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Citation: Robinson, L. & Glosiene, A. (2007). Continuing professional development for library and information science - Case study of a network of training centres. *Aslib Proceedings*, 59(4/5), pp. 462-474. doi: 10.1108/00012530710817645

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Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1108/00012530710817645>

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Continuing Professional Development for Library and Information Science: case study of a network of training centres

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Abstract

Purpose

Describes a network of training centres (TCN-LIS) to support continuing professional development (CPD) of library and information specialists, in countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI). Draws some general lessons for CPD in the library / information sector.

Design/methodology/approach

Reviews the development and activities of the training centre network, and reflects on issues raised and lessons learned.

Findings

TCN-LIS has been effective in raising standards of professional competence among library and information specialists in the countries of the OSI region. General conclusions can be drawn about good practice for CPD, in issues including the most appropriate topics to be covered, most appropriate methods for teaching and learning, situation of CPD training centres, and relations between CPD and formal education.

Research limitations

The study is based on a network of training centres in 23 countries, between 1999 and 2006.

Originality/value

This is the only publication describing TCN-LIS, and the library / information training activities supported by OSI. It provides a unique perspective for considering library / information CPD issues.

Keywords

Continuing professional development; Central and Eastern Europe; Central Asia; Open Society Initiative

Introduction

This article describes the Training Centre Network initiative, a network of national centres for promoting the professional development of library / information workers in countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Initially set up under the auspices of, and funded by, the Open Society Initiative (OSI), the centres of the Network are now self-sustaining. The activities of the network are described here as an instance of international co-operation in professional development in rapidly changing political and economic circumstances. The experience of the network also provide lessons on provision of professional development which are of more general applicability for all library and information specialists.

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Continuing professional development for information specialists

Continuing professional development (CPD), sometimes referred to as continuing professional education (CPE), in a library/information context, is the process by which library and information specialists maintain a professional competence throughout their careers. It has been more fully defined as:

'a career-long process of improving and updating the skills, abilities and competencies of staff by regular in-service training and education, supported by external courses' (Prytherch 2005)

and, in a more general professional context, as:

'the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner's working life' (Corrall and Brewerton 1999)

The relative balance of in-service (internal) training and external provision varies a good deal, internationally, and according to sector; increasingly, internal CPD is not available, except in the largest employer organisations. Similarly, the extent to which CPD may replace, rather than build on, an initial formal professional education is viewed differently in different circumstances.

The need and rationale for CPD generally, and issues arising, have been discussed by *inter alia* Brine (2004), Gorman (2004), Tedd (2003), Layzell Ward (2002), Kinnell (2000), and Farmer and Campbell (1997). CPD provision in particular countries have been outlined, for example, for Croatia (Horvat 2004), for Denmark (Thorhaug 2005) and for the United Kingdom (IWR 2006), and a worldwide overview has been recently presented (Genoni and Walton 2005). Regarding particular topics, CPD provision has been described for cataloguing (Hider 2006), and for the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for working with digital libraries, CPD provision in Slovenia and in the United Kingdom has been compared (Bawden, Vilar and Zabukovec 2005). The use of distance learning techniques for CPD have been described and evaluated (Dahl, Francis, Tedd, Terevova and Zihlavnikova 2002, Bawden and Robinson 2002, Robinson and Bawden 2002, DELCIS 2001).

The ideal curriculum for library and information science *per se* is far from settled, with divergent views as to what should be its 'core' - if, indeed, such a concept is realistic - and equally divergent views as to how to adapt library/information education to a changing technical, economic and social environment: see, for example, from various national and international perspectives, Kajberg and L  rting (2005), Aina 2005, Badovinac and Juznic 2005, Virkus and Wood (2004), van Heusden 2004, Ashcroft (2004), Markey (2004), and Horvat 2003. This reflects onto the CPD situation, where there is little agreement as to the most important and appropriate topics to be covered, although there is usually an assumption that CPD should cover the more immediately practical and vocational - and, perhaps, local and ephemeral - aspects.

Nor is there agreement, or consistency of practice, as to where, and by whom, CPD should be provided. Practice differs internationally, with CPD providers including national libraries, academic departments, professional organisations, government agencies, special interest groups, and commercial providers (see, for example, Bawden, Vilar and Zabukovec 2005, Thorhaug 2005, IWR 2006).

The Open Society Institute and its library/information programmes

The Open Society Institute (OSI) was established by the financier and philanthropist George Soros, in order to promote the concept of 'Open Society' first propounded by the philosopher Karl Popper (Popper 1992, Soros 1995, 2000, Notturmo 2000). In brief, open society refers to a form of society characterised by the rule of law, a mechanism to replace the law-makers without resort to force, and free access to information to support critical and rational debate. The communication and sharing of information and knowledge are key to the idea of open society, and acceptance of the idea, in turn, has implications for libraries and information provision (Robinson and Bawden 2001A, 2001B).

OSI's activities during the period under review were largely in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Central Asia, plus Haiti and Mongolia, and were largely directed towards assisting the emergent and transitional countries during and after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. In 'library terms', there are intriguing parallels between the situation in the early 1990s and that of the late 1940s, when support had to be given to re-establish the library systems of Europe after the 1939-45 war (Danilewicz 1945, Choldin 2005)

From its outset, among many activities and programmes, OSI was involved in promoting the free communication of information, and hence involved with the library / information sector, including such basics as the provision of photocopying, which had hitherto been closely regulated in the OSI region (Danyi 2006).

From 1994 to 2000, a distinct libraries programme, known initially as the Regional Library Programme, and from 1997 as the Network Library programme, was operated by OSI. In 2000, this was merged, along with OSI's Internet Programme and Media Programme, into a single Information Programme, which continues. [Information on OSI's Information Programme is available from <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/information>. Archival information on the Regional and Network Library Programmes is available from <http://www.osi.hu.nlp>]

The specific purpose of the library programmes within OSI's overall remit of supporting emergent open societies was 'to help libraries within the region to transform themselves into modern service-oriented centres, serving their communities, and contributing to the establishment and maintenance of open societies'. These programmes undertook a number of initiatives and projects, including:

- a variety of initiatives for collection development and service improvement
- support for open access and consortium purchasing for international materials (Friend 2004, Rowland 2005)
- a variety of initiatives promoting preservation of, and better access to, local materials (Stalbovskaya 2002)
- support for conference attendance by librarians from the region
- a public library development initiative, aimed at strengthening the position of the public library as a community centre and public information point
- LIS Fellowships, for professional librarians from the OSI region to spend periods at equivalent institutions in the USA and Western Europe, e.g. the Library of Congress, Queens Public Library New York, The University of Graz Library, the British Library, and the Bodleian Library at Oxford University.

Many of these initiatives had a 'training and development' component. For example, the Fellowships had the sharing of knowledge subsequently as an integral part of the programme, and the Fellows were brought together in 'Librarians as Trainers' workshops. Four initiatives addressed this issue directly, and can be seen as precursors to the training centre network.

- Financial support was provided for the creation of training materials for CPD courses for practising librarians: most notably the EDULIB programme which developed several training modules, with a distance learning element, for Slovak librarians (Dahl, Francis, Tedd, Terevova and Zihlavnikova 2002).
- A series of training seminars on library automation and systems development were provided in many countries of the OSI (see Robinson 1997 for an example). These were intended to

assist in the widespread introduction of computerised library management systems being introduced for the first time in many of these countries (Borgman 1996). Although a standard format for the seminars was established, this had to be implemented very flexibly. In some cases, where the knowledge of the participants was relatively great, it took the form of an up-dating and exchange of experience seminar; in other cases, a basic introduction to ICTs in the library, and indeed to the basics of computing itself, was needed first. A similar, though smaller scale, seminar series on library management was also held, and some special seminars on topics such as fundraising were organised.

- Building on the LIS Fellowships concept, funding was made available for Fellowships for two LIS academics at the Department of Information Science, City University London. [Both were later involved as trainers and resource developers in their local TCN-LIS training centre, and in the Network Teaching Programme.]
- A summer school was run for five years, between 1997 and 2001 at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest, for LIS practitioners and educators from the OSI region (Robinson, Kupryte, Burnett, and Bawden 2000, Bawden and Robinson 2002). Initially focused on uses of Internet in libraries, as this concept became better established, the focus changed to the more general concept of digital literacy for open society. The last of the summer schools introduced distance learning to the CEU's summer programmes (Bawden and Robinson 2001, Robinson and Bawden 2002). [Many participants in these summer schools became actively involved in their national LIS training centres.]

Partly based on the success of these initiatives, and recognising the importance of the continuing education of library/information workers in developing a modern and forward looking library sector in the OSI region, a network of national LIS training centres was established with OSI funding.

The Training Centre Network for Librarianship and Information Science (TCN-LIS)

TCN-LIS was set up under the auspices of OSI's Network Library Programme in 1999, and subsequently transferred to the merged Information Programme. The first funding was provided in 2000, and the final funding in 2003. Funding was provided for two years, on a 'matching funds' basis, i.e. the centres were required to raise additional income equivalent to the OSI grant. Some smaller grants, without matching funding being required were also made, and SI also funded the costs of the network infrastructure, including meetings. After the cessation of OSI funding, the network continued on a self-sustaining basis.

A total of 23 national training centres were involved in the network. Five centres - in general, the most active and best established - received OSI funding from the outset: Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia. A further twelve centres received OSI at a later stage: Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Russia, Ukraine, and Yuugoslavia (Serbia). Five centres, though affiliated to the network, were unable to fulfil the conditions for funding: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, and Uzbekistan. Finally, a well-established and active LIS training centre in Latvia was affiliated to the network, though it did not seek OSI funding. These centres operated in a wide variety of settings, and carried out training (largely by conventional face-to-face short courses, though with some innovative methods) across a very wide variety of topics.

The network infrastructure comprised a web-site and mailing list for communication, a set of shared training resources, and a programme of meetings and special training events. The network was initially co-ordinated from the OSI regional offices in Budapest. After cessation of OSI funding, the co-ordination moved to City University London, and then, from 2006, Vilnius University, Lithuania.

The main task of the network coordinator, apart from the administration of grants, and maintenance of the infrastructure, was to promote exchange of experience and good practice between the centres. This was achieved partly through electronic communication, partly through individual visits and local meetings, partly through Fellowships and partly through a series of international meetings. Five main meetings have been held:

- September 2000, Budapest, as an inaugural meeting for the network
- June 2002, Budapest, with the aim of supporting newly established centres, by the sharing of experience from longer established centres
- April 2003, Prague, with a focus on the role of the training centres in supporting and promoting the place of the library in civil society
- November 2003, London, devoted to the future education and training of LIS professionals
- November 2006, Vilnius, with the theme of the impact of library / information services [the papers from this meeting will be published in the *Lithuanian Journal of Information Science* during 2007.]

A series of Training Centre Fellowships were also funded, by which 14 trainers from TCN-LIS centres were able to attend special fellowship programmes, focused on the development of curricula and training materials, at the Department of Information Science, City University London, and at the Mortensen Centre, University of Illinois. This led to establishment of a Network Teaching Programme, by which trainers from longer-established centres supported less developed centres, by carrying out training directly, and by assisting the development of local training materials.

At the end of 2006, TCN-LIS, now co-ordinated from Vilnius University, was still active, though in a very different environment from that in which it was established. Several of its more active centres are in countries which have joined the European Union, and in a much more favourable political and economic situation than at the start of this project. For others, particularly in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, the local situation is much less favourable, and this is reflected in the environment in which library / information services operate. The development of TCN-LIS has illuminated a number of issues of CPD in the library / information context, which are of relevance well beyond the OSI region, and the time of transition to democracy.

General lessons for CPD

Lessons learned from the operations of the TCN-LIS training centres over a six year period, brought out in particular at the international meetings of the network, have relevance for CPD provision for LIS generally, beyond the specific time and place of the network's activity. These are set out here under six main headings: topics for CPD; management and evaluation issues; teaching and learning methods; location of the training centre; relations between CPD and formal education; and local versus general training resources.

Reference is made here to factors promoting success of training centres. 'Success' of centres was judged by their activity (number and variety of courses and participants), longevity, and sustainability after OSI-funding ceased,

Topics for CPD

The range of topics covered in the courses of the TCN-LIS centres was very wide, while the variant nomenclature for course titles and levels made comparisons difficult. A 'core curriculum' to be recommended to all centres was seen as desirable, but this proved difficult to achieve, for reasons including: local needs, issues and concerns, depending on the local library/information environment; levels of education and training of the local library workforce; availability of training resources in local languages; and availability of local trainers for some topics.

However, it is clear that the course mix offered by centres fell into a general categorisation:

- basic 'core' courses, on topics central to LIS work, e.g. reader services, classification, cataloguing and resource description. For some centres, these were typically up-dating and refresher courses; for others, they compensated for a lack of formal LIS education.
- 'transition' topics, of particular importance to countries of the region, as they emerged from a socialist environment, and required new skills, e.g. of marketing and promoting libraries, and influencing decision makers and funders
- 'ephemeral' topics, important to that local situation at the time. This might be, for example, grant writing, if the local library community stood to gain from funding awards, or library management software, if a new national system were being introduced
- 'local' topics. Some topics offered by the centres, e.g. 'psychology of the user' were clearly of established importance to that centre's local LIS 'culture', while not being in the mainstream of LIS education or CPD
- ICT use, which was important for all centres

An awareness of this categorisation was as close as could be achieved to a recommended curriculum, as a benchmarking for centres' provision. It may that this, perhaps omitting 'transition' topics, would be suitable as a template for LIS CPD more generally.

Over time, and with political and economic development, the 'transition' topics became of less paramount importance, particularly for those countries achieving EU accession status. That is not to say that such topics are not of importance, rather that they match the significance which they have in CPD in the countries of Western Europe.

ICT topics retain an important, though a trend seen was for the centres to move away from the '*ICT for libraries*' style of course, and towards provision of 'general' ICT qualifications, such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). This qualification has been suggested to be suitable as a basic grounding in ICTs for formal LIS education, and as a basis for deeper skill sets (Poulter and McMenemy 2004), and hence should be suitable for CPD. As a general principle, it may be worthwhile for LIS training centres to consider the provision of such generally recognised qualifications, rather than attempting to provide LIS-specific equivalents. This may be so, not just for the applications of ICTs, but also for such 'generic' skills as marketing, people management, and budgeting.

Management and evaluation issues

One of the factors which most markedly distinguished the successful centres within TCN-LIS from the less successful was the extent to which they were able to establish an appropriate management structure, handle finances successfully - including finding matching funds to the

OSI grants -, and market and promote their courses to their audience. This latter included assessing the needs of potential trainees - which might well differ between centres - and evaluating the success of the courses, with a mechanism in place to ensure that the results of evaluation were fed back into modification of courses.

These issues were new to many of the centre operators, who had been working in a socialist style of command economy, with little need, or indeed opportunity, to consider them. Some centres dealt with them more successfully than others, often a reflection of the economic and social conditions in the country generally. These aspects received a good deal of attention from within the network, with advice and exchange of good practice being encouraged, to assist the less developed centres.

Another management issue was the need for centres to adapt their training provision realistically to the available infrastructure and resources. While lack of expert local trainers could be, to an extent, overcome through the Network Teaching Programme, problems of adequate accommodation, electricity supply, IT facilities etc. were not so easily dealt with. The Internet has provided many useful and freely available resources, at least to those able to read use material in English (Koltay 2006), but this far from a complete answer.

While many of these issues were specific to their time and place, there are some general lessons for CPD here. Marketing, promotion, needs analysis and self-evaluation are all essentials within any CPD programme in any situation, and may be too readily over-looked in the quest for better training materials and presentations. And a realistic attitude to what can be provided within the constraints of the training situation is of universal relevance.

Teaching and learning methods

The great majority of training in the network was, and is, carried out by the 'traditional' CPD methods of short courses, delivered by face-to-face presentations and demonstrations. Some innovative methods have been tried by various centres. The Lithuanian training centre has made some of its courses available through the WebCT e-learning environment, building on their leadership of DELCIS (2001), an international project (Distance Education for Librarians: Creating an information-Competent Society, funded by the EU Leonardo Da Vinci programme, which produced three distance learning modules - 'Basic Internet', 'Advanced Internet' and 'Webpage design'. As noted above, a series of CPD modules for library and information professionals in the Slovak Republic was designed with OSI support, comprising a week of face-to-face lectures session, practicals and group discussions, followed by three months of guided work through printed self-study materials (Dahl, Francis, Tedd, Terevova and Zihlavnikova 2002). Again as noted above, the OSI-supported CEU summer school on 'digital literacy for open societies', moved, in its final year, from a two-week summer school to a one-week school, preceded and followed by interaction through an e-learning system (Bawden and Robinson 2001, 2002, Robinson and Bawden 2002).

Experience within TCN indicates, however, that full, or even partial, distance learning CPD is not likely to be a popular option. Many of the perceived benefits of a CPD 'course' - time away from work for reflection, face-to-face interaction with fellow participants from outside the normal workplace setting, social and networking aspects, opportunity to attend a central training venue, etc. - are largely lost in a distance learning setting. It is notable, for comparison, that of the many CPD courses available from several providers in the UK, only two courses from one provider have a distance learning version.

This is not to say that distance learning (to include open learning and e-learning) is not of value for CPD: far from it. Rather, it is to say that it should be used carefully, as part of a blended approach retaining the values of face-to-face interaction, as for those CPD topics for which it is most appropriate (Robinson and Bawden 2002, Robinson, Hilger-Ellis, Osborne, Rowlands, Smith, Weist, Whetherly and Philips 2005). Typically, these topics will be those of a 'technical' nature, either in the sense of applying information and communication technologies, or of involving some process such as cataloguing, indexing and resource description.

Location of training centre

It was noted above that CPD is offered by various types of provider, and in various settings, and this was true of the centres comprising TCN-LIS. These were located variously in national libraries, academic libraries, LIS academic departments, professional associations, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and less formal settings.

It was notable that the most successful centres were located either in LIS departments or in academic libraries. These locations provided a continuing focus for activity, physical space and resources, and access to people who could function both as trainers and support staff. Interaction between training activities and other activities of the organisation hosting the centre is also an advantage. Such settings also allow training activities to be spread among a group of personnel, and are hence less dependent on the availability and enthusiasm of a few individuals. Other settings within the network lacked some of these aspects, to the detriment of the centre.

This is different from the situation in the UK, for example, where the national library no longer participates regularly in CPD, and where academic LIS departments provide CPD courses only occasionally, and therefore the 'national library or academic LIS department' model is not to be recommended worldwide. In the UK, however, the lengthy development of an extensive LIS infrastructure has allowed the development of well-established CPD programmes in the professional association, and in commercial and non-profit training organisations. This is not likely to be the case in smaller countries, and those with a less developed LIS environment, and here is situation seen in TCN-LIS is likely to apply.

Relations between CPD and formal education

It became clear that another factor influencing the success of the centres was the situation with respect to formal education at university level in library and information science in the relevant country. The more successful centres were those operating in an environment where there was also a well-established system of higher education providing academic and/or professional qualification in LIS. Although there are some confounding factors - such an educational system was to an extent correlated with economic and social development - this seems a valid observation. In isolated cases where a training centre did not co-operate with providers of formal LIS education, the result was also a relative lack of success.

There are a number of reasons for this. A well-established formal LIS education system implies a workforce with a good basic set of professional skills and knowledge, so that CPD may be used for up-dating and adding specialist skills. The participants will also have a better understanding of the area, and will be better able to articulate CPD needs. Lack of such a system means that CPD may be used as a surrogate for a basic professional education, an intrinsically problematic situation. Such an education system will also provide a pool of trainers for CPD, whether or not the centre is located in an academic department. It will also make it more likely that there will be a set of local language training resources - textbooks, course notes, practical exercises with local relevance, etc. - available.

The general lesson from this is that CPD should complement, rather than try to replace or parallel, formal educational programmes. The two should be synergistic, in terms of topics covered, and resources developed.

A degree of 'formality', in a sense, for CPD was recognised, in the need for some kind of formal certification of completion of training. This was important for participants in the circumstances of the transition countries, but has also been noted as desirable for other forms of in-service training in Western Europe (Bawden and Robinson 2002).

Local versus general training resources

A perennial issue for all CPD (and indeed to all LIS education and training) is the extent to which training materials must be customised to the local situation, and how much can 'generic' materials be shared. In the case of TCN-LIS, this was exacerbated by the number of local

languages in the centres of the network. To a degree, English was the working *lingua franca*, though in some parts of the region Russian was more widely known as a second language, at least at the network's initiation and among older LIS personnel.

The advantages of sharing common materials, in terms of economics and of an ability to pool effort to create high quality materials, are clear. The value of using freely available Internet materials for this purpose has been emphasised (Koltay 2006). Some of the earlier efforts in producing CPD materials were based on the translation of original Danish materials into local languages (DELCIS), and effort was put into the translation of materials for TCN-LIS centres, and into the preparation of recommended resource lists.

However, the counter argument stresses the increased acceptability to participants of materials in local languages, referring to local issues, and using local examples. This point was argued by several of the TCN-LIS centres at various times.

The best solution to an issue which affects all CPD provision, to a greater or lesser extent, seems to be one which provides a 'core' of basic material, sharable by all and translated into local languages if necessary, supported by local and customised instances and examples. This is very much the solution recommended for information literacy training, whether for CPD or for formal education (Robinson, Hilger-Ellis, Osborne, Rowlands, Smith, Weist, Whetherly and Philips 2005).

Conclusions

TCN-LIS has been effective in raising standards of professional competence among library and information specialists in the 23 countries in which centres operated, though the extent of the centres' effectiveness has varied greatly across the OSI region. The factors behind this variant success have been analysed, and lead to general conclusions can be drawn about good practice for library/information CPD. The issues including the most appropriate topics to be covered, most appropriate methods for teaching and learning, management and evaluation policies, the situation of CPD training centres, and relations between CPD and formal education, and the feasibility of a core curriculum based on general resources.

TCN-LIS is a good example of the benefits which can be obtained from international co-operation through an ultimately self-sustaining network.

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