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'C' stands for 'Continuing...'

Briony Birdi

As the Programme Coordinator of a Librarianship Masters programme, it will come as no surprise that (with both hands!) I opposed the motion. Having attended this conference before and been disappointed by the lack of debate and discussion by the most senior members of our profession, I should feel jubilant that such heat has been generated by this one. Yet somehow, in this case, I don't. To question the value of the LIS qualification, the same qualification held by almost all of those attending the debate, seems more than a little odd.

I understand why some would feel that an academic department is 'out of touch', in its clichéd ivory tower. Perhaps this was the case when many of the present service leaders obtained their initial qualifications? Yet this is 2007: times have changed. The many excellent (professional) practitioners who form our advisory panels at Sheffield, asked to scrutinise our curricula, to speak to and host on-site sessions for our students, are well aware of the relevance of an LIS qualification. The librarians who return to the Department to re-train, adding one-off modules to their CV to enable them to progress in the workplace, are well aware of the relevance of an LIS qualification. And just to clarify, the 'C' in CPD stands for 'Continuing'...

Due in part to changes in the market place and in part to the insidious chipping away at professional values by the media and even, I am ashamed to say, by debates such as this, we worry each year that people will no longer choose to qualify. Yet there is no cause for concern: our students are bright, enthusiastic, committed individuals who are not afraid of the debate, and who look forward to a *professional* career. Many of those reading this will be those who regularly employ our graduates, and who feed back to us regarding impressed they have been. LIS departments are doing an excellent job to support those who are happy to call themselves 'professionals'. Our curricula, you may be interested to know, include such diverse subjects and issues as professional ethics, evaluating service quality, human computer interaction, financial planning, censorship, reader development, information literacy, performance management, social inclusion, marketing and promotion...Providing graduates with a little more, you might say, than the ability to 'smile and say hello'.

Each year a large number of excellent graduates, skilled, enthusiastic and ready to work in public libraries, will contact me from their post in a university or workplace library, unable to find the job they deserve in the sector they chose (and had previously felt so passionately about). *This*, in my view, is the true threat to professionalism: a lack of professional posts at professional salaries, which means that the best people – the 'future leaders' we hear so much about – are going elsewhere. A 'greying profession'? Continue to undermine it, and it will soon be a vanishing profession.