

Achieving professional standards

The Library Association (United Kingdom)

The Library Association is the United Kingdom's professional body for library and information staff with some 26 000 members drawn from all sectors of employment — higher and further education, schools, business and industry, the health service, the voluntary sector and public libraries. The Library Association was founded in 1877 and received its Royal Charter from Queen Victoria in 1898.

The Association is the qualifying body for professional librarians, awarding some 300 Associateships and Fellowships each year. The Code of Professional Conduct requires qualified members to maintain their continuing professional development. The Association runs training courses throughout the country and every other year 2000 members come together at the *Umbrella Conference* which offers a program of 350 continuing professional development events and an opportunity to network. The Library Association's twenty-three special interest groups and fourteen regional branches also have an important continuing professional development role.

The LA Mission Statement commits the Association to enable members to achieve the highest professional standards, and best practice is at the heart of much of the work of staff and the advisory committees of council. Standards and guidelines are developed on a range of professional matters and for different types of libraries. Staff also work with government and other agencies, such as the Schools Inspectorate to define standards. Policy statements are published on a variety of issues such as copyright, access to information and equal opportunities.

Members contact the Association for advice on employment, salaries, redundancy, volunteering and so on, and on professional issues such as censorship or services to disadvantaged groups. A new information centre will shortly be established at the Association's headquarters and the Association's website is fast becoming the centre of information services to members.

Perhaps the most important of all the Association's activities is its advocacy work. Relations with the current Labour Government are cordial and the Association has regular contact with appropriate ministers. Recent government initiatives indicate that there is real understanding of the role which libraries can play in achieving the Govern-

ment's objectives on education and ICT. This relatively high profile was not easily come by. It is the result of a decade of tireless lobbying using every opportunity to put the message across to key influencers and the media. Now the media recognise the Association as the primary point of contact for library or information issues. Campaigns such as National Libraries Week help to reposition libraries at the centre of the information society and to celebrate the achievements of our members.

The Library Association is optimistic about the future of libraries and librarians in the United Kingdom. There are a number of opportunities which our members are well positioned to take up and we are confident that our profession can enter the next millennium in a position of some strength. There is a good deal of work to be done but the future is looking more positive for libraries in the United Kingdom than it has for many years. ■



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Membership Over 25 000 members, 17 000 of which are chartered librarians

Mission

The Library Association affirms that libraries are fundamental to a thriving democracy, culture, civilisation and economy.

The Library Association is therefore committed to enabling its members to achieve and maintain the highest professional standards, and encouraging and supporting them in the delivery and promotion of high quality library and information services responsive to the needs of users.

Who is The Library Association?

For over 100 years The Library Association has been promoting and defending libraries, for those working in them and for the people who use them. By representing everyone who works in the library and information sector, The Library Association acts as a focus for discussion, and helps the profession speak effectively with one voice.