

# CILIP accreditation: The Body of Professional Knowledge

## *A guide for course designers*

CILIP accredits courses to guarantee to potential students that the course in question will cover the underpinning knowledge required for a career in information work and which will prepare a student for a successful application to become a Chartered Member. A course must therefore cover the core elements of information work. The learning outcomes required are compatible with the subject benchmark, but it may be helpful to spell out the CILIP requirements specifically. CILIP publishes the *Body of Professional Knowledge*, and this document is intended as a supplement to explain the level at which this *Body of Knowledge* needs to be delivered.

### **Knowledge**

An information professional must have a concept of the ways in which knowledge is accumulated, and its importance to modern society. This would include some understanding of the policies governing information, and the dynamics of the flow of information within organisations and between nations. The work of an information professional is founded upon the understanding of the importance of providing access to knowledge as and when required, efficiently and effectively. Students should also understand that knowledge exists within a legal and ethical context – Intellectual Property Rights, freedom of information, data protection, censorship (moral and political), etc.

### **Conceptual structures**

Knowledge has to be organised if it is to be useful. An information professional needs to understand why organisation is necessary, and the ways in which this can be achieved. It is particularly important that the *principles* of organisation are understood – classification by producer (author), by the subject matter, by the format, for example – together with the ways of ensuring that cognate material is brought together even where there are many ways of describing the topic.

### **Documentation**

These principles have to be applied to recorded forms of knowledge, which may be written documents, pictures, artefacts or electronic data. (Students should also be aware that *unrecorded* knowledge may need to be classified, as in registers of personal expertise.) Again, CILIP's emphasis is on the understanding of ways in which this can be done – catalogues, databases, full text searches – rather than on students acquiring expertise in any particular scheme. Courses may well wish, of course, to use specific schemes as ways both to demonstrate the principles and to assess the student's understanding.

### **User / Client**

Information work should focus on the user or client, and this must be made clear to students. A course should touch on the different levels of detail needed to organise access to a general public collection or a specialist information resource, and within the latter for the key materials and the

peripheries. It should treat the service delivery process – the marketing framework, interpreting a user's vaguely-expressed wants, and finding out the needs of a user community. Crucially, a course must give the future information professional the tools to assess user satisfaction and the effectiveness of a service – this includes recognising which statistics it may be a waste of time to collect. There should also be awareness of other user needs, such as assistance with information and media literacy, and issues of accessibility of both buildings and services.

### **Collection / Information Resource**

Students need some understanding of the ways in which recorded knowledge is acquired and stored. This includes understanding about licensing for electronic resources, and it includes some understanding of the storage and organisation of physical formats (and the concept that the physical organisation may or may not be related to the conceptual structure). Importantly it must contain concepts of withdrawal of information which is out-of-date, archiving of material which may be of historical interest, and the possibilities for co-operative activity in both acquisitions and withdrawals policies.

### **Information**

In the *Body of Professional knowledge* this is the central concept; knowledge becomes information when it is packaged for a user. In looking at the idea of a service, the student must be made aware of the various levels which may be required, from the lending of fiction in a public library to the provision of technical digests to commercial researchers. There must also be coverage of ways of assessing the robustness and reliability of information, and the various means – including web pages – in which a user can be guided towards reliable sources. Various ways of accessing information should be referred to, and this is of course interlinked with the teaching of organisational structures. CILIP will wish to see that the course will give students an understanding of how the Web works, the way pages may be created and the way they are linked, and the ways in which the integrity of those links can be maintained; however, instruction in the use of HTML or XHTML is not essential to accreditation.

### **Professional context**

It is no longer a requirement that there should be a practical placement in a course, but it is important that students are exposed to the world of practical information work. This may be easy in some cases because students have relevant part-time employment; but it can be done using well-managed visits to information services, and / or careful use of practitioner lectures and seminars. CILIP would clearly wish students to know about the Institute, but they should be aware generally of the value of professional bodies and the codes of ethical behaviour which they demand. They should also be aware of the importance of reflective practice, and given opportunities to experience this, and also of the need for continuing development, whether it be to keep up with changing technologies or to acquire the practical skills needed for specific work, to complement the theoretical understanding which they have

gained. The role of professional bodies in encouraging, listing and providing opportunities for this should be clearly stated.

### **Subject context**

Many courses concentrate on the information in particular contexts – health information or business information, for example. Sometimes these contexts can be very remote from a traditional context of “libraries” -- the design of databases for geographical information systems, for example. The fact that CILIP is looking for the students to have understanding of the *concepts* involved means that such courses can be creditable. As long as students are able to understand the basic approaches, they will if necessary be able to apply them in a context other than that in which they were taught.

### **Transferable skills**

CILIP would accept that in a twenty-first century context students should have a number of general skills, particularly relating to IT. CILIP would expect to see that students who will go on to be professionals in any context have a basic introduction to management – the various styles of management, the existence of a legislative framework, the concept of strategic management, budgeting. Some concept of project management should also be provided (this can often be done in the context of organising their own project or dissertation). CILIP would look for the presence of these things, but would not expect to examine the provision in detail.

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