

CILIP's accredited courses go global

Rob Mackinlay looks at why the demand for CILIP accredited academic courses is spreading internationally, focusing on the motives and immediate effects of accreditation in Qatar and Cologne.



Rob Mackinlay (robmackinlay@hotmail.com) is a freelance reporter, and was formerly Senior Reporter at *CILIP Update*.

CILIP international accreditation started in 2010 when CILIP accredited Technische Hochschule Köln (TH Köln) – known as the University of Applied Sciences at the time. Then, in 2015, two more overseas institutions successfully applied for accreditation: one in Qatar, the other in Hong Kong. This is significant, not just because CILIP accreditation now literally spans the globe east to west, but because with 15 CILIP accredited institutions in the UK in 2014/15, international accreditations now make up nearly 20 per cent of the total. The picture for UK institutions and courses seeking accreditation is mobile and at the same is truly international, with ongoing talks between CILIP and a number of universities across Europe, the Middle East and beyond.

Demand

International demand has been generated by a number of different sources. In Qatar, accreditation is seen as a natural extension of the UCL programme which is accredited in the UK. Dr Fred Nesta is Senior Lecturer and degree coordinator for the MA in Library and Information Studies UCL, Qatar. He said the course formed part of

an invitation from the Qatar Foundation to UCL. With new libraries and museums being built, the Qataris wanted the UCL's programme in Islamic Archaeology in order to develop skills. They also wanted a masters programme in librarianship for Qatar National Library, which is due to employ more than 100 people.

The accreditation is more than a 'nice to have' for students. Fred said: 'It's important because they need to have an accredited degree to get a job at any of the institutions. Qatar is modernising, and they are requiring more and more professional accredited degrees. It's a requirement for the eight American universities for an ALA degree and Qatar National Library requires an ALA or CILIP accredited degree. My students, if they are applying for a job, have to have an accredited degree, otherwise they won't be considered.'

This year TH Köln, was re-accredited and Achim Osswald, Professor at the Institute of Information Science and Programme Manager of the MALIS made a similar point: 'The international recognition of our programmes and degrees enables our graduates to enter the international job market.' But he added that accreditation supports the university's international approach and gives it a chance to compare TH Köln's programmes against the demands and standards of the British and global LIS markets.

PKSB

Helen Berry, Development Officer for Learning Providers at CILIP, believes that some of the interest in accreditation has been generated by the marketing of the professional knowledge and skills base (PKSB), developed by CILIP to help professionals keep pace with technological and economic changes. The PKSB also serves as the basis for assessing accreditation and helps map the diverse approaches taken by learning providers, allowing prospective students to assess which of the courses best fits their needs.

Achim, at TH Köln, said: 'Mapping the PKSB areas to our three programmes was not always easy for us during the preparation process because some of the requirements needed further explanation,



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but during the accreditation visit we were able to discuss the areas in question and to clarify that our programmes do meet the demanded elements and criteria. We found this discussion very interesting and fruitful for the further development of our programmes against the demands of an international leading professional body.'

Employers

The demand for LIS courses and accreditation depends on the existence of employers. There are certainly opportunities in Qatar – employer demand was the original reason for setting up the course. Fred said that as well as the National Library needing to recruit 50 people, there were also libraries across Qatar that need trained people: 'Something close to 200 libraries, if you count the school libraries which form the majority of it. There are going to be branch libraries from the new national library and all these need to be staffed. And there aren't any trained librarians in the region – everybody has been imported.'

However Fred recognised that some of his

students aim to take their new skills home. 'My Ugandan student wants to go back to Uganda, Bosnian back to Bosnia – Indonesian the same. They all have a great interest – developing new skills and then taking them back to their own regions as they can see how much development is needed.'

In Cologne, the CILIP accredited courses cater for students entering an established LIS profession but many graduates may also look abroad or at less traditional channels for jobs.

Achim said: 'There are at least 200 libraries and information centres which offer professional opportunities to LIS students of our university. Cologne is known as the centre of the German media industry with several national and regional broadcasting companies and a lot of other companies in the media business. These companies are especially relevant for students who combine the LIS knowledge with an economical and technical focus.'

Course expansion

Plans to expand the Masters programme in

Qatar are currently limited to increasing it from 20 to 30 students. Fred said: 'I think the biggest block for our students is the language. We do have high requirements for the English language; they have to have at least a 6.5 on the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and that to some extent keeps our numbers low, as a lot of students find it difficult to pass the English language exam. We keep it at 20 and we find it difficult to meet that number because the requirements for IELTS are so high.'

As of March 2015, the number of students enrolled in the three programmes at TH Köln stood at 129 in Applied Information Science with 138 and 90 in Library Science and Library and Information Science respectively.

Modules and CPD

Achim said: 'In all three accredited programmes, students are introduced to the work of professional bodies/associations from the first semester. The teaching faculty have a strong awareness of the need and importance of continuing professional



Dr Fred Nesta with students graduating from UCL Qatar.



Students applying for a library job in Qatar require an accredited degree.



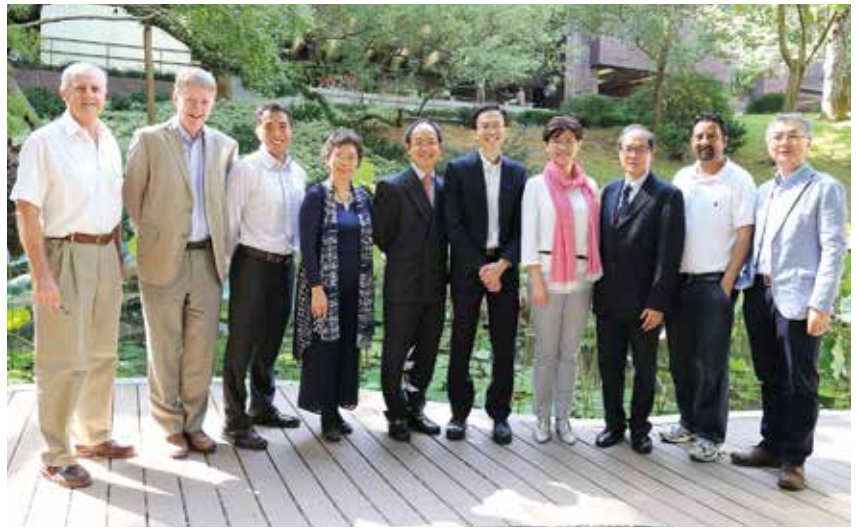
In Qatar, accreditation is seen as a natural extension of the UCL programme.



Qatar is modernising, and they are requiring more professional accredited degrees.



Helen with Assessor Ann Hudson (left) and Professor of Information Science Achim Osswald (top left) and staff at TH Köln.



Staff at Hong Kong University, which successfully applied for accreditation in 2015. HKU's building is pictured below.

development, among others through involvement with the ZBIW, the Centre for Continuing Professional Development in the LIS Field at the TH Köln, and highlight this importance in their courses.' He said that the involvement of LIS experts, internationally-renowned researchers, graduates and representatives of professional practice as teaching staff and guest lectures bring an external perspective to the delivery of the programmes. 'These experts give lectures on current issues, trends and developments in the field of library and information science in all three programmes.'

Fred said that CILIP accreditation would play this role for his students: 'It's mostly keeping our students in the loop. They like getting the CILIP newsletter; they like being informed of what's going on. I like knowing what's going on, keeping the professional contact and also looking at it in a broad context as well.'

In the UK modular courses that allow professionals and students to pick and mix courses for their continuous professional development keep learning providers relevant to the profession.

While Fred recognises the advantages of a modular system, he believes the programme at Qatar is not in a position to offer this yet. 'As UCL we want to do Masters so we are not going to do a Certificate programme.'

Opportunities

However he does see specific opportunities in Qatar's school libraries: 'There are about 200 of them – mostly international schools, English speaking or English speaking courses, English speaking faculties. They all have libraries as it's a requirement, but very few of any of them have trained librarians. So the market is there for us to approach and a speciality to develop – school librarianship. Last year we did a short course on services to children and that brought in some people beyond our course. We are now going to do a programme on reading for children.' He added: 'We have been asked to work with the schools on professional development for the teacher-librarians.'

So there is an opportunity for us.'

This could provide the route to a more modular system. Fred said: 'As we develop the programme, open it up as a modular programme, teachers could take the course over a period of years and get their qualification. It is something we are going to look at seriously.'

In Cologne, CPD is already built into the system and there is some flexibility in the course structure with a variety of further education options, including short-term courses, expert conferences and part-time courses as well as Advanced Master's programmes. Achim said: 'Academic further education and lifelong learning are an essential part of the educational mission of German institutions. TH Köln aims to deliver an education with practical relevance: our academic activities have a strong focus on professional qualifications through applied research and development. As an institution of higher education our concept does not only include lifelong learning, meaning the pursuit of additional professional qualifications, but also continuing education, which aims at advancing one's personal educational process. Our teaching and learning concepts are based on the assumption that learning is always an active, constructive as well as social process.' He added: 'We promote professional expertise as well as key skills to facilitate a smooth transfer of newly-gained knowledge and skills to the job.'

Finding placements

Apart from accrediting courses, CILIP could play a role in making international professional connections easier. For example Fred hopes CILIP might be able to help him find placements for his students. He said: 'The first year I placed them all locally; this year I was able to place them internationally – three in London; two went to the National Library of Singapore and they learned a lot there.' Qatar students who came to London went to Imperial, UCL, the British Library and the Bodleian. He said a lot of them are experienced librarians and often come back from good libraries having seen the



problems. 'But that also helps them to learn – there are problems that face the profession no matter where people are. Usually the same problems – resources, structures and bad management. If they can see that internationally then that's fine as well.'

Some students are isolated for cultural reasons: 'Qatari students have difficulty travelling; they have to be accompanied by a chaperone (they would do this at their own expense).' He said normally 80 per cent of students are female but next year it will be 50 per cent male: 'Mostly Egyptian, Qatari, Bahraini, Syrian, Palestinian – from the region. Some of them have lived and worked abroad, but most of them haven't. It would be good if we can place them particularly in Western libraries; these are skills they want to take back to their own countries.' [1]