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National and University Library of Iceland

Annual Report 1995

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The library in politics

The long-awaited amalgamation of the National Library of Iceland (established in 1818) and the University Library (established in 1940) finally came into force on 1 December 1994, when the new institution, the National and University Library of Iceland (Landsbókasafn Íslands - Háskólabókasafn), was formally opened in a new building.

The change had been prepared by a committee appointed for this purpose by the Minister of Education and Culture. In addition to a representative of the Ministry, the committee consisted of representatives of the National Library of Iceland and the University Library.

This committee compiled a report on the two libraries (December 1993) and then drafted a Bill on the new library for the Minister. Based on this work, the law on the new institution was passed by the Althing, which stipulated among other things that the old libraries be closed and a new library be opened on 1 December 1994. The law also stipulated that all positions in the new library be announced as open to application. Accordingly, the director of the new library was appointed on 1 October 1994, Einar Sigurðsson,

former director of the University Library. Dr Finnbogi Guðmundsson, former director of the old National Library, retired on 1 September 1994. The National Librarian is appointed for a six-year period at a time, which can be renewed, the same applies to the Deputy National Librarian. The National and University libraries have now been merged as a new institution in a new building.

Legislation

The law on the new library was passed by the Althing on 28 April 1994, whereby it stated that the library be both a national library and a library for the University of Iceland. According to the law, its obligations are very comprehensive.

The library board is appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture, and consists of five members, two nominated by the University of Iceland, one nominated by the Icelandic Library Association, one nominated by the Icelandic Research Council, and one nominated by the Minister himself. The Minister appoints one of these five as Chairman. The National Librarian is present at board meetings together with one representative of the staff.

The amount of ISK 250,000,000 (GBP 2,500,000) was allocated to the new library in the State Budget for running the building and the library. This was considerably lower amount than recommended by the committee drafting the legislation.

Apart from the Office of the National Librarian, the library has six departments: Acquisitions Department, Cataloguing Department, National Department, Information Services Department, Circulation Department, and Manuscript Department. There is also a Systems Division, a Bookbinding Service, a Preservation Unit, and a Photographic Unit. The number of staff is approximately 80.

The law on legal deposit has not been revised since 1977. It comprises all printed material as well as sound recordings, but not films, videotapes, and radio and television broadcasts, nor any kind

of electronic publications. It is urgent to revise the law on legal deposit as soon as possible.

New building

The new building is fully air-conditioned, four floors and a basement, a total of 13,000 m². It is designed to hold a total of approximately 900,000 volumes. At present there are approximately 750,000 volumes in the library. There are about 700 reading seats, more than half of which can be connected to the library network. Already there are PCs for library users at about 80 of the reading seats. Approximately 30 of the reading seats are in closed carrels, and in addition to that there are four workrooms for groups. The entrance into the library is on the 2nd floor, where the reference section, circulation, and information services are situated, together with the administrative offices and technical services. Next to the entrance and outside the security gate, there is an exhibition area, a cafeteria and a conference room with a capacity for up to a hundred guests. Most of the reading seats, books and journals on open access, a textbook collection and the audiovisual department are situated on the 3rd and 4th floor. On the 1st floor there are departments with restricted access: the National Department, together with special collections, and the Manuscript Department. There are special reading rooms for these departments. In the basement there are stacks, including compact moveable shelving, as well as technical equipment.

Automation, data processing, retroconversion of already processed data

Automation was an important part of the preparations for the amalgamation of the two libraries. The integrated library system *Libertas* (called *Gegnir* in Icelandic) was bought from SLS (Information Systems) Ltd in Bristol in 1990, and cataloguing

together with OPAC was taken into use in 1991. At the same time a contract was signed with Saztec Ltd on converting most cataloguing records for foreign books to electronically readable form. Other holdings, including Icelandic items, have been catalogued into the system by the libraries themselves, but that work has not been fully completed.

The national bibliography, an annual edition, is downloaded from Gegnir for printing; also a bibliography of sound recordings. In addition to the OPACs, numerous PCs are freely available to library users, with access to Gegnir, word-processing, CD-ROMs, and the Internet.

Conservation and preservation of the collections

Due to relatively stable weather conditions and minimal air pollution, paper deteriorates at a slower rate in Iceland than in most other countries. Nevertheless there is a huge amount of material in the library in need of repair or protection by means of filming or copying.

In the old National Library there was a photographic unit, and such a unit is in the new library as well, in fact with much better equipment.

The old National Library and the National Archives ran jointly a preservation service, but there will be a special small preservation unit for the new library only. It will be taken into use at the beginning of 1997.

There was a bindery in the old National Library and there is one in the new Library as well. This bindery is responsible for repairs and the more difficult binding, but other binding is done outside the library.

Public relations

The Icelandic people are only about 260,000 and it took a long time to complete the new National and University Library building, which is one of the largest public buildings in the country.

The timing of the opening of the library was no coincidence either, because 1 December 1918 was one of the landmarks of the nation's road to sovereignty and that day is always remembered as such, although it has been overshadowed of late by the National Day, 17 June, but that day in 1944 Iceland became a republic.

International cooperation

One of the heads of department in the library is on the board of NORDINFO (The Nordic Council for Scientific Information). The library contributes to the IFLA ALP Project as well as the IFLA Core programmes. The library also participates in CENL as did the old National Library.