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THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education and science form the basis of the society integration and stability of the state. Higher education, science and technologies should be improved as the basis of a sustainable development of a civil society, economy and culture.

Strengthening of the leading role of universities in the development of higher education and science, renewal of the potential of science and development of research in innovative technologies are the main tasks. Higher education is designed to teach people to master knowledge and skills independently in order to promote the quality and effectiveness of studies. It is necessary to strengthen functions of academic libraries in the study process.

In Latvia, there were 33 specialized research institutes that worked in isolation from higher education institutions. This isolation did not augur well for the development of strong links between research and higher education.

One of the major tasks of the research policy over the past six years has been to eliminate this isolationism, and for this reason the Ministry of Education and Science is now carrying out the integration and incorporation of individual state research institutes and their staff into universities with the primary aim of modernizing and strengthening the research capacity of these universities.

The programme of integration and incorporation has been in existence since 1997 and aspects of this integration include:

- Participation of institutes at all levels of higher education,
- The competitive appointment of academic personnel,
- The restructuring of faculties,
- The reassessment of accreditation criteria for study programmes.

At the present time, the majority of state research institutes have transformed their legal status and are now formally incorporated into universities. Fully functional integration is still a matter of time and subject to financial and managerial stimuli.

In 1998, the Latvian Council of Science elaborated the National Concept of the Republic of Latvia *On Research Development* to ensure a constantly growing role of research in the society and national economy. The development of Latvia into a modern Western type country necessitates the rise of the role of science. The main tasks of science are as follows:

- To create intellectual environment for the development of good university education and the society on the whole;
- To lay foundation for the development of innovative technologies and elaboration of technology transfer mechanisms, as well as to encourage wider application of scientific methods and manners in public administration and national economy;
- To promote dynamic and sustainable social development and economic growth, to ensure the research and preservation of national identity and cultural heritage.

In 2001, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia in agreement with the Law *On Research Activity* passed the Decree 548 that approved the following priorities of fundamental and applied sciences to be funded 2002-2005:

- Information technology – new system and software engineering technologies, telematics, multimedia, telecommunications;
- Organic chemistry and biomedicine – new technology of synthesis of biologically active substances;
- Material sciences – nanomaterials, new materials in microelectronics, photonics and optoelectronics as well as biomaterials and other composites;
- Forestry and timber technology – development of forests, rational utilization of wood biomass, wood processing technology;
- Letonica – the Latvian language, culture and history.

In 2002, the Council of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia and Latvian Academy of Sciences elaborated the main strategic approaches concerning the development of higher education, science and technology in Latvia for 2002-2010. The document indicates the main strategic tasks and their quantitative figures.

The task of the academic libraries of Latvia is to promote optimal informative supply to Latvian higher education and science. The Association of Latvian Academic Libraries (ALAL), a self-dependent professional public organization, was founded by 10 libraries in 1994. The main aim of the Association is to promote optimal provision of information to Latvian science, higher education and national economy.

In 2004, the Association has 23 member libraries, 19 of which are libraries of higher education institutions (17 state institutions and 2 – established by legal persons). National Library of Latvia, Latvian Academic Library, Medical Research Library of Latvia and Patent and Technology Library of Latvia are among members of the Association.

In 2003, according to the statistical data on libraries of Latvia, there were 32 libraries of higher education institutions in Latvia, 19 of which are members of the Association, including libraries of regional higher education institutions (Library of the Rēzekne Higher Education Institution, Library of the Daugavpils University, Vidzeme University College Library, Ventspils University College Library, Library of the Liepāja

Pedagogical Academy). The Association has defined its tasks: to work out information supply policy for science, higher education and national economy in Latvia, to co-ordinate and organize the use of the existing informative materials, to acquire and purchase new informative materials according to the nominated areas of national research and study programmes of higher education institutions. In 1997, the General Meeting of the Association adopted and approved *The Concept of the Research and Technical Information Supply in Latvia*. It stressed that due to the great amount and diversity of the published information and the limited financial resources a separate library cannot acquire all the necessary information. It is unprofitable and inefficient from the point of view of use, financial resources and capacity of library stacks. Therefore it is necessary to organize and co-ordinate library work efficiently, in order to:

- Provide acquisition of the necessary information,
- Avoid unnecessary duplicates in libraries,
- Provide information on documents stored in the library stacks,
- Provide quick access to all the documents,
- Provide equal access to documents to all library users regardless of their education or work.

The concept considers two basically different components of information supply process: information search, based on electronic technologies, and acquirement of full-text information documents, making use of printed documents. It also considers the necessity to work out strategic development of virtual library and collection development.

The concept stresses the necessity to gain rapid increase and stabilization of library funding by:

- Stating library funding as a fixed and stable percentage of the budget of science, higher education, higher education institutions etc., avoiding biased approach to the providing of information supply;
- Allocating regular special purposeful financing for national research libraries to purchase internationally important information material.

The mission of the ALAL - promotion of optimal information supply to Latvian science, higher education and national economy - has changed into furthering of competitiveness of the information society in order to promote the development of knowledge-based economy. For the first time since the reinstatement of independence of Latvia, problems of the library collection development were discussed in the international conference *National Policy of the Library Collection Development to Promote Education and Culture in Society* organized by the ALAL in 2003. In 2003, there were more than 62 million copies of books in the stacks of Latvian libraries, of which 42.5 million books were in the stacks of the ALAL libraries i.e. 69% of the total number. The Association members could undertake providing information for all fields of science, study programmes of higher education and branches of national economy. Unfortunately, this task cannot be carried out without a unified state policy of collection development and

without adequate funding. The task is complicated as the libraries are under supervision of five ministries. The aim of the conference was to involve the respective ministries in the creation of the state information resources to meet the requirements of the state development programmes.

The conference adopted a resolution stating that elaboration of the national policy of the library collection development should be considered as the primary task for the successful development of Latvian libraries. It was decided that the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia should create a commission to elaborate the concept of the national policy of the library collection development. The commission would have the following tasks:

- To realize and summarize informational needs of education, science and national economy in the country, involving researchers of different fields of science, specialists, lecturers and students of the Department of Library and Information Sciences of the University of Latvia;
- To define priorities and the optimal depth of acquisition in each field of science according to the defined informational needs of the country;
- To work out the project of delegation of responsibility to certain libraries that would supply information to separate fields of science and to work out the necessary funding model.

The working group of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia has elaborated a project of a concept on acquisition policy creation in the Latvian libraries.

Latvia lacks an elaborated and approved unified national policy of collection development and its strategy. Financial means allotted to libraries are different, subordination to different departments is not strictly regulated by unequivocal principles and funding is not guaranteed for academic and research libraries.

The main objective of academic libraries is to supply study programmes and fields of science of the respective higher education institutions. Collection development is carried out according to this task and according to the study programmes and suggestions of teaching staff and researchers.

At the present moment, the quality of academic libraries collections depends on professional skills, erudition and interest in the respective subject of the teaching staff and librarians as well as on the allotted funding. Funding allocation is not co-ordinated in the country. The list below reveals that the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the development of libraries in the country, but only the National Library of Latvia is under its supervision. At the same time libraries of higher education institutions as their units are indirectly under the supervision of the respective ministries. It means that libraries of higher education institutions depend not only on financial possibilities of their education institutions but also on the administration's understanding of the problems and role of its library.

Requirements of the Ministry of Culture concerning libraries are not binding to other ministries that supervise higher education institutions, and it is difficult to reach an

agreement on the co-ordination processes of library development in the country. Even the Ministry of Education and Science that supervises the most part of higher education institutions and their libraries is not ready to co-operate with the Ministry of Culture to co-ordinate library development. Its main argument is that the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the development of library work.

Libraries and higher education institutions are under supervision of the following ministries:

Ministry of Culture:

- National Library of Latvia,
- Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music,
- Latvian Academy of Culture;

Ministry of Education and Science:

- Latvian Academic Library,
- University of Latvia,
- Daugavpils University,
- Riga Technical University,
- Banking Institution of Higher Education,
- Latvian Academy of Sport Education,
- Liepāja Pedagogical Higher School,
- Rēzekne Higher Education Institution,
- Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy,
- Ventspils University College,
- Vidzeme University College,
- Stockholm School of Economics in Riga,
- Riga Graduate School of Law;

Ministry of Health:

- Medical Research Library of Latvia,
- Riga Stradiņš University;

Ministry of Justice:

- Patent and Technology Library of Latvia;

Ministry of Agriculture:

- Latvia University of Agriculture;

Ministry of Interior:

- Police Academy of Latvia;

Ministry of Defence:

- National Defence Academy.

Now libraries of higher education institutions are gradually turning into public libraries and serve readers who are interested in the respective field. It means that documents regulating funding to enlarge library collections should be changed and the funding allocation should be according to the number of users, not according to the number of students.

A big part of the library budget is spent for purchase of several or many copies of textbooks and special literature; some libraries spend 60-80% of their acquisitions budget to buy textbooks. Such system does not improve the quality of the collections and does not help build good collections.

There is no funding for purchase of special databases that could supply textbooks in electronic format in some cases. Libraries do not have specific resources that are used in the world to compensate lack of textbooks in the corresponding fields.

Some fields of science are represented in one main higher education institution. Some specialised higher education institutions (Latvia University of Agriculture, Riga Stradiņš University, Latvian Academy of Arts, Latvian Academy of Sport Education, etc.) are ready to collect literature in their field, but they need financial support by the state. There are libraries that collect literature in many fields, e.g. the Scientific Library of the Riga Technical University acquires information on different engineering sciences, economics and architecture.

In order to become responsible for creating complete collection of literature in some specific fields, libraries would need additional funding from the state just for this purpose. Libraries are not able to perform this task from the budget allotted by their higher education institutions. At the same time they should consider how to make this literature available to the readers who are not their students – what regulations they should observe (to use literature in the Reading rooms, to use Interlibrary Loans, etc.) to avoid the situation that a library has some material, but it can be used only by a limited number of users.

The sub-programme “Libraries” of the national programme “Culture” gives figures on the library funding for the purchase of literature in 1998. LIBECON (www.libecon2000.org) gives figures for 2001. Funding of Latvian libraries of higher education institutions allotted for one registered user is 5-11 times smaller than that of developed countries and European Union on the whole.

Lack of co-ordination among academic libraries is due to their subordination to many organisations, therefore it is necessary to create a special methodological centre that would co-ordinate development of academic and special libraries and would provide methodological help in solving different problems.

It is necessary to make Ministry of Education and Science and other ministries change their attitude towards libraries. It has to be stressed that none of the programmes of the development of higher education and research mentions libraries and their necessity to develop, although it is one of the essential elements of infrastructure of qualitative education and research. In the future, it is important to co-operate with the Council of Higher Education and to suggest it to consider libraries as information suppliers, when national programmes and concepts concerning higher education, lifelong education and research will be elaborated.

The Council of Higher Education and Latvian Council of Science should be asked to send specialists of different fields of science to assess special collections in the libraries in order to give an expert estimation on information quality and its adequacy to the needs of Latvia. The Latvian Council of Science could define the necessity for information resources in the branches of national economy that are priorities, co-ordinating these priorities with different programmes of the development of the country.

It is necessary to learn the most important lists of special scientific literature (monographs, periodicals, electronic journals, databases, etc.) that are used in the world to learn their prices and to estimate the approximate sum of money necessary for the purchase of this literature. The Latvian Council of Science should involve Latvian researchers in the assessment of these lists. Only together with researchers and teaching staff it is possible to provide academic libraries with qualitative information.