

Editorial

“What’s in a name?” asked Juliet [1]. Quite a lot it would appear, going by recent events in higher education in the United Kingdom. During 1993 polytechnics and certain other institutions were awarded university status. One of the main public manifestations of the change of status has been a change in name. In many cases this has simply meant the replacement of the word polytechnic in the title with the word university. For others, where there was already a university, such as in Manchester, the new institution has inserted the term “metropolitan” in its title. Some institutions have been rather more imaginative. Leicester Polytechnic has named itself after one of the town’s famous sons and become De Montfort University. Liverpool Polytechnic decided to honour a major benefactor and has become John Moores University. Glasgow Polytechnic has found the selection of a name a somewhat painful process. Its first choice, Queen’s University, Glasgow, incurred the wrath of The Queen’s University, Belfast, whilst its second choice, Glasgow Merchants University incurred the united wrath of both staff and students. In the end by democratic, rather than autocratic wish, it has now become Glasgow Caledonian University.

The cynics response to this whole expensive business might be that it is rather like the wolf in sheeps’ clothing. The name may have changed but the institution will be just the same with the same staff, the same quality of students and the same funding problems. No-one, it would be claimed, is fooled by new names, logos, smart signposting etc. No doubt the same comments were made in the 1960s in the UK when the then colleges of advanced technology were made universities. These institutions have all succeeded in establishing reputations, in some cases very impressive reputations indeed and although some academic snobbery still exists about these “new universities”, in most peoples’ opinions they would be regarded on the same academic footing as the older institutions.

The educational sector of the library/information profession has also been active in changing names and labels. The terms “library school” and “department of librarianship” have been removed from the labels of many teaching institutions to be replaced by “department of information studies” etc. In many ways there is nothing at all wrong in changing labels. It could be a case of “that which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet” [1]. In these circumstances the information profession might have no worries other than thinking perhaps that the educators seem somewhat preoccupied with marketing ploys and creating images. If, on the other hand, the change of name reflects a radical change in course content,

the library/information profession might have cause to worry. Does the removal of terms such as librarianship mean that libraries and their associated activities do not feature at all in the courses offered or only to a limited degree? Will graduates of the courses still be educated in things library? After all, while the employment market within the so-called information sector is much wider than it used to be, traditional libraries are still the biggest part of that sector. Potential graduates want to keep their options open and to many, the traditional library sector offers attractive employment opportunities. These particular graduates certainly do not want to find that they are not employable in libraries because the course they have followed did not include the study of things fundamental to libraries. Maybe it is not possible for courses to “be all things to all men” but disposing of what is tried and tested in favour of what *might* be better can be a risky business, particularly in these days when courses are seen as products and students as consumers. Course designers would be well advised to ensure that what they are providing is what the consumer really wants. If it is not, no matter the label, it will not survive.

References

- 1 W Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*. Act ii Scene 2.

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