

The Fellowship of the Library Association of Ireland (FLAI): Reflections and Guidelines

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Abstract

This article reflects the experience of two librarians recently awarded Fellowship of the LAI. It gives practical steps and advice on how to achieve this professional goal.

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Introduction

In an increasingly challenging work environment, it is really important to utilise support structures which exist to help librarians in their professional development and work practice. Becoming a member of the LAI offers a valuable opportunity to be part of a community of practice. Members have access to professional colleagues from every type of library in existence in Ireland. In addition to providing an opportunity to develop within the profession, members help develop the profession through their participation in the professional body.

The LAI has a progressive structure of membership. Personal members can apply for Associateship after one year as a member.¹ After five years at Associate Level, members can progress to Fellowship, the highest level of professional qualification awarded by the LAI. This represents professional recognition for outstanding professional contribution. On occasion, personal members who are not Associates may apply for Fellowship on demonstration of a level of professional development commensurate with that required for the award of Fellowship.

1. Details of Associateship are available at www.libraryassociation.ie under Education

This article is a reflective guide to the experiences of the two authors on applying for and achieving Fellowship membership. We hope this information will encourage others to reflect on becoming involved in the LAI and inform readers of the steps that are involved in progressing to Fellowship.

How to achieve FLAI?

There are two different routes or pathways to fellowship. Pathway A involves the submission of a thesis, while Pathway B requires demonstration of a high standard of professional development, through submission of curriculum vitae, a professional portfolio, a personal statement and any other documentation the applicant deems relevant. Both authors pursued Pathway B.

What are the benefits of FLAI?

1. The application process offers an opportunity to take stock of career to date – in this case Pathway B - through the preparation of a professional portfolio. The exercise of compiling the portfolio is an interesting and challenging developmental experience. Reviewing and reflecting on what you have achieved, might yield some surprises. Often we are too busy to actually reflect on the value of our activities to us as individuals, to our parent organisation and to the wider library environment. Reflection and reflective practice is increasingly valued as a form of professional and personal development and actively used in programmes such as the Future Leaders programme.²
2. Preparing a professional portfolio for the FLAI does not involve significant financial investment, such as that generally incurred in undertaking a postgraduate course. In some cases the employer will pay or reimburse the application fee, which is currently € 150 on successful attainment of the FLAI.
3. The FLAI enhances curriculum vitae. If applying for a new job or for internal promotion, holding the FLAI demonstrates a commitment to the library profession and to professional development and demonstrates the range and breadth of experience of the applicant.
4. The FLAI is a professional qualification, which recognises that the recipient has achieved a high standard of professional practice and has made a significant contribution to the library profession

Who can apply?

An applicant must be a personal member of the LAI. Generally s/he should hold Associateship of the LAI for a minimum of five years. Further details and application form are available from the LAI website.³

What does the application entail?

Pathway B (portfolio route) involves the completion of an application form, submission of curriculum vitae, a 500 word personal statement and a professional portfolio. Each of these is discussed in turn.

Application Form

The application form is available from the LAI website. It requires information on professional education and qualifications, personal details (contact address etc.) and the names of two referees. It also asks for the date when Associateship was conferred (this can be obtained from the LAI). The application form requests (for Pathway B) a portfolio to include curriculum vitae, a personal statement of no more than 500 words and any other relevant documentation.

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum vitae should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. It should include any achievements (enhanced work responsibilities, details of papers presented/published and details

‘ ... members help develop the profession through their participation in the professional body.’

of CPD activity). You can relate your CPD to your work practice. For example, if you attended a seminar entitled “Marketing Library Services” and subsequently implemented a new service or process/procedure, you can add this specific achievement to your CV e.g *Developed revised Library Guide to make users aware of new SMS text services.*

It is important to match your CV to the guidelines. The guidelines stipulate that applicants should provide evidence of appreciable achievement in professional practice, continuity of involvement in professional development and have added significant value to all or aspects of the profession. Applicants should have developed a range of competencies significantly beyond that required for admission to Association Membership. They should also have *“added to the body of professional knowledge by way of strategic innovation in professional practices, contribution to the profession generally or specifically, and/or by research or publication”* and demonstrate *“evaluative and analytical skills applied at a high level of professional activity.”*

The CV should demonstrate how your career has evolved and developed. Do not restrict your thinking to promotions or new responsibilities within or outside your organisation. For many of us the structures of our organisations and the current economic climate mean promotion opportunities are limited. However,

2. <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk>

3. www.libraryassociation.ie – section on Education Committee

opportunities for professional development and career enhancement do exist. If you joined an LAI group and took on a role on an LAI committee, this demonstrates significant contribution to the profession. Give details of any consultancies carried out and state if you have been part of interview panels. Supervision, mentoring and leadership activities relating to the profession should be included. In the supporting statement, you can outline how these activities contributed to your career development.

When listing articles or other publications or research undertaken, if this is available electronically, create a link to the URL within the CV.

Portfolio Development

The development of a portfolio takes time but is a very positive element of the process. It affords the opportunity to formally organise your activities and reflect on how your CPD, research and involvement in the profession have brought you to the level you are at today. The development of the portfolio dovetails nicely with the updating of the CV. Here are some practical steps to consider.

In order to keep track of your development a spread sheet can be helpful. See the example from one of the two authors' worksheets below.

Date attended	Topic	Venue	Reason for Attending	People Met	Comments
16/3/2009	ANTLC Writing for Publication	NUI Maynooth	Interested in getting articles published	H. Fallon, M. Sliney, J. Cullen	Good presentation. Talk to M. Sliney about publishing and getting involved in <i>An Leabharlann</i>

By keeping track of things in this way I could see that in 2009 I wanted to start writing articles so I attended the writing session organised by ANTLC to see what was involved. One of the speakers was Marjory Sliney, Editor of *An Leabharlann*. Listening to her speak about the journal I thought it would be something that I could contribute to and also learn a great deal from. I eventually became the Business Manager, a voluntary post I still hold today. (Jane)

The development of the portfolio takes time and having documentation in order facilitates seeing career progression. Some practical tips for organising your portfolio include keeping a spread sheet as outlined above. It is also useful to have a multi-pocket folder to hold your certificates. If you put a note in with the certificate with some details about the event this can be useful. If you attend a seminar with a number of different presentations, you could insert the program and some relevant notes.

Below are some suggestions as to what might be included in the portfolio. Both authors presented their portfolio in a multi-pocket folder and included links, in the CV to electronic versions e.g. of articles, where possible.

- Copy of CV
- Copies of degrees/diplomas & other relevant qualifications
- Copies of certificates of attendance at courses
- Course outlines for courses presented
- Copies of articles published in the field (if extensive these are better submitted as a list with links to the electronic version if available electronically e.g. through an institutional repository)
- Copies of reviews
- Title page of significant reports
- Outlines of courses presented
- Material relating to LAI committee work
- Writing the Personal Statement

Writing a personal statement can be daunting. It is challenging to write about your own career in an objective way, while keeping to the word count (500). Think of it as a reflective process. Use the personal statement to demonstrate how your CPD and subsequent professional activities contributed to your professional development and the development of the profession. In your CV you will have highlighted various activities including committee work. You should not just replicate the CV in the

personal statement, rather explore how this particular activity helped in you and the committee e.g. In my role as secretary of the Academic & Special Libraries Committee, I co-ordinated a review of documentation. Much of this was subsequently made available via a website.

Similarly, if you present and/or publish state that this adds to the body of professional knowledge e.g.

I have added significantly to the body of professional knowledge by publishing a number of articles and book reviews. I have also presented research and evidence-based papers and posters at conferences.

In the above example you do not need to give names or dates of conferences, as this is already in the CV.

If you have had experience of mentoring in any capacity, or experience of voluntary work, this should also be included, as would any form of consultancy.

Timeline

It's important to be realistic about the time it will take to prepare the portfolio, update your CV, retrieve copies of various certificates etc. We recommend allowing three months to complete this. It can, of course, be done in a much quicker time period, if you are willing to devote more extensive periods of time to the process. Dates for submission each year are **15 March**, **15 July** and **15 October**.

How is the FLAI application evaluated?

The following criteria are used in the evaluation of FLAI applications:

Demonstration of:

- Appreciable achievement in professional practice
- Continuity of involvement in professional development
- Advanced evaluative and analytical skills
- Advanced range of competencies
- Evidence of contribution to the profession through publications/research, association involvement, practice innovation

Each application is reviewed by at least two members of a select panel. The panel is composed of librarians who have experience and expertise at a senior level and who hold FLAI, FCLIP or equivalent professional qualifications. The application is evaluated on the evidence provided by the candidate – the CV, portfolio and other relevant documentation. Fellowship is normally conferred at the AGM of the LAI.

Reflections on the FLAI Process

Jane: There are many benefits to working with a colleague in the FLAI application process. The most significant one is the mutual support and encouragement you can give each other. Setting deadlines to meet to review drafts and portfolios really helps to keep you on target. Another significant factor is that we are not always good at seeing how we influence others in the development of their professional goals. Having an objective perspective can help this.

When you are finally presented with your FLAI certificate it is a very proud moment and it is fantastic to know you have helped each other get to this point in your careers.

Helen: The process of applying for the FLAI was a very interesting one for me. The most enriching part was completing the

portfolio. I had thought I was well organised and do keep a reasonably up-to-date CV. However I was surprised how many dates and titles I had to check and how many pieces of documentation were not readily to hand.

It was great working with a colleague and I would really recommend that. I'm now on the LAI CPD committee and keen to help others get their Fellowship. I've been a member of the LAI for a very long time. Sometimes I'm not very active and at other times I get involved in committee work and so forth. I find it a very useful way to interact with people from different types of libraries and to share expertise and experiences.

Conclusion

We hope this article gives readers some insight into what is involved in applying for the FLAI. Please do not hesitate to contact either/both of us if you have further questions. It should be noted that the LAI CPD Committee is establishing a team of mentors to guide librarians applying for both the ALAI and the FLAI. Details of a new mentoring scheme will shortly be available on the LAI website.

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