

# **The proactive practitioner: developing your information career in your region**

Ely 27 April 2004

*A review by Janet Hughes, Past Secretary ISG*

The aim of this free meeting was to get library and information personnel together from our region to hear about the many practical ways they could implement continuous professional development at all stages of their career. There were 37 attendees from a wide range of organisations including paraprofessionals, qualified, chartered and retired people from the library and information field.

## **CILIP's Framework of Qualifications**

### **Margaret Watson, Past President CILIP**

Margaret, a former lecturer in library and information studies, talked about CILIP's core business for its 23,000 members – education for the profession – through formal courses at CILIP, group and branch activities, and work with partnership organisations. She also discussed the new matrix of pathways to qualifications in the sector which have become less linear and more flexible. With the portfolio approach it is important to keep evidence of all professional activity and development, and to do it as you go along as this makes it so much easier. New handbooks to support this will be available in autumn 2004. The most important aspect of the new regulations will be the recognition of professionalism at all levels:

1. Certification at paraprofessional or 'affiliated' level (ACLIP)
2. New chartership regulations (MCLIP)
3. Voluntary revalidation scheme through assessors in the regions
4. Plus a new route to Fellowship which will include two successful revalidation cycles linked to specific criteria

Diversity is another important issue for the profession as we, as a body, are not currently representative of our multi-racial nation. Research has shown that people do not wish to be treated differently but schemes need to be more inclusive. CILIP's corporate plan is committed to a feasibility study in this area.

Margaret emphasised some key points in her summary. There are excellent examples of training and development in different regions. These must be allowed to flourish. CILIP will not be prescriptive but will have quality controls. There will be mentoring schemes and this is very good for continuous professional development. There will also be leadership programmes, and collaborations with partner organisations in the regions. We need to talk up our profession and take pride in it. But above all we need to be reflective practitioners, to take time to take stock of what we are doing, to stand back and evaluate where we go from here. This way we continually move forward as individuals and as a profession.

## **Learning together**

### **Sue Hughes, EEMLAC**

Sue advocates looking outside our own areas as something that is good for us. She has had a varied library and information service career running an information brokerage, Business Link services in Hertfordshire, and heading the British Council's Information Society team until joining the East of England Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

(EEMLAC) just six months ago. She outlined what EEMLAC does:

1. It informs through email, newsletter, mail outs, website, events, etc.
2. It advocates and understands the importance of the sector and promotes this
3. It listens to the sector and facilitates two way communications
4. It assists with funding. Small grants for specific programmes and advice on sources of external funding.

Other activities include an advisory panel on inclusion, a mapping exercise to establish a profile of libraries and information units in the region, a strategy to establish where library and information services need to go in consultation with key stakeholders in the region. This is just the beginning. The future will see the development of networks, the building up of collaboration and sharing good practice and resources.

In the second half of her presentation Sue talked about her 'life of learning'. She had a tremendous start in the profession as a pre-library school trainee in Barnet and was encouraged to experience every aspect of the service. After her library school training (which did not equip her to deal with the real-life issues of management, difficult staff and customers) she worked in public lending and reference services and had to learn to manage fast. After a career break she worked in an FE college and came across tools like Prestel, a basic forerunner of the information databases and internet of today. She learned about training, teaching and tutoring. A brief spell at a hospital library introduced her to professionally tailored information services. Running a youth service in Hertfordshire stretched her experience further, and developed her presentation skills. At Business Link she was involved in much staff development and training. She also learned how to promote her own agenda. At the British Council she brought together journalists to look at world issues from a young persons view point. In EEMLAC she is still learning about museums.

In our region there are award-winning libraries like Lowestoft, March and Norwich. There are collaborative projects like Learn East, Read East, Co-East and Co-East +. There are great initiatives such as premises sharing, learning centres in libraries, Sunday opening and virtual libraries such as the virtual branch in Bedfordshire.

We need to learn from these, and others, like business and special information units who are good at diagnostics, HE libraries that operate 24/7, museums where we can cross transfer skills and ideas, like setting up trusts. Outside the sector we can learn from retailers, find out what works with young people, who has the best management skills, etc. We can also learn from across the world e.g. from Cyber-libraries in Singapore or shared use sites in Australia and New Zealand. There is so much out there to experience and learn from. It is up to us to take advantage of this wealth around us and share our knowledge with our organisations and our profession.

### **Seizing the initiative: developing your career at a time of change** **Vincent McDonald, Business Manager, Suffolk Libraries and Heritage**

Vincent has worked in Suffolk for twenty years, having previously worked in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Brent. He talked about the New Chapters initiative in Suffolk which sets out the council's vision, and in particular the development of staff and the culture of the organisation, to meet the demands ahead.

The national background to this initiative was the government's Framework for the Future

and Start with the Child. The new strategy and structure were explained to staff in a glossy brochure making the points in plain English in seven concise chapters giving clear outlines, targets and actions in short bullet points or single paragraphs. In it employees were promised training, reviews, better communications, staff meetings, encouragement to show initiative, etc. It is useful for staff to be able to view the organisation's vision in their own context so that their own development can be tailored to make a contribution to that vision. It is up to individuals to spot these opportunities and seize the initiative. We may wait for ever if we expect someone else to do this for us.

Vincent also spoke about his own experience (with several amusing anecdotes) and made some very useful observations. We ought to, for example, reorganise our workloads to focus on what we should be doing. This may give us space for taking on things which will lead to self development. Job exchanges, secondments, project work, committee work are a fantastic learning opportunities and can bring benefits to employee and employer alike. It takes little time to reply with a sentence or two to consultations. A few lines from several colleagues can ensure that policies are on the right track and that individuals are seen to be working together with their organisations. Look for personal growth as well as career prospects. Show integrity and do what you find fulfilling. If you are good at spotting trends you can develop your skills by, for example, suggesting these topics for regional meetings, and then acting upon the knowledge you gain. Get good at making a case for what you want to do. Always show how the organisation will benefit and any wider benefits as well as what it can do for you.

Finally, we should be positive about change seeing in it the opportunities rather than the threats, we should be bold so that we stretch ourselves and grow, we should be focussed on the important things, and managing our time well in order to maintain our work/life balance.

### **How CPD works in Scotland**

**Alan Poulter, Lecturer, University of Strathclyde**

CILIP Scotland (CILIPS) is a very active region and Alan came to talk to us about the different training perspectives he is involved in there including CILIPS, Industrial and Commercial Libraries Group (ICLG), and academic courses at the University.

CILIPS - In August 2003 the membership committee set up an education review group because there had been no review since 1991, skills are changing, and the qualifications framework is changing. Their tasks were to establish the needs, within limited resources, and link into the new accreditation framework. They also needed to address delivery methods, quality assurance, and marketing issues. There was consultation to find the gaps in knowledge. The feedback included a desire for more cataloguing training, school librarians wanted a 'syndromes information day' and teaching skills, FE librarians wanted training on digital libraries, virtual libraries, and commercial library management systems. ([www.slainte.org.uk/Eventsca/index.htm](http://www.slainte.org.uk/Eventsca/index.htm))

ICLG – members were invited to contribute to a web-based survey. This was set up relatively easily using Front Page and Dream Weaver, and using drop down boxes for replies. In paper-based surveys you need to analyse and transcribe the data. But this method enables you to load the data into Excel and (as demonstrated live!) the data is arranged in a manageable format for you. The main problems with it are getting the wording of the questions and the range of drop down answers right. It is also important to be very clear about the content and level of courses required and to state this clearly on

any publicity. It is possible that this project could be scaled up and done officially throughout the UK.

Academic courses – Strathclyde have developed an MSc in Digital Libraries which is unique in the world and due to commence in 2005. They also offer an MSc in Strategic Information Systems by distance learning. In addition they offer CPD courses in conjunction with CDG Scotland and have run IT courses such as Beyond EDCL and Advanced Web Design. Ten modular short summer courses are also to be offered during June and July.

### **Self-development through committee work**

#### **Fay Owston, Kate Byford and Janet Hughes**

Information Services Group committee members Fay (Chair), Kate (Treasurer) and Janet (Secretary) spoke about their individual experiences and the benefits of working on committees as well as the opportunities to expand your experience and skills that this activity affords. They produced a list of 20 benefits which were extracted from their presentations:

Why join a CILIP Group or Branch committee?

- Network with colleagues at meetings
- Keep up with current issues
- Try out or develop skills outside work
- Gain experience and understanding of committees
- Contact other practitioners outside work
- Fill in gaps in your knowledge or experience
- Access information about job opportunities
- Have a say in your profession
- Shape professional activity in your area
- Demonstrate commitment to your employer
- Work with people from other sectors
- Get help with your Chartering process
- Travel and get out of the office
- Be active professionally in a less formal environment
- Give something back to the profession
- Develop your transferable skills

- Make contacts for co-operative ventures
- Become a Chairperson, Treasurer or Secretary
- Make a new set of friends
- Have fun!

## **What Continuous Professional Development (CPD) means to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)**

### **Cheryl King, CIPD**

Cheryl, Membership Development Executive at CIPD, gave us a view from a professional body outside our own. The CIPD sets the standards for industry recognised qualifications. It also offers services to its 118,000 members such as People management magazine, a website, the largest library and information service in Europe, legal advisory helpline, a local branch network of 48 groups, and accreditation of the professional qualifications. There are seven levels of accreditation ranging from affiliate to chartered companion. These levels recognise the paraprofessional, NVQ level 3, the licentiate who is on their way to becoming qualified, the graduate, the chartered member (minimum 3 years management experience), the chartered fellow (possible after 10 years) and the top award of chartered companion for an outstanding contribution to the profession.

Continuous professional development for members of CIPD is a commitment to keeping up to date, actively seeking development, and recording it. Evidence of CPD and how it has shaped their development is required to reach the graduate level. CIPD will do random surveys of members to ensure they are doing this so, in theory, everyone is aware they might be chosen and keeps their records up to date.

The development record is divided up into 12 months for the current year with a 12 month forward plan for future development needs and aspirations. The member has to explain what they did, the reason for it, what they learned from it and how they have/might use it in the future, plus any future actions. We were shown two contrasting records. One candidate gave a list of dates and activities but there was no attempt to indicate the development that had taken place. Such a candidate would receive a letter giving guidance on what is required and offered support if needed. Another candidate's record was clearly set out showing outcomes and applications. There has to be a good mix of activities e.g. work based, projects, personal activities, voluntary activities, courses, conferences, self directed learning, reading, networking. These should cover approximately 35 hours in any one year. CPD can also include negative entries – things that have gone badly wrong but where the candidate has learned from them. They may also include activities that develop confidence such as a day improving your image through make-up and clothes.

CIPD assists members in producing their development plans by making them available to complete online using a secure website, or by using a CD-ROM which has a skills scanner tool, or templates available by email, or ordinary hard copy forms.

The benefits to members are huge. They take responsibility for their own development and keep focussed. They can be used in addition to their c.v. when applying for jobs, and they can be used for applications for promotion. CIPD encourages the thinking practitioner.