

## Altruism as the founding pillar for open monograph publishing in the Global South

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### Abstract:

*The primary purpose of publishing research output is for it to be read by the widest possible audience. Unfortunately, cost has become a major barrier to access limiting readership to only those who can afford to pay. Open access is viewed as the process to overcome the cost barrier to the end user. One of the founding pillars of open access is altruism. However, open access has been marketed to researchers as a means of growing their profile through showcasing their work. Essentially, the pragmatic purpose has taken precedence over the altruistic and social justice underpinnings of open access.*

*The open access movement, within the African context, is challenged by a myriad of difficulties ranging from exorbitant cost of bandwidth to extremely poor electricity infrastructure. Compounding these difficulties is the poor financing of academic libraries to the extent that many academic libraries have not bought any books for a number of years; and subscriptions to journals are extremely low. In essence, researchers in Africa and the community at large have very little access to scholarly content. A further challenge is that in recent years there has been a significant drive for access to local (decolonised) content to support the demand for a decolonised higher education.*

*It is against the afore mentioned challenges that the University of Cape Town Libraries developed its strategic plan to take on the role of 'library as publisher'. At the core of this strategic plan is the altruistic principle which is in line with the University's social responsiveness agenda. The books published are done via diamond open access and addresses as far as it possibly can, African challenges such as bandwidth, electricity and costs.*

**Keywords:** open access, Open Monograph Press (OMP), open monograph publishing, library as publisher

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### Introduction

There is very little disagreement with the assertion that researchers publish their scholarly output so that it can be read by the widest possible audience. There are a number of hypotheses forwarded for this assertion, some of which include, firstly, to share the research so that it can be built upon, secondly, for the sake of egoism on the part of the researcher, thirdly, because it may be a contractual obligation to the funder and fourthly, to keep the citizenry of the world informed. As much as egoism is at the opposite end of altruism, the openness movement is

driven by the purpose of making research more visible, more widely accessible, and therefore more widely seen, read and used. With regard to the issue of egoism, the traditional rules of citation still apply for the academic usage of research and open-access articles have been positively correlated with high citation rates.

Open access (OA) advocates tend to shy away from acknowledging that open access is often marketed as a mechanism to increase visibility and concomitant citations and downloads. Such advocates unintentionally fuel the egoism element of open access. Be that as it may, this paper focuses on the altruistic elements of openness. It focuses on the moral argument that publicly funded resources should be publicly available, with no particular criteria of discrimination. OA enables information resources to be shared with the wider public, helping to create a knowledge society composed of well-informed citizens (Koutras 2016).

OA is underpinned by a philosophical tenet and used as a practical tool to redress imbalances arising out of adverse socio-economic conditions. This assertion is corroborated by Chan, Gray and Kahn (n.d.), while addressing the altruistic component, who point out that “it is important to note at the start that there is a crucial philosophical concept at the heart of the OA movement”. The notion that knowledge is a “public good”. The increased accessibility has the positive effect of increasing equity and bringing about social justice.

There are two streams to OA but they are not mutually exclusive. The first is the publication of research in scholarly journals and the second is the publication of monographs/textbooks. The focus in this paper is on the latter, that is, the publication of monographs and open textbooks. The University of Cape Town (UCT) does make a distinction between open monographs and open textbooks. They view open monographs as material written primarily for a community of scholars, be it students, peers of the authors or any other persons. Open monographs may be used as required or supplementary reading in the teaching process. Open textbooks, on the other hand, are materials that are linked directly to the curriculum and are published to support the learning taking place in the lecture halls.

As indicated, the focus of this paper is on the publication of monographs within an altruistic paradigm. The ‘altruistic coin’ has on the one side the willingness of the authors to share their scholarly work without explicit compensation, that is, financial remuneration or citation impact. On the other side of the coin is the wide distribution of free scholarly content. There are a growing number of libraries that are mapping their research support services against the research life cycle and the distribution of research is part of that life cycle: libraries have taken on the responsibility of delivering a publishing service. The collaboration between the authors and the libraries, within the altruistic paradigm, has resulted in the offering of a diamond OA service. Essentially, there is no cost to the author (the author is already being paid a salary for the services rendered to the academic institution and that would include the authoring of the monograph) and there is no cost to the end user as the library publishes the monograph as part of its new suite of services.

### **Monographs transition to open**

The large-scale commodification of knowledge has resulted in scholarly communication being radically influenced by market-oriented values. To offset this radical shift, OA offers options that negates finance as one of the market forces. While journals have led the way in OA publishing, there have been considerable developments recently in the area of OA monographs and textbooks. However, as indicated by Ferwerda (2014), book publishers have on the whole been slow to explore a transition to OA models. This transition must be viewed against the

backdrop of the assertion made by Crossick (2015: 10) that the monograph world is “still dominated by expensive printed books, conventionally seen by many as an essential marker for demonstrating an author’s research capacity, quality and achievements”. Despite the assertion about the slow transition, it must be acknowledged that in the last few years there has been an increase in the number of OA monographs published.

Crossick (2015) is one of many authors who provide reasonable justification for this slow growth. The publication of a monograph is thought to be more complicated than that of a journal article: hence the transition into the open arena is slower. Furthermore, the fact that “monographs in a significant number of disciplines depend on reproducing, analysing and building upon existing material, such as images and musical quotations, that is covered by copyright means that the challenges to open-access publishing have for some seemed insurmountable” (Crossick 2015: 10). This move to OA has been partly motivated by the declining position of the conventional monograph. The rising cost of books compounded by the reduction in library budgets have undermined the traditional system of distribution through libraries and the availability of publication outlets for scholars. With regard to open textbooks, SPARC (2017) research shows that the price of textbooks has skyrocketed more than three times the rate of inflation for decades. Students face steep price tags resulting in the use of outdated books. Donaldson and Nelson (2012) argue that there is no doubt that cost effective textbooks will make a significant difference to the cost of higher education.

OASIS (2011) reports that some university presses are experimenting with OA for their monographs. The stimulus for this experimentation is an attempt to break down price barriers for scholarly monographs. Further, the publication of monographs by university presses goes back to aligning the press to the core values of the academy (OASIS 2011).

Within the African context, accessibility to open textbooks is a significant issue as a significant pillar in education (that is, access to textbooks) is missing. This is corroborated by the threat that the development of intellectual capital through higher education being at risk because of escalating costs, and the cost of textbooks is a major contributor to this threat. The US government has invested resources to eliminate this threat; in Africa this would have to be through academic libraries delivering a diamond open access publishing service.

The open access textbook project run by the Florida Virtual Campus on behalf of the United States Department of Education investigated the development of an open textbook model to reduce the cost of textbook for students and to increase recognition of academics for open access publishing as a scholarly activity. The open textbook model is intended to be sufficiently adaptable to embrace new opportunities and meet new challenges. The push is for dynamic open access textbooks that contain links to embedded resources such as original source documents, maps simulations, videos, games, podcasts, animations, and relevant websites. In many cases, there is a low cost, print-on-demand option (Donaldson and Nelson 2012).

If these dynamic textbooks are available to the international audience, it would be invaluable for the African continent given that research facilities such as laboratories and associated equipment are scarce/non-existent. An audio-visual clip can provide simulated research environments that can only add to the value of the research process.

Donaldson and Nelson (2012) point out that part of the appeal for open content is that it responds to both the rising costs of traditionally published resources and the lack of educational resources. It is a cost-effective alternative to textbooks and other materials.

### **Pragmatism versus altruism**

Chan, Gray and Kahn (n.d.) posit that the citation models force researchers to fight for page-space in handful of core journals – leading to the consolidation of a culture of “publish or perish”. These journals are not only expensive to access, but they have a narrow mandate, and tend to publish work only from a small selection of global research. As indicated by Swan, Willmers and King (2014), there is empirical evidence that citations rise when authors make their research open. However, the fact that research produced in the global south are not generally published in ‘high’ impact journals has led to a situation where research from the global south is overlooked, creating a scenario of ‘scientific silence’ which misrepresents the reality. There is an invisible college of networked researchers lurking in the global south producing high-level research to positively impact the lives of locals.

Many librarians champion the openness movement as it is their belief that making scholarship and information freely accessible to all users is in line with their ideals and professional obligations as librarians. They are committed to the principles of freedom of access to information and the belief that universal and equitable access to information is vital for the social, educational, cultural, democratic, and economic well-being of people, communities, and organizations (Aulisio 2014).

For many decades researchers were prepared to ‘donate’ their intellectual output to large publishing houses in exchange for visibility. Exacerbating this ‘generosity gesture’ is the growth of one of the ‘recognition’ processes, namely the impact factor. The pursuit of improved visibility and accessibility and the ultimate result of an increase in downloads and citation counts, gives legitimacy to impact factor. As much as this legitimacy is challenged, it is accepted that downloads and citation are the current standard used to affirm the contribution of research output. It is generally argued that acknowledgement by peers, via citations, is an acceptable yardstick for measurement of scholarly contribution.

Heller and Gaede (2016) suggest that traditional ways of assessing the return on investment of OA initiatives and institutional repositories is based on pragmatic measures such as download and citation counts. OA advocates have fallen into the trap of using pragmatic measures to promote openness. With all good intentions, these advocates utilised this pragmatic approach but have overlooked the powerful altruistic impact of improving access to critical content to international and/or marginalized communities.

The assessment of OA initiatives, in the view of Heller and Gaede (2016), must exist on a continuum between purely altruistic and purely pragmatic considerations. Assessments of OA institutional repositories generally have focused on citation advantage, since these are quantifiable and may have a direct benefit to the institution as it showcases the institution’s research agenda and publishing trends. Confirming this pragmatic measure is research that shows that making an article OA tends to improve its chances of citation (SPARC Europe, 2016).

On the flipside, universities with a social justice or social responsive mission need to ensure that their research output is part of public conversations. OA to scholarly output must be seen as contributing a vital academic commodity predicated on its ‘social good’ status. In reclaiming their role as disseminators of scholarly content for democratic discourse, librarians need to strongly advance the principles of Ubuntu<sup>1</sup> and social justice; social justice and moral

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<sup>1</sup> Ubuntu means generating a sense of community and togetherness

obligation must become explicit drivers of OA. Raju, Claassen and Moll (2017) advance that OA should be driven primarily for altruistic purposes and those institutions that are relatively advantaged have a moral obligation to share their output and not to use OA platforms simply to grow their profiles – the emphasis should be on development.

### **African challenges**

Unlike the global north, the challenges that beset African tertiary education are complex. The cost of monographs (including textbooks) is only the ‘tip of the ice berg’. The wide range of socio-economic conditions are a challenge to mediate in order to provide even the most basic of services to the users of an academic library. By the same token, it is these challenges that serve as the driver for the roll-out of a publishing service. In fact, it is these challenges that have driven the University of Cape Town to explore solutions that are very different to mainstream publishing services provided. It is these innovative services provided by UCT Libraries and the commitment from leading UCT researchers that sustain the altruistic utopia that is proposed in this paper.

One of the challenges that academic librarians need to explore (and which is commensurate with the purpose of this paper) is the issue poor access to content for the decolonization of the curriculum. In an era of a glut of information, African academic libraries are strangled by severe cost constraints limiting access to information. Exacerbating the limited access challenge, in an era where ubiquitous access to information is fast becoming the norm, are the exorbitant costs of bandwidth. On average, accessing the Internet costs Africans 50-100 times more than what it cost consumers in the global north and Asia (Saide 2004; Twinomugisha 2010). Assuming that Africa can overcome the bandwidth cost barriers, another significant challenge is the frequent blackouts, that is, no access to electricity.

As the world moves towards a new higher education paradigm that promotes collaborative learning, Africa is grappling with this changing paradigm against the backdrop of a drive to decolonize the curriculum. The reality is that only African texts can address this issue. Unfortunately, publishing outlets are limited as the market is very small – not because people do not want to read these texts but in the current financial climate, it is unaffordable. For the small African publisher it is financially not viable and as for the big international publishers, they have little interest as the profit margins are miniscule at best.

For African academic libraries to play a more meaningful role in the higher education process, it has to reinvent its service model. The Library as a publisher is one of the golden strands in a reinvented service model. As will be discussed, access to indigenous content is important for the African higher education system. Further, African content is essential to support the changing education paradigm and current collection development practices. As would be discussed, collection development in many African countries has been seriously neglected over the decades. The author is of the opinion that library publishing services would provide some relief in improving relevant collections in African academic libraries.

### **Collection development and facilities**

As indicated, the focus of this paper is on library as publisher. Hence, it is important to examine collection development practices and to examine how this new role of the library, that is, library as publisher, can support collection development at African institutions of higher education.

Library collections in the majority of African academic libraries are housed in make-shift buildings, this is a clear indication of the state of the library collections. Agboola (2000) states

that collections in Africa is best described as mediocre and continuing to deteriorate despite the increasing number of students and academics. Ksibi (2006: 256) asserts that “Tunisian university libraries generally have between 2 to 30 titles per academic user, as compared to 250 in some developed countries”. In Nigeria, at the University of Ibadan, the acquisitions rate had dropped by 89.6% from 1976/77 to 1989 (Raju 2017). It is acknowledged that this data is very dated, however, there is no recent data that is readily available. Nonetheless, there is evidence in the literature that alludes to African higher education library collections being on a continuing downward spiral.

Kavulya (2006) posits that funding of university library services in Kenya is inadequate. This is due, in the main, to diminished allocation of funds from government for universities and their libraries. This diminished funding has resulted in low book acquisitions (on average less than 100 books purchased per year) and a reduction to an already limited journal subscriptions. Kavulya (2006) goes further to point out that even private universities in Kenya are experiencing these problems, but to a lesser extent (Kavulya 2006: 29).

Kanyengo (2007) reveals that the funding crisis for books and journals is not restricted to one African country – it is an ‘Africa problem’. Kanyengo (2007) goes on to assert that, “this scenario is repeated in countries from Kenya in the East to Zimbabwe in the South, as well as Nigeria in the West”. She attributes this crisis to the lack of government support for university libraries. Given the generally poor state of collections at African universities, one questions the contribution that a university library can make to the teaching, learning and research objectives of the university; one questions the capacity of libraries to contribute to the decolonization agenda; one questions the capacity of libraries to contribute to the transformation and social justice agenda.

What African libraries need is a survival strategy which should be universal for the African continent. This survival strategy should address, *inter alia*, the issue of decolonialization of the content together with making research content available via monographs and journals. The survival strategy should also address the issue of transformation and social justice.

### **UCT’s commitment to open access**

Like most South African higher education institutions, UCT’s three core strategic objectives include excellence in research and, teaching and learning. The third objective is community engagement via ‘social responsiveness’. UCT Libraries’ open access strategic objectives must be viewed against the backdrop of the university’s core strategic objectives. All three of the university’s strategic objectives are exploited to deliver on a robust open access programme, which includes, amongst others, a ‘library as a publisher’ service. This service includes the publication of journals and monographs (including open textbooks).

UCT uses the process of education and research to respond to, serve and strengthen its communities for local and global citizenship. It is committed to participating actively in the democratic process and to empower those who are less privileged (Favish and Ngcelwane 2009; [UCT’s] Social responsiveness 2017). The social responsiveness objective addresses the various threats impeding efforts to construct a more democratic and just society, such as high levels of poverty and inequality, the poor quality of education in many of the public schools and the lack of infrastructure development. Hence, it is important for UCT Libraries to advance an open publishing strategy that drives an altruistic open access programme through the publication of open monographs to stimulate growth and development in the global south.

UCT Libraries' altruistic 'library as a publisher' service must be viewed from the perspective of a continuous fluctuation in the exchange rate of the South African Rand (impacting negatively on the rand) and the rise in inflation. Exacerbating this scenario are the exorbitant increases in the price of textbooks which makes textbooks unaffordable to both students and the libraries. Wiens (2015) places in context the desperate state of the majority of the students with regard to the affordability of textbooks. She indicates that at UCT, the average cost of first year textbooks is approximately US\$1400 per year. The book allowance for students on a Bursary Scheme is approximately US\$283. This shortfall is an onerous burden on students and their families. This burden forces students to make choices between food and rent over textbooks and many opt for not buying textbooks. Hence, students become dependent on under-resourced libraries or they make illegal copies to meet their textbook requirements. It has been reported by the *Mail and Guardian* (2015) that 53.8% of South Africans live below the breadline of \$691 per year. The additional cost of textbooks sit at \$1117 per year – this is most unaffordable: the additional costs are almost 200% more than the breadline.

### **Open Monograph Press**

The offer of diamond open access publishing is gaining traction in South Africa and internationally, albeit very slowly. There are a relatively small number of academic libraries internationally that are publishing monographs via the diamond open access route. UCT Libraries is one of those academic libraries that is offering such a diamond open monograph publishing service.

The experience of UCT Libraries with regard to the publishing of monographs is still very much on a steep learning curve. It is still experimenting with new technologies to continuously offer enhancement and new capabilities. As much as UCT Libraries has published seven titles in the last 18 months, it still considers itself in development mode with regard to publishing monographs in an open access format. The Libraries has moved from a pilot phase to a consolidation phase with the experimentation of technologies and processes. With regard to the pilot phase, the first port of call was the publishing of an open monograph that was no different to the digital version of the paper copy, that is, it did not have too many technical capabilities. In the second publication, UCT added the author's ORCID which linked the reader to, where possible, open content through the exploitation of the capabilities of the ORCID identification. The third publication was the first open textbook which was a reference guide. This reference guide was a prescribed text for a number of faculties at UCT. The earlier paper version was used by other institutions in the Western Cape. The digital version is now accessible to any person/institution that has access to the internet. These three titles, for all intents and purposes, were part of the pilot phase.

The second phase (which is consolidation and further experimentation) included harvesting unpublished monographs that academics were placing on their websites for use by fellow researchers and practitioners. The possibility of using Open Monograph Press (OMP) to convert the website versions into published monographs has now become a distinct reality for the University community. The growing interest in making content accessible gave the library staff the confidence to experiment with possible enhancements. However, the exploitation of OMP software was proving to be a challenge for staff who had no formal training in both the technical (information technology) aspects as well as technical aspects relating to the publishing process. With the support of Simon Fraser University, the staff assigned to the publishing service began to experiment with technologies that allowed the monographs to be downloaded on simple devices, including the mobile phone. Further, they experimented with making the book accessible in pdf, html and epub formats. This capability is consistent with

the goal of making every effort to make the content accessible to users in South Africa and in the rest of the continent.<sup>2</sup>

The efforts to make the monographs accessible to as many African users as possible users were driven by the knowledge that cell phone technology usage has grown exponentially in sub-Saharan Africa. Poushter et.al. (2015) points out that the proliferation of mobile phone networks has transformed communications in sub-Saharan Africa. It has also allowed Africans to skip the landline stage of development and jump right to the digital age. UCT Libraries is also aware that the vast majority do not have reliable access (or no access) to electricity. Blackouts are a feature in Africa (Parke 2016). Therefore, the capacity to download with minimum data usage and when the user has access to electricity were primary drivers in ensuring that the monograph format was in alignment with ‘bandwidth and electricity access’ issues in Africa.

It is against the backdrop of poor access to electricity, high costs of bandwidth and other challenges, that UCT Libraries developed its ‘library as a publisher’ service. The high cost of education, including textbooks, served as a major incentive to explore the publishing of open textbooks. UCT Libraries holds the view that the publication of open textbooks addresses issues that are fundamental to open access, namely, ‘philanthropism’ and social justice. Further, open access textbooks also addresses the challenging issue of decolonization: the availability of textbooks that reflects African needs would go a long way to redress the issues of the decolonialization of content and Africa’s transformation agenda.

The second open textbook that was published was by a renowned otorhinolaryngologist. This medical textbook has audio and visual clips embedded to assist with medical procedures: both medical students and practitioners would have access to an essential medical textbook free of financial constraints. Further, it is in formats (pdf, html and epub) that would aid in accessibility – it may be downloaded onto devices for accessibility in remote areas without electricity and/or bandwidth. Africa is in dire need of ear, nose and throat specialists and this atlas will provide much needed support to both practicing doctors and medical students. This diamond open access textbook is likely to bring considerable relief to both students and doctors that are in practice.

On the publication agenda of UCT Libraries is an open textbook in law and another in health sciences. In terms of the open textbook in law, the area of law identified for publication is constitutional law. Given that every law student in South Africa must have knowledge of constitutional law, an estimation was done on possible cost savings – it was estimated that the savings would be around ten million Rands for the country as a whole as law students would not have to purchase the textbook because of its open access availability. Further, there are students from other disciplines that would have a need for access to a constitutional law textbook. The open textbook will also be useful to those in practice. For the layperson, free access to this legal book on the constitution of the country would, in the opinion of the author, be most welcomed. The other open textbook that is planned for the coming months is the *Atlas of paediatric HIV infection: an illustrated guide for health care professionals*. The authors of this atlas are located at five different institutions from three different countries (University of Ibadan (Nigeria), University of Nigeria (Nigeria), University of Ilorin/Teaching Hospital (Nigeria), Egerton University (Kenya) and University of Cape Town (South Africa)). It is envisaged that this textbook would be developed in consultation with librarians from the

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for examples of open monographs/textbooks published by UCT Libraries



respective institutions – such a strategy would add value to skills development at other African academic libraries.

UCT Libraries is of the opinion that the publication of these open textbooks is an attempt by the University to contribute to addressing the transformation agenda of the country and the continent. The challenges navigated to make the content available are done under the umbrella of the innate principles of open access and that is, social justice, moral obligation and philanthropic principles.

### **Conclusion**

The movement into the open access environment must be underpinned by a commitment to make content accessible to the widest possible audience especially for scholarly information that is funded by taxpayers. It is acknowledged that librarians have used and continue to use the ‘egoism leverage’ (or downloads and citations leverage) to rationalise why researchers need to publish their scholarly output in open forums to ensure accessibility to the widest possible audience. In pursuing the open access agenda to make scholarly content discoverable and accessible, librarians and pro-open access authors have relegated the altruistic principle to a secondary purpose and the pragmatic purposes have become the primary purpose of open access. Open access purists may scorn at the methods used to grow the movement or to grow the content that is freely available to the general public and researchers. However, there has been some movement towards mainstreaming open access albeit very slowly. In the current environment in the chase for recognition and affirmation (be it via impact factor, downloads or citations), the pragmatic approach has brought with it some level of success.

The exemplar of UCT Libraries, assisted by an institutional goal of social responsiveness, is testimony that the altruistic goal is not lost. The provision of ‘library as publisher service’ by UCT Libraries to the university community is in alignment with the gold strand of open access, that is, the upholding of the altruistic principle. In making monographs and textbooks available free of cost barriers, UCT Libraries has taken the conscious decision to also address other African challenges such as poor bandwidth and poor access to electricity. The exponential growth of cell phone technology in Africa has also played a significant role in determining the format/s in which the texts are developed and delivered.

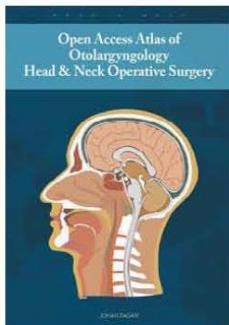
At the core of UCT Libraries open publishing strategy is the commitment to making scholarly content open based on the founding altruistic principle of open access. The strategy is marketed in terms of the content being a public good and authors have responded accordingly. Altruism as the founding pillar for open monograph publishing at UCT is still very much the driver of the strategy and its concomitant practises.

## Appendix A: Examples of monographs/textbooks published



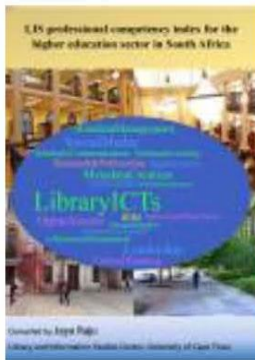
### UCT Author-Date Reference Guide

A characteristic of academic writing is that other writers' words or other forms of creations are acknowledged by citing and referencing all sources of information that were used. Previously known as Harvard UCT: handbook on citation, the **UCT Author-date Reference Guide: based on the Harvard referencing style** will assist in understanding how to deal with academic sources without resorting to plagiarism. The guide provides examples of different information sources: how to cite these sources within a text and how to include them in reference list.



### Open Access Atlas of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Operative Surgery: Volume 1 - Head and Neck

More than 50% of the world's people live in the Developing World. 360 million people have disabling hearing loss, this represents >5% of the world's population 70% of new cancers will occur in the Developing World by 2030. The book aims to promote exchanges of ideas between practitioners and institutions in the Developing World, to promote appropriate teaching and training, as well as to facilitate links with Developed World training institutions in ENT services.



### LIS professional competency index for the higher education sector in South Africa

This first iteration of a library and information services (LIS) professional competency index was a targeted outcome of a three-year National Research Foundation (NRF)-funded research project with the objective of developing a national LIS professional competency index for the higher education sector in South Africa to be used by: i) LIS employers and employees for practical purposes (to benchmark existing competencies and to ascertain the need for further knowledge and skills acquisition); ii) LIS educators (for curriculum development purposes); iii) LIS researchers (as a basis for further research, both theoretical and empirical, in the area of workplace competency exigencies); and, iv) the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) in its oversight of LIS education and training in the country.

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