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TRAINING INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN THE
ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

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TRAINING INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

BACKGROUND

The Region

The phrase English-speaking Caribbean is normally used to describe the former British Colonial territories in and surrounding the Caribbean Sea. The area comprises the mainland territories of Guyana (South America) and Belize (Central America) and several islands of the archipelago of Greater and Lesser Antilles stretching from Jamaica in the west to Trinidad and Tobago in the south.¹ These countries are all relatively small in area and population size, ranging from Jamaica, the largest, with over 4,000 sq. miles and more than two million inhabitants and Trinidad and Tobago (1,980 sq. miles) with a population of just over one million, to Anguilla with 35 sq. miles and 7,000 inhabitants. They have stable governments but limited resources, weak and unstable economies. A slow diversification process is taking place away from dependence on export crops to tourism, export manufacturing and services.²

Caribbean Community

Apart from the affinities of language and similar historical development, they share many cultural and social features which bind them together as a grouping of more than mere chance or convenience. A novel federation of ten of them (called simply the West Indies) lasted only four years (1958-1962) but has been succeeded by other cooperative structures in CARIFTA (Caribbean Free Trade Association) and, since 1972, the broader-based Caribbean Community, known as CARICOM. The CARICOM Secretariat, which functions from Guyana, addresses a wide range of issues of regional interest including agriculture, education, health and trade. A review³ conducted in the early eighties identifies "regional library development" as one of the areas of functional co-operation and some specific issues and projects in the field have been taken up from time to time. Meetings of the relevant ministers are convened periodically and an annual CARICOM summit brings together the Prime Ministers for discussion and decision-making on issues of mutual interest and importance. Separate ministerial meetings have not applied in the case of libraries and information which fall usually under the education ministers. Such references to Information as occur in some ministry titles, do not encompass the broader connotations now being applied in our field.

Although many of the same territories share membership in other international or regional bodies with international links, such as the OAS and the CDCC (Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee) of UNECLAC, CARICOM is the only grouping which is exclusively of English-speaking countries. In addition, a smaller grouping exists within CARICOM in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) with headquarters in St. Lucia; currently there is a movement towards political unity between some of these smaller Eastern Caribbean states. There is, in short, no dearth of cooperative frameworks for action in the Caribbean subregion of English-speaking countries and this augurs well for a coordinated approach to Information and training for Information Professionals.

Library and information services

The region defined above is one of diversity in library and information services. Two reviews of a comprehensive nature have appeared in the eighties. Juan Freudenthal's⁴ general article, supplementing the individual country articles for the four more developed countries (MDC's) in the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, provides a detailed historical overview and synthesis of library development in the region, with an annotated bibliography. Daphne Douglas's⁵ contribution on the British Caribbean to Miles Jackson's review of contemporary developments also gives a macroview, addressing each of the main library types separately. Together these sources trace the pattern of development for the region's library and information services.

One finds the strongest public library services in Jamaica and to a lesser extent in Barbados and Guyana with all the smaller territories lagging well behind. The Library Association of Trinidad and Tobago recently painted a sorry picture⁶ of stagnation over 20 years and indeed, shrinking public library service points, but a less gloomy situation for school libraries at the secondary level and a promise of libraries in all primary schools under a current IDB project. Throughout the region there is some growth in school library services (often by bookmobiles) whether based in existing public libraries or independent of them. Academic libraries (mostly those of the University of the West Indies and a few other tertiary institutions) are relatively well developed but special libraries have been the major growth area for the region as a whole and especially in the MDC's.⁷

Noteworthy trends have been the emergence of

- (1) national coordinating bodies in the MDC's (NACOLADS in Jamaica and Barbados and NALIAS in Trinidad and Tobago) and a Network Manager to coordinate information systems for the Less Developed Countries (LDC's) of the OECS;
- (2) national plans for the development of national systems in most territories with sponsorship or assistance mainly from CARICOM, UNESCO and IDRC in their preparation;
- (3) regional coordination and cooperation mechanisms in the Association of Caribbean University Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) and the Caribbean Documentation Centre (CDC) of UNECLAC; the latter especially has influenced the growth of information systems and the use of microcomputers in libraries throughout the region.
- (4) sectoral information systems, many operative⁸ and others projected.⁹

Education for librarianship

Dorothy Collings¹⁰, Daphne Douglas¹¹, and Juan Freudenthal¹² all provide useful reviews of the growth of library education and training in the area. They trace the early stages in the fifties when the British pattern of pre-professional recruitment was followed by in-service study for professional examinations. The Eastern Caribbean Regional Library (ECRL) based in Trinidad provided students from all the islands with training in preparation for the British Library Association exams until its external funding ceased in 1955. Thereafter, between 1959 and 1964 successive tutors were employed by the Trinidad and Tobago government to enable the Central Library to continue this basic work. When

that programme too disappeared there was a long hiatus until the Department of Library Studies was finally established at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica in 1971 with UNESCO assistance. This was achieved after years of effort by the Library Associations of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and it marked a major milestone in library education for this region.

Throughout the early years some professionals also took all or part of their training abroad, mainly in the United Kingdom and latterly, in Canada and the United States of America. This mixed pattern has continued but local training has predominated naturally since the school was established. Douglas¹³ concludes that British Caribbean librarianship "has been built upon a synthesis of the best and most applicable practices in other countries."

Department of Library Studies, UWI

Almost from its inception the department has attempted to address the training needs for professionals by offering two programmes concurrently:

- (1) a three-year undergraduate programme leading to the B.A. with both library science and non-library science subjects, begun in 1971;
- (2) a one-year post-graduate diploma leading to the Dip. Lib. Studies which began in 1973.

In recent years the department also introduced a third programme offering a research Master's degree – M.Phil (by thesis) but there have been no takers so far.

In 1988 proposals were accepted for the conversion of the 12-month post-graduate diploma to a 15-month M.A. degree with a "light" thesis. By the end of the 1988/89 academic year the Department had produced 410 graduates, 251 with first degrees and 159 with diplomas. They were drawn from 15 of the 16 territories, the Cayman Islands being the lone exception. The first M.A. students have not yet graduated.

Still in the making are proposals for another advanced qualification (M.A. by coursework) which would offer B.A. degree holders (with a library science component) an opportunity to pursue further work in their academic subject major, along with library science options. Since the University is about to change to a semester system, these proposals have been framed in this context and it is hoped to finalize them at the appropriate time.

As the only institution in the region offering a programme of library education, the department is inevitably a major (though not the only) point of focus in discussing problems and needs in the training of information professionals for the English-speaking sub-region of the Caribbean.

It should be noted in passing that while alone in this role for the geographic area, it is far from being isolated in any sense. Many of its problems and needs are not unlike those of other similar institutions in the third world, while others are shared world-wide. Even its local problems must therefore be seen against the background of the world scene in this complex field of information which is now at a transitory stage in its evolution.

No attempt can be made here to define the "Information Profession." The emergence of such a definition is, however, a crucial issue. It is in fact one of the needs to which this paper will refer in the specific context of this region although the need is clearly much wider, as the landmark study by Griffiths and King¹⁴ clearly established.

PROBLEMS

World-wide issues

Harmonization and core curricula

The many issues surrounding such a clear definition, with a philosophy of education for the newly emerging information profession, may thus be considered very much a part of the fundamental problems facing our developing countries in this area. They are in the unfortunate position of confronting debates on these inevitable changes well before having fully developed or perfected traditional library systems in many cases.

Current literature^{15,16} indicates the transitional nature of present library education as the gradual shift to a "post-industrial" "information society" occurs. Shinebourne¹⁷ has, in fact, gone so far as to suggest that "education for librarianship as a distinct profession" should cease. Indirectly at least, the title of this paper (as assigned) and of our whole meeting seem to endorse that view.

Seminars and colloquia on harmonization of education and training for library, information and archival personnel have explored possible approaches but not yet resolved the formulation of core curricula with basic and specialist options. An interesting and successful pilot project described¹⁸ for the Polytechnic of Hanover in West Germany, suggests that the problem is not insoluble.

Internationalization

It would, however, be a major undertaking to succeed in gaining world-wide acceptance of such curriculum changes, for the internationalization of library and information science education is still to be achieved. While this objective is highly desirable and is continuously pursued by international organizations such as UNESCO (our meeting is but one example) we must admit that currently our profession is far from stable or homogeneous. Such advantages as internationalization could offer are largely unproven¹⁹ except for the obvious personal mobility it would afford all information professionals. The wide disparity in existing programmes and different stages and types of development internationally do not augur well for success, especially in these times of technological change.

Caribbean issues

Within these two broad problem areas, which are acknowledged world-wide, lie a cluster of familiar issues; they tend to affect our countries more severely because they are combined with a weak information climate – under-developed infrastructures and a general lack of basic resources, whether economic, human, physical or bibliographic.

Problems facing our particular region may be enumerated as follows:

(1) *Professional identification and educational objectives*

Identification of the overall objective to be served, i.e. the existing and potential information users, their needs and the true nature and dimensions of an emerging information profession within the Caribbean context.

(2) *Types and levels of training*

Consensus on the most desirable types and levels of training to meet the region's needs as identified, perceived or projected at local or country levels. Should we train generalists and/or specialists? Should training be conducted at undergraduate and/or post-graduate levels? How should these programmes interrelate if both obtain?

Much informal debate has surrounded these issues, with different countries adopting different positions. Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago have both favoured post-graduate rather than undergraduate training as official policy.

(3) *Harmonization*

Should harmonization assume greater importance in view of the need for all-round skills in many of the smaller island settings where a trained professional is likely to be expected to advise on (if not work at) archives and records management alongside traditional library settings and even futuristic information services?

(4) *Curriculum content and length of programmes*

Deciding on the desirable content and optimum length of programmes for basic and specialist training, especially in the light of the immediate functionality in supervisory (or even leading) roles often demanded of new graduates due to acute staff shortages, but still keeping training costs (borne mainly by the governments) in mind. Can schools hope, Beasley²⁰ rightly asks, to teach enough theory for the future while offering specialized training for the present in a one-year post-graduate programme?

Few, if any, of these general issues have been conclusively resolved across the boundaries of the major developed countries on which we tend to pattern our own systems. There are, moreover, several problems which can be seen as peculiar to the region.

(5) *Theory vs practice*

Arriving at a suitable balance between theory absorption and practice periods as part of the education programme.

The fieldwork programmes have, so far, worked well but still pose some logistical problems.

(6) *Continuing education locally and abroad*

The nature and extent of continuing education programmes which should be formally planned, the most appropriate areas for relegation to such programmes and how they should relate to, or link with programmes of advanced study and higher degree work.

Closely related to the above is the role of overseas training and the areas for which it should realistically be retained in planning.

(7) *Paraprofessional training*

Grasping the nettle of taking a wider approach by embracing planning in parallel for paraprofessional training. This approach is advocated by Horowitz²¹ as being particularly necessary in long-range planning of library and information services in the developing world. In the Caribbean context it is also dictated by chronic shortages of full professionals in the short to medium term and the widespread use of library assistants, for example in junior secondary and comprehensive schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Indeed, there has already been a good deal of attention devoted to developing a model and modular curriculum²² for such training but this has not been without its controversies. The large degree of professional content proposed has led to some distinct expressions of fear that such programmes could retard, if not prevent, the development of more fully trained professionals, thus undermining the profession itself. This is a common problem articulated by Guadalupe Carrión²³ in relation to Mexico.

(8) *Professional image and student recruitment*

Conquering the poor image which obtains due to low salaries and, at best, unclear public perceptions of "library work" with the vicious circle these generate for recruitment of professional trainees of suitable quality in viable quantity. The emergence of such variants as "documentalist" and "information specialist" job titles in some settings has only compounded the problem. Recruitment practices for the training programme are further influenced by the peculiar role of the several governments which support the university and, quite often, students from their territories through scholarship awards.

(9) *High mobility and vacancy levels*

The high mobility of staff in some territories and large numbers of vacant positions with slow policies and practices for making replacements has complicated the job market over several years.

(10) *Manpower needs assessment*

Lastly, the lack of up-to-date manpower needs assessments to inform the planning of training programmes is currently complicated even further by the "continuous revolution" being effected by Information Technology; this relates to professional roles and functions as a whole and to Technical Services operations in particular.

Problems of the Department of Library Studies

Although finding solutions to this hub of issues is evidently crucial to the full emergence of the profession in the area and deserves full airing, the problem has not been seriously addressed in any Caribbean forum other than the Department of Library Studies (DLS) itself, to a limited extent and on rare occasions.

In 1986 the Department brought together a team of experienced professionals from all parts of the region for its fourth Advisory Committee meeting and specifically to discuss a

restructuring of the curriculum, in advance of its introduction of the new Master's programme described earlier. The many broad policy issues outlined above could not, however, be tackled as such. The focus was largely on a cluster of new programme proposals with curriculum implications.

The crux of the problem facing the department has been the development of strategies to successfully confront the growing variety and diversity of needs in the library and information sector from a small school with very limited resources.

The head of the DLS currently identifies²⁴ the major problems as

- (1) financial constraints, resulting in too limited an establishment (five full-time plus part-time) to cover all specializations needed, especially in the modern context. Thus the annual reports²⁵ of the early eighties refer to "Automation in Libraries" as a special course being offered for the third time with only an expressed hope that it could become regular and to "several other courses which should be offered" and efforts to make this possible;
- (2) inadequate space especially to accommodate such growth areas as audio visual, computer, cataloguing and conservation laboratories;
- (3) difficulty in recruitment of students of suitable quality to join the profession in the face of low salaries and inadequate career paths throughout the region;
- (4) the irony of acute staff shortages and high turnover in major services in the region so skewing the labour market that new graduates (even with limited skills and ability) can be very selective about job offerings. This in some measure masks the problems faced by the education programme;
- (5) a fifth problem she cited relates to the inflexibility imposed by the school's status as a department in the Faculty of Arts and General Studies of the university, subject to the same general regulations, staff/student ratios and other constraints not always appropriate to education for a rapidly changing profession.

Many criticisms which could be levelled at the programme can indeed be attributed to one or other of these fundamental problems over which the school has no control. Thus, for example, restrictions in available options at different times and limitations in course offerings can be said to be partly responsible for the shortage of personnel with newer technological skills. The seeming "neglect" of full training in archives and records management is another obvious example. Such a programme has long been proposed but still awaits funding.

Indeed, most of the modern competencies listed by James Rush in 1985/86 and cited by Donald Sagar²⁶ as being absent from LIS programme catalogues abroad are equally absent here – marketing, telecommunications, electronic publishing, computer architecture and graphics, database management, to name a few. Another pertinent observation is that here as elsewhere²⁷ training is concentrated on technical skills as opposed to social skills or "behaviour that facilitates human social interaction." This is a deficiency on which a recent graduate commented when consulted during the preparation of this paper.

These problems notwithstanding, many informal reactions give the school warm credit for its achievements. Much credit is certainly due for the ingenuity and success which

have characterized its quests for external funding and other assistance from library schools abroad. Although this has itself posed the problem of extra and over-taxing burdens on the head of the school (who retains substantial teaching loads), it has its rewards for full credit is likewise given to the high calibre of many of the graduates produced by the programme over the years and the valuable contribution they have been able to make to the development of LIS in the region.

NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS

Following on such a formidable list of problems there are naturally many identifiable needs in order to arrive at an ideal education programme for information professionals in the region. The range of solutions to specific problems is also growing; some of these have already been articulated in the literature (published and unpublished) or proposed informally. In what follows an attempt is made to consolidate a statement of needs, incorporating some problem-solving as a logical prelude to future action whether at national, regional or international levels.

General Needs for the Region

Information policies and utilization environment

It is clear that the region already suffers in some measure from the current difficulty being experienced world-wide (in varying degrees) in grappling with definitions, demarcations between facets and interpretations of information, its uses, users and handling. Its relationship with the more traditional libraries and librarianship which have been most familiar in the Caribbean has been an equally slippery slope, still being negotiated with some caution to avoid undue confusion.

The need therefore is to gradually improve the information environment in each country, building on existing services to develop the newer concepts of information management, using information technology wherever feasible.

At a time when the profession in the developed world is being exhorted²⁸ to change and broaden its perspective, this first and basic need, nay challenge, means active promotion of the broader definition and role of information and information systems in Caribbean societies as a key to development. Only when favourable national and regional positions on information policy are assumed and a better climate for information utilization prevails will the full implications of education for information professionals be recognized as a matter of importance, warranting attention at the highest level. Existing associations (national and regional) will need to understand and identify with this objective in order to lobby accordingly.

The newly launched CARICOM Commission to prepare the region for the year 2000 seems to offer an excellent opportunity to address the use of information as a vital resource, taking this through all its policy implications.

Strengthening the information profession and its image

While attacking this fundamental need for national and regional policy development to create a healthy information climate, the basic need is to develop and strengthen information services of all kinds and to identify and promote a unified profession with a new image.

For this much better understanding of specific local conditions and pitfalls in the past will be required. By integrating planning for Library and Information Services (LIS) with national planning several vital links in the chain can be strengthened at the same time. Improved services and conditions of service would increase the status of the profession, winning more public regard both for information itself as a resource and for information professionals. These in turn should impact favourably on the recruitment and career path problems identified.

Developing research programmes

The development of programmes of research in the information field, coordinated at national and regional levels is an important need in this context. Such programmes would underpin national LIS planning and address several other areas of need in so doing. The fact that this was an early objective of the DLS,²⁹ which has not, however, produced any higher degree graduates so far, underlines the gap.

Only the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) of the UWI and NACOLADS in Jamaica have made some sallies of this nature and there is virtually virgin territory for information research in general and for research with a focus on library education in particular.

Thus, for example, the following possible research areas can be readily identified:

- (a) *Manpower surveys* are an on-going need which has already been addressed^{30,31} but requires current and future updates. A regular programme with clearly assigned responsibility is needed.

Rapid changes have occurred since the second survey of 1983 (published in 1985) and a decline in the Trinidad and Tobago economy is known to have invalidated projections made. Moreover, the more widespread use of computers has radically changed procedures and affected the scale of need for new professional staff. Many areas of critical information were addressed in that study and although response levels were disappointingly low the findings provide the only source of empirical data in this area.

- (b) *Professional profiles* are needed based on existing job descriptions (written or otherwise) especially to compare and distinguish as necessary between different job titles with similar functions. The titles Librarian, Documentalist, Information Scientist and Information Specialist have all been applied by different organizations and some clear and agreed standards are needed in their use in a unified information profession.

The terminology applied to paraprofessional and other support staff is equally varied and confusing and could similarly bear greater uniformity for better understanding within and outside the profession.

- (c) *Identification of professional knowledge needs* at different stages of a career and in different LIS settings including comparisons between the requirements of large and small units (especially one-man-band school and special libraries) are needed to relate to training and curriculum needs as well as to field work and in-service training programmes.

- (d) *Follow-up studies* of groups of graduates of the school to probe what knowledge and skills they have needed and how far their training either matched these needs or had to be supplemented by further education formal or otherwise.
- (e) *Probing of employer satisfaction levels* in libraries of different types with graduate recruits trained within and outside the Caribbean.

Information flowing from such research projects should prove most enlightening in identifying some future directions for the education programme.

General review and evaluation of the DLS

Indeed, much of the research suggested above would readily fit into a full-scale review and evaluation of the DLS which is now approaching its 20th year of operation. Such a general review therefore seems a definite need as a prelude to further planning.

Regional planning of education and training

Any concerted action plan for the growth of information services will naturally involve conscious planning for education and training at all levels on a wide scale for the new information profession, as its definition and dimensions evolve, or are determined within an information-oriented Caribbean society.

This will require

- (a) careful identification of the knowledge and skills needed, not only to match jobs which exist (as suggested for the research programme) and those being created but more importantly, redefinitions of these skills in relation to what information professionals will be doing and how they are serving (or will serve) users as the dramatic effects of Information Technology increase in the region,
- (b) suitable redefinition of educational objectives, with curriculum adjustments for professionals and paraprofessionals in the light of these findings, and
- (c) scholarships or other incentive and assistance programmes, including overseas specialist training to ensure the development of a suitable cadre of professionals.

Thus attention must be focussed on training library educators as well as specialists for several specific types of functions, in addition to the more general streams. Greene and Robb³² pinpointed such a need for systems analysts in their study. Sporadic scholarship awards have usually obtained in the field but only the Trinidad and Tobago Government consistently provided a substantial number of these awards for several years. Unfortunately this has now ceased.

Training of leaders

There is a growing need also to develop and train a team of leaders both for teaching and practising positions. Greene and Robb³³ refer to a large group of "old stagers" especially in the government services i.e. staff who were ten to twenty years in the profession. This ageing of senior personnel has obvious implications for training new leaders. The tendency has been to expect them to emerge naturally and succession planning has not commonly obtained in the profession. This is often compounded by high mobility

between professional posts in a given country and a leadership training programme could well be devised for the near future.

Planned paraprofessional training

The peculiar circumstances of the region described earlier make it imperative that equal attention be given to provision for paraprofessional training standardizing curriculum content, entry requirements and suitable posts for their absorption in close harmony (rather than conflict as has been feared) with full professional functions.

Only two countries (Barbados and Jamaica) have so far developed formal programmes for such training at community colleges. Parallel developments for the other countries (or groups of countries such as the OECS) are needed.

Needs of the Department of Library Studies

Against this general background several specific needs for the DLS can be listed.

Continuous evaluation and dialogue

There is a clear case for a strong partnership (with continuing dialogue) between this single source of education for the profession and the major employers of its output. Although seemingly difficult to achieve, the Department addressed this need within one year of its establishment by organizing an Advisory Committee with appropriate membership. Unfortunately it has only been able to convene a few meetings at irregular and long intervals, usually in conjunction with other business, since substantial travel funding is inevitably involved.

A formula for funding regular meetings of the Committee and for continuous evaluation of the programme is needed, especially after the proposed review and evaluation have been undertaken. Wide-ranging input from the committee at that stage could usefully inform the revision of the department's development plan which should naturally follow such an exercise.

New building

Both in the development plan and in its recent identification of major problems the department has pointed to areas of need which are basic enough to warrant immediate attention, without fear of prejudging any issues which could arise from an evaluation exercise. The field of information as a whole is already an acknowledged growth area and some basic strengthening of the school's capability is equally recognised as a major need.

Thus a new building should be an early target. While its detailed planning should preferably follow the proposed review, funds should currently be sought as part of the university's Rehabilitation and Development Programme.

Special funding

Apart from special equipment needs identified in the plan, immediate special funding should also be included at least to provide an interim boost in additional options, using not only part-time but also short-term specialist staff from a variety of sources. This would dramatically improve course offerings to students at both levels in the programme as well as to the many seekers of continuing education, for specialist roles in the region. Areas of

need identified in the last survey were indexing and abstracting, non-book materials, automation and audio-visual librarianship. While some of these have already been taken up, automation is itself such a wide field that particular attention should be given to expanding on the single course now being offered. Exposure to CD-ROM and on-line searching or management of data base systems, for example, would be most useful.

Restructuring of programmes

The restructuring of programmes which has already begun with the new and proposed M.A.'s needs to be taken in greater depth, based on the evaluation proposed earlier, and taking regional trends in information policy and development into full account.

Thus, beginning but urgent consideration needs to be given to how the university might best address Caribbean needs for the coming information age in its total programmes; this could possibly call for the creation of a new school, faculty, or inter-faculty structure or other mechanisms to meet the inter-disciplinary needs of today's information management concepts. Greene and Robb³⁵ have recommended that the department should be developed into a professional school and this was endorsed by the Head of Department's comments on the inflexibility of its present status within a faculty.

Whatever restructuring emerges, the absorption of output from undergraduate and post-graduate programmes, if both remain, should be clearly differentiated. Bryson's³⁶ advice in this regard (to distinguish between entry to the field and the profession) may prove pertinent, especially if a similar training programme is adopted for several information-related fields.

Integrated Information Studies Programme

In such a reorganization a composite Information Studies Programme might well be arrived at for Library Studies, Mass Communications and parts of Management and Computer Science thus creating an integrated whole for many information-related professions and sub-professions such as journalism, broadcasting, publishing, editing, indexing, abstracting librarianship, archives, records management, documentation, information science, database and information system management, systems analysis, communications management and many more.

Well-structured programmes in these fields should fit in well with a new information thrust throughout the societies of the region. It has already been suggested elsewhere in this paper that such a thrust is a vital need and might logically be expected to come from the new CARICOM Commission's activities in preparation for the year 2000.

Suggestions along similar lines are already surfacing in the U.K.³⁷ and this might be especially appropriate to our developing countries where the numbers to be trained for each field would be smaller, wider opportunities and career paths would be opened up and pooled resources could also prove beneficial. Library and archival services are being seen as a small part of this broader information picture – the growing information industry. Changes and signs of change have indeed already occurred in universities like Salford in the U.K.³⁸ and Carnegie Mellon in the U.S.³⁹ which have merged their computer centres and libraries under one director.

It would be most opportune for the University of the West Indies to lead the Caribbean in coming to terms with this information revolution facing the society in the years ahead.

Research programme growth

Any growth in the department's higher degree programme should result in some contribution to research needs in the field. This could include indirect (if not direct) assistance to governments in the planning and development of their LIS infrastructures. Indeed, the department's current brochure indicates that a consultancy service of this kind is already offered but formal research on user needs and information-seeking habits in specific fields, for example, would help to determine service requirements and networking possibilities.

Gradual growth of research programmes is therefore an obvious need to be satisfied. Two approaches which could help to promote activity in this area might be the injection of long-experienced supervisors of post-graduate work at the school and the granting of research fellowships to suitable candidates at the same time.

Other special needs

In addition to the general needs and needs of the DLS already identified, a few special areas of need should also be mentioned.

Qualities and qualifications of recruits

Reference has been made to the problem being experienced in recruitment of suitable students to join the existing profession. These problems could grow for a broadened information profession and it will be increasingly important to consider the aptitudes and attitudes or "behavioural traits"⁴⁰ which should be sought. A formidable but plausible list of 24 qualities is provided by Niemeyer,⁴¹ for example, in relation to school libraries and media centres. The wider the definition of the new information profession arrived at, the more options will be open to graduates and additional course mixes can help students to build in certain areas (e.g. in social skills by taking psychology or other relevant social science courses) but the need to avoid training misfits will remain.

Special joint training programmes

There is a growing need to address the current dearth of systems analysts and subject specialists by providing attractive opportunities for their training. The joint honours programmes offered by the (former) College of Librarianship, Wales and the University of Wales come to mind and similar options might well be explored locally.

Caribbean service orientation

In planning for the education of the new information professional, special attention should be focussed on peculiarities of the region, its cultural traditions and mores and how these impact on LIS.

A compulsory Caribbean study is already required by the UWI (and a university course on Caribbean History) but there is a need to ensure that the new professional is fully service-oriented in a Caribbean context – capable of repackaging and interpreting information where this is indicated to facilitate the assimilation of its content. This, too, fits in with the wider interpretation of the information professional, going beyond the traditional objective dissemination of information, as and where this is deemed appropriate.

Cooperation and networking

Lastly, in the training of information professionals closer attention will be necessary to Caribbean cooperation and networking, especially in the context of technological advances. Many changes in professional assignments could flow from coordination of information systems both in building and accessing Caribbean databases for wide use. Greater awareness of and sensitivity to these possibilities among graduates would be a distinct advantage.

The information systems movement which has mushroomed with little coordination and control is at once an asset and a liability – asset in its potential for meeting vital Caribbean information needs currently and in the future, but liability, because the movement is largely uncontrolled and uncoordinated⁴² with some duplicated efforts and overlapping systems while other areas remain uncovered. This is resulting in failure to maximize the use of scarce personnel, a luxury the region can ill-afford.

OPPORTUNITIES AND THE LABOUR MARKET

At the time of the 1983 survey, Green and Robb⁴³ concluded that the current training programmes had made only marginal impact on needs for personnel in the libraries and information services of the region. In their 1989 article⁴⁴ they confirm that "these trends seem to continue and demand will continue to outstrip supply." The comments of the Head of the DLS supported by other current literature⁴⁵ all indicate that there is indeed a large number of current vacancies to be filled and a dearth of suitably trained personnel.

The contributory factors vary from migration of trained staff, to high mobility between public academic and special libraries (public and private sector) and slow to low levels of action in filling vacancies. In some cases a freeze on filling vacancies currently obtains. But the end result across the region is similar for the more traditional LIS services. A London University report⁴⁶ on national archives in the Caribbean cites similar problems in maintaining a corpus of trained and experienced professional staff.

That 1986 report, however, sees the region as being on the edge of expansion of both archival and records management services with a potential demand for trained manpower to support a permanent training programme for initial qualifications in these fields.

New opportunities, moreover, are already evident in the MDC's and to a lesser extent in the LDC's. They are arising from the introduction of information management concepts and the use of information technology with sophisticated information systems requiring non-traditional skills.

Still other opportunities are still-born due to prevailing circumstances. Thus, for example, in some cases non-librarian managers do not necessarily identify new jobs they create and advertise with library or information science qualifications and functions until after consultation with professionals in the field. Opportunities which could exist in private organizations such as the Association for Caribbean Transformation (ACT) (which provides information system services) are not yet being seen as part of this broad "information profession" since it is yet to be defined and recognized in our area.

Informally, however, that recognition is already on the way. Indexers and abstractors employed by UNECLAC as part of its information systems thrust at the Caribbean

Documentation Centre have mostly been graduate non-librarians with subject strengths. Happily, many of them have been wooed into the profession after this exposure, proceeding to post-graduate qualifications in the field. The person responsible for their patent information system (CARPIN) is similarly a non-librarian who was previously employed as an "information specialist" at the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI). This latter organization has a mixture of traditional librarians and information scientists or specialists working in the Technical Information Service (TIS) providing a range of information services such as database searching linked with technical advice to its commercial clients.

Some special libraries and the UWI libraries however, are using staff with traditional LIS training, enhanced by continuing education and in-service training to provide similar information services. These include indexing, abstracting, building and management of in-house databases, CD-ROM and on-line database searching, etc. There is, therefore, no recognisable distinction in functions for many of these information professionals with different types of qualifications and job titles. In short, the new information professional already exists in the region and needs only to be identified and recognized as such, both within and outside the field.

It is clear, therefore, that the first need cited earlier in this paper to identify the new information profession in our Caribbean context can be extended to include rationalization of existing positions and terminology to broaden the range of opportunities (many of which already exist) for new information professionals as a whole.

By addressing training needs in this wider context and promoting new information management concepts in a modern information environment further opportunities will naturally arise. Proximity to and close links with the North American developed information scene are already having the inevitable catalytic impact and this is likely to grow rather than diminish.

Indeed, Greene and Robb⁴⁷ state that evidence exists that, although not yet established, a database industry is likely to emerge soon. They do not however, advance that evidence concretely beyond examples of what is already being done by ACT. The telecommunication services table they provide includes the four MDC's of this region and is itself some evidence of the enabling technologies which are already on tap, except in the case of Guyana.

There is undoubtedly fertile ground for the growth of a high information utilization climate in the region.⁴⁸ Given the appropriate policy decisions and implementation at national and regional levels, there is every indication that this new information profession can indeed emerge, combining several existing streams, to meet the needs of the English-speaking Caribbean by the year 2000 and beyond.

The view has been expressed⁴⁹ that although harmonization is desirable and necessary, the individuality of existing professions should be maintained; taken narrowly, this would restrict mobility, retain conflict, ambiguities and anomalies which already exist (as described) without taking into full account the visible signs of future trends. It would seem preferable therefore, that these distinctions be retained as specializations within one broad information field. In any case the movement world-wide seems safely headed in this direction.

Dark predictions⁵⁰ that a broader context than "institutional librarianship" is necessary assert that without this move the existing profession will be outflanked. We must relate to

all kinds of information use and users by any kind of information carrier and in any kind of institution. In that statement Shinebourne⁵¹ approaches the definition which is needed for the new profession.

CONCLUSION

In the shifting sands of today's Caribbean with new European unity already affecting old alliances and aid pacts, threatening as they do to marginalize small states such as ours, we would do well to heed these warnings. We need to open our eyes and ears to these signs and rumblings, preparing ourselves to enter the information age not as wards on its fringes but as full partners with a new breed of information professionals equal to the tasks that lie ahead.

It must be hoped that logically the CARICOM Secretariat will assume the key role which only such an organization can play in taking this forward. No better start could be made than the early institution of an Information Desk as a full portfolio at the Secretariat.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The complete list is as follows: Anguilla*, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands*, Cayman Islands*, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat*, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands*. The five asterisked remain colonies of the U.K. Bermuda is not usually included although it was also British.
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