

# STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY: THE CASE OF THE BALME LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

BY

G.D. ASIAGODO

## ABSTRACT

In well established organisations staff development is regarded as a life long process through which individual members of staff maintain themselves as competent people and grow to meet the challenges of change in their places of work. This paper takes a look at the need for staff development in a university library and reviews the situation as it exists at the Balme Library, University of Ghana.

## INTRODUCTION

A university is defined as "an institution of higher learning which provides facilities for teaching and research."<sup>1</sup> Some of these facilities which are in the form of recorded knowledge and experience are kept and maintained in university libraries where professional librarians are employed to organise and make such facilities accessible to the university community. University librarians are, therefore expected to provide services that meet the academic and research needs of the university, and responsive to the demands of students and the teaching programme of the university. The capacity of the university librarian to perform his duties efficiently depends largely on his ability to keep in tune with current professional practices and developments in

librarianship. Staff development programmes in the library in which he is employed, assist the librarian to achieve competence and efficiency in his job.

D.W. Piper, Head of University of London Teaching Methods Unit, and an eminent scholar on issues of staff development, defines staff development as "a systematic attempt to harmonise the individual's interests and wishes, his carefully assessed requirements for furthering his career and the forthcoming requirements of the organisation within which he is expected to work."<sup>2</sup> William Scott writing on staff development said among other things that "the immediate goals of staff development aim at improving individual job effectiveness and the climate of interpersonal relations in an organ-

isation. By necessity, training and staff development are oriented towards organisational objectives."<sup>3</sup>

Apart from improving individual job effectiveness and harmonising his aspirations with the goals of the library, staff development in a university library is necessary to prepare the librarian for

1. the challenge of change in the academic programme of the university;
2. growth in size of the library beyond what is necessary for work being done;
3. the complexity of modern technology in which integration between activities and persons of diverse, highly specialised competence is required; and
4. a change in managerial values

The interplay of these factors "alter the missions and the goals of the library, modify its priorities and call for change and improvement within the library to meet the challenges and needs of the university."<sup>4</sup>

James Thompson pointed out that "a university library has a duty to further the professional development of its staff members once it has been recruited." He considered this duty important because a "static staff leads to restricted thinking and restrictive practices."<sup>5</sup> Beswick also reminds

us that "quality education demands responsive academic library with an equally responsive professional staff."<sup>6</sup> A static and insufficiently informed staff cannot provide a library service that is dynamic and responsive to the academic and research needs of a university.

If a university library is to retain its position as the focal point of all information, it is important that the librarian should be given regular professional training. This will enable him provide a service that is within the context of the educational goals of his parent institution. Continuing education for university librarians prepares them for the rapid change of knowledge that is occasioned by the environment. How far is Balme Library at the University of Ghana alive to its staff development programmes?

### History, Growth and Development

The Balme Library started as the University College Library of the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948. During its formative years, the university college library was conceived "to cultivate and preserve high academic standards, for, the founding fathers believed that the students of the university college of the Gold Coast could only compete with their counterparts in London if they had a good collection of books".<sup>7</sup> Between

1948 and 1952 the stock of the University Library stood at 55,000 books and 1,900 periodicals. In 1959, the University College Library was moved to its permanent building at Legon and was renamed the Balme Library after the first principal of the University College, Dr. David Balme. By 1961 a vigorous expansion and innovation programme started at the Balme Library to enable it cater for the rapidly growing reading population of students, faculty members and research fellows of the university. The need for competent and professionally qualified staff became inevitable. The Balme Library had then grown to become the largest library in the country with over 153,000 volumes.

The first staff training programme to be developed at the Balme Library was an agreement with University of London for the training of Legon graduates at the School of Librarianship and Archives, University College, London. The graduates first received one year on the job training at Balme before being sent to London. Three members of staff benefited from this facility.

When Legon established its own Library School, the need for the above agreement was no longer felt. Instead the best product of each year from the University of Ghana Library School went on an internship at the Institute

of Education. University of London, for one year. Five members, three of whom are currently on the staff of the Balme Library got the Internship. At the same time as the Institute of Education's arrangement was on, the Inter-University Council (IUC) sponsored educational visits to University Libraries in Britain under its Senior Academic Staff Training Scheme. Mr. Kafe, the current University Librarian (1972) and Mrs. Kissiedu (1973) got this sponsorship.

Under the Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa (SCOLMA) joint acquisitions scheme, the University of Exeter collects materials on Ghana. During Mr. Kafe's visit to Exeter in 1972, the need was felt for the exchange of professional staff between the two University Libraries. The first leg was operation in 1975 when Mrs. Dadson of the Balme Library visited Exeter. Unfortunately the scheme could not be sustained. First, the University of Exeter lost interest and secondly, the Inter-University Council which sponsored the scheme could not sustain it.

After the collapse of the overseas programmes, the Balme Library was left on its own and it had to resort to in-house training programmes for its professional staff. The most prominent are staff orientation, staff-meetings, in-service training, departmental seminars, sub-

ject responsibility and professional activities outside the university including conferences and workshops.

### **Staff Orientation**

Presently, the professional staff who join the Library on appointment by the University are given an orientation in all the departments of the library, notwithstanding the experience and the qualifications. During the orientation, the new member is required to go round all the sections of the library to acquaint himself with the work being done there. The sections involved are the Orders/Acquisitions Department, Cataloguing Department, Periodicals Department and Reader Services Department which also include the Africana Library and the 'Students' Reference Library. A computer has recently been installed at the Students' Reference Library to serve the staff and the readers. The new member of staff is required to submit a written report embodying his observations on each department. He is free to make any recommendations and suggestions for improvement. At the end of this duty tour he is expected to be well informed about most of the activities going on in the library. He is then assigned to the department where he would work.

### **Staff Meetings**

Staff meetings for senior members are held at least, once every month to discuss library problems and issues. These meetings provide a good opportunity for establishing and maintaining effective communication links between the Librarian and his staff and among the staff members. It offers opportunities for senior members to participate in decision-making. It also affords the staff opportunities to meet and listen to visiting librarians and other visitors to the library.

### **Department Seminars**

A monthly departmental seminar is organised for professional and para-professional staff of the library. Other senior members of the University, including the staff of the Department of Library and Archival Studies are invited to attend. At each seminar, a senior member presents a paper on a topic of his own choice relating to librarianship. Usually the paper to be presented at the seminar is distributed by the seminar co-ordinator to all university librarians and invited participants. There is often a discussion after the presentation of the paper. Departmental seminars provide good opportunity for librarians to update themselves academically and professionally. Papers presented at these seminars are, therefore expected to be of high standard.

## **Subject Responsibility**

From the beginning of the 1987/88 academic year, the library introduced subject responsibility for the professional staff working in the library. By this move, all senior librarians assume responsibility for selected subjects and disciplines taught in the University. The idea is to get university librarians actively involved in the teaching and research programmes of the University.

Each librarian is required to offer leadership in building, maintaining and exploiting resources in the Balme Library in his area of responsibility. The subject librarian should be available for consultation on bibliographic matters and other documents useful for teaching and research projects.

Outside the library, the subject librarian is expected to liaise between the Library and the Faculty/Department for which he is responsible; establish and maintain contact with the teaching staff and their library representatives. He is to look after the department libraries, give book orders, and advise the departments on library resources when new courses are being planned for implementation. He should attend departmental meetings when matters affecting the library come for discussion.

While subject responsibility allows for maximum utilization of staff expertise and qualities, the Balme

Library hopes to achieve through this device, a constant flow of ideas through interaction between librarians and the lecturers in their common endeavour to expand the frontiers of knowledge.

## **Professional activities outside the University**

Members of staff are encouraged to participate actively in professional activities outside the University. Workshops, seminars and congresses organised by the Ghana Library Association (GLA) and other organisations on library matters in Ghana, are patronised by the staff. The University provides the funding for that participation.

Since 1972, the library has participated actively in the proceedings of the Standing Conference of African University Libraries, Western Area (SCAULWA). This is a bi-annual international conference for university libraries in the West African sub-region. The University of Ghana normally provides funds for the Librarian and some senior members to attend.

For these international conferences, the Research and Conferences Committee of the University insists on the presentation of a paper at the conference as a condition for funding.

Participation in professional activities outside the University helps the staff to gather new ideas, learn

from the experience of senior and internationally known members of their profession and make helpful contacts.

### Other Factors

Staff Development in a university library may be necessary to enhance individual aspirations and institutional goals. Some factors should, however, be considered as very important in realising the aims and objectives of staff development and training. These include the leadership at the library, the individual staff members, and the University which employs the librarian.

The leadership in the library can be very much involved in the professional development of staff. The Librarian is instrumental in moving university authorities to provide adequate financial support for staff development and continuing education. His approval is necessary when organising in-house programmes for staff. Above all, it is his duty to prepare his staff to meet the ever challenging situations which the academic environment imposes on the library.

The improvement of personal and professional competency requires the individual to assess his need and to determine his goals and directions. Individual responsibility

involves time, energy and commitment to make effective use of available opportunities and to ensure that both personal and library goals are kept in sight. The routes to staff development for the individual librarian include reading, writing, involvement in research projects, active participation in social and professional groups, workshops and seminars.

Universities are usually associated with scholarship and excellence. They exist to promote the highest levels of academic achievement. The university library which is the centre where facilities are provided to fulfil the fundamental role of teaching and research, should be managed efficiently. The university, therefore, has a stake in the professional growth and competence of the library staff and it has to provide opportunities for them. Study leaves, sabbaticals, study visits and tours and funds for research work are some of the avenues the university can make available for the library staff. University librarians are expected to understand academia and the complexities of instruction and research to enable them perform their duties to the university community creditably.

## Conclusion

The importance of university libraries in the academic life of universities cannot be overemphasized. University libraries have played a very crucial role in education and will continue to function as repositories for teaching, learning and research. It is prudent therefore to ensure that the people who manage university libraries are conversant

and up-to-date with the skills and practices of their profession. This involves training and re-training of the library staff through staff development programmes. Providing opportunities for updating and upgrading university librarians is a task we all need to acknowledge if we want to maintain our university libraries as dynamic instruments of education.

## REFERENCES

1. Webster's Third International Dictionary, Vol. II, 1981.
2. Piper, David Warren, "The Role of Staff Development Unit." In: *Issues in Staff Development: A Collection of Conference Papers*. Oct., 1975 (pp.12-18).
3. Scott, William, *Organisation Theory: A Behavioural Analysis for Management*, 1970.
4. Bennis, Warren, "The Leader of the future." In: *Public Management*, 52 (13) March, 1970.
5. Thompson, James, *An Introduction to University Library Administration*, 3rd ed. - London: 1979.
6. Beswick, Norman W., "Libraries and Tutor-Librarians." In: *Library College Journal*, Spring, 1969.
7. Asiagodo, G.D: "The Management of the Students' Reference Library, Balme Library, University of Ghana." In: *African Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 5, 1987.

## GENERAL REFERENCES

1. Colson, John Calvin: "Learning and Libraries and Librarianship." In: *Journal of Education for Librarianship*, Vol. 24 (2) 1983.
2. Jones, C. Lee: "The impact of Technology Users of Academic and Research Libraries." In: *IFLA Journal*, Vol. 10 (1) 1984.
3. Lancaster, F.W: "Future Librarianship: Preparing for an Unconventional Career." In: *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Vol. 57 (9) May, 1983.
4. Metcalfe, John R: "Secondary Service for Developing Countries." In: *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol 36 (7/8) August, 1984.