

# Agenda for the future

The strategy of the Netherlands Public Library Association  
2009 - 2012

*"The best way to predict the future is  
to create it"*

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## **1. Why the Library?**

*The public library provides free access for all citizens to information, knowledge and culture to enable them to act consciously, actively and critically in society.*

*In that respect the library fulfils a unique role in society and wishes to strengthen that role in the future even more. Especially in today's complex information society there is a growing need for an independent institute that helps people in the selection of reliable and meaningful information. The library aims to provide reference points in the abundance of information and media that people are subjected to every day. Also, the library is becoming increasingly important for the local community as a meeting place and societal living room.*

But the library is more than a beacon in an ocean of information. In a time when reading is on the wane and illiteracy and language deficiencies are increasing, the library is gradually developing into the knowledge centre for reading and literature. The enormous success of actions such as 'Holland Reads' indicates that the library taps into a clearly felt need.

With 4 million members and 130 million loans per year, the library remains the most successful cultural institution of our country. Nearly 100% of elementary school children make use of the library. The library manages to reach a large proportion of the Turkish and Moroccan communities. Library use among those groups is increasing all the time and is particularly high among teenagers and young adults .

Despite these positive developments, in recent years there has been a steady decline in library use. This in itself is no reason to be doubtful about the future, libraries; see ample opportunities to continue their important role in the future to build and increase their influence amongst the population. However, it is an important signal that requires a strong response.

A new strategy is needed to reverse the downward trend and anticipate more effectively the changing needs of society. This strategy must be a joint effort on behalf of all Dutch public libraries.

In this document, the public library sector formulates a strong answer to these challenges.

## **2. Why an Agenda for the Future?**

Many aspects of society are changing rapidly. For the library with its central position in society a permanent response to these changes is necessary. This places strong expectations on the innovative capacity of libraries. Despite the larger scale that has been reached in recent years, no library can make the necessary innovations on its own. Besides local entrepreneurship, pooling of efforts at provincial and national level is an absolute necessity. In a coherent network, ideas, knowledge and resources may be pooled to a maximum and affordable result, all this with the aim of ensuring a sustainable and solid anchorage of the library's position in the local community.

Modernisation is not a finite process; a continuous response to social change requires continuous innovation. The jaded concept of 'library modernisation' no longer fits the bill. It is about designing the future, enabling a new golden age of public libraries. We are convinced this is possible, provided substantial changes are made. Following the

process of library modernisation a powerful new strategy is needed. There is broad consensus on the key elements of this new strategy: **focus, direction and speed** are crucial for success.

This agenda starts with an overview of trends and opportunities. Next it focuses on the themes and activities which will get the highest priority in the coming years: the specific *Agenda for the Future*. The choice of topics has been decided in consultation with the libraries. For that purpose in recent months a series of strategy meetings have been organised. The report of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), '*The public library ten years from now*', the '*Final Report*' of the Libraries Steering Committee, the '*Advice on Library Modernisation*' by the Advisory Council for Culture together with discussions with outside experts, served as valuable background material. The final chapter describes the elements of the "Change Program" that will be developed in the second half of 2008.

The Agenda covers the period 2009 to 2012. The more distant the future, the harder it is to make a detailed description of the necessary action. This is how it should be; we must remain alert to respond to new trends in society. Therefore, the Agenda will be updated annually and an annual implementation plan prepared.

Central to this agenda is our belief in the future. Of course there are plenty of threats, but if you look closely, you will see opportunities in every threat. The aim is to capture these opportunities and do everything possible to create excellent and valuable results for our customers. This way it is up to us to largely determine the future for ourselves.

*The best way to predict the future is to create it*

### 3. Trends and Opportunities

Our society is becoming increasingly an information society. The permanent access to information and the use of a wide range of information and communication channels are taken for granted. An information-intensive sector such as libraries is strongly affected by these developments. But there are other social developments affecting library usage. The population changes, users become more demanding and trends follow each other at an ever-increasing pace. The SCP report offers a comprehensive analysis of these developments and their impact on the library sector. In this chapter we address the most relevant trends and the opportunities they offer.

#### 3.1 Information overload and information literacy

Internet is an easily accessible, democratic medium. Anyone can assume the role of information provider. The result is a constantly expanding flood of information. The more information, the more difficult it is for people to filter out relevant and reliable data. Moreover, the information is often offered in fragmented form, thereby losing its context and semantic coherence.

The overload of information appears to reduce factual knowledge. But he who doesn't know the facts, develops no broader understanding. Management guru Tom Peters once remarked: "*A flood of Information can be the enemy of intelligence.*"

Most users, especially the young, are not bothered by this. To them, acquiring knowledge and understanding does not come first; they want to find an answer as soon as possible. This is what Google delivers and what has made Google the no.1 favourite with the public. Although nearly everybody 'googles', most users have only rudimentary skills and ability to navigate in the digital world. Research among young people shows that contrary to the generally accepted view they are not such skilled internet users at all. They seem hardly capable of selecting valuable information from a long list of search results. They are also inclined to believe that anything on the internet is true. Moreover, it is often unclear where information ends and advertising begins. Information mixed with advertising is a profitable business and so Google offers sponsored links. Few users are aware of this. Information literacy, the ability to critically and responsibly deal with internet and the media in general, is not sufficiently developed, especially in children and young people. Schools have an important role in this area, but are not always able to provide an adequate solution. Here is an important opportunity for libraries. In collaboration with schools they have the opportunity to develop programmes to promote information literacy.

#### 3.2 Changes in user behaviour

The vast majority of the Dutch have access to internet either at home, school or work. In cyber space, location and time are irrelevant. There are no borders or closing times. You may shop, anytime and anywhere in the world, use information, exchange content or make contact by email or chat.

Users increasingly rely on getting anything they want at a time that suits them. They make high demands on the product and its delivery and expect efficient and tailor-made service. Services such as Al@din, Search & Book capitalise on this, but don't (yet) offer the speed and ease of service to which modern consumers are accustomed.

Meanwhile, the consumer choices are increasingly difficult to predict. Traditional classifications of consumer behaviour based on age, income or gender appear no longer reliable. New methods are being developed in which people are grouped according to lifestyle and matching consumption patterns. Many companies use these profiles to offer suitable products and services.

Libraries do not yet sufficiently anticipate to the customers need for personalised services. User surveys and customer segmentation provide very valuable input for the development of tailor-made services. An important -not be forgotten- resource that libraries have had available for decades and offers a wealth of information on the preferences of the users

are the lending data. Such data processed anonymously, will provide the library with an unprecedented set of interest profiles.

The SCP report suggests that the appreciation of an ordered collection of physical media, such as the library has on offer, has decreased. To users this represents only a limited part of the total collection. They're increasingly used to organising their information in their own way and set great store by the preferences and appreciation of fellow users.

In its most basic form, this phenomenon is well known in the library world. Consider the popularity of the returned books trolley. Items borrowed by other people exert a strong attraction.

There is a certain paradox in these developments. The need for an institution that offers order and selection is decreasing, while the need for meaningful selections seems to be increasing. Core book lists are extremely popular. The publication of the cultural-historical canon of the Netherlands lead to an explosion of local and provincial canons. Elections for the best Dutch and foreign books are organised and the NRC and Volkskrant national newspapers actively promote selections for filmed literature and series and 'lesser-known books of great writers'.

The cause of the increased desire for lists and selections is not known. Maybe it is because the world is becoming more confusing and making choices a complex affair. The fact remains that the library still holds an excellent position to offer reliable and meaningful selections, albeit in a modern way: cross-media, socially relevant, surprising, but specially inviting for users to respond to.

### **3.3 E-economy**

The quantity and the speed of content on the internet increases exponentially and the distribution possibilities are endless. This has profound economic consequences, for example in the way global download sites have led to the collapse of traditional distribution models for the music and film industry.

The potential of the internet has led to entirely new market dynamics. On the one hand it constitutes a threat to libraries in the way major new commercial providers could take over its functions, putting free and independent access to information under pressure.

On the other hand the E-economy offers opportunities. The global nature and the unlimited potential of internet distribution are making it possible to reach a large group of customers even for less common products. The many niche markets thus combined create worthwhile sales. This marketing principle, which is called 'The Long Tail', can also be used by libraries. Together they may organize 'The Long Tail' of the collections as a hugely varied and specialized offer. This offers great possibilities in reaching a whole new group of customers.

### **3.4 Less Reading, Less Borrowing**

Reading and literature face increasing competition from other forms of time usage, such as watching television and in particular computer based activities. Each year fewer books are being read. Meanwhile, more books are sold than ever before. Increasing prosperity and the ease of online stores have contributed to this (ordered today, delivered tomorrow), but also the fact that books have become a popular gift article.

The vast majority of users still visit the library to borrow books, but the decline in membership and reading obviously have a negative impact on the overall lending rates.

The decline in lending is age-related according to the SCP. Children of primary school age often go to the library and more than 80% of the children aged between 8 and 13 years old have a library card. From 14 years onward there is a sharp decline in library use that reaches rock bottom in the 24-year olds, of whom only 6.9% are members. The share rises again from 30 years onwards, usually because people start having children. From age 40 the percentage varies between 16 and 20%.

To turn the tide of declining lending rates, much more effort should be give to the quality,

variety and findability of collections, supported by a clever marketing strategy. It is however important to make full use of the book-related image of the library. The fact that people associate the library with reading and that reading is fun may be used as strong branding for the library. The SCP report recommends libraries to regard the decline in reading and lending not as inevitable and not to consider the book as a lost case. Reading is an important form of relaxation for a large group of people. It offers a distraction from daily life and stimulates the imagination. Cooperation with CPNB, the Collective Campaign for Dutch Books, and the Reading Foundation provides opportunities to strengthen further the image of the library as an ambassador for reading in the future.

Moreover, it also means that libraries do well to embrace developments such as the e-book. Diversity in the collection includes not only the content but also the form in which that content is packaged. The market for electronic books is growing, although much slower than was predicted a few years ago, but as e-book readers improve, the interest of the public will increase accordingly. A national newspaper, the NRC Handelsblad, currently offers an iLiad eReader in combination with a digital newspaper subscription.

### **3.5 Reading and literacy**

The importance of information literacy, was already referred to in chapter 3.1 Information Overload. There are, however many more aspects. The government viewpoint is that every citizen should have sufficient knowledge, skills and insight to take part in our current complex and changing information society in an active, conscious and critical manner. Basic literacy is a prerequisite for coping. For that reason reading promotion and combating illiteracy also are essential elements of information literacy.

For the government these are very important policy priorities. Not just because our country has 1.5 million people who are functionally illiterate, but also because of recent disturbing reports on the insufficient reading and language levels of students. Last year's figures showed that 57% of students in vocational training are unable to understand a simple text. Most teachers are of the opinion that the language skills of their students are not adequate to function in society and in a future profession. Primarily this is a problem for education, but libraries may claim a significant role in providing a solution. For many years they have offered programmes for reading promotion to all. Recently this was extended to special media and activities for people with reading disabilities and low literacy. In collaboration with appropriate partners, libraries may further develop their programmes into an integrated package of reading and language programmes. This will strengthen their position in this area even more.

Further cooperation with the Reading Foundation will be developed. This also includes supporting scientific research into reading.

### **3.6 Target groups**

As to the demographics of the population, the SCP report identifies a growth of the over 65's and the arrival of new groups of Western and Non-Western immigrants. Given the social role of the library the latter two groups deserve special attention, however difficult they are to reach. The same goes for other disadvantaged groups in the community; people of all ages who need extra attention and support to cope in society. This concerns disadvantaged pupils, people with low literacy and those with low incomes.

An opportunity for the library sector lies in developing an adequate service for the growing population of affluent and active seniors. In addition, the library may focus even more on providing materials and programmes supporting and stimulating lifelong learning including informal learning.

### **3.7 Distribution and diversity of facilities**

The dense network of facilities is a major strength of public libraries. Besides more traditional facilities such as service points, branch libraries and mobile libraries, more and more libraries are part of community schools, residential care centres, cultural centres,

village halls and other facilities. This dense network ensures that almost everyone has a library in their vicinity.

In recent years the network of facilities was at times affected by short-term savings by municipalities or rivalry between provinces and municipalities.

That trend now appears to have stopped, the presence of a library facility once again being seen as an important element in improving the social cohesion and quality of living in a residential environment, both in small villages as urban areas.

Libraries count on the support of the joint different layers of government to maintain and expand this dense network.

The increased variety of facilities demands a more differentiated offer of products and services. It is simply not possible to offer a full range of services in every facility, at least not in the physical sense. Opportunities are to be found in the development of modular service levels tailored to the needs of the residents in a small village or city area. In order to guarantee quality levels, the issues of diversity of the services should be certificated.

#### 4. Focus

Focal point in many of the recommendations is that more emphasis should be laid on services that are the most relevant socially and have the best chance of success. To focus properly, one needs to be in balance. Libraries however are still imbalanced by the renewal process. In such situations it is helpful to go back to the core business: the reason why there are libraries.

##### 4.1 The core

From interviews with external experts the main message emerging, was: "Go back to your core and do well what you're best at".

According to these outsiders the library brand is still very strong and highly valued. The library should not try to be something else, but remain close to its roots and supply the services that give it its unique right to existence.

That right has not been better and more succinctly expressed than in the UNESCO Manifesto. The public library is defined herein as the local gateway to knowledge, which creates an essential prerequisite for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of individuals and social groups. It means that the library is there to equip people as well as possible to develop themselves culturally and socially. Literate and informed citizens are in a better position to exercise their democratic rights and move about in society critically and actively and with more awareness. It also means the library contributes to personal development by providing space for meetings, inspiration and education.



##### 4.2 Choices

To maintain and even increase its important social role, the library will have to formulate an adequate response to the current needs of society. This means, make clear choices, operate efficiently and deliver excellent quality. Individually libraries realise that the current decentralised system makes it impossible to respond effectively to this enormous challenge. For that reason there is a strong commitment to join forces on a number of issues.

During the strategy meetings that have been held in recent months, there was broad consensus on the issues which deserve the highest priority in the coming years. Mentioned most often were:

- Digital Library
- Collection Development
- Information literacy
- Reading and reading promotion .

A joint approach to marketing, ICT and HRM was considered an absolute prerequisite. The chosen themes are all related to the fundamental responsibilities: Information, Education and Reading. This choice is in line with the focus on the three core tasks as proposed by the Advisory Council for Culture. However, this does not mean that the other core tasks 'arts and culture' and 'meeting and debate' are now less important. These are largely carried out locally, but will not disappear from sight nationwide.

Responding to the changing needs of customers is high on the agenda of the libraries. After a period of government-led reorganisation it is time for substantive results, visible to the customer.

To serve that customer, - we call him 'curious man' - three core objectives are formulated. In the next chapter these are explored further.

## 5. Attainment targets

Libraries have much to offer 'curious man' . The coming years are set to offer even more added value, for current customers as well as future audiences. Most of the approximately 16 million Dutch people are interested and curious. Libraries want to encourage these millions of people to continue reading, listening, viewing and learning.

Based on many discussions that have taken place, the following three core targets were formulated:

- Responding to changing needs
- Improvement of resources and service
- Improvement of infrastructure and availability.

### 5.1 Responding to changing needs

As far as reach and customer loyalty are concerned public libraries are a most successful service. More than four million customers have a library card. Although the reach is extensive, it is on the wane. Some groups, such as people with poor literacy skills, students in vocational training and adult immigrants, prove difficult to reach. Some people do not think the resources and the service of the library cater for their needs. In their experience opening hours and service don't fit into their busy work schedule.

The challenge in the coming years will be to attract more people to the physical and digital library with an appropriate and attractive offer and retain them as customers. This will only happen if the resources and service are suited to their needs, circumstances and curiosity.

The coming years, therefore, will be geared toward increasing the convenience, personalisation and bundling of services for different audiences. In addition the library will have to promote its services in the community more actively. The library has to be where the customers are: for school pupils and students in their learning environment, for the elderly in their residential homes and day care centres, for holidaymakers in their resorts and for local people in their village halls and cultural centres.

It is also of great importance to formulate an answer to the changing needs created by the information overload. That means support for citizens in developing information literacy and making sound and meaningful selections. This is and will always be an important role of the library.

### 5.2 Improving the resources and service

In the coming years the priority will be to greatly improve a number of key factors of the service. One of those factors is the collection. We are no longer talking about a collection

of media within the four walls of a library building, but the hybrid collection: a set of carefully selected traditional and contemporary sources, physical and digital, free and copyrighted.

Joining the physical and digital collections of the public libraries (and their partners) together to form a national *Collection of the Netherlands*, will create an incredibly rich and complete resource. During the coming years much effort will be put into developing high-quality access and availability to this *Collection of the Netherlands*, matching customer demand and library resources in the best possible way.

The public library has an important position as an ambassador of reading. This concerns both promoting reading skills, reading for pleasure as the spread of literary culture. In this case the library's image as a place for books works in our favour and may be exploited to strengthen our position in the field of reading. In the coming years firm action will be applied to further develop and improve programmes around reading promotion, illiteracy and the spread of literary culture.

### 5.3 Improving the infrastructure and the availability

In the coming years improving the digital infrastructure is placed at the top of the list. The current decentralised infrastructure of public libraries makes the implementation of innovations a difficult process. This very much affects the speed with which the renewal of services to the public can be addressed. Therefore a powerful programme will be designed to improve the ICT infrastructure which will support the future plans of the libraries. This includes a common presentation of the Digital Library and the virtual Collection of the Netherlands. Other issues to improve the infrastructure and availability are the introduction of a National Library Card, improving the existing digital services and enabling home use of online resources. The Agenda contains a separate explanatory statement on the programme supporting the ICT infrastructure.

Improvement of infrastructure and availability is also related to the physical network of library facilities. Distribution and diversity of facilities are not included as separate subjects in the Agenda, but remains a major focus in all subjects that will be developed in the coming years. The challenge ahead is to ensure that the large variety of library facilities will be connected to the infrastructure of the country. All facilities will be involved in the arrangements that are made about the collection, the digital library and the activities surrounding reading and reading promotion etc. Library facilities in small villages and urban districts may not provide all physical resources, they still are to be part of the big picture.

## 6. The Agenda for 2009-2012

### 6.1 Themes

To achieve the attainment targets in the coming years, libraries will focus on the following themes: digital library, collection, information literacy, reading and reading promotion.

These themes extend over all three of the core tasks (Information, Education and Reading) and are the most promising and ideal for a joint approach.

To succeed it is essential these issues are supported by a strong marketing strategy, adequate ICT solutions and expert staff. To achieve this support programmes for marketing, HRM, ICT infrastructure and HRM are set up.

In the coming months, the themes will be developed further. This will also include checks whether the results formulated contribute sufficiently to the set of attainment targets.

The agenda therefore will be as follows:

- Digital Library
- Collection of the Netherlands

- Information literacy
- Reading and reading promotion
- Support Programme Marketing
- Support Programme ICT infrastructure
- Support programme HRM

Below, the themes and programmes are described in more detail.

## 6.2 Digital Library

The ambition is to further develop the digital library in the coming years in such a way that a growing number of users may make use of the range of information and services in a contemporary way. The perspective for the future is a joint professionally designed and managed digital library.

On top of the list is the development of a single clear web presence for all public libraries. This is only possible if there is a common ICT infrastructure.

In addition, interaction and personalisation are the important keywords for the future development of the digital library. Users of the digital library will have access to personal online services by 'MyLibrary.nl'. From the creation of interest profiles, they will be informed of new acquisitions for reading, viewing or listening. An example are the services Muziekweb.nl already delivers for music.

Digital services will be bundled and offered made-to-measure to different target groups and educational levels. For example, the Zwolle pilot project with a college for vocational training, in which Al@din, Search & Book, Schoolbieb.nl, and the Aqua Browser are offered as a coherent package, and papers produced by students are all added to the Aqua Browser (school projects database).

Part of this strategy is to provide ease of access from home to all citizens.

## 6.3 Collection of the Netherlands

To reverse the trend of declining membership and lending rates and to win new members, the public libraries will jointly build a varied and attractive collection of high quality for their users: the Collection of the Netherlands. This Collection of the Netherlands is a coherent collection, selected professionally, comprising easily accessible, traditional and contemporary sources, physical and digital, free and copyrighted. These sources come from public libraries, their partners and users and are complemented and enriched by librarians.

The Collection of the Netherlands will become *The Long Tail* of library collections. Supported by provincial and national collection policies a complete and comprehensive collection will evolve in which the user will find difficult to obtain and long sold-out titles.

As an integral part of the Collection of the Netherlands a network of selected collections will be built: the showcase collections. The national system of academic support libraries will be transformed for this purpose. The collections are designed to showcase a specific domain or topic. They will be presented prominently both physically and digitally.

Market research and customer profiles are already used to optimise the collections in libraries to the needs and wishes of users. Next, new organisation and presentation types will be developed, ranging from store concepts to alternative organisation types such as *The Library of 100 talents*. Using RFID technology experiments are run with exciting and educational search paths through the collection.

#### **6.4 Information literacy**

Faced with an abundance of information on many different platforms it is increasingly difficult for people to distinguish reliable and valuable information. The library plays an important intermediary role by offering reliable selections. Extending its role to equip citizens for society, the library also plays an active role in promoting information literacy. In these times an active, conscious and critical attitude towards information and the media are essential.

The coming years will see active involvement in the joint development of learning programmes for the target groups: young people, senior citizens and teachers.

Libraries will also actively participate in the newly created Expertise Centre for Information Literacy. In libraries one-stop shops will be created where parents and others may get information on children and the role of the media.

A range of training courses for teachers and librarians will be widely available throughout the country. Examples are: the national training for information literacy coach, 'information literacy in 7 steps' and '23 things'.

The development of the necessary electronic learning environments will take place within the collective ICT infrastructure.

Essential in all these plans is close cooperation with education, both primary and secondary education as well as and higher and adult education. This field offers many opportunities for libraries. In education information literacy is also a relatively new subject, so there is a great willingness to work together in developing good programmes.

#### **6.5 Reading and reading promotion**

The library is developing more and more into the knowledge centre for reading and literature. The events organised in cooperation with the CPNB (The Collective Campaign for Dutch Books), such as *The Netherlands Read* and the National Book Week, reinforce the image of the library as a reading ambassador and will certainly be continued in the next few years.

Basic literacy is a prerequisite to get by in society. In the Netherlands it is estimated that over 1.5 million people are functionally illiterate. In addition, reading and language level of students are deemed to be decreasing. With these facts in mind the major themes for the coming years will be reading promotion and illiteracy.

Libraries will widely focus on these issues. The range of language and reading programmes will be packaged as a comprehensive and coherent set of activities. Cooperation with education and social partners is considered an absolute must.

The websites Literatuurplein (LiteraturePlaza) and Leesplein (ReadingPlaza) will be further developed, including more possibilities to interact with the users.

#### **6.6 Support Programmes**

To be successful within the chosen themes three powerful support programs are needed.

##### *Marketing*

Success begins with the delivery of excellent services that fit the needs of users. Following that, all these quality services will have to be marketed. A wide audience is essential to maintain, renew and expand the service.

On a local level promotion campaigns relate to the identity of the local library. To position the entire sector joint customer research and marketing is necessary. Explanation of the

possibilities of franchising will support this concept.

In the period 2009-2012 a sophisticated central marketing strategy, developed in the previous period and aimed at increasing the market share, will be implemented. The aim is an increase in the number of visitors, increased membership, a broader reach of target groups and increased use of the digital library.

There will be concerted effort on a wider scale to reach institutions, especially schools, that make collective use of the service and facilities of libraries. The aim is to ensure an unquestioned role for public libraries as adviser and assistant to education, especially regarding pre-school, primary and secondary education. For secondary schools and vocational training colleges business-to-business services may be developed.

In addition, a targeted marketing approach for young people will be developed. Young people rarely visit the library because it's a fun place to be. The reason for their visit is usually school related. Once they finished school, libraries lose contact with young people. The challenge ahead is attract and keep young people as members of the library, and in a manner which relates to their world and their needs. Libraries have little systematized knowledge on what young people need. Good research is an essential.

New and successful concepts which have been put into practice may be developed further. An example is DOK, the Delft Public Library, where gaming is used as a learning tool and to attract young people to the library. In a broad partnership the VOB contributes to the concept of the 'The library of 100 talents' in which new and contemporary forms of library service are developed by, and for, information literate children.

Due to the increase in the number of people over 65 in the Netherlands, developing an adequate service for this group is seen as an important opportunity. Many of them are healthy, active, with a broad interest in the world around them. For this group, also, good research should be conducted to determine the way in which the library may best serve their needs and wishes. This will of course imply a strategic marketing approach.

Besides marketing specifically tailored to the chosen themes, promoting the library as a 'strong brand' is also urgently needed. The national marketing strategy includes many activities, for example:

- The libraries will operate as a national organisation with local 'cultural entrepreneurs'.
- The library brand will be publicised and promoted through a clear and unequivocal national campaign, this on the basis of a self-confident identity and a realistic positioning.
- Libraries make use of a national branding in all their public relations (print, buildings, websites, corporate clothing).
- The library sector will investigate whether it is possible to develop into a franchise organisation in which nationwide customer and store formats are developed for locations with limited local possibilities.
- Customer data and customer segmentation (MOSAIC) will be used towards bringing the service better in line with customers needs as regards opening hours, tariffs, presentation of the collection, services etc. The effects will be measured on a regular basis.
- The library card will be upgraded to a loyalty card, ranging from simple customer benefits to a VIP card which entitles customers to digital services and services in all libraries. Conditions for use will be agreed nationwide, making customers experience their library card as a membership card for all the combined libraries.
- National agreements will be made on the tariff policy.
- Specific attention will be paid to marketing for senior citizens and young people.

Combined with the high quality services that will be developed, this strategy will lead to a significant advancement of libraries. More people will find their way to the physical and digital library and the social value of the library will continue to grow.

## *HRM*

No matter how much work is contributed towards improvement and innovation of the service in the coming years, success hinges on the quality of the workforce. Skilled and customer-oriented workers will have to deliver excellent service. In the exciting and complex world of digital information, the librarian will have to fulfil his role as a guide at a different level than at present. The choice of a more market- and customer-oriented approach demands different, and higher qualities of the organisation and its staff.

A new image of the profession and another form of library education are needed. The library aims at empowerment of the user by providing content that contributes to the strengthening of self-confidence and self-reliance of its users. This makes it even more important to connect content and users, as well as cooperating to achieve this. This means a new, excellent working environment where learning and active involvement with content are central.

This makes the upcoming need for renewal due to the aging of the workforce a problem, but at the same time offers opportunities for innovation. The influx of students at different levels is not enough to replace the anticipated outflow in the coming years. Targeted recruitment will be necessary, especially since it is expected that the labour shortage in the coming years will greatly increase. The current training does not sufficiently reflect these new challenges, neither does it reflect the diversity of learning issues related to these. We need a new library curriculum agenda that will enable the Learning Organisation. The ambition is to consider the librarian as a carrier of culture with the following characteristics: excellence (the performance), inspiration (the energy), talent (the ambition). A nationwide, effective HRM policy will be formulated with the following elements:

- Central direction on (new) training (vocational and graduate levels), support for strategic workforce planning in regional networks, further development of HR tools such as the Virtual Career Centre, reward and appraisal systems, desired job profiles, required skills and diversity policies.
- To be able to attract good quality staff (including lateral entry) appropriate remuneration is necessary and, wherever possible, efforts should be made to offer jobs with more hours and better career prospects.
- To stimulate the creation of learning networks with linkages and connections between libraries with similar organisational issues and learning objectives. Joining on to this, a flexible and varied learning offer will be developed, in which an active connection is sought with the know-how and expertise of colleges, universities and other educational institutions.
- The certification standard for investment in training and development of existing staff is currently set at a minimum of 3% of the gross wages. The standard is not achieved everywhere and one might even wonder whether in the current circumstances an even larger investment might be necessary, especially since recent analysis by the Central Bureau of Statistics show that in recent years courses have become considerably more expensive.

All in all, the staff issue is the most urgent obstacle to achieving successful modernisation. After all, it's people who will have to do the job. Starting in the very short term, the library sector and the government must join force to create a "Delta Plan" for the future staff problems. This plan should comprehensively address training, recruitment and remuneration. A steering role for the central government, including the necessary financial injection, seems a logical step.

## *ICT infrastructure*

ICT is a means of innovation, efficiency and connector all in one. A common ICT infrastructure makes work processes across organisational boundaries easier, so valuable

time can be won; time which can then be used for the implementation of the future plans of libraries.

In almost all these plans, ICT plays a major role. Consider the role of ICT in, for example, the development of the Digital Library, access to the virtual Collection of the Netherlands and the national services, such as Al@din, GIDS, Search& Book, Schoolbieb.nl, the National Library Card etc.

The Steering Committee on Information, which is set up by the VOB (public library association), states that a common information architecture is the only way forward for the library sector in order to adequately respond to (ICT) developments and innovations in the near future. Cooperation in this area is an absolute necessity. A joint information architecture provides the following advantages:

- ICT resources can be used more effectively.
- There is a strong basis for the development of new functionalities, both for library organisations and suppliers.
- Individual developments may be much better aligned.
- New forms of service can be developed more quickly.
- Knowledge and experience may be shared.

The aim is to achieve a common information architecture, spearheaded by: content management, relationship management, search and accessibility.

A national coordinator is needed to make connections, to promote expertise and to develop and maintain the information architecture.

A system of 'crystallisation points' is being considered. These are libraries that - with support from the national network - work out elements of the architecture that may be used by other libraries later on.

## **6.7 Partners**

The libraries have an extensive network of partners for cooperation. The existing alliances with Kennisnet (education), TeleacNOT (educational television), Public Health Service, Reading Foundation and CPNB have led to many new activities. One example is the extremely successful campaign 'The Netherlands Read', carried out in collaboration with the CPNB Foundation.

The themes offer many different possibilities for cooperation with new partners. As an addition to the Collection of the Netherlands and its showcase collections, parties in possession of valuable physical and digital collections will be actively sought. In many places, sources of cultural heritage partners and other cultural partners have already been made accessible. These could be valuable additions to the Collection of the Netherlands. For the Digital Library new content partners are important as well. Particularly in the areas of image and sound there are interesting partners who can contribute towards enhancing the attractiveness and versatility of the sources in the Digital Library. Google may also be considered.

In addition, cooperation in reading and reading promoting is producing valuable results. The Holland Reads campaign together with the CPNB has already been mentioned. Such forms of cooperation, including the Reading Foundation, will certainly continue in the future and hopefully be strengthened.

Perhaps the most important is that cooperation with the field of education will have to take shape even more extensively in the coming years. For years, libraries have maintained a close relationship with primary education, and the last few years cooperation with secondary education and vocational training colleges has been intensified.

The strategy for the future is aimed at further strengthening the links with education. By delivering quality services, tailored to the different levels of education, public libraries aim to develop into a valuable and indispensable partner for education.

Also cooperation with new partners, both international and commercial partners, will be part of the business strategy of the future.

## **7. Change Programme in the pipeline**

### **7.1 Central in the Agenda**

All in all we can see the implementation of strategy formulations at the various meetings have yielded the desired focus. The themes for the coming years include:

- Digital Library
- Collection of the Netherlands
- Information literacy
- Reading and reading promotion

To keep up speed, a vigorous approach is needed. In the second half of this year, the four themes and their relation to the core targets, will be worked out in more detail in project plans. The project plans will be firmly anchored in governmental and organisational policies and partnerships. Financial terms will be well substantiated.

Project plans and related budgets will be determined in the AGM of the VOB (public library association) in December 2008. For implementation, full use will be made of the support and implementation potential of libraries, including the academic support libraries, Provincial Service Centres, NBD / Biblion, partners and the Innovation Centre which is yet to be created.

The project will name at least one quick win per theme, guaranteeing a successful achievement in one aspect per theme by the end of 2009, noticeable and visible to customers and the government.

Furthermore, in the same period the support programme for marketing, HRM and digital infrastructure will be initiated. Customer knowledge, expert and motivated staff, together with a good digital infrastructure, are essential for the successful development of the four topics. The support programmes provide the basis for successful innovation.

### **7.2 Governmental anchorage**

For ensuring continuity and to create space for the implementation of the Agenda governmental embedding is required.

To strengthen decisiveness and increase the tempo -whilst guaranteeing the commitment from the sector at the same time - the model of governance of the VOB should be renewed. The new governance model should provide the basis for a powerful realisation of the subjects and the attainment targets, as well as the support programmes. In this new model of governance the relation to the Innovation Centre should be taken into account as well as a new relationship with the different levels of government involved.

In addition the relationships in the network need to be reassessed. The VOB should develop into a national quality organisation for public libraries. To promote transparency, further integration of the employer's organisation (WOB) and the association (VOB ) will be prepared in 2009. This intention also applies to the Foundation of Academic Support Libraries. As a result, the Network of Directors will also have to consider its position in relation to the renewed library association.

The three levels of government, central, provincial and local will agree on a new covenant with the VOB, the Library Charter, for the period 2009-2012.

### **7.3 Establishment Innovation Centre**

All parties agree that an organisational intervention is needed to get the desired innovation moving. In the recommendations of various governmental bodies and the Libraries Steering Committee various types of platforms and innovation centres are reviewed, with the number of participants sometimes greatly increasing. The ideas on this matter have not yet fully crystallised. In our opinion, dynamism and focus should be leading in establishing the innovation centre. An innovation centre for public libraries and run by public libraries, but separated from the VOB, seems the best solution. This would create an independent innovation centre, fed and financially supported by the sector, detached but not isolated .

In our view, the innovation centre will be responsible for the following tasks :

- Implementation of innovation
- Facilitating change processes
- Management of online services and the national ICT infrastructure (including standards)
- Back office functions, essential administrative support functions for the whole sector.

The initiative to establish such a centre was partly prompted by the good experiences gained in the Netherlands in Higher Education and the realisation of e-government, where the SURF Foundation and the ICTU Foundation respectively have shown good results on the cutting edge of innovation, ICT infrastructure and management.

It is to be imagined that this centre will only performs parts of the total task in hand, because we believe that the Provincial Service Centres (in scaled form), NBD / Biblion, libraries and other organisations would wish to take on executive roles. In this way the innovative capacity will be encouraged across the full breadth of the sector.

The overall responsibility for the central management of innovation, lies with the innovation centre. The authorities monitor the centre and can guide on tempo, focus and quality. The sector has indicated a willingness to contribute financially to the innovation centre provided local and provincial money becomes available (because tasks are performed nationally), and if the collective quality is higher than the already achieved individual quality (leaders should not be punished).

Libraries are aware that we have to make choices nationally and that it is necessary to join on to these locally.

The business model for the innovation centre is intended to be completed late this year, with the three main knowledge domains (customers, libraries, ICT) interconnected.

#### **7.4 Financing model for the Agenda**

The sector may count on continued involvement of the central government during the process of modernisation. The current grant of € 20 million remains available and may even be extended.

The funding of the activities of the innovation centre, the chosen themes and support programmes need a joint use of resources. Given the ambitions it means an initial estimate for an annual budget of approximately € 50-55 million over four years (approximately 10% of the total public funds annually spent on public libraries). This should be raised from contributions from the public libraries themselves, municipalities, national government and the provinces.

The amount of the sector's contribution may rise gradually over the years. The starting point must be that the contribution in 2012 is about the same as the current grant. On the other hand, cooperation also offers significant savings and benefits.

#### **7.5 Feasibility study franchise model**

Libraries are not quite familiar with franchise-like arrangements and the possibilities and

limitations they have. On the whole there is a great willingness to make use of the knowledge from the retail sector in the development of store formats, perform market analyses and develop a national marketing strategy. Many libraries see opportunities in national marketing campaigns as well. A feasibility study is needed to determine if, and to what extent, there are opportunities and support for franchise models.

#### **7.6 Marketing Research**

The activities around market research will be intensified, partly based on the SCP report. All project plans will include a paragraph on marketing. The national marketing strategies that are already started will continue full strength.

#### **7.7 Development and implementation HRM policies**

The sector policy documents '*HRM Agenda*' and '*Learn to shine*' have been decided in the VOB AGM of respectively June 2007 and December 2007. Late 2008, the relevant planning and prioritisation will be developed.

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