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Global Library and Information (LIS) concerns: the case for International Accreditation of LIS qualifications

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Accreditation/International accreditation defined

Accreditation together with certification and licensing of individual practitioners, creates a complex quality assurance system known as credentialing. Credentialing refers to the process of self-regulation in which interests in the profession, business or other fields join with one another to exercise controls for the better of society at large (Jacobs 1992:1).

Credentialing focused on an institution is accreditation; and that focused on an individual is certification. Both accreditation and certification are essentially complementary, providing a quality control assurance for those entering the profession and continued competence through programmes of professional development and certification.

Accreditation entails two aspects: self assessment and peer assessment. Self- assessment is ongoing (3 to 5 years) and involves planning, goal setting and measurement against two dimensions - the goals and objectives set by the programmes, and evaluation by peers against the

set standards of accreditation, specifying the quality of curriculum, the facilities, the faculty, the students and the administrative structure (Kigongo-Bukenya:2000:84).

From the above, International accreditation can be construed as quality control measures agreed and put in place and involved in the education, training and practice among LIS institutions and professionals of nations of the world. It has been referred to in many ways including: international parity, reciprocity of qualifications, recognition of overseas qualifications, equivalence of LIS qualifications or for that matter LIS International Education.

Reasons for International Accreditation in the LIS Profession

One of the obvious reasons for International Accreditation is the total benefits derived from the process by the institutions, the students, staff, administrators, librarians, documentalists, archivists, and those in the book trade. Many authors on the topic have expressed different reasons. As far back as 1970 Carroll Frances Laverne observed that the significance of these international undertakings were two fold: first, many common problems are seen as solvable only by nations working together; and second, extinction was a real possibility unless new ways were found to increase co-operation and world orderliness. Boyer (1978:69) agrees that Education must teach us that nations on this planet, physical and social are irrevocably interlocked. Hinkins (quoted by Kigongo-Bukenya 1995:15) argued that knowledge of other countries encourage friendliness and co-operation; knowledge to assist people in need of information for various activities... and strategic understanding of each other. Herbert Coblans (1974) gave two interrelated benefits: standardization or equating education and practices which itself would lead to attitude of positive neutrality between national activities. Carroll drew the attention that international understanding was becoming stronger as people's rights had become a hot issue. International LIS co-operation was imperative to ensure humanitarian information provision which consisted of granting all people access to a wide variety of information through advancement of knowledge.

Tonkin and Edwards (1968: 15) advise:

Because peoples lives are already to a large measure internationalized, the information professionals must internationalize their education as well. All of us must learn to ensure ourselves in this communication and interaction with the rest of the world, and make creative use of it to avert disaster and increase the chances of humanity. The critical choice is no longer between stagnation but between destruction and survival.

Past efforts towards International Accreditation

Efforts towards international accreditation have been several and over a long time. With the support of Unesco, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) through the then Division of Education and Research, forums were organized for example: the Seminar which took place in 1980 in Manila to discuss questions related to Library Education especially for the South-East Asian region; another which took place in Montreal for Latin American librarians and considered the relationship between library research and library

education in that part of the world; and in 1984, the topic of educating librarians particularly in public libraries at the grass-root level, was dealt with in Nairobi as an important question for many African countries.

These seminars culminated in the International Colloquium on the Harmonization of Education and Training Programmes for Library, Information and Archival Personnel, which took place in London in 1987 in connection with the Brighton IFLA Conference. At these meetings library and information educators and experts discussed issues related to their fields and resolved ways of cooperation in Library and Information Education internationally.

The Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA) has made efforts in general terms but more so specifically in the Commonwealth. One of COMLA's aims is to promote the status and education of information scientists and the recognition of their qualifications. To meet this objective COMLA hosted a seminar on Reciprocity of Qualifications and Training for Librarianship in Kingston, Jamaica in 1978.

The Association of African Library Schools was formed in the 70s with the view of bringing library schools in Africa together to discuss and identify strategies of tackling problems in Africa, but it has never survived the critical formative years.

Regional Schools to which faculty and students from different countries have been recruited have existed for a long time now. Those still operating include: The Madalin University Library School, Colombia established in 1956 for Spanish-speaking countries; The University of Dakar, School of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists founded in 1963 to meet the needs of the French speaking countries of Africa; The West Indies School of Library and Information Studies founded in 1871, at Mona Lisa Campus, to serve the Caribbean Islands; and the East African School of Library and Information Science, Makerere University, Uganda, founded in 1963 as a regional school for the English speaking countries and has offered training to information workers from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and many from Central and Southern African countries.

On another level, there has been School to School cooperation. The most successful in this category has been the International Graduate Summer School (IGSS) held annually at Aberystwyth and jointly run by the Department Information Studies, University of Wales and the School of Library and Information Sciences, University of Pittsburgh. This is a living example of positive cooperation resulting into an international programme involving faculty, students administrators and employers from all over the world in the field of library and information.

There have been national efforts as well. For example ALISE in USA has the mission of: "To promote excellence in research, teaching and service for library and information education." One of ALISE's goals is to promote the local, national and international Library and Information Science Education.

A major break-through in International Education has been the work of the Section of Education and Training responsible for education and training issues. It has developed guidelines for equivalence and reciprocity of professional qualifications. The production of the guidelines was a follow-up to the section's major previous project which resulted into the International Guide to

Library and Information Science Education. The guide prescribes essential data on professional programmes all over the world and established its educational levels. The overall objective is to facilitate consideration of equivalence and reciprocity so that *professional exchanges and cooperation may be encouraged worldwide at institutional, regional, national and international levels.*

The Working Group appointed to probe equivalence and reciprocity of qualifications made the following final recommendations:

- To install an International Committee of Experts for the assessment of LIS on an advisory basis;
- To develop an International Resource Center for relevant information on LIS education.
- To endorse the national and international recognition of LIS professional qualification, and to promote the professional status of libraries and information scientists in all countries (Carroll...).

The most recent efforts in the catalogue of efforts has been the “Investigation of LIS Qualifications throughout the World” by Dalton Pete and Livinson Kate in 1999.” The project explored Library and Information Science standards worldwide and the potential for increased international parity of qualification. The research concluded on three possible methodological approaches to facilitate international accreditation: production of a database detailing the various accreditation criteria required for recognition by the appropriate national LIS organizations; stablishing procedures as existing in the European Community to allow for recognition of overseas qualifications; and compiling a detailed database which examines the programmes duration and content of each of LIS education institutions throughout the world.

Challenges of International Accreditation

It is well known the issue of international accreditation has been with us for a long time under different terminology. The challenges therefore are not entirely new. As early as 1904 a LIS International School was conceptualized. Unesco and IFLA were ready to give funding. But the initiative was lost in the forest of logistical decisions- question of location, language of instruction, curriculum, and staff recruitment, which appear to have been insurmountable. Perhaps this may no longer be a big threat in view of the global information and knowledge society.

One big challenge though may still be the uncompromising attitude by LIS national authorities conservatism - the need to hold on “our own system we have proudly developed over a long time.” This is made worse by the attitude of chauvinistic superiority- the attitude that something different from another country is necessarily inferior.

In their study Dalton and Levinson (1999) highlight problems inherent in the three approaches they saw as possibilities in the international accreditation system. The **national professional accreditation approach** had the problem that all countries in the world had no accreditation authorities and even where authorities existed they did not accredit all programmes. **The generic academic qualification equivalence approach** was also not perfect because it was only

applicable in a few countries and could therefore not apply universally. The third alternative - **the Institutional Course Approach** had its shortcomings as well including uncertainty of ready availability of data required from LIS institutions the world over; and the interpretation of “equivalence” in terms of the needs, culture of the individual countries.

The Way Forward

Dalton and Levinson could have given the lead to the possibilities of LIS International accreditation through the findings of their study “An Investigation of LIS Qualifications Throughout the World”. Should it be: the “Professional Associations Approach”; “The Generic Academic Qualification Equivalency Approach” or “The Institutional Course (Programme) Approach”.

The answers to these questions are the purpose of this Session.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION.

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