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RECENT TRENDS IN COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS OF LIBRARIANSHIP AND INFORMATION STUDIES

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Introduction

In 1995, the second edition of the *IFLA World Guide to Library, Archive and Information Science Education* (1) reported the existence of 443 Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies. The existence of Schools which are small, newly established or in transition from traditional librarianship to contemporary information science, is fragile, and potentially any such School might be a beneficiary of cooperation and collaboration. Little attention has, however, been given to the recent growth of cooperation between Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies.

The aims of cooperation and collaboration

In almost all countries, there are two noticeable trends in the system of education for librarianship. First and foremost are the attempts being made to revise curricula. As well as continually trying to incorporate information technology into appropriate parts of their courses, most Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies are also trying to respond to other perceived needs for professional skills in their countries. The second general trend is the impact of national financial problems on the education system. This affects funding for equipment, for staff development, and the ability to implement change. Underlying the problems of many Schools is a lack of adequate library facilities, with few foreign journals, almost prohibitive interlibrary loan costs; and sometimes even few local journals.

The common needs of many Schools in both the developed and developing countries might be summarised as follows:

- guidance in planning and developing modern curricula, and in conducting related manpower studies
- guidance in new teaching methods, and in making new subjects relevant in their local context
- improving the availability of learning resources
- closer contact for both staff and students with all aspects of professional practice and professional education, especially in other countries, to develop contacts and professional partnerships
- assistance in identifying mechanisms for collaborative development

The emergence of inter-School collaboration and cooperation

The need for collective strength through voluntary cooperation has long been recognised at an international level, e.g. in the foundation of IFLA's Section on Library Schools and FID's Education and Training Committee.

At a national level, the nature of the education system in some countries compels collaboration between Schools. In the former Soviet Union and its dependencies, for example, curriculum development was usually guided by a State Council, comprising representatives of all the Schools and senior practitioners. As a process, it might be considered to have been cumbersome and slow, but it assured a uniformity of development and the necessary resources and staff development. In other countries, the curriculum for all the Schools must be modelled on that of the principal institution, for example Al Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad has this role in Iraq.

Voluntary cooperation has been more commonplace in the U.S.A. and Britain. In Britain the Association of British Library (and Information Science) Schools (ABLISS) was, however, for many years little more than a convivial meeting of the Heads of the Schools. Age and/or dramatic changes in the British government's approach to higher education led to the retirement of almost all the Heads within a few years, and in 1991/92 agreement was easily reached on the establishment of a replacement for ABLISS.

The new organisation, BAILER - the British Association for Information and Library Education and Research differs from its predecessor in several significant ways. A Committee of Heads of Schools and Departments was retained, but with a clear remit to guide policy and to lobby government. Membership was opened to all staff of the Schools, and an elected Committee was charged with organising staff development activities and with the general promotion of the Schools. The Heads also agreed on a basis for providing core funding for the organisation, through a common base subscription and a per capita levy based on the size of each School's staff.

BAILER can identify a number of successes. The Heads' committee has lobbied the government the continual erosion of the funding available to support research in an increasingly important field, and achieved a significant (albeit temporary) reversal of the trend. To spread best practice, several staff development events have been organised, aimed at staff teaching in specific subject areas, and an annual conference includes invited papers on recent developments in teaching and research.

Regional cooperation

These developments in Britain led to a similar pan-European development. There has been some involvement of the Schools in the European Commission's Research and Technological Development projects, and in the TEMPUS (Trans European Mobility Programme for University Studies) programme in Eastern and Central Europe, and the former Soviet Union. The TEMPUS programme is aimed at the development of teaching staff and the improvement of structural capacity of higher education institutions, and the requirement for any project is that assistance

should be provided through partnerships comprising at least one partner from 2 European Union countries and 1 East European country. The European Commission's ERASMUS programme has been another stimulus for collaboration. The programme (renamed SOCRATES -ERASMUS from 1996) supports staff and student exchanges between universities in member states of the European Union. A number of such cooperative programmes have been established.

More recently, the European Union has been establishing a framework for educational collaboration between Universities in its member states and Universities in other countries, both industrialised and developing, for example the ALFA programme in Latin America, and the ISCO programme with other developing countries. As yet, these sources of funding remain to be exploited by the Schools of Librarianship.

Many of the partnerships established between Schools in the European Union to develop student exchanges and joint research projects had overlapping memberships, and it was becoming clear that there was a need to share experiences and understandings with a wider group. It was to help meet these challenges that a general invitation was issued to European Library and Information Science Schools to attend a conference in October, 1991 at Fachhochschule für Bibliothekswesen in Stuttgart, Germany to consider the need for an organisation to foster cooperation. Twenty-six representatives of departments from 14 countries attended the meeting, and agreed to establish a new association, to be known as EUCLID: the European association for library and information education and research. The aims of EUCLID were agreed to be:

- a. To facilitate exchange of students among the institutions.
- b. To facilitate exchange of staff among the institutions.
- c. To encourage the mutual recognition of curricula or parts of curricula.
- d. To develop cooperation on research projects.
- e. To develop cooperation with other international organisations.
- f. To exchange mutual information about development in curricula and research.

To facilitate membership from all countries in Europe, subscriptions are based not only on the size of each member School's staff, but also on an international indicator of the relative wealth of its country. EUCLID now has 44 full members from 21 countries, 8 affiliated or corresponding members.

A newsletter is now being published regularly, and a comparative directory of the member Schools has been compiled. Two small grants have been won from the European Commission to support international activities - a workshop to assess the needs of the Schools of Librarianship in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (also supported by Unesco), and a study of the nature of current practice in teaching information and communication technologies. Future plans include more direct contact with the European Commission, and with the other European professional associations in the field. The potential for greater use of e.mail networks for communication between members and for distributing the Newsletter is being investigated, and it has been agreed that news of EUCLID activities will be published regularly in the journal *'Education for Information'*.

EUCLID has become a catalyst for the development of other regional cooperative groups. Subsequent to the establishment of EUCLID, the need for an Arab association for education for librarianship and information studies was established during discussion at a Unesco Expert Meeting on Education for Librarianship and Information Studies in the Arab World held in Rabat, Morocco in May 1993. With support from the Canadian government funded International Development Research Centre, an African Association of Schools of Librarianship has been established. IFLA's Advancement of Librarianship Programme is also seeking start-up funds for a similar grouping in Latin America.

EUCLID has not only brought together Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies from within Europe, and the adjacent countries of the former Soviet Union in its conferences in Barcelona in 1993 and in Copenhagen in 1995. It plans to establish contacts with other regional groups, and its next conference, in May 1997, is intended to be held in Iceland as a joint conference with ALISE, its counterpart in North America.

Bilateral cooperation

There have been numerous examples of bilateral cooperation between Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies, usually supported by one or both of the governments concerned. Recent or long-standing examples might include Amsterdam University and the National University in Romania; Kent State University and the University of Warsaw; The Robert Gordon University and Comenius University Bratislava; and the University of Northumbria and the University of Papua New Guinea (26). Other links have been more generalised. For example, a Dutch government programme to support library development benefited several Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies in Pakistan, and involved several Schools in the Netherlands. An ALISE programme potentially involves all its American member Schools in activities in the former Soviet Union. Several British Schools have worked, consecutively, with the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information, Beijing.

International cooperation

The contribution of Unesco's General Information Programme (PGI) to cooperation between Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies should not be understated. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, PGI supported the development of regional Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies, located in the West Indies, the Philippines, Nigeria, Venezuela and Ethiopia. Unesco was then able to award scholarships to students from the region to attend the newly established programmes, offering them a range and level of courses not available in their own countries.

Regrettably Unesco's funding has been curtailed in recent years. Nonetheless, Unesco has continued to support collaboration between Schools, and in 1995 launched a new initiative, SLISNET, an experimental network of Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences, founded at a meeting held in Pittsburgh in December 1995 attended by 16 Schools which had previously been associated with Unesco activities (2). Collaboration between these Schools is expected to be

facilitated by communication through the Internet, and will initially focus on the exchange of advice and information. If other funding can be found, staff exchanges for advanced training may take place, and joint research projects may be developed.

The future of cooperation and collaboration

Because of their changing professional context, Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies have found themselves particularly at the mercy of external forces. In difficult times, there is much to be said in favour of a policy of strength in numbers. In the context of the Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies, this implies a need to come together to share experiences and understanding of emerging situations, and to establish a forum in which a common view can be developed to put forward to the decision makers in the academic and political environment to try to influence policies.

There are also more tangible benefits which can make it worthwhile for Schools to band together. Staff development is a particular challenge. Developing the knowledge and skills of the practising professional is often well catered for. The needs of the teacher go beyond these, as it is necessary to consider how much needs to be taught, and to devise the most effective means of achieving learning (and, usually, to decide what has to be squeezed out of a crowded curriculum to make room for something new). For all Schools, the challenge of working with colleagues in updating a curriculum can be a major contributor to staff development. Collaboration with other institutions can offer opportunities for this and for sharing teaching materials. For Schools in the less developed countries, international collaborative ventures may also offer the opportunity to have computer and library facilities upgraded with assistance from a national or international technical cooperation agency.

The recent experience of the Schools in Britain and Europe has demonstrated that cooperation can be successful, if approached with a clear sense of purpose and commitment. The establishment of Unesco's SLISNET must be seen as further affirmation of the potential of collaborative ventures.

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