



next practice  
in public libraries

# de Library School

## What is the LibrarySchool?

What future does the public library have? How do you respond to changes in society and technology? What does innovating mean in practice? And what contribution can you make towards this? These are the questions being addressed by the new LibrarySchool, a school with a difference because it offers a pioneering new approach that blends learning, working and innovating. The LibrarySchool is a top-quality academic programme that trains the librarians of the future. It is also a community in which students, professionals working in library innovation and external experts come together to explore the future of public libraries. This is about sharing knowledge, acquiring new insights, learning, reflecting and practising. The LibrarySchool is a collaborative project of public libraries, steered by the Open University and based in the Amsterdam Public Library.

## Why?

Public libraries operate in a drastically new context. The rise of information technology is having an enormous impact, but that is not all that's going on. The behaviour of users is changing, the diversity in society is increasing and trends are emerging in rapid succession.

The library will have to respond adequately to new questions and needs in society. Going with the flow of society means continually developing ideas, continually innovating. Permanent innovation is imperative, but what exactly does that mean? And how can we guarantee the quality of that innovation? Working together and sharing knowledge will help us move ahead. By combining brainpower, knowledge and creativity and linking innovation projects nationwide, we can enhance the quality of innovation and its chances of success. But how can we ensure inclusion? What is needed are new positions, new work processes, new libraries and new buildings that can truly fulfil the tasks of a 21st-century library. The School wishes to play a part in that process by researching innovative forms of library work and making a concerted effort to set up innovative initiatives in times of great change. This is no longer about improving or modernising the current services, but about real change and innovation.

And there's more: the imminent and massive staff turnover rates at public libraries in the Netherlands are forcing us to think about the preferred make-up of a staff complement in libraries. It looks as if over 20% of current staff will be retiring in the period up to 2015, and if you take 2020 as a benchmark, that figure rises to almost 45%. This staff exodus is happening at a time when the public libraries themselves are faced with huge challenges and the Netherlands no longer offers a specific training programme for librarians in public libraries. The reason for this is because for decades the "baby boom" generation held all the jobs, resulting in the old training courses – most of which were set up in the 1970s and 80s – being discontinued or being incorporated into general training programmes for information specialists.

The "baby boomers" are, however, gradually being replaced by new colleagues; not librarians, but people trained at different higher professional and university education levels. They bring with them new approaches, knowledge and qualities that are of huge value to the innovation process. Are these new colleagues our future innovators? If that is the case, we will have to impart the identity and core values of public library work to them. How can we best achieve that? And how

can we ensure that, rather than becoming isolated from other employees, they are capable of inspiring them?

The answers to these questions can be found in the new LibrarySchool, a School with a pioneering new approach that blends learning, working and innovating. The LibrarySchool will train future innovators but is also a community where students and colleagues share knowledge and gain new insights and so take library innovation forward. By establishing a direct link with everyday library practice, the School contributes to enhancing the innovative capacity of the sector as a whole.

## New librarians required

A library in transition requires new librarians, colleagues who are committed and curious, and who work in an innovative fashion with content and expertise. Librarians who base their work on the classic ideals of the library, but who also recognise the need to respond to the demands of the future.

The new library seeks to enlist the economic, cultural and social participation of citizens in society, for which it needs librarians who can combine social awareness, creativity and cultural knowledge with management skills, knowledge of digital developments and the ability to enter into alliances. Within the force field of culture, society and technology, this new librarian is constantly on the lookout for the added value and excellence the library can offer, always acting on the basis of the core values and identity of library work.



The librarian of the future is able to innovate the discipline based on content. Not single-handedly, but together with employees, other libraries and social partners. This requires talent as well as a large measure of professionalism and expertise. The LibrarySchool offers a curriculum that responds to these challenges and does justice to the resulting learning questions.

## Focus

Real rejuvenation and change are needed to ensure that public libraries remain socially relevant. The LibrarySchool sees the public library as a valuable institution that contributes to the social, economic and cultural vitality of the community, an institution in which creative and well-informed people play an active part. If society changes, so too do the demands made on the knowledge and skills of its citizens. To move with the times, libraries will have to look for new answers without following fads or resorting to quick wins. However, we don't want to make do with a library that defines its relevance at an individual level only or that sees its users primarily as consumers. What is crucial for the School is the transition from the "passive" to the "active" values of the public library. Passive values are values such as good accessibility, searchability, traceability and immediate availability. It's becoming more and more

difficult, however, to survive on the basis of these values alone, let alone to innovate. To create added value that is truly socially relevant, we need to start working on active values: creating knowledge, making it meaningful, sifting through it and explaining it, inspiring, interpreting, co-creating and participating. A library collection is no longer an aim in itself; it is a means. The librarian transforms from a passive “arranger” into a (pro)creative “meaning giver” and a ‘liaison officer’. We will have to investigate what kind of transformation this requires, what innovative concepts of library work to align with this and what this requires in the way of people, infrastructure and buildings. This will then be translated concretely into approach, curriculum and research at the School.

## What’s special about the LibrarySchool?

The LibrarySchool integrates training, working and learning, making it more than just an education programme that could be delivered autonomously by any educational organisation. The curriculum is based on the principle of the learning organisation. The School not only wants to deliver well-trained and inspired librarians, but also to raise the quality of reflection and innovation in the sector.

To that end, the School has contacted the Netherlands Open University’s Centre for Learning, Sciences and Technology (CELSTEC) to discuss co-operation. CELSTEC specialises in learning methods for adults, more specifically in learning processes in a virtual environment. CELSTEC’s expertise is applied to the completion of a Library Learning Network, an online learning network for knowledge sharing and knowledge development supported by experts and coaches who further enhance the learning processes and actively encourage knowledge sharing between the participants. As a result, the School provides a learning environment that supports the initiation of innovations. Ideas, knowledge and insights are examined from various angles and shared so that new solutions and surprising insights surface. The participants are key “learning sources” for one another, inspirators and knowledge brokers. After all, given their various practical situations and their prior education, they bring their own knowledge and inspiration. All the learning experiences they have and the insights they gain are shared with their colleagues, for example by having their colleagues take part in seminars organised periodically by the School. During these seminars, joint reflection takes place, knowledge is shared, more context and depth is added. Students and colleagues are given the widest possible platform to create and share knowledge in an online learning network. Thanks to the support of this “working network”, the School also creates links between students and their colleagues, and between libraries with related organisational issues and learning goals. That way, a learning sector can develop in which staff at all levels are capable of linking learning and innovating.

## The School curriculum

The School is intended for employees who have completed higher professional or university education and who have an executive position in a public library. A wide range of preliminary educational programmes qualify, because it is precisely the students’ own knowledge and inspiration that makes it possible to approach themes and issues from different perspectives. In order to establish an immediate link with library practice, students will bring with them an innovative project from their own library.



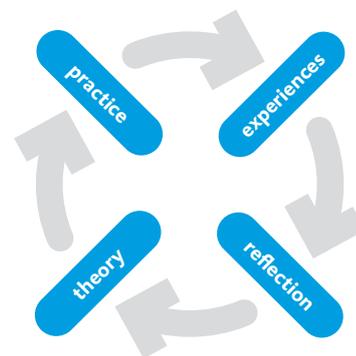
*The Academy of Athens was a place to reflect, to discover the workings of the world together and to gain new insights. The central figures are Plato and Aristotle. Plato is pointing upward, to the higher source of inspiration that is the world of ideas. Aristotle, on the other hand, points to the earth as the starting point of all natural sciences. This learning community, in which individuals were connected through common themes and issues, serves as a source of inspiration for the Library School.*

Key issues of the School are experiencing, reflecting on, transferring knowledge and experimenting. The educational programme comprises distinctive learning routes:

- a generic curriculum comprising subjects such as library sciences and the study of literature, and social and cultural orientation;
- the students’ own study assignments resulting from their individual innovation projects.

Course content is prepared, processed and improved on the School’s digital campus (the virtual learning network) and in the “FreeSpace”. Together, they form a permanent workshop and meeting place, the aim being to enhance inspiration and reflection on what has been learned and improve quality of this.

Originally, the term “free space” related to instruction in practical philosophy and the systematic reflection on the question of “how to live well”, based on the three classic disciplines of dialectic, rhetoric and grammar, which were called the “liberal arts”. These disciplines have been translated into library practice: in conversations, excursions and seminars, students study the essence of library work and explore their own role as professionals and innovators.



Exchange, reflection, learning and intensification are highlighted in five three-day blocks: “wisdom is created” with teachers, experts and colleagues, in the form of lessons and masterclasses, reflecting on what has been learned and what significance it has for future library work. A permanent feature of the FreeSpace is the public seminar, where participants and colleagues from interested libraries jointly reflect on what has been learned and discuss what relevance this has for the library of the future. New learning for the following two months is

devised from within that framework. The blocks in the FreeSpace are always structured in the same way:

- day 1**
- Review of and reflection on the subject matter of the last two months
  - Further in-depth study of the subject with a high-profile guest teacher
  - Preparations for the public seminar on the following day

- day 2**
- Masterclass by curator or external speaker
  - Presentation of results in a public seminar, intended for colleagues, experts and interested librarians
  - Excursion to a library or organisation that has an affinity with the subject

- day 3**
- Guest lecture on the upcoming course by an Open University lecturer
  - Preparation of new subject with the help of experts in the library sector
  - Finish

Each year, a renowned, inspiring guest is invited to become a “guest curator” for the entire year with a specific responsibility for the content and programming of the FreeSpace. The guest curator for the 2011/2012 course year is Bert Mulder, a lecturer in Information, Technology and Society at the Hague University of Applied Sciences (Haagse Hogeschool) and director of the esocietyinstituut. He works on vision development and strategy formation for the government and the health care sector, and is much in demand as a speaker in the Netherlands and abroad. Bert Mulder is known in library circles for his role on the advice committee for library innovation, which published the “Innovation with effect” report.

## Foundation year

Each student at the LibrarySchool starts with a foundation year that is structured as an introductory year for new staff and as a professionalisation programme for tenured staff. Courses are taken through regular OU channels, and interpreted in terms of their significance for library innovation through interactions, activities in the LibrarySchool learning network and the FreeSpace. As co-consultants, direct colleagues and supervisors are given the opportunity to play an active part by participating in the learning network and attending masterclasses. The foundation year can be followed separately as an “independent” learning programme, but what has been learned can, of course, be a part of a further study programme.

The emphasis during the foundation year is on the following subjects:

- *Library and society*: the public library’s core values and social task
- *Library and technology*: digital developments and the need to innovate
- *Library and culture*: the cultural context of the library, the value and significance of its collection
- *Library and organisation*: introduction in management and management competences

These themes are addressed through the choice of subjects. During the foundation year, all students follow the same three OU course modules, which are related to the theme. In addition, students attend multiple-day activities in the FreeSpace, during which various theme strands are combined and synthesised. Finally, in the individual learning programme,

students investigate what they have learned in terms of its significance for their own work by testing it against their day-to-day professional practice. To do this, students create their own qualification “masterpiece” and a “portfolio of transitions”, in which they reflect on what they have learned and what it means for their role as an innovator in their own organisation.

### inspiring

Knowledge of and working with the collection

library and culture

### creating

How can you add value to the collection together with users?

library and technology

### participating

The role of the library in a participative society

library and society

### organising

How are we going to design and implement new work processes?

library and organisation

The foundation year is intended for students (especially those who are embarking on a course of study after several years) to get used to (the discipline involved in) learning and studying. It is, after all, a preparatory year for those who wish to pursue a further study such as a Master’s or an MBA. There is an annual rhythm to the structure of the learning activities and the timetable of the LibrarySchool/foundation year, which is based on the following guiding principles:

- The year of study comprises five blocks of two months each.
- The first block is an introduction to each other, to (future) work and to studying at the Open University.
- In blocks two, three and four, students follow a course at the Open University through distance learning, which is related to the theme currently being addressed. The theme “library and society” is not offered as a separate subject, but as a continuous “common” thread in the FreeSpace, with guest speakers, discussions and practical case studies.
- The topic of the final and fifth block is to produce a “masterpiece”.
- The blocks, which last about two months each, are flanked by inspiring and thematic, three-day meetings, during which the courses are prepared, explained and fleshed out: the FreeSpace. Another permanent theme of the FreeSpace is library and society, and it also serves as the venue for the communicating new insights to colleagues and the library community.
- Students also work on the digital campus, the school’s online learning network. The first year concludes with the presentation of the students’ masterpiece, for which they receive a certificate.

The study load for the three subjects and for producing the masterpiece is about 120 hours per subject. Three days every two months for the “FreeSpace” are also required.

## Further study...

After having successfully completed the foundation year, students can choose from a range of options for further training. They can opt not to continue their studies and start innovating their own organisation, making use of the School's learning network. They can also decide to go on and do further training. Individual learning programmes depend on what prior education they have and what their ambitions are. In this way, students select their own route and can acquire courses through the regular Open University channels.



Translating into practice continues in the LibrarySchool's learning network and the FreeSpace. The exact structure of these programmes depends to a large extent on the individual's prior education, interests and ambitions. The following options are available as of the 2012/2013 academic year:

### • LibrarySchool/Master's

This study leads to an academic Master's degree. The home base is the Open University's School of Cultural Sciences (CW). This is an existing, regular Master's degree course during which students study innovation, social and digital developments and the permanent significance these have for public libraries. The study package – within the School's research focus – depends largely on a student's own specific interests and the research subject of their Master's thesis. On completion, the student is able to analyse library innovation and to develop solutions from a research and design perspective. Students are active members of and experts in the virtual campus's learning network.

**Study duration:** This depends largely on prior education; taking a university Bachelor's degree as a starting point, the study lasts 2 - 2,5 years.

**Target group:** Students wishing to study innovation in public libraries at an academic level. Entrance requirements include completing a foundation year and holding a university Bachelor's degree. Transfer programmes, offered parallel to the School's learning programme, are available to students who do not have the required Bachelor's degree.

### • LibrarySchool/MBA

Students can opt for a non-academic MBA course at the OU's School of Management. The entrance requirements for this course are different from those for an academic Master's degree. The course concludes with an MBA thesis. Having successfully completed this course, students can start, plan and implement changes in their organisation, on the basis of a specific vision. They are also active as members of the virtual campus's learning network and can coach colleagues and students.

**Study duration:** Completing a full MBA programme takes about two years.

**Target group:** This is same as the Master's degree, the assumption being that the MBA is more attractive for "hands on" people. Moreover, a higher professional education certificate (HBO) suffices for entry to an MBA course. The students on these courses are more practically minded; they will work to innovate public libraries from within a wider and more contextual framework.

## What will the School deliver?

The School is a network of people who want to learn and innovate, to which they will each contribute their knowledge and expertise. This approach will have the following deliverables:

- Highly trained and inspired librarians who will take on the role of innovator, who know what it is to permanently innovate and who can introduce the required knowledge and skills in their own library.
- A serious, scientific reflection on innovation and innovation projects in the public library sector, improving the quality and effectiveness of the projects.
- Interconnection of innovative projects, as a result of which the quality of innovation in the sector will improve as well.
- Last but not least: an appealing perspective for current and future librarians in that an attractive job is combined with a challenging learning environment.

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