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## GLOBALISATION AND EDUCATION FOR THE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONS: CHALLENGES FOR SMALL COUNTRIES

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**Abstract.** Globalisation raises many issues which are relevant to information management. These include the creation and implementation of international standards, records management, archives and library operational needs of multinational companies and international organisations, the transborder flow of information and the increasing international mobility of information management professionals. This paper considers the tensions that ensue from increasing globalisation in terms of small countries, specifically New Zealand, in terms of the provision of education for information management.

### Introduction

Globalisation raises many issues which are relevant to information management. These include the creation and implementation of international standards (for example, ISO15489 Records Management), records management, archives and library operational needs of multinational companies and international organisations, the transborder flow of information and the increasing international mobility of information management professionals. This paper considers the tensions that ensue from increasing globalisation in terms of small countries, specifically New Zealand, endeavouring to provide education for the management of information that is appropriate for the needs of that country, and at the same time attempting to equip graduates with internationally recognised qualifications. Firstly, definitions of key terms are provided. This is followed by a description of the New Zealand situation, and discussion considering the reasons why this situation has arisen and its consequences. Finally, the conclusion suggests a way forward.

### Key Terms

#### *Globalisation*

The sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to globalisation as something that affects almost every aspect of what we do in today's world, and emphasizes its nature as being economic, political, technological and cultural (Giddens, 2002).

Key features of globalisation that are relevant to this paper are

"...the emergence of new kinds of trade in services, a technological revolution in communication that makes the globe itself the site of operations for major companies and the growing influence almost everywhere of market forces." (Firth, 2000, p.179).

A particular feature of globalisation that is of concern to educators is the mobility of the information management workforce. This can be both employee and employer driven - because of a need or desire of individuals to seek employment on a permanent or temporary basis overseas or because requirements for skilled professionals cannot be met locally. It can also be an outcome of political changes as national allegiances shift and change. The European Union provides an example of this situation, particularly since the Bologna declaration. This declaration established the need for a European-wide higher education system with common qualifications and cross crediting arrangements. The impact of the Bologna declaration on education for information managers is explored by Boekhorst and Owen (2003), Kajberg (2003), Juznic and Badovinac (2005) among others.

#### *Information Management*

The complexity of information management, and the involvement in it of multiple occupational groups means that the definition of information management as a discipline has been subject to considerable debate. There is a tendency to define it from the perspective of a single occupational group active in this domain (see, for example, Rowley & Farrow, (2000)), and it has also been claimed that because of the involvement of multiple professions it is unrealistic to expect to find a single definition that covers the entire spectrum of information management (Lewis & Martin, 1989). Leading scholars such as

Kirk (1999), Rowley (1998) and Gorman and Corbitt (2001) all attempt to provide that single definition. The existence of distinct occupational groups within this domain, if acknowledged, tends to be in a cursory fashion; occupations may be identified, but reference is not made to the different purposes of information that they focus on.

However, the information continuum model (see Upward, 2000, Schauder, Stillman and Johanson, 2004 and Oliver, in press, for detailed descriptions of the model), acknowledges the existence of different specialisms within information management, and facilitates more in-depth analysis of activities by identifying the purposes of information which are the primary focus of activity for the different occupational groups.

These purposes of information are as follows: accountability, knowledge or awareness, and 'infotainment', information as entertainment. Where information is of the accountability type it provides evidence of organisational activity and functions as the corporate memory. This information type is the focus of activity for records managers and archivists. Information as knowledge or awareness is the focus of library and publishing activities, as is information as entertainment. To summarise, the scope of information management considered in this paper includes the work carried out by librarians, records managers and archivists. Reference will be made to 'information for accountability' and 'information as knowledge'.

### **Culture**

Political and social changes which have contributed to increasing globalisation would seem to have emphasised cultural differences, rather than minimised them. As the economist Frances Fukuyama states,

"one of the ironies of the convergence of larger institutions since the end of the cold war is that people around the world are now even more conscious of the cultural differences that separate them" (Fukuyama, 1995, p.5).

Culture has been the focal point of much attention in the literature from the perspectives of different discipline areas (for example anthropology, sociology and psychology). Detmar Straub and colleagues (2002) distinguish three groups of definitions of culture, two based on shared values and problem-solving respectively, and a third group of 'general all encompassing definitions' (p. 14). The definition of culture underlying this paper is that of Triandis (1972), from the 'shared values' group. Triandis defines culture as a

"group's characteristic way of perceiving the man-made part of its environment" (p.4).

He suggests that this perception is likely to be shared by

"people who live next to one another, speak the same dialect, and engage in similar activities (e.g. have similar occupations)" (p. 4).

Despite Fukuyama's comments it could be assumed that the globalisation of business would lead to greater standardisation of information technology. However, extensive research in the information systems domain has concluded that the influence of local cultures will still lead to significant differences in approach according to the local environment (see, for example, Weisinger and Trauth, 2002). The management of information is similarly subject to cultural influences and research has been carried out to explore the interplay and significance of these factors (Oliver, 2006). Conclusions from this research indicate that information cultures within organisations are shaped by values and attitudes to information, which may vary according to the purpose of that information. These values and attitudes were found to be significantly different in case studies conducted in Germany, Hong Kong and Australia and it was also found that the successful implementation of international standards would depend on different strategies devised to suit the specific environment. A conclusion to be drawn from this is that it is essential that education for information managers takes into account the cultural environment, and therefore local values and attitudes to information.

### **New Zealand**

New Zealand is a relatively small country, with a population of approximately just 4 million. It has a well-developed information infrastructure and in 2004 launched a digital strategy, spearheaded by the National Library of New Zealand (Digital strategy: creating our digital future). The focus of the strategy, not surprisingly given its origins, is primarily on information for knowledge. Information for accountability has also recently been addressed at the national level, with the passing of the Public Records Act 2005. This Act is directing attention on records and archival requirements of public bodies and in so doing highlighting needs for trained personnel.

### ***Cultural characteristics of New Zealand***

The cultural characteristics of New Zealand society are complex. The government recognizes the existence of two cultures – the indigenous culture (Maori) and the culture of the colonisers (Pakeha). New Zealand life has consequently been described as being

“A Janus one, representing at least two cultures and two heritages, very often looking in two different directions” (King, 2003, p.167)

The implications of this biculturalism for information management are profound and impact on librarians, records managers and archivists. Considerable attention has been paid to information equity issues (see for example Cullen, 1997 and Coleman, 2002) and there has been recent recognition of a distinctly Maori information tradition, as opposed to the established mainstream Anglo-Celtic tradition. The main differences between the Maori and Pakeha views of knowledge are reported to be concerned with the ownership of knowledge and with its transmission and communication (Cullen, 1997).

### ***Education for Information Management in New Zealand***

The variety of educational programmes that have been developed in New Zealand to fulfil local requirements for a skilled workforce has not resulted in a cohesive or progressive set of information management qualifications.

The early development of education for librarianship in New Zealand is recounted in detail by Mary Ronnie (1996). The option of collaborating with New Zealand’s nearest neighbour, Australia, for the provision of library education was mooted at a very early stage, but nothing further came from this proposal (Ronnie, pp 8-9). Formal education for librarians in New Zealand was first offered in the 1940s and today consists of two programmes offered in parallel – one at undergraduate level and one at postgraduate level. This situation came about as a result of the initial New Zealand qualification being devised as one consisting of two parts, a certificate and a diploma. The content of each part was envisaged as being quite distinct from the other, with the certificate covering the more operational aspects of library work (Ronnie, p.11). However, in fact two parallel qualifications evolved.

Despite a clear recommendation in the otherwise influential Saunders Report in the late 1980s that the two qualifications should be amalgamated and offered by a single department (Ronnie, p. 154) they have continued to be offered by two different educational providers. Today, Victoria University of Wellington offers a Master’s degree, and the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand offers two undergraduate diplomas and two bachelor’s degrees. Both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications address the fundamentals of the body of knowledge required by librarians, but the two providers have encountered some difficulties in attempting to provide as many electives in specialised areas of information management as may be desired – for instance health or legal information. It is important to note that the undergraduate qualifications are not linked to a specific job title or responsibilities and that, unlike Australia, the paraprofessional occupation of library technician does not formally exist.

The existence of the parallel qualifications has been an ongoing cause for debate, causing much confusion and acrimony whenever the topic of professionalism is raised. Today New Zealand is again undergoing this debate, as a proposal to establish professional registration is discussed. One of the benefits of pursuing professional registration is indicated as being international recognition (LIANZA, 2005, p.6).

It may be argued that what I have designated ‘library’ qualifications have a much wider applicability than just libraries, because they are focused on information. However, I suggest that the information they focus on is ‘information for knowledge’, rather than ‘information for accountability’ and therefore they do not provide sufficient grounding for recordkeepers.

Consequently, formal education opportunities for records managers and archivists in New Zealand have been far fewer. The ‘Ham Report’ (Ham, 1993) describes an environment in which fewer than 20 New Zealand archivists had taken an overseas archival graduate qualification (Ham, 1993, p.17) with the majority of recordkeepers having either a certificate (Certificate in Archives Management from the Wairarapa Community Polytechnic or Certificate in Records Management from the Auckland Institute of Technology) or an introductory postgraduate paper covering both records management and archives from Victoria University of Wellington, or having no formal qualification at all. Ham dismissed the above-mentioned educational offerings with the words

“To date, [they] are much like the mini-skirt: they reveal a lot without covering very much” (p.7).

At least Ham alludes to one of the reasons that there were no significant educational opportunities available for recordkeepers in New Zealand, when he refers to an unsuccessful review of education and training opportunities in 1987. The lack of success was because

“Tension within the profession made progress impossible.” (p.6).

Subsequently, however, economic imperatives have undoubtedly played the deciding factor as to what qualifications, and at what level, have been developed. As with the library qualifications, the same two providers have developed undergraduate and postgraduate awards for recordkeepers. In 2001 the polytechnic established an undergraduate diploma, and the university set up a postgraduate certificate and diploma in Archives and Records Management in 2004. The likelihood of either of the postgraduate or undergraduate qualifications developing into specialist degrees seems extremely unlikely, given the relatively small size of the market of potential students.

## **Discussion**

The range of New Zealand qualifications, in particular the recordkeeping diplomas and certificate, are a result of trying to meet the needs of a relatively small population for expertise in information management and at the same time to take into account specialist requirements.

Economic constraints have restricted the development of a full range of qualifications at levels that are recognised internationally. Reduced government funding for education (Austen 2002, Marginson, 2000) have resulted in significant pressures on universities and polytechnics worldwide to provide financially viable educational programmes. In countries with small populations, the consequence of this is that the likelihood of developing or maintaining specialist courses for comparatively few numbers of students are extremely remote. On the other hand, the massification of education (Austen 2002, Marginson, 2000) has led to greater numbers of students wanting to enrol in programmes, but affordability and ability may mean that this will be at lower levels.

Another important factor to be considered is the size of organisations in countries with smaller populations, and the ability of those organisations to pay appropriate salaries for staff with postgraduate qualifications. In New Zealand, the numbers of students studying on a part-time basis in undergraduate programmes certainly lead one to believe that if these opportunities were not available, many organisations would function with untrained staff managing records, archives and library services<sup>1</sup>. This consideration certainly seems to have been one that the originators of New Zealand’s lower level qualification were aware of, as Mary Ronnie makes clear:

“It was set ... at a rather higher level than the concept of the technician courses elsewhere, with which it is often equated for ease of description. There was always an element of management and theory in it, the quite realistic view of the planners being that many smaller libraries would be run by NZLA Certificate holders, Diploma graduates being likely to opt for larger or more specialised libraries in major cities.” (Ronnie, p.13).

The New Zealand situation has been described in detail here, but it is recognised that other small countries have identified different solutions to this problem. Other regions with relatively small populations and distinct educational needs such as Hong Kong have relied on the delivery of qualifications by overseas providers (Gorman, 1997). The problem here is taking into account the all important cultural national characteristics. Cultural requirements that need to be considered will include values and attitudes to information that shape ‘information cultures’. Slovenian authors Juznic and Badovinac (2005) surveyed library and information science programmes in new and applicant European Union member countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Malta and Slovakia). They identified the following obstacles to the ‘internationalisation’ of programmes in these countries: different languages, insufficient resourcing of academic departments, cultural and political differences and most interestingly a ‘historical/traditional reluctance to openness’ (p. 182). Similarly, although the obstacles presented by a trans-Tasman approach to internationalising study programmes may appear far fewer, the significance of New Zealand’s unique biculturalism and consequent need to take into account the values and attitudes of Maori is not something that can be overlooked. Different legislation is another highly significant factor which cannot be ignored, particularly when the focus of education is on information for accountability.

## **Conclusion**

Globalisation has brought to the forefront tensions between providing information management qualifications that are culturally appropriate and economically viable, and ensuring that the knowledge, skills and abilities of graduates are internationally recognised. Increasing possibilities for the

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<sup>1</sup> Enrolments in the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand’s Information & Library Studies courses in 2005 totalled 1556

international mobility of information management professionals highlight seemingly incompatible qualification levels and professional registration requirements in different countries. Educators and practitioners in small countries should not ignore the challenges presented by globalisation, but should start to work towards addressing these challenges.

It is incumbent on educators in small countries to ensure that the education they are providing is internationally relevant, while taking into account the values and attitudes of their own environment. In addition, educators should explore options for what has been described as distributed education (see, for example, University of Toronto's strategic plan - Faculty of Information Studies, 2004, p.24). Distributed education entails establishing relationships with other providers (within the same country and/or internationally) to, for example, provide a full palette of electives. A 'distributed education' approach across national boundaries would enable providers to ensure that culturally specific contextual needs were addressed while taking advantage of opportunities for their students that would not be otherwise available given economic constraints. This would involve extensive collaborative effort to reconcile curricula, and more fundamentally, to agree a common approach to the education requirements for the information management professions. Recognition of distinct purposes of information, and association of the different occupations with these purposes would be a key step along this path.

Assessment of professionalism should be multi-faceted, not based solely on the level of academic qualifications awarded, but taking into account the breadth and depth of the experience of the practitioner. This is an area where professional associations of small countries bear critical responsibility. The associations need to establish standards that are appropriate for their national context, rather than trying to merely emulate others that have developed in quite different cultural and economic environments. In addition, the associations then need to advocate accordingly in international settings in order to ensure that their cultural context, including the historical background to the development of their qualifications, is understood and the professionalism of their members recognized accordingly.

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