Continuing Professional Development and Irish Libraries: Report of Key Survey Findings

Executive Summary

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Purpose of the Study

This study was carried out over the months of July to December 2009 by Sophie Bury, Visiting Professional Scholar at the School of Information and Library Studies (SILS), UCD. The primary goals of this study were to gather and analyse data in order to provide an overview of key trends and developments in the current Continuing Professional Development (CPD) landscape for Irish library professionals including:

- CPD trends in the Irish library profession
- Description of key types of CPD activities available to library professionals in Ireland
- Preferred topics for CPD seminars provided by SILS
- Expected fees for a half-day CPD seminar provided by SILS

Definitions & Methodology

CPD embraces a wide range of activities that are pursued to improve knowledge, skills and ability related to the performance of professional work and responsibilities. Examples of activities include training courses, professional reading, work exchanges and mentoring. For the purposes of this study CPD has been defined as learning activities designed to facilitate professionals' acquiring new competencies. This may take the form of in-person or distance education options, and could range from more informal formats, e.g., a lecture, or half-day or full-day workshop or seminar, to more formal education options, e.g., award of a certificate or other formal qualification.

Data for this study was gathered through a combination of methods. Interviews were arranged either in-person or by phone with approximately 40 study participants in top management positions in library organizations, **or** in leading roles in Irish library associations and groups providing CPD programming for Irish library and information professionals in Ireland. There was good representation across sectors as follows: academic libraries (13), public libraries (10), special libraries (13).

In addition a 26 item online survey was distributed to Irish library professionals across multiple library sectors and ran from August 31st until September 25th 2009. A total of 295 usable responses were received, of which 42% were from the academic library sector, 32% from the special libraries sector, 24% were from public libraries, and 2% from library and information professionals working in other sectors or different capacities.

CPD Trends in the Irish Library Profession

- **The value of CPD is overwhelmingly acknowledged as important** with 86% of employers devoting some funding to CPD activities for their library staff, and about 2/3 of libraries have an employee who has responsibility for staff development.
- **Funding cuts are having a negative impact on CPD spending in Irish library organizations.** Thirty survey comments reported recent or imminent cutbacks on CPD opportunities for Irish library professionals. In addition this surfaced as a theme in 16 interviews. Today's tight financial times have implications for CPD activity.
- **The current Irish CPD landscape is siloed and fragmented.** No one central body coordinates or administers CPD activities for Irish library professionals. In Ireland CPD is currently provided by a wide range of groups representing different library sectors or types of libraries, e.g., the Academic and National Training Cooperative or ANLTC (primarily university libraries), the LIR Group (primarily academic libraries), the Library Council (public libraries), and the School Libraries Association of Northern Ireland or SLARI (school libraries). Even the main umbrella organization, the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) has an organizational structure comprising of constituent groups defined by library sectors. As a result of this fragmented CPD landscape it appears there is overlap in CPD offerings and limited opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas and networking across library sectors.
- **There is no national strategic policy relating to CPD.** This is in contrast to the United Kingdom where qualifications, including Certification, Chartership, Fellowship and Revalidation, granted by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) provide a relatively structured route to formal and broad-based recognition of CPD activity and accomplishments.

Description of Key Types of CPD Activities available to Library Professionals in Ireland

- **The Human Resources Department or equivalent in the organization or institution to which library organizations belong invariably plays a very important role in providing generic skills training** for Irish library professionals and other employees. Approximately 50% of those interviewed highlighted the core role this unit plays within their organization in offering library professionals the opportunity to upgrade both technical and other skills.
- **CPD programming available in Ireland with a specific focus on the field of library and information work or studies is overwhelmingly provided by non-profit (often volunteer-based) organizations** including the Acquisitions Group of Ireland, ANLTC, the Library Council, the LIR Group, sub-groups of the Library Association of Ireland, the Shannon Consortium (LNSS Project), and SLARI. This forms the most important source of CPD programming for the majority of librarians who participated in the survey and interviews. The one primary exception to this is McGrath Barrett & Associates, which is a private consulting firm.
- **International providers of CPD offerings, especially U.K. organisations, play a core role in offering CPD opportunities for Irish library professionals**. Irish professionals travel to the UK for CPD and library groups and associations hire UK professionals and some academics to speak at their CPD workshops.

Preferred Topics for CPD Workshops provided by SILS

The online survey instrument asked participants to identify their level of interest in potential CPD topics in six different categories: (1) management/administration of libraries; (2) public services; (3) teaching, learning, presenting, (4) research support; (5) information technology; and (6) technical services. These categories emerged from a review of selected similar surveys implemented recently by professional library organizations/bodies, a review of the content of CPD programs offered currently by selected major professional library organisations in the U.K., Ireland, and North America, and through consultation with a long-time SILS faculty member on topics likely to mesh with the portfolio of expertise and knowledge within SILS at the time.

Respondents were asked to indicate their interest in each topic on a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 is "extremely interested" and 1 is "completely uninterested." The lowest mean score provided for any topic was 4.2, while the highest mean score was 5.6. 15 of the topics received rankings between 5.0 and 5.6, while the remaining 10 topics received rankings with mean scores between 4.2 and 4.9.

The highest mean (and median) rankings overall are associated with the four topics comprising the information technology category. These topics are Web site publishing and design for libraries (mean 5.6), Assessing the success of your web site (mean 5.6), Web 2.0 (mean 5.5), and Writing for the web (mean 5.5).

The next category with relatively high rankings was the teaching, learning and presenting category with closely matched mean and median scores for each topic as follows: information literacy assessment (5.2), presentation skills (5.2), followed by information literacy pedagogies and learning styles (5.1) and content design using Virtual Learning Environments or VLEs (5).

The management category, unlike the information technology and teaching learning and presenting categories, has a wider range of mean and median scores. The topics, strategic planning and assessing the effectiveness of library services, had mean rankings of 5.5. Just slightly below this are the topics of project management (5.4) and marketing (5.3). In contrast other management topics receive lower mean and median rankings as follows: building/spatial design and use (4.4), and advocacy (4.2).

The majority of topics in the remaining three categories, public services, research support and technical services, received mean rankings between 4.2 and 4.9 as follows: metadata development (4.7), writing for publication (4.7), reader advisory services (4.6), conducting the reference interview (4.3), bibliometrics (4.3), cataloguing (4.3) and classification (4.3). Only three topics, one in each of these three areas as follows have mean rankings above 5.0: electronic resource management (5.4) in the technical services category, open access and digital repositories (5.2) in the research support category, and customer satisfaction/service (5.1) in the public services category.

It should be noted that in the case of some topics the lower rankings may in part be the result of a high level of relevance to one sector with minimal relevance to others. However, it is not possible to determine from the data available the extent to which professional job responsibilities influences these low mean and median rankings. Furthermore the limited variability in responses limits the conclusions that can be drawn. It appears that information technology is an important topic area, followed in popularity by specific management topics.

Expected Fees for Attending a Half-Day (3-5 hours) CPD Workshop at SILS

Survey respondents were asked to indicate from among a variety of price points, an option which they believed to be reasonable for a half day seminar or workshop with refreshments to be hosted at SILS, UCD. Data gathered illustrates that a vast majority of respondents are happy with a cost that falls between €50 and €125 with an almost equal percentage of respondents selecting the price options €50-€75 (24.3%), €76-€100 (27.8%) and €100-€125 (24.6%). The option of €30-€50 was selected by 5.3% of respondents, while price points above €125 were selected by 9.2% of respondents. 8.8% of respondents indicated that they were not sure what a reasonable cost for this type of CPD event would be.

Conclusion

In summary Irish library professionals report they are supportive of SILS' initiative in undertaking this research study and potential to play a broader role in the CPD arena in the future. SILS faculty who engage in research and teaching are uniquely placed to foster visionary thinking and planning, and fill knowledge and skills gaps in a way that no other Irish-based organization can.