

# Continuing professional development through our professional association

## Attaining an award from the Library Association of Ireland (LAI)



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### Introduction

The Library Association of Ireland (LAI) offers two awards to recognise contribution to the library profession. This article recounts the experiences of the two authors in attaining Associateship and Fellowship.

### Associateship of the Library Association of Ireland (ALAI)

*Laura Connaughton*

The Library Association of Ireland aims to 'promote the career development of persons engaged in library services and information provision, and to foster their professional and paraprofessional interests and aspirations and to promote a high standard of education by evaluating and according recognition to degrees and courses as appropriate' (LAI, 2015). The LAI offers Associateship of the LAI (ALAI) as part of this aim. This is an internationally recognised award that signifies both academic success and practical experience in library and information studies' (LAI, has 2015). Any member of the LAI can apply for the award provided s/he been a personal member, in good standing, for at least one year. The applicant must hold an academic qualification in library and information studies which is recognised by the LAI and have a minimum of two years' post-qualification work experience.

### My career path

I decided to apply for Associateship for a number of reasons. I've worked in libraries for six years; my first post was with the Marine Institute (<http://www.marine.ie>), a small specialised library; following that I spent a short while at Dublin City University (<http://www.dcu.ie/library>) before joining Maynooth University (MU) (<http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library>). This is my first permanent post and I am keen to develop as a professional. I've been actively involved with the LAI (<https://libraryassociation.ie/>) for a number of years and served as chair of the LAI Career Development Group.

### Why do ALAI?

Attaining associateship reflects professional recognition from both peers and possible future employers. In addition, it demonstrates my commitment to my own continuing personal development, which is a very important career consideration for all librarians. It certainly adds to and enhances my CV. Being elected to the register of associates of the LAI, I can now use the post-nominal letters 'ALAI'. Five years after attaining ALAI I shall be eligible to apply for Fellowship of the LAI (FLAI). And of course it is also an opportunity for me to promote the importance of our professional association and its values.

### The application process

The application process was an opportunity for me to reflect on my career to date and highlight evidence of both personal and professional achievement. There are four elements to the process:

- application form (from <https://libraryassociation.ie/career/apply-award>)
- 500-word personal statement
- CPD activity record
- application fee.

### Application form

The application form asks for details of education, academic qualifications, work experience, an outline of CPD activity and two referees.

### Personal statement

At the time of application, I had four years' library experience, which is relatively short; however, I still found it challenging to put my experiences into 500 words. I did, however, find the personal statement an excellent way of reflecting on my career to date; it made me consider how I've contributed

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to the library profession. I included information on conferences at which I have presented, seminars I've attended, committee membership and my professional memberships. It also afforded me the opportunity to write about the development of my personal, managerial and leadership skills. Through my personal statement, I think I conveyed my passion and enjoyment of my chosen profession.

### Record of CPD activity

I keep a record of all my CPD activity – training, courses, seminars attended, any blog posts, articles, speaking at conferences, committee membership activities etc. This is really useful for job applications and also to develop a sense of professional identity. CPD is so important both for new learning and to build and engage with our professional network. Having a strong record of CPD enhanced my CV and strengthened my application.

### Fee

The application is accompanied by a €100 fee. At Maynooth University (<http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library>) the fee is paid by the library as part of staff professional development.

I was awarded the ALAI in March 2015. I presented a poster at the annual LAI Academic and Special Libraries conference in 2015 entitled 'Continuing professional development in librarianship: applying for the Associateship of the Library Association of Ireland' (<http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/5926/>). I was delighted to win the Best Poster award at the conference.

I enjoyed compiling my application for Associateship – it was a learning process, allowing me to reflect on my career to date and to look towards my future career. My aim is to apply for Fellowship (FLAI) in the future.

## Fellowship of the Library Association of Ireland (FLAI)

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### Regina Richardson

After five years at Associate level, members of the LAI can progress to Fellowship, the highest level of professional qualification awarded by the LAI. This represents professional recognition for outstanding professional contribution. It signifies that an Associate or other eligible member has developed to the potential required for that award and has applied an increasing level of professionalism both through personal professional practice and through contribution made to the profession at large.

Candidates are required provide evidence in keeping with the key criteria below (LAI, 2013):

- appreciable achievement in professional practice;
- continuity of involvement in professional development;
- having added significant value to all or aspects of the profession.

### My career path

In professional terms my journey began in 1977 when I became Librarian & Information Officer at the Spanish Cultural Institute in Dublin (now the Insituto Cervantes). From working in a small organisation in a team of four administrators I moved to a university library with a much larger staff and a somewhat different clientele: a university which had started on the road to endless and enormous changes and developments in terms of resources, technology, buildings, services, and indeed culture.

From catalogue cards to OPACs, from stencilled newsletter to webpage, via subject librarianship in music and modern languages, teaching and learning, collection development, information literacy, academic liaison, editing and research, project management, archives, rare books and pamphlets, my journey

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has been one of great variety and interest, and I have been fortunate in that I have been able to incorporate my personal interests into my professional work to enhance my role.

I obtained my Associateship in 1989. Now in late career it seemed timely to apply for Fellowship, as there had been a great many developments in the library and information world as well as in my own career since then. In both cases it was at the suggestion of the deputy and university librarians at Maynooth University, who were both deeply engaged with the LAI and with its professional activities. The encouragement and support of library management was very important, as it allowed me time and facilities to prepare my submission and the library paid the application fee €150 as part of CPD activity.

### Submission

In preparing my submission, I first considered the *raison d'être* of an information professional. I considered how my work reflected the goals and aspirations of my university and library, referring to their current strategic plans. I provided evidence of relevance, for example:

- participation in an on-going programme of Continuing Professional Development;
- taking on new roles, gaining knowledge, developing new skills and enabling innovation;
- engagement with the student population and academic community, and the development of resources such as library guides and subject webpages to assist users;
- publications and presentations in my fields of expertise thus adding to the body of professional knowledge;
- active participation in professional conferences and meetings - both organising and presenting;
- collaboration with academics, archivists, librarians and other information providers on and off campus;
- involvement in the university library working groups and committees, and in the LAI with committee memberships and contributions;
- being a contributing member and bringing representation of my university library and country to international professional organisations
- engagement with the wider community on the library committee of the local post-primary school, doing voluntary work by assisting them in choosing and setting up an integrated online library system.

While the LAI has a formal mentoring system, I didn't avail myself of this; rather a colleague in house, who had completed the FLAI, provided informal mentoring, which was invaluable.

### Portfolio

Because of my long and diverse career, and the existence of many supporting documents that I had kept over the years, I had quite a large amount of information for my portfolio, which included documents, images, letters, facsimiles, photographs, CPD certificates, testimonials and weblinks. My physical portfolio was in a dozen sections under the following headings:

1. Application form; personal statement; CV
2. Degrees and diplomas
3. Testimonials
4. Publications

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5. Russell Library / Archivo General de Simancas
6. Learning, teaching and research
7. Bibliographic services
8. Music
9. Exhibitions
10. School library
11. Spanish Cultural Institute
12. Visual arts

## Outcome

I was admitted to Fellowship of the Library Association of Ireland in March 2014. For me it was illuminating to look back over a long career in librarianship, and having gained recognition, to allow myself a sense of achievement. Far from encouraging one to rest on one's laurels, the Fellowship is an incentive to learn and develop one's career even more, and implies the responsibility to be involved in collective professional development, and to continue to be deserving of the accolade.

## Conclusion

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The route to attaining Associateship and Fellowship of the Library Association of Ireland is a learning process which allowed us both to reflect on career so far and to formulate plans for the future. We would highly recommend engaging with this initiative not only as a way forward with your career but also as a reflection on what you've done to date. If you've been thinking of doing either the Associateship or Fellowship, we would urge you to go for it. The initial work involved in completing the applications pays dividends as you proceed towards attaining the awards. Further information can be found at <https://libraryassociation.ie/membership/associateship-fellowship>

## References

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- LAI. 2013. <https://libraryassociation.ie/membership/associateship-fellowship>
- LAI. 2015. [https://libraryassociation.ie/sites/default/files/B22584 Associateship LAI Leaflet rev3.pdf](https://libraryassociation.ie/sites/default/files/B22584%20Associateship%20LAI%20Leaflet%20rev3.pdf)

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