

Challenges to be met by South African LIS policy

LIS Policy Technical Team

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What/Whose behaviour would you like policy to change?

- Library staff's lack of motivation – often referred to as a lack of “professionalism”
- Ill-informed interference from politicians and outside managers in LIS management
- Teachers' inadequate use of LIS and their lack of understanding of their crucial role in quality schooling and learning.

Six categories of challenge

1. Access / accessibility restrictions
2. Governance / leadership weaknesses
3. Fragmentation of LIS sector
4. Human resources issues
5. Collections / resources shortcomings
6. Infrastructure issues

Solutions for each challenge do exist - on the ground.

Each challenge offers opportunities for policy.

Access restrictions

- Physical access to LIS
 - Need more public LIS
 - Only about 20% of schools have libraries
- Opening hours restrict access
- Internet access restricted
- LIS facilities (like halls)
- Access for people with special needs
 - People with disabilities
 - Children & families
- Membership restrictions

Governance & leadership

- LIS sector has no regulatory body (NCLIS only “advises”)
- Public LIS mandate uncertainties:
 - Provincial LIS are underfunded
 - Shortfalls: province ↔ local authorities
- Political & outside interference in LIS management (e.g. staff appointments, “pet” projects)
- No dedicated school LIS unit at DBE
- Provincial education departments’ school LIS services lack capacity & funding

Fragmentation of LIS sector

- LIS parent govt departments do not collaborate (e.g. DBE/DAC; Public works/Provincial education depts.; ...)
- Departments within education departments out of sync (e.g. infrastructure depts /LTSM / school LIS support services)
- Local authorities & provinces out of sync (e.g. staff grading, opening hours)
- Universities do not work with public LIS
- Schools & teachers do not work with public LIS

Human resources challenges

- Lack of professionalism
 - Public & school LIS often managed by unqualified staff
 - Lack of customer orientation
- LIS graduates struggle to find jobs
- No provision for school librarian posts (most funded by SGBs)
- Confusion over standing of different qualifications
 - School librarian training shelved
- Content & quality of LIS education programmes uneven
- Not enough staff development & continuing professional education

Collections / resources

- Supply chain problems
 - SCM processes are unwieldy
 - Procurement officials don't understand publishing industry & special requirements in purchasing library books
 - Inappropriate suppliers with no knowledge of books and publishing win tenders
 - Small publishers & local writers marginalised
- 80% of our schools (mostly in Quintiles 1-3) have no library collections
- Public LIS selection processes are centralised - “undemocratic”
- Collections are eurocentric / “colonial”
 - Not enough coverage of SA's indigenous knowledge
 - Not enough SA literatures & languages
- Collection budgets are disparate across the historical university divides

Infrastructure

- Buildings
 - Many not fit for purpose
 - Public works & infrastructure depts not responsive
- Maintenance issues
 - Who does what?
- ICTs
 - Internet access often inadequate & unreliable

In conclusion: Two underlying challenges

- A general undervaluing of LIS and the LIS profession in terms of their important social and educational roles in:
 - the thriving knowledge economy that South Africa aspires to
 - the high-quality education that prepares school leavers for the knowledge economy and an open participatory democracy
 - social cohesion and the breaking down of the divisions that still exist in our fragmented and unequal society.
- A general underfunding of LIS – probably the result of the lack of appreciation of their social and educational roles

Thank you!