

•Recognition and Quality Assurance in Library and Information Science (LIS): common objectives, indicators and benchmarks in Europe

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•Abstract

•The objectives of the article are to demonstrate the need of cooperation in quality assurance and recognition between higher education institutions and vocational education and training accreditors, with particular focus on exchange of models and methods of accreditation, which have been adopted in LIS, as well as common criteria and principles. There are some assumptions in this research: author believes that there is enough room within the fundamental concept of the quality of LIS education, to incorporate most of the emerging theories and philosophies of learning, based on reflective practice and lifelong learning. The Guidelines produced by Library Associations, together with a documentary and literature review, have been analysed to outline common objectives, indicators and benchmarks between individual certification and LIS programmes accreditation. In Europe, the internationalisation process – with the Bologna Declaration (1999) and the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) - have identified certain concrete outputs in the fields of quality assurance, transparency and recognition of qualifications, in order to improve the overall performance and attractiveness of European Higher Education Area and to foster students and workers mobility. The European Qualification Framework, Europass and ECVET are discussed as the way that learning outcomes and recognition of competences can be linked to European Commission action lines. In conclusion, the need for a broad definition of continuing professional development in LIS is outlined.

•Introduction

•A number of developments are beginning to affect the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance tradition in Library Information Science (LIS). These developments reduce the value of formal qualifications and academic titles and place more emphasis on labour market-oriented competences and lifelong learning.

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•Firstly, the development of information society and a knowledge economy puts into perspective the value of professional continuous upgrading of competences and focuses attention on lifelong learning. Changes involving technology and the organisation of labour in LIS, require a high level of re-education and learning with new competences and skills. The economic situation also has an influence, leading to flexibility and differences in the significance of

qualifications (Walton and Edwards 2001). This development has consequences for the position of learning providers, where formal higher education is gradually having to deal with lifelong learning and share its position with other learning providers and with non-formal and informal learning paths.

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- Secondly, internationalisation of information professional qualifications are taking place. This article will focus on the policy developments at European level. The European labour market cannot function effectively without a qualification framework, quality criteria and principles to work as a common reference point for mobility and better employability. The necessary mutual trust can stem from quality assurance systems which are appropriately compatible and credible, so that they can be validated. In this connection, a common framework for quality in Higher Education and in Vocational Education and Training (VET), as part of the follow up of the Copenhagen declaration in conjunction with Bologna process, should be top priorities for the European Commission.
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- These developments point to the importance of lifelong learning as a competence-oriented approach in the assessment of individuals, not only to increase employability on the labour market, but also for personal development in a broad social context. The emphasis of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should be on “enhancing participants”, adding value to their capability, empowering them (Haycock 2001) and seeing the evidence that the learning experiences are having positive effects on persons’ growth and development. A commitment to lifelong learning, to critical reflection and to riding the continuous flow of change, are all characteristics of the desirable outcomes. As a consequence different forms of learning should be seen as a continuum: formal, informal and non formal learning.
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- By formal learning, we mean all forms of learning within a structured learning environment. This refers not only to the formal education system, but also to structured learning in public, intermediary and private training systems. Non-formal learning encompasses all activities which are not explicitly described as learning but which do contain a substantial learning component. Semi-structured learning, through planned activities in a work environment, is included, where elements with a learning component are deliberately introduced (e.g. counselling, supervision, work-based learning etc.). Informal learning is the usually implicit learning results of the everyday activities of the individual in the personal, family, professional and social context.

•1. Recognition and Quality assurance in LIS

- LIS practitioners seeking first appointment or promotion within an information organisation should be able to provide employers with assurance of the currency of their knowledge, skills and competences. These benefits should be

gained from the recognition of continuing professional education (Layzell Ward 2001). Recognition should motivate and reward practitioners who take their professional development seriously. The professional bodies could be the natural providers of this service because they are independent associations and many of them have demonstrated involvement in accreditation of professional education. Two types of measures can be identified in supporting lifelong learners: counselling for individuals on educational routes and recognition of acquired competences. The counselling of individuals essentially relates to helping find potential answers to career questions. This counselling can be a basic service, in the form of the provision of information, in other words, familiarisation with the learning labyrinth. Counselling can also go further towards advising on careers and accrediting educational programs.

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- Recognition is seen as the “endpoint” in a procedure, where the first step involves making the competences “visible” to everyone as well as being “demonstrable” by the person in question. The second step is the validation of the role which these “visible” and “demonstrable” competences can play in the choice of further training, the search for work or participation in socio-cultural life. The third step is the certification of these “visible” and “demonstrable” competences.

•1. 1 Recognition and quality assurance models

- There are three models for the recognition of formal qualifications and quality assurance in LIS, in our opinion:

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- 1) Program accreditation model: in this model a formal academic qualification is required as a basic entry level into the profession and the accreditation is focused on LIS schools programs. For example American Library Association (ALA) accredits institutions which provide courses and not the individuals. It sets down standards for accreditation, regularly reviewed, and examines LIS schools and programs. However in this model there is no requirement for CPD beyond the entry level education. This is the most diffused model of accreditation in LIS, but it can lead to stagnation within the profession;

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- 2) Individual lifelong learning: in this model there are different pathways to enter into the profession, including the academic title, and more flexibility. CPD is individual responsibility of information professional. It removes paraprofessional and professional distinction, and CPD is recognised. For example Australian Library Information Association (ALIA) considers, as does ALA, the LIS schools in its program of accrediting and an applicant must demonstrate of having completed a recognized course. ALIA also has a personal category for technicians who continuously maintain a portfolio. The reward is to be able to add CP certified practitioner to their post nominals. The weakness of this model is that it ignores

program accreditation and there is the need to continuously update the personal portfolio.

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- 3) Vocational education and training (VET) program: in this model there are no entry level standards and the training opportunities on which it is based are built in collaboration between stakeholders, as employers, education providers, local governments. The most important benefit of this model is flexibility, with a focus on specialisation, together with CPD recognition and emphasis on lifelong learning but it relies too heavily on subjective assessment of personal portfolio and there is also the risk that employers may emphasise practical skills rather than deep knowledge. This is the model where there is no professional association involved in the recognition process (Tammaro 2003).

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- While in these models, recognition is based on a competence based approach, another model (not considered here) is based on criterion-referenced assessment. Many countries have national systems of qualifications which are comprehensive, including all levels of education and training. A number of English-speaking countries have formally developed and published national frameworks of qualifications. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), introduced in UK in 1980, are work related and represent a national standards recognised by employers throughout the country and used as reference criteria for qualifications.

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- IFLA started a project at the annual Conference in Jerusalem and has accepted the *Guidelines for professional LIS programs* which define accreditation requisites, including core subjects (IFLA. Section Education and Training 2000). CILIP has a different approach. In common with ALA and ALIA, at first level it has a program for the accreditation of LIS courses, following its standards. At second level, there is verified evidence of individuals fitness for professional practice. Evidence required is the preparation of a professional development report, a portfolio and an interview. The third level requires the registration and maintenance of CPD records. Fellowship is at the fourth level. It should be said that if the entire process of validation has to have compliance with guidelines, it becomes too cumbersome or costly, and it will be bypassed. CLENE (Continuing Library Education Network Exchange) tried to implement a learner recognition and provider approval system tied to quality guidelines. Because the system seemed complicated and involved fees, it was abandoned and eventually transformed in ALA guidelines (Varlejs 2003).

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- Competences lists are important tools for recognition and quality assurance. Webber (Webber 1999) discusses three competences lists: two from Europe and one from US. The first is the Council of Europe study, in the context of the new book economy, including media and publishing inside the traditional library and information professionals competences. The second study, by TFPL on

behalf of UK Government, is on Knowledge Management people competences. SLA study only was realised within a professional association, its target are educators, positioning the profession in the new environment of digital library. Webber highlights international issues of the competences lists as linguistic problems, problems of identifying up-to-date lists of target departments for all countries and problems of cultural identification. They would be compounded by the fact that a much broader range of professions is covered and that there would be a variety of different bodies carrying out the training. Towards international recognition of qualifications, it is important the work of ECIA (European council of information associations) which, in 1994, established a certification for allowing experienced professionals to obtain recognition of their level of qualification, even if they did not possess the corresponding diploma. Another outcome was the definition of compatibility criteria between different certification systems. The second stage was CERTIdoc: its objective is the definition and establishment of a European certification system. The certification procedure will be the same, it will refer to the same range of competences, the certificate will have the same value ((Meyriat 2003). For almost all European countries, most of the information associations were interested in a European certification in higher levels and expect an integration in the information sector in Europe to learn from each other and to integrate the different professional groups in the information sector (archivists, librarians, documentalists, ecc.) (Rittberger and Schmid 2003). CERTIdoc (CERTIdoc Consortium 2003) has defined in this way the elements of an international recognition process to be agreed:

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- Competences: a set of skills necessary to perform a professional activity and the proficiency of required behaviour. The components are: knowledge, know-how, aptitudes. These are considered as proficient when put in practice effectively and validated;
- Level of qualification: a person place in reference to a scale of qualifications, which separates the knowledge and know-how of an occupation (or group of similar occupations) into different functions. The level of qualification takes into account the individual's competence (especially technical), the complexity of different responsibilities undertaken as well as his/her degree of autonomy, decisiveness and foresight;
- Profile: directory of competencies necessary to exercise a profession.
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- The risk of recognition is to become a rigid grid, leading to the status quo conservation instead of motivating people to continuing development. A revised accreditation model is needed, focusing more on innovation, experimentation and collaboration between different stakeholders. RAPID is an interesting project of collaboration between HE and VET. The RAPID process also enable the lifelong learners, from students to full professional status, to trace their progress through a process of identification of skills

acquisition and further training needs (Brine and Feather 2003).

•1.2 *Dimensions of quality standards*

- Three set of quality standards have emerged from various LIS guidelines (Knox 2001) for evaluating CPD and LIS education: desirable outcomes, education process and program administration.
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- 1) Desirable outcomes: it is difficult to identify in this cluster the quality indicators because they include impact on professional performance and benefits to users. The typical way to show results of CPD programs is the number and characteristics of participants, or indicators of their use of learning for improving practice. Some relate to professionalism process as knowledge mastery, problem solving, use of practical knowledge.
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- 2) Educational process: the quality indicators include the major decision areas for people who plan and conduct continuing education programs. Quality indicators can be: allowing for differences in learning styles, responsiveness to adult learners backgrounds and preferences, opportunities for varied practice and progression, assistance with self directed learning. Needs assessment procedure includes multiple sources of evaluation Other forms of evaluation are based on ISO standards and are focused on program improvement and justification.
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- 3) Program administration: Attention is given to functions such as goal setting, staffing, resource acquisition and allocation. Quality indicators are balancing participants background and aspirations, provider purposes and resources, societal trends and accountability. For staffing, quality indicators include attention to recruitment and selection criteria, use effective procedure.
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- Quality assurance has been considered a strategic importance for LIS schools future in both the two models considered: the professional and the program ones. Strengths and weaknesses of the two models have been extensively discussed. Most would agree that LIS programs accreditation has meant higher standards and greater progress for libraries. Saracevic however (1994) speaks of the “iron grip” on library education held by the Committee on Accreditation (COA) of the ALA and Gorman (2004) criticized ALA program accreditation for simply measuring a program against its own mission and vision statements, adding that, due to an increased concentration on technology, curricula in LIS programs today are not adequately addressing the real needs of the profession. Cronin (2000) claims COA tended to accreditation focusing attention on the bottom and not on the top, with an uncritical veneration of vocationalism, fuzzy values, and final homogenisation of the accreditation process, wishing LIS schools evaluated intramurally by higher education institutions. Gorman (2004) however ended with a plea that accreditation be tied to national

standards and that the programs develop greater concentration on librarianship by cooperating with practitioners in developing curricula.

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- LIS accreditation is at a crossroad. A lack of a common definition of quality, of same purposes and of similar process seems to make difficult and also not desirable to collaborate toward a single accreditation system. Different stakeholders have different view on quality. However common trends must not to be overlooked. The actual shift of pedagogy from teaching to learning and the focus on learning outcomes and lifelong learning will place students in a more central role in the process of quality assurance; it is also important to study the employers expectations and analyse the labour market. For quality assurance to work properly and to obtain its objectives, it should be a cooperative enterprise among higher education institutions and accreditors. The individual lifelong learning model of recognition could be the common reference model, once the focus is on learning outcomes.
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- The first two clusters of quality indicators are listed in Tab. 1, together with recognition systems. Putting together quality assurance and recognition accreditors, the key issues seem to be:
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 - - Learning outcomes: the extent to which an accreditor specifies the particular learning outcomes or allows complete institutional discretion;
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 - - Quality assurance focus: the extent to which an accreditor is concerned about either individual student competences or overall program effectiveness;
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 - - Quality assurance process: the extent to which an accreditor examines direct evidence of student achievement or the adequacy of the processes used to assure particular levels of student attainment.
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- Within the framework of lifelong learning, higher education and vocational education and training assessment should gain visibility and transparency through their integration. The emergence of common themes is now based on a new learning philosophy in response to changing social and political realities. What may promote a more collective position for HE and VET accreditors? The recognition and quality assurance issues, briefly indicated at national level, are not different at international level. National and international LIS recognition and quality assurance systems should focus on different learner profiles and needs.
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•Tab. 1 Recognition and quality assurance in LIS

LIS Guidelines	Unit of analysis	Ways of looking at performance	Ways of looking at outcomes	Ways to review performance
CILIP	Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposes • Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Further education • Career mobility • Income • Self-assessment • CPD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation of programs • Supervised training and portfolio
ALA-APA certifications	Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic qualifications • Competences • Needs assessment • Curriculum Design and delivery • Assessment exam and planned evidence of results • Target audience • Eligibility requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning outcomes and competences; • Responsiveness to learner backgrounds and preferences; • Opportunities for the profession; • Program evaluation methodology (including quantitative and qualitative data) 	Measurement of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants; • Number of institutions offering coursework; • Quality of learner assessment products; • Evaluation of each delivery institution or individual; • Participants evaluations
ALA-COA (Accredited by CHEA and member of ASPA)	Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission, objectives; • Curriculum content; • Faculty or faculty recruitment plans; • Students recruitment, pre-requisite; • Physical resources and facilities; • Administration and financial support; • Evaluation plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desired learning outcomes assessment • Way of accommodate various learning styles; • Way of encouraging students to practice and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures of aims and objectives achievement; • Resources effectively used; • Departmental and program evaluation; • Students achievements: basic skills, thinking and

			apply their practice in the learning discipline, preparations for lifelong learning.
			o Examinations
			o Performance
			o Student work
			· Alumni survey
			· Employer feedback
ALIA	Program		
	Adult learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · University program · CPD · Work experience · Competences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Mechanism for equivalence of formal qualifications. · Minimum 20 hours for year of formal training
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Recognition of ongoing learning, acceptable to employers and compatible with Australian Qualifications Framework
CERTIDoc	Adult learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Competences · Diploma (Level 1: in Higher Education; other Levels: secondary studies) or professional Diploma or a course of 200 hours · Professional experience (Level 1: 5 years; other: 3 years) · Plan for CPD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Self-assessment · Assessment of items in the dossier; · Interview; · Decision of the Certification Committee · Periodic Renewal
IFLA	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Mission, Goals and Objective · Curriculum · Core elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Regular review of the curriculum, informed by · Evaluation of student achievement, provided in

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Continuing education · Faculty and staff · Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Admission/completion requirements · Administration and financial support · Instructional resources and facilities 	input from consistent and equitable basis employers, practitioners and professional associations, as well as students and faculty	· Student and alumni evaluation on a regular basis
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•2. *Internationalisation, recognition and quality assurance*

•The problem of recognition has an other aspect: namely LIS education agreed quality standards and the potential for increased international equivalency of information professionals qualifications. This issue is currently hindering the international mobility of LIS professionals and not protecting students from diploma-mills. Harmonisation of the standards required for success in LIS schools, on which is based the mutual trust, has failed. IFLA has studied possible methodological approaches to the equivalency of qualifications but the issue of international recognition of qualifications is extremely complex and requires committment and support from the international community (Dalton and Levinson 2000).

•2.1 **European Commission policy**

The policy of internationalisation of the European Commission focuses upon two major issues: the need of facilitating mobility of workers and improving European economic effectiveness by increasing skills and employability of students. The general aim is not only to support lifelong learning but to audit results. From a political point of view the focus is on person, or non traditional learners, including special needs communities as persons with handicap and immigrants. Because mobility is closely linked to the way in which learning and competences are recorded and valued in different countries, the focus is on transparency, credit transfer, quality assurance and common frameworks of qualification. In the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) and throughout the Bologna process (1999), actions lines are formulated for the fields of HE and VET. These measures are two-part. Firstly, some measures are designed to eliminate extrinsic barriers to participation in life-long learning, such as measures related to mobility as the European qualifications framework and the Europass. Secondly, some measures are designed to encourage CPD, such as time credits, training credits, career credits, etc.

●2.1.1 European Qualification Framework

- While transparency was originally linked to mobility in European labour market, it has a much broader significance in the development of policy on education and training. To give transparency to qualifications, the first strategy adopted at Community level has been the realisation of common reference tools for the recognition of qualifications of skilled workers and quality assurance (European Commission. Irish Presidency Conference 2004).
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- The European Qualification Framework (EQF) will make it possible to compare and link the growing diversity of education, training and learning provisions existing throughout Europe. The notion of ‘levels’ of education is taken to be broadly related to gradations of learning experiences and the competences which the contents of an educational programme require of participants. Broadly speaking, the level is related to the degree of complexity of the content of the programs. This does not imply that levels of education constitute a ladder where the access of prospective participants to each level necessarily depends on having successfully completed the previous level. This means that competences, in the form of knowledge and learning outcomes, are always given their value through qualifications awarded by educational players (Bjornavold 2000). EFQ is at an early stage of development, but have been identified some of its elements, as the learning outcomes, the credit transfer system and the portfolio.

●2.1.2 *Learning outcomes*

- The need to develop linkages between higher education and vocational education must surely be central to lifelong learning and mobility and this is why the Copenhagen Declaration is combined with the Bologna process. Learning outcomes are the basis for this integration and they have applications at three distinct levels: the local level of the individual higher education institutions; the national level (for qualifications frameworks and quality assurance regimes); and internationally (for wider recognition and transparency purposes). Learning outcomes represent an approach that plays a significant role in a much wider context that includes: the integration of academic and vocational education and training (VET), the assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL), the development of lifelong learning qualifications frameworks, the development of credit transfer and accumulation systems.
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- They represent a change in emphasis from “teaching” to “learning”, or what is known as the adoption of a student-centred approach in contrast to traditional teacher-centred viewpoint. Student-centred learning produces a focus on the learning assessment and the fundamental links between the program design, course delivery and measurement of learning. The learning outcomes-based approach has implications as well as for quality assurance and recognition

(Adam 2004).

●2.1.3 *Europass and ECVET*

- The Qualification Framework would need to be complemented and supported by a range of instruments and guiding principles agreed at European level. Elements to be included are the Europass and ECVET.
- Europass should consist of a portfolio document, with a common brand name and a common logo supported by adequate information systems, voluntarily adopted by individuals. The open architecture proposed for Europass is comparable to the common architecture in three cycles of European higher education degrees and will allow new and dynamic approaches to assessing, validating and recording learning in the future. Competences can be demonstrated and therefore assessed and related to the corresponding professional qualifications. This is seen as a necessary feature of any reference tool, pointing to the need for an approach based on competences and learning outcomes.
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- ECVET introduces a credit systems for the accumulation (more than transfer as originally conceived) of credits: it requires a compatible organisation of curricula and programs delivery and a mutual trust in the quality of learning providers. However there are a number of issues that make implementing a credit transfer system for VET more complex than in HE, essentially for the lack of quality assurance systems in training.
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- It is important to recognise the broad connection between learning outcomes, levels, level descriptors, credits, and recognition of qualifications and quality assurance. Learning outcomes have been described as a basic educational building block and as such they have a direct and powerful links with a number of other educational tools. They make possible much more than the simple identification of learning achievements. They have a direct relationship to levels and level indicators. When learning outcomes are written they are created in the context of the institutional/national/international reference points that aid the maintenance of standards and quality. However, ECTS credits are not currently linked to levels and consequently they suffer from being rather crude instruments as they cannot delineate progression or indicate anything about the nature of learning. It is only when credits are linked to level and learning outcomes, that they reach their full potential.
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- Conclusion
- In conclusion the opportunity of a learning outcome approach, would mean a decisive innovation in current practice of fragmentation of initiatives and division between information professionals and LIS teachers. The benefits of cooperation regarding the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance might be: ease of access to a standard qualifications framework, cost-effectiveness of quality assurance methodologies, recognition of work experience in place of formal education, facilitating employment and career of information professionals. One possibility is

now to work within the internationalisation framework in Europe for the sector of LIS. In the context of European internationalisation, the current trend is to consider quality assurance in education and training holistically, taking into account recognition of qualifications and quality assurance which are necessary for facilitating lifelong learning. The driving force of the EU policy is the mobility of students and workers, but the efforts are towards increased quality and transparency and visibility of competences at sectoral, national and then international level.

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- The recognition of acquired competences is a measure aimed not only at more employability. The recognition of acquired competences also aims to increase the intrinsic learning motivation and participation in life-long learning, by starting from the continuous improvement of “acquired competences” and not only from a “lack of competences” and by acknowledging the value not only of formal learning, but also of non-formal learning. In the debate concerning life-long learning, we observe that employability thinking dominates. This implies that the emphasis is placed on labour market-oriented competences and on the recognition of immediately employable competences. It is clear that this implies a serious narrowing of the broad competence concept, put forward in the academic discussion (Haycock 2001) (Cronin 2000).
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- A learning outcomes approach is, by definition, an approach with a lifecycle perspective. This means that, in addition to immediately employable competences, attention should also be devoted to the continuous development of learning competences and career competences. The recognition of competences is then a possible component or instrument of career guidance and development.
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- The challenges of internationalisation and a rapid change in economies and occupation have given rise to the development of sectoral qualifications, in business and industry. This has led to the development of international training modules, assessment standards, assessment methods, curricula and qualifications and or competences. We need a broad definition for continuing professional development in LIS and a development plan to identify LIS personal career, using a portfolio.

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