

The Library Association of Singapore (LAS) Enters a New Era of Seeking Relevance

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The Library Association of Singapore (LAS) is the national organization representing the interests of the library and information professionals in Singapore. Membership comprises professional librarians as well as others who are interested in library and information work. LAS provides opportunities for networking and professional development through its publications, talks, visits, conferences, training courses and social activities.

The genesis of the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) was in the formation of the Malayan Library Group on 25 March 1955 as Singapore was part of Malaya. Following the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1966, the the Persatuan Perpustakaan Singapore (Library Association of Singapore) was formed.

One of the key objectives of the LAS is to unite and promote the interests of all persons engaged in library and information work or interested in libraries and information centres.

LAS Projects and Activities

■ LAS Awards

The LAS Awards Panel was set up in 2006. The Awards Panel is responsible for the coordination and administration of the LAS Awards Program and presents recommendations to the LAS Council on all policies relating to awards given by LAS. The awards given include:

- LAS Lifetime Contribution Award
- LAS Professional Services Award
- LAS Outstanding Newcomer Award
- LAS Scholarship Award

■ Professional Development Scheme

In 2008, LAS launched the Professional Development Scheme (PDS) and formed the Professional Development Scheme Board. LAS continues to receive and process applications for the Practising Profession (PP) status. The 4 sessions of receiving new applications per year have now been reduced to twice per year. Starting in 2011, both new applications and applications for renewal of PP status will be processed.

■ The Singapore Libraries Bulletin and Virtual Community

The bulletin continues to be published on an online blog platform. With contributions from members, LAS was able to publish articles every month. This has been a good knowledge sharing platform on latest local library development, LAS programmes and social events.

An internal virtual platform has also be set up for members of the LAS to set up their own communities, share documents and to schedule meetings and discussions.

■ Special Libraries Section (SLS) Committee

The LAS Special Libraries Section (SLS) has several active interest groups such as the Law Librarians Group, the Arts Librarians Group and the Business Librarians Group. A newly Digital Library Group was formed in 2011. SLS has recently started an initiative to explore collaborative opportunities with service provider to sponsor and host events for members. The objective is to foster a closer working relationship with special librarians and information professionals, and to establish a collaborative platform that facilitates open communication, knowledge sharing and innovation. SLS held its second Networking Event at the Singapore Management University in November 2011. LexisNexis sponsored the event and presented a cheque to the second LAS Special Librarian Passion Award.

■ Para-professional Training and Development

In 2008, LAS collaborated with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) to develop Level 2, the entry level competency standards of the library para-professional staff using the standards template provided by the WDA.

A significant achievement is the successful completion and launch of the 5 competency based Level 2 programmes for para-professionals which form the Higher Certificate in Library and Information Services. All the 5 modules were developed by LAS course developers and trainers who have achieved certification. We have received a strong level of interest and participation for all the 5 modules. The first to be offered was the programme on Support General Reference and Information Enquiry which itself had 4 runs.

LAS has announced the training delivery of the modules for 2012. Each module will run more than once. Each workshop session can take a maximum of 20 participants.

Module 1 : Supporting General Reference and Enquiry;

Module 2 : Support Collection Maintenance;

Module 3 : Support Bibliographic Control;

Module 4 : Support Acquisitions & Serials;

Module 5 : Provide Loans and Membership.

Librarians for Tomorrow

2011 was an important year for LAS as we moved even more into the age of digital engagement. We moved into Twitter and Facebook for the first time in our history to engage librarians all over Singapore, and even internationally, on our activities and aspirations. The LAS Website was also revamped with a fresh look including a mobile version enabled for smart devices.

The move into social media is a reflection of the preoccupation of LAS in the recent two years on the future of the library profession. As a result the association has initiated discussions amongst its members on whether

librarians will continue to be relevant. Increasingly LAS has engaged external parties in debate.

In its conference of 2012 entitled aptly *Librarians for Tomorrow*, guests from Facebook, Google, local booksellers, the film-making industry as well as journalism were embroiled in an active exchange of views on what librarians should be. Surprisingly, most of the guests felt that it was important for the physicality of libraries to continue – even as the world moves gradually into more of a digital realm. The consensus amongst the guests was that the need for spatial connection is even more urgent and needed because and not in spite of the exponential increase of time spent in social media.

At the conference, LAS members also looked at a Singapore that is increasingly diversified and where there is a preponderance of misinformation or too much information. Issues relating to the increasing polarization of the communities in Singapore amongst the local and foreign residents are sometimes magnified due to the outsize misrepresentation in the social media. The conference explored how librarians can help to make sense of this Singapore – to help Singaporeans be more discerning about information they receive for their work or leisure.

Librarians' traditional strength is in providing authoritative content as well as well referenced context to information. We hope as a profession to empower Singaporeans especially the next generation of Singaporeans to make sense of the world of information, so that they can be responsible and civil participants in the national, community and professional conversations.

The conclusion of the conference as well as the debates that the LAS have had in the past year is that while it makes sense to continue to have libraries and librarians in the future, libraries and librarians should not just make sense to librarians. There is an increasing need for advocacy to have them make sense to the wider world.

Future Libraries: Infinite Possibilities

An enormous opportunity for local and international advocacy for librarianship will come in August 2013 when Singapore will host the 2013 edition of the World Library and Information Congress (WLIC).

The bid was won by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) was jointly submitted by the National Library Board (NLB) and the Library Association of Singapore, supported by the Singapore Tourism Board, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The international convention is expected to attract more than 4,000 participants from over 100 countries who will converge in Singapore to discuss the developments and new trends in the library arena.

For many librarians across generations in Singapore, this was the fulfillment of a lifelong aspiration and LAS was very much involved in the process to secure this historic outcome. We also look forward to galvanizing the entire community to show the world and Singapore the brand and power of librarians and libraries.

The theme of the congress reflecting the focus and anxieties of the profession is *Future Libraries: Infinite Possibilities*.

Libraries around the world are well-loved spaces and in Singapore they remain one of the most popular social and learning spaces. The public libraries in Singapore alone have managed to attract 37 million loans a year or 5 per capita – one of the highest per capita loan figures in the world. Libraries in Singapore are visited by more than 36m visitors a year for a nation of about 5m residents.

Even so, there is an urgent need to rethink the evolution of services and librarians in these spaces as this love and need for libraries is an opportunity for this generation to leverage on for the greater advancement of Singapore's knowledge and learning objectives. The love might not last beyond this generation.

Celebrating Librarians

To further bring libraries and librarians to the fore – one of the flagship projects by the LAS for the WLIC is Celebrating Librarians.

The project has two components which will be launched by the President of Singapore.

Firstly, it is a physical as well as electronic publication celebrating the contributions of librarians in Singapore through the years. 100 stories are being collected through documentation of the memories of librarians from different types of librarians – from public, academic, government to company libraries. Not only are the memories of the librarians documented but also the stories of those who remember them well.

The second component is a gala event to honour librarians who have given a lifetime of their work to the profession. These are the awards that have been set up by the LAS Awards Panel. Through the Congress, LAS aims to amplify the significance of the awards and through the achievements of the award-winners, how librarians can make a considerable contribution to society.

The Relevance of LAS

In the years ahead, LAS will continue to engage its members, its stakeholders and the wider population in conversations on the future of librarians and libraries. It will utilize a mixture of platforms including physical platforms that appeal to its older membership as well as virtual ones to reach out to the burgeoning generation of digital natives.

Even as LAS focuses on initiatives to advocate the value of the profession, it will also continue to strengthen the network of librarians in Singapore and to provide training and development opportunities for the profession.

The vision of the association is to promote the message that “Librarians and Libraries Make Sense” – it makes sense to have them now and in the future, and they will continue to help make sense of the world of information and knowledge.