



**Division VII, Education and Training Section**  
**“International Guidelines for Equivalency and  
reciprocity of Qualifications for LIS Professionals.”**

Report of the project submitted by  
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11/2/08

## **1. Aim and objectives**

The project aimed to explore the feasibility of developing Guidelines for the quality of LIS education programs that will provide a basis for establishing procedures for determining the equivalency of degrees granted and the reciprocity for recognition of job qualifications from the wide variety of LIS program contexts and cultures that exist internationally.

The specific objective was to develop and test the feasibility of guidelines that will assist employers and LIS education programs to assess the equivalency of earned degrees and certificates internationally and establish criteria for establishing reciprocity in assigning placement in educational programs and employment.

This project focused on determining if a common framework for LIS professional qualifications, competencies and learning outcomes necessary for different levels of professional employment and for a variety of job profiles is possible for LIS professionals in the international context of the information society.

## **2. Conclusions of Literature Review**

Based on the review of the literature dealing with Equivalency and Reciprocity of LIS Qualifications, it is clear that what is lacking is a uniform basis of assessing equivalent degrees internationally. For a small number of countries maintaining LIS education in the Anglo-American model, there are organizations and/or national bodies that provide a basis for making some comparisons and assessments. But for most of the rest of the world, there are no organizations or national bodies that take on this responsibility. The question remains, what is the feasibility of developing some form of procedures or guidelines that will be applicable internationally? The establishment of an international database of course content and assessment measures does not seem sustainable in terms of the time and expense that would be required to establish it and maintain it over time.

That leaves us with trying to determine what measures would be acceptable for reciprocity of degrees in those countries that have formal accreditation or credentialing programs and what would be acceptable in those countries that have no such formal process of accreditation or credentialing in place.

In those countries with formal accrediting and credentialing programs, it might be enough to develop measures that the approved LIS programs in each country would

accept as equivalent. In the U.S. and Canada, for example, it would be a Master's degree program as a minimum. But in many other parts of the world where the first professional degree is less than a Master's degree, the acceptance would be adjusted accordingly. The question as to what role IFLA Education and Training Standards would play at this point needs to be considered.

### **3. Methodology**

The literature on equivalency and reciprocity of qualifications for LIS professionals has been reviewed to provide the historical and research context for the methodology. The various current methods of assessing quality of LIS programs and competencies of LIS professionals have been analyzed. A questionnaire has been developed with the following purpose:

- To determine acceptable criteria and procedures for establishing equivalency and reciprocity of LIS Professional Qualifications.
- To determine best measures of quality assurance of LIS educational programs in the judgement of LIS professionals and LIS faculty worldwide.

The Feasibility of establishing or following through on the 1987 final recommendations:

1. To install an International Committee of Experts for the assessment of LIS education on advisory basis;
2. To develop an International Resource Center for relevant information on LIS education;
3. To endorse the national and international recognition of LIS professional qualifications, and to promote the professional status of librarians and information scientists in all countries.

Preferences for Quality assurance of LIS programs:

4. A Peer review team of LIS Professionals and Faculty to select Benchmarks based on LIS Professional Education Best Practice
5. A database of the results of a survey of LIS Professionals regarding their evaluation of the quality of the programs where they had taken courses.

What should be the basis of assessing learning outcomes?

Student evaluation of learning experience?

Employer evaluation of employee learning outcomes?

Exams used to assess student learning outcomes?

Core course content as specified in IFLA standards?

Employer established first day on the job criteria?

How much is each of these options worth paying for (Contingent Value)

The survey was conducted by email. The resources of the Education and Training Section of IFLA were utilized to facilitate the data gathering.

Two focus groups were held to gather data for the project. The first focus group was in September 2007 at an international conference in Lisbon. The second was during a European regional workshop organised in Zadar, Croatia, in January 2008.

A limitation of this survey is the low respondent rate from US and Asia and the total lack of respondents from Africa.

## **4. Findings**

### Professional qualifications

Most of the respondents provided evidence that the first professional degree for entry level professional positions in Europe and in Asia is the LIS Bachelor degree. In the United States and other countries, (as for example U.K. Poland, Turkey) LIS Master's Degree is required. Any Bachelor's degree (not in LIS) is required by some countries in Europe and Asia (Portugal, Bulgaria, Italy and Japan).

For civil servants, additional requirements are: certification of individuals (Estonia, Belgium), professional exam (Spain, Croatia), generic exam (Italy). For career advancement in Public Administration, there are special requirements, as professional retraining with 2 years curricula (Russia), or Master's degree completion (as in France).

### Professional Associations role

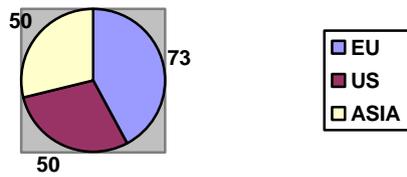
Who is overseeing the quality assurance process?

In U.S. and Canada and some other countries (Australia) the library association oversee the accreditation process of LIS programs, . In Europe library associations, except in the UK, are not involved in quality assurance of LIS programmes.

The oversight of library associations could be especially important for the recognition of the profession, and also for facilitating equivalency of qualifications at the international level.

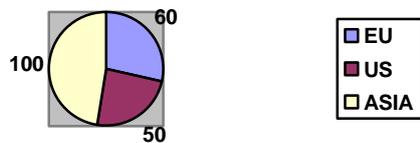
Most of the participants in the IFLA survey in Europe (73%), US (50%), and Asia (50%) would like IFLA to assume an active role in stimulating member associations in their country on this issue. A Quality model should be established by IFLA to achieve transparency and facilitate recognition of quality programs of study. .

### IFLA encouraging QA model



Seventy-three percent of the respondents from Asia and Europe would like IFLA to encourage member associations and institutions to establish systems of accreditation and/or certification in their country or region based on recognized Quality Assurance mode. Twenty percent of the respondents in Europe and 50% in Asia, felt IFLA should have a more active role in endorsing the task of national recognition of individuals having appropriate credentials.

### IFLA promoting accreditation/certification



### Accreditation and recognition procedure

How can IFLA or an international library organisation realise the task of accreditation? Three models have been indicated:

- international resource center on relevant information about LIS education.
- international experts committee for the assessment of LIS education on an advisory basis.
- learning outcomes to be met by all LIS professionals who wish to have their training recognized internationally.

The survey replies indicate that many of the respondents would prefer the third approach: a quality model focused on learning outcomes (53% in Europe, 50% in US and 50% in Asia). In order of preference, the other approaches are: an international resource center (50% in Europe, Asia and US) or the international experts committee (respectively 50% in Asia and 40% in Europe, 0% in the U.S.).

The respondents were asked also to give their opinion on two different approaches to learning outcomes:

- a benchmarking system established by sharing best experiences of LIS schools creating benchmarks to assess quality through a peer review process
- a second approach linking quality assurance of LIS education to the assessment of LIS programs by professionals who successfully completed the courses at each school. (Tammaro, 2005, p. 19)

The first approach of benchmarking was preferred, respectively from 60% of respondents in Europe, 100% in Asia and 50% in US. The second approach was indicated as 50% in Asia and US and 53% of the preferences in Europe.

## 5. Conclusion

IFLA could take the lead in establishing a quality model for library education programs to follow. The Quality model could focus on learning outcomes that students should possess to be competent professionals.

The validation of learning outcomes as a basis for establishing the feasibility of Guidelines for Equivalency and Reciprocity of LIS Professional Qualifications has been explored along with other quality assessment tools by surveying leaders in LIS education, librarians and information professionals on the cutting edge of the application of the internationalization of information in the twenty-first century. This learning outcomes approach can shift from quantitative criteria such as the length and content of courses studied, to the outcomes achieved and the competencies obtained during these studies. This approach is of more relevance to the labour market, and is certainly more flexible when taking into account issues of lifelong learning, non-traditional learning, and other forms of non-formal educational experiences. This means passing from a prescriptive QA system to a more descriptive one. The principle question asked of the student or graduate will therefore no longer be “what did you do to obtain your degree?” but rather “what can you do now that you have obtained your degree?”.

The identification of appropriate learning outcomes and competencies would also facilitate the ability of employers and academic institutions to establish international reciprocity and equivalency of qualification guidelines in the global world of library and information professionals. The final result of the project will be a draft Guidelines for Equivalency and Reciprocity document for review and discussion by the professional community.

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#### UNESCO-OECD Guidelines:

(2005) UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education Available at:

[http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Code%20of%20good%20practice\\_EN.asp#](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp#)

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UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2002 e 2004 used the mechanisms linked to the UNESCO regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications (1997) The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. Available at:

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## Appendix I. Thoughts on Draft Survey Instrument Components: (TW)

### Purpose:

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## Appendix 2: Review and Synopsis of UNESCO and OECD Guidelines with those cited in the IFLA Literature Review (AMT)

### UNESCO-OECD Guidelines:

(2005) UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education Available at:

[http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Code%20of%20good%20practice\\_EN.asp#](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp#)

(2001) Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. Available at:

[http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures\\_EN.asp#Top](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp#Top)

UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2002 e 2004 used the mechanisms linked to the UNESCO regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications (1997) The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. Available at:

<http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php->

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The criteria respect national sovereignty and denounce uniformity; also GATS requirements of transparency of products and regulations each country can impose to foreign exporters of products and services are followed.

All these guidelines and codes of practice directed to three objectives:

- improve transparency of programmes and qualifications
- stimulate cooperation and mutual recognition
- experience international cooperation and professional networks

While the first and second classes of objectives are related to relationship between countries, the third one refers to internationalisation and quality assurance experiences.

On the third class of activity, bottom up consensus building and voluntary acceptance of shared principles seems to be the preferred way to proceed between national agencies, professional bodies or joint courses. The methodology suggested or experimented include:

- international composition of review teams, exchanging qualified personnel among agencies, engage in cross-border joint assessment projects;
- forms of mutual recognition of accreditation agencies (example Washington Accord for engineers);
- recognition by an umbrella organisation in the quality assurance field;
- multilateral initiatives by professional bodies to work towards agreed international standards for the profession (example International Union of Architects);
- joint degrees are emerging as a method for institutions to agree on curricula and learning outcomes.

A comparison can be made between UNESCO OECD suggestions and IFLA SET:

	UNESCO OECD	IFLA SET
Transparency	The establishment of an international database based on a clear set of definitions and a typology of regulatory systems, listing all institutions that are recognised, registered, authorised, licensed, accredited, etc	(Fang and Nauta, 1987) To develop an International Resource Center for relevant information on LIS education  (Dalton Levinson 2000) A detailed database of LIS course content and duration of for each LIS education institution in the world.  Dowling calls for IFLA to identify accrediting agencies for LIS programs in each country
Cooperation in QA/recognition	Establish, develop and implement assessment criteria and procedures for comparing programmes and qualifications to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and to accommodate learning outcomes and competencies that are culturally appropriate in addition to input and process requirements;  Improve the accessibility at the international level of up to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on mutual recognition agreements for the professions and encourage the development of new agreements.	(Fang and Nauta, 1987) To install an International Committee of Experts for the assessment of LIS education on advisory basis;  (Fang and Nauta, 1987) “model form” to be used in conjunction with the information provided in the <i>International Guide</i> and to be completed by individuals seeking recognition of their LIS degrees or certificates in other  (Dalton Levinson 2000) International expansion of the existing NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) service in the EU
Internationalisation and QA/recognition	Some international professional associations are developing guidelines on recognising standards of professional programmes, usually respecting national sovereignty and denouncing uniformity.	(Dalton Levinson 2000) A database of national accreditation criteria by national library associations (Tammamo 2005) Benchmarking system be established by sharing best experiences of LIS schools

	Professional recognition arrangements can have an important harmonising impact on curricula, learning outcomes and qualifications	creating benchmarks to assess quality through a peer review process and linking quality assurance of LIS education to the assessment of LIS programs by professionals who successfully completed the courses at each school
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There is increased understanding among international experts and policy-makers that it is of limited value to try to achieve convergence in the formal input and process characteristics of programmes. The way programmes are organised, the delivery mode, the specific teaching and learning setting, even the exact amount of time and workload invested in them, are increasingly diverging, but this divergence does not intrinsically affect the comparability of learning outcomes.

[www.ifla.org/VII/s23/index.htm](http://www.ifla.org/VII/s23/index.htm)