

INASP pilot helps African universities enhance postgraduate librarian courses

Project recognizes key role of librarians in access and use of information

The INASP Library and Information Science pilot project ran from 2012 to early 2016, working with African universities to further develop library and information science curricula and teaching. Here INASP reflects on what the pilot achieved and learning points that may benefit future work.

Acknowledging the critical role that higher education plays in providing a fertile environment for research and learning and in producing skilled and job-ready graduates, the African Union's 'Agenda 2063' sets out plans for postgraduate education to be expanded and strengthened. However, research shows that in many areas, due to lack of resources and investment, African higher education (HE) curricula are falling short of providing the quality of content and teaching demanded, or are not adapting to rapidly changing technology or skills requirements.

INASP research in 2012 showed this to be the case for some library and information science courses, which are a key part of the process of generating future professionals with the skills to help researchers and students access and use relevant information. In his book 'Atlas of New Librarianship', David Lankes (2011) suggests that the mission of future librarians is to "improve society by facilitating knowledge creation in their communities".¹ In order to do this, they will need appropriate higher education and continuing professional development.



Postgraduate curriculum review workshop at Kenya Methodist University in May 2014, during which participants discussed the overall library and information science course structure, core and elective modules and specialist options.

Scoping studies carried out by INASP on the state of library and information education in selected African countries in 2012² suggested that some library courses were not adapting to changing skills and knowledge requirements in the HE sector, and found significant discrepancies between what was being taught in classrooms and what was required in the workplace.

The INASP Library and Information Science (LIS) pilot project was designed to respond to the studies'

findings by encouraging and stimulating modest improvements to curricula and teaching methods, with hopes that this would support ongoing efforts led by the universities themselves to strengthen their postgraduate courses. It aimed to review and update existing curricula collaboratively with individual universities and provide a starting point for LIS lecturers to improve teaching methods and support for learners.

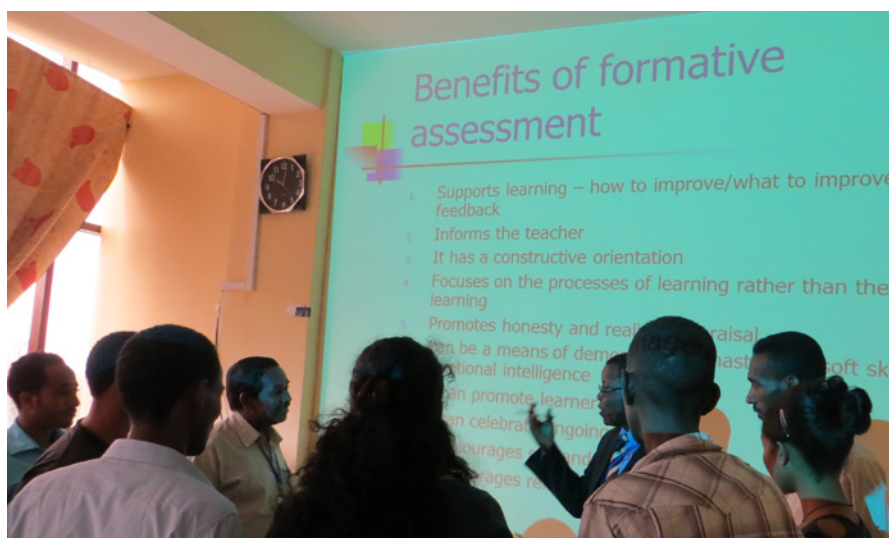
Planting these 'seeds for change'



was not intended to provide instant solutions to the issues identified, but instead to stimulate thinking on course content and delivery. INASP has been providing professional skills training and grants for continuing development for librarians and information professionals in Africa over the last two decades. The Library and Information Science pilot was intended to complement this by working at an earlier stage in the educative process, aiming to improve teaching and learning outcomes for students before entering the workplace.

Recognizing that systems and policies within HE institutions that regularly review and update curricula, and continuous improvements to pedagogy, are key to improving learning outcomes for students, the pilot focused on engaging with those processes in five African universities. The library schools involved were at Kenya Methodist University (KeMU), the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in Tanzania, the University of Zambia, Jimma University in Ethiopia and Mzuzu University in Malawi - all of whom INASP had previously worked with and had built good relationships with. The needs identified for the pilot to address were:

1) **Reviewing LIS postgraduate Masters curricula**, in partnership with teaching staff and practitioners at African institutions and experts in



Participants discuss the benefits of formative assessment at a workshop on pedagogy skills at Jimma University, Ethiopia, in April 2015.

the field drawn from INASP's network of contacts;

- 2) **Enhancing teaching practice** through workshops on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning, for current LIS lecturers on postgraduate courses;
- 3) **Providing continuing professional development opportunities** for those lecturing on relevant courses to upgrade their knowledge and skills in digital libraries.

A Learning, Reflections and Innovation document³ produced at the end of the second year provides an overview of activities up to that point, what had been learnt so far, and how future programmes of work could build on foundations laid during the pilot.

Now, as the pilot draws to a close in early 2016, we can reflect more fully on how activities developed over the life of the project, the learning points derived and what further work could be done in this area. INASP hopes that the understanding gained during this pilot will be of use to other practitioners working to improve curricula and teaching practices in African universities.

Reviewing course curricula and teaching practices to enhance learning outcomes

In response to the scoping studies showing that some library and information courses were not keeping up to date with new developments in the field and sector requirements, during the

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Dr Mike Calvert, York St John University





Group work during a pedagogy workshop at the University of Zambia in September 2014.

first year of the pilot INASP staff worked collaboratively with the universities and international education experts (see INASP team box) to review postgraduate LIS courses, and develop processes by which the curricula could be regularly assessed and updated.

The second part of the pilot, recognizing the value of good teaching and learning practices in producing skilled library professionals, introduced pedagogy workshops to help teaching staff adopt new and improved methods, and offered them support to update their skills through further professional development.

Evaluating and updating library course curricula

INASP worked with the five universities to jointly review their LIS postgraduate curricula to better match the skills profile required by employers, working with Quality Assurance units where possible. The curriculum reviews, guided by experts in information studies, took place during workshops in which university staff identified gaps in postgraduate course outlines, updated reading lists

and suggested new modules or courses, as well as considering best practice for the design and development of curricula. Some of the outcomes and learning points from the workshops were:

- Two of the University of Zambia's nine modules were fully revised and comments were made on the other seven for revision after the workshop. By the end of the event, significant changes had been proposed and have since been implemented. It was recognized that the programme needed to be strengthened in terms of ICT and leadership skills due to changes in terms of student and employer demand.
- At the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania, recommendations were made by the facilitators to update core course content, notably in research methods, organization of knowledge, information and communication theories and management for information professionals.
- The Kenya Methodist University workshop participants made suggestions for changes or modifications to the curriculum

and discussed the overall structure, core and elective modules and specialist options. It was decided that the elective module on 'Leadership and Strategic Management' should become core content.

- Mzuzu University in Malawi outlined the content and structure of a new master's Programme in Library and Information Science to address the need for more qualified librarians. "This was not an easy process, but the enthusiasm of all concerned led to the identification of agreed module".⁴
- The review of the master's curriculum at Jimma University in Ethiopia revealed unnecessary overlaps between modules. Although too complex an issue to be resolved during the workshop, the discussion of this problem laid a foundation for streamlining the modules when the university is in a position to do so.

Introducing new skills, knowledge and educational resources to teaching staff

To address the need for better learning outcomes amongst postgraduate students, pedagogical skills workshops were held at each university and facilitated by learning expert Dr Mike Calvert, Senior Lecturer at York St John University. The content and format of the workshops was developed in discussion with each university, and fine-tuned by INASP staff and the facilitators between each set of workshops. They covered a range of contemporary approaches to learning in HE,





INASP team members and Mzuzu University staff at the second pedagogy workshop in Malawi in December 2015, where participants discussed embedding the course learning in their departments.

including active learning, fostering information literacy, feedback and assessment, managing plagiarism and peer learning.

Feedback indicated that individuals and institutions found the pedagogical workshops useful and motivating. For example, the pedagogy workshops at the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania were felt to have had a “huge impact”⁵ according to one participant.

Following the workshops, individual staff have made changes in their teaching approaches, for example by incorporating peer assessment. At the University of Zambia, lecturers report that they are making use of their newly acquired skills and knowledge: “Our lecturers were not trained in pedagogy and this was the first encounter. It was very beneficial and lecturers are already using the skills learnt”.⁶

Another learning point was that lecturers would benefit from being trained to use the e-learning platform Moodle. This was supported by research in 2012 that had found that the majority

of the university community were not aware of Moodle’s existence and therefore did not use it.⁷ This also accorded with feedback about aspects of the workshops that were not as valuable as other aspects, such as using online activities as part of learning. Although keen to incorporate e-tivities,⁸ some lecturers did not yet have sufficient experience or knowledge of online teaching to put it into practice. Subsequent pedagogical training was revised to reflect this.

Barriers to Continuing Professional Development in HE

Part of the pilot’s initial scope was to examine further professional development for university staff, and potential for this was discussed in the various workshops. However, although individuals confirmed both enthusiasm for and the necessity of developing new skills or knowledge,⁹ take up of the available funding was limited. As part of collecting information for the first Learning, Reflections and Innovations report, INASP investigated the reasons for this and the following learning points were gained:

- The facilitator found that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was too sensitive a topic to introduce in the large workshop groups – some individuals were understandably reticent to acknowledge any shortcomings in their teaching or professional knowledge;
- Lack of time on the part of the participants due to heavy teaching workloads prevented them taking up training opportunities, with some classes containing up to 100 students;
- CPD was sometimes not highly valued or made compulsory by the institutions and this meant it was not prioritized by the staff;
- Unfamiliarity with online learning also proved to be a barrier.

“There is interest in CDP. The problem... is the busy schedule of staff. We are 10 members of staff against around 1,300 students in the department. Staff spend most of the time teaching, marking and supervising students,” commented Benson Njobvu, Lecturer, Department of Library



and Information Studies, University of Zambia.

To be fully effective, CPD needs to be accompanied by a commitment at the university's top level and reflected in funding, policies and practices. This could not be covered within the short-term and investigative scope of a pilot project. However INASP instigated discussions with the universities and made recommendations on their options for developing a quality learning experience. Dr Mike Calvert of York St John University, who has since written

a report on how the universities could develop their own Teaching and Learning Units to facilitate this process, summed up the need for clear objectives, strong management buy-in and 'joined-up' thinking between different parts of the institution: "It must be recognized that change is a process not an event and it takes time, particularly with a large institution, to turn the ship around."¹⁰

Increasing institutional awareness of the importance of LIS

In some cases just holding the workshops had the unintentional but welcome effect of raising the profile of library schools within their own institutions, and the efforts they were making to improve teaching, placing them in a stronger position for advocacy on other issues such as resources and training. Salome Mathangani of Kenya Methodist University commented that the workshop caught the attention of their management and prompted them to "look at library professionals in a new light".

Maintaining momentum after completion of the pilot

Although the pilot has now ended, there has since been further engagement between INASP, the consultants and the universities, building on the momentum provided by the pilot to work towards embedding curricula improvement, continual learning and pedagogical development at an institutional level. Tailored briefing papers on developing faculty by Dr Calvert were presented to the Vice Chancellor at Mzuzu University and senior

leadership at Jimma University to assist discussion of their options for future work in this area.¹¹

INASP has also continued to explore with Kenya Methodist University how best to progress a skills analysis of the teaching staff and identify any knowledge gaps. In addition, the university is developing an e-pedagogy course using an online learning platform for its staff, working in partnership with Dr Calvert and Kenya Education Network.

Learning for future work

INASP has received a great deal of feedback on the efficacy and usefulness of the pilot from individual participants, but assessing the long-term and wider impact of the activities is more challenging. Despite participants being on the whole enthusiastic and committed to the training, they are often hampered by lack of resources, network infrastructure and time. Revised curricula take time to be implemented, and improved courses will only start to have an effect on graduates after several years. Until then it is not possible to ascertain the impact of improved pedagogy or enhanced teaching by the universities' staff as a result of the project, or whether it has helped bridge the gap between LIS professionals and LIS educators.

The preparation of future LIS practitioners in Africa is an ongoing process, requiring approaches at many different levels and stages in the training and development system. INASP's ongoing training of library professionals and exploratory work with universities during the LIS pilot forms a small, but important, part of this process. ●

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Learning points for future work

Building on the learning from this project, future work could benefit from the following:

- HE institutions indicating readiness for cultural change, such as the existence of quality assurance, [embryonic] teaching and learning units, or strategic plans which incorporate clear staff development policies and continuing professional development objectives.
- Institutional understanding of the nature and depth of change required, and clear institutional and departmental processes in place to instigate, manage and evaluate change.
- In addition to commitment at the top level, dedicated 'champions' within each institution with vision and understanding of the key role that the library and librarians can play in growing research and strengthening teaching. These champions would be advocates and drivers of change at institutional level.
- Networks and relationships between LIS staff, senior managers and university leadership within universities and also between universities. Some departmental heads might benefit from one-to-one peer support relationships (for example, mentoring) from more experienced peers.

INASP Team

Peter Burnett, who retired at the end of January 2016, was INASP's Programme Manager of Library Curricula and Network Management. He also led its work with National Research and Educational Networks (NRENs) to help them strengthen national connectivity, bandwidth management and campus networks.

Paul Sturges OBE is Professor Emeritus, Centre for Information Management, Loughborough University. He has also worked on African library and information related issues since 1984 and has recently published articles on LIS curriculum development partly based on the experience of the LIS pilot project.

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