

# LIBRARY WORKERS

## their training needs

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### Background

A new award issued by LIASA-Sabinet in 2003 for Library Support Employee of the year went to Jean Uys. The award entailed funding for the attendance of a local conference of choice or a series of library visits. Uys decided to utilise her prize in the form of visits to a number of public libraries in 2004.

My decision to visit public libraries was taken largely as result of newspaper reports regarding the closure of libraries in the Theewaterskloof Municipality. Having just completed a B Bibl degree the previous year and full of enthusiasm and eagerness to proceed with an honours and then masters degree I decided to structure my visit in a way that could possibly benefit me in later studies. For this reason my visit covered two aspects, namely the marketing of Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) and conducting interviews regarding the training needs of library workers. What follows are observations made during these visits. These observations will be in the form of tables showing comparisons in municipalities rather than individual libraries so as to maintain confidentiality.

### Organisation

*Municipalities and libraries that showed an interest in my visit*

Municipality	Total libraries in municipality	Total libraries faxed	Libraries responded YES	Libraries responded NO and NO REPLY
Overstrand	9	4	3	1
Swellendam	4	4	3	1
Theewaterskloof	9	4	2	2
Witzenberg	8	4	3	1
Langeberg	10	5	3	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>

*Municipalities and libraries from which I received no replies*

Total other municipalities faxed	Total other libraries faxed
10	17

38 libraries were approached, 14 replied positive, three replied negative, and from 21 libraries there was no reply.

### Marketing of LIASA

Total librarians interviewed	Aware of the existence of LIASA	Positive response	Negative response
17	6	5	12

As the responsibility to appoint library staff rests with the municipalities and not the Provincial Government, there is a tendency to employ staff in libraries who are not qualified librarians and to transfer staff from one department to another with little or no thought to appropriate qualifications. The result is that many of the staff have no interest in joining an organisation that represents the library profession, as their current position might just be a stop-gap to another position/profession. For those interested in librarianship as a more permanent profession, the cost and time involved in attending workshops is often a deterrent. The Public Libraries and Community Libraries Interest Group (PACLIG) could perhaps consider offering workshops that coincide with library closing times and regional meetings.

Another suggestion is that activities and training are presented in closer proximity to the rural libraries. LIASA has looked into ways of making the cost of membership more affordable for those who cannot afford the once-off payment of R180 by introducing an instalment over three months of R60 per month by stop order.

As there is no clear distinction between the responsibilities of local government as opposed to provincial government as far as libraries go, many libraries have been told by local government that there is no money for training and travelling. This situation seems to be an ongoing issue with no solution in sight. National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS) has as one of its visions the investigation of existing library and information legislation and provision of alternative solutions. The legislation regarding whose responsibility libraries are should therefore be of paramount importance.

Many of the librarians remarked that this was the first time that a representative from LIASA had visited them. A suggestion is that the new branch committee contacts the regional library supervisors with the request that a representative from the committee be allowed to attend their meetings. This would be an ideal opportunity to promote and market LIASA amongst library workers.

Another issue regarding membership is that very few of the libraries in rural areas are computerised which could hamper communication between LIASA and members. Currently

newsletters and flyers issued by LIASA are provided to the Provincial Library Services who assist with distribution.

Interesting to note here is that discussion surrounding training appeared to be more of a burning issue than becoming a member of LIASA - which has as one of its aims the promotion and provision of education to LIS workers.

## Training

Municipality	Highest level of education	Training offered	Training adequate	Training needed
Overstrand	Matric	Yes	No	Yes
Swellendam	Matric	Yes	No	Yes
Theewaterskloof	Tertiary	Yes	No	Yes
Witzenberg	Tertiary	Yes	No	Yes
Langeberg	Tertiary	Yes	No	Yes

### Level of education

In some municipalities there seems to be a discrepancy between the level of education and job title. The level of education does not necessarily guarantee an appointment to a better position. This type of inconsistency leads to unwillingness to go the extra mile on the part of those who have taken the time and effort to further their studies. This problem is not restricted solely to public libraries. Various LIASA interest groups are presently involved in researching and planning workshops around issues such as the professionalism of librarianship, characteristics of a professional librarian and related topics.

### Training offered

All the librarians I spoke to were aware of a training booklet, (aimed at children's librarians) distributed by the Provincial Library Service. However, the situation remains unsatisfactory, as not all staff have attended training sessions due to various factors such as lack of funds, staff shortages, irregularities in staff selection and the accessibility of a training booklet to all library workers.

### Inadequate training

The majority of librarians felt that the training offered was inadequate as it did not skill them for promotion to other positions as it is aimed at the position they currently occupy. The problem is, therefore, not the training currently offered but rather the lack of appropriate training. A suggestion is that Provincial Library Services do an audit of training needs by all library workers throughout the province.\*

### Training needed

High on the list of training required is development of computer skills. Some local municipalities have gone as far as to state that it is not necessary for their library to be equipped with a computer because of short opening hours. Another argument is that because there are no computer facilities in the library it is not necessary for training. Computer literacy is essential to equip young people for the future. It is appalling that libraries in the rural communities - communities that are hardest hit with illiteracy - have no access to computers with

network connections. The LIASA Information Technology Interest Group envisages undertaking an audit in 2005 of all libraries in South Africa to determine the computer and network requirements. Librarians who work on a daily basis with their borrowers should be in the best position to determine whether or not their library requires a computer.

Second on the list was managing people. Most of the libraries are run by library workers with little experience in the management of people. Even though some libraries have a total staff of only two the ability to manage staff is essential in the successful running of the library. Supervisory staff need to be equipped with essential training in managing, delegating and other leadership skills.

Thirdly, library procedures seem to be an area which has been overlooked in training. Some librarians have had no experience in working with children and require training.

Accurate report writing and correct statistical data are essential. Some librarians have had no formal training in this field. Circulation and inter-library loan (ILL) policies and procedures also create a problem for some. Other training needs are security (of building, books and staff), languages (areas where borrowers speak languages other than the mother tongue of the librarian), disaster management (in the event of a fire, flood, et cetera). Whether Provincial Library Services should be covering all of this is to be debated but LIASA provides, via its interest groups, considerable training every year. See what 2005 has to offer and enrol staff for workshops. It will definitely equip them for their jobs and create a happier workforce.

## Transformation

Considering that South Africa celebrated 10 years of democracy in 2004 it is quite strange to note the obvious discrepancies that still exist in some libraries. The intention of my visit was not to compare libraries but it became obvious that libraries situated in previously advantaged communities are better stocked and better equipped.

The disparity between the level of education and job position also indicated an obvious lack of transformation in some municipalities. This also includes the disparity in salaries between a library assistant running a library and a senior librarian running a library.

Many librarians feel they have little or no decision-making authority in the day to day running of their libraries which creates a feeling of despondency amongst staff. Added to this, meetings between librarians are rare with the result that staff members have little or no direction.

To all public librarians - the work you are doing, often under adverse conditions, is amazing. Keep up the good work and remember to make use of the various support systems available.

*\*It should be borne in mind that the WCPLS is not an accredited education department and that the level of training being offered to library workers are therefore of a practical nature. By implication the Service is also not in a position to offer computer skills training.*