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### **CPD stakeholders in Latvia – have ten years of independence made a difference?**

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#### ***Abstract***

*The paper discusses developments in continuing professional development (CPD) of librarians in Latvia. The role of librarians in all types of libraries has changed dramatically since the renewal of independence (1991), and the needs for re-training and CPD have been manifold. It has played a vital part in implementing ICT applications in libraries and upgrading professional skills and attitudes. The ideology and compulsion that were the tenets of the state-run integrated system, the formal basis for continuing professional development throughout the Soviet Union, ceased to exist. To replace them, CPD for professionals in all fields started a haphazard re-development process through a variety of institutions: for example, professional associations, local government, education centres and libraries.*

*For librarians, independence meant re-orientation in thinking and working with users, as well as approaches to collection development and organisation. Automation in most university, research and city main libraries was implemented during 1996-1998, bringing with it the need for training in IT and further re-thinking of service delivery.*

*Even with financial constraints on organised CPD programmes, libraries continued with internal activities, fostered local, inter-regional and international exchanges at personal and institutional level. Librarians met at regular intervals to share information about experiences. The Library*

*Association of Latvia (LAL) and other professional associations for librarians organised workshops, conferences etc.*

*The formal approach to CPD, with certification to confirm competencies, is found in the Continuing Education Centre for Librarians (CECL, est. 1998) of the University of Latvia. The Centre provides a systematic approach to the improvement of professional skills through short courses, seminars, and educational programmes. The newest of these, called “Trends in Library Development in an Information Society”, started January 2003. A joint initiative with the British Council was the workshop “Professional English for Librarians” in May 2003. An exciting Leonardo da Vinci project in which the CECL participated with the Faculty of Communication at Vilnius University from 2000 to 2002 was DELCIS – Distance Education for Librarians: Creating an Information Competent Society. This project created a first ever online distance education programme in ICT as an integral part of CPD of librarians in Latvia and Lithuania.*

### **CPD STAKEHOLDERS IN LATVIA: HAVE TEN YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE MADE A DIFFERENCE?**

by Dr Iveta Gudakovska (Director, University of Latvia Continuing Education Centre for Librarians) and Inese A. Smith (Lecturer, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University)

A paper presented to the Open Session “Stakeholders for Continuing Professional Development (CPD): a look at the future of online delivery” of the IFLA Section on Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning on 3rd August 2003, Berlin.

#### **The Past: Ideology and Compulsion**

During the period that Latvia was part of the Soviet Union (1945-1991), the continuing education (or raising of qualifications, as it was called) of library staff was carried out by a number of institutions, among them being city and regional central libraries, the State Library of Latvia and the Ministry of Culture. Courses were also organised by the Institute for the Raising of Qualifications of Cultural Workers of Latvia; this institute was, in turn, accountable to, and worked within, the guidelines set down by the Moscow Institute for the Raising of Qualifications of Cultural Workers. Each profession had its equivalent in-country institute, methodology centres and zonal centres. Courses were streamed according to categories by types of library (e.g., school, public), library processes (e.g., centralisation of library work, collection management), topic (e.g., local history, social sciences), library activity (acquisitions, catalogues, reference sources) and more. All librarians were required to raise their qualifications at regular intervals (at least once every three years) and were sent on courses at set times, regardless of the usefulness of the course attended. All courses were highly politicised as, indeed, were all aspects of library work, and communist ideology constituted at least 20% of course content, higher if aspects of politics or sociology were on the agenda. When the Communist Party Congresses were imminent, massive efforts were made in the area of propaganda for the party and its ideology.

Continuing education was also carried out through the Scientific Methodology and Bibliography Department of the State Library of Latvia (later the Library Advisory Service of the National Library of Latvia). The staff of this department reached a wide audience throughout the public library sector and played an important role in recommending how to prepare materials that informed the practice of work with the readers, within the required ideology, of course. Nevertheless, despite all the

propaganda and ideology that overlay library work itself and the training and continuing education of librarians, there were many useful outcomes. One that is particularly mentioned by librarians who worked during the Soviet period is the professional group visits that were made to analogous libraries in another town or region; on return, recommendations might be made for improvements of local services, based on what had been observed during the visit.

### **Comparing past and present**

In a questionnaire survey that was carried out in January 2002 during the Annual Conference of the Library Association of Latvia, participants were asked to compare the circumstances of libraries and librarians pre- and post-independence, and to comment on whether the situation was better, worse or unchanged from the way it had been ten years ago. The questions relevant to this paper related to their personal opportunities regarding professional qualifications, attending courses, studying. Responses were received from 136 conference participants (about 60%) and these are outlined below.

<b>Personal opportunities</b>	<b>Comparison with pre-independence</b>							
	Better	%	Worse	%	No change	%	No answer	%
Professional qualifications	90	66	8	6	30	22	8	6
Attending courses	85	63	15	11	29	21	7	5
Studying for a degree	25	18	61	45	29	21	32	16

Over 50% of respondents commented on the reasons for their answers, particularly regarding the second and third type of opportunity. The overwhelming reason for the increase in answers at “worse” was money. In the past, no matter what the content or value of the courses that librarians might be sent on to raise their qualifications, they were all funded by the employer. Now, librarians must pay personally for their continuing development, or look for grants to fund course fees, travel and living expenses while on-course. With librarians’ salaries being among the lowest of any profession, most librarians cannot afford to self-fund CPD activities. This is even more true as regards paying for attending university to gain a professional qualification and become a qualified librarian or to go on to a Master’s degree. Nevertheless, librarians are committed to continuing education and make efforts in a variety of ways that are outlined in the next section.

### **Continuing Education and Professional Development in Latvia Today**

In an information and knowledge society, libraries have a particularly significant importance as a sources of organised knowledge, providing for the storage, arrangement, proactive and targeted dissemination of this knowledge and ensuring free access to it for all members of society. Library and information processes and their interconnection need well thought out and justifiable library management and strategic development, which can be accomplished only by highly qualified library staff.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia approved a Concept/Strategy of Adult Education, which envisages the possibility for everyone to: supplement their education according to interest and necessity, regardless of age or former education level; compensate for inadequacies of

education; solve problems of social adaptation and integration. Thus, the strategy anticipates the development of the adult education system of Latvia to be in accordance with lifelong learning goals as they are recognised in the rest of the world. However, in its content and teaching methods, it is being formed according to local ways of thinking, idiosyncrasies and ambitions.

One of the basic elements of an adult education system is further education or, as it is more commonly known today, continuing education or lifelong learning. This ensures the extension of education and facilitates the development of balanced professional competence as required by a specific profession after attainment of formal education and the start of a career. The goal of continuing education is the improvement of knowledge, skills and competencies through the information education system. It is specifically the continuing education process that contributes to the opportunities of a person's balanced professional development in society, and it continues throughout life. Substantial and conscious learning through the continuing education process ensures qualitative activity in a professional sphere, and it ensures permanent raising of an individual's and society's quality of life.

Since renewal of independence in 1991, librarians and information workers in Latvia have been involved in many continuing education activities, which form a steady development system for professional competencies. Some examples of such activities follow.

**Self-education.** Librarians study professional literature in their spare time. Substantial support for self-education is provided by the Library and Information Science Section of the National Library of Latvia, which has expanded considerably during the last ten years. Of course, access to professional materials on the Internet has also opened a new world of information and facilitated self-development for those who have online access. However, Internet access can be problematic if you do not have the requisite ICT skills or lack English language.

**Exchange visits – foreign.** Visits to other libraries and sharing experiences and problems have always been a source of new ideas and have stimulated growth of self-confidence. Those to libraries outside Latvia have been facilitated by the professional associations (Library Association of Latvia, Association of Latvian Academic Libraries, School Library Association of Latvia) and different local authorities have also supported organised group visits to libraries of European countries. In most cases, librarians make a point to share with colleagues the experiences gained during these visits.

**Exchange visits – local.** Within the region and further afield in Latvia, these local visits have been part of professional activities for many years. They continue to form a valuable source of information on developments and initiatives and facilitate the professional networking that is so important in any profession.

**Conferences, meetings, etc.** Attending different gatherings of colleagues to discuss specific subjects and problems provides further opportunities to network and to remain up-to-date. If such conferences are international, then the added dimension of foreign languages is available to local librarians. The main organisers of such events are the National Library of Latvia, the Library Association of Latvia, the Association of Latvian Academic Libraries and the Department of Library Science and Information Science of the University of Latvia Social Sciences Faculty. For example, the National Library of Latvia has, in conjunction with other institutions and organisations, organised 24 international conferences since 1991. The Association of Latvian Academic Librarians has organised at least three international conferences since 1997.

**Summer seminars.** These weeklong annual residential seminars on a different theme each year have been organised by the Library Association of Latvia since 1998, although recently other professional associations have also started to offer similar events. The LAL seminars are attended primarily by librarians from public libraries.

**Internal CPD opportunities.** The largest libraries in Latvia, regional public and school libraries, and the professional associations have established their own internal training systems. The staff who have taken courses or attended meetings share their newly acquired knowledge with colleagues on returning home, also discussing how new systems or ideas could be implemented locally. During the selective in-depth interviewing in summer 2002 that followed the questionnaire survey, librarians commented that this sharing of training forms a very useful and non-threatening form of upgrading one's skills.

**Secondments.** With the support of international bodies, a number of Latvian librarians have been able to work in libraries and also study abroad, bringing back outside experience and new work methods. For example, during the first half of the 1990s, staff of Ventspils Central Library worked for several weeks in Rugby (UK) Public Library and, in return, Rugby librarians also went to Ventspils.

**Courses.** Courses are the most common form of active continuing education and upgrading qualifications. These are offered in specialised subjects by different companies (e.g., SIA IT Alise offers IT training courses for its integrated library system) and also by the University of Latvia Continuing Education Centre for Librarians (CECL), which was established in 1998. The CECL now plays a leading role in CPD for librarians in Latvia, ensuring a strong link between the University's higher education programmes for librarians and the changing labour market, and also stimulating acceptance of lifelong learning. The CECL offers courses with classroom teaching and also via online distance education.

**Professional Master's degree.** In Latvia, the possibility to improve competence by taking so-called professional study programmes at Master's level at the University of Latvia is also considered part of CPD. One of these, which started in 2001, gives its graduates the qualification of "Systems Librarian".

Librarians recognise the necessity of CPD as security for career development, are aware of their training requirements, individually formulate their training demands, and increasingly plan opportunities for improving their skills and competencies. This is a notable turnabout in the qualitative development of Latvia's librarians. The motivation to improve their knowledge and to gain new skills is already evident. As a result, the attitude of employers towards staff qualifications is also changing and work performance is improving, which hand in hand often determine career development and salary. Library managers who are change orientated have a positive attitude towards, and an active interest in, the development of their staff, which is reflected in a regular and goal-directed planning for their continuing education through budget allocations and attracting outside finances for training purposes.

Conforming with professional development opportunities, the continuing education directions of library and information workers emphasise the formation of understanding and cooperation between the following: state management institutions, higher and other education possibilities, employers and those who offer CPD opportunities; market research and the necessity of re-training; development of employee's skills; improvement of training content, quality and environment.

## **Continuing Education Centre for Librarians (CECL): Achievements and Proposals**

Even though a part of the University of Latvia, the CECL may act autonomously, which means that in the production and implementation of its programmes, it can react to the demands of the marketplace, continually improving and developing its continuing education syllabus, involving academic staff and practitioners alike in their expansion and implementation.

The Centre follows these basic principles when carrying out its market research and planning:

- coordination of the training needs of the individual and of society
- equal opportunity for all participants
- the learning process is a client-centred process
- consideration of the needs of different target groups
- quality assurance for the product on offer
- correlation of participants' qualifications and the demands of the labour market
- effectiveness and usefulness of the training
- flexibility of the learning process
- use of up-to-date ICT applications

The success of the Centre is reflected by these statistics: in the academic years 1998/99 to 2001/02, there were 107 courses with 3216 participants from libraries, information centres and other institutions throughout Latvia. The majority of teaching was aimed at improving computer literacy and advancing ICT skills. The trends in practical research for professional continuing education can be seen in the diploma projects of academic programmes at the University of Latvia Department of Library and Information Science. As a result, what is on offer through the CECL is being continually improved and expanded. The most significant activities of the last few academic years are discussed in the following sections.

### **Continuing Education for Rural Librarians**

Responding to the needs of *pagasta* (small rural area) librarians, a 16-hour programme of courses was developed over a three year period, financed from government budget allocations. In 2000-2003, these courses attracted 488 participants. The necessity to organise this programme of courses was defined by the *pagasta* library's unique place in the *pagasta* local government infrastructure, i.e., the library being the most democratic and accessible place to gain information:

- the library offers a free and equal opportunity to access high quality information
- it definitely improves the quality of life of local residents
- it gives diverse support to the development of local society
- it provides for lifelong learning for rural inhabitants
- it supports formal education at all levels
- it ensures the preservation and dissemination of the local cultural heritage
- it facilitates an aptitude for reading and encourages the formation of a reading habit among local people.

All rural inhabitants appreciate and use the *pagasta* library: pre-school children, school children, students, teachers, local businessmen, local government civil servants, unemployed people, people with special needs, pensioners.

This means that the *pagasta* library focuses not only on provision of specific services, but also on works out a services plan for each of the diverse user groups.

The mission the society has given *pagasta* libraries can be achieved by librarians who are knowledgeable, professional, ethical and aesthetic in their approach, who are characterised by: a high level of education; good communication skills; openness to change; ability to plan, analyse, draw conclusions and form library policy; teamwork skills; continual professional self-improvement. These essential characteristics also formed the basis for discussion by the *pagasta* libraries course participants.

### **Professional Programme: Trends in Library Development in an Information Society**

Any librarians with at least a secondary education diploma who feel the need to improve their professional skills can take part in the Professional Development Programme “Trends in Library Development in an Information Society”. However, it is recommended for those with a secondary/higher academic or professional education who have not attended any formal further education programmes.

The programme has a five year license from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, and its graduates can receive a certificate of continuing professional development.

The content of the programme was produced in coordination with a working group comprising representatives from all of the professional associations of Latvia (the Library Association of Latvia, the Association of Latvian Academic Libraries, Latvian Association of School Librarians, Association of Latvian Music Libraries), the Library Council of Latvia, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, the Library Information Network Consortium, the Schools of Culture, and representatives of the largest libraries in the country. Working with such a group guaranteed that the maximum needs range of professional skills would be included in the training programme and that the pathways through optional modules would match the requirements of different groups of librarians. It also guarantees the necessary professional continuing education for librarians as defined by the latest regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia.

The programme is taught to a high standard at the Continuing Education Centre for Librarians, which has up-to-date equipment and can provide a suitable professional environment. Its teachers are academic staff from the University of Latvia and well-known practitioners who have teaching experience and at least a Master’s degree.

The subject modules of the programme (see curriculum outline below) include three streams: theory, practicals and independent study on directed projects. Each module concludes with a seminar presentation. Practical placements are arranged for participants at libraries with innovative working methods and up-to-date equipment.

### **Curriculum**

Modules	Form of assessment	Number of contact hours			
		Theory	Practicals	Individual study	Total
<b>Compulsory modules:</b>					
1. Introduction to library organisation and management	coursework*	4	4	12	20

2. Library collections	coursework	4	6	10	20
3. The environment and technologies of library and information work	coursework	4	6	10	20
4. Services to information users	coursework	8	2	10	20
5. Information searching	coursework	6	6	8	20
6. Practical placement	coursework	-	20	-	20
<b>Total</b>		26	44	50	<b>120</b>
<b><i>Optional modules for librarians from public, research and special libraries (choice of 2 courses with 40 contact hours**):</i></b>					
1. Bibliographic description	coursework	6	14	-	20
2. Basic computer applications	coursework	2	18	-	20
3. Use of Internet in library housekeeping and services to users	coursework	4	16	-	20
4. Public relations. Effective interaction with clients	coursework	4	16	-	20
5. Library management systems	coursework	6	6	8	20
<b>Sub-total</b>					<b>40**</b>
<b><i>Optional modules for school librarians (up to a total of 40 hours):</i></b>					
1. School library programme	coursework	6	2	4	12
2. Development of information literacy	coursework	6	-	6	12
3. Programmes for facilitating reading	coursework	6	4	6	16
<b>Sub-total</b>		18	6	16	<b>40</b>
<b>Total no. of contact hours</b>					<b>160</b>

\* Coursework covers a variety of assignments, as appropriate for the content of a particular module; at the moment there are no examinations, but these may be included as the programme develops.

\*\* Participants must register for at least 2 module groups, attaining pass marks for 40 contact hours' worth of optional modules.

Recruitment of course participants and teaching of courses take place in Riga or in regional training centres. Thanks to government financing, in 2003 there are instructors being prepared for this programme who will supplement the Centre's existing staff. There are also plans for some of the modules to be available via distance learning and in online mode.

### **Development of Language Skills**

In an open information society, confident use of foreign languages in the library professional environment has particular importance. They are the instruments of cooperation and collaboration, and the sign of highly qualified library staff. All librarians in Latvia are at least bilingual in Latvian and Russian. In local educational institutions, about 80% of students study English, which has become the second most popular language of communication after Russian. With increasing contact between library and information professionals throughout the world, ever improving access to the professional literature, and its intensive use in electronic resources and communication, competence in English has become virtually essential. Therefore, in May 2003, the CECL in cooperation with the British Council organised a five-day course "Professional English for Librarians: Training of Trainers", led by Janet Stevenson, author of the well-known *Dictionary of Library and Information Management* (Peter Collin, 1997), a qualified librarian, and an experienced teacher of English as a second language. This dictionary is also familiar in Latvia, because there is a Latvian language edition (transl. by Baiba Sporane & Inese A. Smith, Zvaigzne ABC, 2001) which is available in most libraries. The aim of the course was to enable the participants, all of whom already had English language competence to an upper intermediate level, to become trainers of English themselves, thus

passing on their knowledge and skills to staff in their local libraries. The course attracted participants from all types of libraries and regions of Latvia.

### **Continuing Education of School Librarians**

Serious consideration has been given to the continuing education of school librarians in Latvia, because school libraries and their librarians as education providers still need to define their role and find a method for development. The Ministry of Education and Science, from its side, makes high demands on the staff of educational institutions: school teachers must have a degree and at least once every three years they must take continuing education courses in their teaching specialty. This is why the CECL created a 36-hour continuing education programme called “The Development of School Libraries as Guarantors of the Education Process”. Its goal is to provide qualified librarians with professional further education in accordance with the State educational standards and development trends of school libraries throughout the world.

In lectures and working groups, participants in the programmes gained an understanding of:

- the duties of a library in an educational institution and the skills required of its staff to carry them out;
- information literacy as a skill that must be mastered so that a person can independently engage in lifelong learning and tackle the solutions to information problems at levels appropriate to specified class and skills groups;
- the quality indicators to be used in school library information systems and their suitability for the learning process;
- how to become familiar with facilitation of reading activities and their meaning in teaching and tutoring;
- discussing the ethical aspects of library work.

In the 2002/2003 academic year, 185 school librarians in eight training groups received certificates for having participated in the programme. It should be noted that this programme is partly based on recommendations from two month-long projects that were organised in 2001 and 2002 by the CECL and the Nordic Council for Scientific Information (Nordinfo) called “Development of School Libraries and Information Services in Latvia”. These had the Canadian consultant Gerald R. Brown as facilitator.

### **Distance Education: Proposals and Prospects**

With the development of international contacts, those responsible for continuing education in Latvia have become actively involved in international projects. In 2001/02, the CECL took part in the project “Distance Education for Librarians: Creating Information-Competent Society” (DELCIS), which was financed by the Leonardo Da Vinci programme of the European Union. Partners in the project were institutions from a wide geographic area, including Scandinavia (Denmark), Eastern Europe (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), Central Europe (Romania) and the Mediterranean region (Greece).

As a result of the project, an e-education programme of ICT skills was developed for librarians and information workers in Lithuania and Latvia. The programme’s necessity was determined by:

- the functions of today's library as an intermediary, which are accomplished with the help of ICT, as well as the requirement that librarians must have the skills that allow them to compete in the labour market;
- the opportunity to offer an alternative form and environment of teaching, which facilitates independent study in terms of time, speed and amount;
- the need for alternative training in terms of content and quantity, independent of the location of participants, as well as the limited teaching staff and the amount of finance available for continuing education.

The distance education version of the training courses is now under the management of the University of Latvia.

The ICT courses were originally created by Aarhus County Library (Denmark) in 1998 and over the two-year period of the project were adapted and supplemented to match the requirements of library and information workers in Latvia. They will need regular revision and updating. Already from 2003, library professionals in Latvia can use the programme, which comprises three courses, or they can take each course separately. The courses are also integrated into the licensed professional development programmes.

The three independent courses forming the distance education programme are:

- **Basic Internet.** Introduction to the history of the Internet; search tools; search engines; search strategies; Internet resources; electronic journals; evaluation of Internet sources.
- **Advanced Internet.** Use of e-mail; mailing and discussion lists; newsgroups; plug-ins for radio broadcasts, song, films or TV broadcasts; multimedia.
- **Web-page design using MS FrontPage.** Introduction to HTML; formatting text and editors; FrontPage basics; creating tables; hyperlinks; images and graphics; cascading style sheets.

The project materials were appraised as they were being developed. Riga Central Library staff evaluated the finished course, acting as students, and their conclusions were as follows.

- The virtual learning environment of WebCT was considered traditional and unobtrusive, easily understood; logging on was easy and quick.
- The structure of the courses was clear and easily understood; the separate parts of the course were logically linked.
- The theoretical materials and exercises were graduated from simple to complicated in a logical way.
- The teaching materials were considered "excellent": extensive and useful; comprehensive information about familiar and new topics alike.
- The teaching materials were presented in an understandable form – text, tables, examples. Includes successful links to specific Internet materials, which could be accessed at once by activating the hyperlinks.
- There is a great advantage to the illustrations, which simplified understanding of the courses and saved time.
- The exercises matched the syllabus content and the new knowledge gained in each section was needed for their completion.
- If something has been left out while doing a lesson or if there were problems with the exercises, it was easy to return to a particular section because of the good index.
- There was no problem with registering for the course.

- Communication with the teacher and with other course participants – comprehensive and very useful.
- E-mail and discussion groups were useful for communication.
- It was easy to use “Information for students” and “My progress”, where it was possible to see how intensively the course materials had been used.
- The “Calendar” enabled work to be planned.
- The “Dictionary” facilitated understanding of the terms used in the text.

The Project DELCIS could be considered as an ‘overture’ to the University of Latvia (UL) e-University project, which was started in 2002 in accordance with the University’s development guidelines and which is progressing apace. The DELCIS Project is one of the first UL e-courses, so it served as a practical example for understanding the WebCT electronic learning environment. The UL e-University project leaders have been very positive in their evaluation of all that has been done under the auspices of Project DELCIS: familiarisation with the e-environment in which students and teachers interact and course approbation. That is why the experience of the DELCIS project group was frequently used at e-learning support seminars for UL academic staff.

Development of the DELCIS Project has also facilitated understanding of the infrastructure that is necessary for the implementation of the e-University project. This, in turn, allows for realistic estimates of resources so that financial planning can be carried out in good time.

The project revealed the positive aspects of the evolving e-learning courses as well as exposing the problems involved, and the experience gained will help in the choice of directions in which to develop such programmes. The most important conclusions that can be drawn are:

- participants must be assured of a learning environment that is appropriate to e-learning in terms of computers and software;
- there must be inexpensive access to the Internet;
- course participants must overcome any psychological barriers that might exist to using ICT and venture into a new form and environment of learning;
- there are radical changes in the roles of learners and teachers in the educational process;
- there must be agreement on teaching methods, so that tuition fees will not increase.

In a research project carried out in December 2002 by the Library Advisory Centre of the Library Development Institute of the National Library of Latvia, it was found that only 298 (13.6%) of the 2184 libraries in Latvia had the ICT capabilities necessary for e-learning via distance education. Of those 298 libraries, 34 had only dial-up access to the Internet through analogue telephone lines as opposed to ISDN through digital lines. Many of the libraries suffered from outdated computer equipment as well, which might cause technical difficulties with handling e-learning materials. In many places in Latvia the cost of connecting to the Internet is unacceptably high compared to the services provided. There isn’t yet a tradition of e-learning in the distance learning context; the adjustment necessary is easier for the younger course participants. Nevertheless, professional development of librarians in terms of gaining ICT skills is just as essential for those who are mature and do not always accept innovations as quickly as those who are younger. Therefore, some time is still likely to elapse before all course participants acknowledge that the alternative (i.e., e-learning) environment is suitable for them.

In distance education learners take personal responsibility for understanding their teaching materials and the teacher only plays the role of intermediary in the education process. E-learning offers

freedom to the learner: there is no intervention or limitation by others in the learning process; there is access to an almost unlimited set of sources and very little meaning in any modifications by the tutor. On the other hand, the learner must have self-discipline and motivation, and invest considerable effort in the selection, understanding, analysis and evaluation of information. In this process, the conversion of the acquired information into knowledge is more open and subject to personal choice and evaluation and, therefore, promising, but also possibly risky. During the ratification of the distance education courses, it was found that the cost of teachers increases several times over, because they work with each course participant individually: consultations, checking coursework, marking and reports, and appraisal. It is difficult to see how compensation will be found for such a rise in costs. In addition, regular revision of course content is required, because there are constant changes in the ICT environment and prepared materials become outdated very fast.

The above observations, gained from the short trial period, point to some of the essential differences between e-learning and traditional learning.

## **Conclusion**

So, the answer to the question posed in the title of this paper is “yes, there is definitely a difference”. There is reason to be optimistic, because online distance education has started being offered to librarians in Latvia at a time when the strategy for a State Unified Library Information System is being implemented. The aims of the System are to make libraries into places where universal information services are provided. In the near future, all types of libraries will continue to acquire computer equipment and, in parallel, there will be a need to carry out targeted ICT training of library staff, who can be viewed as potential clients for online distance education courses.

## **Resources**

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