

AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

SUMMARY

The Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB) has held a strategy discussion with its members, resulting in the *Agenda for the Future*. The rapidly changing society places enormous challenges on the innovative capacity of the library. Tempo, focus and direction are the key factors of this strategic vision. Important sources underlying the Agenda are the analyses from the report by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) '*The public library ten years from now*', the '*Final Report*' of the Libraries Steering Committee, and the '*Advice on Library Modernisation 2009-2012*' by the Advisory Council for Culture.

New opportunities and developments for libraries are to be found in the following:

- The information overload caused by the internet calls for information literate people;
- Changes in user behaviour;
- The e-economy requires modernisation of public library services;
- People read and borrow less;
- Reading and literacy is declining;
- A renewed policy aimed at target groups is necessary;
- The distribution and diversity of library services require adaptation to the demands of time.

Three core objectives

Starting point is 'the curious citizen'. Three focal points are formulated:

- *Respond to changing needs;*
The challenge is to draw more people to the physical and digital library, by way of a suitable and attractive offer, and retain them as customers with more service and convenience.
- *Improvement of collections and services;*
Improving the physical and digital collections of public libraries with high quality cataloguing and access, so that supply and demand can be optimized. Reading and pleasure in reading remain key to promoting reading, fighting illiteracy and spreading literary culture.
- *Improvement of infrastructure and access.*
Improving the digital infrastructure has priority. The current decentralised infrastructure of public libraries will be subjected to a centrally controlled improvement programme. The collection, the digital library, information literacy and activities around reading and reading promotion will all be part of the agreements to be made on the national digital infrastructure.

To achieve these goals and starting from the focal points: reading, learning and information, libraries focus on four central themes:

1. *Digital library:* The ambition is to create a joint high quality Digital Library of, and for, all public libraries by using a common ICT infrastructure. Key words: interaction and personalization for different target groups and educational levels. Top priority will be given to home use of bought online sources.
2. *Collection of the Netherlands:* the Collection of the Netherlands includes all sources of public libraries, library partners *and* users. Through coordination of regional and national collection management policies, development of the showcase concept and integration of specialized collections, users have access to special, not easily accessible or sold out titles. Complemented and enriched with the knowledge of librarians and readers they will form The Long Tail.
3. *Information Literacy:* To equip citizens better to the wealth of information, libraries develop curricula for different target groups. Libraries will also act as local support centres for the newly established Expertise Centre for Information Literacy. This is done in collaboration with the education sector.
4. *Reading and reading promotion:* The library as a knowledge centre for reading and literature is developed further. Special attention is given to people in all age groups with poor literacy skills.

The chosen themes are all related to the core tasks of the library: Information, Education and Reading.

Support programmes

To support the core objectives the Agenda is divided into three programmes:

1. *Marketing*: For the period 2009-2012 a central marketing strategy will be introduced, aimed at: increasing the catchment area of customers, the number of visitors, the number of registered members, and increasing use of the digital library. People over 65 and young people in education will specifically be targeted. Elements of the marketing strategy are: the libraries will operate as a national organization with local cultural entrepreneurship; the library brand will be strengthened by cooperation in national campaigns; knowledge of customer data will be extended and customer segmentation will be utilised; national agreements will be made on the fee policy and research will be carried out into the possibility of developing nationwide customer and store formats with options for local interpretation ('soft franchising').
2. *HRM*: A new professional image and a different training programme are necessary. The existing training and professional skills are no longer sufficient for the ambitions of the library of the future. The large outflow of staff will not sufficiently be compensated by the influx. Therefore a new library education programme, modelled on the principle of the Learning Organization will be set up. Principles: central control of (new) training courses (vocational and college or university level); support for strategic staff planning in regional networks; (further) development of HRM tools. To be able to attract good quality staff adequate salaries are essential as well as full time jobs and better career opportunities.
3. *ICT-Infrastructure*: Realization of a common information architecture with an effective use of ICT resources, which will create a solid basis for new features and services, enabling better aligned and faster development, where knowledge and experience can be shared.

Partnerships

The libraries will realize their ambitions through collaboration with partners from different sectors.

Financial

The central government gives an extra financial injection of 20 million euro's towards library innovation. In a growth model up to 2012, libraries, municipalities and provinces will also jointly contribute an amount equal to the government grant.

Governance and Organisation

To implement this agenda a new governance model of the VOB is necessary in order to give priority to tempo, direction and focus. Shortly after the administrative agreement between the different levels of government and the resulting decisions regarding the sector institute and library association, this model will be defined in more detail.*)

*) The administrative agreement, called the *Charter*, was signed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, the Association of Dutch Municipalities, and the Inter-provincial Forum on 17th of December 2009, and includes the lay out of their responsibilities regarding public libraries.