

Bhutan's First Library Qualification, Background and Development

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ABSTRACT

During a six month contract with the Royal University of Bhutan, the author was required to develop the initial stages of a first library qualification to be offered in Bhutan. Questions raised by this project included: Is a first qualification in librarianship needed in Bhutan? What are the potential student numbers in such a program? What structure should such a program take? What guidance exists for developing diploma programs at the Royal University of Bhutan? Does the country contain the expertise to run the program? The author utilized situational analysis to gather data for the program, building on a number of existing but unpublished documents relating to training library staff in Bhutan. Using the guidelines in existence, and the knowledge gained from the situational knowledge, data was gathered to answer the research questions. A three year, part time Diploma of Library Management to be offered by mixed mode (distance education) was designed, and supporting documentation written. There is no doubt that appropriate, relevant library training is needed for library staff in Bhutan. It is less clear that the resources currently exist to fully develop and present an initial diploma level qualification.

Keywords: Library education programs; qualifications; developing countries; Bhutan

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are a fairly recent introduction to Bhutan with the exception of those located in monasteries. The National Library and Archives of Bhutan (NLAB) was established in 1967. Sherutse College, the oldest constituent college of the Royal University of Bhutan and the National Institute of Education, now Samtse College of Education, were also established in the 1960s. The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) as an entity was not established until 2003. There is only one library designated a 'public library' in the country, the Jigme Dorji Wanchuk Public Library in the capital, Thimphu, and it was founded in 1980. There are some other libraries that have a public patron base. There are also special libraries serving the needs of government departments or organizations like the Centre for Bhutan Studies. Although there are now more than 600 schools in Bhutan, each with at least a cupboard of books, if not a room designated the library, the first students to complete high school within the country did not graduate until 1968.

Access to education has expanded rapidly in Bhutan, and given that the median age of the population in 2009 was 23, according to Bhutan's National Statistics Bureau (2009), this is a desirable and necessary growth area for the country. Each library, whether in a school, government department or elsewhere has someone designated to look after the library's collection, although that someone may be a teacher, clerical worker or a librarian.

In 2010 there were fewer than ten qualified librarians in the entire country. The majority of these people worked at the Royal University of Bhutan, and most have less than five years professional experience. All qualified in either Canada, the United Kingdom or Australia. The National Librarian is a scholar, but not a trained librarian. Most of the day to day work in libraries is performed by library assistants whose training has primarily been acquired on the job. Three month training attachments are available at the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) Documentation Centre in New Delhi, but other than workshops, often offered during the winter school vacation period, there is no training for library staff within Bhutan.

The idea of the diploma of library management was not new, and it had earlier been suggested that it be based at the Royal Institute of Management, but in 2010 the development of the diploma was adopted by Samtse College of Education.

The author spent six months working for the Royal University of Bhutan. One of the author's terms of reference stated:

Design and develop an undergraduate diploma programme in school library management. The programme is intended for assistant librarians in schools who have no or little training/education in librarianship. These people do not have educational qualifications beyond

a high school completion certificate. The proposed programme, offered through a mixed mode of residential schooling and distance learning, should be equivalent to a 2-year fulltime undergraduate diploma programme (i.e. 240 credits). Amongst others, the expected activities for Sylvia Ransom, in collaboration with college lecturers, are:

- a. Design and carry out the situational analysis for the programme to assess the demand and purpose of the programme.
- b. Ensuing from the situational study, develop the Planning Proposal for the programme for submission to the APRC
- c. Develop detailed module descriptors for selected modules
- d. Identify resources needs and develop a plan for their acquisition
- e. Identify HR needs for the programme to help Samtse College of Education to plan for human resource recruitment and development (Yangkha, January 2010)

Early in the author's time in Bhutan, it was evident that such a program should be offered to a broader base of applicants than school library assistants only. Library staff in the RUB also needed training. Visits to the ten RUB libraries showed that most staff were library assistants with limited understanding of library practice. During the author's time in Bhutan a shortage of library staff at the RUB was rectified, with the number of library assistants across the RUB libraries almost doubling in 2010, but this created a training deficit before the new staff could be fully effective. Every visit to other libraries, whether school, the NLAB, public or special revealed enthusiastic workers with a desire to learn more about library procedures, and requests that the program to be developed be expanded for assistants from all kinds of libraries.

The author's preliminary work on the program before arriving in Bhutan consisted of examining the content of librarianship and library technician program offered in Australia, particularly those offered by distance education mode. Subjects offered, the length of the full program, entry requirements and content of individual units was scanned using university and TAFE websites.

Once in Bhutan, every library of the Royal University of Bhutan was visited and the author worked at least a week in all libraries but one. At each visit data was gathered on the library, its stock and its staff, and workshops on topics suggested by the author and by the library staff were presented. The libraries' practices and facilities suggested that training of a practical nature was not only needed, but requested by the staff. The most commonly asked for workshops were in cataloging and classification. The single biggest omission from Bhutan libraries was the lack of library catalogues. The next biggest area missing from Bhutanese libraries from the author's perspective, was programming for library patrons using face to face contact or the virtual environment in the form of an up to date library website with useful links. This part should briefly describe the background to the paper. For example, "theses and dissertation are important materials for research and scholarship....."

EXISTING FRAMEWORKS AND CONSTRAINTS

The RUB has a document entitled the Wheel of Academic Law that outlines the process and steps in introducing new programs. It also outlines the length of various levels of courses from certificate and diploma through PhD, as well as size of units, modes of delivery, and the processes in getting a course up and running. For example, it specifies that a diploma program must have 240 credit points, spread across at least 12 units. Associated with this are a number of documents that outline what sort of financial support a new course will receive.

Samtse College of Education has implemented a structure that fell within that outlined in the Wheel of Academic Law and was concurrently developing a diploma course for laboratory assistants. Some basic units were compulsory for programs at Samtse College: Introduction to Academic Skills, Functional IT, Conversational Dzongkha, and Values Education were modules common to all programs at Samtse College. Module content had already been developed. A further module being developed for the laboratory assistants, an Introduction to Research Methods fitted well with the library management diploma.

The librarian at SCE proved to be a source of documents for other new courses that had passed through the RUB Academic Planning & Resources Committee and Validation Panels. These served as guidelines, as well as providing figures for costing estimates, and minutes of Academic Board meetings revealed some useful history of course development. He also had been involved in presenting and facilitating workshops for school library assistants over a number of years.

Experience at the college campuses revealed gaps in library practice, and provided guidance about what subject offerings in the diploma should be. Requested workshop topics from library staff also provided additional guidance.

The RUB Academic Board approved relatively modest student numbers: 20 initial students, increasing by 20 each year, with a full enrollment of just over 60, allowing for some students proceeding at a slower rate than others.

Together with the structure provided by the Wheel and the SCE documents the following were decided as necessary to the program development:

- Modules need to be basic and practical, based on the current state of libraries in Bhutan.
- The program needs to be offered by 'mixed mode' which in Bhutan means by self instruction modules that can be delivered by distance education. Students undertaking the diploma will be employed in libraries, and their personal situations make study from a distance the only realistic mode of delivery.
- The program therefore needs to be offered as a part time study. A time frame of three years part time study was decided upon but up to six years can be taken to complete the program.
- Students will benefit from residential schools, where they meet tutors and other students face to face, but these needs to be structured to minimize time away from home and place of employment.
- Entrance requirements for a diploma program are stipulated by the Wheel of Academic Law, with Class XII completed, and Dzongkha language competency completed to Class X level. Library assistants in schools however may have only completed Class X, and recognition for prior learning on the job should be recognized.
- To accommodate staff and backgrounds from different types of libraries, while most of the program will consist of compulsory units that progress logically from an introductory module through to a final one, there should be some flexibility with electives that permit further investigation into particular types of libraries and subject areas.
- While delivering module content via the internet using Moodle the RUB's online courseware choice is desirable, the internet in Bhutan is not yet reliable nor fast enough to use initially for the diploma. Course materials will initially be provided in paper, and together make up a manual for practice in the students' places of employment. The content will be migrated to Moodle when appropriate.
- Most library assistants in Bhutan are in their first library position. Many have never been to another library, unless it was the library in their school. Students in the program would benefit from visiting other types of libraries to observe practices. A module based in Thimphu where students visit libraries was designed.
- Hands on experience are a valuable component of any diploma program so a fieldwork component that is assessed is also part of the program.
- Assessment tasks whether examinations, continuous assessment of written work or some other method should not only be meaningful, but require minimal labour on the part of markers/tutors, given that these people are likely to be library staff in the various RUB libraries with other work responsibilities.

WHAT THE PROGRAM LOOKS LIKE

As designated by the Wheel of Academic Law, the planned Diploma of Library Management consists of 240 credits. Twenty modules will be offered over a period of three years. Each module consists of 12 credits equivalent to 120 student's notional hours. The majority of the modules will be offered by Mixed Mode (Self Instruction Modules) which in Bhutan means distance education with teaching materials provided. There is to be a residential requirement

for three of the units. Five of the modules are common with other programs offered by Samtse College of Education. They are not coded LIB in the table below and establish a base for students studying at the College. Except in the case of electives, modules are offered in a progressive sequence that reinforces building on modules already undertaken. The LIB numbered subjects start with basic topic areas and build to more complex ones. Elective subjects permit students to explore individual areas of interest and build expertise appropriate to their interests or employment.

Table 1: Course Structure, Diploma of Library Management

Level	Year	Semester	Module Number	Title of the Module	Credit Value
I	1	1	1	Introduction to Library Practice (LIB 101)	12
			2	Cataloging and Classification I (LIB 102)	12
			3	Introduction to Academic Skills (EDN 1404)	12
		2	4	Functional Information Technology (EDN 1402)	12
			5	Dzongkha for Communication (DFC 102)	12
			6	Collection Management I (LIB 103)	12
II	2	3	7	Collection Management II (LIB 201)	12
			8	Processing Library Materials (LIB 202)	12
			9	Lending and Loans Systems (LIB 203)	12
			10	Examining Bhutan's Libraries (LIB 210)	12
		4	11	Value education	12
			12	One Elective - see list below	12
			13	Library Management (LIB 204)	12
III	3	5	14	Introduction to Research Methods	12
			15	Reference services (LIB 301)	12
			16	User Education (LIB 302)	12
		6	17	Technology and Libraries (LIB 303)	12
			18	Fieldwork experience (LIB 310)	
			19	Future of Libraries (LIB 304)	12
			20	Elective 2 - from list below	12
				Total credits	240

Electives

Module 21: Cataloging and Classification II	(LIB 222/322)
Module 22: The School Library	(LIB 221/321)
Module 23: The Academic Library	(LIB 223/323)
Module 24: The Special Library	(LIB 224/324)
Module 25: Reading, Investigative and for Pleasure	(LIB 225/325)

WEAKNESSES AND PROBLEMS

Library staff trained overseas often studied subjects whose emphasis is not relevant, nor focused on the situation in Bhutan. Even library staff who have attended the three month attachment program at the SAARC Documentation Centre have found that what is learned is difficult to apply in Bhutan. For example, when students go to India where there is no shortage of people to take up library positions, training can fail to take advantage of practices where staff are limited in number. Specifically, many Indian libraries have library attendants who retrieve books from the shelves for library users, and who act as security guards for the stock. In Bhutan, some libraries do have a staff member who checks library users as they leave the building, but an electronic security system would free up staff for other activities, and until recently, academic libraries have been critically understaffed.

A reliance on copy cataloguing in western countries has led to much less emphasis placed on learning to do original cataloguing and classification, yet in Bhutan the ability to download copy cataloguing and to modify the downloaded records can be problematic. Library staff need familiarity and practice with cataloguing codes and with library classification systems. Other examples of needing a country-tailored program include the fact that the bulk of book purchases in Bhutan's educational institutions are obtained via a tender process that is unlike the acquisitions procedures outlined in standard overseas published texts.

Funds in Bhutan are limited. The cost to Bhutan of sending students overseas is high and is one of the reasons that there are so few qualified librarians in the country. Many overseas library science programs assume easy purchase of off-the-shelf library packages for cataloging, loans and other management activities. Using what is already available to a small library with a desk top computer and Microsoft Office programs is an important aspect of library training. Stable, fast internet access is still not assured in Bhutan, but is assumed in western countries, and library education programs can be structured around this fact. These factors weigh in favor of training library assistants within Bhutan, as well as reducing the cost per student trained overseas to the government.

Against running the program are the limited qualified librarians available to teach the program, or even to write the self instruction modules. Although the program initially was to be designed for library assistants in school libraries, and expanding its scope was decided early in the consultancy, the author was not provided with opportunities to visit school libraries until the end of her time in Bhutan. Subsequent to these brief visits, the author was advised that the choice of library had biased the views of the author as these particular libraries were under resourced compared with other school libraries in Bhutan. The librarian with whom the author worked in Bhutan has extensive experience in training library staff in school libraries, so the input provided by him was deemed to be adequate for determining if the scope of the program was appropriate for school library staff.

While the program received the qualified approval of the Samtse College of Education Academic Committee in November 2010, the Committee did not approve the modest costs outlined to support the program. Without adequate funding, the program cannot be effective. There is limited understanding of what is needed to run libraries well, in any type of library. Stock and trained staff are only a starting point. The role of trained library staff in education, whether in schools, universities or special libraries should not be underestimated.

With so few librarians in Bhutan, who will teach the program or write the content of the modules? This issue was addressed in the author's report to the Office of the Vice Chancellor, RUB, but the shortage of qualified staff to be involved is critical. The chief librarian of SCE is currently designated the co-ordinator of the program with responsibility for ushering the Diploma of Library Management through various committees, but his other duties, teaching of teacher trainees, running the library and adequately supervising his staff will suffer without administrative relief. The RUB envisaged that qualified library staff of its other libraries could be resource people, marking assessment tasks, possibly writing some of the module content, and providing student feedback. Again, what sort of compensation will they receive if this is added to their current workload? Some already teach into programs at their colleges in addition to running the library. Will their libraries suffer when their responsibilities are divided?

THE PROGRAM AT TIME OF WRITING

The author completed all the requirements outlined in her Terms of Reference quoted in the Introduction. The document for the RUB Academic Planning and Resources Committee (APRC) was written, and has been revised after comments received from the College Academic Committee of Samtse College of Education. The document for the Validation panel has been drafted. The full module template has been devised, based on self instruction modules used at Samtse College of Education, and on the templates used at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia (which were also used as the basis for the SCE module design). All the module descriptors have been written and brief module outlines completed. A work plan is part of the document for the APRC and stipulates that the first eleven modules should be written in full by the end of 2011. The remainder of the modules, including the electives will be written during 2012, and all are to be completed by the end of 2012.

While the program is working its way through the appropriate processes at the Office of the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan, work has commenced on writing the full modules, locating appropriate resource materials for each, and identifying books to be acquired by Samtse College Library.

The RUB Academic Planning and Resources Committee listed the program on its agenda for February 11, 2011. At time of writing, the results of this step are not known. If approved, the program moves through further steps on its process, with the visit and approval from a Validation Panel one of the big steps to becoming reality. The Panel will be comprised of stakeholders, potential employers and senior staff of the RUB. If the program passes through all the necessary committees, it is anticipated that the first students will enroll in the program at the beginning of 2012.

THE FUTURE

There are plans for further development for the Diploma of Library Management. Once the program is operating, it is intended that its graduates could articulate with a program overseas to upgrade to a bachelor or masters level qualification, should they wish to do so. It is planned that this possibility be discussed with a number of Australian universities. Once the internet and Moodle, the RUB selected online teaching courseware, is working well, the module content will be migrated to online delivery. The subject offerings of the program should be expanded to include archive and museum studies subjects. And of course the program will need to respond to changes both in Bhutan and outside the country.

CONCLUSION

The requirements of the author's Terms of Reference relating to scoping a diploma in library management were met and much foundation work achieved. Although there is a very real need for a first library qualification for library assistants in Bhutan, and the groundwork in developing a relevant program completed, it may be too soon to have a first student intake in 2012. There is a shortfall in staff able to teach the program, or even write the necessary course materials, and to date no budget has been allocated to contract people outside Bhutan to write the modules. Should funds become available, there are very few librarians with any experience of libraries in Bhutan who might write module content that is relevant to Bhutan, rigorous in content and useful for the future students.

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