Brief Communication

A review of library and information service job advertisements: what do they tell us about work in the Irish library sector?

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Abstract.

Over the past fifteen years, analyses of employment advertisements have generated data on employment conditions and skill requirements for job seekers in the library and information sector. This paper analyses library and information job advertisements in the two most comprehensive appointment sections in Irish national daily newspapers over 1999 and demonstrates that a small but steady number of positions are advertised in both organs. Skill requirements vary, but experience in communications, management and information technology is essential for advancement and a professional qualification in library and information studies is essential. Most positions advertised were for work in academic and public libraries, mainly in locations on the east coast of Ireland (especially Dublin).

'Job postings reflect the changes in our information world' [1, p. 165].

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Job advertisements are principally conceived to recruit the best staff, but they also serve to lay certain sectors and professions open to external scrutiny. Newspaper appointments sections can challenge the myths which serve to undermine the status of professions, which, in turn, damage the services that professionals hope to offer. 'The caricature of the librarian as a classic low achiever still persists, and the popular notions of what goes on in a library are so misguided that few non-librarians believe it takes much of a high flier to run one' [2, p. 54]. Job advertisements also provide graduates and school leavers with an opportunity to examine the working conditions, salaries, possibilities for advancement and qualifications required for each profession.

This paper analyses library and information job advertisements in the appointment sections of the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* newspapers over the course of one year, 1999, in an attempt to gauge the changing skill requirements of professionals working in the field of library and information services in Ireland. The research presented is not an exhaustive analysis of the appointment sections of the many local, regional and Sunday newspapers in Ireland, but it is a representative survey of advertisements in the two most comprehensive appointment sections in national daily newspapers. The advertisements provide excellent raw material for demonstrating:

(1) what special library, and non-library, skills are being sought by employers;
(2) which sectors offer the most positions;

(3) which time of the year is the best for seeking library and information work;

(4) where most positions are being offered;

(5) what the average starting salary range is;

(6) what employment conditions are available;

(7) how much experience is required for specific posts;

(8) what qualifications are sought;

(9) which publication advertises more library and information jobs;

(10) whether the professional qualification in library and information studies (LIS) is still of value.

Similar research has been undertaken in the USA, Canada and Australia over the last fifteen years and has proved to be extremely useful. 'LIS graduates, and all others who aspire to become information managers, should be encouraged to read advertisements carefully, work out why their knowledge and skills are appropriate and then present themselves in a way which highlights this relevance and their suitability to fill the position' [3, p. 326]. One academic librarian found the examination of job advertisements to be an effective way of informing and motivating students and of alerting him to the new elements of the area in which he taught which were most desirable to employers [4, p. 62].

Many positions are advertised as non-library positions which could be filled by professionally trained, experienced librarians [2, p. 54]. In their research, Willard and Mychalyn used the term *the emerging information labour market* to define the 'broad range of information management positions which are not part of the established LIS field or the information handling component of other established occupations and which fitted, in the researchers' assessment, the criterion that the tasks were appropriate ones for LIS graduates' [3, p. 316].

In 1999, 123 library and information work positions were advertised, 60 (48.8%) of them in *Irish Times*, 28 (22.8%) of them in *Irish Independent* and 35 (28.5%) appeared in both newspapers.

An average of ten positions were advertised every month. The single best month for job-hunting in the library and information sector was July (eleven positions above the average). The other above-average months were January, February and October.

Table 1 shows the number of positions advertised. Other positions advertised included: Information Specialist; Associate Librarian; Microfilming Assistant; 'Know-How Manager'; Project Leader; Principal Assistant; Information Manager; Picture Researcher/ Librarian; Information Services Manager; Divisional Librarian; Youth Information Co-ordinator and Library, Media Production and Services Manager.

Table 1
Number of positions advertised

Position	No. advertised
Library Assistant	27
Assistant Librarian	23
Librarian	22
Senior Library Assistant	10
Information Officer [5]	9
Library Director [6]	7
Development Manager	3
Chief Librarian	2
Regional Librarian	2
Library Trainee	2
Deputy Librarian	2
Sub-Librarian	2

The vast majority of advertisements were for positions based on the east coast of Ireland: 71 (57.7%) were for positions in Dublin; 20 (16%) for positions in other areas of the province of Leinster; thirteen (10.5%) for Connaught and ten (8%) for Munster. Only seven positions were advertised in Ulster, two of which were in Northern Ireland. Two positions in Africa were also advertised.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the advertisements were for jobs in the academic and public library sector. Sixty-one (49.6%) were for positions in the academic sector; 28 (22.8%) were for the public library sector; fourteen (11%) were for information positions in the voluntary and community sector. There were four health library positions advertised, three business library positions, two school library positions, one legal library position and ten (8%) other special library positions advertised.

Thirty-six advertisements did not include details on remuneration. Starting salary ranges and the frequency with which they were offered are outlined in Table 2.

Most of the positions for the £5,000–£10,000 range were for library assistants and trainees; most of the jobs with starting salaries in the range of £11,000–£15,000 were for senior library assistants and assistant librarians. The highest paying positions were for senior and managerial staff in the public and academic library sector.

Terms of employment were not stated in 52 advertisements. Of those appointment notices which did state the terms, 32 were for permanent positions, 26 for contract positions, six for temporary posts and five for part-time employment.

Table 2
Ranges and frequencies of starting salaries

Starting salary range	Frequency
£5,000–£10,000	21
£11,000–£15,000	19
£16,000–£20,000	18
£21,000–£25,000	16
£26,000–£30,000	2
£31,000–£40,000	8
£40,000–£49,000	3
£50,000+	0

Seventy-nine (64.2%) of the advertisements stated that experience was necessary/desirable. Most of the advertisements for positions which required no experience were for library assistants.

Only one advertisement required knowledge/fluency of a European language, but twelve stated that knowledge of Irish was essential. One advertisement sought knowledge/fluency of Irish and a European language.

Fourteen advertisements stated that applicants should have knowledge of certain subject areas. These areas included law, history, science, media, social work, Irish studies, social policy and art. A number of special skills (mainly management and communication skills) were sought. The number and frequency of these is demonstrated in Table 3. Both of the advertisements for library and information work in the legal sector required that applicants have law degrees.

Forty-seven advertisements stated the need for information technology (IT) skills. Thirty-six of these demanded a general knowledge of computing applications, eight for knowledge of library management systems, two for knowledge of the Internet and online searching and two for systems administration skills.

Table 3
Skills sought and their frequencies

Skills	Frequency
Communications/Interpersonal skills	10
Management	7
Administration	6
Management and communications	5
Leadership	2
Cataloguing	2
Finance/Budgeting	2
Management and strategy	1
Research	1

Fifty-eight (47%) of the advertisements stated that a professional qualification in LIS was desirable/essential. Seventeen required education to school-leaving level and eight required a third-level qualification. One required a non-library Master's degree and one a fellowship of a professional association. Thirty-five did not state a requirement for a level of qualification.

This review of job advertisements demonstrates the following:

(1) both newspaper appointment sections need to be scanned to ensure that the job seeker is exposed to a great number of employment possibilities;
(2) a small, but steady, number of library and/or information positions are advertised in the reviewed appointment sections every month;
(3) skills required in advertisements vary, but IT skills in general are very important. Communication and management skills are essential to ensure appointment at a managerial level. These needs should be reflected in training programmes;
(4) experience is essential for anyone intending to work above the level of library assistant;
(5) professional qualifications in LIS are still essential to anyone wishing to work in the sector [7].

As stated above, this research was carried out on the two most comprehensive and widely-read newspaper appointment sections in Ireland and does not take into account the number of positions available at regional or organisational levels. A more comprehensive analysis of the present nature of library and information work could be facilitated by both the acquisition of job descriptions and a broader analysis of appointment sections in regional newspapers and professional journals. A notable feature of the advertisements was the number which offered further details, application forms, etc, on their institutional websites. Many position notices appear regularly on websites, bulletin boards and mailing lists and thus a more detailed analysis of job postings will be deficient if this aspect of employment advertising is not addressed. Nevertheless, this review provides a first glimpse at the current status of the library and information profession in Ireland, as reflected through appointment advertising.

References and notes

[1] C. Cote, The library job market as seen from Quebec, *Canadian Library Journal* 46(3) (1989) 165–167.
[2] J. Glenn, The future of professional librarianship in public libraries, *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library* 14(2) (1998) 53–58.

[3] P. Willard and J. Mychalyn, New information management work in a changing world: an Australian survey, *International Journal of Information Management* 18(5) (1998) 315–327.

[4] J.W. Palmer, Job advertisements and cataloguing skills, *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 33(1) (1992) 61–63.

[5] A number of information officer positions were advertised which were of a strictly computing nature. The information officer positions included in this survey related solely to library and/or information services.

[6] All three were for positions in Citizens Information Services.

[7] Although most libraries are involved in continuing professional development (CPD) internally, through consortia and through the Library Association of Ireland, the only graduate programme leading to professional qualification in Ireland is offered by the Department of Library and Information Studies in University College Dublin (www.ucd.ie/~lis/index.html).