

An open letter to CILIP's Board of Trustees (if you would like to add your name, please email us at openlettertoCILIP@protonmail.com)

As workers within the library, information, and knowledge areas, we are writing this letter in order to express our concern with CILIP's Employer Partner scheme, and in particular with the recent announcement of partnerships with [Greenwich Leisure Ltd.](#) (GLL) and the [Ministry of Defence](#) (MoD).

We acknowledge CILIP's explanation that the Employer Partners scheme is simply a continuation of the 'Employer Membership' offering that preceded it. However, we believe that the shift in language from 'member' to 'partner' represents a significant change in how CILIP views its relationships with the organisations that join the scheme. Furthermore, we feel that it is clear from CILIP's recent online promotion of its partnerships with GLL and the MoD that they wish to encourage the perception of a closer relationship to their membership and to other potential partners.

In light of this move towards "[working in partnership with employers](#)," including "[ensuring that their voice is clearly heard and amplified](#)" and offering them "[strategic influence](#)" and the opportunity to shape CILIP's policies, we feel that it is necessary to raise a number of ethical concerns about the choice and promotion of these initial partnerships.

Transparency

Firstly, we are asking CILIP to provide more information on how Employer Partners are granted this status. It is unclear how the process functions and whether adequate procedures are in place to ensure due checks, balances, and oversight are consistently undertaken in the "[3-step test](#)".

Transparency around the process is necessary in order for the community to feel comfortable that employers' fitness for partner status is properly evidenced and considered, especially given their influence over CILIP's strategic direction and policies.

Therefore, as workers we need to know;

- a) the process by which organisations are granted Employment Partner status;
- b) how their suitability for this status is measured, and whether this includes ethical considerations;
- c) who within CILIP is ultimately responsible for assessing and granting Employer Partner status, and are members involved with each decision;
- d) whether, as a member-led organisation, members were substantively consulted in the development of the process as part of the migration to the Employment Partner scheme.

Defending stable employment in libraries

We are highlighting the above questions due to serious concerns over the ethics of entering into partnership with organisations such as GLL. As an organisation who have taken over the management of public libraries, GLL make disproportionate use of zero-hours contracts, increasing the precarity of public library workers. GLL are also known for winning public library contracts through promising to [implement cuts](#) at a higher rate than their competitors.

Most notably, library workers in Bromley are currently engaged in indefinite strike action against GLL, as a result of, among other issues, "[GLL bosses not filling vacant posts; asking staff to be managers without paying the proper rate for the job; and failing to pay wages owed](#)".

We strongly believe that a priority for the leading professional body for library workers, information specialists and knowledge managers should be stable, secure employment for its members, with appropriate liaison and dialogue with the employers to consolidate this.

UK public libraries and their staff have seen unprecedented cuts, job losses, privatisation, precarity and replacement by volunteers over the past decade. We worry that any commitment that CILIP may make to supporting and advocating for public library staff will be undermined by partnership with an organisation such as GLL, which has shown itself to be an employer with questionable ethics, and that have demonstrated exploitative practices in relation to their workers. As library, information and knowledge workers ourselves, we are left unsure about whether CILIP support their Employer Partner or workers in such instances of industrial action.

Other concerns

We would also like to raise our concerns over CILIP's partnership with the MoD, which we feel raises potential tensions with CILIP's [Ethical Framework](#). Just as our [colleagues and peers in North America have raised concerns about the presence of the CIA being represented as an employer at the ALA conference](#) with ALA being used as a legitimising force to whitewash the social harm that the CIA causes. CILIP's partnering with the MoD offers similar concerns for the library, information, and knowledge workers that CILIP represent.

For CILIP, their commitments in the Ethical Framework can be seen to be in tension with C1, C2, C3, C6, and C7, all of which pose potentially huge challenges for the development of policy and strategic influence advertised by the Employment Partnership scheme.

For workers represented by CILIP, The MoD's active engagement in programmes of mass surveillance sit uncomfortably with the ethical principles of at least A1, A4, and A6.

The migration to an "Employer Partner" scheme suggests a strategic change in the liaison between CILIP, government agencies, employers, and its individual members. The promotion

of the partners indicates that CILIP are trying to drive further interest in the scheme to recruit employers to it. However, without the sanctioning of the community of individual members and workers, this scheme offers employers a licence to shape what was a member-led organisation into an employer partner-controlled organisation.

We would like this letter to be formally acknowledged and request that a response is made that is openly accessible to all stakeholders.

Kindest regards,

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