RECOGNITION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LIS: NEW APPROACHES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN EUROPE

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Abstract
The term ‘lifelong learning’ is used for combining formal, informal and non-formal education and training, with a reconsideration of professional recognition and quality assurance processes. The objectives of the paper are to demonstrate the need of cooperation in quality assurance and recognition between higher education institutions and vocational education and training accreditors. There is a particular focus on exchange of models and methods of accreditation (which have been adopted in LIS) as well as common criteria and principles. In Europe, the internationalisation process – with the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002 - have identified certain concrete outputs in the fields of quality assurance, transparency and recognition of qualifications. This has served to improve the overall performance and attractiveness of European Higher Education and foster students and workers mobility. The European Qualification Framework, Europass and ECVET are discussed as the means by which learning outcomes and recognition of competences can be linked to European Commission action lines. The need for a broad definition of continuing professional development in LIS is outlined.

Introduction
A number of developments are beginning to affect the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance in Library and Information Science (LIS). These developments reduce the value of formal qualifications and academic titles and place more emphasis on labour market-oriented competences and lifelong learning. Firstly, the development of the information society and a knowledge economy highlights the value of the continuous upgrading of professional competences and focuses attention on lifelong learning. Changes involving technology and the organisation of labour in LIS require a high level of re-education and learning of new competences and skills. The economic situation is also influential, leading to flexibility and differences in the significance of qualifications. This in turn has consequences for the position of learning providers, whereby formal higher education providers have to accommodate lifelong learning and share their role with providers of both non-formal and informal learning.

Secondly, internationalisation of LIS professional qualifications is taking place. This paper will focus on the European wide policy developments. The European labour market cannot function effectively without a qualification framework, quality criteria and principles to use as a common reference point for improved mobility and employability. The required mutual trust can stem from quality assurance systems, which are appropriately compatible and credible, and therefore able to be validated. In this regard, a common framework for quality in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training (VET), as part of the follow up of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Bologna Process, should be top priorities for the European Commission.
These various developments point to the importance of lifelong learning as a competence-oriented approach to the assessment of individuals, not only as a means of increasing their employability, but also for their broader personal and social development. The emphasis of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should be on ‘enhancing participants’ by adding value to their abilities, empowering them\(^2\) and seeing the evidence that learning experiences are having positive effects on personal growth and development. A commitment to lifelong learning, to critical reflection and to adjusting to continual change, are all characteristic of the desirable outcomes. As a consequence different forms of learning - formal, informal and non-formal - should be seen as a continuum.

By formal learning, we mean all forms of learning within a structured learning environment. This refers not only to the formal education system, but also to structured learning in public, intermediary and private training systems. Informal learning is the usually implicit learning outcomes of the everyday activities of the individual in personal, family, professional and social contexts. Non-formal learning encompasses all activities which are not explicitly described as learning but which do contain a substantial learning component. Semi-structured learning, through planned activities in a work environment, is included where elements with a learning component are deliberately introduced (e.g. counselling, supervision, work-based learning etc.).

**Recognition and quality assurance in LIS**

LIS practitioners seeking a first appointment or promotion within an information organisation should be able to provide employers with assurance of the currency of their knowledge, skills and competences. These benefits should be gained from the recognition of continuing professional education.\(^3\) Recognition should motivate and reward practitioners who take their professional development seriously. The professional bodies could be the natural providers of this service because they are independent associations and many of them have demonstrated involvement in accreditation of professional education. Two types of measures can be identified in supporting lifelong learners - counselling for individuals on educational routes and recognition of acquired competences. The counselling of individuals essentially relates to helping them find potential answers to career questions. This counselling can be a basic service, in the form of the provision of information, in other words, familiarisation with the learning labyrinth. Counselling can also go further towards advising on careers and accrediting educational programs.

Recognition is seen as the ‘endpoint’ in a procedure, where the first step involves making the competences ‘visible’ to everyone as well as being ‘demonstrable’ by the person in question. The second step is the validation of the role, which these ‘visible’ and ‘demonstrable’ competences can play in the choice of further training, the search for work or participation in socio-cultural life. The third step is the certification of these ‘visible’ and ‘demonstrable’ competences.

There are arguably three models for the recognition of formal qualifications and quality assurance in LIS.

1. **The Program accreditation model**, whereby a formal academic qualification is required as a basic entry level into the profession and the accreditation is focused on LIS school programs. For example the American Library Association (ALA) accredits institutions which provide courses rather than the individuals who completes those courses. It sets down standards for accreditation that are regularly reviewed, and examines LIS schools and programs. However in this model there is no requirement for CPD beyond the
entry-level education. This is the most diffused model of accreditation in LIS, but it can lead to stagnation within the profession.

2. The *Individual lifelong learning model* which provides different pathways by which to enter into the profession, of which academic achievement is one. The emphasis is on flexibility, and CPD is the responsibility of the individual information professional. It removes paraprofessional and professional distinction, and CPD is recognised by the professional body. For example the Australian Library Information Association (ALIA) recognises LIS schools as does the ALA, and an applicant for membership must demonstrate that they have completed a recognised course. Members may then choose to demonstrate their commitment to CPD by maintaining a portfolio of relevant activity. The reward is to be able to add CP (certified practitioner) to their post nominals. The weakness of this model is that it ignores program accreditation and there is the need to continuously update the personal portfolio.

3. The *vocational education and training (VET) program model*, where VET is defined as the education and training which prepares individuals for a particular profession, trade or employment. This model has no entry level standards and the training opportunities on which it is based are built on collaboration between stakeholders, including employers, education providers and governments. The most important benefit of this model is flexibility, with a focus on specialisation, together with CPD recognition and emphasis on lifelong learning, but it relies too heavily on subjective assessment of a personal portfolio. There is also the risk that employers may emphasise practical skills rather than deep knowledge. This model has no requirement for professional association involvement in the recognition process.

In each of these three models recognition is based on a competence-based approach. Yet another model is based on criterion-referenced assessment. Many countries have national systems of qualifications that are comprehensive, including all levels of education and training. A number of English-speaking countries have formally developed and published national frameworks of qualifications. For example National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) introduced in the UK in 1980, are work related and represent a national standards recognised by employers through the country and used as reference criteria for qualifications. One Lead Body for NVQ was created for the information occupational sector, subdivided into the areas of Information and Library Services, Archives, Records Management and Tourist Information. NVQ describes work functions, work tasks and standards of competence in five levels of achievements, each representing an increasing range and complexity of tasks and greater responsibility within the working environment. Each level refers to a job role or a range of role activities. Individuals complete a set of tasks, which are assessed against criterion-referenced national standards, and, if deemed to be satisfactory, a national recognised qualification is awarded.

At the annual conference in Jerusalem in 1980 IFLA commenced a project which has accepted the *Guidelines for Professional LIS Programs* which define accreditation requisites, including core subjects. CILIP has a different approach. In common with ALA and ALIA, at has a first level program for the accreditation of LIS courses. At the second level, there is verified evidence required of each individual’s fitness for professional practice, with evidence consisting of the preparation of a professional development report, a portfolio and an interview. The third level requires the registration and maintenance of CPD records, and Fellowship follows at the fourth level. It should be noted that if the entire validation process has too many compliance requirements or becomes too cumbersome or costly, it will be
bypassed. For example CLEN (Continuing Library Education Network Exchange) attempted to implement a learner recognition and provider approval system tied to quality guidelines. Because the system seemed complicated and involved fees, it was abandoned and eventually transformed to the ALA guidelines.\(^6\)

Competences lists are important tools for recognition and quality assurance. Webber\(^7\) discusses two competences lists from Europe and one from the USA. The first is the Council of Europe study, in the context of the new book economy, including media and publishing inside the traditional library and information professional’s competences. The second study, conducted by TFPL on behalf of the UK Government, related to knowledge management competences. Only the third study, from the SLA was conducted within a professional association. Its target audience is educators, and positioning the profession in the new digital library environment.

Webber highlights international issues of the competences lists as problems associated with linguistics; identifying up-to-date lists of target departments for all countries, and problems of cultural identification. They would be compounded by the fact that a broader range of professions is covered and there would be a variety of different bodies conducting training. With regard to the international recognition of qualifications, it is important to note the work of the European Council of Information Associations which, in 1994, established certification allowing experienced professionals to obtain recognition of their level of qualification, even if they did not possess the corresponding diploma. This model of certification was followed by SEDIC (Spain) in 1997 and DGI (Germany) in 2001. Such achievements fostered the idea of a common endeavour, Decidoc (Develop EuroCompetencies for Information and Documentation), which in turn resulted in Euroguide LIS: The Guide to Competencies for European Professionals in Library and Information Services.

Another outcome was the definition of compatibility criteria between different certification systems. The second stage was CERTIdoc, the objective of which is the definition and establishment of a European certification system. The certification procedure will be the same, it will refer to the same range of competences, and the certificate will have the same value.\(^8\) In almost all European countries, information associations were interested in a European certification in higher levels and expect the information sector to learn from each other and to integrate the various professional groups (archivists, librarians, documentalists, etc.).\(^9\) CERTIdoc\(^10\) has described the elements of an international recognition process to be;

- Competences: a set of skills necessary to perform a professional activity and the proficiency of required behaviour. The components are: knowledge, know-how, and aptitudes. These are considered as proficient when put in practice effectively and validated.
- Level of qualification: a person’s place in reference to a scale of qualifications, which separates the knowledge and know-how of an occupation (or group of similar occupations) into different functions. The level of qualification takes into account the individual’s competence (especially technical), the complexity of different responsibilities undertaken, as well as his/her degree of autonomy, decisiveness and foresight.
- Profiles: directory of competencies necessary to exercise a profession.

The risk is that the recognition process will become a rigid grid, leading to the preservation of the status quo rather than motivating people to continual development. A revised accreditation model is needed, focusing on innovation, experimentation and collaboration between different stakeholders. RAPID is an interesting project of collaboration between HE and VET. The RAPID process enables lifelong learners - from students to full
professional status - to trace their progress through a process of identification of skills acquisition and further training needs.\textsuperscript{11}

**Dimensions of quality standards**

Three sets of quality standards have emerged from various LIS guidelines\textsuperscript{12} for evaluating CPD and LIS education - learning outcomes, education process and program administration.

1. **With learning outcomes** it is difficult to identify the quality indicators because they include impact on professional performance and benefits to users. The typical way to show results of CPD programs is the achievement of course objectives by participants, or indicators of their use of learning to improve practice. Some relate to qualification frameworks and include professionalism as knowledge mastery, problem solving, and use of practical knowledge.

2. For the **educational process** the quality indicators focus on the major decision areas for those who plan and conduct continuing education programs. The quality indicators can include; allowing for differences in learning styles, responsiveness to learner backgrounds and preferences, providing opportunities for varied practice and progression, and assistance with self directed learning. The needs assessment procedure includes multiple sources of evaluation.

3. In **program administration** attention is given to functions such as goal setting, staffing, resource acquisition and allocation. Quality indicators are balancing participant’s background and aspirations, the learning provider’s goals and resources, societal trends and accountability. For teachers, quality indicators include attention to selection criteria, understanding adult learners, and use of effective procedure.

Most commentators agree that LIS program accreditation has resulted in higher standards of education. Saracevic,\textsuperscript{13} however, speaks of the “iron grip” on library education held by the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA), and then ALA President-elect Michael Gorman criticized the ALA program accreditation for “simply measuring a program against its own mission and vision statements, adding that, due to an increased concentration on technology, curricula in LIS programs today are not adequately addressing the real needs of the profession”.\textsuperscript{14} Gorman concluded with a plea that accreditation be tied to national standards and that the programs develop greater concentration on librarianship by cooperating with practitioners in developing curricula.

LIS accreditation is at a crossroad. A lack of a common definition of quality and the absence of consistent goals and processes make it not only difficult but also undesirable to collaborate on a single accreditation system. Different stakeholders have different view on what constitutes quality. Some trends, however, must not to be overlooked. The actual shift of pedagogy from teaching to learning, and the focus on learning outcomes and lifelong learning, will place students in a more central role in the quality assurance process. It is also important to study the employers’ expectations and analyse the labour market. For quality assurance to work properly and to meet its objectives, it should be a cooperative enterprise among higher education institutions and accreditors. The recognition of individual lifelong learning could be the common model, once the focus on learning outcomes is clarified.

The first two clusters of quality indicators are listed in Table 1, together with recognition systems. Concerning quality assurance and the recognition process, the key issues seem to be around learning outcomes, in particular the extent to which an accreditor specifies learning outcomes or allows institutional discretion. There are also issues related to whether
an accreditor is primarily concerned with either individual student competences or overall program effectiveness. That is, does an accreditor examine direct evidence of student achievement or the adequacy of the processes used to assure particular levels of student attainment?

Within the framework of lifelong learning, higher education and vocational education and training assessment should gain visibility and transparency through their integration. Common themes are now based on a new learning philosophy emerging in response to changing social and political realities. What may promote a more shared position for HE and VET accreditors? The recognition and quality assurance issues, briefly indicated at national level, are not different at international level. National and international LIS recognition and quality assurance systems should focus on different learner profiles and needs.
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<td>• Competences</td>
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<td>• Assessment of student learning outcomes</td>
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<td>CERTIdoc</td>
<td>Adult learners</td>
<td>• Competences</td>
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<td>• Diploma (Level 1: in Higher Education; other Levels: secondary studies) or professional Diploma or a course of 200 hours</td>
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<td>• Professional experience (Level 1: 5 years; other: 3 years)</td>
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<td>• Plan for CPD</td>
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<td>IFLA</td>
<td>Program</td>
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<td>• Regular review of the curriculum, informed by input from employers, practitioners and professional associations, as well as students and faculty</td>
<td>• Evaluation of student achievement, provided in consistent and equitable basis</td>
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<td>• Curriculum</td>
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There is yet another challenge facing the recognition process in the potential for increased international equivalency of LIS professional’s qualifications. The lack of equivalency is currently hindering the international mobility of LIS professionals and failing to protect students from diploma-mills. Harmonisation of the standards required for success in LIS schools has failed to eventuate. IFLA has studied possible methodological approaches to the equivalency of qualifications, but the issue of international recognition of qualifications is extremely complex and requires commitment and support from the international LIS community.15

European Commission policy

The policy of internationalisation of the European Commission focuses upon two major issues; the need to facilitate worker mobility and improving economic effectiveness by increasing skills and employability of graduates. The Bologna Declaration (19 June 1999) and the Copenhagen Declaration (30 November 2002) promoted enhanced European quality assurance and co-operation in higher education and vocational education and training with the aim of ensuring greater transparency, comparability between approaches in different countries and better employability.

The general aim is not only to support lifelong learning but also to audit results. From a political point of view the focus is on persons, or non-traditional learners, including special needs communities such as the handicapped and immigrants. Because mobility is closely linked to the way in which learning and competences are recorded and valued in different countries, the focus is on transparency, credit transfer, quality assurance and common frameworks of qualification. Throughout the Bologna Process and in the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) outcomes are formulated for HE and VET. These measures are two-part. Firstly, some are designed to eliminate extrinsic barriers to participation in life-long learning. These include measures related to mobility such as the European Qualification Framework and the Europass. Secondly, some measures are designed to encourage CPD, such as time credits, training credits, career credits, etc.

While transparency was originally linked to mobility in the European labour market, it has a much broader significance in the development of policy on education and training. To give transparency to qualifications, the first strategy adopted at Community level has been the realisation of common reference tools for the recognition of qualifications of skilled workers and quality assurance.16

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) will make it possible to compare and link the growing diversity of education, training and learning provisions existing throughout Europe. The notion of ‘levels’ of education is taken to be broadly related to gradations of learning experiences and the competences that an educational programme requires of participants. Broadly speaking, the ‘level’ is related to the degree of complexity of the content of the programs. This does not imply that levels of education constitute a ladder where the access of participants to each level necessarily depends on having successfully completed the previous level. It does mean that competences, in the form of knowledge and learning outcomes, are always given their value through qualifications awarded by educational players.17 EQF is at an early stage of development, but many of its important elements, such as the learning outcomes, the credit transfer system and the portfolio, have been established.

The need to develop linkages between higher education and vocational education must surely be central to lifelong learning and mobility and this is why the Copenhagen Declaration is combined with the Bologna process. Learning outcomes are the basis for this integration and they have applications at three distinct levels; the local level of the individual higher education institutions; the national level, for qualifications frameworks and quality assurance
Learning outcomes also represent an approach that plays a significant role in a wider context that includes: the integration of academic and vocational education and training, the assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL - also known as PLAR, prior learning assessment and recognition), the development of lifelong learning qualifications frameworks, the development of credit transfer and accumulation systems.

This represents a change in emphasis from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’, or what is known as the adoption of a student-centred approach in contrast to traditional teacher-centred viewpoint. Student-centred learning produces a focus on the learning assessment and the fundamental links between the program design, course delivery and measurement of learning. The learning outcomes-based approach also has implications for quality assurance and recognition.

The Qualification Framework would need to be complemented and supported by a range of instruments and guiding principles agreed at European level. Elements to be included are;

1. Europass. Covers qualifications and competences achieved through lifelong learning. Focuses on personal competences (CV), language learning (European Language Portfolio), mobility experiences (MobiliPass) and qualifications in VET (Certificate Supplement) or in HE (Diploma Supplement).

2. ECVET. A credit system, which can support the transfer and accumulation of credits by learners. It can be based on notional accounting of time and workload and linked to learning outcomes. At present the ECTS is a system used for European HE transfer of credits across borders.

Europass should consist of a portfolio document, with a common brand name and a common logo supported by adequate information systems, voluntary adopted by individuals. The open architecture proposed for Europass is comparable to the common architecture in three cycles of European higher education degrees and will in future allow new and dynamic approaches to assessing, validating and recording learning. Competences can be demonstrated and therefore assessed and related to the corresponding professional qualifications. This is seen as a necessary feature of any reference tool, pointing to the need for an approach based on competences and learning outcomes.

ECVET introduces credit systems for the accumulation (more than transfer as originally conceived) of credits: it requires a compatible organisation of curricula and program delivery and a mutual trust in the quality of learning providers. However there are a number of issues that make implementing a credit transfer system for VET more complex that in HE, essentially due to the lack of quality assurance systems in training.

It is important to recognise the broad connection between learning outcomes, levels, level descriptors, credits, and recognition of qualifications and quality assurance. Learning outcomes have been described as a basic educational building block and as such they have direct and powerful links with a number of other educational tools. They make possible much more than the simple identification of learning achievements as they relate directly to levels and level indicators. When learning outcomes are written they are created in the context of the institutional/national/international reference points that aid the maintenance of standards and quality. However, ECTS credits are not currently linked to levels and consequently they suffer from being rather crude instruments as they cannot delineate progression or indicate anything about the nature of learning. It is only when credits are linked to level and learning outcomes, that they reach their full potential.
Conclusion

The implementation of a learning outcome approach would mean a decisive advance on current practice of fragmentation and division between information professionals and teachers. The benefits of cooperation regarding the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance would be:

- ease of access to a standard qualifications framework,
- cost-effectiveness of quality assurance methodologies,
- recognition of work experience in place of formal education,
- facilitating the employment and careers of LIS professionals.

One possibility is now to work within the internationalisation framework in Europe for the LIS sector. In the context of European internationalisation, the current trend is to consider quality assurance in education and training holistically, taking into account recognition of qualifications and quality assurance, which are necessary for facilitating lifelong learning. The driving force of the EU policy is the mobility of students and workers, but the efforts are towards increased quality and transparency and visibility of competences at sectoral, national and then international level.

The recognition of acquired competences is aimed not only at improving employability through the recognition of directly usable competences. The recognition of competences also aims to increase the intrinsic learning motivation and participation in lifelong learning by starting from the continuous improvement of ‘acquired competences’ and not only from a ‘lack of competences’. It also acknowledges the value not only of formal learning, but also of non-formal learning. In the debate concerning lifelong learning, the concept of employability dominates. This implies that the emphasis is placed on labour market-oriented competences and on the recognition of competences associated with immediate employability. It is clear that this implies a serious narrowing of the broad competence concept promoted in the academic context.¹⁹

A learning outcomes approach is, by definition, an approach with a lifecycle perspective. This means that, in addition to immediately employable competences, attention is also devoted to the continuous development of learning and career competences. The recognition of competences is then a possible component or instrument of career guidance and development. The challenges of internationalisation and rapid economic and occupational change have given rise to the development of sectoral business and industry. This has in turn led to the development of international training modules, assessment standards, assessment methods, curricula and qualifications and/or competences. The LIS professions need to adopt a broad definition for continuing professional development, and a portfolio based approach to personal career planning.

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