

# The Case of the Royal School of Library and Information Science: A European iSchool

## 歐洲 iSchool 案例分享：丹麥皇家圖書資訊學院

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### 【Abstract】

The present paper forms the basis of the invited talk given by the author at the International Symposium on the Transformation and Innovation of Library and Information Science, November 16-17, 2010, Taipei, Taiwan. The paper introduces the Royal School of Library and Information Science, Denmark, as a European School of Library and Information Science and a member of iSchool Caucus. The paper outlines some of the current challenges of the Royal School of Library and Information Science and how these challenges are met, including how the membership of the iSchool movement is considered beneficial with respect to the mentioned challenges. The paper also touches upon some of the challenges, which the iSchool movement is facing – at least from the perspective of the author.

### 【摘要】

本文為作者受邀於 2010 年 11 月 16-17 日，在臺灣師大舉辦的「圖書資訊學蛻變與創新國際研討會」上所發表的文章。本文介紹丹麥皇家圖書資訊學院為歐洲圖書資訊科學院，並為 iSchool Caucus 成員。本文概述丹麥皇家圖書資訊學院面臨的挑戰，以及如何面對這些挑戰，包括 iSchool 的成員活動如何有益於這些挑戰。作者也探討一些其他 iSchool 運動正面臨的挑戰。

### Introduction

The author kindly thanks the Graduate Institute of Library and Information Studies at the National Taiwan Normal University for the invitation to act as speaker as well as for the initiative to organize the International Symposium on the Transformation and Innovation of Library and Information Science. The invitation provides an occasion and opportunity for the author to introduce the Royal School of Library and Information Science, Denmark [1], to the Taiwanese and international audiences as well as to

act as a European iSchool ambassador. It is a true pleasure to accept the invitation, to meet with dear colleagues, and to visit Taipei and Taiwan known for their great beauty, friendliness and endless hospitality.

The Royal School of Library and Information Science (hereafter: the Royal School of LIS) became caucus member of the iSchool movement in April 2009, following the Berlin School of Library and Information Science at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin as the second European member of the iSchool movement. Recently the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield has joined the movement, too, as the first UK iSchool. Other non-North American iSchool members are the School of Information Systems at Singapore Management University and the School of Information Management at Wuhan University, China. With the iSchool movement being a North American initiative it is of no surprise that the remaining 22 iSchool members are from North American [2]. The high number of schools; the diversity in their approach to information (from library and information science, information management, computer science, information engineering etc); the variety in their offerings of educations, and levels of educations, and how these educations are structured; the national, international plus cultural differences; and not the least how the schools themselves are organised as well as funded provide challenges for the iSchool movement. One way to overcome the challenges is to be aware of the differences and know how these materialise. Therefore the objective of the present paper is to use the opportunity to introduce the Royal School of LIS and hereby give the audience a chance to get to know the Royal School of LIS better.

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 presents the Royal School of LIS as a Danish mono-faculty state-funded university, how it is organised and located at two physical locations in different regional parts of Denmark, the educations offered, and the number of

staff and students at the Royal School of LIS. In section 3 a number of challenges which the Royal School of LIS is currently facing are outlined, and initiatives to meet the challenges are presented. The paper closes with section 4 in which possible challenges of the iSchool movement are presented.

## **An Introduction to the Royal School of LIS, Denmark**

The Royal School of LIS is internationally recognised for its research. In particular former Rector Ole Harboe and the Professors Peter Ingwersen and Birger Hjørland have managed to position the Royal School of LIS as the world leading school in Library and Information Science it is perceived as today. This position made the Royal School of LIS an obvious iSchool candidate. While Professor Hjørland is still active, Professor Peter Ingwersen has recently retired, however, still associated the Royal School of LIS as Professor Emeritus.

Interestingly, the Royal School of LIS is not very recognized nationally for its high quality research neither among the librarians and the information specialists nor by the Danish universities. This is one of the problems of the Royal School of LIS. In order to be better at communicating the Royal School of LIS's research and to strategically further develop research areas a research strategy was formulated and implemented in 2009. The research strategy runs from 2009 to 2014 and covers the following six focus areas of research: Libraries and Innovative Processes; Research Evaluation and Research Policy; Information Systems and Interaction Design; Information Literacy and Practice; Cultural Mediation, and Knowledge and Information Theory. These research areas demonstrate the width of expertise of the Royal School of LIS, and the explication of these will hopefully mark and position the research expertise of the Royal School of LIS to the national audience, not the least to future potential students.

The Royal School of LIS is one school with two locations. The main school is situated in the capital Copenhagen, and from here the primary management of the Royal School of LIS takes place. A minor branch of the Royal School of LIS is located at the university campus of Aalborg.

Aalborg is the fourth largest city of Denmark with a population of approximately 123,000 citizens compared to Copenhagen which is by far the largest city of Denmark with 1,181,000 citizens. The total population of Denmark is 5½ million. Compared to Taiwan with its population of 23 millions, and Taipei city of 2,607,428 people and the Taipei metropolitan area with a population of 6,776,264 Denmark is, however, a small country.

As said the management of the Royal School of LIS is mainly located in Copenhagen. Figure 1 depicts a diagram of the organizational structure, which also illustrates that an Aalborg Head of Department is appointed to specifically manage the daily business of education (teaching) and research of the Aalborg branch. The majority of managers, including Rector, Professor Per Hasle are all located at the Royal School of LIS in Copenhagen.

In the matter of business the Royal School of LIS refers to the Ministry of Culture, and not to the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation as the

remaining universities of Denmark do. For the same reason the Royal School of LIS is not allowed to call itself “university” despite the fact that the Royal School of LIS educates to the highest level (PhD). This is a problem as you will later see.

The Royal School of LIS is funded by the Danish State – as it is the case with all universities in Denmark. The economy of the Royal School of LIS based on the enrolment of students – more students, more money! Enrolment at the Royal School of LIS (and the remaining Danish universities) is free of charge for Danish students. This means that the educations of the students are paid for by the State (i.e., Danish tax-payers), or in other words that Danish students do not pay tuition fee. This is a part of the Danish welfare system which does also include, e.g., free use of the Danish healthcare system and financial support if one loses one’s job. The students pay for the books they are to use and for their own personal PC. They also pay for the daily living expenses (housing, food, cloths etc.), but are, however, entitled a study grant by the Danish State that covers the basic expenses. A study grant runs for five years, and basically covers the periods of bachelor’s and master’s studies. Danish PhD students receive a salary during their three years of employment as doctoral students, a position which they are to apply for – hence not available to all.

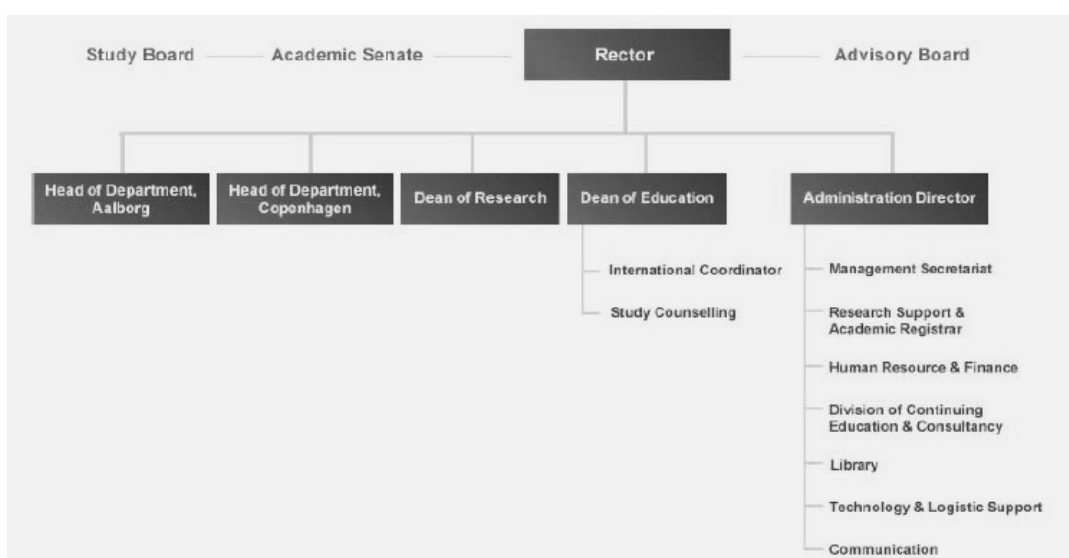


Figure 1 Diagram of the organizational structure of the Royal School of LIS, Denmark

At the Royal School of LIS the following educational programmes are offered:

- Bachelor's degree (undergraduate) in Library and Information Science – three years
- Master's degree (graduate) in Library and Information Science - two years
- Mater's programme is available in English, too
- PhD in Library and Information Science – three years
- National continuing education programmes in Library and Information Science (tuition fees are charged):
  - Week courses
  - One-day courses and one-day thematic workshops
  - Master-diploma courses:
    - “Innovative library development” (from September 2010)
    - “Information interaction and information architecture” (from September 2010)
- Education of library assistants

The bachelor's and master's degrees are offered as a study year of two terms: Autumn term (September - January) and spring term (February - June).

A total of approximately 750 students (bachelor's/master's students) are enrolled at the Royal School of LIS every year. 90 students enroll, and pay, for the master diploma courses per year, and approximately 1,000 librarians and information specialists participate at the tuitions fee-based continuing education courses per year. The students (bachelor's/master's students) who graduate from the Royal School of LIS find jobs in the following sectors:

- 38% public libraries
- 24% industry, e.g., pharmaceutical companies as Novo Nordisk
- 12% public service
- 9% research libraries

- 17% academia (PhD students) (plus section of employment unknown)

It might also be worth mentioning that the unemployment rate of librarians and information specialists in Denmark is low with 2.6% being without a job (estimation from medio 2009).

Over the past three-four years the Royal School of LIS has exercised severe budget reductions, which have lead to the dismissal of many colleagues, as recently as February this year (2010). At the moment the numbers of staff at the Royal School of LIS are:

- 45 academics and researchers (including doctoral students /excluding external lecturers), and
- 33 in administration (secretaries, librarians, systems supporters, and technicians).

The distribution of staff between Copenhagen and Aalborg is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1 *Distribution of the number of staff with reference to Copenhagen and Aalborg as of July 2010*

	Copenhagen	Aalborg
Academics and researchers	35	10
Administration	29	4

Approximately 35 members of staff have left the Royal School of LIS since 2006 due to either budget cuts, natural retirements or when moving on to new jobs elsewhere. The reason for budget cuts is mainly due to decreasing number of student enrolments. The low number of students is only one of several challenges of the Royal School of LIS, which is further discussed in the section below.

## The Challenges of the Royal School of LIS

A number of challenges of the Royal School of LIS have already been mentioned, e.g., low number of student enrolments; financial problems and budget cuts;

the fact the Royal School of LIS is not very well known in Denmark; and is not allowed by law to name itself “university.” The first three of these “issues” are all closely interrelated, because the very tight financial situation is mainly due to the low number of student enrolments as more students release more money, and fewer students mean less money. There seems to be at least two reasons for the low number of student enrolments: first, the potential students (and their parents) do not know of the Royal School of LIS, which is a prerequisite for enrolment. Second, the students (and their parents) seem to prefer university to “Biblioteksskole”, which is the Royal School of LIS’s name in Danish (actually the name is “Danmarks Biblioteksskole” – Denmark’s Library School). In summary, knowledge of the existence of the Royal School of LIS to the public of Denmark is vital, including an understanding of the types and levels of educations provided and the areas of research expertise of the scholars of the Royal School of LIS.

One could claim that the first step in the approach of creating public awareness of the existence of the Royal School of LIS, nationally, was taken when the Royal School of LIS became caucus member of the iSchool movement in April 2009. This event was used nationally to brand the Royal School of LIS as an internationally highly esteemed LIS institution. Almost a year later (May 2010) even more progressive branding of the Royal School of LIS took place with the change of the School’s Danish name from “Danmarks Biblioteksskole” to “Det Informationsvidenskabelig Akademi” (the Academy of Information Science) - hereby signalling university level without using the word “university”. Rector Per Hasle explains: “The new Danish name unifies the entire institution and indicates a clear direction for the future. In the long term, it also opens up the possibility for introducing additional lines of study and combined study programmes. At the same time, the name gives a clear signal that our institution is involved in university

level education, while reflecting the width of the labour market in which our candidates find employment today” [3]. The Royal School of LIS’s new name is the result of a decision making process which involved the management, student representatives as well as employees at the School. In order to gain a greater insight into how the surrounding world perceives the Royal School of LIS telephone interviews with selected key persons were conducted. The focal point of the internal deliberations has been the Royal School of LIS’s unifying brand essence, which can be summarized in the statement: *We create connections*. The Royal School of LIS’s study programmes contribute to the societal development, educating - through research based teaching - information specialists with competencies in the areas of knowledge and culture. Information specialists are capable of creating connections between information and knowledge, knowledge and users, and not least between users.

A new logo followed the new name, and new material for recruitment of potential students was made. Efforts of improving student study facilities, especially at the Royal School of LIS in Copenhagen, have also been made in order to make the Royal School of LIS a more attractive place to study. These efforts have resulted in inviting and functional reading and work places, and “comfort zones” which all are much appreciated by the students.

Further branding initiatives have been taken with reference to what the Royal School LIS is and what it stands for by sharpening of the research and education profiles partly via the previously mentioned research strategy and by redesigning the educations with a clearer focus on skills learned rather than where to work with these obtained skills - (this includes minimizing the use of the word “library” in the descriptions of the educations offered at the Royal School of LIS).

Many of these initiatives have, in addition to provide awareness of the existence of the Royal School of LIS, also made the School an attractive partner for research and education – no doubt the iSchool movement membership also plays an important role in this interest towards the Royal School of LIS. A visible sign of this interest are the agreements of cooperation made with the neighbouring universities of Copenhagen and Aalborg, respectively (2009). The agreements have already resulted in new courses offered and students from primarily Copenhagen University attending these courses at the Royal School of LIS in Copenhagen.

Of all of the challenges of the Royal School of LIS the low number of student enrolments is the most serious, and therefore it is so much more satisfactory to notice that this year's enrolment of bachelor students has increased with 37% – it is an indication of that all the initiatives and efforts makes a difference for the good.

Another good thing that is happening to the Royal School of LIS is the close cooperation with the Berlin iSchool, which is a direct result of joining the iSchool movement. Doctoral students from the two schools present research projects to each other via video conferencing - as such this is an example of what the Royal School of LIS hoped to gain from joining the iSchool movement. That is, being part of a network from which students and scholars can benefit in the exchange of ideas for research as well as curriculum development, and by being part of a network hereby expanding the network of the Royal School of LIS and of the individual academics and researchers of the School.

## **The Challenges of the iSchool Movement**

The iSchool movement was founded in 2005 by a collective of U.S. Information Schools with the purpose of advancing the information field in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As then, so it is today, that each individual

iSchool has its own strengths and specializations, but together they share a fundamental interest in the relationships between *information, people, and technology* [4]. Under this theme the iSchools have united and the movement has developed. The large number of iSchool members is a strong indication of how the movement has succeeded in promoting the movement and in advancing the information field. Now it is time to define the future purpose of the iSchool movement as the global movement it has turned into. A potential challenge in this respect is to define a clear purpose and support it to become reality.

As said previously the existing iSchool members differ from each other in so many ways that this in itself represents a challenge. That be in how they are economically funded, organised, or with respect to cultural and educational differences. In order for the iSchool members to work together they are to know each other and understand the premise, the differences and the similarities of the schools. It remains an issue how they are to get to know each other better, world-wide. Is this process of getting to know each other better to be initiated and supported top-down via the iSchool movement, or to take place as a bottom-up initiative carried out by the individual members on an ad hoc basis?

Another remaining challenge or issue to deal with is how to gain the most of the iConference and make it an attractive and stimulating event to participate in. The iConference is an excellent opportunity and forum for the members (and non-members [5]) to get together and meet. However, with the iSchool movement having turned into a global movement this also means that participating in the iConference is no longer a "local" event. Hence participation becomes a matter of travelling costs and travelling time, two things which we all are short of. This means it has to be worth the while, not the least considering how the iConference has to compete with the "traditional" conferences within the information field.

The iSchool movement is a strong movement which has proven its worth by going global – the challenge ahead is to maintain its strength and relevance to the community of the information field by being an assert for, and of importance to this community.

## Notes

[1] Please note, the present paper represent the viewpoint of the author and is as such not an official or formal introduction to the Royal School of Library and Information Science, Denmark. The responsibility of the paper is that of the author and any mistake, misrepresentation or error rest on the author.

[2] For a complete list of iSchool members, please consult: <http://www.ischools.org/> (visited: October 12, 2010).

[3] Source of the quotation by Rector Per Hasle: <http://www.iva.dk/english/aboutus/default.asp?cid=25744> (visited: October 12, 2010).

[4] <http://www.ischools.org/site/about/> (visited: October 12, 2010).

[5] The call for participation at the iConference 2011 to be held in Seattle, WA, February 8-11, 2011 can be found here: <http://www.ischools.org/iConference11/2011index/>. Please note, the conference is open to all and participation is hence not restricted to iSchool members, only.