

## THE NATIONAL LIBRARY of Finland Bulletin 2011

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EDITORIAL

### The National Library of Finland earns its evaluation



The National Library of Finland prepared for its international evaluation with great expectations and respectful anticipation for nearly two years. The final year was a busy and hectic time for the secretariat, which generated an impressive 500 pages of English-language text for the evaluation group. This project was preceded by a self-evaluation, requiring the participation of every member of the National Library community.



Photo by Kari Timonen

It is perhaps its labour-intensive nature that makes international evaluations such a rarity in other national libraries, with the exception of the largest institutions. It is clear that just undergoing the evaluation will be an inspiring example to other libraries. The first presentation of the evaluation process will be this autumn at the Conference of European National Librarians.

The most important result of the evaluation has been improved self-understanding for the National Library. The evaluation process alone was incredibly valuable, as it proved that the National Library wished to gain an objective view of its performance.

How did we ultimately benefit from the evaluation? We had great, perhaps excessive, expectations for this project. We tried to remind ourselves in advance that the evaluation group would not solve all our problems, nor would it act as an international court of justice which would decree all correct solutions for the past, present and future. The results of even the finest evaluation group are professional reflections and recommendations. We must find the solutions ourselves; the evaluation group cannot be held responsible for them.

I view [the recommendations of the international evaluation for the National Library of Finland](#) as analytical comments which support our operations.

The results of the evaluation were also certainly expected. We received notification well ahead of time that the evaluation group would not recommend that the National Library break away from the University of Helsinki. Many considered this to be a key issue, but the National Library staff were more reserved.

#### Permanent funding needed

The permanent operations of the National Library, such as digitisation, require permanent, significant funding. Our endurance is often tested to the very limit as we are made to compromise between different funding types and their periods. Stress among personnel can be traced to this: will my contract be extended, will digitisation and the digital library continue to receive funding?

Integrating the National Repository Library with the National Library must not become a deal breaker. We must consider the services we offer the public and the functionality of the library network. Personally, I see this as an opportunity to generate new services. Our Repository Library is highly esteemed abroad, and I was recently asked for details of our system.

#### Two proposals together supporting the National Library

At the same time another working group of the Ministry of Education and Culture integrates and streamlines the related official functions of the ministry. I believe it can be safely said that the official duties in this field have been scattered, and to a degree, the field has been troubled by the lack of cooperation. The National Digital Library project and its challenges, undertaken jointly by libraries, archives and museums, place us all in a new situation. The proposals of this working group included a suggestion that the National Library be separated from the University of Helsinki, and that the leadership of all memory institutions be integrated.

I consider these proposals to be constructive, and do not see a major conflict between them and the evaluation of the National Library. I feel we can study both reports side by side, take the best proposals and compare them with each other. The Board of the National Library is receptive to both proposals, and has left both avenues open. As our sole goal is the promotion of the National Library's operations, we may prepare for both options and assume that they can provide substantial new support and dynamism to our work.

Only one thing is certain: the responsibilities and results of the National Library are of such a high international standard that they have already been recognised in the evaluation, and we now have

more good proposals than we need. This evokes a positive thought: something is really happening.

This article references the following publications:

[International Evaluation of the National Library of Finland. Report of the evaluation panel. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2011:14](#)

[Memorandum of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2011:6](#)

*Photo by Veikko Somerpuro*

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