



Chartered Institute of  
Library and Information  
Professionals

## **INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM, ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND CENSORSHIP**

CILIP is committed to promoting a society where intellectual activity and creativity, freedom of expression and debate, and access to information are encouraged and nurtured as vital elements underpinning individual and community fulfilment in all aspects of human life. It is the role of a library and information service that is funded from the public purse to provide, as far as resources allow, access to all publicly available information, whether factual or fiction and regardless of media or format, in which its users claim legitimate interest. [In some cases this will be limited to those areas reflecting the primary purpose of a parent institution; in others it will be generalist in nature].

Access should not be restricted on any grounds except that of the law. If publicly available material has not incurred legal penalties then it should not be excluded on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds, to satisfy the demands of sectional interest. The legal basis of any restriction on access should always be stated.

In the past librarians and information staff have resisted pressure from many shades of opinion to censor material and have defended the principle of the free dissemination of information. They are expected as part of CILIP's Ethical Principles to show "commitment to the defence, and the advancement, of access to information, ideas and works of the imagination". The responsibilities of librarians and information staff should include full discretion over collection development and management and access policy within a broad general policy set by the parent institution. The provision of access to materials by a library or information service does not imply endorsement especially where the material may be thought to encourage discrimination.

The principles of access are the same in the emerging networked society where the opportunities provided by information and communications technologies have revolutionised the way information is made available. CILIP endorses the Council of Europe Guidelines (attached) on "Public Access to and Freedom of Expression in Networked Information". It urges all employers of library and information staff to embed these guidelines into their practice and to support the principle of uninhibited access to information, recognising the discretion that library and information staff will need to exercise in meeting the legitimate interests of their users.

Any librarian or information specialist who considers that undue pressure has been brought to bear over matters concerning selection or access policies is asked to inform the Institute.

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