

# Unifying the library and information professions in the UK: opportunities for the future

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(From April 2002, the Library Association unifies with the Institute of Information Scientists to form CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.)

## R E S U M

L'article presenta el procés i els resultats de la fusió duta a terme al Regne Unit entre la *Library Association* (LA) i l'*Institut of Information Scientists* (IIS) per a constituir una nova entitat professional, CILIP, *Chartered Institut of Library and Information Professionals*: els antecedents i el procés, l'organització interna, les empreses annexes, els avantatges de la inscripció, els estàndards ètics professionals i les perspectives de futur.

**Paraules clau:** Unificació, Professions de l'àmbit de la Informació i la Documentació, Regne Unit, Biblioteques del futur, Associacions de Bibliotecaris i Documentalistes.

## R E S U M E N

El artículo presenta el proceso y los resultados de la fusión llevada a cabo en el Reino Unido entre la *Library Association* (LA) y el *Institut of Information Scientists* (IIS) para constituir una nueva entidad profesional, CILIP, *Chartered Institut of Library and Information Professionals*: los antecedentes y el proceso, la organización interna, las empresas anejas, las ventajas de la inscripción, los estándares éticos profesionales y las perspectivas de futuro.

**Palabras clave:** Unificación, Profesiones del ámbito de la Información y la Documentación, Reino Unido, Bibliotecas del futuro, Asociaciones de Bibliotecarios i Documentalistas.

## A B S T R A C T

This article describes the process and results of the merger that took place in United Kingdom between the Library Association (LA) and the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS), resulting in the creation of a new professional entity: CILIP: Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. Covered in this article are the background and process of the merger, the internal organisation, the affiliated companies, the advantages to registration, the ethical professional standards, and future perspectives.

**Keywords:** Unifying, Information professions, United Kingdom, Libraries the future, Librarian Associations.

## Introduction

In April 2002 the United Kingdom's Library Association (LA) as we have known it since 1877 and the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS), formed in 1958, will both cease to exist. In their place will be a new body, created out of the unification of the two organisations, making the United Kingdom one of the very few countries in the world to bring together the librarianship and information science arms of its library and information profession. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, as the unified body will be called, will emphatically not be a merger between the two predecessor bodies; it will be a new all-encompassing organisation for all who work with information, however delivered.

This fundamental change in structure recognizes the fact that technological developments, the changes in practice that have accompanied them, and the way library and information services are perceived in the UK have all made the distinction between librarians and information scientists inappropriate. The baseline technology through which library and information services of all kinds are delivered is no longer the exclusive preserve of academic research establishments for whom access to online information has been essential for years, or of commercial services that can regard information as an investment for growth. The technology is now available to all. Partly as a result of this, the distinction between the ways the different arms of the profession deliver their services is narrowing too. Book lending remains the core public library service. But, encouraged by successive governments that regard access to information and learning as a fundamental requirement for a twenty-first century society, public library services are developing rapidly to encompass the instant access to current information and research material that has always been the stock in trade of the academic and workplace library.

The year 2002 therefore marks a point of major transition for the library and information profession in the UK, and a jumping-off point for a new professional body that, while respecting and acknowledging the achievements of the past, will be firmly focused on the development of professional practice to meet the needs of the future.

## Outline history

The LA was formed in 1877 and received its Royal Charter, which permits it to award professional (Chartered) status to members, in 1898. It became a registered charity in 1963 and was awarded a supplemental Royal Charter in 1986, bringing its objectives and powers up to date, including the aim to «represent and act as the professional body for persons working in or interested in library and information services.» The centenary of the first Royal Charter, held in 1998, was marked by a reception at the British Library, attended by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, who presented commemorative medals to 100 LA members, as representing the commitment and imagination of all generations of librarians throughout the hundred years.

The Scottish Library Association was founded in 1908, and formally affiliated with the LA (of the UK) in 1931. However the separate and distinct legal, educational and government structure in Scotland means that the SLA has always undertaken representation of the LA in the Scottish context – a situation whose validity has been reinforced by the introduction of devolved powers to Scotland and the creation of a Scottish Parliament. The Welsh Library Association (WLA) is a branch of the UK LA, and a further branch exists in Northern Ireland.

In the late 1950s, a group of professionals working predominantly in scientific and technological research took the view that a separate body was required to meet their more spe-

cialist form of practice and split off to form the Institute of Information Scientists. The IIS was founded in 1958 to promote and maintain high standards in scientific and technical information work and to establish qualifications for those engaged in the profession. Thereafter increasingly the IIS also attracted those working in the rapidly expanding field of financial and business information, and subsequent technological developments meant that its members were in a better position to pay close attention to developments in digital technology. Like the LA, it also has charitable status, and has about 2,000 members all of whom are personal members, including a significant number overseas.

## **Background to unification**

Formal moves towards unification of the LA and the IIS began in November 1998 with the joint publication by the two bodies of *Our Professional Future: proposals for a new organisation for the library and information profession* [1]. This report highlighted the clear commonality of interest between the two organisations. Both memberships were engaged in the provision of information services in a wide range of settings, and it was estimated that about 40% of IIS members were also members of the LA. Both organisations accredited programmes at universities, increasingly on a joint basis. Both awarded professional qualifications, maintained active publishing programmes, ran courses and conferences, and maintained a regional and special interest group structure.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that there had been previous proposals to unify these (and other) organisations to form a single, more powerful body to represent the broad information and library community. The previous attempt had begun in 1989 when Aslib: the Association for Information Management (Aslib) and the LA commissioned Professor Wilfred Saunders to consider the case for bringing Aslib, the LA and the IIS into a close working relationship.

The result was published in 1989 as *Towards a unified professional organisation for library and information science and services: a personal view* [2], and in it Saunders concluded that:

Collectively the Institute, Aslib and the LA represent an extremely powerful combination of expertise in information science, information management and librarianship in all its varied manifestations. There is a high degree of inter-dependence between all three of these areas and the potential for mutually beneficial interaction is great indeed. The case for this potential being achieved more effectively via a single unified organisation which includes the three organisations operating independently must be very strong indeed.

Discussions between all three organisations began. In 1991 LA Council agreed in principle to a proposal from the discussion group that the three organisations unify to form a new body. Soon after, however, Aslib Council decided not to proceed and subsequently IIS Council also decided not to go ahead.

Thereafter, however, there was a degree of co-operation between IIS and LA, most notably in the sphere of accreditation of courses at universities. Most accreditation visits were carried out jointly and, in due course, the IIS revised its procedures to further facilitate this process. Eventually, at the IIS's Annual General Meeting in September 1996, a motion was presented which sought to authorise IIS representatives to initiate exploratory discussions with the LA, with a view to assessing the scope for a formal alliance between the two bodies. The motion was put to the full membership of the Institute. The result was in favour of the motion by a ratio in excess of 2:1.

A year later, in September 1997, a brief report was presented which charted the passage of the discussions thus far. The report announced the establishment of a discussion group, comprising four primary players from the Institute and four from the LA, which had held a number of highly positive and forward-looking meetings, culminating in the presentation to the Councils of both organisations an initial joint report in June 1997. Both Councils warmly accepted the recommendations contained in that report, the main thrust of which was that talks should continue with the aim of developing a framework for a new, single association for information professionals, into which the membership of both the Institute and the Association would be drawn.

Negotiations proceeded by means of a Unification Planning Group (UPG), formed from the original eight members of the discussion group, together with one new member from each of the two bodies. The UPG held a residential think tank session in December 1997 focusing initially on position papers prepared by Peter Enser, chair of IIS Council and Ross Shimmon, chief executive of the LA. In a spirit of close co-operation a wide range of issues, including constitution, membership criteria, and resourcing were considered, together with the need for a new name for the putative new organisation. Having arrived at a shared perception of the practical and logistical issues involved, the UPG then set up three Task Forces, charged with the detailed assessment of these issues in the particular contexts of constitution, membership and finance.

A special meeting of the IIS Council, held in April 1998, considered its Director's report on the UPG's Think Tank meeting. The Council also discussed an alternative vision of an umbrella organisation, hospitable to professional groupings within its membership. Great emphasis was laid upon the need for the new organisation to be forward-looking, projecting a stimulating image, with its members perceived to be natural stakeholders in the dynamic employment market for information and knowledge professionals. The UPG considered all of these issues carefully.

Meetings of the Task Forces brought forward a number of detailed recommendations. The clear model that emerged from their deliberations was of an entirely new, single body rather than an umbrella organisation within which the two existing organisations (and, possibly, others) might shelter. The UPG met again in late September 1998 and agreed the consultative document *Our Professional Future*. It was presented to the Councils of both the IIS and the LA at their meetings in October 1998 as the basis of a final consultative document to be distributed for comment to every member of the two organisations. Both Councils agreed that it should be issued, subject to a few minor changes suggested to the Unification Planning Group.

The document was issued to all members of both organisations in November 1998 with a deadline for responses of 15th March 1999. An independent firm of consultants, Chambers & Stoll of London, was engaged by the UPG to prepare an analysis of the responses, which was presented to the Councils of both the IIS and the LA at their meetings in April 1999. Thereafter the UPG undertook further work on issues arising from the Council meetings, which was discussed at both organisations' June Council meetings of both organisations. The outcome was that both Councils agreed in principle the UPG recommendation to proceed with unification and to recommend revised proposals to the memberships of the two organisations.

The formal motion to unify in principle was put to the AGM of the IIS on 16 September 1999, and to the LA AGM a month later on 14 October 1999. With a clear mandate secured from the memberships of both organisations, the Unification Planning Group set in motion the legal moves necessary to create the new body.

## The proposed new body

The new body, it was proposed, would be poised to play a major role in the developing information society and would support its members' aspirations to be key players in society's economic, social, cultural and technological activity and development. It would be primarily a personal membership organisation, and would seek a Royal Charter and charitable status. It would offer Chartered status to those of its members who demonstrated competence to practise at a professional level, and would be democratic; governed by an elected Council. It would have a regional and special interest group structure.

The assets of the two existing organisations would be transferred to the new one, and subscriptions would be income-related. Services broadly equivalent to those offered by the IIS and the LA combined would be provided by the new organisation, and the staff of the existing organisations would be assimilated into the new one. Finally, implementation would be as fast as possible consistent with due process.

The new body's vision would be of access to information, ideas and works of imagination as an essential characteristic of thriving democracies, cultures and economies-increasingly so in the global information society. It would acknowledge that technological advances had led to a range of new methods of supplying information, organising the knowledge base, creating information, disseminating and preserving it. It would assert that information was a cultural, social and economic resource and a commodity of crucial importance in a huge range of diverse enterprises. And it affirmed that librarians and information scientists could be at the heart of this revolution, in demand for their creative, technical and managerial expertise.

These developments, and the convergence in information and communications technology, made old distinctions between librarians and information scientists irrelevant, and the two bodies were clear that to perpetuate those distinctions by maintaining their separate existences was a disservice to their members, to the profession and to society as a whole. There was an urgent need to promote the important roles played by information professionals to the public, politicians and decision makers. Both the LA and the IIS had made great steps forward, they acknowledged, but more needed to be done and done quickly. Their efforts would be most successful, they believed, if a strong unified professional body were created, building on the wide ranging achievements of both. This single organisation would speak with an authoritative voice for the profession as a whole. Its task would be to:

- position the profession at the heart of the information revolution;
- develop and enhance the role and skills of all its members;
- present and champion those skills, together with new skills which members would acquire as part of their continuing professional development;
- ensure that individuals, enterprises and voluntary organisations had ready and timely access to the information they needed.

The recommended mission of the proposed new organisation was:

- To set, maintain, monitor and promote standards of excellence in the creation, management, exploitation and sharing of information and knowledge resources.
- To support the principle of equality of access to information, ideas and works of the imagination which it affirms is fundamental to a thriving economy, democracy, culture and civilisation.

- To enable its members to achieve and maintain the highest professional standards in all aspects of delivering an information service, both for the professional, and the public good.

The final stage was for members of the two organisations to vote for unification in the form ultimately proposed – a completely new body, formed out of the LA and the IIS, to be called the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. The IIS's final votes took place at an extraordinary general meeting held in July 2001, and the LA followed at its annual general meeting in October.

## **What CILIP will be like**

In one sense, it is too early to say what CILIP will be like; that is a matter for its Council and Committees of Members, which are not yet elected at the time of writing. However it is possible to indicate the scope and extent of its services, and to outline the national information context in which it will operate.

Firstly, its name. It is, frankly, long compared with the snappier titles of its two predecessor bodies. However its name is highly informative about the nature and status of the organisation, and every word in it carries its own special weight:

- Chartered – officially acknowledged as having authority and credibility...
- Institute – a corporate force to be reckoned with...
- Library – the frequent, but not sole working environment of CILIP members...
- Information – CILIP members' core business...
- Professionals – CILIP members demonstrate expertise and are committed to excellence.

To expand briefly on this analysis:

Whether we call ourselves an Association, Institute, Society or Club, we have to have a word that denotes incorporation. This incorporated body represents the interests of people – professionals, rather than libraries or the services they provide; we can get too fixated on the library as an environment. Those people use their expertise to exploit information; it may be in a library, whether a physical or virtual one, and we would not wish to lose sight of that. But libraries do not have a monopoly on information, and it is the job of library and information professionals to seek knowledge out, codify and disseminate it wherever it may be – inside people's heads, for example. Finally, this is a Chartered body. Awarded by the UK's Privy Council, which is answerable directly to the Queen, the Charter proclaims CILIP's commitment to excellence, and to continuing professional development. It offers the library and information profession parity of esteem with personnel professionals, management accountants, patent agents, bankers, all of whom also have their own chartered bodies.

Underpinning all of CILIP's activities is a highly effective infrastructure – specialist services tailored to meet the widest possible range of Member needs, with profitable internal businesses to further enhance the service and generate income for the Members' benefit. Less than half of CILIP's income comes from Member subscriptions, and the benefits come in the form of Members' discounts on the full range of services. CILIP is fully accountable to its Members, and its Council and Committee work enables them to determine how the organisation will develop in the future.

## *Council and Committees*

CILIP's governing body is its Council, composed of representatives of Branches and Groups, a number of Councillors elected nationally, and the Honorary Officers of the organisation. CILIP is a registered charity and Councillors are the Trustees of the charity.

The Council meets three or four times each year to decide on major issues of policy and resource allocation, to scrutinise the work of its various Committees, and to review the Regulations which govern the ways in which CILIP conducts its business. As a Chartered Institute, CILIP has a Royal Charter and associated Byelaws which are subject to approval by the Privy Council. These set a broad framework within which the details of rules and procedures are determined by the Council.

In between meetings of the Council, matters of policy and resource allocation and the overall management of CILIP are dealt with by the Executive Board, which also has responsibility for the organisation's equal opportunities policy and practice.

In addition, there are three broad areas of Committee work to cover in detail the various activities of CILIP.

At the heart of any professional body are processes of professional development and standards of professional practice. In this area the Committee structure covers activities such as: the accreditation of courses in librarianship and information science; the framework of qualifications awarded by CILIP; the code of professional conduct; the work of Branches and Groups; and other matters related to the profession.

Central to the work of CILIP is the portfolio of Enterprises, which generate more than half of the income used to fund CILIP's various activities. To oversee these income-generating activities CILIP has an Enterprise Board, and there is also an Editorial Board to advise the Editor of CILIP's monthly professional magazine, *Update*.

## *Chief Executive's Directorate*

Central functions essential to the effective running of CILIP in all its aspects come under the Chief Executive's Directorate. Here can be found secretariat support to Council and Committees, the finance and personnel functions and information technology services – as well as the Principal Policy Adviser's team, marketing and external relations. Departments in the Chief Executive's Directorate work with all sections of CILIP's Member Services and Enterprises Directorates, to ensure that CILIP's various services run smoothly with the support they need to ensure their continuing success.

## *Member Services*

The Directorate of Member Services provides a range of direct and indirect support activities which focus on Members' needs and promote the profile of the profession to key decision makers.

The Directorate consists of three teams: Membership, Careers & Qualifications (MCQ), International Relations & Information Services (IRIS) and a team of Advisers who work closely with the Director on professional strategy and advocacy matters.

MCQ is responsible for CILIP's policies on education and the training of library and information workers. The department accredits courses in UK universities and administers and

monitors admission of candidates to the Register of Chartered Members. It also maintains the vital task of keeping Membership records accurate and up to date.

IRIS is responsible for handling all general enquiries and provides expert advice across the whole spectrum of LIS matters, both externally to Members and internally to colleagues within the CILIP infrastructure. The department undertakes general data gathering as well as specific fact finding investigations. CILIP's Professional Advisers will undertake «one to one» casework on employment issues and advise on complex professional issues for individual Members whilst providing balancing information to satisfy employers' needs. The Advisers also co-ordinate responses to government consultation papers on behalf of the profession, network to influence decision makers and continually lobby key stakeholders to ensure that the role of all libraries and the skills of librarians and information workers are fully recognised at national level. A specialist consultant is retained to advise and act on copyright matters on behalf of CILIP.

The International Office provides expertise and advice on international and overseas activities to Members, undertakes work in partnership with other national and international organisations – for example on standards and manifestos – develops programmes for overseas visitors and delegations (in both directions) and manages bilateral programmes. All of which enhance opportunities for continuing personal and professional development for Members.

### *CILIP Enterprises*

CILIP Enterprises is the «commercial» arm of the Institute, and comprises six separate departments each focused on a different area of activity. Its role is to generate income for the Institute by producing a wide range of goods and services for the information professional, both in the UK and overseas. Not only does it raise CILIP's profile, both within the library and information profession and beyond, but its essential contribution of over half CILIP's total revenue helps to keep Members' subscriptions down.

Facet Publishing, which is wholly owned by CILIP, publishes books on every aspect of library and information work. The *Update* team is responsible not only for CILIP's monthly *Update* magazine but also for CILIP's Website-[www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk). CILIP Enterprises' Training and Development Department offers training courses and executive briefings and INFOmatch, CILIP's recruitment agency, while the fortnightly *Library and Information Appointments* is the UK's leading source of job vacancies within the profession. With the Conferences Department handling conference, exhibition and event organisation not only for CILIP but also under contract to many other organisations, CILIP Enterprises has an excellent reputation for quality and service in all these fields.

Although CILIP Enterprises operates on commercial lines, its goods and services are geared to supporting Members in all aspects of their work. There are discounts on books and training courses available to all Members, while the recruitment service is free to all job seekers.

### *Subscriptions and benefits*

Subscription levels –based on income and regularly reviewed– are approved by the Members at CILIP's AGM. During the transitional period from 2002 to 2004, subscriptions of the two predecessor bodies will be brought into line in a staged process, overseen by CILIP's elected Council. Subscriptions are an essential part of CILIP's income, enabling it to provide the comprehensive range of services that the Members of a Chartered Institute incorporated



under the auspices of the Privy Council expect. But subscriptions provide only about 40% of CILIP's income; revenue from CILIP Enterprises, together with some rental and investment returns, make up the bulk of CILIP's income.

In return, the benefits for CILIP Members are extensive, whatever type of library or information service they work in. CILIP offers advice on careers, employment and professional issues, supports Members through lobbying and advocacy, awards qualifications to help Members shape their future, provides a wide range of networking opportunities, and gives special Member discounts on its full range of «commercial» products and services.

### *Code of Professional Conduct*

CILIP's Code of Conduct is a set of standards of ethical behaviour expected of CILIP Members. It sets out, in general terms, the standards and duties which it is reasonable to expect a professional to observe. This can be used as a point of reference when dealing with disciplinary procedures against Members, and it is intended to protect the profession, individual practitioners and their clients.

Members of the Institute are required to conduct themselves in such a way that their conduct would not be reasonably regarded by their professional colleagues within the field of library and information services as serious professional misconduct or as professional misconduct. It is by this overall test that their conduct will be judged.

(This Code was originally approved by the Library Association's Council and Annual General Meeting in 1983, in accordance with LA Bye-law 45(a), and the current (3rd) edition was issued in 1999. It will be revised by CILIP as part of the transitional period from 2002 to 2004.)

### **The future: expansion to meet new challenges**

CILIP is the professional Membership body of choice for upwards of 24,000 Members, at all stages of their career development. Nevertheless, there are many more people who could benefit from Membership of CILIP –people already working in libraries and information units, or with advice and guidance services, in records management or learning support, as knowledge managers, researchers or consultants. CILIP is open to anyone who uses library and information skills in the course of their work. Its aim is to create an inclusive profession, based on common skills and competencies, irrespective of where people work.

Part of the reason why CILIP can contemplate a growing membership in so many disciplines is the unprecedentedly high priority being given to information and knowledge issues within government, society and the economy. In all these areas, people with library and information-related skills have a role to play. At the first level are the wider society issues—the knowledge economy and learning society, globalisation and competitiveness, lifestyle changes and quality of life, the Human Rights Act. The library and information community needs to make connections between these big developments and people's access to information.

At the next level are those areas where much has already happened, but where it is important to ensure that the voice and contribution of library and information professionals is recognised and paid attention to. This level includes issues such as freedom of information and copyright, metadata and interoperability, universal access, legal deposit, heritage and legacy, e-government –all areas where the library and information community should expect its voice to be heard.

The third level contains the areas of most pressing need, where the library and information profession should be seeking to achieve greatest change. It includes in particular the issue of information competencies, encompassing people's personal skills, as well as whether the right specialists are to be found in the workforce, and whether organisations are developing the expertise they need in order to thrive in the information society and knowledge economy.

CILIP is committed to addressing all these challenges, and in the process to growing its Membership for the benefit of all its Members and stakeholders. A growing Membership will allow CILIP to offer an even wider range of services and facilities in the future, and to keep subscriptions within bounds. But most important of all, unification will allow the new Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals to speak on the profession's behalf on all these wider issues with an even more powerful voice than the LA and IIS do at present, benefiting not only its Members but also our society, economy and culture.

Fuller details of CILIP and its activities will be available at its Website –[www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk)–. Information on its two predecessor bodies can be found at (Institute of Information Scientists) and [www.la-hq.org.uk](http://www.la-hq.org.uk) (The Library Association).

## References

[1] [http://www.la-hq.org.uk/directory/prof\\_issues/opf.html](http://www.la-hq.org.uk/directory/prof_issues/opf.html).

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