



Summary of a meeting between the board members of the Readers Association and the library administration: 19 Feb 2015
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In wake of changes in the staffing of the reference desk in the JRR and in the functioning of the reading rooms in general the members of the board requested a meeting with the administration.

A. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE ASSOCIATION BOARD MEMBERS

1. *The functioning of the reading rooms and reference desk*

The members of the association board commented on the absence of directors of the reading rooms, which we view as detrimental to their functioning, also noting deterioration in the level of service to readers. We noted that the workers at the service desk lack expertise in the collection and the location of books and that regular shelf checks are not being carried out.

Administration response: the administration is seeking to hire a services supervisor, who will oversee the frequency of shelf checks, worker rotation, and interlibrary loans. There are 17 service counters scattered throughout the library which creates problems of supervision. The administration is also considering placement of a permanent worker at the service desk. The disadvantage of such a step is burn-out from repetitive work.

The library is looking into whether to draft students or librarians to man the service desk.

2. *Drafting professional reference librarians*

The administration explained the difficulty it faces in finding expert reference librarians. The library is prepared to train academics in the library sciences, and to provide academic training to librarians. It is not prepared to sacrifice quality even if it takes time to fill the positions.

3. *Preserving the "readers' community" and knowledge of readers' fields of interest*

We noted that there is no longer close contact between the reference librarians and the regulars, which in the past made a significant contribution to research and to the creation of connections not just between the librarians and the readers but among the readers.



Administration response: The librarians in the reading rooms have been instructed to improve their acquaintance with the readers and to create research-topic-based profiles in order to advise readers of the publication of material in their spheres of interest.

We suggested that the reference librarians spend several hours a week at the service desk as a means of getting better acquainted with the readers and to train the workers at the service desk. This suggestion was not accepted.

4. *Problems in orienting oneself in the GRR*

The library will train the workers in the reading room in the Library of Congress system.

There is a bulletin board in the GRR which displays the subject headings.

B. THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEW OF THE ROLE OF REFERENCE SERVICES

1. *Initiated and random reader inquiries*

The library provides guidance in use of electronic resources and locating information. The service is available to all the target audiences of the library, including the general public, teachers, and pupils.

2. *Making an appointment with a librarian*

Assistance with specific topics: Judaic studies, Israel, Islam, the Edelstein and Scholem Collections.

Assistance in the field of history will be provided by Galya Richler. At present there is no reference librarian for the field of general humanities.

C. DEVELOPING THE OPEN COLLECTIONS IN THE READING ROOMS

Direct responsibility for developing the collections is in the hands of the reference librarians in the reading rooms, in consultation with the curators of the relevant fields.

The library keeps track of what is ordered to the reading rooms. In the past year and a half 160,000 books have been ordered to the reading rooms. In line with the extent of interest in specific items, limited or great, the library decides what to place in the reading rooms. Based on demand for books on sectors of Israeli society, such studies, especially of *haredi* society, were added to the JRR collection.

The collection on kabbalah in the JRR will be weeded and the books transferred to the Scholem Collection.



D. REFERENCE SERVICES AVAILABLE OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY BUILDING

The administration noted that reference librarians must provide different levels of service. There are different models for giving service to “consumers” and the librarians have received training in this field. There is constant increase in the number of applications for help both at the service counters and from a distance: by phone, email, and “chat.”

There are self-help pages on the library website—but they are not easy to locate. More such pages will be prepared in the future.

The library is working on a program to familiarize readers with electronic tools.

The library’s goal is for readers to be independent. The library is working on improving the search engines—under the direction of Daniel Lipson. It is important to send comments on the searches (through the “contact us” tab) because this facilitates feedback.

There has been an increase in the use of smartphones to access library services.

In 2015 there should be improved access to Judaica databases. We have been commenting on the difficulty of access for several years.

E. ADDITIONAL TOPICS

The library is exploring changing the shelf numbering system in the ORR to the Library of Congress system.

The library will consider such a change for the JRR when it moves to the new building.

The Scholem Collection will retain its shelf numbering system and will remain a separate collection.

The administration declared that it believes in providing excellent service and that it tries to balance the need to provide professional reference services and the need to bring books from the stacks to the readers.

New lighting in the reading rooms:

We noted that the new lighting strips are less effective than what was available in the past, especially to the side. The administration noted that safety concerns motivated the change and that lighting experts were consulted. The administration promised to check into the matter again.