

Completion of research libraries and archival libraries

Can research libraries ensure the availability of scientific information and are archival libraries capable of ensuring the preservation of national publications?

Report of the National Audit Office to the Riigikogu. Tallinn, 9 April 2008

A summary of audit results

The objective of the audit was to assess whether research libraries are capable of ensuring the availability of necessary scientific information and whether it has been possible to develop, as economically and efficiently as possible, full and permanently preserved collections of data media (compulsory copies) relevant to Estonian natural culture.

The task of research libraries and archival libraries is to ensure the possibility of research in Estonia and to develop and ensure the permanent preservation of a complete collection of Estonian publications as national cultural heritage through compulsory copies. All in all, these libraries contain more than six million data media and the total of the annual budgets of the libraries exceeds 176 million kroons. On an average, libraries obtain as compulsory copies more than 58,000 publications and 800 audiovisual documents each year, which are subject to permanent preservation. Permanent preservation is expensive.

Key findings concerning research libraries:

- In the course of accreditation of the curricula of doctoral studies and evaluation of research and development, Estonian research libraries have been reproached for the insufficiency of scientific literature. A survey conducted by the National Audit Office revealed that the availability of scientific literature meets the expectations of those writing doctoral theses, but it varies by spheres. The situation is better in the spheres of natural and exact sciences. On the other hand, in the spheres of social sciences and humanities, in which some 4-5 libraries specialise in the scientific level in Estonia, doctoral students procure most of the publications necessary for writing their doctoral theses from sources other than through Estonian research libraries. International electronic databases have had an important role in ensuring a satisfactory level of the availability of scientific publications.
- The uniform collection development plan for research libraries, which was established with the aim of arrangement and coordination of nationwide procurement of scientific information, fails to function as envisaged. The plan lacks actual connections with universities' curricula, research activities or finances. As the exact bases of preparation of the plan were not agreed upon, it cannot be guaranteed that the way of providing research libraries with publications is optimal.

Key findings concerning compulsory copies and archival libraries:

- Publications whose value in terms of preservation of national cultural heritage is questionable are collected as compulsory copies. At least it is debatable whether all these publications should be collected and permanently preserved in eight copies (which is the number of copies in most cases) and simultaneously in five libraries.
- On the other hand, many libraries never receive the compulsory copies. The number of compulsory copies varies by libraries, even though all libraries should be provided with such copies equally under law. Hence, all libraries are not capable of developing complete collections of the data media important in terms of preservation of national cultural heritage, which should be their function.
- The number of both compulsory copies and the libraries that receive compulsory copies is larger than absolutely necessary for the creation of a complete collection of national culture. Estonia has chosen to follow the Scandinavian model where a large number of copies are procured in several libraries. However, all libraries are not capable of ensuring the use and preservation of data media in accordance with requirements. Common practice elsewhere in Europe and in the world is that the national library procures one or two copies – depending on the type of the data medium. In Estonia, compulsory copies are also used as a regular source of collection, which is incompatible with the generally acceptable practice.
- Storage conditions in archival libraries designated for a specific term do not conform to requirements. Archival libraries are responsible for protecting and preserving written cultural

heritage. The depositories and utility systems of libraries were built many decades ago and have not been refurbished. Due to the absence or deterioration of air-conditioning equipment the environmental conditions of depositories are unstable, as a result of which the state of data media worsens consistently. The pollutant rates which exceed the limits prescribed in regulations concerning archives imply the inadequate quality of air in depositories, which results from the low efficiency of air filters and ventilating equipment. Water pipes pass some archival libraries, which endanger the publications held in the libraries. The new depositories of the National Library of Estonia and the Archival Library of the Estonian Literary Museum conform to requirements in material respects.

Responses of auditees:

The **research libraries** found lending between research libraries to function well in the given circumstances, but emphasised that readers need to be more informed about the possibilities of inter-library lending.

The **Minister of Education and Research** acknowledged that the uniform collection development plan for research libraries does not serve as the basis for funding the procurement of research information from the state budget, and assured that the work plan for 2008 prescribes the drafting of amendments to the Organisation of Research and Development Act which would omit the reference to the uniform collection development plan as a basis for funding. As to compulsory copies and archival libraries, the Minister found that clear responsibilities regarding the storage conditions of archival libraries and the compliance with the Archives Act and archiving regulations could solve the problem.

The **Minister of Culture** deemed it important to review the Compulsory Copy Act and promised to initiate the amendment of the Act in 2009, involving the Ministry of Education and Research and representatives of relevant libraries and interested parties.

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