

resources. Without taking the merit of a good number of staff members who work hard and do their best to deliver; one cannot overlook the lack of professional staff employed with our public libraries. In this day and age, how can some call themselves librarians when they cannot even use generally accepted tools such as email and chats, let alone effectively browse for internet resources? I am aware that this statement may sound harsh and somewhat unsuitable but one cannot ignore this reality in the present situation of our public libraries.

However, one should not stop there; the Malta Libraries is there to help and encourage library staff to undergo further training to abide by today's information requirements. Last year, Malta Libraries motivated staff to follow the Diploma course on Library and Information Science by offering a flexible working environment. Additionally, with the setting up again of our former ICT Support Unit, we are already providing in-house informative sessions to our staff members. The training will ensure that proper procedures are in place with regards to the computerised circulation of library material in accordance to the established Library Lending Regulations. All this is being performed in tandem with the Malta Libraries plans to migrate the current Library Information System to a more user-centric system which will embrace the major enhancements available in contemporary Library Systems as well as to incorporate a number of catalogue enrichment solutions.

Another problem concerning human resources is quite frankly the deficiency of it. To keep the ball rolling in all the public libraries is definitely not an easy task considering the small number of staff members presently available.

*Malta Libraries* has been liaising with ETC on the provision of suitable individuals willing to undertake work experience at the Public Libraries. Additionally, we accommodated a number of volunteers through MCAST, Junior College, Foreign Language Schools and ERASMUS programs.

Further significant challenges include funding and quality standards. The Public Libraries Fund is divided between all the 43 public libraries in Malta. This is hindering any substantial improvement in any of them. Consequently, this year's funds are going to be allocated according to performance. However, we still try to move forward and consider other ways to acquire alternative funding. For instance, other funding may be collected from fundraising activities, the vending of weeded out or even donated books which the library might already have multiple copies of, and by encouraging the donation of appropriate library material. Moreover, one may also lobby with authors, publishers, or maybe other organisations for sponsorships.

Coming back to the previously mentioned weakness, specifically to contemporary library standards, one can identify two main concerns here being the libraries physical standards and the current services standards. Unfortunately, most of the Regional and Branch Libraries were set up without ever considering adequate space and accessibility standards. Last year, MaLIA presented a set of guidelines regarding the appropriate physical standards which are now being consulted before setting up new libraries. Malta Libraries is also offering support to the existing libraries to exploit the restricted library space in the best way possible. For instance, all public libraries were presented with a set of guidelines on weeding techniques in order to create room for new material.

Additionally, Malta Libraries has been exploring the possible funding for refurbishments through the Ministry as well as through the European Union Structural Fund.