



Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche  
Association of European Research Libraries

## LIBER DEFINITION OF RESEARCH LIBRARY: BACKGROUND PAPER

### 1. Background

The LIBER Executive Board has recently been discussing the question of how to define a research library in present times. This matter has been discussed by the Executive Board at its meetings in June 2016, October 2016 and February 2017. This paper sets out the background to these discussions, and the conclusions that have been reached by the Board. It is to be read in association with the paper in this Mailing which sets out an 'Endorsement Proposal' for institutions applying to join LIBER (*vide*: LIBER Definition of Research Library. 2. Endorsement Proposal).

### 2. LIBER: An Association of Research Libraries

LIBER has defined itself an organisation of European research libraries from its founding in 1971<sup>1</sup>. Types of membership, and major alterations (in red) to categories of membership over the period 1971 to 2016, are set out for information in Appendix 1.

LIBER's remit as an association of research libraries is to cover the whole of Europe, as defined by countries that are in membership or associate membership of the Council of Europe. LIBER's most recent Statutes (2009) state (Art.4): 'Participants can be research libraries in countries that are Members or Associate Members of the Council of Europe'.

LIBER has never defined what constitutes a research library. Although research library organisations have definitions or criteria by which they admit members, rather few seem to publish them: exceptions are the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) (<http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/membership-principles-2013revision-final.pdf>)<sup>2</sup>; and the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) (<http://www.carl-abrc.ca/about-carl/members/membership-requirements/>)<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. LIBER: University Libraries

In the past, university libraries applying to join LIBER were normally the libraries of research-intensive universities with major research collections. Libraries of primarily teaching universities did not generally regard themselves as research libraries and did not apply to join LIBER.

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<sup>1</sup> The original purpose in 1969 was to establish an association 'which might be the counterpart of the American Association of Research Libraries'.

<sup>2</sup> The ARL Principles of Membership are set out in full in Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> CARL definition: 'member research libraries exhibit the following characteristics; a member library has extensive collections and services of sufficient breadth to contribute to the Canadian distributed national research collection; a member library's institution is committed to graduate study and research, having established PhD programs, normally in the arts, social sciences and sciences; a member library's institution has annual revenue from sponsored research normally equal to or greater than 15% of the institution's general operating budget; and there is a clear and sustained institutional commitment to and support of a member library'.

In more recent times, the Higher Education sector in a number of European countries has been subject to substantial change. For example, the Netherlands has a binary system of higher education, which means there are two types of programmes: 'research-oriented education, traditionally offered by Research Universities, and applied sciences, traditionally offered by Hogescholen, or Universities of Applied Sciences. The situation in Finland is similar. Of the 'new universities' created from former polytechnics and central institutions in the UK in the early 1990s, some have advanced their research focus and others have retained their original ethos of focusing on teaching for professional practice.

LIBER is now receiving applications to join from libraries of universities of applied sciences. The universities which these libraries serve offer a spectrum of taught postgraduate programmes; taught postgraduate programmes with a research element; and research degree programmes. There may be a number of factors contributing to this change. There is a general orientation in the direction of research in universities; and LIBER's own agenda has moved from more traditional library activities (e.g. collections, preservation) to more current issues, e.g. open science and research data management, thus making a connection with LIBER more attractive to the libraries of the new/newer universities.

This has raised the question of how LIBER should treat applications to join LIBER from the libraries of these new universities.

#### **4. LANDSCAPE: EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES**

LIBER is open to research libraries within the area of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe comprises 47 member states, of which 28 are members of the European Union.

EU statistics state that there are approximately 3,300 higher education establishments in the EU, and approximately 4,000 in Europe as a whole (Euro-Lex). In tertiary education, EU countries in the main issue Bachelors, (taught and research) Masters and Doctorates.

The situation pertaining to universities and their libraries across Europe is diverse with different arrangements being followed in different countries, and it is often difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the positions in individual countries. Under the Bologna Process, the 48 states comprising the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are working towards greater compatibility in their higher education systems. Basically, the main categories of universities in Europe are:

##### 1.1. Research Universities

1.2. Vocational Universities (including professional universities, applied technological universities, colleges of higher vocational studies and universities of applied sciences). These are difficult to compare since they grant academic degrees at Bachelor, Master and sometimes PhD level.

Some countries make a clear distinction between the two categories: others do not. For example, the Netherlands divides its universities into research universities and universities of applied sciences. The latter do not grant doctorates. In Germany, tertiary educational institutions specialize in engineering, technology and business, and do not award PhDs but they can run doctoral programmes where the degree of PhD is awarded by a research university partner (e.g. in Bavaria). In Norway, Sweden and Denmark, university colleges are the equivalent of universities of applied sciences: they offer less variety in academic disciplines and can only award doctoral degrees in specific subjects, differing from universities which are entitled to offer them in any field.

The situation of universities in Europe has become more complex over the last twenty-five years, with the creation of new universities, mergers of universities, and an increase in

partnerships among institutions of higher education on the creation and development of postgraduate courses and on the awarding of higher degrees.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBER OF EXTENDING THE DEFINITION OF RESEARCH LIBRARY**

In considering this matter, the LIBER Executive Board has carefully assessed the implications for LIBER of extending the definition of research library, in order to maintain the research aspect of LIBER's core function; retain the intimate LIBER environment that LIBER libraries have valued up to the present; maintain the scale of LIBER Annual Conferences in line with the wishes of LIBER Participants (the feedback in the questionnaire from the 2016 Annual Conference indicated that LIBER Libraries would like the Annual Conference to comprise 500 to 600 delegates); secure an effective base for future LIBER strategy and direction.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

Over the last twenty-five years in Europe, there has been a significant increase in the number of existing educational institutions that have formally achieved university status. They come under the umbrella designation of vocational universities and include professional universities, applied technological universities, colleges of higher vocational studies and universities of applied sciences. It is also true that the distinction between academic universities and universities of applied sciences, university colleges, etc., is now less clear-cut than earlier, and there are a number of new models (e.g. universities of applied sciences co-operating with research universities on awarding degrees). The merging of the former distinction appears to be most advanced in the Nordic countries.

The LIBER Executive Board has taken the view that while taking account of this movement and responding to it, it is nevertheless important that the focus, value and mission of LIBER as an association of research libraries is preserved. In discussion, the Executive Board agreed at its February 2017 meeting that libraries applying to join LIBER should henceforth be asked to agree to endorse and support LIBER's mission and to adhere to LIBER's values. The 'Endorsement Proposal' is set out in a separate paper in this Mailing (*vide*: LIBER Definition of Research Library. 2. Endorsement Proposal). It was agreed by the Executive Board that the proposal to include the 'Endorsement Proposal' in the LIBER application, and the text of the proposed 'Endorsement Proposal' should be presented to LIBER Participants in the March and May 2017 Mailings, and should be discussed at the Meeting of Participants in July 2017.

Kristiina Hormia-Poutanen  
President

Ann Matheson  
Secretary-General

March 2017

## **APPENDIX 1: STATUTES OF THE LIBER ASSOCIATION**

### **1971 STATUTES (amended 1972 and 1989)**

#### *Article 1*

In accordance with this Constitution and with the Swiss Civil Code (Art 60 *et seq.*), an international association called the "Association of European Research Libraries" (hereinafter referred to as LIBER – Ligue des Bibliothèques européennes de recherche –) is hereby established for an indefinite period, having its set at the domicile of its Chairman.

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#### *Aim and character of the Association*

#### *Article 2*

The aim of LIBER is to establish a close collaboration between the general research libraries of Europe, and national and university libraries in particular. Its intention is to help in finding practical ways of improving the quality of the services these libraries provide. For the time being, libraries in the following countries may become members: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, the Holy See, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

#### *Amendment 1989:*

The aim of LIBER is to establish close collaboration between the research libraries in Europe. Its intention is to bring together professional knowledge and experience of European librarians in finding practical ways of improving the quality of the services which their libraries provide. It seeks to cooperate with other bodies concerned with research libraries, especially with international governmental and non-governmental organisations.

#### *Article 4*

Membership shall be granted by the decision of the Executive Board to European research libraries within the meaning of Article 2 which undertake to abide by this constitution and hence to take out annual subscriptions to LIBER publications. Appeals may be made to the General Assembly against any decision by the Executive Board concerning granting of membership.

#### *Amendment 1989:*

Membership shall be granted by the decision of the Executive Board. The following kinds of membership can be granted:

- (i) Institutional
- (ii) Associative
- (iii) Individual
- (iv) Group
- (v) Honorary

(i) Institutional membership is open to research libraries in Europe. Research libraries, for this purpose, are defined as:

- (1) National libraries
- (2) University libraries
- (3) Libraries of institutes conducting teaching or research on a post-graduate level

#### (4) Public libraries with major research collections

(ii) Associate membership is open to library associations, consortia, and commercial organisations, supplying services to research libraries.

(iii) Individual membership is open to professional librarians who work or have worked in research libraries.

(iv) Group membership: In addition to appointing working groups the Executive Board can establish specialist groups. Although membership of such groups is not confined to members of LIBER, their statutes, financial and other organisational arrangements and their officers must be approved by the Executive Board. The fees for such specialist groups shall be set by the officers of the groups themselves. Each working and specialist group is obliged to report to the Executive Board and to the Annual General Assembly.

(v) Honorary membership can be granted by special resolution of the Executive Board with the approval of the General Assembly.

### **1994 STATUTES (amended 1998, 2003 and 2006)**

#### CHAPTER 1

##### Article 1

1.1 In accordance with the Swiss Civil Code (Art.60 et seq), an international association called the "Association of European Research Libraries" (hereinafter referred to as LIBER - Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche) was established in 1971 for an indefinite period, having its seat at the domicile of its chairman.

1.2 These Statutes amend the original Statutes of 1971, and subsequent revisions.

#### CHAPTER 2 – AIM AND MISSION OF THE ASSOCIATION

##### Article 2

2.1 LIBER is a non-governmental association of the research libraries of Europe, formed under the auspices of the Council of Europe and having the status of a consultative body with that Council.

2.2 LIBER represents and promotes the interests of research libraries of Europe. The general aim of LIBER is to assist research libraries in Europe to become a functional network across national boundaries in order to ensure the preservation of the European cultural heritage, to improve access to collections in European research libraries and to provide more efficient information services in Europe.

#### CHAPTER 3 - MEMBERSHIP

##### Article 4 – Categories of Membership

4.1 Membership shall be granted by the decision of the Executive Board.

4.2 The following kinds of membership can be granted:  
Institutional, Associate, Individual and Honorary

4.3 (i) *Institutional membership* is open to research libraries in countries that are Members or Associate Members of the Council of Europe and which, for this purpose, are defined as:

(1) National libraries

(2) University libraries

(3) Libraries of institutions conducting teaching or research at a post-graduate level

#### (4) Public libraries with major research collections

The Executive Board may also grant institutional membership by special resolution to such other non-commercial organisations or institutions which are concerned with special fields of interest to research libraries.

(ii) *Associate membership* is open to library organisations, consortia and commercial organisations, supplying services to research libraries.

(iii) *Individual membership* is open to professional librarians who work or who have worked in research libraries.

(iv) *Honorary membership* can be granted by special resolution of the Executive Board with the approval of the General Assembly.

## 2007 STATUTES

### CHAPTER 1

#### Article 1

1.1 In accordance with the Swiss Civil Code (Art.60 et seq), an international association called the "Association of European Research Libraries" (hereinafter referred to as LIBER - Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche) was established in 1971 for an indefinite period, having its seat at the domicile of its Secretariat.

1.2 These Statutes amend the original Statutes of 1971, and subsequent revisions.

### CHAPTER 2 – AIM AND MISSION OF THE ASSOCIATION

#### Article 2

2.1 LIBER is a non-governmental association of the research libraries of Europe, formed under the auspices of the Council of Europe and having the status of a consultative body with that Council.

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### CHAPTER 3 – MEMBERSHIP

#### Article 4 – Categories of Membership

4.1 Membership shall be granted by the decision of the Executive Board.

4.2 LIBER has the following categories of member:

Institutional, Associate, Individual and Honorary

4.3 (i) Institution: research libraries in countries that are Members or Associate Members of the Council of Europe and which, for this purpose, are defined as:

(1) National libraries

(2) University libraries

(3) Libraries of institutions conducting teaching or research at a post-graduate level

(4) Public libraries with major research collections

(5) National archives

(ii) Organisation: library organisations in countries that are Members or Associate Members of the Council of Europe consisting of national libraries and/or the libraries of institutions of higher education granting awards up to and including PhD level. In countries where no organisation of research libraries exists, membership in the Organisation category may be obtained by a more general library organisation. Organisations consisting principally of personal members (e.g. associations of librarians) are not normally eligible unless there is no other library organisation in the country.

(iii) Associate: companies or consortia supplying services to research libraries, and library organisations in countries that are not Members or Associate

Members of the Council of Europe.

(iv) Individual: professional librarians who work or have worked in research libraries.

(v) Honorary membership can be granted by special resolution of the Executive Board with the approval of the General Assembly.

## **LIBER FOUNDATION (*STICHTING*), 12 JANUARY 2009 STATUTES**

### Participants

#### Article 4.

1. The Foundation has Participants. Participants can be research libraries in countries that are Members or Associate Members of the Council of Europe, defined as: national libraries, university libraries, libraries of institutions conducting teaching or research at a post-graduate level, public libraries with major research collections and national archives. Participants can also be library organisations. The Executive Board may by way of exception grant the status of Participant to other (legal) persons. The conditions for participation as well as possible Institution categories and Organisation categories of Participants will be specified in the Rules and Regulations.

## **RULES AND REGULATIONS, 2009**

### **Article 2 – Participants**

2.1 The Participants of LIBER play a decisive role in appointing its Executive Board and, through continuous communication and the Meeting of Participants, an important part in the policy-making of LIBER.

2.2 LIBER has the following categories of Participants:

2.2.1 *Institutional* – Research libraries in Europe, defined as National libraries, University libraries, Libraries of institutions conducting teaching or research at a post-graduate level, Public libraries with major research collections, and National archives.

2.2.2 *Organisational* – Library organisations in Europe consisting of national libraries and/or the libraries of institutions of higher education granting awards up to and including PhD level. In countries where no organisation of research libraries exists, participation in the Organisation category can be obtained by a more general library organisation, working for professional purposes.

2.2.3 *Associate* – Companies or consortia supplying services to research libraries and non-European library organisations.

2.2.4 *Individual* – Professional librarians who work or have worked in research libraries.

The Executive Board can grant Honorary status to individuals with the approval of the Meeting of Participants.

## APPENDIX 2

### **Principles of Membership in the Association of Research Libraries (latest issue, 2013)**

<http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/membership-principles-2013revision-final.pdf>

The mission of the Association of Research Libraries is to “influence the changing environment of scholarly communication and the public policies that affect research libraries and the diverse communities they serve. ARL pursues this mission by advancing the goals of its member research libraries, providing leadership in public and information policy to the scholarly and higher education communities, fostering the exchange of ideas and expertise, facilitating the emergence of new roles for research libraries, and shaping a future environment that leverages its interests with those of allied organizations.” ARL is a not-for-profit membership organization comprising the libraries of North American research institutions and operates as a forum for the exchange of ideas and as an agent for collective action.

Membership in ARL is by invitation and based on single institutions, not systems. Once achieved, membership in the Association is presumed to be continuing.

The following principles are used in considering extending invitations for ARL membership.

1. The members of ARL are research libraries distinguished by the breadth and quality of their collections and services. Each member makes distinctive contributions to the aggregation of research resources and services in North America and, through individual and cooperative efforts, strives to preserve for the future the record of knowledge represented by these collections.
2. Membership is based on the research nature of the library and the parent institution’s aspirations and achievements as a research institution. The parent institution’s accomplishments are established by the classification Research Universities (high or very high) as reflected by the current Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education™ and published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, membership in the Association of American Universities, or by comparable affiliations or documentation.
3. ARL members individually contribute to the broader research library community and are distinguished by common characteristics including:
  - a. Distinctive research-oriented collections and resources of national or international significance in a variety of media that result in shared or collective collections that support global research and core and specialized services to the scholarly community of faculty, students, and visiting scholars;
  - b. Leadership and participation in national and/or international library-related



programs that advance the role of libraries in the scholarly information and research environment;

c. Creation of tools and services that facilitate discovery of collections and holdings;

d. Preservation and archiving of research resources to ensure their availability for future scholars;

e. Effective development and innovative use of technology to extend the ability to deliver library and research-support services;

f. Active engagement and involvement of the library in support of academic planning and research programs of the institution (e.g., development of new academic programs, participation in teaching, research grants or projects, level of advancement support, service on institutional committees, involvement in governance, etc.);

g. Appropriate institutional infrastructure, both physical and digital, that support the mission, roles, and collections of the library within the institutional framework.

h. Leadership and external contributions of the staff to the profession;

i. Collaborations and partnerships with other libraries, consortia, or cultural institutions to leverage cost-effective activities or extend the reach of existing resources and services.

*Principles approved February 8, 2001 by the ARL Board. Revision approved September 23, 2013 by the ARL Board and affirmed by the ARL membership on October 10, 2013.*

