



# World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

---

<b>Code Number:</b>	202-E
<b>Meeting:</b>	146. University Libraries and other General Research Libraries & Information Literacy
<b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b>	Yes

## **The International Information Literacy Certificate: a Global Professional Challenge?<sup>1</sup>**

**Cristóbal Pasadas Ureña**

Dirección: Biblioteca, Facultad de Psicología, Campus de Cartuja  
Universidad de Granada,  
Granada, Spain  
E-mail: [bibpsi01@ucartuja.ugr.es](mailto:bibpsi01@ucartuja.ugr.es).

---

### **1. - Introduction**

The joint open session of the IFLA University and Other General Research Libraries and the Information Literacy Sections within the 68<sup>th</sup> IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Berlin 2003 will try to start a debate on the viability of developing an International Information Literacy Certificate (IILC) as part of the Information Literacy (IL) worldwide agenda, its rationale, goals and basic operation, the challenges for the LIS profession in such a move, and the role IFLA and the national Library Associations could play. Expected outcomes include as well clear directions about ways to advance the IL agenda, as IFLA fights for a greater presence of libraries and the LIS profession in the UNESCO World Summit on the Information Society (2003-2005).

References to a certificate or credential of the IL achievements by individuals, mainly in connection with the European/International Computer Driving Licence (E/ICDL) as a possible model, began to appear in the LIS professional literature in the UK as late as 1999 or 2000<sup>2</sup>; as yet there seems to be no deep and thorough study of the topic from a national or a discipline-focused standpoint. On the other hand, even though most of the IL literature available shows a local and/or national scope, especially as regards practical approaches within particular libraries and institutions, the IL paradigm to be obtained out of this literature and out of practical experience might be used as a sound starting point for international standards and developments, the certification issue included. In fact, if the IFLA Information Literacy Section is working right now on an international IL standards project, once these international standards have been agreed upon, a most natural sequel should be the development of benchmarking tools and

mechanisms for homogeneous provision of content and outcomes measurement around the world, if and when and where appropriate.

The discussion on the IILC seems to be timely in view of current events in at least three major areas of global professional interest, all of them having to do with the future of our profession:

1) The UNESCO World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) (2003-2005) will take place in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 and Tunis in November 2005<sup>3</sup>. According to IFLA Secretary General, Ross Shimmon, during the preparatory stages the emphasis has been “on the technology rather than the content”, and “libraries have received little attention”. In an attempt to redress the situation, a Pre-Summit Conference has been organized for IFLA by the Association of Swiss Librarians for International Relations, to take place in Geneva from 3-4 November, 2003, under the title “Libraries @ the HEART of the Information Society, Prelude to the World Summit”. IFLA representatives and librarians from all over the world should contribute with a clear agenda on the best ways to foster IL worldwide and the solutions the LIS profession and libraries are ready to enforce, including the IILC issue.

2) IFLA has been going through a process of reorganization and new ways of membership participation since 1999-2000, to highlight and advance the role and contribution of libraries and the LIS profession to society. Berlin will be host to the first transition between President and President-Elect. As a result, the strategic planning cycle of all IFLA units has been adapted to this new time frame for IFLA activities. In new President Kay Raseroka’s program for her term 2003-2005, the digital divide and the information-rich information-poor gap feature prominently, as well as advocacy for the profession. There is a strong component of advocacy for the profession in the IILC. On the other hand, those in favour of the word “literacy” in the IL name rightly stress the vital importance of basic literacy skills as the starting point for a continuum with IL and the rest of literacies people need from cradle to grave, something that has been brilliantly captured under her presidential motto: **lifelong literacy**. This priority is even more relevant if we think of this decade as a “literacy decade”. Any discussion on the IL agenda at international levels must include provisions on this obvious priority for most countries; and a good planning of the eventual IILC surely would have to take it into account.

3) Latest developments in assessment and evaluation of public services stress the need for libraries to offer evidence of their contributions to society. For example, in the higher education sector of the USA, in particular, IL programs of academic libraries are best assessed in the light of institutional learning outcomes for accreditation purposes<sup>4</sup>. In fact, not many people from all educational, cultural and social backgrounds even in the most developed countries master the information and other key skills required by critical thinking, social integration and active participation in democratic decision making –the most valued outcomes society should expect from investments in cultural, educational and social services. The IILC can contribute to the personal advancement of citizens with a clearly designed mechanism of provision, content specification and assessment methods for one particular key skill: IL education, both for entry, middle and exit level and for continuous upgrading. The IILC would provide sound and internationally accepted content, guidelines for provision, assessment tools for individual achievements and evaluation of outcomes for IL programs, as well as for IL skills as a comprehensive institutional outcome for all types of libraries and information services.

Thus, the IILC concept and product might serve as:

- an important contribution of libraries and the profession to the IL agenda worldwide within the information society<sup>5</sup>
- a powerful mechanism for the promotion and advancement of libraries and the profession globally
- a way of enhancing social visibility and -hopefully- financial viability of professional associations and IFLA.

## 2. – **The IL Agenda**

IL can be said to epitomise the really important contribution and impact of libraries and the LIS profession on society; but the tools and mechanisms to prove the nature and extent of this impact are still missing or in a very early stage of development. In trying to develop the IILC as a kind of evidence globally, the LIS sector can benefit from the whole body of literature on library instruction, user education and IL, both in theory and practice, as applied in different countries. The contribution of the LIS sector to the comprehensive educational issues implied in the IL agenda has been paramount, even if not yet fully recognised outside of the LIS environment –not the least because of the biased emphasis on channel, format or medium (Information and Communication Technologies -ICT) rather than on content (information plus knowledge in whatever format –indigenous knowledge systems included) –a very common mistake even among LIS professionals. Fortunately enough, not only practicing librarians like Town<sup>6</sup>, but also sociologists like Castells<sup>7</sup>, ICT educators like Reffell and Whitworth<sup>8</sup>, or researchers of information issues in organizations like Davenport<sup>9</sup> or Koenig<sup>10</sup>, to name only a few authors, rightly stress the obvious difference between having the possibility of accessing information through the latest ICT device and being able to use that information to best advantage, a capability for which librarians have always provided formal and informal education and training for users in all types of libraries. The achievements of the LIS profession in this area, and particularly the emphasis on information content and information use rather than on pure technology, should be used in marketing the profession. The IILC could be one of the main “products” of the profession to be marketed among employers, community leaders, educational agencies, and users.

### 2. 1. – **The IL paradigm**

Present-day IL situation might be summarised and articulated as an IL paradigm to be obtained from the literature and the expertise available; this paradigm should be used as foundation and rationale for the IILC. However, this IL paradigm has never been implemented or achieved in full in any real LIS situation for any single country in the world. Individual institutions in several countries might be said to be well ahead and better off than the rest along this road, but even they still have a long way to go.

2.1.A. – **Factors and drivers** which help understand why the IL agenda has been brought to the forefront of the LIS professional priorities have been best summarised, among others, by Sheila Corral<sup>11</sup>:

- Shift from an industrial age to an information age (knowledge economy; learning society)
- Growth in publications and communication (information overload)
- Advances in information-related technologies (ICT literacy)
- Replacement of mediation with self-service

- Public concern with national skill levels
- Quality frameworks, accountability and outcomes assessment for public services

### 2.1.B) IL in theory

2.1.B.1) **Definitions:** according to Sheila Webber and Bill Johnston<sup>12</sup>, “Information Literacy is the adoption of appropriate information behaviour to identify, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, leading to wise and ethical use of information in society”. Of course, all this encompasses effective information seeking, informed choice of information sources, information evaluation and selection, comfort in using a range of media to best advantage, awareness of issues to do with bias and reliability of information, and effectiveness in transmitting information to others.

2.1.B.2) **Models and Standards:** the body of IL literature includes theoretical model building; development of standards and guidelines to act as catalysts of these models; application of these standards in real library situations through IL instruction programs; and articulation of best practices and critical success factors drawn from experiences already tested which have been successful according to sound assessment methods.

**Models** are theoretical constructs which try to present in a coherent framework most if not all competencies required for attainment of the features above if one person wants to be considered as information literate at a particular developmental stage<sup>13</sup>.

**Standards** are operational developments of these models, breaking down and describing the nature and extent of different subcategories of IL characteristics. These listings can be used, as is the case with any other type of standards, as guidelines for planning and evaluation for IL programs at local, national and international levels, as well as for establishing learning objectives and outcomes to be documented. Standards available to this date include AASL/AECT (1998)<sup>14</sup> for school libraries and ACRL (2000)<sup>15</sup> and its CAUL adaptation (2001)<sup>16</sup>, plus the ACRL new Objectives (2001)<sup>17</sup> for academic libraries.

### 2.1.C) IL in practice

2.1.C.1) **IL instruction programs:** there are plenty of IL programs developed in different academic institutions across the world and available online. They can be used as evidence for program content and modules, delivery, learning objectives and outcomes, assessment, tests, etc. And of course their features and characteristics should be incorporated into the delivery modules for the IILC.

In addition to **planning** and **content**, the most crucial factors for any IL training program are methods and modes of instruction, responsibility for the instruction (staffing), assessment of individual and program learning outcomes, and evaluation of global institutional outcomes for IL skills among users<sup>18</sup>.

2.1.C.2) **Best practices and critical success factors:** the expertise acquired over the last decade through planning and implementation of these IL programs in higher education institutions in the USA has been collected and analysed in the “Best Practices Initiative” of the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy<sup>19</sup>: as an outcome, a document on the “Characteristics of IL programs which illustrate best practices” has been issued for benchmarking<sup>20</sup>. According to these documents, most salient features of a successful IL program should include:

- commitment of library staff and faculty to the advancement of personal IL and lifelong learning agenda

- integration of IL across the curriculum
- tailoring of programs to student growth throughout learning cycles
- collaboration among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and other program staff and institutional units for delivery
- identification of generic and specific competencies to be acquired for specific subjects and disciplines and professional/occupational levels
- fusion of IL concepts and disciplinary content
- accommodation of multiple learning styles and different approaches to teaching
- building on students' existing knowledge
- acknowledgment of differences in learning and teaching styles by using a variety of appropriate outcome measures, such as portfolio assessment, oral defence, quizzes, essays, direct observation, peer and self review, experience, etc.
- focus on student performance, knowledge acquisition, and attitude appraisal.

Concurrently, critical success factors in the achievements of a good IL education program have been identified in the UK by SCONUL<sup>21</sup>.

All these characteristics are drawn from the higher education environment, but most if not all of them can be said to be of value when trying to develop standards, content specifications, learning modules, tests, etc. for IL programs and the IILC for all types of libraries.

## 2. 2. – Issues and concerns for future IL developments

This summary of the IL paradigm offers a brief but fair picture of the currently consolidated IL situation, just to reassure LIS professionals that they already have a solid platform for new developments. Of course, IL education is a field of professional theory and practice which will continue to evolve as more and more LIS institutions and professionals around the world live through the same challenges, issues and problems that prompted IL developments in currently leading institutions, countries and settings. So, IL is expected to continue to feature prominently in the professional literature along the next decades; and hopefully the debate on the IILC might serve as a triggering device for more in-depth considerations of the global aspects of IL, clearly the missing link as yet in the IL paradigm.

There are several issues and problems in the IL agenda for most countries where a deep scrutiny of the eventual contributions of an IILC could be of help, not the least in trying to avoid the obvious risks for specific types of libraries and LIS sectors in such an approach. This can be said to be a good summary of the main issues yet to be addressed in the IL agenda for all types of libraries:

- integration with institutional strategies
- integration of IL in the key skills agenda, even though recognising that IL encompasses skills as well as problem solving and critical thinking capabilities
- clear differentiation of IL from other key skills, and specially from ICT literacy and from learning to learn<sup>22</sup>, as a way of documenting professional contribution and setting up sound conditions for partnerships with other professions and stakeholders in the key skills agenda
- full awareness that IL encompasses lower-order skills and higher-order competencies like critical thinking and problem solving and even research skills
- clear understanding of the context-specific nature of IL; context includes specifications for different age cohorts, educational segments, academic disciplines, professions, national and regional characteristics, etc.

- need for assessment of individual achievements as well as for evaluation of institutional IL education programs
- staff training and qualifications.

In addition, for libraries in all educational sectors, these issues are of utmost concern:

- curriculum integration
- IL education provision as collaboration between all learning facilitators
- highest level of IL achievement as a global, institutional outcome at exit stage<sup>23</sup>.

The missing links in the IL agenda and paradigm could be summarised as follows:

- practical approaches and developments from a truly international perspective
- IL standards as applied through different disciplines
- IL standards as applied through different work and professional environments
- IL as developed in different local, national and regional settings
- clear guidelines as to levels of learning objectives and outcomes for different stages (entry level; mid-career; exit stage)
- standardization
- research skills and their articulation within the IL agenda.

### **3. The International Information Literacy Certificate**

These issues and problems will continue to be addressed at institutional, local, regional or national levels. There seems to be no reason why they could not be dealt with globally for the benefit of all citizens and the worldwide advancement of the LIS profession. Of course, certification will not solve all IL problems for all situations in all countries, but can help through internationally agreed policies and procedures.

The European/International Computer Driving Licence (E/ICDL) offers a model worth considering and studying if we want to find a clear direction for the global IL agenda. An IILC developed in this way would help the LIS sector to address some of these issues

- by offering a practical framework for development of activities
- by helping countries and LIS sectors and institutions less developed along the IL agenda to start their own route and approach from already clearly established conclusions and best practices
- by prompting efforts of LIS professionals in these situations to find answers to local needs and circumstances while avoiding most pitfalls in the traditional trial and error approach.

The E/ICDL as a model is not free from well grounded criticism. According to Hilary Johnson, Chair of the SCONUL Advisory Committee on Information Literacy (formerly Information Skills Task Force), the E/ICDL analogy must be applied with care because “the E/ICDL is a ‘one size fits all’ threshold competency approach”<sup>24</sup>. In fact, according to Town<sup>25</sup>, the “direct equivalence ceased to be seen as either possible or desirable” by the SCONUL Information Skills Task Force when they developed the Seven Pillars model. These comments concur with criticism of the E/ICDL model for IT education by Reffell<sup>26</sup>. However, the need for something of the type for IL education has been a recurrent headline in professional circles, at least in the UK<sup>27</sup>. Hilary Johnson again sets the record straight when she states that “what is needed for information literacy is a suite of qualifications which can reflect the educational progression of the various stages of learning and achievement which are so closely linked to information use”<sup>28</sup>. A fair conclusion of this debate could be that there is an obvious need here, and the LIS

sector should try its own approach, taking care to avoid the shortcomings the E/ICDL currently seems to have.

In spite of these warnings, most statements made for the rationale, characteristics and deployment of the E/ICDL are applicable to the IILC, and surely readers of this paper should benefit from a visit to the webpage of the E/ICDL Foundation (<http://www.ecdl.org>) for an in-depth review of their approach.

### 3.1. – The IILC: rationale, objectives, components and deployment

- The IILC certifies that the holder has achieved a basic/advanced knowledge and practical expertise of IL concepts and practice as end user, by passing theoretical and practice-based tests which assess her/his basic/advanced competence in accessing and using the information effectively
- The IILC is an internationally accepted certificate based on a single agreed syllabus developed and maintained by an international foundation under the leadership of IFLA and other co-sponsors as appropriate. National licensees must be a LIS professional association member of IFLA
- Objectives of the IILC include
  - to promote and encourage IL for all at basic/advanced level
  - to raise the level of knowledge about IL and the level of competence in accessing and using information effectively
  - to provide a basic/advanced qualification to assure employers and customers that applicants and practicing professionals have the required level of knowledge and competence in information use for continuous professional updating
- Benefits of the IILC include
  - an IL skills qualification
  - a method of IL skills measurement and validation
  - a model for delivering education and training in IL
- The target population for the IILC is any individual who wants to access and use information competently and get evidence thereof for whatever purpose. Due to the cross-cutting nature of IL skills and the different levels of requirements for different educational sectors and work environments, the IILC is offered in two main alternatives:
  - 1) basic or generic: designed for the general public and students from the primary and secondary education, where the certificate could be evidence of a global institutional learning outcome at exit stage before entering the higher and tertiary education sectors or the job market;
  - 2) advanced or specialized: designed for practicing professionals and qualified workforce, as well as for higher and tertiary education sectors, where the certificate could be evidence of a global institutional learning outcome at exit stage.
- The IILC consist of the following main components:
  - the syllabus, which is the detailed description of the knowledge areas and skill sets to be mastered for certification
  - the questions, tests and any other examination and assessment procedures used to certify the achievements in different modules
  - the guidelines for IILC certification
  - the IILC that attests to the holder's ability to access and use information in whatever format, and states that he/she has been tested according to the authorised IILC modules.

- the card used as an official form to record each test successfully completed before applying for the Certificate.
- The modules included in the syllabus could be taken in any sequence; the tests can be taken in different test centres and indeed in different countries and languages. However, establishment of modules must follow the logical sequence of information seeking, information access and information use, so that in the final benefit of the trainee a fixed time and logical sequence must be recommended for those modules for which previous ones are a functional prerequisite.

### 3.2. – Framework already in place for the deployment of the IILC

- IFLA as international leader, sponsor and guarantor through an IILC Foundation
- other partners include UNESCO, educational authorities, professional associations, international agencies like IPA, ICA, etc.
- national library associations as licensees
- LIS professionals responsible for the delivery of modules if licensed by the national body (this should not prevent, within the educational sector, cooperation with teaching staff and faculty and integration of IL education in the curriculum; however, LIS professionals members of the associations licensed should provide the required links)
- Teaching and learning modules: drawn from the IL paradigm, namely standards, IL programs and best practices. As an example for discussion:

Module 1: Basic concepts of ICT

Module 2: Information needs analysis and different ways of meeting needs

Module 3: Information seeking strategies and effective access and use of information

Module 4: Evaluation of information accessed

Module 5: Organising, applying and communicating information

Module 6: Synthesizing and creating new information

Module 7: Social and legal problems of information access and use

Module 8: Subject-, discipline- and occupation-specific information issues

Module 9: Specific information issues at national and regional level

Module 10: Knowledge management and information issues in organisations

- Questions, tests and other assessment tools: to be built upon experiences and results from national projects like SAILS<sup>29</sup>, CAUL Information Literacy Assessment Project<sup>30</sup>, etc.

In summary, the LIS profession has already in place most of the elements needed to launch the IILC venture. What is still missing is a clear understanding by the majority of librarians and library authorities of the issues at stake, and the establishment of a path to follow.

### 3.3. – Issues about the IILC

If we conclude that there is something worth pursuing in the IILC, then thorough consideration should be given to the following issues and concerns before launching the first pilot exercises:

3.3.1. Financial considerations for the IILC are a *sine qua non* condition. Although the LIS sector should emphasize IL developments as driven by long-term benefits to society in terms of more and more people capable of accessing and using information effectively for whatever purpose, there is no contradiction in viewing the IILC as a venture which will cost money; delivery of modules, maintenance and updating of the syllabus and the questions and tests base, and the internationally standardized product is



something offered to potential buyers, be they either the customers themselves or their organizations (educational institutions for their students; organizations and/or unions for their workforce; social and community services for upskilling of unemployed; professionals for their CPD portfolios; etc.). A market research and a financial viability study should be made right from the start. Consideration of national and regional circumstances will be a must for the establishment of fees, but the philosophy behind should always be cost recovery plus a small benefit for the whole IILC framework (International Foundation, National Associations as Licensees, teaching and test centres, etc.).

3.3.2. IL is to do with skills, which are best catered for through practical training; but at the same time IL is to do with competencies encompassing higher order skills like critical thinking and problem solving, which are traditionally seen as a matter of education<sup>31</sup>. This clearly impinges in the content, scope and learning objectives for the IILC modules, as well as on methods of delivery. If the IILC remains at the threshold level of transferable skills training, it will be a hardly marketable product beyond the educational requirements for the general public in present-day societies. For people in the higher education and tertiary education sectors to be interested in the product, the coverage and provision of education in the higher order skills of critical thinking and problem solving are critical –letting aside the research skills as highlighted by Herson<sup>32</sup>. This, in fact, is the rationale for the basic-generic /advanced-specialized choices referred to above.

Consideration should be given to the sequential up-taking of both alternatives. All university students, for example, would be required/advised to have the generic brand in order to be able to apply for the specific one? Or could it be taken for granted that they get the generic as well when qualifying for the specific brand?

3.3.3) Standardization of content and learning objectives and tests, questions and any other assessment procedures used homogeneously across the world has clear and well documented risks for educational settings: the so called “teach-to-the-test” or “learn-to-the-test” approach devalues the learning experience<sup>33</sup> and can be said to run counter to the overall goal of helping people to learn how to learn. There is an absolute need for curriculum integration here. However, a certain degree of compromise needs to be reached for the development of the IL agenda and the IILC, since not all people wanting to get the certificate will be in a specific educational setting; so they will have no curriculum to integrate the IL training and education with, and will have to take the modules on a stand-alone basis: this could be the typical situation in work environments, where LIS consultants could offer the IILC to the rank and file of an organization as a way of CPD and upgrading of IL skills among all employees. This would be as well the situation with public libraries offering the IILC as a course for local union members, or as part of a social programme for unemployed, or simply for their users.

In fact, upon a closer examination of IL programs around the world, common themes, techniques, and examples for both alternatives as well as for both delivery approaches (curriculum-integrated vs. stand-alone) might outnumber the differences and context-dependent variables for each. And the content, structure, and learning objectives of most IL programs have plenty of shared elements, so that standardization here would not be difficult to achieve (f. ex., the structure of a bibliographic record in a catalogue, the fields of an entry in a database, the basic features of a webpage that can be used as a first evaluation filter, etc.). Thus, the practical examples, the specific tools and the

peculiarities in a given country or region, setting, culture, institution, discipline or profession could be the best way to convey to the learner most of the context-dependent variables.

Too much emphasis on the absolute context-dependent nature of IL could mean a real danger to the profession, and particularly if we conclude that there is no need or use in developing standardized approaches. Each LIS professional or institution could develop their own IL education program without any validated framework of professional reference, or without the real possibility of seeking an accreditation for their program; thus, the professional activity we hold as our main contribution to society would be left by ourselves outside of the professional control that could guarantee conformance to professional and quality standards to the benefit of our clients. On the other hand, we would make it very difficult to use benchmarking techniques for improvement of programs, as far as the context-dependent nature of IL would prevent any homogeneous and standardised approach. If a well established profession takes pride in assuring that its members develop their main activities according to the same code of professional practice across the world, then IL training and education should not be overlooked when it comes to professional standardization, even if it proves to be extremely difficult: this is the real challenge.

3.3.4) Similarly, differences across national, regional and social borders is the other most important issue for the IILC concept and development. As literature collected for the Meeting of Information Literacy Experts in Prague<sup>34</sup> clearly shows, regional and national differences and priorities in the IL agenda across the world make it even more difficult to achieve an international agreement on standards, content of modules, priorities, types of tests and exams, etc. for the IILC. And surely these national and regional differences must be taken into account if the IILC wants to have a truly international, and not simply a Western appeal. Again, considerations about local circumstances and needs can be accommodated within the modules, since most practical contents in information access and use would have to be tailored to local and national or regional sources and tools.

3.3.5. The points above can be of value as well in dealing with the next most important issue for the IILC: how to account for differences in IL needs and approaches across different disciplines and professions/occupations. Further to the availability of two alternatives, this issue can be addressed at least in two ways: either tailoring practical experience and content to specific disciplines/professions in the planning and delivery of modules; or having the specialized brand subdivided in broad disciplines/professional areas (Health and biomedical sciences; Social sciences; Humanities; Sciences; etc.). Being a global institutional outcome at degree level, nothing prevents any particular higher education institution from integrating the IILC concept in the curriculum according to its specific mission and strategic goals for learning outcomes; and nothing prevents IILC developers from designing types of tests and questions which take into account specificities of sources and tools in a set of disciplines for a particular degree, provided that these assessment tools comply with the IILC concept requirements and are endorsed by the international Foundation.

These comments are even most appropriate for the higher and tertiary education sector, where marketing and advancement of the IILC could then include assessment and certification of individual achievements in IL education and training as a showcase or developmental portfolio to use for different purposes when entering the labour/professional market.

On the other hand, consideration must be given to the fact that current standards available are subject to well grounded criticism for lack of guidelines as to scaling and phasing of learning objectives for each specific IL standard according to developmental stages of students for different degrees: f. ex., percentage of a particular skill to be achieved by the end of second year for a specific major. This has to do with the risk of lack of flexibility of the IILC model to accommodate personal learning styles and agendas, including people with learning disabilities. This again will have to result in a kind of balance and compromise in the design of the IILC product: within the educational sector, the IILC as a global institutional outcome at exit stage doesn't require standardization of teaching and learning techniques, so that each institution can accommodate them to local circumstances without any risk of failing to meet the IILC standards if they wish so.

3.3.6 Due to current obsolescence rates and technology replacement rates, recertification of IL skills and competencies should be considered for at least a 10-years period.

3.3.7 A module for the basics of knowledge management and the ecology of information in businesses and organizational environments would be a must for both basic and advanced levels.

3.3.8) Special consideration should be given to the approach to ICT within the IILC. A strong partnership with the E/ICDL Foundation would be an important factor in the consolidation and success of both certificates. Mutual recognition of specific modules would be a very practical approach to synergy and partnership building for marketing as well as for strategic purposes and joint ventures with our ICT colleagues and other learning facilitators. Moreover, for the majority of developing countries where community telecenters are being set up as a priority, partnership of LIS institutions with all authorities and professionals involved in such ventures should be proactively sought, in order to get the maximum social benefit for the community as these resources become available. There is a strong market there for the LIS sector in convincing these authorities and other partners about the social effectiveness of integrated approaches for delivering information services in a converged way, as many higher education institutions have already experienced, although in a very different scale.

A second issue in connection with the ICT has to do with the specific ICT – dependent nature of plenty of tools and activities to be learned for most modules. Careful consideration should be given to the exact situation of countries and social groups in relation to the availability of ICT, so that the ICT-component of modules for the IILC should not prevent citizens with low expectations of accessing these technologies from applying for the certificate. The IL agenda and the IILC does not have to depend on broad availability of these technologies, for in that case the IL could be said to be an added privilege for developed countries and for well-off population segments in those countries. In principle, it could be possible to have the modules and the examples based on real life situations of countries and population segments without much availability of ICT. There would be a problem there for the international acceptability of a certificate without much hand-on experience with ICT-based products and tools; but a special module could be designed to be passed by people wanting to have their original certificate validated in another country where wide availability of ICTs was present in the delivery of modules right from the start.

3.3.9 The LIS sector must seek further partnerships with organisations with interest in these IL developments: first of all the education sector through evaluation and

accreditation agencies; the employment and professional/vocational qualifications sector; local authorities; professional associations and the unions; and cultural agencies like UNESCO, the IPA and other information-oriented organizations (archives, museums, etc.)

3.3.10 Legal considerations in different countries as to the capacity of LIS associations to grant certificates must be addressed, even though the private nature of the venture doesn't call for it and ultimately the success of the IILC will depend on the goodness of the product itself and the marketing strategies of the LIS profession together with strategic partners. And may be there would be special legal requirements for IFLA to act in such an international capacity. These legal issues should be explored further.

A strategic decision is to be made as early as possible as to registration of property rights of the name and concept in as many countries and languages for IFLA and the national associations.

#### **3.4. – The IILC as a way of advancing the IL agenda and the profession**

An IILC developed along the lines above and applied in such a way as to minimize the risks highlighted would be a significant help in addressing most of the important issues yet to be met within the current IL agenda. And specifically the IILC would help to advance the IL agenda at local, national and international levels since it would offer the LIS sector a tool for planning and implementing IL programs of international standing and recognition and specific approaches to the assessment and evaluation issue, the most important one for the advancement of the IL agenda. The IILC being accepted as a global institutional outcome at exit stage for a particular educational segment, it would follow quite naturally an institution-wide commitment for collaborative provision and curriculum integration, the corner stones for any real improvement of the IL agenda to date. This would result in the upbringing of the LIS profession as they have a marketable product to offer to society at large. And not the least, professional associations would gain in membership, cohesion and social visibility since all institutions wanting to offer the IILC to its constituency would have to rely on national associations' members for provision.

#### **3.5. – Challenges**

Many of the issues and concerns outlined above might be seen as challenges if the IILC is accepted as a route worth to be tested and followed by the LIS profession. But all of them can be summarized as being part of the following two comprehensive challenges for the LIS sector:

- LIS professionals from all over the world must be convinced that standardization in this area of professional activities is as desirable, useful and achievable as it has been for many other professional processes and products before. Rightly putting a strong emphasis on the context-dependent nature of IL should not prevent the LIS sector from reaching an agreed middle ground for the IILC, from which specific developments and approaches tailored to local circumstances and needs could be built. By this time it is quite clear that the IL agenda is here to stay and the LIS profession will go ahead with important developments tested in real library situations in different geographical and topical settings; it would be a pity at this stage if the lessons obtained from this experience could not be shared internationally, so that professionals in many countries

and situations who do not have the resources and energy to start their own trial and error approach can rely on something like the IILC concept which has already been tested by colleagues around the world and accepted by professional associations as sound methodology.

The really important challenge with the IILC, then, should be to find that middle ground, that compromise about content/modules, tests/questions/assessment procedures, delivery methods and standards as learning outcomes, so that the “product” can be visualized by society as a normalized and standardized professional product, while at the same time allowing the freedom for specific developments and applications, and responsiveness to context. What really would matter is that the international certificate has the same guarantee of quality and conformance to standards for every segment, irrespective of ways of delivery and adaptation to local requirements.

- Teaching abilities and good foundations in the understanding of the learning process in different developmental stages should feature prominently in the curriculum for the LIS schools in all countries, as well as in the CPD activities of associations and institutions. And of course IL integration in the LIS curriculum should be a must – which doesn’t seem to be the case nowadays even in most advanced LIS schools around the world. The best way for any LIS graduate to be proactive in the IL agenda when entering in the job market is just to have been exposed to a well planned and implemented and successful IL program in their own Library school: LIS professionals should leave their alma mater with their LIS degree plus their own personal IILC (advanced-specialized brand).

#### 4. – Antecedents to build upon for the development of the IILC

Readers of this paper might be by now asking themselves if all this has any real root in actual practice. If we use techniques like strategic management, this is clearly environmental scanning, both internal and external, for the development of your own IL education program; or for the advancement of the LIS profession, if you are engaged in the development and strengthening of professional associations within your particular country or sector. The international IL agenda and the IILC are but logical departures out of a variety of experiences and reflections available, but not yet fully developed to cover their international dimensions.

Reference has already been made to the E/ICDL as a model for the IILC in spite of the shortcomings, especially the “one-size-fits-all” and the “teach-to-the-test” approach. Public libraries in several countries are now offering the E/ICDL as a service to their users, and this should be most welcome everywhere in the world, and especially in situations where public access to ICTs are being provided through telecenters, which could be thought of as a natural component of the social capital already available to the community together with libraries and information services and many other community services. LIS professionals, however, should think about developing their own product, the IL agenda and certificate, according to the rationale presented in this paper, so that users can understand the vital difference between information access and use and the technology used for it.

But even if this obvious model were not available, there are still plenty of experiences and developments to be used as a starting point. Here are the most easily related to the purposes of this paper:

- The rationale behind national IL forums already available in leading countries like the USA, Australia and New Zealand could be easily adapted for the international scene.

- Again, most of the proposals for action in CILIP Past-President Sheila Corrals' campaign for a national IL framework in the UK, as outlined in her *Information capability*, could be easily accommodated into an international approach: definition, terminology, good practice, special interest group to address vital IL issues, etc.
- EnIL's (European Network for Information Literacy)<sup>35</sup> has been set up recently with a long-term goal to develop a common European IL strategy in Higher Education, made up by such interrelated systems as standard competencies for different classes of learners, related educational materials, indicators for evaluation of entry-level competencies, quality of IL level achieved, and outcomes of the courses. Difficulties experienced at the European Union level and the way they will be overcome, if they will be at all, are of direct relevance from a truly international perspective.
- When reading the literature of outcomes assessment in libraries, one comes across a variety of comments that can have a direct bearing for the worldwide IL agenda and the certification issue. Taking as an example the work by Hernon and Dugan, *An Action Plan for Outcomes Assessment in your Library*, here are several points worth mentioning:
  - a) Smith's<sup>36</sup> contention that libraries should take the lead in designing first their own learning units and how they could fit into the curriculum, and then proactively seek to convince faculty and curriculum administrators that the library contributes to the learning outcomes (p. 35). This is really the rationale behind the certificate: a model for IL education programs across the world.
  - b) Learning outcomes to define "what students would be able to do at the time of their graduation and ideally throughout their professional careers" (p. 102). The certificate would be an evidence of the level achieved.
  - c) Basic methods of gathering evidence of outcomes achieved include: developmental portfolios, and nationally developed surveys (p. 104, fig.6, and 105). The certificate could play this role of developmental portfolio on an individual basis, while offering the content and methodology for these surveys at regional and national level.
  - d) "National, state, or regional tests enable institutional assessors to compare programmatic strengths and weaknesses with similar programs elsewhere" (p. 106-107). The certificate would facilitate this benchmarking exercise across the world.
  - e) "There should be an independent assessment, one that places courses within the context of a program of study and looks at the progress that the participants made from the time of their entry into the program until their graduation. That assessment might even look at how well the foundation of lifelong learning has been laid" (p. 133). The certificate would provide here a working model for this type of assessment.
- Again, within the ARL framework for new performance measures and the E-Metrics suite of projects, the project SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills) will try "to develop an instrument for programmatic level assessment of information literacy skills that is valid and thus credible to university administrators and other academic personnel". The tool envisioned by SAILS researchers will be standardized, with items not specific to a particular institution or library, easily administered, proven valid and reliable, and fit for external and internal benchmarking<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, the Information Literacy Assessment Project endorsed by CAUL "aims to develop an item bank validated against the Australian National Information Literacy Standard"<sup>38</sup>. These and other experiences in IL assessment could be used as the embryo for a questions, tests and assessment tools base in the international IL agenda and certificate.
- In the UK, within the organizational environment, TFPL has designed the program FOCUS: Mobilising information, which "concentrates on the information and

knowledge working skills required by everyone in an organization". Modules include Value and impact of information, Finding, Organising, Creating, Using, and Sharing Information<sup>39</sup>.

- Of course, there are plenty of IL courses offered by universities all around the world, either under the label of "Information Literacy Certificate" or not. They tend to be first-year, stand-alone and discipline-independent courses, designed mostly as an aid for the students at entry level. The IILC, on the contrary, should be designed as a global institutional outcome at exit level, so that all graduates should be entitled to receive the same level of IL training and education across the curriculum, and the evidence of their achievements through the IILC, if they wish so.

## 5. – Conclusion and proposal for action

Hopefully by now the reader has got a fairly good idea of the challenges in the international IL agenda and the certificate issue, as well as enough information to be in a position to conclude whether there is something worth to be followed through in the IILC issue or not. If yes, the next question would be quite simple: is it time now to start doing something? Again, if yes, what next? Is there any role IFLA and the national associations could play in leading the developments by means of a carefully planned international process right from the start?

Again, if the answer is yes, a reasonable vision behind eventual pilot developments would be that by 2005 there would be an IFLA- led international IL forum, or even an IL Foundation working on the IL agenda and the certificate; likewise, by 2008 several national associations would have gained licensee status and their members would be engaged in delivering the IILC according to standards.

To start the journey towards that vision, there would be several alternatives:

1) an IFLA interim Information Literacy Core Activity, or even an International IL Forum, could be established with the basic remit to further review and report on:

- roles of IFLA in the IL agenda worldwide, and priorities for action
- feasibility study of the certificate issue; depending on conclusions:
- core features and elements for the IILC syllabus
- financial and legal aspects of the venture
- starting-up of a questions, tests and assessment tools pilot base
- priorities for partnerships with other bodies interested in the IL agenda
- first marketing campaign for specific target bodies like evaluation and accreditation agencies in the educational sector, UNESCO, etc.
- any other alternative actions identified within the international IL agenda.

Of course, IFLA Council and Governing Board would secure that membership in this core activity or international forum should include IL experts as representatives from major national associations from different regions of the world, and especially Division VIII representatives from all three Sections. This interim Core Activity or International Forum would be the embryo for the eventual IL Foundation.

2) the tasks outlined above could be developed as well through two alternative approaches:

2a) a coalition of national associations under the umbrella and within the priorities of the Management of Library Associations Section, the Information Literacy

Section and all Divisions involved – especially Division VIII, set up as a joint working group or even a special interest group to report by a given deadline;

2b) a research project commissioned by IFLA to a recognised group of IL researchers and practitioners, with a substantive representation from all regions of the world.

The time frame, the remit and the outcomes expected would be the same outlined above for all three alternatives: role and priorities for IFLA in the IL agenda, viability study of the IILC program and Foundation, first draft of syllabus, content of modules, collection of questions and tests base, recommendations for the first marketing campaign at international level, etc.

Just to conclude, one last question: if we agree all this to be a real global challenge for our profession..., how long will it take to address the challenge globally?

---

<sup>1</sup> This is an updated and refocused version of a draft discussion paper circulated privately by the end of January 2003 among selected IL experts and IFLA members, as preparation for the open session in Berlin. My thanks to the following colleagues for their comments and reactions: Chan Sai Noi, Sheila Webber, Sonia Minetto, Toby Bainton, Hilary Johnson, Frances Groen, Angela Abell, Winston Tabb, Christine Bruce, Hannelore B. Rader, Sheila Corral, Hans Geleijnse, Susan Lazinger, Margaret Appleton, and Alex Byrne.

<sup>2</sup> As confirmed by Hilary Johnson in her letter “Broad approach to information literacy”, in *Library and Information Update*, vol. 2, 4, (April 2003), 27.

<sup>3</sup> IFLA documents on the WSIS available at <http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Hernon, Peter and Dugan, Robert E. *An Action Plan for Outcomes Assessment in your Library*. Chicago: ALA, 2002, pp. 29-55.

<sup>5</sup> “Information society” is used throughout this paper having in mind all *caveats* brought forward, among others, by John Feather, Alistair Black, Dave Muddiman and Chris Batt in their contributions to *Challenge and Change in the Information Society*, edited by Susan Hornby and Zoë Clarke. (London: Facet, 2003), and particularly Chris Batt’s “Content society” (p. 82).

<sup>6</sup> Town, J. Stephen. “Information Literacy and the Information Society”. In *Challenge and change...*, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Castells, Manuel. *The Internet Galaxy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. [*La Galaxia Internet*. Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2003, p. 325]

<sup>8</sup> Reffell, Pete and Whitworth, Andrew. “Information fluency: critically examining IT education”. *New Library World*, vol. 103 (2002), n° 1182/1183, 427-435.

<sup>9</sup> Davenport, Tomas H. *Ecología de la información: Por qué la tecnología no es suficiente para lograr el éxito en la era de la información*. México: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 1-16 *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Koenig, Michael E. D. “Knowledge management, user education and librarianship”. *Library Review*, 52, 1 (2003), 10-17.

<sup>11</sup> Corral, Sheila. *Information Capability: the Need for Professional Leadership*. February 2003. Available at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about/president/corralls/president.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Webber, Sheila and Johnston, Bill: <http://dis.shef.ac.uk/literacy>.

<sup>13</sup> See the Big Blue Project home page at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bigblue> for a taxonomy of IL models/standards.

<sup>14</sup> American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technologies (AASL/AECT). *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. Chicago: ALA, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. Available at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). *Information Literacy Standards*. 1<sup>st</sup>. ed. Available at <http://www.caul.edu.au/caul-doc/InfoLitStandards2001.doc>.

<sup>17</sup> Association of College and Research Libraries – Instruction Section (ACRL-IS). *Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: a Model Statement for Academic Libraries*. Available at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/objinfolit.html>.



---

<sup>18</sup> Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries. *College and Research Libraries News*, 63, 10 (November 2002), 732-735.

<sup>19</sup> Best Practices Initiative. See <http://www.earlham.edu/~libr/Plan.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> [Http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ACRL/Standards\\_and\\_Guidelines/Characteristics\\_of\\_Programs\\_of\\_Information\\_Literacy\\_that\\_Illustrate\\_Best\\_Practices.htm](http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ACRL/Standards_and_Guidelines/Characteristics_of_Programs_of_Information_Literacy_that_Illustrate_Best_Practices.htm).

<sup>21</sup> Town, J. Stephen. "Information literacy: definition, measurement, impact". In *Information & IT Literacy: Enabling learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, edited by Allan Martin and Hannelore Rader. London: Facet, 2003, pp. 57-62.

<sup>22</sup> The need for and the implications of a clear distinction between IL and "learning to learn" were kindly brought to my attention by Hilary Johnson.

<sup>23</sup> For a comprehensive coverage of these and related issues and recommendations for a specific environment (UK), see the Big Blue web site at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bigblue>, and CILIP Past-President Sheila Corrall's programmatic documents, especially *Information capability*, available at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about/president/corralls/president.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, Hilary. "Broad approach" ..., 27.

<sup>25</sup> Town, J. Stephen. "Information Literacy and" ..., p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> Reffell, Peter. "IT skills are not enough". In *Information & IT Literacy*..., pp. 120-131.

<sup>27</sup> See, f. ex., "Costs of Information Illiteracy", *Library and Information Update*, 2, 3 (March 2003), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, Hilary. "Broad approach" ..., 27.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://sails.lms.kent.edu>.

<sup>30</sup> Information about this project kindly provided by Margaret Appleton.

<sup>31</sup> See Town, J. Stephen. "Information literacy and"..., p. 90, and Garson, G. David. "The Role of Information Technology in Quality Education". In *Social Dimensions of Information Technology: Issues for the New Millennium*, edited by G. David Garson. Hershey, PA: Idea Group, 2000, p. 190.

<sup>32</sup> Herson, Peter and Dugan, Robert E., *An Action Plan*..., pp. 46, 67 and 103.

<sup>33</sup> Garson, G. David. "The Role of Information Technology"..., p. 190.

<sup>34</sup> IL Experts Meeting in Prague 2003: <http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/grouppaper.html>.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.ceris.to.cnr.it/Basili/EnIL/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, Kenneth R., New Roles and Responsibilities for the University Library: Advancing Student Learning through Outcomes Assessment. Available at: <http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas/outcomes>.

<sup>37</sup> See <http://sails.lms.kent.edu/projdescription.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Unpublished document on the project kindly provided by Margaret Appleton.

<sup>39</sup> See [http://www.tfpl.com/skills\\_development/information\\_literacy.cfm](http://www.tfpl.com/skills_development/information_literacy.cfm).

(All electronic references accessed July 2003)