

Chairman's Report Annual General Meeting 2008

Introduction

I would like to introduce this year's report with a positive message. Despite all the difficulties, MaLIA is alive and kicking. The number of events organised during the year under review shows that the outgoing council has showed great endeavor and commitment towards the objectives set during the year. The Council met 13 times during the last year and following the University library opening hours being extended till 8.00pm, the venue for Council meeting has now returned to the traditional University Boardroom. A word of thanks goes to Mr Anthony Mangion, Director and the University Library for all his support to MaLIA.

The new MaLIA website

Following the launch of the new website during the AGM 2007, this website has been updated regularly with the latest and foreign news concerning libraries, information and archives. During the summer months, MaLIA sustained the campaign of the National Book Council to promote reading by placing its posters on the homepage. The website also served as an important communication tool with local and foreign library and information professionals and the use of RSS feeds has also been a success. There are other projects in the pipeline to make the MaLIA website more useful for its users.

Activities¹

MaLIA managed to organise various talks by visiting library and information professionals from the UK. Following Ms Heather Brown's (the MaLIA Secretary at the time) letter in Update inviting all professionals coming to Malta to get in contact with us, we managed to organise two talks. The first, by Ms Sheila Silvester was delivered to school librarians whilst the second, delivered by Ms Carole Wolstenholme was organised at the Central Public Library. We are very grateful to these two colleagues who dedicated time during their holiday here in Malta to share their experiences with us. A word of thanks also goes to the Schools Library Service and the Department of Libraries for their assistance in organising these activities. I will recommend strongly to the new Council to continue networking with our colleagues in the UK as this has been a very positive experience.

Dr Mike Freeman, also accepted to deliver a talk during his visit last January. This was organised at the University library. I find it hard to recall a year in the recent history of MaLIA during which we had three talks by foreign professionals visiting our shores. Well done to all involved in organising these activities.

¹ All the presentations are available on the MaLIA website.

Register of Library and Information Professionals

The Register was finally launched after a lot of hard work from various members of MaLIA. I personally feel that this is an important event in the history of MaLIA as it provides a solid base for the recognition of the profession. There is still a lot of work to be done, including enticing fellow library and information professionals to apply for inclusion in the register, but the foundations have been placed.

Participation in the World Book and Copyright Day events

MaLIA also participated in the events marking World Book and Copyright Day 2007 at St. James Cavalier. Mr Claudio Laferla, a Council member, delivered a presentation entitled "The effect and reading and conversation with children". The presentation was well received by those present and MaLIA I suggest that MaLIA should take part in such events on a regular basis.

Talks with local authorities

As indicated in the MaLIA Resolutions emanating from *The Report on the State of Maltese Libraries*, MaLIA has met with several local authorities to discuss the way forward in the various sectors. Meetings were held with the Director of the Libraries Department and the Officer in Charge of Public Libraries to discuss the National and Public Libraries. A meeting was also held with the Director of Library Services at the University of Malta. Meetings are scheduled with the National Book Council and other local authorities to further promote the resolutions and discuss possible ways of cooperating.

MaLIA position statements

MaLIA prepared and published two position statements. The first was a statement on the white paper on the proposed Freedom of Information Act and the second was a statement on the Pre Budget 2008 document. MaLIA also presented feedback following a seminar organised by the National Book Council.

The Challenges ahead

It has not been all high flying during this past year. The MaLIA Council has encountered various problems in trying to achieve its objectives and these are mainly due to lack of cooperation.

Our main problem has been the lack of a serious communication link with the Ministry responsible for libraries. Despite our continuous efforts, we have not managed to make a breakthrough notwithstanding the appointment of Ms Micheline Sciberras as our contact point within the Ministry. It is indeed disheartening that despite our repeated reminders and two position statements, the promised new Act on libraries will not materialise under this legislation. MaLIA, being the only national association directly related to the library profession in Malta, should not be struggling to communicate with the ministry and writing in the local newspapers about it.

Another communication problem has been encountered with the Malta School Libraries Association (MSLA). Despite cooperation in the organisation of the talk by Sheila Silvester, the MSLA has declined an offer by MaLIA to hold a meeting to discuss possible cooperation on various issues. This attitude is certainly not conducive to the necessary synergies that are

indispensable for the development of libraries in Malta and Gozo but I believe MaLIA should not be deterred and continue seeking the cooperation of all stakeholders.

There is also room for more cooperation with the Department of Libraries. Following the two meetings held during the past year, it is felt that further meetings are needed to enhance the possibilities of cooperation in various areas. It is unfortunate that only MaLIA seems to be the interested party in furthering this cooperation.

I would also like to highlight the fact that the Committee for the Development of Public Libraries (KILP) is slowly but surely dying a natural death. This is mainly due to the lack of cooperation by all the entities involved. It is very disappointing to be part of this committee that has, as one of its few achievements, that of being instrumental in acquiring 20,000 books from the Belfast public libraries, and yet not being at least given a mention during the presentation of books last December.

Academic Sector

I had already commented favorably last year on the first ever Bachelor of Library, Information and Archive Studies at the University of Malta last year. MaLIA would like to congratulate Dr William Zammit on being appointed lecturer within the Division of Library and Information Studies. I believe that the MaLIA Council should offer to meet with the Division to discuss progress and offer its cooperation to ensure the success of this important aspect of our profession.

The Future

After four years as Chairman of MaLIA, I believe that it is now the time to pass on the Chairmanship to others. I will in fact be contesting the next elections for Council but feel that I have given my all during these years as Chairman and a new leadership with new ideas will benefit MaLIA in general. I must thank all Council members during my Chairmanship and also thank the authorities that have cooperated with MaLIA.

I believe that the new MaLIA Council must work very hard to communicate better with its members. The proposed advocacy campaign was not carried out during the year under review mainly due to other commitments by the Council members. I believe that this should now be a priority. New alternative ways of communicating with our members should be sought.

I am also of the opinion that the new MaLIA Council should have an international secretary that communicates with authorities abroad and explores all possible avenues that could benefit MaLIA. The main problem remains that of the huge administrative burden that is required to participate in international projects.

MaLIA should strive to cooperate with all the local authorities but should also be more assertive about its positions, especially if the authorities continue to ignore MaLIA. I have become a firm believer in the words that Dr Paul Xuereb said during one of the activities organised by MaLIA: "It seems that the only way to be given attention, is must make a nuisance of yourself." Sad, but so very true.

Conclusion

Finally, I feel that I have to conclude my report with exactly the same two appeals that I made last year. I think that both are still very valid and to a certain extent, both still need to be taken on board. Given that in the local library scenario, things move on very slowly, there is absolutely no harm at all in repeating. The appeals are, and I quote from last year:

***“The first appeal goes to all the members receiving this report. We need your support. We need you to be active members, to sit on council and to pay your membership fees regularly. Without active members, our association will find it very hard to achieve its objectives. I believe the new Council should make an effort to communicate with members and involve them in the organization of forthcoming activities.*”**

The second appeal goes to all the authorities concerned with the running of libraries, information units, documentation centres etc. Let us build bridges and cooperate with each other. We need to get our libraries out of the 60s and help them move towards the 21st century. This will not happen if we continue to build our niches and defend the status quo. The catalyst of this development must be the Ministry concerned with libraries. Let us not keep libraries on the backburner any more. We must acquire the vision of what libraries can contribute in a modern society, devise a strategic plan, get everyone on board and move forward. It is time to move from rhetoric to actions.”

Robert Mizzi
Hon. Chairman, MaLIA