

## Editorial

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Two contributions in this issue of *Education for information* make similar points in mentioning the relationship between courses in library/information science and employment. In one, the authors state that, since graduates from a course in Jilin University, China, obtained jobs in different types of libraries and information centres, this means that the course followed by the students was indeed highly relevant. The other contribution, in discussing Expert Systems teaching, draws a connexion between employment in the field and particular courses stating that students at those institutions with the most intensive courses were most successful at finding jobs in the Expert Systems area. In both cases, whilst the course content might have been the key factor in job success, equally other factors may have been at work. That said, it is worth considering the relationship between course content and employment. The debate between training and education has always plagued library school faculty. Over the years many employers in the library/information world have criticised the educators for producing graduates unable to be immediately employable. (1) The educators' riposte has been that job training is properly carried out when in a job and that educators have to prepare students for a wide range of jobs and a lifetime career and can only achieve that by concentrating on educating and explaining principles. This becomes even more the case when the rapidly changing nature of jobs is considered. Some traditional jobs are no longer carried out on the scale they used to be and many staff are required to be *au fait* with information technology, which in its present form is a relatively recent development and was not included in the curriculum when many underwent their initial library /information education. It might be worth considering the relationship of the current jobs of graduates of 20 years ago to the training they received then. Certainly if the students of that era had received *training* as opposed to *education* the relationship would be a tenuous one. If on the other hand, the emphasis had been on introducing principles then the relationship would be likely to be much closer.

One way in which the content of courses can be monitored is through validation and accreditation by a professional body. Given that a professional body is concerned with the longer term, it should ensure that the educational orientation does not lose out to short term pragmatism. This safeguard does not exist, of course, with those programmes that are not validated and there is evidence, in the UK at least, of the beginnings of a trend away from having courses validated by the major professional body, the Library Association. For example, the Library Association has not approved a new Diploma in Information Management being offered by the Queen's

University of Belfast, Northern Ireland. There could be a whole range of reasons for this situation but one might be that the institution has identified a market and has designed a course for it but feels that the Library Association would take some time to consider the course and might insist on modifying the course content so that the course would be less attractive to students. Since UK universities are under considerable pressure to attract students, this would not be a desirable situation. The difficulty in this scenario is, though, that the temptation to provide courses to cater for immediate short term requirements begins to dominate. This is not necessarily in the interests of the students who are being prepared for a lifetime of work, not just for their first job.

It is true, though, to say that professional bodies are often bureaucratic and slow to "move with the times". The world of information and its management is changing constantly and opportunities can be lost if institutions have to wait for cumbersome associations to respond to new requirements. There is truth in this but it is arguable whether not bothering about accreditation is the best way forward. The information profession holds a precarious enough position in society as it is, and any large scale movement away from accreditation will further weaken its position. It is ironic, too, that the situation at Queen's University, Belfast should happen when the different professional organisations in the information field in the UK, the Library Association, ASLIB and the Institute of Information Scientists are attempting to bring their respective interests under one large "umbrella" organisation. The development, too, of a new organisation linking all library, information and document associations in the member states of the European Community is proceeding very successfully and agreement in principle has been reached to establish the new body by Autumn 1992.

Reconciling differences between individual autonomous bodies, such as universities, and professional associations can only come about if there is understanding and a willingness to co-operate on both sides. Institutions should carefully consider whether they are serving the needs of students and society by running courses that are not accredited and professional associations need to ensure that the criteria they use for accreditation is flexible enough to allow for sound innovation and that the wheels of bureaucracy for organising accreditation visits are as "well oiled" as they should be.

## References

- 1 R.H. Van Wye. New requirements for information professionals in librarianship. *Education for information* 2(2) June 1984. pp. 123-125.