

## Using a New ISO Standard to Measure the Impact of the Lyon Declaration

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### **Abstract:**

*This article attempts to demonstrate how libraries may assess the impact of the Lyon Declaration by using the recently developed standard; “ISO 16439 Information and Documentation: methods and procedures for measuring the impact of libraries”. According to the Lyon Declaration on Access to information and Development (2014), the right to information and exercising this right may be a transformational agent in people’s lives and of particular importance in environments where people are marginalized for various reasons including inequality on account of poverty, gender, disability or unequal access to education. Also, in recent years academic libraries have increasingly been attempting to measure the impact of their activities on their stakeholders. ISO 16439 aims to be a definitive statement on methods and approaches to impact assessment in libraries and is therefore applicable in situations where the intention is to assess the impact of specific initiatives to provide access to information and development. The commitment, as expressed in the mission statements of a number of South African universities to providing access to information and development to previously disadvantaged groups among their stakeholders, is explored. Based on the assumption that academic libraries function as agents of their parent bodies the universities, and that academic libraries are primarily focused on providing access to information to their communities, it becomes possible to identify methodologies proposed by ISO 16439 to assess the impact of such interventions, in this case activities specifically focused on students that were previously disadvantaged. The article provides an overview of ISO 16439 to show how it becomes practically possible to measure the impact of access to information and development as proposed in the Lyon Declaration.*

**Keywords:** Lyon Declaration; Impact assessment; ISO 16439 .

## **Introduction**

The Lyon Declaration on Access to information and Development of 2014 was issued as a result of the United Nations' new post-2015 development agenda to take the place of the Millennium Development Goals (Lyon Declaration 2014). The Declaration is premised on the belief that the right of access to information and exercising this right, supports development and improves lives. As such, information can act as a transformational agent in people's lives and is of particular importance in environments where people are marginalized for various reasons including inequality on account of poverty, gender, disability or unequal access to education.

In a library context, the marginalized groups on which the Lyon Declaration focuses, may be assumed to be most prevalent in the public library domain where community-based activities, the provision of basic information and the development of literacy and other basic skills are frequently found. Academic libraries in South Africa however, also serve many students who may be handicapped in the academic environment on account of having had little or no library experience prior to coming to university, who studied at under resourced rural schools, and are unfamiliar with the tools and technologies that would enable them to access the knowledge resources that would empower them in the way proposed by the Lyon Declaration. By implication therefore, academic libraries are also engaged with addressing such inequalities and marginalization in their own institutions and if so, they could be concerned about assessing the impact of their interventions on students who may be regarded as marginalized according to the Lyon Declaration.

## **Impact assessment in academic libraries**

Academic libraries are expensive to establish and sustain and increasingly need to provide tangible evidence of the extent to which they contribute to the goals of their funding institutions, so that in recent years they have been attempting to measure the impact of their activities on their stakeholders (Poll, 2012:121). In order to identify and to gather together meaningful approaches to assessing the value added by academic libraries, the International Standards Organization has just developed a set of standards: *Information and documentation – methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries (ISO 16439)*. This document aims to be a definitive statement on methods for impact assessment in libraries and is therefore also applicable in situations where the intention is to assess the impact of specific initiatives aimed at providing access to information and development, in this case the impact of library activities that address the extent to which academic libraries support the injunctions of the Lyon Declaration.

The scope of this article is therefore limited to one critical issue; to exploring the impact of library activities that illustrate aspects of the Lyon Declaration, which for the purposes of this article are crucially concerned with increased access to information and knowledge, to assist in the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality. Academic library activities that support the aims of the Lyon Declaration may, for example, be sought in interventions that teach students new skills and techniques with which to find, evaluate and use information to improve their learning, which in turn could lead to better marks, graduation and qualification, thus enhancing their employability, dignity and autonomy, and which by implication may reduce poverty and inequality.

*ISO 16439* defines library impact as “the influence of libraries and their services on individuals and/or on society” (2014:13). Such impact, according to the Standard, may be experienced by individuals; by the library’s parent institution or its community; or by society at large (2014:14).

Impact on *individuals* in academic libraries may for example be demonstrated by changes in skills and competencies; changes in attitudes and behaviour; changes in increased success in studies, or in research activities and output; and possibly also in enhanced career prospects and improvement in individual well-being.

Impact on the academic library’s *institution* or *community* may be sought in more positive visibility of the library in the community and its success in attracting a new population of students who might previously have experienced the library as a foreign or alienating environment that they might not have wished to frequent.

Although *social* impact of libraries might mainly be regarded as a function of public libraries as noted above, social impacts of academic library interventions may include increased experience of social inclusion and cohesion; participation in information and education, e.g. free access to information; free internet access; support in education; increased awareness of local culture (for example from exhibitions) and the acknowledgement of cultural diversity.

*ISO 16439* also identifies substantial challenges (2014:18) inherent in attempts to evaluate library impact, which are intangible and difficult to quantify, as the influence of the library is often not the only or even the strongest variable affecting student experience. It is acknowledged that the same library services may also have different impacts among different populations, that the data on which impact assessment is based, is mainly qualitative and therefore subjective, and that the workload associated with impact assessment is strenuous and may even be daunting.

### **The Lyon Declaration and mission statements from South African universities**

This article reviews the commitment of selected universities in South Africa, as expressed in their mission statements, to foster and enhance services and interventions that give expression to the Lyon Declaration, and will then illustrate how the impact of library activities that address the concerns of the Lyon Declaration, could be explored according to the approaches suggested by *ISO 16439*.

Since 1994 South African universities have been instituting deliberate measures to “broaden participation in higher education as one means of reducing the highly stratified race and class structure of the country” (Fraser & Killen, 2005:25). Taking this into account and in order to establish what universities and their libraries regard as their most important responsibilities, university mission statements, which are assumed to express these institutional values and priorities, were consulted to explore their commitment to the values expressed in the Lyon Declaration.

In order to obtain mission statements from a cross section of South African universities, six were chosen out of the total of 23 in the country (Higher Education South Africa, 2015). Mission statements were found on respective universities’ web sites. Of the 23 universities in South Africa, mission statements of six universities were selected on account of their explicitness. Four of the selected universities are categorized as “traditional” while two are “comprehensive” (SouthAfrica.Info, 2015). Before 1994, two of the traditional universities

selected were regarded as “advantaged” while the others were for “disadvantaged” students. Universities in South Africa no longer discriminate on the basis of race, but universities that have been designated as “previously disadvantaged” below, are institutions that before 1994 had been created to cater exclusively for black students.

Mission statements were scrutinized for language that reflected concerns expressed in the Lyon Declaration. The names of the specific universities whose mission statements are quoted below, have been deleted. Verbatim extracts from mission statements read as follows:

**University 1: Traditional, Urban**

Addressing historical disadvantage in education of the majority  
Providing opportunities for all to participate in academic activities  
To eliminate gender discrimination

**University 2: Traditional Urban**

Redressing disadvantages inequities and imbalances of the past  
Promote access to learning  
Tolerance and respect for multilingualism, diverse cultures, religions and social values

**University 3: Traditional, Rural; previously disadvantaged**

Instil respect, tolerance & social responsibility  
To respect and affirm the dignity, equality, freedom and rich cultural diversity  
Not to discriminate on the grounds of birth, race, colour, national, ethnic or social origin, gender ...

**University 4: Comprehensive, Urban, previously disadvantaged**

Providing access to knowledge to a diversity of learners and actors from many rural, poor and disadvantaged communities  
Relevance to local provincial, national & regional development  
Service to community, business & industry

**University 5: Traditional, Urban, previously disadvantaged**

Assist educationally disadvantaged students gain access to higher education  
Nurture and use the abilities of all in the university community  
Seek racial and gender equality & contribute to helping the historically marginalized participate fully in the life of the nation

**University 6: Comprehensive; distance learning**

Participates in community development ... for the upliftment of the disadvantaged  
Accessible to all learners, specifically ... the marginalized, by way of a barrier-free environment  
Promoting equity of access and opportunity so that all may develop their full potential

From this brief perusal it is clear that all six universities are indeed concerned with issues that resonate with the Lyon Declaration; rejecting discrimination by undertaking to address disadvantage, to reduce inequality and to support access to learning for all. As these six institutions were selected arbitrarily on the basis of their substantial mission statements, it is reasonable to assume that the other South African universities would express similar sentiments in their own statements.

Mission statements are intended to express a formal affirmation of an institution's values and goals, but their value as an institution's "compass" has also been questioned (Leonard, 2014). Markless and Streatfield noted that mission statements are very broad and often too bland and optimistic to provide solid indicators of impact (2013:70). The evidence from these mission statements will therefore not be used beyond demonstrating that South African universities indeed regard as their own business some of the most important issues expressed by the Lyon Declaration.

### **Demonstrating impact with *ISO 16439***

Library impacts identified by *ISO 16439* that potentially relate to the Lyon Declaration, may therefore be sought in library interventions that improve the ways in which students, who have been marginalized for a variety of reasons including poverty, background, gender or disability, are able to access, to obtain, to understand to share and to use information in whatever format as a transformative agent in their lives. In the context of academic libraries, potentially measurable aspects of such transformation may include improved marks in examinations, fewer failures, employment after graduation (Poll & Payne, 2006:550) or evidence of improvement in self esteem and confidence (Markless & Streatfield 2013:82).

Markless & Streatfield (2013:80) identified the nature of the kinds of change in users which could demonstrate that an impact has been made. Such changes may be "affective" when attitudes or levels of confidence have improved in individuals or groups. Changes may be "behavioural" when people learn to do things differently, for example search for information more effectively or critically, or could be either "knowledge-based" or "competence-based" depending on what has been learnt.

*ISO 16439* explores and illustrates approaches that libraries may employ to assess the impact of their activities in spite of the mainly qualitative nature of impact assessment. Such evidence may be established in one of three ways: by *inference* from other data or in combination with qualitative data; *solicited* by asking library users about their experiences; or *observed*, by looking at user interactions with library activities whether in person or by proxy when for example evidence of activity is studied from video recordings or log files reflecting the use of library provided databases and other resources (2014:21). Approaches to evidence gathering that could be relevant in attempts to demonstrate initiatives in support of the Lyon Declaration, include the following:

#### *Inferred evidence (ISO 16439, 2014:24)*

Library statistics that are collected as a matter of course may be used to infer aspects of impact. Use and user statistics, especially if measured over time, may show whether and how frequently particular groups visit the library, access its electronic resources or attend training or information literacy sessions. If such numbers increase, this may suggest that value or impact is being derived from these activities. Similarly, library visits or high seat occupancy rates by the groups being investigated, may show that working in the library is a desired activity, although it should also be emphasized that a single or a few indicators of this nature would not provide sufficient evidence of impact and should be supported by other more qualitative indicators as will be suggested below.

*Solicited evidence (ISO 16439, 2014:28)*

Evidence is solicited when individuals or groups are questioned about their experiences in using the library or their perceptions of the value of library resources and services. Surveys, interviews or focus groups may be employed for this purpose and although it may be possible to analyse results using statistical techniques, the results reflect the affective or qualitative perceptions and personal opinions of the respondents. *ISO 16439* is also careful to note (2014:28) that users' "satisfaction in itself is not a direct impact", although reports of satisfaction may point to activities or services that could have had an impact on recipients' skills or knowledge. Reports of satisfaction therefore, should be combined with the results of other investigations to provide evidence of value. *ISO 16439* explains in detail how libraries could proceed to design, construct and format instruments for soliciting impact, and institutions seeking to establish the impact of interventions that resonate with the Lyon Declaration, will find in section 7 of the Standard that discusses solicited evidence, the information together with examples of questions that they would require for constructing appropriate research instruments.

*Observed evidence (ISO 16439, 2014:46)*

The different approaches to looking closely at how users interact with library services, may be categorized as either open or covert observation, depending on whether subjects are aware of being observed or not (2014:48). Especially in the case of covert observation, ethical issues such as the requirement for informed consent (2014:47) have to be taken into consideration. Usability testing of the library's web site, to find for example whether marginalized groups are able to interact with it successfully, is an example of open observation where a respondent is tasked with finding answers to pre-set questions and an observer notes how the tasks are attempted and accomplished. Analysing log files is an example of covert observation and when activities from a particular user group over a period of time are tracked, it is possible to see how much time is spent on searching, or how behaviour may have changed, for example after training. Changes in behaviour may reflect that an impact has occurred.

One of the commonest ways in which libraries may demonstrate an observable impact on the knowledge or competencies of users, is through teaching what is generally known as "information literacy", which is defined by *ISO 16439* as:

"more wide-ranging than knowing how to use a library, but an aspect of lifelong learning that refers to attributes of people who are able to find, assess and use information wherever it may be located. This includes the skills for using information technology to access and retrieve information" (2014:50).

In order to be sure that learning has taken place after an information literacy intervention or training course, *ISO 16439* recommends that tests, whether standardized or specifically designed, are administered before the training begins and then also afterwards to establish whether a measurable difference in knowledge or skill can be demonstrated. The document offers extensive advice on how to implement different approaches to testing information literacy skills and their impact on learning. Annex A provides examples of impact surveys that may be used or altered to suit specific circumstances.

*Library impact on user success (ISO 16439, 2014: 55)*

Unequivocal evidence that library use contributes to student success, whether in studying, learning or qualifying, has always been an important but elusive goal in academic libraries. Nevertheless, attempts to link evidence of library use with student success data have been reported, both in the print as well as more recently in the digital domains. *ISO 16439* acknowledges this work and discusses (2014:55) how data from library systems (e.g. downloads, circulation, gate counts) may be combined in large data warehouses with student records of examination results, to explore whether there are correlations between student success and library use. As university entrance data from the entire student population are included in the system, results from identified student groups may be extracted separately. It therefore becomes possible to investigate the relationship between library use and the academic achievement of students from specific schools or provinces. Studies from Australia, the USA and the UK have been showing that activity data from library systems correlate positively with student success (Cox & Jantti, 2012).

### **Other issues to consider for impact assessment**

For any venture into impact assessment specifically targeted at a particular group of respondents, a close definition of the target population is essential (*ISO 16439: 76*). The Lyon Declaration aims to ensure access to knowledge and the availability of information and communication technologies to “marginalized groups, including women, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities, older persons, children and youth” in order to effect sustainable development in democratic societies. For an investigation into the access to knowledge and the use of information and communication technologies among library users at a specific institution, to assess the extent to which the library addresses the issues raised in the Declaration, it will therefore be essential to obtain responses from a representative sample of students from one or more of these categories of marginalization. In terms of the situation in South African universities, such marginalized groups would primarily consist of both male and female students from poor, disadvantaged and frequently rural backgrounds and schools; migrants; refugees; and persons with disabilities.

Should a library wish to target members from these groups, a great deal of tact and sensitivity will be required, as obtaining informed consent to investigate such groupings could easily be mistaken for either further discrimination or paternalism. Students with physical disabilities to some extent form a discrete group and may be approached and invited to participate in an investigation about the extent to which they are able to access and use the library, its resources and facilities. Other marginalized student groups may be more difficult to identify. One possible approach to distinguishing them, could be not to focus specifically on students’ marginalized state, but to address participants in library interventions that are marketed to make the library more attractive, user-friendly and inclusive to all students; for example information literacy sessions, or writing workshops. All these participants could be invited to participate in investigations about their perceptions of the usefulness and value of the library.

### **Conclusion**

As the discussion above has shown, a library that intends to launch an investigation into the impact of some or all of its services, will need a clear focus on what exactly it wishes to assess and be prepared for a substantial investment in both time and effort. This brief

overview of some of the approaches to impact assessment suggested by *ISO 16439*, has however demonstrated that it could indeed serve as a guide to finding objective evidence for the difference that an academic library can make to users who might have difficulties in fully utilizing and accessing its information and other learning resources.

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