

**MaLIA AGM 2011 (42<sup>nd</sup>)**  
**22nd February 2011**  
**Chairman's Report for the year March 2010 to February 2011**

Dear MaLIA members,

This report is not intended to describe in detail or comprehensively all the year's activities of this outgoing council but rather to give an overview of main activities and their relevance to MaLIA's development.

I start my address by quoting the ending paragraph of last year's AGM address:

"I end by thanking you all especially Council members for your support and advice in bringing so many of the above projects to fruition. I can only wish we had more expertise and energy at our disposal to do more of what must be done to keep the momentum of these past two years going. Personally at present I no longer have the necessary stamina to maintain the past year's pace. Though presenting myself for a Council post I will not seek re-election to the post of Chairman. Present personal work commitments do not leave much time or energy for such a commitment. There may be others who can do a better job than me at the present moment."

In fact nobody offered themselves for the post of Chairperson, so out of sense of duty and service I accepted to stay on. Of course, the reasons why I would have liked not to stay on did not change and hence the momentum of the recent past years was not kept. Which slower pace is reflected in a smaller program of activities and endeavours over the past year as the following report will show. This also explains why some pressing matters have not been tackled head on.

**Main happenings of last Council**

- Let me start with a positive internal matter. We were lucky to commence the work of the last council with a new face and a hard working capable person at that – Cecily Rizzo, who very ably took care of editing our newsletter and also presented her ideas on the various issues discussed during our Council meetings. MaLIA would be so much more effective with the presence of 2-3 other such members on Council. At the same time we will be losing our Secretary Claudio Laferla who this time round will not be contesting Council elections. A loss to the association. Which other association has a secretary who sends draft minutes of a Council meeting with 2-3 hours of the end of a Council meeting?
- Attentive to what is happening around us in Malta that is of interest to libraries and librarians, MaLIA Council over the past year had many internal discussions of various such issues and then published its views as a position statement. One of them was the exaggerated restrictions on use of Internet by Library staff. Our position is that library staff employers should give unrestricted access, barring pornography and hate sites, unless abuse can be proven in which case MaLIA favours disciplinary action.
- Similarly MaLIA published as a press release its position statement on book selection in Secondary school Libraries. This happened after a particular book (Vampir u rakkonti ohra by Mario Azzopardi) was banned from secondary school libraries. Not all papers carried it but it is available on-line on our web-site. This press release also elicited a response (e-mail correspondence) from Mr. Joseph Boffa of the Schools Library Service which helped us to understand better the intricacies how the Ministry for Education operates vis-a-vis school libraries. On this matter MaLIA also wrote to the Minister showing its disappointment and dismay that a committee appointed by her to look into the question of book selection in school libraries failed to include a school librarian or any librarian for that matter.

- MaLIA should also have spoken about the broader censorship issue but never got down to discussing the issue internally (Council and members) or in the form of a public debate. In fact I invite members from the floor to express their views on this matter as one of the times on the Agenda.
- Another issue on which MaLIA should take a stand and publish its views is whether state School and College libraries should employ full-time librarians as opposed to teacher librarians who still retain a teaching load. And whether qualified non teacher librarians should be allowed to work in school libraries. Again your views on the matter are essential to give the new council some direction.
- Once our views on these two matters (censorship and school libraries) become public we can expect to find ourselves at the centre of controversy.
- In spite of the apparent good relations with the Minister for Education and her appointed person following Library matters (Mr. Henry Cachia) we are still being excluded from formal invitations to Ministerial activities related to books and libraries e.g. appointment on National Book Council, National Book Council activities like the Book Awards ceremony this January, the Opening of the Book Fair in November and the launch of the library use and summer reading campaign organised by the Department of Libraries and the Ministry for Education. We have worked with Mr. Henry Cachia on a very important issue - the new "Malta Libraries Act" but then on other matters it is as if MaLIA does not exist. At times some of us receive a personal invitation but never to my knowledge an official invitation as MaLIA officials. We have written to the Minister pointing out our disappointment about this state of affairs but there has been no response or developments apart from MaLIA's pivotal role in getting all interested parties together to debate the new draft Act Libraries Malta.
- On the other hand relations with Parliamentary Secretary Dr. Chris Said are better. In fact through an initiative by his office we have organised a course for Public Library Staff (a group of 20) in November – an important source of income for the MaLIA.
- The new Malta Libraries Act. The text is almost lifted word for word from MaLIA's position which had been sent to the ministry and incorporates most of the matters discussed during a meeting that MaLIA convened last year for all stake holders, MaLIA, the UoM library, the National Library, The Central Public Library and the Ministry of Education. Significantly our suggestion to have a MaLIA Council member serving on the advisory Library Council as a representative for NGOs working in the library field has not been taken on board. MaLIA's views on this piece of legislation which is now in its first reading in Parliament have been sent to all members of Parliament. Two MPs have asked for a meeting with MaLIA (Dr. Owen Bonnici and Dr. Evarist Bartolo both LP party members) which meetings still have to take place..
- A new edition of the 1996 GhB publication Directory of Libraries and Information Units in Malta. Yvonne Schuerer a German national who wrote a thesis about the local library scene has updated the old 1996 information and is willing to be part of an editorial team. However, the MaLIA Council does not, at present, have the manpower to take on this project. If any members are willing to participate in this project, I urge them to come forward.
- In June I was in Bari (Puglia, Italy) representing MCAST at a library conference on the subject of informal learning through libraries. The conference was the XIII library Workshop organised jointly by the Consiglio Regionale Della Puglia and 'Teca Del Mediterraneo'. MaLIA was mentioned both in the speech delivered and the paper that was subsequently published in November. Over 250 participants attended this workshop, mainly Italian library professionals. This event is also a Euro-Mediterranean libraries workshop so there were also a number of foreign librarians representing the following Mediterranean countries; Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Also, a representative from Iran gave a presentation. Various contacts were made and I have made a written recommendation that a future theme for this Euro-Mediterranean libraries workshop would be

discussions among representative of library associations from the Mediterranean region on how they can work together.

- The Warranting of Conservators and Restorers has been publicly mentioned recently. MaLIA should work for a similar warranting for librarians to be recognised as professionals. However for this to happen we have understood through meetings with Ministry and the Malta Qualification Council that unless we as an association do the lobbying, nobody else will do this for us. Secondly besides the lobbying we would need to draft a future law ourselves and finally there is a very important issue that needs to be clarified, which issue can be framed in the form of question. “Will present diploma holders qualify as professionals that merit a warrant”? We have been given to understand that, to be considered a professional, as a minimum there should be first degree qualification, and only professionals qualify for a warrant. We have to take into account that by far the bigger majority of qualified librarians only have a Diploma. Many of them have a first degree in a subject unrelated to librarianship e.g. a B. Educ degree. There have however been precedents to this i.e. Diploma holders attaining a professional status, e.g. school counsellors. I understand that this came about because there was a particular need in this area. But essentially all this means is that for MaLIA to work on such a complex issue, we need to put in more effort by way of study and stronger lobbying by MaLIA – something we have been unable to take on due to lack of manpower and expertise.
- Malia notes that the National Library of Malta is still without a Director. This has gone on for more than a year now, and no decision to this problem seems to be in sight. I am pretty certain that the authorities are waiting for the draft law to be enacted and then set the ball rolling within the framework of the new law. In itself this is a good, giving the new person a clean slate and work tools but the longer delay will make it all that much harder to start cleaning out the proverbial Augean stables, a veritable Herculean task. But whether this new law will be enacted soon, is not a certainty given the present national and soon to come parliamentary debate on divorce and other pressing matters.
- At this point close to concluding this address I must point out the two institutions that give support to MaLIA. First the new Director of Library Services at the UoM, Mr. Kevin J. Ellul who has accepted that MaLIA retains its base and address at the UoM library. And the MCAST library, which over summer months, provides MaLIA with a venue for Council meetings at the MCAST Main Library in Paola, and also hosts MaLIA courses. MaLIA is grateful to both library institutions.

I now invite the floor to give its views on the following points

- Issue of professional status and the issue warranting of our profession
- Issue of membership in Professional bodies centre
- Issue of who should work in State School Libraries and whether the post should be full-time and permanent as opposed to 3 years at a time (note that MaLIA has an official position on this as the report we had submitted to Micheline Sciberras stated clearly our opinion).
- How to tackle relationship with Ministry for official recognition of MaLIA
- The new law and MaLIA’ presence, or rather absence, form the Libraries Council

I end by thanking you all especially Council members for your support and advice in bringing this year’s activities to conclusion. I can only wish we had more time, people and energy at our disposal to do more of what must be done to keep the momentum of these past years going.

Laurence Zerafa  
Chairman MaLIA  
7<sup>th</sup> February 2011