

Koninklijke Bibliotheek

Final Report of the External Evaluation Committee

The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) invited an external committee to evaluate its plans and programmes. On 22 and 23 August 2005 the External Evaluation Committee (the EC) visited the KB. Discussions and interviews were held with staff, senior management, the board of governors and external stakeholders. Prior to the visit, all members of the EC had been supplied by the KB with substantial information, including recent strategic plans, financial accounts and a self-evaluation document. The Committee considered this documentation to be relevant, well-prepared and to provide adequate basis for preparation for the two days of meetings at the KB.

Principal evaluation outcomes

1. Strategic: 1998 - 2005

The EC reviewed the KB's strategic plans for the periods 1998 –2001 and 2002-2005. We established that the main objectives had been largely achieved.

- a) Definition of the KB's role as the repository and source of publications on Dutch language, history and culture has clarified its role as a national library, in relation to other national libraries and to other research libraries in the Netherlands (but see also point e) below).
- b) The KB's services and activities are valued and appreciated by the users and audiences for whom they are intended. Visitor numbers to the main KB buildings have improved satisfactorily despite the somewhat obscure location of the main building within the centre of The Hague. Exhibition facilities, and the use made of them, are exemplary and we commend the recently opened exhibition room 'The Legacy of the Netherlands' (shared with the National Archives). The KB has demonstrated its capacity for mounting large, attractive exhibitions (notably *The Wonderful Alphabet* in 1998 and *Wonderland* in 2002).
- c) The programme of digitization is progressing, and use of the digital library is increasing, although the goal of developing a knowledge domain for Dutch language, history and culture was not achieved. This was mainly on account of lack of funds
- d) The main national programmes are being achieved. *Metamorfoze* for preservation, the *Memory of the Netherlands*, and the project to digitise the Dutch parliamentary papers are well-conceived and effectively managed.
- e) The KB's determination to tackle the problems of, and deliver, perpetual access to digital publications, received special attention from the EC. Our deliberations on this ambitious project, centred on the 'e-depot', are more fully summarised in the appendix to this report. We noted that the KB's published mission statement focuses on Dutch language, history and culture and so is aimed essentially at arts and humanities users. As drafted, the KB's mission cannot encourage appropriate attention to the KB's objective of maintaining an international archive which guarantees perpetual access to the records of science, predominantly publications in the areas of science, technology and medicine (STM), and to the needs and expectations of the users of these digital publications.

- f) The objective of acquiring practical experience in archiving Dutch content of the world-wide-web was not achieved, (see appendix).
- g) The programmes referred to in d) are contributing significantly to the KB's position of leadership among Dutch libraries.
- h) The KB plays a very active international role and is widely respected for its international activities. The KB houses the headquarters of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), and has for many years chaired and provided the secretariat for the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL). In 2005 the KB was among the libraries that launched an online service offering integrated access to the holdings of Europe's national libraries. It is doubtful whether without the KB's central role in providing the management focus for that project, it could have been undertaken at all.

2. Strategic: 2006-2009

The EC reviewed the outlines of the KB's emerging strategic plan for the period 2006-2009.

The plan concentrates on:

- a) defining the KB's role as a location for storage and access to publications in Dutch language, history and culture;
- b) developing and enhancing digital services;
- c) expanding national programmes;
- d) strengthening its international role.

We concluded that the plan constitutes a straightforward and coherent programme and we are confident that the KB has the capacity to deliver its objectives. However, we remain concerned by the restriction of the KB's role, as defined in its mission statement, such that it apparently cannot expand its role and activities in areas that are predominantly STM, international in scope, or a combination of those. The description of KB tasks set out in the relevant Higher Education and Research Act in our view is insufficiently inclusive, so that it does not recognise the true scope of the KB's realistic and reasonable aspirations. We recommend that the KB be given appropriate – statutory or other – recognition of the wider range of activities in which it is legitimately, in our view, involved.

3. Corporate Services

The ability of the KB to deliver its programmes and operate both effectively and efficiently relies on the expertise and motivation of its staff. We concluded that:

- a) the quality of the staff is high, and that appropriate staff development programmes are in place;
- b) staff members are well-motivated and aware of the individual contributions they make to the overall, corporate objectives of the KB as the national library of the Netherlands;
- c) the KB is felt by its staff to be a good employer, and to be a good place to work. On the other hand, this means that

- d) staff turnover is low, so that the age and skills profiles of the staff are a concern, as the technological and service environment in which the KB operates is changing rapidly. However, appropriate steps have been taken to monitor the organisation's needs and it is apparently prepared to take any necessary corrective actions.
- e) the KB's financial position is sound and recent restructuring of the way the KB is given public funding is regarded as beneficial. However, building rent and staff costs, support for neither of which are indexed to real terms increases, are likely to become cause for concern;
- f) the KB should pay attention to identifying and managing the main risks that it faces, possibly through the creation of a risk register, with management of specific risks, such as to reputation, because of fire, or systems failure, to specific members of staff;
- g) consideration should be given to commissioning a report reviewing the economic benefits that are brought to the Netherlands, through the presence and activities of the KB, so that a clearer assessment is available of the returns that flow from public investment in the KB.

Conclusions

The Evaluation Committee had no hesitation in commending the KB as an efficient, imaginative and well-run organisation the existence of which is a benefit to, and a credit to, the Netherlands. The national and international impact of the KB is substantially in excess of what might be expected from it, given its relatively small scale within the company of the other organisations with which it co-operates on a regular basis. The KB is also a courageous institution, as our remarks on the e-depot and digitization programme will aver, and we believe this to be symptomatic of a style of management that is ambitious, risk-taking, and entrepreneurial. Digital technologies, by their nature, ignore national boundaries. They are now the norm for modern libraries like the KB and the regular activity of any national library worthy of the title has to be international in scope. We hope that recognition will be given to the central role played by the KB in the development of national policies aimed at developing a knowledge-based Dutch economy and society. We urge that appropriate official recognition be given to the KB so that it can face the brave new world of digital services with confidence and even greater ambition.

For the External Evaluation Committee

Brian Lang (Chair) (signed)

Dale Flecker
Martin van der Mandele
Ludo Simons

(date)

Appendix

Perpetual access and the e-depot.

For a decade the KB has been an international leader in digital preservation. This leadership has taken two forms. First, the KB has been at the forefront of research in digital preservation. The quality of research is high, as testified by many international publications. It is reassuring that the Ministry has granted structural funding to ensure the continuity of these activities. The leading role of the KB in this field has earned the organization an excellent reputation. Second, a major activity has been the implementation of a working system for the deposit and preservation of digital material, the e-depot. The e-depot is a great achievement in both technical and organizational terms. It is embedded in the Acquisitions and Processing Division, with a separate department for long term preservation research in the Research & Development Division.

As a national library the KB is not only responsible for the printed Dutch heritage but also for its digital heritage. In the first test version of the e-depot the KB experimented with archiving Elsevier journals with an Amsterdam imprint, a clearly appropriate activity. However, because internet-based digital information is not geographically bound, the first formal archiving agreement comprised all e-journals of Elsevier. Other agreements have followed since and now the KB is beginning to archive a substantial portion of the international scientific literature. The Evaluation Committee recognizes the importance of ensuring permanent access to this kind of material, and admires the vision and courage of the KB in its pioneering work in this. However, the Committee also believes the activity raises a number of important issues.

The first is whether the archiving of the world-wide publishing in science, technology, and medicine (STM) fits within the designated role of the library. In recent years the library has clarified its role to centre on Dutch history, language, and culture. It does not collect STM materials in physical form or purchase related products (such as the finding aids for STM literature). STM archiving therefore represents a significant expansion in the role of the library, and that expansion would seem to require explicit recognition in the formal documentation of the KB's responsibilities.

The second issue of concern is that today the KB stands alone in this activity. One wonders if any one institution can reasonably assume responsibility for the world-wide STM literature by itself. The Committee is concerned that the KB's activity could be at risk unless it becomes part of a larger international programme for preserving this literature.

The Committee **recommends** that the KB should work actively with other key libraries world-wide to build such a programme. In particular the KB should consider using its considerable leverage as the pioneering archive to encourage publishers to make archiving easier and more affordable (by, for instance, supporting a single format for archived publications), thus lowering the barrier for others considering parallel programmes.

A related issue of considerable importance is the funding model for archiving STM journals. Based on well-deserved credibility and years of sound achievement, the KB has been able to date to get funding for the activity from the government. It is not clear that as the activity grows this will be an adequate funding model. Several alternatives were discussed during the Committee's visit. An obvious question is whether this activity should be funded by the European Union. The activity benefits the entire European research community, and certainly

no other library in Europe is as well prepared to assume this responsibility. A second model involves the publishers helping to fund the activity, as it is of importance to their customers across the world. The KB has initiated discussions with selected publishers about this, and the Committee encourages the continuation of these talks. The KB's position as the pioneering archive should give it particular leverage in setting the model for STM archiving world-wide.

Another issue that concerned the committee was the potential cost of STM archiving as the programme grows. To date the KB has worked with a few very large publishers, allowing the coverage of a large number of journal titles with only a small number of technical and business arrangements. There are however a very large number of STM publishers world-wide, many publishing only a few titles each. In many scientific domains the most important titles are published by such small organizations. Archiving cost is in fair part sensitive to the number of publishers involved, so that as the scope of the KB archive grows, the marginal cost per journal title will certainly increase. This needs to be recognized when planning the growth of the archive.

While the archiving of STM journals is an important activity, there are many other digital domains where archiving is an issue. In particular many national and research libraries are building programs today to archive web sites within their national or topical domains. The web is an increasingly important medium for the sort of informal publishing that documents the currents of our time. The KB is not yet archiving the Dutch web, although it has had plans to do so for some time. The committee believes the KB should consider carefully the relative importance (and thus the relative resource commitment) of web and STM journal archiving as it develops its next strategic plan.

As part of its internal preparation for this Evaluation the KB commissioned an audit of the e-depot by a consulting firm. The Committee applauds this, but considers the consultants did only a very shallow analysis. While the consultants did find one major weakness in the e-depot (the lack of off-site back-up of the archive), there are many other areas that would benefit from an outside analysis (for instance, are the right technical formats being archived; is the metadata appropriate to support preservation; has all of the target material been deposited in the archive; is there appropriate quality control over deposited materials?). The Committee believes the e-depot has reached a state of development where a more thorough review by outside experts with experience in digital archiving and preservation is in order and **recommends** that this be commissioned.