

Schools of Librarianship and Continuing Education in Britain (part 1)

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Introduction

In Britain the schools of librarianship are generally expected by the professional to provide some forms of continuing education. Some have indeed made a considerable contribution to the development of continuing professional education in the last twenty-five years, particularly through the provision of courses leading to further qualifications and short courses. This paper describes the developments that have taken place and the changing circumstances in which the schools operate.

Further Qualifications

During the 1960s British higher education expanded and developed rapidly, creating an additional demand for professional librarians at a time when there was already a shortage of professional staff to meet the needs of an expanding public library service. Seven new schools of librarianship were established, raising the total to seventeen schools. Six of these seventeen schools were in universities and devised their own syllabi at the undergraduate and/or postgraduate level. The remaining eleven schools were part polytechnics and colleges of higher education and taught a syllabus prescribed and examined by the Library Association. At the undergraduate level, the Library Association syllabus was for a two-year diploma program. During the 1970s the polytechnics gradually introduced Bachelor's degree programs. The Library Association syllabus was withdrawn and its teaching discontinued in 1981/82.

The shift from qualifications awarded by the Library Association to degrees awarded by the schools, and the Association's decision to move to graduate status as the basis for future recognition of an individual's professional standing, caused some recently qualified to suspect that their lack of graduate status might in some way diminish their career prospects. Recognizing their problem, Leeds Polytechnic established in 1972 a three-year part-time program leading to a Bachelor's degree for non-graduates who held the Library Association's qualifications. Subsequently four other polytechnic schools began planning similar courses, in cooperation with Leeds, offering the possibility of transferring credit between institutions for those who changed jobs and relocated while still studying. The original need for these courses was quickly satisfied, and they have been adapted to provide a regular basis for part-time study for persons currently working in libraries who're unable to give up their jobs to obtain professional qualifications. A slightly different approach at Loughborough University permitted the admission of non-graduate qualified librarians into a postgraduate program leading to an M.L.S. degree. This also quickly exhausted the potential market in the UK but continues to attract mature non-graduate

students from abroad who are seeking to upgrade their professional education and achieve graduate status.¹

Advanced Qualifications

In Britain the traditional route to an advanced qualification is to undertake research on a topic in which one has a particular interest, working under the supervision of a member of the staff of one of the schools. This can lead to the award of either a Master's (usually M.Phil.) or Doctoral degree. At least twelve of the schools now offer to supervise candidates for research degrees. Most students have carried out their research on a part-time basis because of the limited number of government scholarships for full-time research students in librarianship and information studies. This is, however, currently under review and some improvements may be introduced in the early 1990s. Leeds Polytechnic's part-time Bachelor's degree program had revealed the strength of the local market for part-time study. In 1975, therefore, it initiated a part-time program of advanced study for those who are graduates and already qualified librarians. The program leads to a Master's degree.² It follows the pattern of the usual alternative route to a higher degree in Britain, comprising an advanced program of guided study or "taught courses," usually completed by a dissertation applying the knowledge gained from the course to some topic of particular interest to the student. A similar part-time program has since been established at Manchester Polytechnic.

Full-time programs along similar lines were soon introduced. In 1978 it became possible to take the program at Leeds on a full-time basis. In 1980 the College of Librarianship Wales also established a number of full-time programs of advanced study. It currently offers nine specializations in different aspects of librarianship and information work. A further program offers students the possibility of selecting three different courses that meet their immediate professional needs. Initially the enrolments of these courses were almost entirely from overseas because of the difficulties encountered by British students in obtaining financial support. There were, for example, no government-funded scholarships for British students to take advanced courses in librarianship and information studies at any of the schools. However, in 1987 the Office of Arts and Libraries' Committee on Postgraduate Awards agreed to allocate up to ten studentships to the College of Librarianship Wales to be awarded annually on a competitive basis to British students.

Contacts with the profession had made it clear that a significant obstacle to advanced study was the difficulty in taking extended periods of leave for study purposes. The contacts also reinforced the conclusions reached in various research studies that had suggested that the main need for continuing education lay in the development of management skills. Therefore, in 1984 the College of Librarianship Wales began to offer a distance learning program in the Management of Libraries and Information Services leading to an advanced degree of Master of Librarianship. The first students were enrolled for the academic year 1985/86. The initial preparation of the teaching materials has been estimated to have required the equivalent of more than one man-year of effort. However, applications for the first two years far exceeded the available space. As was expected when the course was planned, the number of

applications from the UK has since declined and the College has recently agreed to consider applications from overseas residents.

Recruitment to Further and Advanced Qualification Programs

Table 1. UK Students

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84*	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87
Full-time	55	64	29	34	23	13	7	12	20
Part-time	176	149	183	167	132	103	75	107	86
Total UK students	231	213	212	201	155	116	82	119	106

* Excludes returns from three schools.

Source: Library Association. Enrolments on courses of library and information studies (annual)

Concern has been expressed repeatedly about the difficulties schools encounter in recruiting students for programs leading to further qualifications. This is supported by the data on enrolments. The number of full-time students has fallen in recent years, but some improvement can be expected because of the allocation of studentships to the College of Librarianship Wales. The overall number of part-time students has also fallen, despite the development of the College of Librarianship Wales' distance learning program. Part of the decline may be attributable to the falling number of non-graduates taking courses to achieve degree status.

A number of research studies have examined attitudes toward continuing education. Noragh Jones found that those continuing education activities in which schools of librarianship are commonly involved were ranked as infrequently undertaken by the subjects of her study. Academic librarians placed studying for further qualifications seventh, while public librarians placed it twelfth.³ A survey of academic librarians by Konn found that middle managers felt that "formal study could present very real problems in terms of time and expense."⁴ Ritchie found that while 10.5 percent of her subjects were taking a course leading to further qualification, less than a quarter of those were taking courses in librarianship. She noted that a significant proportion of those seeking further qualifications were doing so out of interest in the subject.⁵ The low proportion taking courses in librarianship may be explained by Konn's finding that "some individuals could not conceive of actually enjoying the study of professional topics."

Short Courses.

From 1969 until 1986 it was possible for working librarians and information specialists to qualify for admission to the Library Association's Register of Chartered Librarians (this is the recognition of professional standing in Britain) by attending a specified number of short seminars and workshops. However, few people undertook this route to professional status. The development of short courses was, however, significantly influenced by the Industrial Training Boards for each major sector of the economy, including the local government authorities responsible for public library services. From 1964 to 1979 the boards

imposed a levy on employers, who were then able to recover from the boards part or all of the costs incurred in training their staffs. The public library systems employ about one third of the professionals in Britain, and the ready financial support available to them for training under the levy system provided a foundation for the development of much continuing education activity for the profession as a whole. Local authorities have been under considerable pressure from the government since 1979 to reduce all aspects of their expenditure. A recent survey has revealed that the total expenditure on staff training in public libraries in Britain in 1985 was only about 300,000 pounds, or little more than 10 pounds per employee.⁶

As the schools stabilized in the 1970s, they began to make a contribution in continuing education and training. Many short courses were prompted by the new developments, particularly in the introduction of information technology. A number of schools also took the opportunity to provide short courses on the introduction of AACR2 and DC 19. Two of the schools were particularly active in providing short courses. Between 1968 and 1980, Leeds Polytechnic provided more than 100 short courses, which were attended by over 4,000 people.⁷ The College of Librarianship Wales has also been active in this field. In the last ten years the college has conducted 94 short courses at the college, lasting from one day to thirteen weeks. They have been attended by more than 2,700 people.

By the end of the 1970s, because of the reduction in funds available for training, and because libraries with reduced staffs were finding increasing difficulty in releasing people for periods of training, several schools were encountering difficulty in recruiting students for short courses and many courses were cancelled due to low enrolments. The college subsequently invested its staff time and energy into other activities. The expectation that the schools should continue to provide short courses, despite economic realities, remained strong. For example, the Transbinary Group was told that some schools that in the past had offered short courses were finding difficulty in attracting people to them. Nonetheless its report expressed the opinion that "the schools are relatively weak in their provision of short courses."⁸ Since then, a new impetus appears to have developed. A survey, undertaken while preparing this paper, produced responses from thirteen of the sixteen schools. Eleven had undertaken some form of short course activity in the last two years, providing in total more than 70 courses.

To provide access to continuing education, a number of institutions have also made policy decisions to redesign all degree programs on a modular basis, so that individuals can attend relevant modules without necessarily taking a qualification or gaining credits. Newcastle Polytechnic was the first of the schools of librarianship to offer this feature. Also to be implemented is a government initiative to develop a system for the transfer of educational credit. These developments may have a significant impact on the number of students taking modules not only as a means of professional updating, but also as a route to further qualifications.

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