning provider is providing a high quality learning experience for students

The learning provider must provide evidence of:

- Validation through any internal quality assessment procedures
- Validation through any external quality assessment procedures
- Good support from the senior management of the organisation for the department and the delivery of programmes or modules
- An ongoing dialogue to gain and respond to student feedback
- Sufficient resources and facilities to support learners

3. The learning provider engages with employers to ensure that programmes are relevant to students

The learning provider must provide evidence of:

- Employer involvement in shaping programmes/modules
- Employers support/complement programme delivery (CILIP recognises there may not be specific involvement in individual module delivery)
- The kind of roles students progress to on completion of programmes

4. Staff are up to date with current professional practice

The learning provider must provide evidence that:

- There is a staff development policy in place
- Staff are keeping up to date through membership of relevant professional bodies, CPD, research and practical projects

5. Students are encouraged to engage with CILIP

The learning provider must provide evidence that students are introduced to CILIP, its products and services and how it can support their career development.

Applying for Accreditation

Applications are made using CILIP's Virtual Learning Environment. This enables learning providers to easily share information with the CILIP team as they begin to build their submission, for CILIP to manage the application process and assessment, and for visibility of the status of the application.

There is a clear timeline and timescale for Accreditation. The Accreditation assessment process takes no longer than 8 weeks from the time the application is submitted. All timescales are agreed in advance as part of CILIP's ongoing engagement with Learning Providers.

Applications are reviewed by one of a team of four contracted assessors. Managing assessments in this way has provided a greater level of distinction between those making the decisions and the team providing advice and guidance. There is no Accreditation Board to ratify decisions. Instead, the assessor uses the assessment criteria and clear guidance to make a decision and the new Professional Registration and Accreditation Board simply maintain an overview of the process and assessment criteria. Assessors are brought together for training, development and information sharing twice a year.

In turn, clearer guidance and advice from the CILIP Team about what is being assessed has ensured that there is a reduced reliance in requiring further clarification and evidence as part of the assessment process.

Once an application has been submitted it is reviewed by the assessor and an initial assessment completed. The initial assessment identifies any specific concerns which will be passed to the applicant so they are aware of the topics for discussion at the assessment visit.

All applicants receive a visit which will last for one day (though if there is a significant number of programmes or number of concerns this may be extended to 2 days in discussion with the applicant). Applicants are told the result of the application at the end of the visit and receive a written report a week after the visit.

Annual review/monitoring

CILIP staff visit all UK based learning providers with accredited programmes on an annual basis. CILIP maintains regular contact with International learning providers via email and web conferencing.

This is not intended as a formal assessment. It is an opportunity to catch up, hear about what is going on in the institution, any interesting trends or research areas, and identify any potential changes to programmes.

If as a result of discussions it is felt that a review of a programme or set of programmes are required, CILIP will write to the learning provider to outline any concerns. The learning provider will then have an opportunity to make a written response to these, providing relevant evidence as appropriate.

If it is felt that the changes are significant enough, CILIP may request that a full or partial review be conducted.

Support from CILIP

CILIP is now providing a greater level of interaction with accredited programmes as a way of strengthening links with both learning providers and students. This has included the introduction of free student membership, a student newsletter and the re-introduction of student roadshows to encourage participation in CILIP.

Covering costs

CILIP has introduced a charge to contribute towards the costs of delivering Accreditation.

Impact

Feedback on the new model for accreditation has been extremely positive. Learning providers are pleased with the clarity in the process and new assessment criteria. However, we have continued to use feedback from learning providers, students and employers to ensure the process and criteria remain relevant.

Since introducing the new process, six new programmes delivered by four new learning providers have been accredited alongside the majority of previously accredited providers who were seeking reaccreditation of their programmes (including some new programmes).. However there are also another six new learning providers working towards accreditation with increasing interest from overseas learning providers seeking CILIP accreditation.

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