



Guideline 1

Strategies, policies and advocacy for public libraries and Lifelong Learning

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1. Introduction

This guideline is the first of six guidelines concerning informal learning settings in libraries and their role in promoting lifelong learning and combating digital illiteracy and social exclusion. It has a specific focus on strategies, policies, and advocacy.

"Politicians at European level have recognised that education and training are essential to the development and success of today's knowledge society and economy. The EU's strategy emphasises countries working together and learning from each other"

The European Union is committed to Lifelong Learning as an integral part of its aim to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world. Since the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, Lifelong Learning has become a core element of European strategies not only for competitiveness and employability but also for greater social inclusion, more active citizenship and the fulfilment of personal aspirations. In 2004, an integrated action program in Lifelong Learning was initiated.

European Ministers of Education have agreed on three major goals to be achieved by 2010 for the benefit of citizens and the EU as a whole:

- to improve the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems;
- to ensure that they are accessible to all;
- to open up education and training to the wider world. Many national governments also have learning policies and targets, for example on basic skills and language learning for all citizens.

One of the major pillars of Europe's i2010 initiative calls for "inclusion, better services for citizens and quality of life" and emphasises the enhanced use of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) for Lifelong Learning and social inclusion.

Role of public libraries

It is clear that learning is not confined to formal institutions such as schools, colleges and universities and there an important role is played by non-formal/informal learning institutions, such as Europe's 96,000 public libraries.

Public libraries were often formed originally as institutions intended specifically to support the education of the ordinary citizen. During the last few decades, they have once again begun to orient their activities towards a somewhat more systematic provision of various types of learning services in addition to providing access to reading for leisure, information and to cultural artefacts of various kinds.

As such, they represent a highly valuable and widely accessible resource in the informal learning landscape of Europe. However, the extent to which this potential is recognised and acted upon by the education sector, varies enormously between Member States.

Likewise, those working in the library sector have not always allied their policy objectives effectively with those of the learning sector, to the extent that the role of public libraries in lifelong learning is often not fully recognised or resourced by the 'mainstream' lifelong learning community.

All this is beginning to change, but much more needs to be done to achieve consistency of exploitation of public libraries as a learning resource throughout Europe. The work of ENTITLE is directed towards that end.

In understanding where the role of public libraries in Lifelong Learning may fit, it is essential to take in consideration the EU recommendation on European Education and Training: *"There is a need for coherent and comprehensive national lifelong learning strategies. In this context, it is necessary to promote more effective partnerships between key actors including business, the social partners and education institutions at all levels."*

The European Institutions have actively promoted policies to stimulate responses where the formal, informal or non formal Education and Vocational Training are integrated into the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning.

In lifelong learning strategies, formal education is often complemented by an additional focus on a broader spectrum of topics such as Citizenship, Creativity and Enterprise Education. Lifelong learning of languages is also an important component of EU education policy.

'Cultural institutions' such as public libraries need and are beginning to respond to policies and developments such as these which are acting as drivers for change, including:

- EU and national targets aimed at achieving a knowledge-based society
- government agendas for more inclusive services
- the need for new knowledge-based skills in the workplace
- the demand of eGovernment for digitally literate citizens
- the mobility of people leading to a demand for better language skills
- integration of peoples from different backgrounds leading to the need for solid foundations for community cohesion
- globalisation, which brings a corresponding need to preserve cultural identities
- technological developments making possible the delivery of education through a growing range of interactive and mobile devices

National government policies increasingly provide a strong context for public libraries to be accepted as playing a full part in delivering lifelong learning strategies and examples of successful implementation are beginning to emerge. Public libraries play a significant role in local communities and at their best are able to assume a new role in local communities as 'lifelong learning provocateurs'.

Too often, however, initiatives by public libraries in learning provision are viewed as something separate and outside the mainstream of Lifelong Learning policies. Likewise, education and training initiatives are still not always recognised as being services which are basic to a library. This helps to explain why it is sometimes difficult to identify budget support for them from budget.

Strategic responsibilities

At national level, public libraries are most usually the strategic responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. This can present something of a challenge in terms of establishing their role clearly in the context of other government departments which may have core responsibilities e.g. those for education. The emergence of government agencies with strategic and professional advocacy responsibilities for libraries and in some cases (e.g. Norway, United Kingdom) for other cultural institutions or 'domains' e.g. museums and/or archives has represented a generally positive development in terms both of their ability to focus on Lifelong Learning as a major target area and to interact with other relevant government departments.

The role of professional Library Associations also remains important in promoting this area of work. This is reflected in the adoption by Eblida (The European association for Library Associations) of Lifelong Learning as one of its core strategic priorities.

A survey conducted by ENTITLE¹ among its 13 participating countries showed that in only two of them, Denmark and the United Kingdom was a central role explicitly identified for public libraries in published national Lifelong Learning strategies. In only two others, Finland and Czech Republic, were there strong references to public libraries. The other 9 countries had only weak references at best and three of them (Greece, Hungary and Romania) included no reference to public libraries at all.

On the other hand, published national public library strategies appear to take somewhat more seriously the provision of Lifelong Learning services. A central role is identified in 5 countries and in only one country (Bulgaria) is there no reference at all.

At a more practical level, public libraries in all 13 countries provide some services specifically aimed at learners.

Building on their traditional strengths as content manager and access provider, public libraries need to be 'reengineered' to a significant extent as a supplier of learning opportunities within a learning-friendly environment. By using the potential of the digital environment, public libraries can be an important player in providing learning services which are accessible to all citizens.

To achieve this, library staff require additional training, recruitment policies need to be made more flexible in order to engage the right sets of skills to support learners and to develop a 'learning climate' and new resource management models will need to be developed.

Current provision

There is already a strong basis on which to build. In many libraries, opening hours are already adjusted to students' needs. Courses are organised all over Europe which are intended to enrich formal learning curricula. Some contribute to vocational education or acquiring qualifications in subjects such as touch-typing or languages. Other types of provision are linked to classroom curricula in areas such as poetry, cultural monuments, astronomy, climate change, wild life, etc and may be supported by specialised organisations and communities active in these fields. Activities such as writing, painting, crafts or other art work frequently focus mainly on children or the elderly and are often organised during the summer.

Many public libraries run a homework support service of some kind, building on the fact that libraries represent a safe place for children. Libraries provide access to online databases and electronic media, make basic reference tools available, and provide a place where students can work in private. In the USA, children are encouraged to use the libraries by a special community-service, which provides older students to serve as tutors for younger children. In Denmark, Homework Cafes assist refugees and immigrants with homework and conversation training. Supporting basic skills, reading, writing and number work are often seen as important components of public library learning services.

¹ Full results of the survey including a country survey are available at <http://www.entitlelll.eu/eng/Reports/Categorisation-of-Public-Libraries-and-LLL-Results2>

In a knowledge-based society, the application of ICT can also be considered as a basic skill involving digital and technological literacy. Public libraries have strong record in Public Access Computing which well equips them to play a role in this area. The concept of digital literacy can also be related to other skills such as critical thinking, unbiased assessment of factual information and opinions from different sources, searching for information (mainly using Internet search engines), filtering data etc. By acting as a provider of public information services in cooperation with other institutions, libraries can also provide services in other aspects of information literacy development, such as guidance on Internet safety and copyright issues.

Public libraries can be particularly effective in working with individuals or socially excluded groups, drawing them back into the learning cycle and improving their quality of life, for example by organising after-school and holiday activities, helping young people to spend their free time beneficially and focusing on people with special needs.

On a somewhat more advanced technical level, they can also act as a central point of a network through web-based services connected to homes, schools, creating personalised Virtual Learning Environments.

Financing

Providing new services is inclined to increase costs. Competition for public funding often presents financial challenges for public libraries in extending their learning services. There is a long-standing debate within the professional community and beyond as to whether all public library services should be free to users at the point of service or whether partial or supplementary charges should be levied to cover some additional costs. This is a debate paralleled in many areas of publicly provided services, for example health, formal education, culture (museums) etc.

The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto states that "the public library shall in principle be free of charge" and IFLA has gone on to say that "charging users for services and membership should not be used as a source of revenue for public libraries, as it makes the ability to pay a criterion in determining who can use a public library. This reduces access and therefore breaches the fundamental principle that the public library should be available to all".

In practice, this is a principle quite widely breached as public libraries struggle to find funding to fulfill their potential. A plethora of charges is in fact levied, according to widely differentiated practices between countries, including annual membership fees, fines, reservation fees, charges for lending CDs or DVDs etc. These are usually modest in scope but counted across library membership can form a valuable component of a library's budget for innovation, which may otherwise be hard to come by.

It appears self-evident that where, as is the norm, Lifelong Learning activities provided by public libraries aim to support social inclusion by reaching children, retired, disabled, minorities and unemployed people, services need to be available free of charge or be available at a low 'concessionary' cost.

Public libraries need therefore to be active in negotiations with local and national authorities, in order to ensure that they achieve a funding mix that meets their strategic needs.

Cooperation and partnership with other organisations (schools, municipalities, training institutions including those engaged in distance learning, governmental agencies for training and/or regional development, etc) is crucial in order to achieve the highest impact (see Guideline 2: The Learning Landscape).

2. Conclusions and Recommendations

Public libraries need to continue to develop their traditional way of thinking with regard to learning services in order to demonstrate their case for full integration in the wider mainstream of Lifelong Learning policy and strategies and to secure funding.

Public library services need to be 'reengineered' to a significant extent as a supplier of learning opportunities within a learning-friendly environment, making full use of the digital environment, public libraries can be an important player in providing learning services which are accessible to all citizens. To achieve this, library staffing complements need to reflect a more complex range of skills relevant to the delivery of Lifelong Learning.

The establishment of agencies in member states responsible for professional and strategic advocacy and support to public libraries appears to have a generally beneficial effect on their ability to focus on Lifelong learning.

3. Good Practice

ABM Utvikling (The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority)

www.abm-utvikling.no

Advisory and executive organisation for the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs on the specialist fields of archives, libraries and museums. ABM-utvikling also work with archive, library and museum issues related to other ministries, notably the Ministry of Education and Research, where all university libraries and museums belong, operating mostly at the strategic level.

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Global Libraries programme

www.gatesfoundation.org/topics/Pages/libraries.aspx

The programme has partnered national bodies in supporting major public access to computing initiatives in public libraries in several member states including Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, as well as elsewhere in the World.

Eblida

<http://www.eblida.org/>

Has established a working group in the area of Lifelong Learning, one of its key strategic areas

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (UK)

<http://www.mla.gov.uk/>

Agency responsible for strategic support and advocacy for public libraries which has given high priority to Lifelong Learning.

Sulinet (Hungary)

<http://www.sulinet.hu/tart/kat/S>

Sulinet has developed a Digital Knowledge Base used by libraries to deliver Lifelong Learning.

UK initiative

<http://www.entitlell.eu/eng/About-ENTITLE/News/UK-government-announces-£20-million-programme>

“Museums, libraries and archives can bid for a share of £20 million in Government cash from today to open up new opportunities and build new alliances that will help to secure a thriving informal adult learning movement in the UK”

4. References

CALIMERA Guidelines, 2003

[http://www.calimera.org/Lists/Guidelines/Learning_\(formal_and_informal\).htm](http://www.calimera.org/Lists/Guidelines/Learning_(formal_and_informal).htm)

The Calimera Guidelines on Learning (work funded under the IST Framework Programme) identified a number of policy issues which provide a basis on which to build.

Commission of the European Communities. The General Policy Framework for Education and training http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm

Commission of the European Communities: Learning and learning outcomes. In *Towards a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/consultation_eqf_en.pdf.

Council of the European Union- Make lifelong learning a concrete reality. In *Education & training 2010 the success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent Reforms*.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf.

Dillmuli project: toolkit section 1. Policies

<http://www.dillmuli.feek.pt/31.htm>

Extensive set of references to online resources relevant to cultural institutions and lifelong Learning, compiled by a project funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for development: the Public Library Service

<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s8/proj/publ97.pdf>>.

The IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for development on public library service states that library managers must be aware of the issues arising from continuous and fundamental change in society and the implementations this has on librarianship. Managers must thus establish methods of dealing with these issues.

McMenemy, D., Poulter, A. *Delivering Digital Services: a handbook for public libraries and learning centres*. London: Facet publishing, 2005.

UNESCO/IFLA Public Library Manifesto 1994

<http://www.ifla.org/en/publications/iflaunesco-public-library-manifesto-1994>

According to the Manifesto the librarian is an active intermediary between users and resources. Professional and continuing education of the librarian is indispensable to ensure adequate services. Library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban areas. To achieve these goals it is essential to develop organisational learning and evaluation culture and practices in public libraries