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Citation: Gannon-Leary, Pat, Hare, Catherine, Parker, Sandra and Winkworth, Fay (1999) The impact of National Vocational Qualifications on library and information services. Library and Information Briefings, 86. pp. 2-1. ISSN 0954-1829

Published by: Library Information Technology Centre

URL:

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# Library & Information Briefings

Issue 86

June 1999

## The Impact of National Vocational Qualifications on Library and Information Services

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National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) were introduced in the UK in the 1980s as part of a drive to improve the skills of the workforce. Within the Information and Library Services sector, S/NVQs are now widely accepted and have contributed to the broadening of access and policies of diversification in educational establishments at all levels. This Briefing traces the history and development of S/NVQs in the profession, outlines the benefits to both the organisation and the individual, and discusses some of the criticisms that remain.

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Series Editor  
Mary Feeney

ISSN 0954 1829



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27 AUG 1999

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## **HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT**

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National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) were introduced in Great Britain in the 1980s because it was believed that increasing the skills of the workforce was the way to improve the economic health of the country as well as redressing the imbalance as compared to other developed countries. The Department of Education and Science set up some 160 organizations, called Lead Bodies, to represent occupational sectors and to lead the way in developing S/NVQs with particular responsibility for developing the standards of work-based practice for the sector. The organization charged with representing the information occupational sector was the Information and Library Services Lead Body. The information sector is wide ranging and this is reflected within the Lead Body which has been subdivided into the specialist areas of Information and Library Services (ILS), Archives, Records, and Tourist Information. Each specialist area is represented by nominated professionals and practitioners in the field.

### **Information and Library Services NVQs**

The ILS Lead Body started work in April 1991, but it was not until the summer of 1995, after development, discussion and testing, that the first S/NVQs based on the occupational standards were approved. There are now 11 awards in the sector: levels 2-4 in Information and Library Services accredited in 1995, Records Services and Records Management developed in 1997, Archives in 1997, and levels 2 and 3 Tourist Information in 1996. Work has been undertaken to introduce a level 5 award for Information and Library Services, Archives and Records, but this is still under development.

Since they were first to be developed, the Information and Library Services and the Tourist Information S/NVQs have had the greatest uptake.

By December 1997 ILS S/NVQs had developed to the extent that there were 134 assessment centres nationwide, six of them overseas. (The number of centres has now increased to over 150.) At this point, 719 candidates had registered, with many more working

towards units pre-registration, and 15 candidates had successfully completed their S/NVQ.<sup>1</sup> This is a considerable achievement:

All this achieved in just two years. What other qualification is there, in our field, which has anything like this rate of enthusiastic support?<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the ILS Lead Body reports that 'the number of candidates registered for ILS S/NVQs is higher, after eighteen months, than in some sectors which have much larger workforces after five years.

The greatest uptake to date has been in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Tourist S/NVQs have replaced the now discontinued Certificate of Tourist Information Centre Competence (COTIC) award for trainees in the field. The Records and Archives S/NVQs provide a completely new, national award for paraprofessionals in records and archives management. Uptake for Records and Archives S/NVQs has been slower than for Information and Library Services because of a lack of assessment centres.

### **Awarding bodies**

Initially the awarding bodies were RSA (now OCR) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and SCOTVEC for Scotland. In 1997 Edexcel also became an awarding body for the ILS NVQs. With broadening of access and policies of diversification in educational establishments at all levels, ILS S/NVQs will potentially offer an additional route to the Library Association's Charter, making Associateship and Fellowship available to those library and information staff who have not undertaken formal professional education.

The ILS standards and qualifications are currently being revised and are due to be accredited in September 1999. This is part of the normal review programme, but is being combined with the review of all S/NVQs following the Beaumont Report<sup>3</sup> which evaluated 100 S/NVQs.

An Information Modern Apprenticeship (MA) and an Information National Traineeship in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and a Skillseeker's MA in



Scotland have now been approved. These will provide opportunities for young people to start a career in the information and library services sector combined with acquiring an S/NVQ award.

Lead Bodies are currently being phased out to be replaced by National Training Organizations (NTOs). The ILS sector is currently awaiting the outcome of its bid to become a National Training Organization. If successful, the sector will for the first time have a single body whose remit is to coordinate training provision across the highly diverse information occupational sector as well as retaining the role of developing occupational standards.

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## **IMPLEMENTING ILS S/NVQS**

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The successful introduction of S/NVQs should start with strategic planning. It should build on an effective training programme and have some long- and some short-term goals. The organization needs to establish how many staff will be taking S/NVQs and at what levels. It is important to decide how the training will be delivered to fill the skill gaps in staff competencies when they are measured against the standards.<sup>4</sup> Induction training for assistants in the various ILS sectors should fit very well with the level 2 standards, and therefore a good entry point might be to enrol new members of staff on the level 2 programme as soon as they join the organization. The candidates will then be monitored and evaluated against the standards. They will also receive feedback and recognition for their training—a dimension of the training cycle that many organizations find most difficult to complete. Some organizations have welcomed the opportunity to recognize the training staff have already undertaken and enrol more longer serving staff on levels 2, 3 or 4, as appropriate, or Accredited them with Prior Learning (APL) which is a core feature of NVQs.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

The implementation of S/NVQs is often perceived as a complex process because of the need to have in place staff who are competent to assess and verify the standards. Competence to assess is ensured by staff

obtaining the relevant Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) units. These are D32 (Assess Candidate Performance) and D33 (Assess Candidate using Differing Sources of Evidence). Additionally, internal verifiers need D34 (Internally Verify the Assessment Process). Assessor and verifier awards are themselves NVQs for training and development. It is acceptable and even desirable for assessors and verifiers to train and qualify during the running of the centre, that is by having real candidates to assess and verify, though from 1998 all centres must have at least one qualified internal verifier under the terms of the Common Accord Document which regulates all S/NVQ awarding bodies.

External verifiers are appointed by the awarding body to monitor the assessments being made in centres and to check for consistency of assessment and interpretation of the standards. External verifiers must be current practitioners or be taking active steps to maintain the currency of their skills. They should be occupationally competent, trained in assessment, qualified to act as an external verifier, and possess D35 (Externally Verify the Assessment Process) and ideally D32 and 33 as well.

The centre coordinator is responsible for managing a centre's physical resources, staff resources and assessment system, including quality assurance, and control and liaison with external verifiers. Some assessment centres have no administrative support at all while others have support in varying degrees. Many centres run induction and portfolio building sessions and some follow this up with more specific workshops and tutorials. They may offer support on demand either by phone or fax, and make regular visits as part of the assessment and internal verification process. Line managers should be involved as much as possible, often being trained as assessors. Initially all units have to be seen by the external verifier during a visit. Over time centres can apply for direct claim status, which means they can sign off units as and when submitted.

### **Assessment arrangements**

After finding out the facts about the ILS S/NVQs from the Lead Body and the three awarding bodies, the first



step is to make provision for candidates to be registered and assessed. There are three choices:

- to purchase the services of a commercial assessment centre:
- to link with other organizations and become a consortium assessment centre:
- to become an assessment centre in your own right.

### **Using an external assessment centre**

For smaller organizations to test the water, it is perhaps best initially to register candidates and buy assessment from an external centre. Centres offering assessment externally for Information and Library Services include Richmond College, Somerset College of Arts and Technology (SCAT) and the Department of Information and Library Management at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. It can also be sensible to buy in assessment for the qualification of assessors (D32 and 33) and internal verifiers (D34). This was the experience of Age Concern England. As this was a one-off event for them, for just one member of staff, they found a nearby assessment centre, one of their library staff undertook training as an assessor, and the candidate was able to attend some sessions at the local college on portfolio building.<sup>5</sup> Many organizations offer Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) training externally.

### **Linking with other organizations to become an assessment centre**

Organizations, which are too small individually to support the whole assessment process alone, can join together and form consortia. This avoids the immediate necessity of setting up assessment centres and training assessors. The individual organization then has the option of becoming an independent assessment centre later when its own S/NVQ provision is further developed. Somerset College of Arts and Technology became the first assessment centre in the UK to be validated to deliver the ILS NVQs.<sup>6</sup> Other consortia include Leeds City Council, in partnership

with Leeds Careers, Manchester City College, and The North Wales Training Group. The Department of Information and Library Management at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, working in conjunction with the Northern Training Group, was the first UK school of librarianship to set up an assessment centre.<sup>7</sup>

### **Developing an in-house assessment centre**

There are several case studies of organizations which have set up their own assessment centres, including Essex Libraries,<sup>5</sup> Surrey County Libraries,<sup>8</sup> and Kingston upon Hull City Libraries.<sup>9</sup>

Breaking into this assessment and verification circle has proved a difficult process for some libraries and information services, even where effective induction and staff training programmes were already in place. As indicated previously, the organization will need staff to become assessors and internal verifiers. Assessors work directly with candidates, interpreting standards, judging evidence against criteria, and identifying gaps in achievements. Internal verifiers check the work of assessors, offering advice and support, and ensure the awarding body's criteria are met — in other words make sure that the quality of the assessment process within the centre is maintained. Assessors and verifiers need to be competent in the relevant occupational area but must also be competent to assess. While not an official role within the S/NVQ system, many assessment centres set up an informal support network of work-based mentors. Mentors can be senior colleagues or managers who work closely with candidates. Occasionally, mainly in small organizations, the assessor undertakes the mentor's role.

### **Assessment centre problems**

Typical problems in the early days relate to the amount of evidence needed by the S/NVQ candidates. There have also been concerns about the viability of small centres, but these could be overcome by their joining up with other centres and forming consortia.<sup>2</sup> However, for many larger organizations it is appropriate



and effective for the managers who, in the normal course of their work, would be responsible for the training and development of their staff, also to assess the candidates' portfolios in-house. This must be the cheapest and most effective model for those who are able to follow it. The shortage of qualified assessors may be a problem in some centres with Information and Library Managers experiencing difficulty in finding the time to assess candidates from outside their own organization.

Other problems include delays in the appointment of an external verifier and inadequate support from the awarding body.

### **Costs**

Organizations contemplating going down the S/NVQ route will no doubt be concerned about the costs involved. Questions to be addressed include the following:

- Will the candidates pay their own fees, or does the library pay all or part?
- How much will assessment, assessors and verifiers charge? If this is done externally then there is an immediate effect on the costs involved.
- Some funding may be available from the local TEC, especially to train assessors, or via Modern Apprenticeship and National Traineeship schemes, but will this last forever?
- Will S/NVQs offered by colleges be eligible for Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funding?

The ILS Lead Body has arrived at a cost of £250-950 per qualification, depending on the level of qualification and the assessment required. If an organization becomes an assessment centre for external candidates this may generate income calculated on a basis at least to cover costs. There are, however, compensations. The Leeds Centre Coordinator reported: 'We were to find that working with the candidates was more fun than talking about it'.<sup>10</sup>

## **BENEFITS TO THE INDIVIDUAL**

### **Recognition**

One of the main benefits derived by the ILS S/NVQ candidate is gaining a nationally recognized qualification based on measuring her/his abilities against national standards. S/NVQs have given recognition to the information worker's key role in the smooth running of the service. Chapman reports that, despite the fact that no additional salary was offered for achieving NVQ status, there were 50 applications from the staff of Kingston upon Hull City Libraries to be on the pilot for NVQ level 2, and 12 for the assessor's award. Chapman comments: 'What seems to have fired the imagination of the staff is that they recognize in the authority a commitment to resource them adequately to do the job expected of them'.<sup>9</sup>

### **Increased confidence and motivation**

The successful completion of an ILS S/NVQ can bring increased confidence, recognized both by employers ('We ... have seen the value of gaining a better trained and rather more confident staff member, who now has a recognized library qualification'<sup>5</sup>) and by the candidates themselves ('the programme has ..... raised my self-esteem', comments Christine Hall, a Principal Library Assistant with Bolton Libraries taking an NVQ in Customer Services<sup>11</sup>).

### **Transferability and increased mobility**

Another benefit ascribed to S/NVQs is that their framework renders qualifications comparable across sectors. Since the National Framework includes generic units taken from Administration, Management, IT and Customer Service, acquiring these units in one qualification not only means that candidates do not have to re-take them for another qualification, but also demonstrates that they are carrying out many of the same functions as people working in quite different fields. Therefore, once qualified, they should be able to transfer more easily from one sector to another, and also between specialist areas within the sector.



e.g. from archives to records management. S/NVQs are already gaining increased recognition in other EU member states through various joint projects, such as the Euro Qualifications Programme.<sup>12</sup> In time they should also help ILS workers to gain equal status and pay with staff working on comparable levels in other fields.

## **Other benefits to the individual**

Other benefits include:

- *Training is on the job.* S/NVQs do not require candidates to take extended time off work since the qualification can be acquired on the job. S/NVQs are suitable for flexible workers, part-timers, volunteers and those in such sectors as school librarianship.
- *Accessibility.* There are no barriers in accessing S/NVQs as far as age, gender or language are concerned.
- *Existing skills or qualifications may gain candidates exemption* from some parts of S/NVQs by means of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).
- *A better understanding of the job.* Given that S/NVQs are based on competence in the workplace, they provide the ideal opportunity to reflect on the job being done, making employees more focused and encouraging them to explore whether tasks could be done better. Sue Mason from Richmond College Library comments: 'I do like the way in which the NVQ makes you think about all the elements of the job and how they fit together.'<sup>13</sup> Undertaking an S/NVQ should help to encourage good interpersonal, written and organizational skills, all of which many of the traditional courses have tried to achieve, some times through contrived methods.<sup>14</sup>
- *Financial rewards.* Some organizations reward staff for achieving S/NVQs by giving them a salary increase. An IFF Research Ltd survey in 1996 showed that 42 per cent of employers gave pay rewards to staff when they gained an S/NVQ.<sup>5</sup>

- *Career progression and development.* The several levels of ILS S/NVQs offer for the first time a path for career development for the paraprofessional. For professional librarians with assessor skills, Somerset College of Arts and Technology has created posts on academic grades and with improved pay and conditions of service.<sup>6</sup>

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## **BENEFITS TO THE ORGANIZATION**

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Many suggestions are put forward about the benefits derived by organizations which follow the S/NVQ route. These include:

- raising the profile of the library staff and service;
- helping to retain motivated and skilled staff;
- providing external proof of staff competence — a benchmarking or quality assurance measure which should help improve service for customers;
- helping to identify training needs;
- providing an objective basis for job descriptions and a framework for performance appraisals and staff training programmes;
- providing a route to better recruitment procedures;
- lessening the need for lengthy off-the-job training.

## **Raising the profile of the library staff and library service**

NVQs provide an opportunity to professionalize information and library services at all levels. Becoming an ILS NVQ assessment centre has helped raise the profile of the library service and staff at City College Manchester.<sup>5</sup> At the individual level, undertaking NVQs promoted the role of Brent school librarians in the eyes of the teachers who recognized an improved contribution to supporting curriculum matters.<sup>15</sup> Within the NHS, with the lack of any specific salary grades for library staff, S/NVQs will be useful when attempting



to secure regrading for library posts, as the appropriate S/NVQ level for that post will already be used for other positions within the organization.<sup>16</sup>

## **Standards ensure quality**

The fact that staff are assessed against national standards provides a benchmark for quality assurance since the standards are based on both the functional and occupational analysis of best practice within the ILS sector. As part of the quality monitoring system, S/NVQs are routinely revised to keep pace with developments in the workplace. As stated in the introduction to this Briefing, the 11 ILS qualifications are currently being revised and are due to be accredited in September 1999.

## **HRM dimension**

ILS S/NVQs provide a framework for human resource management (HRM) activities such as performance appraisals, staff training programmes and continuing professional development (CPD). It is also posited that S/NVQs will lead to improved recruitment — since evidence of S/NVQ assessment will show employers exactly what a candidate can do — and improved service delivery from a better trained, more fulfilled, better motivated and more confident staff. NVQs have often been found to be a useful vehicle in achieving Investors in People (IiP) status. The impact of S/NVQs on staff in the ILS sector is the key focus of the INSIST project which has been undertaken by the Department of Information and Library Management at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. Researchers conducted a survey of all of the ILS assessment centres which existed in May 1998 and then followed up with in-depth case studies of different models of provision.

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## **CRITICISMS**

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NVQs have divided the ILS sector. Between the two extremes — one viewing S/NVQs uncritically and likely to take over all existing library qualifications at all levels, the other wishing to have nothing at all to do with them — there are many intermediate positions.

Some criticisms are levelled at the perceived overbearing bureaucracy of NVQs: 'The impact of what NVQs might mean can give you the feeling of being hit on the head with a mallet'.<sup>14</sup> Some have seen them as belonging to the 'inhumane and anti-social programme to diminish the value of people at work, not only in money terms, but also in terms of their self-worth and self-esteem', on the part of the government which introduced them.<sup>18</sup>

Such criticisms led to the Beaumont Report's review of 100 NVQs and SVQs.

Within the ILS sector, levels 2 and 3 are now widely accepted, and the debate has moved on to level 4 which has the potential to provide access to professional qualification, subject to recognition by professional bodies. At the time of writing, and based on the findings of INSIST and Lewis's dissertation,<sup>19</sup> candidates are challenging professional bodies to accept level 4 as a basis for full membership.

## **Jargon and language**

A much repeated criticism is of the language of S/NVQs and especially their use of jargon. Tuffin<sup>20</sup> expresses his concerns:

'For me the NVQ system is basically a very simple and useful idea rendered almost impenetrable by the generic language of its standards and the complexity of its bureaucracy. These features are essential to give the system its desired strength and integrity but can be a real barrier for the beginner.'

The issue of jargon and language has been a major focus of both the normal review programme and the review of all S/NVQs. The new standards are written in a much clearer personal style with use of the second person singular and more concrete explanations.

In the early days the incorporation in ILS of units from Customer Service and Supervisory Management S/NVQs resulted in a lack of consistency in terminology and layout. Now, however, it is possible to modify imported units to fit the context of the ILS sector, whereas in the past no changes of any kind were possible.



## **A time consuming process**

Another frequently voiced criticism is that S/NVQs are very time consuming for both assessors and candidates because of the paperwork involved with performance evidence and the continual commitment needed by assessors. Managers have voiced concerns that S/NVQs are mechanistic and some workers feel that S/NVQs are too involved for the reward gained. If S/NVQ candidates are not given time during the day by their employer they may need to give up lot of their own time. A major problem also is finding enough time in the workplace to prepare evidence. A worker in Goulding and Kerslake's study<sup>21</sup> comments:

'I've just recently started doing the NVQ but I'm finding it difficult to find the time. Especially with job-share. Maybe if I'd been full-time, it would have been different. Like you say, you find gaps in the week, but on two and a half days you don't find many gaps.'

The point needs to be made that S/NVQs take more time than training programmes because they are assessing not only work-based performance but also underlying knowledge and understanding.

## **The levels**

Another criticism concerns the differentiation between levels of the ILS S/NVQs. It is felt that level 2 is really only appropriate for the new entrant, yet few assistants are operating at level 3, in terms of the supervisory units, although the other units would be more suitable for them in terms of their underpinning knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

Again, this is being addressed in the reviews. It will continue to feature as the development of the standards is underpinned by an occupational analysis of activity within the information sector which explicitly examines the combination of tasks within job specifications for information workers across the two levels.

## **Subject content of ILS S/NVQs**

ILS S/NVQs have been criticized in terms of their relevance to jobs in the sector. Drury's survey found

that, of 61 per cent of the library assistants offered the opportunity to do an S/NVQ, 41 per cent felt it would have no relevance, and only 24 per cent believed it would improve their performance.<sup>23</sup>

The units concerned with supervising others may prove difficult for people working in smaller organizations, such as schools, special libraries and industrial libraries. The information technology units, which are currently imported in their original form, do not relate closely to the information and library environment.

The cataloguing and classification unit at level 3 has been the subject of fierce debate since the standards were first published. Many libraries and information services see cataloguing and classification as a professional task and will not let paraprofessionals undertake it. Other organizations do involve paraprofessionals with this work. At the moment the cataloguing and classification unit is mandatory, and most centres have managed to interpret the standards so that their candidates can achieve it.

As well as concern about the inclusion of some units, there is also the question of omissions, notably health and safety issues and cash handling. Some of these have been addressed in the new standards planned for launch in September 1999.

## **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)**

To date, APL from other certificated programmes plays only a very small part with the ILS S/NVQs — notably the practical assessments from City and Guilds 737 Library Assistant's Certificate, which may be used as partial evidence for some of the S/NVQ units. APL can be an important aspect of evidencing S/NVQs and each centre should have an APL adviser to guide assessors and S/NVQ candidates.

## **Costs**

Some people query whether S/NVQs are affordable for either employers or employees. There is also the issue of whether employers will both pay for an academic qualification and support the costs of vocational qualifications. Costs may be so prohibitive as to deter some would-be candidates and therefore militate



against the equity of access hoped for, but because S/NVQs are often assessed in the workplace and are relevant to employers' needs, they will frequently be met by employers. Unemployed adults may be able to gain S/NVQs 'free' through national schemes such as 'Training For Work'. Modern Apprenticeships and National Traineeships offer opportunities for young people to gain an S/NVQ as part of their training programme.

The explicit costs for S/NVQs, i.e. registration and certification fees, are low but it is the hidden costs of staff time, both for the candidates and the assessors, which need to be factored into the equation. S/NVQs, if costed fully, are not necessarily a cheap option, but they do provide a nationally recognized award which measures work-based competence.

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## MORE THAN TRAINING?

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### Practical versus underlying theory

It is the emphasis on practical competence that has led to criticism from those who are concerned about lack of theoretical underpinning. Wilson worries that there is no mention of the need for imagination, creativity, innovation or analytical thought, especially for managers at levels 4 and 5.<sup>18</sup> Muddiman thinks that '2001 may well see in libraries the emergence of the jobber, who knows how but not why'.<sup>24</sup>

Some critics have also argued that, unlike academic courses which cover a wide range of theory, S/NVQs focus exclusively on practice within the candidates' own organizations and that therefore their knowledge would not transfer easily to another type of organization within the sector, for example from a public library to an information unit in industry.

And yet the performance evidence refers to portfolios needing to show underpinning knowledge and understanding: to carry out a task well, people need to know why they are doing it and what to do when things go wrong. Sandra Parker (Library Association President in 1996) has described ILS NVQs as being *as well as*, rather than *instead of* existing qualifications.

NVQs are not in themselves a training programme but rather provide a framework of practical skills and underpinning knowledge against which training needs can be established.

### Higher level S/NVQs — suitable for professionals?

There has been much debate in general about the higher level S/NVQs — levels 4 and 5. Concerns and criticisms voiced with regard to the higher level ILS S/NVQs in particular, cover a range of issues. Johnson<sup>25</sup> questions whether S/NVQs can deliver what the university system aims to achieve and what employers seek from graduates in librarianship and information studies. He argues that university education aims to develop students' abilities to analyze, evaluate and develop problem-solving abilities, while S/NVQs at levels 1 to 4 do not attempt this incremental intellectual development. Wilson<sup>18</sup> formally expresses this concern when he states:

'The real answer to problems that librarians and information managers face is not narrowly focused, competency-based, part-time training but effective, full-time professional education. The aim of that education is to produce people who question what is done now; who are capable of analyzing situations and phenomena so as to identify novel solutions to problems ....'

Noon,<sup>26</sup> commenting on the Personnel Training and Education Group of the Library Association's submission to the staffing sub-group of the Follett Committee, writes:

'... on the question of staff development issues we were not convinced that the supposed benefits of NVQs would have any relevance for professional staff ... The real relevance of the NVQs lies in providing library assistants with a new route for qualifications as librarians.'

Elkin<sup>27</sup> expresses concern for the way in which higher level S/NVQs are being standardized without any apparent thought for their practicality at this level.

Muddiman<sup>24</sup> asks whether potential LIS students will bother to leave work for a year and take out a student



loan for the sake of a postgraduate qualification when they can pick up accreditation via an S/NVQ in the workplace:

'NVQs may well prove popular with employers and students on tight budgets, with the effect of deprofessionalizing whole areas of work.'

On the other hand, Irving,<sup>28</sup> supporting Parker's argument, already mentioned above, maintains that the aim of S/NVQs is to *complement*, not replace professional education. She states that:

'NVQs do not denigrate professional education and training. They simply provide more opportunities for people to choose how to acquire these in order to be assessed as competent, by making the assessment of their application available without the entry barriers currently presented by institutional learning.'

The library schools, traditionally the prime suppliers of professional education for ILS, have been slow to embrace S/NVQs. The Department of Information and Library Management (DILM) at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (UNN) in November 1996 launched the first ILS assessment centre in a library school. DILM believes that NVQs present a challenge, but also an opportunity, for the providers of professional and vocational qualifications for the information and library sector and that, although there are some legitimate concerns about S/NVQs' relationship with higher education, the competence approach has a lot to offer the academic curriculum.<sup>7</sup> Some organizations are already choosing to *send* their employees on a level 4 S/NVQ rather than having them study part-time for a BA in Information and Library Management. DILM has combined the two by offering exemption from years one and two of the undergraduate degree for candidates who have already achieved level 4.

It is worthy of note that ILS S/NVQs are now becoming the subject of Masters level and Doctoral studies. In addition the British Library has given its support to the INSIST project.

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## FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

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The introduction of S/NVQs has been the most significant development in vocational training in the last decade. Despite their relatively recent development, the ILS occupational standards have been adopted across the sector with over 150 assessment centres being established and the number of registered candidates per site ranging from a minimum of one to a maximum of 26 (level 2), 29 (level 3) and 8 (level 4). The approval of the Modern Apprenticeship (Skillseekers in Scotland) and National Traineeship programmes for ILS will give an added impetus to the implementation of these S/NVQs for young people. The revised and updated standards and awards for Information and Library Services, Tourist Information, Archives and Records Services will be available in September 1999. The major remaining target to complete the picture for the sector will be the establishment of a National Training Organization to replace the Lead Body.

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Library and Information Briefings (LIBS) are published two at a time, five times a year by the Library Information Technology Centre. The 1997 UK subscription is £70.00; overseas subscriptions are £85.00.

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