REFERENCE POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

BY

Umar Ibrahim, Ph.D (A.B.U. /.aria)
Department of Library and Information Science,
A. B. U. Zaria

Being a paper presented during the Annual Conference and AGM of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Kaduna State chapter, held at the conference hall of the Faculty of Education, A. B.U. Zaria on the 9th -10th December, 2003

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the weed and importance of Reference and Information policy statements as means of providing effective, efficient and relevant Library and Information services. The paper presents a sample reference and information.policy statement for adoption by Nigerian University Libraries and other Libraries.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many organizations whether profit or non-profits are today struggling to create the needed competencies and markets, and to position themselves to win in the market place. The issue now for organizations is not just in surviving the harsh socio-political and economical conditions of the day but also becoming relevant, indispensable and different. This urge has therefore propelled many organizations to adopt different corporate strategies. It is often very interesting to hear such strategies as re-engineering, re-structuring and re-positioning.

However, it is evidently clear that whatever strategy organizations are adopting, the starting point for all the strategies is to create good vision and mission statements. Out of these, meaningful goals and objectives are set out, from which effective and efficient policies are drawn and implemented

Libraries and Information centers as customer-focus organizations develop services to meet their needs and also market to nonusers who are potential customers. Therefore, Libraries and Information are increasingly demanded to provide better services, especially to justify the funds they receive and to face the challenges coming from other Information based providers, such as Internet Cafe.

In order to effectively and efficiently meet up with the above challenges, Libraries and Information centers need to adopt appropriate and proactive corporate strategy. It is rather

unfortunate that although other non-profit organizations have since adopted different strategies that will reposition them in this millennium, Libraries and Information centers are yet to. This is evident in a study conducted by Ibrahim (2001). The study revealed that most Libraries, especially University Libraries-the focus of the study lack even departmental written policies, such as reference policy, collection development policy, and e.t.c not to talk of the overall Library Vision, Mission and policy statements.

It is a fact that the lack of the above has no doubt hindered the provision of effective and efficient services in Libraries. The types of services to be provided are not well specified, and the staff job not well defined. The services provided are in most cases subject to the staff's initiatives, willingness, capacity and capability.

It is because of the above-unwanted situation that this paper set out to practically provide sets of reference and information policies for adoption and implementation by Nigerian University Libraries. Reference and Information service is regarded as the core of all the services offered in a Library set up. Therefore, any attempt to improve the overall Library service provision through good policies is directly promoting the image of the Library and hence providing relevant services that can be measured.

In his "Art of policy-making", Ovuorie (1986) defines a policy as a guide for making administrative decisions. It is the organization's point of view and established way of making business or providing service and directing managerial action. As far back as 1967, McFarland defined policy as a statement of action that commits management to a definite plan or course of action. From these two authoritative definitions it can be concluded that a policy is essentially, an internal administrative law governing executive actions within the organization.

In demonstrating the functions of policy statements, Osaze (1991:19) cited Ovuorie's (1986) five major reasons why policies are formulated. These he stated as follows:

1. It clarifies management viewpoints and philosophies within designated areas of operation;
2. It provides a pattern within which delegation of authority may be expedited and controlled
3. It establishes latitudes and guides within which authorized persons may make administrative decisions and effect action
4. It anticipates future conditions and situations and resolves how they will be dealt with.
5. It fosters a feeling of confidence in making administrative decisions; it expedites decisions, encourages executive self-reliance, growth, development and improvement of executive performance

From the above mentioned reasons why policies are formulated, McFarland (1967:230) present the following advantages of written policy statements.

1 They are available to all in the same form
2 They can be referred to, so that anyone who wishes can check the policy
3 They prevent misunderstanding through use of a particular set of words
4 They indicate a basic honesty and integrity of the organization's intentions
5 They can be readily disseminated to all who are affected by them
6 They can be taught to new employees easily

7 The force managers to think more sharply about the policy as it is being written, thus helping to achieve further clarity

8 They generate confidence of all persons in management and in the fact that everyone will be treated substantially the same under given conditions

Therefore, policy statements are very important to the growth and development of Organisations. This is because, as noted by Robson (1997:20), they provide a way to judge the appropriateness of all potential activities the Organisation might engage in. Similarly, Moore (1987:20-45) observes that without an explicit policy statements that contain the philosophy, mission and goals of reference and information services, the reference section risks encountering either of the two sources of operational problems. These are (i) the ineffective use of resources or (ii) the inefficient use of resources. Each of the problems, as demonstrated by Sjolander and Sjolander (1995:60) is a serious risk to the organization.

In emphasizing the need for written Reference policy statement that specified everything. Whitson (1995:105) summed it up when he notes that whatever they do Libraries can no longer effectively justify any particular pattern of reference and information service without being able to describe more clearly the clientele they are serving, the information needs they are addressing and the reference resources and staff they need in order to do so.

The propose policy statement presented here tried to indicate the philosophy, goals, type of services, e.t.c to be provided. The policy statements also provide key measurement and key ratios that summarizes the expected benefits the reference and information service provision is suppose to yield. And the success or otherwise of the reference division can also be judged from the policy statements.

A SAMPLE POLICY STATEMENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For all intent and purposes, Reference Department is expected to provide accessible, effective and efficient reference and information services through relevant, current and adequate reference collection, delivered by well trained and highly motivated reference staff.

1.1 THE OBJECTIVE OF THE POLICY

The objectives should be stated in such a way that it will reflect the overall objectives of the Library. The objective of the policy should center on the need to:

(a) Provide adequate reference and information resources that will encourage the advancement of learning and the pursuit of knowledge.

(b) Provide adequate reference and information resources that will support teaching and research in the University.

(c) Provide adequate and in-depth reference and information services to readers.

(d) Provide orientations and instructions on how to use the library and reference and information resources.

(e) Periodically evaluate the reference collection, reference and information services and the performance of the reference staff.

1.2 CONTENTS OF THE POLICY

1.2.1 THE CLIENTELES TO BE SERVED

The Reference Department of the Nigerian University libraries should serve the following categories of users:

(a) Undergraduate students

(b) Postgraduate Students

(c) Academic Staff

(d) Non- academic Staff

(e) Other categories of readers that may request for reference and information services.

1.2.2 THE REFERENCE COLLECTION

The Reference collection should consist of adequate, current and Relevant Reference and Information resources such as Encyclopedias, Abstracts, Information databases, CD ROM databases, e.t.c

1.2.3 THE REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED

The Reference and information services to be provided in the Reference Department should include:

(a) Instruction and Orientation Services

(b) Information Services, such as providing answers to various inquiries, providing CAS and SDI Services.

(c) Bibliographic Services, such as Indexes, Abstracts and compilation of both general and subject Bibliographies.

1.2.3 REFERENCE STAFF

The Reference Department should be staffed by well trained, qualified and highly motivated professional and paraprofessional staff. ~~For the schedule duties of each category of Reference staff (see Appendix B)~~

1.2.4 FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

For effective and efficient provision of Reference and information services, the Reference Department should be equipped with Information and Communication Technology facilities such as Computers, Telephone, Internet, Intranet, CD ROM databases, Information databases, and e.t.c.

1.2.5 FUNDING

Reference and information service provisions, especially Indexing and Abstracting services Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) are capital intensive, hence need adequate funds. Therefore, certain percentage, like 10%, of the Library recurrent budget should be expanded in the provision of current and relevant Reference and Information resources, such as Internet services, CD ROM databases, and e.t.c

1.2.6 EVALUATION AND CONTROL OF SERVICE QUALITY

To ensure continuity and efficiency of Reference and information services there is the need to continuously evaluate the Reference Department, especially in the following areas:

(a) Reference collection
(b) Reference and information service provision
(c) Reference staff performance.

2.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper highlights what reference and information policy statement is, its importance and the need for all Libraries in general and academic libraries in particular to formulate and adopt good policy statement. The paper further provides a sample policy statement that was carefully drawn for Libraries to adopt. The paper concludes that adoption of this drawn policy statements would no doubt go a long way in providing effective, efficient and relevant reference and information service.

REFERENCES

Ibrahim, U (2001) Reference and Information Inquiries, Wait-time and Staff patterns in the Reference Divisions of Nigerian University Libraries. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Zaria. Dept of Library and Information Science, A.B.U

MacFarland, D. E (1967) Policy Administration. In. Gross, A and Gross, W (eds) Business Policy. New York. Ronald press

Moore, N (1987) How to do Research. London. Library Association Publishing

Osaze, E. B (1991) Nigerian Corporate Policy and Strategic Management: Text and Cases. 2nd ed. Lagos Centre for Management Development

Ovuorie, J. M (1986) "The Art of Policy Making" Business Times October 13

Robson, W (1997) Strategic Management and Information System: An Integrated approach. London. Financial Times Management

Sjolander, E and Sjolander, R (1995) "A Strategic Analysis of the delivery of service in two Reference department" College & Research Libraries 56 (1)

Whitson, W. L (1995) "Differentiated Service: A new reference model" Journal of Academic Librarianship 21 (2)