

**Issues relating to professional staffing
in Maltese specialised libraries:
An analysis**

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Abstract

This research study delves into the staffing situation of special libraries in the Maltese islands. It focuses primarily on the extent of the professional staff population in such libraries. It analyses whether a lack of staff exists in this library category and compares the present situation with that reported a few years back in other studies, including the 2006 MaLIA report on Maltese libraries. The data obtained enables stakeholders and researchers to compare the findings with the situation back then and evaluate how special libraries are faring today.

The study investigates the causes behind the extent of the present staff population in Maltese special libraries and the consequences this brings about. It also identifies other staffing issues in various special library categories, determines the most important skills and qualities expected in special librarians, and discusses how technology could assist library personnel and parent organisations in staffing and related issues.

A qualitative approach was adopted, employing an inductive method of research through interviews with special librarians and entity managers and questionnaires distributed among library clients. The findings could help entity managers, library staff and researchers to gain the necessary knowledge and be able to assess their situation and find ways to maintain staff and address staffing issues at present and plan for the future.

Keywords

specialised libraries, staffing situation, special librarians, entity managers, library clients, Malta

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List of abbreviations

ACP	Australian Council of Professions
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALA	American Library Association
CDA	Confirmatory Data Analysis
CMS	Collection Management System
DMS	Data Management System
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
GWU	General Workers Union
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
MaLIA	Malta Library and Information Association
MCAST	Malta College of Art, Science and Technology
NCLIS	National Council for Library and Information Services
NLI	National Library of Ireland
OPAC	Online Public Access Catalogue
PL	Partit Laburista
PN	Partit Nazzjonalista
Prov.	Provincial
SLA	Special Libraries Association
Theol.	Theological

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Most library users in any country would probably be familiar with public and school libraries, and perhaps a national library, but may hardly know special libraries exist. This is because such libraries have distinguishing characteristics which may not apply to the general public. For one, they are “devoted to the requirements of a specific subject or group of subjects” (Silva, 1970, p. 8), such as medicine, politics, religion, law, history or other areas of study. They also cater for particular sectors of society, usually specific groups of users (Williams & Zachert, 2009). Their clientèle is usually a closed group of members or employees of the library’s parent organisation.

Due to their specialised nature, librarians working in these libraries usually are not simply qualified in librarianship but also have thorough knowledge of the subject area. Through their pride in offering specific information services, “librarians’ professional worth and value” are tangible and defined (Hicks, 2014, p. 262).

This study delves deep to analyse what defines special librarians and what is needed to establish themselves as a distinguished profession. It deals with Maltese special libraries and focuses mainly on their staffing situation.

1.2 The present context

A library’s main remit is to distribute information. Up to a few decades ago this could only be done through printed literature. Books, journals, magazines and other publications had to be borrowed from or consulted in libraries. However, modern technological advances and

especially the internet revolution today enable researchers to access endless articles, papers and whole publications online. This is surely a giant leap forward for information services, but nonetheless there is the other side of the coin.

Due to the easy, quick and constant access to data provided by the internet, libraries and librarians may have become less relevant and important in some students' and researchers' endeavour to obtain information. Some stakeholders argue that libraries are dying out and librarians would soon lose their jobs. Moreover, this uncertainty seems to hit special libraries harder, because of their small pool of users and very specific area of expertise.

This research study is being conducted in this context. The world of information is changing dramatically. The study analyses the value and need for special libraries and especially their staff members in the digital age.

1.3 The research question, scope and value

Human resources availability poses a challenge for special libraries in different countries and contexts. This was also highlighted for the Maltese context in a report on Maltese libraries (Mizzi et al., 2006). Primarily this study takes stock of the staff complement at Maltese special libraries today. The second question is whether these libraries are lacking staff at present. This will be established by investigating the level of usage, the type and amount of work carried out at the participating libraries, the management's and the clients' perceptions about the library's importance, prestige and value, and other aspects. It seeks to determine the causes of the present situation and what its consequences could be. This should prove to be a useful exercise for librarians and managers, to be able to address future issues. In fact another main research question is to identify issues related to professional staffing at special libraries.

The only available data regarding professional staffing and their situation in Maltese special libraries before this study is from a 2006 report and a 2013 directory of Maltese information centres. Considering the extensive technological and social changes which happened in the last two decades, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to assess the situation today, identify which issues are still prevalent and discuss potential solutions. The best way to conduct this exercise was deemed to be a mixed methodology approach involving interviews and questionnaires with different sets of stakeholders.

1.4 Definition of terms

The following are some key terms forming the basis for this study. They are listed and defined in Table 1, for ease of reference and to clarify any doubts about what the researcher means when using such terms.

Term	Definition
Cause	The reason why something is what it is; that which produces an effect or a situation. (Cambridge Dictionary)
Client	A person who uses library services, sometimes also referred to as “user” or “patron”. (Reitz, 2004)
Collection	All the items, including books, journals, periodicals, magazines, ephemera, photographs, audio-visual material and more, owned or held in a library, catalogued and arranged in a systematic way for ease of access, sometimes referred to as “holdings”. (Reitz, 2004)
Consequence	The result of an action, situation or condition. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Digitisation	The process of converting data which exists in printed format to digital format, meaning text or images that can be processed by a computer and displayed on a screen, usually by means of a scanning or photographic device. (Reitz, 2004)
Entity	A corporate body or organisation which exists on its own and is independent legally and financially. (Cambridge Dictionary)
Issue	A subject or problem that is identified and analysed in a study. (Cambridge Dictionary)
Librarian	A person, often professionally qualified and trained, who oversees a library, its care and promotion, contents cataloguing, organisation and weeding, and who sees to the needs of library users. (Reitz, 2004)
Management	The group of persons who are in control and make decisions for an entity, including its library and members of staff. (Cambridge Dictionary)
Manager	A member of the management team (see <i>Management</i>).
Parent organisation	The entity that owns, is responsible for and in control of the special library. (Law Insider)
Professional	A person whose job requires a high level of education, skill and training. (Cambridge Dictionary)
Special librarian	A person who works at a special library (see <i>Special library</i>).
Special library	A library which holds items that are specialised on a particular area of study that interests the company or parent organisation that

	owns it and its management, employees, members or patrons. (Reitz, 2004)
Staff	The whole group of individuals responsible for the operations and running of a library (Reitz, 2004). In this study this term is being used for both paid employees and volunteers.
User	See <i>Client</i> .

Table 1: Definition of terms

1.5 Structure of the study

The following is a breakdown of the structure of this study, listing the five chapters and what each one attempts to achieve.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter introduces special libraries, special librarians and their value and role in today's digital era. It includes the main glossary terms and their definitions. It also advocates the importance of this research study.

Chapter 2: Research background

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature about the subject. It defines special libraries and gives a list of characteristics which distinguish them from other library typologies. It looks at some of the most renowned and prestigious special libraries worldwide, namely in the US, Europe and Australia, before shifting the focus on Maltese libraries. The chapter discusses professionalism and the importance of education, training and practice for librarians to be treated as such. Finally it deals with the staffing situation in Maltese special libraries and beyond, as described in previous studies, along with the probable causes and consequences of the said situation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter starts by stating the aims and objectives of the research study, before describing its significance and the reasons for its importance. It outlines the research strategy and explains the choice of a mixed method approach to collect data through interviews with special librarians and entity managers and questionnaires with library users. This is followed by the research design, which explains the qualitative approach that was adopted, before describing the data collection process, which includes statistical data regarding participating libraries, conducted interviews and received questionnaires. Supplementary material is given in the Appendices. The chapter describes what data was analysed and how, some ethical considerations which influenced the research process, and limitations noted along the same process.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Chapter 4 presents the various findings of the study, deduced from the data collected through interviews and questionnaires. It includes numerous tables and pie charts depicting various statistics regarding the most salient points, including the extent of the staff population in Maltese special libraries, the stakeholders' assessment of the situation, the reasons behind it and the consequences it brings about, the financial situation and its relevance towards staffing issues, the management's level of support and investment plans, qualities needed to be an efficient librarian, practical solutions, compensating for lack of staff, the role of technology, and the need and benefits of a library at the parent organisation. These findings are analysed considering the related literature discussed in Chapter 2 and adopting the methods described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The concluding chapter reminds the objectives and the methods used and highlights the most important achievements and outcomes of the study. Importantly, Chapter 5 compares the findings in Chapter 4 with those of previous studies and gives practical recommendations for the future. The chapter also suggests some possibilities for further research on the subject, before passing the concluding remarks.

The next chapter (Chapter 2: Research background) gives a thorough review of the literature that was written before this study regarding special libraries and librarians, staffing issues, their causes and consequences, and what constitutes librarian professionalism, starting with international data and gradually zooming in on the situation in Malta.

Chapter 2: Research background

2.1 Introduction

“The significance of libraries endures for the health, wellbeing and success of society. They are vital places providing opportunities for educational advancement, intellectual nourishment, cultural promotion, communal engagement and economic development” (Kosciejew, 2022, p. 98). Libraries have long been pivotal in education and culture and are no less important in today’s digital age. There are various library typologies. This study focuses on specialised libraries.

2.1.1 Introduction to specialised libraries

IFLA’s glossary in its Library Map of the World (2024) enlists library types, most notably national, academic, public, community and school libraries. The last type is “Other” libraries which are not part of the other groups, and include “special libraries, government libraries, medical libraries, industrial and commercial libraries” (<https://librarymap.ifla.org/data-glossary/library>). This formally recognizes special libraries for their specialised unique contribution to knowledge and distinguishes them from other library types. Meanwhile, IFLA’s “Competency Guidelines for Rare Books and Special Collections Professionals” of 2022, quoting from a previous IFLA document of 2019, defines “special collections” as:

collections of materials such as incunabula, rare books, printed books, manuscripts, archival records and materials, ephemera, photographs, prints, maps and other graphic works; audio-visual material in all formats; born-digital and digitized media; art objects and three-dimensional (3-D) objects deemed irreplaceable or considered to be unusually rare and invaluable

(Sonzini, 2022, p. 404)

The SLA, founded in 1909 for information professionals, works in “specialised” settings like commercial companies, government agencies, university faculties, associations, non-profit organisations and law firms. Its founder and first president, the renowned John Cotton Dana, felt “the practical and utilitarian needs” (Clair, 2009, p. 24) of patrons who required information for different purposes than those who visit traditional libraries. He intended to represent the interests of librarians working in fields like law, insurance, business and engineering, among others. Dana described special libraries as libraries “for men of affairs” (Hanson, 1991, p. i).

2.2 Characteristics of specialised libraries

The term “specialised libraries” is broad and encapsulates a diversity of libraries, so a simple definition does not suffice. They “select, evaluate, organise and disseminate information” in specialised topics (Silva, 1970, p. 8) and consist of collections that are specialised in specific fields of knowledge (Murray, 2013). This encapsulates various subjects, as Kumar (1998) says in Chisita et al. (2020, p. 223): “Libraries are critical institutions whose services permeate every aspect of human life.” Today we speak of “information centres” alongside “libraries” (Fraser-Arnott, 2020).

Perhaps their most distinctive attribute is that special libraries normally have a “single clearly identifiable clientèle” (Humphreys, 1988, p. 1). The fact they serve well-defined small groups of people (employees at corporate companies, faculty students etc.) permits special librarians to know their clients better than their colleagues in other categories do, which enables them to provide clients a better service (Murray, 2013). This contrasts with national libraries, whose mission is to “collect, protect and make available the recorded memory” (NLI, 2022, p. 3) of a country or nation, and are usually described as national information depositories since

anybody can be their client – their “responsibilities include ensuring the security of the national collection and its availability to researchers and users through the Library’s reading rooms and online” (NLI, 2022, p. 20).

Special library attributes also contrast with those of public libraries. The latter are usually “equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment” (Koontz et al., 2010, p. 1) and serve all kinds of users with all kinds of literary genres, interests and formats. Special libraries are very different, “sponsored” by and created to serve parent organisations (Murray, 2013, p. 275), whether corporate, governmental, non-profit or other organised entities (Matheny, 2015), and are subject-oriented according to their parent organisations’ areas of expertise.

Another factor is the library’s location (Silva, 1970), usually within government departments, businesses, organisations, headquarters or museums. Silva (1970) also differentiates between the most significant possession of most library types – the items themselves – and that of special libraries – the information contained in the items. A final characteristic is the library function: to collect and disseminate comprehensive information about a particular topic (Ashikuzzaman, 2013).

Today special librarians have different roles from other librarians. They are moving towards the role of information managers and deliverers (Scammell, 1997). Stan Davis of the Harvard Business School suggests a new way for special librarians: “being transformed into information professionals” (Williams & Zachert, 2009, p. 19). In fact special libraries are also referred to as corporate libraries, research centres or information centres. Today researchers describe them more by their mission than the physical space they occupy (Porter, 1997).

2.3 Renowned specialised libraries

Due to the wide spectrum of parent organisations there are numerous specialised libraries:

“By 1929 Dana could enumerate more than 1,000 special business libraries in the U.S. alone”

(Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2011, pg. 32). This part looks at six of the most renowned, valuable, comprehensive and prestigious special libraries around the world.

2.3.1 US special libraries

- Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library:

Situated in New Haven, Connecticut, USA it possesses over one million books, apart from manuscript pages, papyri and more. It welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors every year and millions of readers online, offers knowledge about a wide range of topics, and presents several special exhibitions free of charge. It started in 1963 with three special collections but today houses various unique collections, including “manuscripts and early printed books from the Middle and Near East, Japan, China and Korea as well as special formats such as playing cards and maps” (<https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>).

- Newberry Library:

A Chicago privately-owned library, open to the public free of charge since 1887 and intended by its founder Mr Newberry as “a first-class reference library to satisfy the wants of scholars” (Anon., 1887, p. 213). It consists of over 1.6 million books and millions of items like maps, music documents and more, mainly specialising in “some humanities for everyone” (<https://www.newberry.org/about>), as described by its current president and librarian Astrida Orle Tantillo. Its special genealogy collection enables people to research their family history.

- George Peabody Library:

Situated in Baltimore, Maryland it is described as “one of the most beautiful library spaces in the world” (<https://www.library.jhu.edu/library-hours/george-peabody-library/>). Since 1982 it has been acting as the research library of the John Hopkins University, housing the university’s special collections, including numerous nineteenth century items and very early editions of *Don Quixote*. It contains 300,000 volumes and its specialisation ranges from religion to history, geography, travel, exploration, music – including the Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music (George Peabody Library: Past and Present, 2023) – and much more.

2.3.2 European special libraries

- Special collections at various Bodleian Libraries of the University of Oxford:

More than one million of the thirteen million items held in these libraries can be classified as special collections. Some of them focus on very specific and unique subjects, such as the ornithology collections of the Alexander Library, the plant taxonomy collections of the Sherardian Library, and the Jewish and Hebrew collections of the Leopold Muller Library. Other collections include the Classics and art history collections of the Art, Archaeology and Ancient World Library and the literary collections of the English Faculty Library.

- Cuypers’ Great Library:

Part of the Dutch National Museum (Rijksmuseum) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, it houses around 450,000 items and specialises in art, art history and science. It was “a direct consequence of the growing demand for scientific libraries in the 19th century” (Vogel, 2012, p. 46).

2.3.3 An Australian special library

- Special collections at the State Library of Victoria:

Established in 1854 in Melbourne as the first (and still the busiest) Australian library, its collections focus mainly on the state of Victoria and include a Rare Books Collection of thousands of items which formerly belonged to prominent book collectors. One of the latter was John Emerson, who was mostly interested in seventeenth-century material (Salzman, 2021) and ephemera, such as almanacs, which make his collection a highly specialised one.

2.4 Specialised libraries in Malta

2.4.1 A directory of Maltese libraries

The second edition of *A Directory of Libraries, Information Units and Archives in Malta*, published by MaLIA in 2013, lists 166 libraries in the Maltese islands. Eighty-three (50%) are categorised as “special”. This makes specialised libraries the biggest group of information centres in Malta in 2013. However, category sizes in the MaLIA directory might be misleading. The editorial decision was to include a number of libraries in more than one typology. For instance the Cana Movement Library is classified as religious and special, the Commerce Department Library as governmental and special, and the Institute of Art and Design library at MCAST as academic and special, whereas the BirdLife Malta Library, the Malta Employers’ Association Library and the Central Bank of Malta Library are classified solely as special libraries (Zerafa et al., 2013). This proves the challenge to pigeonhole a particular library under one label or category.

2.4.2 Similarities and variations

Prima facie, according to the 2013 directory, Maltese specialised libraries vary in certain aspects and are similar in others. For instance some collections are quite large, made up of thousands of items, such as the Central Bank of Malta Library or the China Cultural Centre Library, whereas others, such as the Malta Union of Teachers library or the Hospice Malta library, are small, with a few hundred books. Most libraries employ only one or two librarians, mostly on part-time basis. Size and the number of staff should not minimise a library's importance or status. Rather, it is "the variations in size, foci and client bases that characterize special libraries" (Fraser-Arnott, 2020).

2.4.3 Online presence

The 2013 directory hardly provides information about Maltese special libraries' online presence. Today some do have a website and online catalogue. One of the best is the Central Bank of Malta Library. Its catalogue is available to the public and anyone can register and search items (<https://www.centralbankmalta.org/the-library>). The Theological Library at the Archbishop's Seminary in Tal-Virtù, Rabat also has a comprehensive online catalogue (<https://library.seminary.org.mt/PublicSearch.aspx>).

2.5 Defining library staff as professionals

The Australian Council of Professions gives a thorough definition of what makes a profession (2003, p. 1):

A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing, special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others.

The same Council states that every profession has its own code of ethics which guides actions and demands high standards from members of the profession. Being “professional” presumes a person has “integrity, ethics, trust and expertise” (ACP, 2003, p. 1).

2.5.1 Education, training and early practice

The ACP’s definition emphasises knowledge and skills, acquired through research, education and training. In various professions, formal education, enhanced by study and research, is the first step to become a professional. Training then emboldens what is learnt through formal education and “has at least equal value in the developmental process” (Pierson et al., 2019, p. 416). Besides education and training, introduction into the profession, early practice and interaction with fellow professionals help librarians formulate their perception of librarianship as a profession and to identify themselves within it (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2016).

Later on in a career, experience is key in acquiring the fundamental aspects of the profession and in solidifying the professional’s identity (Sare & Bales, 2014), sharing values and the same way of being as fellow library professionals (Yap et al., 2023). All of these – continuous learning and training, everyday practice, experience and interaction with others – suggest librarianship is a dynamic profession (Fraser-Arnott, 2019a) influenced by many factors like “environment, context and time” (Pierson et al., 2019, p. 422). “Professional identity is the identity that an individual builds around their work or professional life” (Fraser-Arnott, 2019b, p. 431), and such an identity is apt to blur in other identities, when necessary, like in the case of teacher-librarians (Branch-Mueller & de Groot, 2016).

2.5.2 Distinguishing professions and associations

An important aspect that defines a profession and portrays its members as professionals is what makes it unique, easily identifiable and distinguishable from other professions, namely “the specialized activities, values and standards of the discipline” (Garcia, 2011, p. 94). Such standards and values are often defined, developed and advocated for by associations (Preer, 2004), such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the Special Libraries Association (SLA). Associations also give professions a way to communicate professionally (Bak, 2002) and collectively, bringing together individuals performing similar tasks in different places and circumstances. They strengthen a profession’s status in society and work in its favour.

2.5.3 Librarians as professionals

Professionals are presumably experts in their field and assist members of the public who do not possess the same knowledge or who need expert help in that field. A lawyer assists clients at court, a medical professional diagnoses and cures a patient, while an educator teaches and assesses students. Similarly, librarians have their set of skills, knowledge and theoretical grounding which are unique to their profession (Houston, 2016). They “serve as insiders, having unique knowledge of information systems and technology, which they bring to those in need, the outsiders” (Pierson et al., 2019, p. 419).

Another defining aspect of librarians as professionals in the digital age is their skill to evaluate the legitimacy of sources and counter false information, along with fact-checking (Yap et al., 2023). Fake news, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation have become a constant threat due to social media and the digital transformation of the world (Carmi et al., 2020).

2.6 The staffing situation, causes and consequences

Special libraries face the same challenges as all types of organisations, like the implementation of organisational change, turnover of staff, capacity building and safeguarding the knowledge transfer of the institution.

2.6.1 The extent of the staff population

Human resources in libraries consist of the management, employed staff and volunteers in some cases. This personnel makes decisions about collection development, weeding, budgeting, cataloguing and more, and meets users and researchers daily. One great challenge faced by professionals, including librarians, is embracing and implementing organisational change (Samara & Garoufallou, 2023). Special librarians experience specific challenges, including shortage of staff. This happened especially in corporate companies when retiring librarians were not replaced, as a result of which some corporate libraries have closed in the last two decades, although “companies still need quality information” (Murray, 2016, p. 194). Issues of inadequate staffing in special libraries have existed for many years. A British Library survey among special libraries and information units conducted a few years back found 32% had only one employee, some of whom on part-time basis (Ashworth, 1979). In the 1960s the situation was that “there are few special libraries with a sufficiency of professional staff, or whose chief librarian or information officer can spare the necessary time to supervise training” (Astall, 1966, p. 56).

2.6.2 The situation in Malta

Though Malta is very small compared to larger countries, the situation is similar. When MaLIA’s *Report on the State of Maltese Libraries* was published two decades ago, five major

difficulties were mentioned specifically regarding special libraries. Staffing was one of them, along with funding, space, recognition and stock (Mizzi et al., 2006).

Porter (1997) suggests a minimum of one qualified librarian and one support staff employee for small special libraries. However, some Maltese libraries were reported to have no staff, while staff in other libraries lacked the time and necessary resources to perform their duties efficiently (Zerafa et al., 2013). In fact quite a few special libraries listed in the 2013 directory did not specify their number of personnel; others had just one librarian or a handful.

2.6.3 Possible causes of the staffing situation

A shortage of staff in special libraries could be caused by other problems, like a lack of professional recognition by the entity's management, which results in inadequate budgeting and minimal support to staff. Meanwhile, staffing difficulties bring about other challenges. Ironically, for example, they exacerbate the problem to retain existing staff, who can become disheartened and demotivated (Ergado & Gojeh, 2015).

Besides the will to give an optimum library service, any organisation should have a strategic plan: the type of service to provide, a collection development policy, a suitable location to house the collection, and more. Above all, "it is necessary to determine and select the ideal minimum staff needed to run an efficient service. This should be done in conjunction with the original policy and planning of the administration" (Astall, 1966, p. 53). The lack of staff in several libraries could indicate that certain entities do not adhere to Astall's advice or find it very hard to meet requirements.

Since special librarians are usually employees or members of the parent organisation, they need a degree of compatibility with the organisation itself and their colleagues (Porter, 1997), to be "professionals aligned with their employer's mission" (James & Pearlstein, 2011, p. 40).

Sometimes what causes a shortage of staff is the challenge to find librarians with managerial skills who would also be interested and knowledgeable in the organisation's area of expertise, have great communication and interaction skills (to liaise with colleagues and clients) and are trustworthy at the same time.

There could also be certain "dissatisfiers" in libraries owned by parent organisations: poor salaries, minimal opportunities for career advancement, a lack of say in decision-making, poor communication with the managers, and a lack of training or automation at the library (Bakewell, 1993). Murray (2018) says librarians at companies that focus on skills other than information (like manufacturing, law etc.) are often automatically overlooked for promotions or career advancement. Meanwhile, a big "satisfier" mentioned by Bakewell (1993) – a good relationship with colleagues – is obviously lacking in libraries with a sole librarian. Solo librarians hardly interact with colleagues within the organisation, and perform all sorts of tasks at their libraries. Indeed, "special librarians need to be proactive rather than reactive" (Camilleri, 2013, p. 26), or rather, "proactive, flexible and motivated" (Anastasi, 2005, p. 8). Otherwise they would not be appreciated by the management and would be overlooked and not given funds or support (Semertzaki, 2011).

Another cause could be a lack of awareness of the purpose, the utility or even of the existence of special libraries (Mizzi, 2018). If they are not valued and appreciated by their parent organisations, special libraries are in for trouble, as are the librarians themselves. However, for libraries to be valued and supported accordingly, "strategic alignment" (Semertzaki, 2011, p. 31) with their parent organisations is necessary (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2011), and special librarians should be keen to acquire an "intimate knowledge of the business" (Davenport & Prusak, 2004, p. 14) and to help colleagues solve their information needs, to convince

managers of their library's worth. Special librarians should engage in "networking and collaboration" (Murray, 2013, p. 276) to convince the management of their importance.

2.6.4 Possible consequences of the staffing situation

Astall's 1966 comment that few librarians can spare time for training (see above) not only emphasises the lack of staff in special libraries but also describes a negative consequence: several librarians never get the opportunity to attend proper training. This hinders their professional development, which could in turn impact the service given to clients. Contrastingly, some scholars believe one cannot (and does not need to) teach librarianship – knowledge and skills will be acquired through practice and experience (Leonard, 1950). Meanwhile, a 1992 study in Canada to identify the position of librarians regarding bibliographic instruction found that while special librarians consider information delivery as the main scope of reference service, they mentioned "financial constraints as the justification for *not* engaging in bibliographic instruction," citing lack of staff and lack of time to perform instruction duties (Harris, 1992, p. 255).

Other negative consequences of staff shortage include the inability to keep libraries open – as happened in the Dorchester County libraries (Henningesen, 2023) – and staff having to perform various functions. Furthermore, new information professionals may feel overwhelmed, burnt out and inadequately prepared for everyday tasks. Having no colleagues with whom to share problems makes the burden heavier. One may think small libraries are at an advantage because they are easier to manage, have less wages to pay (Borg, 2007), their staff is more approachable, and users are given individual attention. However, reality is often different, as in the case of the Life Sciences Library at the Indiana University Bloomington. While assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a library branch in a downsizing exercise,

librarians at the said library mentioned the lack of staff as a primary weakness (Winterman & Hill, 2010).

Libraries with a sole librarian may not be able to attend to their users' needs if librarians are unavailable (Anastasi, 2005) or have to perform various tasks everyday, including administrative duties not linked to librarianship (Murray, 2013). Speaking of administration, another dilemma faced by special librarians, especially solo librarians, is who manages the library. "In special libraries leadership and management skills are necessary" (Murray, 2018, p. 185) but special librarians probably lack managerial status within their parent organisations. On the other hand, non-librarian managers often have total control over the budget and make final decisions about acquisitions.

2.6.5 The staffing situation in other library typologies

Staff shortage seems also widespread in other library categories. South African academic library staff was asked what problems they faced when handling online requests. Twelve out of twenty-seven respondents mentioned shortage of staff as a primary challenge which considerably increased their pressure (Dube, 2021). The situation is similar in public libraries (Mthembu et al., 2019), where unqualified and untrained personnel were employed to fill gaps, diminishing library service significantly (Department of Arts and Culture & NCLIS, 2014). In Pakistan non-professional staff were pinpointed as a problem in specialised libraries (Nawaz, 2021).

2.7 Conclusion

The special libraries spectrum is wide, depending on their parent organisations' nature and purpose. One aspect that differentiates them from other library typologies is being part of an

entity and existing to serve its members. Special librarians should acquire the same type of education, training and experience as librarians in other typologies, but require specialised training in their area of expertise, to provide the best possible service to their colleagues and to be considered and treated as professionals.

Numerous such libraries operate in Malta. One main issue they face is staffing. Early twenty-first century studies show there are various special libraries, considering Malta's small area. Most operate with minimum staff, sometimes a solo part-timer or volunteer. Several factors may cause shortage of staff, such as the entity management's lack of appreciation and a lack of funds. Consequences brought about by lack of staff include a lack of training, unfinished work and demotivation among the minimal staff.

The MaLIA report on the state of Maltese libraries is twenty years old, while the directory, which also gives an insight on Maltese library situations, is more than a decade old. Therefore, the most recent picture dates back a few years. Since then, the world has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted special libraries. All these facts prove this study's importance, to assess the present staffing situation in Maltese special libraries, compare findings to former studies, and identify staffing issues and their probable causes and consequences. This way managers, librarians and researchers would have the data to predict and formulate a way forward for these information institutions, which have operated for many years but whose existence and purpose need to be reevaluated according to the signs of the times to serve modern society better in a digital world.

The next chapter (Chapter Three: Methodology) outlines the steps taken and the tasks carried out to assess the situation in Maltese special libraries and analyse it in terms of the salient points raised throughout this literature review.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

To establish the extent of staff in Maltese special libraries and explore issues which could be causes or consequences of the present situation and answer the research question, the study collected opinions and suggestions from personnel presently involved in these libraries. A mixed methodology approach was applied, consisting of interviews and questionnaires. This chapter describes the aims and objectives of the study and highlights its importance in understanding the context, to have a clear assessment of the present situation of Maltese special libraries. It also explains why and how a mixed method approach was applied, why and how interviews and questionnaires were used, and the steps taken to conduct this study successfully.

3.2 Research aims and objectives

3.2.1 The aims of the study

The staff population extent in Maltese special libraries today is practically unknown. The most comprehensive data is derived from the aforementioned 2006 MaLIA report and the 2013 directory of information centres. Still, information is sparse and not detailed. Thus, this study's first aim is to get a snapshot of the present staffing situation in specialised libraries. It aims to identify what could have contributed for this situation to be brought about and to shed light on future possibilities and predict the direction Maltese special libraries could take. This research study should put librarians and entity managers in a good situation to prepare themselves for the future.

3.2.2 The objectives of the study

The following objectives were set out to reach the aims of this study:

1. Discover the extent of the staff population in special libraries in Malta and Gozo.
2. Compare the findings to those of the 2006 MaLIA report and the 2013 directory of Maltese information centres.
3. Analyse data to discover staffing issues that exist in Maltese special libraries today and identify challenges regarding the staff complement.
4. Investigate data to explore the causes of the extent of the present staff population in Maltese special libraries.
5. Observe the consequences that were brought on Maltese special libraries due to their present professional staff situation.
6. Offer practical suggestions, as derived from similar international situations and as inspired per best practice.

3.3 Research significance and importance

This study is primarily significant to stakeholders in Maltese special libraries, but not exclusively. Foreign special libraries can relate to the findings and evaluate their situations accordingly. The study updates existing knowledge about staffing in Maltese specialised libraries and presents arguments about the prospects of such libraries in Malta and abroad.

The findings are particularly important considering three facts:

- a. the last snapshot of the staffing situation in Maltese specialised libraries dates back a few years;
- b. the vast technological advancements the world has experienced since then, considering today's digital dominance and the emergent Artificial Intelligence;

- c. the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on libraries, especially regarding staffing.

Special librarians and management teams in parent organisations in Malta and abroad can use this study to compare and assess their libraries' situations and identify any challenges they may already be encountering, aiming to find the best ways to address them. Stakeholders should keep in mind that "if one wants to solve a problem, one must generally know what the problem is" (Kerlinger (1986) in Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014, p. 5). Institutions could apply the suggestions offered to overcome problems efficiently, according to their situation.

3.4 Research strategy

To analyse the staffing situation the study required a context. Data from interviews and questionnaires (see point 3.5) was evaluated in the global context of special libraries, with a focus on the Maltese islands. Context and perspectives are important in defining qualitative research (Busetto et al., 2020). The following strategy was applied:

- thorough reading of published literature about the subject;
- applying findings to the Maltese context to structure the gathering of data;
- analysing the extent of the staff population and other issues in a number of Maltese special libraries, a mix of governmental, religious, commercial, political libraries and more, big, medium-sized or small;
- understanding their concerns and positive and negative aspects;
- extracting trends, ideas, thoughts and suggestions given by respondents.

For this research strategy to be successful, a mixed method approach was opted for, as explained below.

3.5 Mixed methodology approach

When considering the best methodology to answer research questions it is worth considering that “one approach is rarely adequate; and if the results of different methods converge (agree, or fit together) then we can have greater confidence in the findings” (Gillham, 2007, p. 2). This study adopted a mixed method approach, the two methods being interviews and questionnaires.

Interviews were conducted with special librarians and managers at parent organisations that own the participating libraries. Interviews enable researchers to relate to people while conducting a conversation to acquire data. They offer the chance to observe the respondents’ body language and get the feel of what participants think and believe (Knott et al., 2022). The interviews were semi-structured, with a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions, “each... clearly connected to the purpose of the research” (Galletta, 2012, p. 45). This style lets researchers start with some leading questions that require straight-forward answers, like names and numbers, to set the ball rolling and channel the discussion towards the focus. This allows subjectivity, personal opinions and suggestions to be expressed freely, and is “the most common type of interview: one researcher taking a semi-structured approach to interviewing one participant using a topic guide” (Knott et al., 2022, p. 1).

Questionnaires were used with library clients. They served as an alternative to interviews as it was impossible for the researcher to meet library users personally and conduct interviews individually, for various reasons, like time constraints and practicality. Besides these constraints, however, questionnaires were used with clients since their “potential strengths primarily lie in the refinement of research objectives and the testing of the research hypothesis to find valid answers to the research questions” (Ekinci, 2015, p. 106). For the

same reasons as the interviews, questionnaires were semi-structured. Close-ended questions required ticking a box, whereas respondents could answer open-ended questions freely, expressing their thoughts, ideas, reflections and suggestions. Questionnaires were left with librarian interviewees, for them to distribute the forms personally to clients. This was opted for as there was no direct contact between the researcher and library users.

3.6 Research design

The study adopted a qualitative approach with an inductive bottom-up research method. The mode of analysis was exploratory data analysis (EDA). Contrary to confirmatory data analysis (CDA), EDA is concerned with discovering, exploring and detecting phenomena in gathered data through the research methods used (Jebb et al., 2017), in this case through interviews and questionnaires. The inductive method followed this sequence:

observation ➡ pattern ➡ tentative hypotheses ➡ theory

- Observation: observing the extent of the professional staff population in special libraries globally, with special focus on the Maltese situation, through literature, interviews and questionnaires;
- Pattern: analysing empirical data to extract common traits from different situations as described in readings consulted for the literature review along with common observations, comments, suggestions, complaints and situations as described by consulted stakeholders (librarians, managers and clients);
- Tentative hypotheses: formulating tentative hypotheses from the findings and patterns observed. Hypotheses regard the size, nature and clientèle of special libraries; their dependence on parent organisations; finances and resources; the attitudes of

management staff; audience engagement levels; professional qualifications and incentives for librarians; technological advances and future staffing plans;

- Theory: developing a testable theory regarding the probable causes behind the staffing situation in Maltese special libraries today and the consequences on special librarians, library users, parent organisations and special libraries themselves.

3.7 Data Collection

The original plan was to collect empirical data from around ten libraries, possibly eight in Malta and two in Gozo, to get as wide and clear a view of the situation as possible. More than ten libraries were contacted, to counter for those which would not consent to participate. However, concurrence was more than expected, and at the end sixteen libraries participated, all specialising in different areas of expertise.

3.7.1 Participating Maltese special libraries

Table 2 breaks down the types of libraries which participated in the study, while Figure 1 visually represents the percentages.

Type of special library	Quantity	Percentage
Academic	1	6%
Governmental entity	6 ¹	38%
Trade union	1	6%
Political	2	13%
Theological/religious	5	31%
Legal	1	6%
Total number of special libraries	16	100%

Table 2: Participating library types

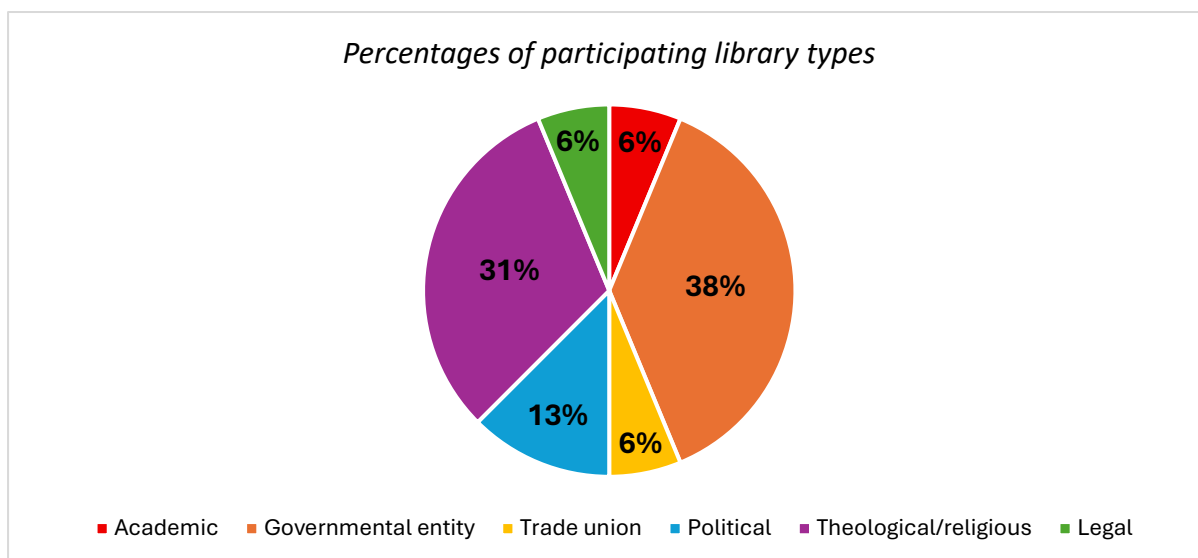


Figure 1

Data was collected through these qualitative methods:

- interviews with main stakeholders:
 - special librarians working at participating libraries;
 - managers at parent organisations owning these libraries;

¹ A special librarian at a governmental entity felt uncomfortable being interviewed and declined to participate. Still, the librarian emailed the researcher with useful information which is also being considered in the data analysis. However, for statistics purposes and percentages this case is not being considered along with the interviews and does not feature in tables and figures.

- questionnaires distributed to other stakeholders:
 - library users – employees or members of parent organisations

3.7.2 Interviews with librarians and managers

The number of interviews, with librarians and managers combined, was twenty-four, split as shown in Table 3. Figure 2 visually shows the percentages. Interviews lasted between roughly twenty minutes and almost an hour. In two cases no librarian was interviewed but only an entity manager, for reasons explained in Chapter 4.

Interviews	Quantity	Percentage
With special librarians	14	58%
With entity managers	10	42%
Total number of interviews	24	100%

Table 3: Conducted interviews

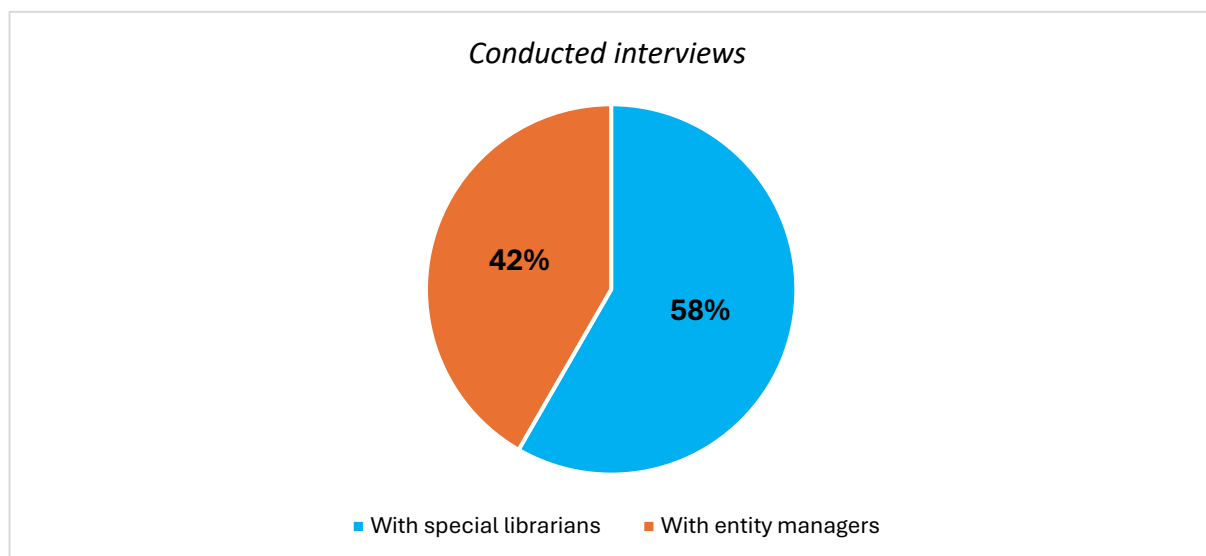


Figure 2

As a point of clarification, one library falls under two separate entities, thus provided two interviews with different managers. That is why ten manager interviews were conducted

although nine entities participated in them. Table 4 shows the number of participating libraries in librarian and manager interviews, while Figure 3 visually shows the percentages of both interview sets out of sixteen participating libraries.

Participating libraries in interviews	Quantity	Percentage
With special librarians	14	88%
With entity managers	9	56%
Total libraries	16	

Table 4: Libraries participating in interviews

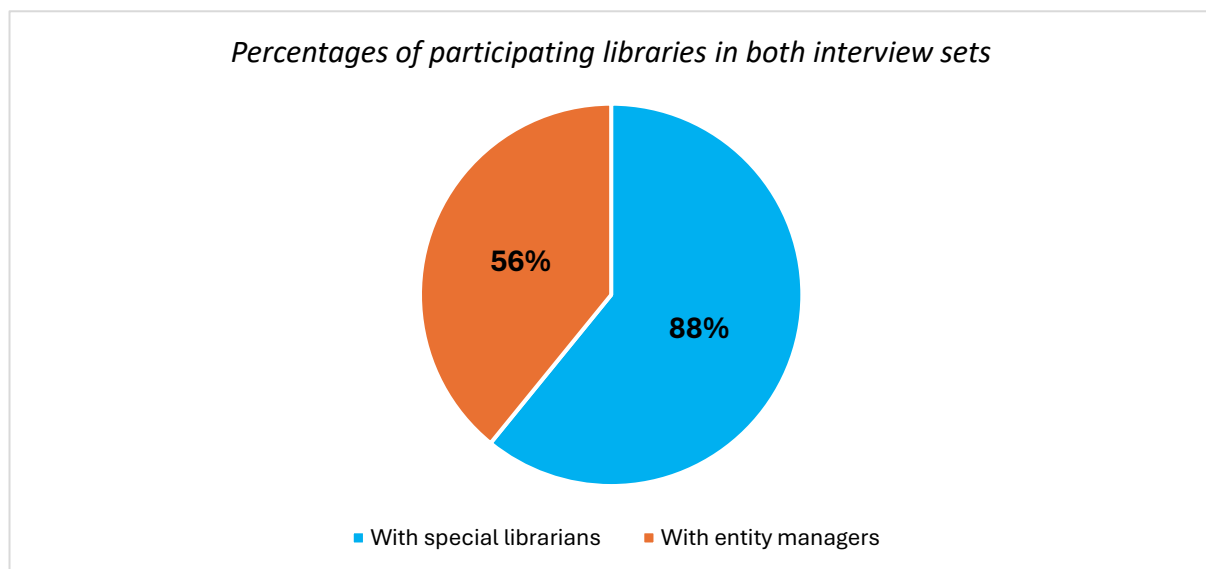


Figure 3

3.7.3 Levels of participation in the interviews

A different number of respondents were interviewed from every library. While only one librarian or manager was interviewed in certain cases, other libraries provided more interviewees. Table 5 shows the different levels of participation while Figure 4 visually gives the distribution percentages.

Number of interviewees	Libraries	Percentage
1 librarian	6	37.5%
1 manager	2	13%
1 librarian & 1 manager	6	37.5%
2 librarians	1	6%
3 librarians and 2 managers	1	6%
Total number of libraries	16	100%

Table 5: The libraries' levels of participation in interviews

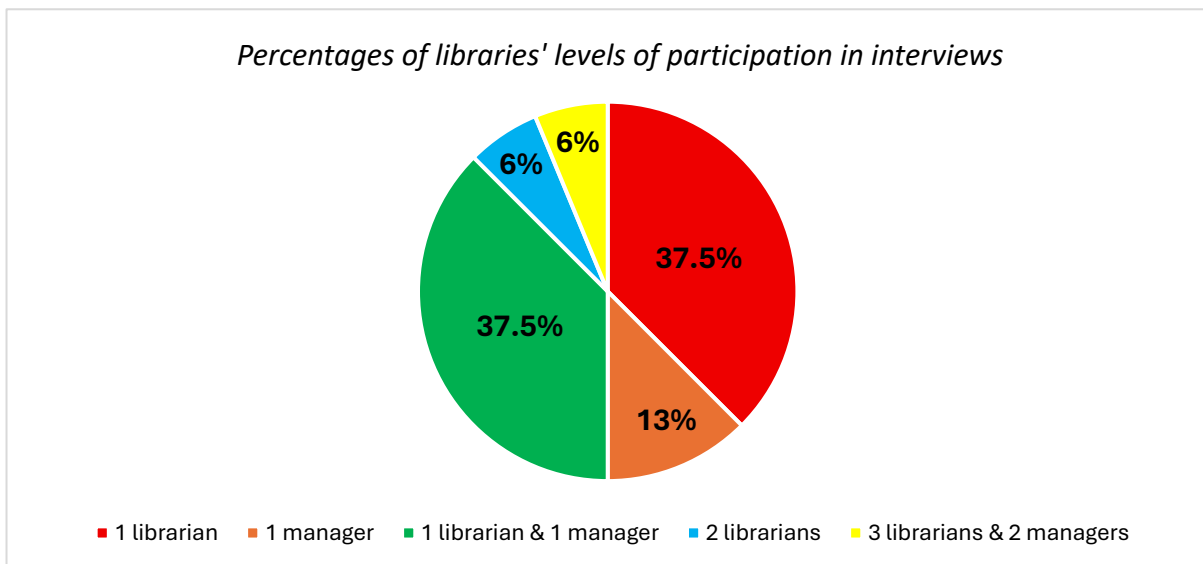


Figure 4

Knowing which library categories interviewees came from is very important. Numbers and percentages are presented in Table 6 and Figure 5 for librarians and in Table 7 and Figure 6 for managers.

Special library type	Librarian interviews	Percentage
Academic	1	7%
Government entity	4	29%
Trade unionistic	1	7%
Political	2	14%
Theological/religious	5	36%
Legal	1	7%
Total number of interviews	14	100%

Table 6: Library types of participating librarians

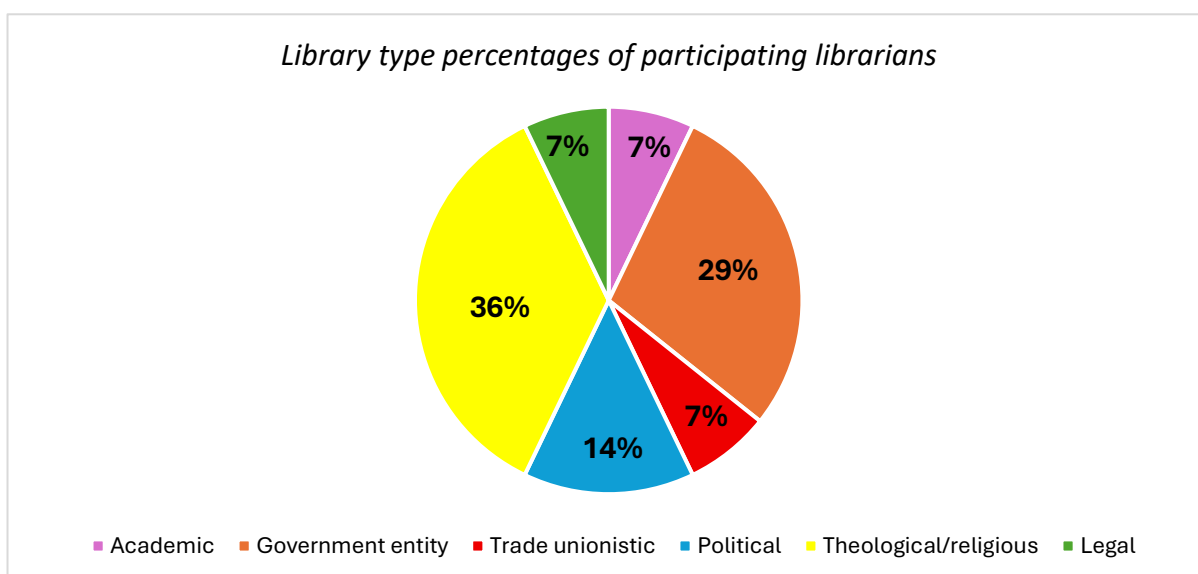


Figure 5

Special library type	Manager interviews	Percentage
Government entity	4	40%
Theological/religious	5	50%
Legal	1	10%
Total number of interviews	10	100%

Table 7: Library types of participating managers

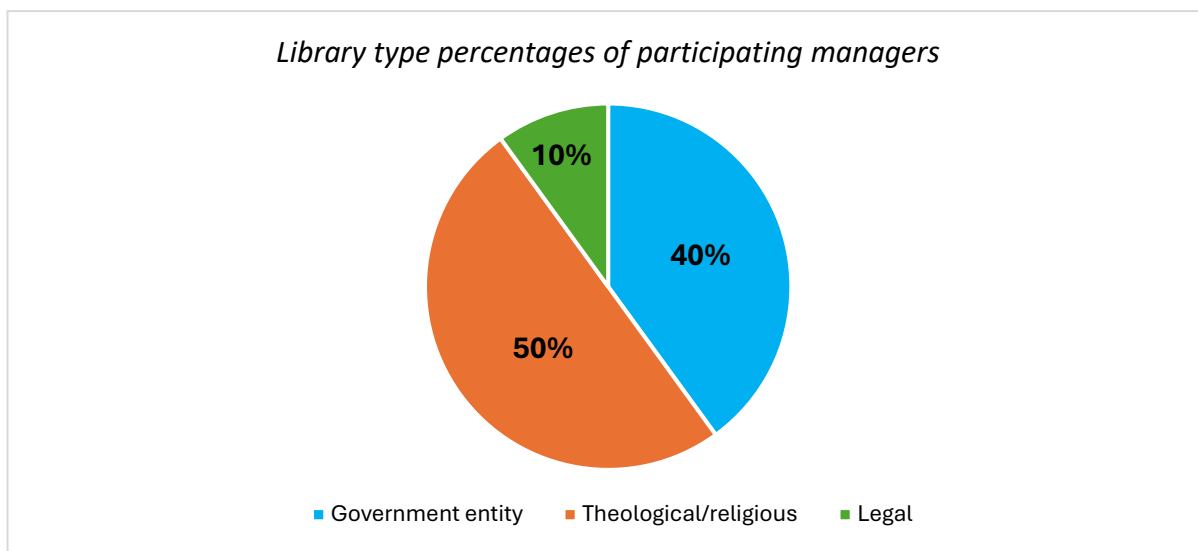


Figure 6

3.7.4 The number of interviewees

Another clarification regards two interviews which were carried out with more than one interviewee. In one interview at a theological library three librarians participated together, while an interview at a government entity was done with two librarians together. Thus, the total number of interviewees was twenty-seven, as depicted in Table 8. Figure 7 visually gives the percentages of both sets of interviewees from the total of twenty-seven.

Interviewees	Quantity	Percentage
Special librarians	17	63%
Entity managers	10	37%
Total number of interviewees	27	100%

Table 8: The number of interviewees

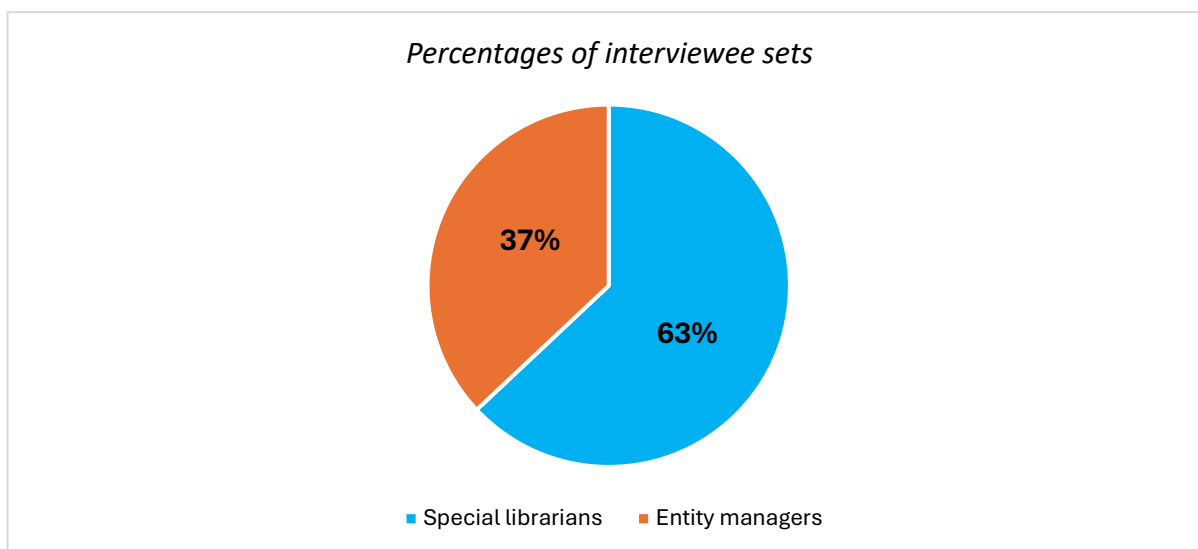


Figure 7

3.7.5 Received questionnaires

The number of questionnaires that were distributed to library users and the number of potential participating clients are unknown. Special librarians could photocopy and distribute as many questionnaires as they wished. In all, fourteen questionnaires were received, from only four libraries. The number of libraries in each category from which questionnaires were received is shown in Table 9. Figure 8 visually gives the percentages of library types which provided questionnaires.

Library type	Quantity	Percentage
Political	1	25%
Government entity	2	50%
Theological/religious	1	25%
Special libraries which provided questionnaires	4	100%

Table 9: Library types which provided questionnaires

No questionnaires were collected from academic, trade unionistic and legal libraries.

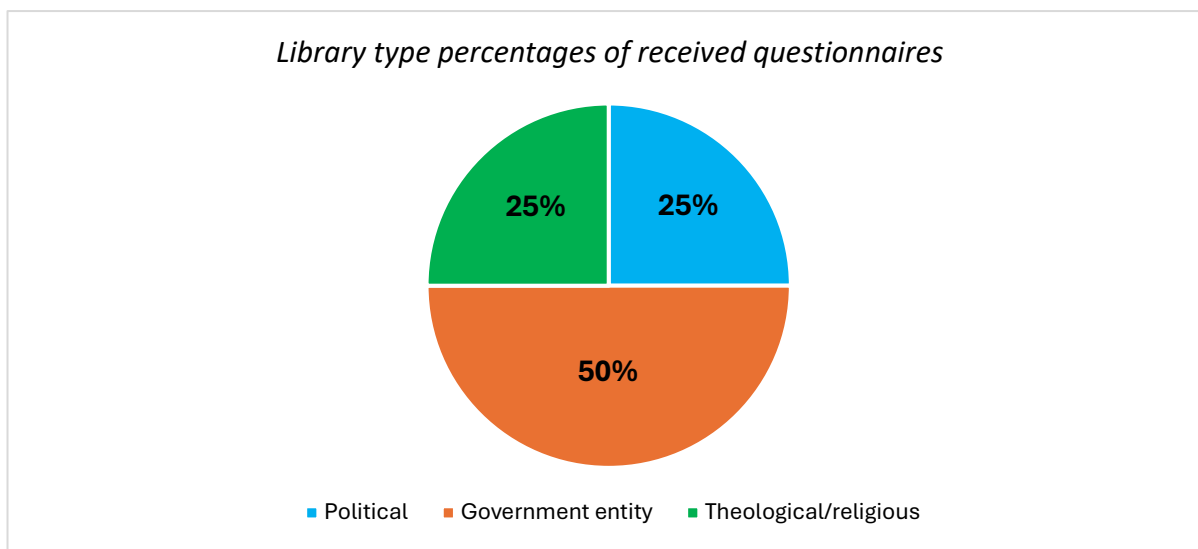


Figure 8

Meanwhile, Table 10 shows the number of questionnaires received from each of the four libraries while Figure 9 visually shows the percentages of their distribution.

Library type	Quantity	Percentage
Political	3	21%
Government entity	7 ²	50%
Theological/religious	4	29%
Total number of questionnaires received	14	100%

Table 10: Received questionnaires

² One government entity library provided four questionnaires while another three questionnaires were received from another library.

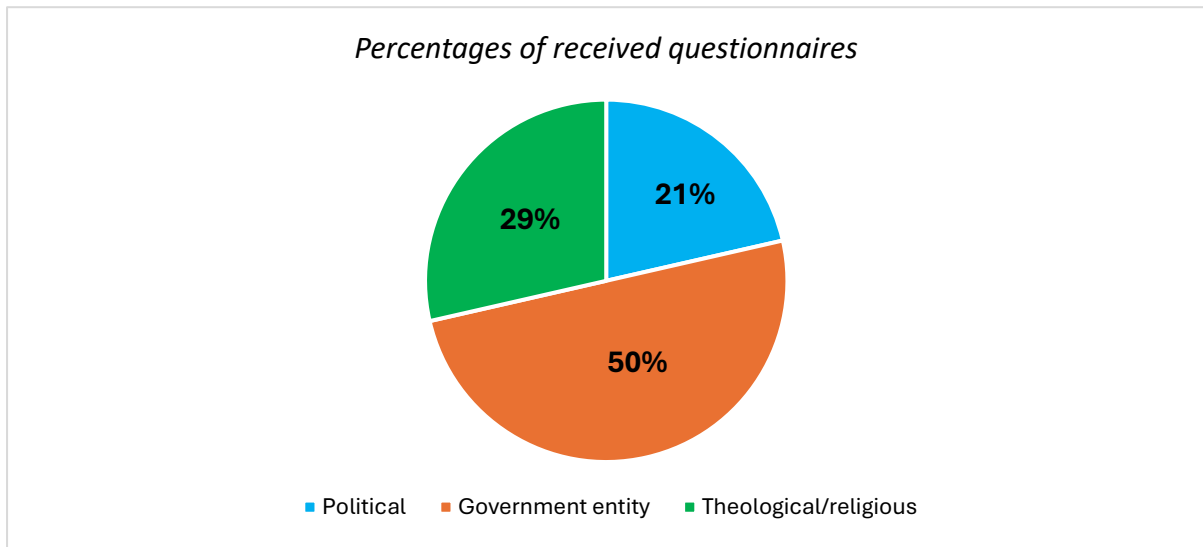


Figure 9

3.8 Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Most were carried out in English and four in Maltese, adhering to the interviewees' requests. Some respondents codeswitched between Maltese and English. Then, all interviews were analysed thoroughly, along with the questionnaires received. Most interview questions used with librarians were similar or on the same lines of those answered by managers. Some were also close to questions included in the clients' questionnaires, albeit from different perspectives. Important points from interviews and questionnaires were jotted down. Then, similar ideas were put together in clusters, coded according to topics and categorised into main and secondary themes. Interview questions and questionnaires are given in Appendices C, D and E.

The main themes regarding staffing in Maltese specialised libraries that were analysed were the following:

- the number of special librarians working in each library;
- the number of full-time, part-time or volunteer librarians;
- the number of professional and unqualified librarians;

- the librarians' and managers' opinions about their staffing situations, mainly whether they feel staff is lacking;
- the reasons why the situation is as it is;
- the consequences that the present situation may bring about;
- whether the staffing situation is related to the financial situation;
- the level and type of commitment, enthusiasm and support given by managers;
- the most important skills needed in special librarians;
- how libraries compensate for lack of staff problems;
- whether librarians and managers think more staff is needed;
- the main challenges libraries face regarding staffing;
- practical and innovative solutions to staffing problems;
- the role of technology in addressing problems of staff;
- whether managers and clients feel the library is needed at their organisation, and to what level of importance;
- the benefits of having a library at the organisation, according to managers;
- the clients' level of satisfaction with the service they receive;
- the type of service clients expect from librarians;
- the clients' opinions about increasing or decreasing library staff;
- the clients' opinions about what influences staffing decisions at their libraries.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Since the study involved interactions with human subjects, ethical clearance was required from the Faculty Ethics Research Committee, prior to commencement. The Committee gave its approval in January 2025, with some minimal recommendations, which were duly applied.

The main ethical consideration was whether to name participating individuals and organisations or leave them anonymous. Names may give more credibility to data; however, anonymity is usually expected to yield more sincere responses, although in some cases it may still deter respondents, who “may deal with uncomfortable questions by delivering various forms of evasive or sidestepping talk” (Ellersgaard et al., 2022, p. 682). The study had to ensure discussions do not jeopardise the respondents’ situation in their parent organisation. This was relevant since librarians were asked, for example, about the type and level of support they receive from managers. Thus, the study was duty bound to offer some level of anonymity to respondents, and this was duly explained in the information letter (see Appendix A) and consent form (see Appendix B) sent beforehand to interviewees. However, one should also consider that total anonymity “cannot be completely guaranteed” (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 629). In Malta, for example, social insularity, the relatively small number of special libraries and special librarians, and certain levels of familiarity between different respondents may make it easier to identify respondents. This was duly explained in the information letter. All participating librarians and managers signed the consent form as proof of acceptance and ethical clearance to participate in the study. Questionnaires did not require names or signatures and were kept anonymous.

Responses were analysed in clusters, according to the types of libraries they came from. The intention was to ensure more confidentiality for interviewees, although this advantage could be limited in certain cases, especially in library categories from which very few libraries participated. Furthermore, extracting results in clusters, without the need to identify specific individuals or libraries, was more significant and indicative for this study. For instance, it was enough to discover existing issues in religious libraries and made no difference whether data came from the Capuchin, Jesuit or Augustinian library. Some issues pertaining to individual

libraries were found to indicate common trends in some types of libraries, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Interviews and questionnaires were saved in password-protected cloud folders. Only the researcher, the supervisor and possibly the examiners may be given access, only if necessary. This was duly explained in the consent form, along with interviewee rights, like the right to stop an interview at any point and to have data destroyed if the interviewee so wishes.

3.10 Research limitations

Research that uses interviews and questionnaires for data collection is quite limited to the number of individuals and organisations taking part (Vivar et al., 2007). In this study sixteen special libraries participated, from more than eighty listed in the 2013 directory of libraries. This was one limitation, since the number of participating libraries does not represent the whole situation. A related limitation was that certain librarians and managers declined the invitation to participate. This forced the researcher to work with fewer options, although the final number of participants was still satisfactory.

Another limitation was the minimal contact between the researcher and library users, mainly due to lack of time and opportunity. The number of clients varies between different categories, but it was still impossible to meet every individual user. Considering the small user pool of these libraries, questionnaires were deemed more fitting for data collection, rather than other methods such as focus groups.

A final limitation worth mentioning is that the answers, ideas and suggestions obtained were very subjective and biased at times, something Rice & Ezzy (1999) had warned about. Sometimes respondents deviated from the subject of a question, picked on unrelated issues

and gave information which was irrelevant for the scope of the study. In such cases the researcher had to steer the conversation back to the focus to extract relevant data and answer the research question.

3.11 Conclusion

This research study was conducted to answer the research question about staffing issues in Maltese specialised libraries. A central issue was whether staff is lacking in these libraries. The study also aimed to identify the causes and consequences of the present staffing situation. The best option for such a study was a mixed method approach, consisting of interviews with librarians and managers and questionnaires with clients who were willing to participate. The next chapter (Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis) presents the findings and discusses in detail the issues identified during interviews and from questionnaires.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a thorough analysis of the findings derived from interviews and questionnaires. It answers the main research question by establishing the extent of the staff population at the participating libraries and explores themes that emerged from the research background and were investigated through the interviews and questionnaires.

The findings are presented according to different subthemes, like the number of staff, the financial situation and its impact on staffing, the managers' level of commitment, the necessary qualities in special librarians, and others. This is the ideal way to present the findings in this study, since various similar questions were asked to librarians, entity managers and users, to compare the opinions, suggestions and reflections of different stakeholders with often contrasting needs.

Twenty-seven special libraries were invited to participate. Sixteen took part with interviews or questionnaires, whereas eight libraries declined the invitation, another library did not reply, another one accepted but did not manage to conduct an interview, and another library just sent an email with relevant information which was taken into account in the findings. Table 11 gives a breakdown of which categories the participating libraries come from, their names and parent organisations, and the number of interviews conducted with librarians (or staff assisting in the library) and managers, and user questionnaires, for every library.

Library category	Libraries and their parent organisations	Librarian/staff interviews	Manager interviews	User questionnaires
Academic	Special Collections – University of Malta	1	–	–
Governmental	Central Bank of Malta	1	–	3
	National Statistics Office	–	1	–
	National Museum of Archaeology (Valletta)	1	1	4
	Parlament ta’ Malta lib.	1	1	–
	Gozo Museum of Archaeology (Ċittadella)	–	1	–
	Enemalta library	1	–	–
Trade union	GWU & Union Print	1	–	–
Political	Informa – PN	1	–	3
	PL library	1	–	–
Theological/ religious	Theological Library – Major Seminary & Foundation for Theological Studies	1	2	–
	Capuchin prov. library	1	1	–
	Major Seminary – Diocese of Gozo	1	–	4
	Jesuit depository library	1	1	–
	Augustinian prov. library	1	1	–
Legal	Ganado Advocates	1	1	–
Total	16 participating libraries	14	10	14

Table 11: Categories and participating special libraries

Some findings are supported by verbatim quotes from interview and questionnaire participants and analysed in line with relevant literature discussed in Chapter 2.

4.2 The staff and the extent of its population

This section establishes the number of staff members at every participating library. It describes the employment status of the staff – whether employed or volunteers – and their professional status – whether qualified in librarianship or in other disciplines or simply unqualified.

4.2.1 The number of librarians

The number of librarians serving in specialised libraries varies, mostly according to the library category. The sole participating academic library has thirteen members of staff, assigned within three departments: digitisation, Melitensia and the Archives and Rare Books section. While the number is comprehensive enough, one should consider the thousands of items and potential users of this library. In fact, colleagues from other sections of the library at large are often requested to help this Special Collections section.

Libraries at government entities are not uniform in the way they operate. Only three of the six participating libraries (50%) have staff working full-time. The other three have no librarians and distribute tasks among various employees. The government entity which only sent an email with information also never had any staff, but a clerk takes care of the library. Meanwhile, the trade unionistic library has one employee, while the two political libraries' situations differ greatly regarding the number of staff. Whereas one library has a director and four volunteers, the other library has no employees but two helpers. The legal library employs one person who also looks after the firm's archive.

The five participating religious libraries also operate differently. One library has a comprehensive staff – three employees and a volunteer. Another library involves the

interviewee (a member of the clergy) and eight volunteers to different degrees. However, three libraries whose parent organisations are religious Orders are in dire situations. One library has four staff members giving some hours per week but the other two are looked after by a sole librarian. Though not ideal, working alone in a library happens to be quite common (Church & Reeve, 2011).

4.2.2 The librarians' employment status

This part analyses the employment status of participating librarians, in which there are notable differences. The variation ranged from teams of full-timers and part-timers working together to libraries with no designated staff.

The situation was quite straightforward in the academic, trade unionistic and legal libraries. All three have full-timers on the job, though their situations vary. The academic library is the only library with a two-digit cohort – all full-timers – and takes interns (but no volunteers). Sometimes it even engages additional staff from other parts of the larger academic library to help with certain projects. This high number of personnel is to be expected, considering the thousands of students following courses at the institution, the academic staff and researchers in general. The solo librarians at the trade unionistic and legal libraries are both full-timers. Political libraries basically rely on volunteers, but one library employs a full-time director, who is assisted by four volunteers. The other political library is manned by a long-serving elderly volunteer and a youth who has joined recently.

The employment status in the other categories was more varied. Governmental libraries are the only category which spans the whole spectrum. Half of them employ at least one full-timer. The largest cohort is two full-timers and a part-timer. For some projects this library even takes students on board. The other 50% of libraries at government entities have no

designated staff. They operate by assigning tasks to different personnel when the need arises. One entity is overseen by the interviewee, who also sees to requests, but also engages students regularly. Another library takes interns occasionally while the other does not. Two governmental libraries engage volunteers, one occasionally and the other regularly – the same one which takes students regularly.

Religious libraries rely on volunteers. Of five participants only one did not mention volunteers. Regarding this reality Murray (2015, p. 501) said “there is a strong tradition of volunteerism in special libraries”. Only one employs a full-timer, in which case there are even two part-timers and an experienced volunteer. This is in fact the biggest cohort in participating religious libraries. Only one other religious library pays a librarian – a part-timer without voluntary help. The other three only engage volunteers. One library is manned by one volunteer offering ten hours a week, another library opens on all working days thanks to six volunteers and two substitutes, while another library has an experienced veteran leading three other volunteers and some students occasionally. Figures regarding this theme are presented in Table 12.

Library category	Full-timers	Part-timers	Volunteers	Students	No staff
Academic	1/1	–	–	1/1	–
Government entity	3/6	1/6	2/6	3/6	3/6
Trade union	1/1	–	–	–	–
Political	1/2	–	2/2	–	–
Theological/religious	1/5	2/5	4/5	1/5	–
Legal	1/1	–	–	–	–
Total libraries	8/16	3/16	8/16	5/16	3/16

Table 12: Staff members in every employment status

4.2.3 The librarians' professional status

The librarians' professional status also varies between different categories, and even between libraries in the same category. The study analysed whether librarians at participating libraries are qualified in the field, have different degrees, are unqualified (not graduated in any field) or whether there is no assigned staff.

The academic library staff are all qualified, mostly in librarianship or a related area like archives. The personnel at both political libraries are also qualified, albeit not in librarianship, while the volunteers helping them are well educated and most of them are graduated, but only one volunteer has previous library experience. Meanwhile, the librarian at the trade unionistic library is unqualified but has over three decades of experience, while the librarian/archivist at the legal library is reading for a Master's degree in archives.

The professional status at governmental and religious libraries varies significantly. Two government entities have one and two qualified librarians, while a librarian with many years of experience at another entity is graduated in another area. As highlighted earlier, three other government entities have no designated library staff, but the personnel who assist the occasional user are all graduated in other areas, like statistics or archaeology. The clerk at the governmental library who sent an email with information is not qualified in librarianship.

Religious libraries are almost all served by qualified librarians. Staff at three of the five libraries (60%) has a librarianship degree, another library is led by a qualified archivist while the remaining library has an experienced librarian who has never obtained a degree in the area. Some religious libraries involve graduates in other areas, whereas most volunteers are unqualified. Situations involving unqualified librarians have been an issue for some years in other countries too, with the main reasons being a lack of graduates or a lack of funds for

decent salaries (Paton, 1960). In all cases, however, volunteers are supervised by a qualified librarian.

It seems staff who is not qualified in librarianship is not getting proper training when hired. Hertenstein (2025, p. 7) believes librarians' education is "the responsibility of the individual, the employer, and LIS educators". The director at a political library enrolled volunteers for a course organised by MaLIA, but other qualified librarians who oversee volunteers do not train them in librarianship. In some libraries, even at government entities, not a single employee is qualified in the area. Table 13 shows figures regarding the qualification status of participating librarians.

Library category	Qualified	Other degree	Unqualified	No staff
Academic	1/1	1/1	–	–
Government entity	2/6	1/6	–	3/6
Trade union	–	–	1/1	–
Political	–	2/2	–	–
Theological/religious	3/5	2/5	3/5	–
Legal	–	1/1	–	–
Total libraries	6/16	7/16	4/16	3/16

Table 13: Participating librarians' professional status

4.3 The present staffing situation

This section gives a simple organigram of the participating libraries, to describe their situation regarding staffing. It also explores what librarians and managers think about their situations.

4.3.1 Distribution of responsibilities

In libraries manned by solo librarians there is no distribution of responsibilities. They catalogue, classify and shelve books, assist researchers and more. That is the situation in six participating libraries: two at government entities, the trade unionistic library, two religious libraries and the legal library. Three governmental libraries do not have assigned staff (see Table 2). In these cases the manager assigns some member of staff to answer queries and supervise students helping in the library. In the other government entity the library is part of the Communications Office and is cared for by a managing librarian, another librarian and a part-timer.

The academic library has a comprehensive organigram. The interviewee manages the Special Collections section at a large academic institution and is responsible for Digitisation, Melitensia and Archives and Rare Books. All three departments have a head of section. The remaining subordinate librarians are distributed between the three sections. One political library has a full-time director who supervises a few volunteers. The other political library has two volunteers sharing the same responsibilities.

Three religious libraries have more than one staff member. At the Jesuit depository library an experienced veteran volunteer is in charge, and the other volunteers and students follow his instructions. The Gozo Seminary library is led by a qualified archivist who distributes tasks and the opening hours between six volunteers, with two others substituting them when needed. The Malta Seminary library involves a full-timer, two part-timers and a volunteer who respond to the Rector of the Major Seminary and the Director of the Foundation for Theological Studies.

4.3.2 Assessment of the situation

The study analysed the librarians' and managers' views about their present situations. In this case it suffices to compare the answers of both sets of respondents.

Thirteen staff members at the academic library is a good number, but the interviewee emphasised their great amount of work. The collection is ever-growing, mainly thanks to bequests, so more staff is needed. The trade unionistic library needs staff urgently since the situation is very dire – the librarian cannot keep up to date with all tasks at hand. Contrastingly, the legal librarian and manager said the situation is very manageable and satisfactory respectively. Thus, not only the number of staff determines if a situation is manageable, but also other factors like the amount of work and the level of usage.

Both librarians of political parties believe more staff is needed, while opinions are mixed in governmental and religious libraries. One governmental library situation was described as satisfactory because the number of staff is encouraging. Other entity librarians said they just manage – two of them are sole librarians. The other library has no staff, but its manager thinks the situation is manageable with the distribution of tasks amongst employees. Two managers at entities with no librarian had differing views. One said the situation is manageable because the library is hardly ever used while the other says their situation “is miserable”.

The three librarians employed at one theological library feel their situation is very positive, while both their managers, in separate interviews, said it is satisfactory, considering its usage, the number of personnel and the opening hours. Contrastingly, librarians at three other religious libraries feel they need more staff – even where six volunteers open the library everyday. Another librarian who is alone and manages just ten hours a week said the situation is very dire. Similarly, three managers (provincials or administrators) agree that more staff is

needed. Tables 14 and 15 give the librarians' and managers' assessments respectively, while Figures 10 and 11 show their percentages.

Library category	Very positive	Satisfactory	Managing	Staff needed	Very dire
Academic	–	–	–	1/1	–
Governmental	–	1/4	3/4	–	–
Trade unionistic	–	–	–	–	1/1
Political	–	–	–	2/2	–
Religious	1/5	–	–	3/5	1/5
Legal	–	–	1/1	–	–
Total interviews	1/14	1/14	4/14	6/14	2/14

Table 14: Librarians' assessment of the situation

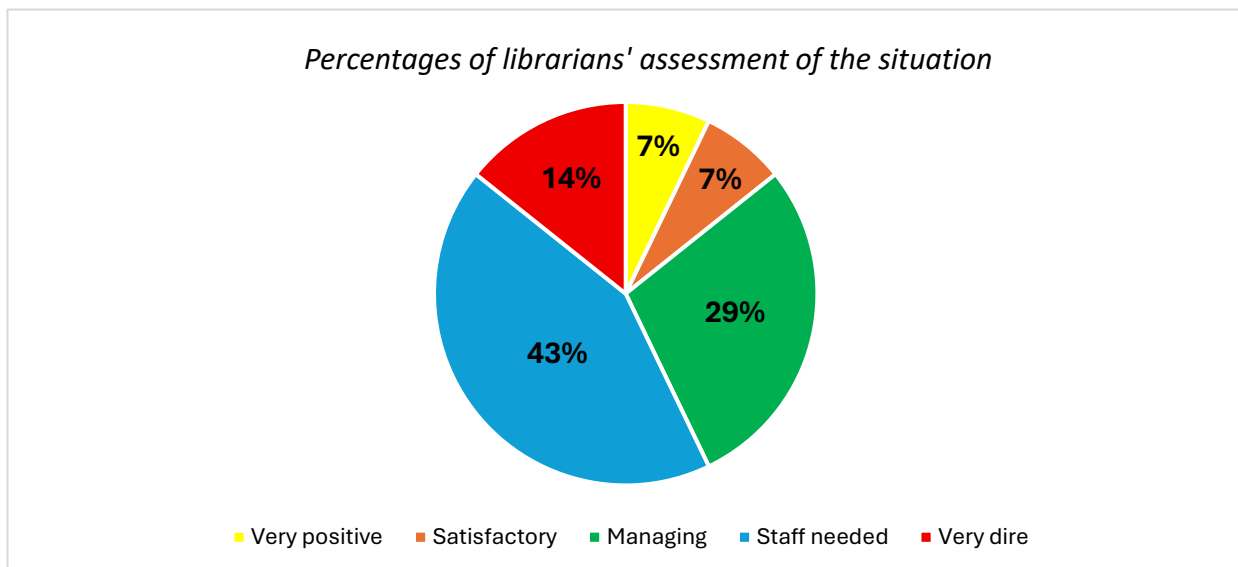


Figure 10

Library category	Very positive	Satisfactory	Managing	Staff needed	Very dire
Governmental	–	1/4	2/4	–	1/4
Religious	–	2/5	–	3/5	–
Legal	–	1/1	–	–	–
Total interviews	–	4/10	2/10	3/10	1/10

Table 15: Managers' assessment of the situation

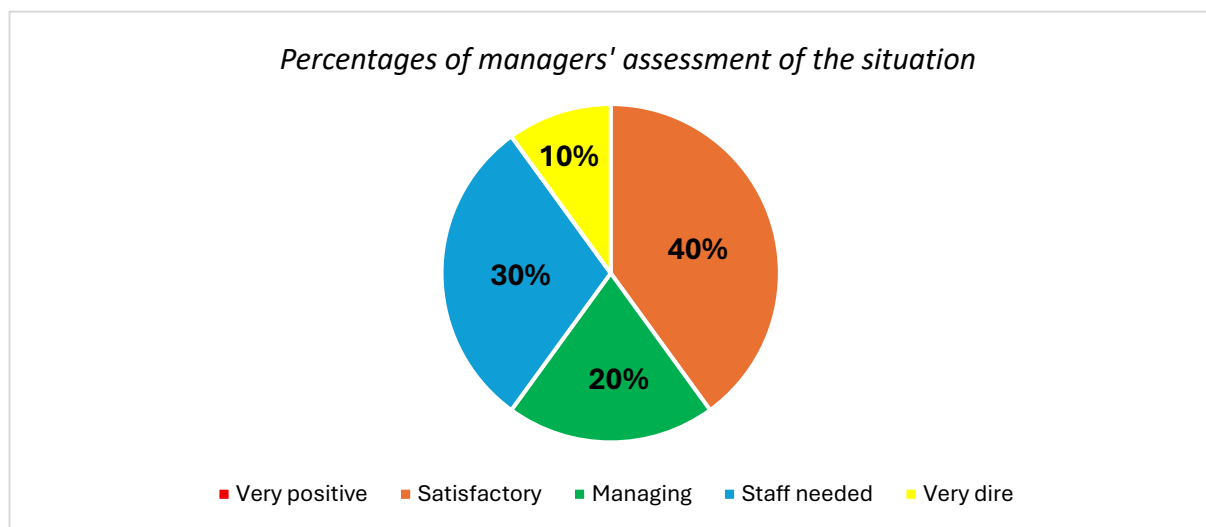


Figure 11

4.3.3 The staff complement and how it compares to the past

This section elaborates on the staff complement, this time including answers from library users. Participants were asked whether there is a lack of staff, just enough or more staff than required at their libraries. Not a single respondent stated there is more staff than required. This suggests there is no surplus, waste or misuse of human resources in participating libraries. Answers varied between lacking staff and having just enough, and were quite balanced, except among managers, 70% of whom said they have enough staff. The librarians', managers' and users' responses are represented in Tables 16, 17 and 18 respectively, while Figures 12, 13 and 14 show their percentages.

Half of the librarians (50%) believe staff is lacking, but library categories differ. The academic library only copes thanks to help from staff in other sections, while all librarians at trade unionistic and political libraries clearly stated they lack staff. Contrastingly, the legal librarian and all four respondents from government entities feel they have just enough staff (although they admitted additional help would alleviate pressure). Political party libraries also declared they lack staff, while religious libraries are balanced. Three libraries declared they are short on staff but two others have bigger cohorts and manage well.

Library category	Lack of staff	Just enough	More than required
Academic	1/1	–	–
Government entity	–	4/4	–
Trade unionistic	1/1	–	–
Political	2/2	–	–
Theological/religious	3/5	2/5	–
Legal	–	1/1	–
Total	7/14	7/14	–

Table 16: Librarians’ assessment of their staff complements

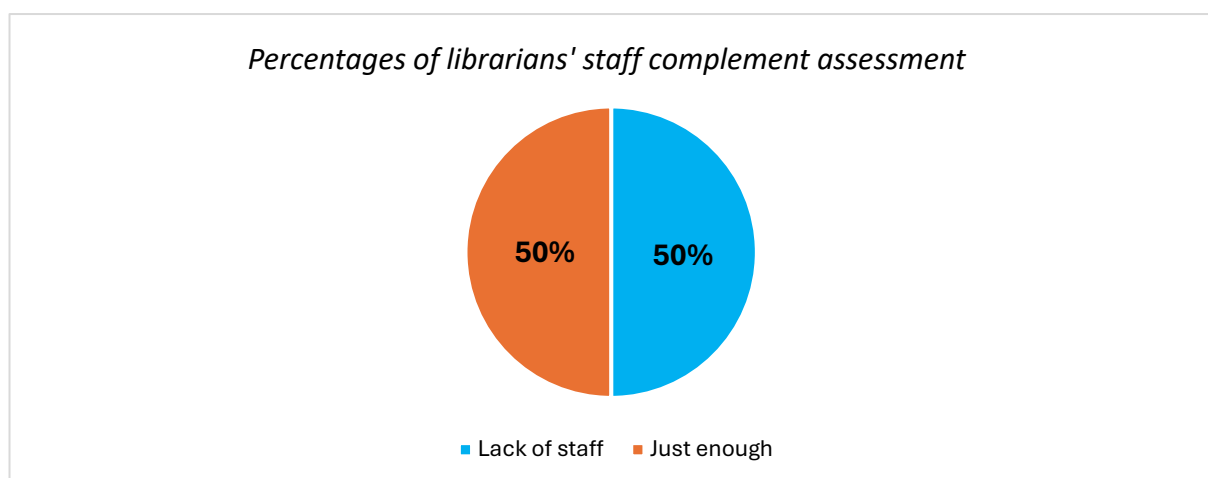


Figure 12

As highlighted earlier, most managers believe they have enough personnel. The legal entity manager thinks the librarian is doing a good job. Surprisingly, whereas governmental librarians feel they are enough, their managers are split. One manager who thinks staff is lacking said a former librarian was never replaced. Thus, the service he used to offer is missing today. Only one religious manager admitted they need more personnel. The other four, including two separate interviewees from the same library with three paid librarians, think they have enough. Two other managers said their libraries are seldom used, and one of them believes the use determines the need.

Library category	Lack of staff	Just enough	More than required
Government entity	2/4	2/4	–
Theological/religious	1/5	4/5	–
Legal	–	1/1	–
Total	3/10	7/10	–

Table 17: Managers' assessment of their staff complements



Figure 13

Questionnaire responses from library users were split. Six of them wrote staff is lacking. The main comment – from a governmental library – was that no fixed staff exists at their library.

Respondents from a political library mentioned the backlog of work and the need of another full-timer, notwithstanding its declining importance in recent years. Meanwhile, the eight respondents who believe there is enough staff, especially governmental employees, mentioned most the minimal level of use. Religious library users mostly remarked there is enough staff to open the library everyday. Other users think staff is enough because the client community is small. Table 19 shows the distribution of all answers given.

Library category	Lack of staff	Just enough	More than required
Government entity	3/7	4/7	–
Political	3/3	–	–
Theological/religious	–	4/4	–
Total	6/14	8/14	–

Table 18: Clients' assessment of their staff complements

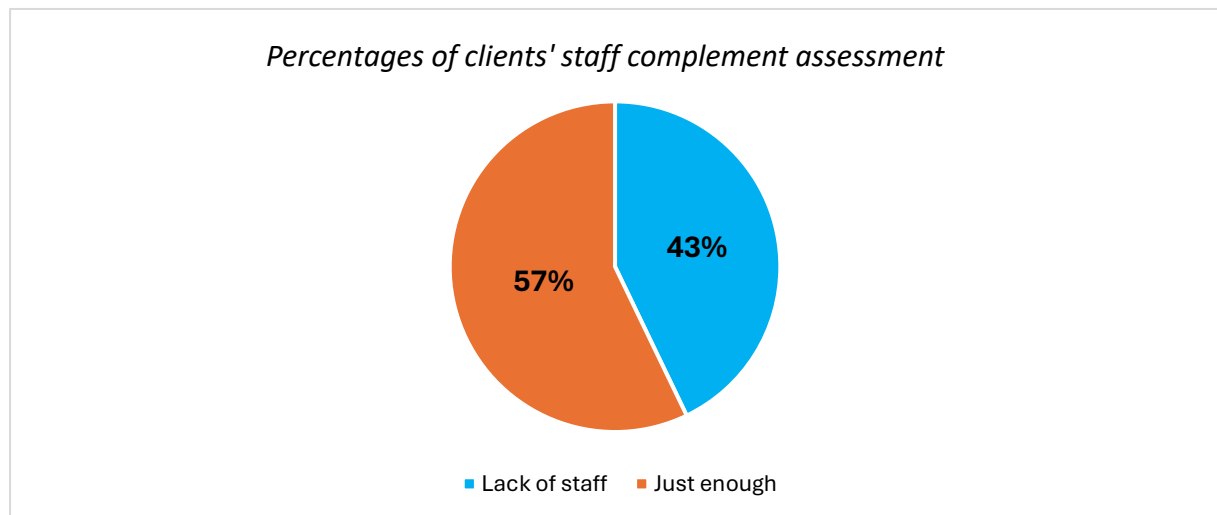


Figure 14

	another full-timer needed	backlog in library work	library given less importance recently	no fixed staff appointed		enough staff to open everyday	minimal usage	small user community	users' needs are met
Governmental				3		2	x	x	
Political	x	x	x						
Theol./religious					2	x	x		
Total	1	1	1	3	2	3	2	1	
	Lack of staff				Just enough				

Table 19: Clients' comments on their staff complement

Librarians and managers were also asked to compare the present situation to the recent past, to analyse whether staff has decreased, remained the same or increased. As expected, answers varied between fourteen different backgrounds, identities and operating styles.

A very common turning point mentioned by librarians was COVID-19. Clearly the recent pandemic played a huge role in reshaping the staff complement at special libraries, mostly because of new remote ways of distributing information. The online factor reduces the need to visit libraries in person and consult physical items. Most literature today can be accessed through library websites and OPACs, so the need of staff for circulation has somewhat decreased. Funding is related. COVID badly affected finances at several parent organisations. Even abroad, sometimes this resulted in a reduction of staff or retiring personnel not being replaced (Green, 2022). In fact, wherever staff increased it was mainly thanks to volunteers.

Table 20 depicts the librarians' answers while Figure 15 gives the percentages.

Library category	Less staff	The same	More staff
Academic	–	–	1/1
Government entity	2/4	2/4	–
Trade unionistic	1/1	–	–
Political	–	1/1	1/1
Theological/religious	1/5	2/5	2/5
Legal	–	1/1	–
Total	4/14	6/14	4/14

Table 20: Librarians' comparison of the present and past situations

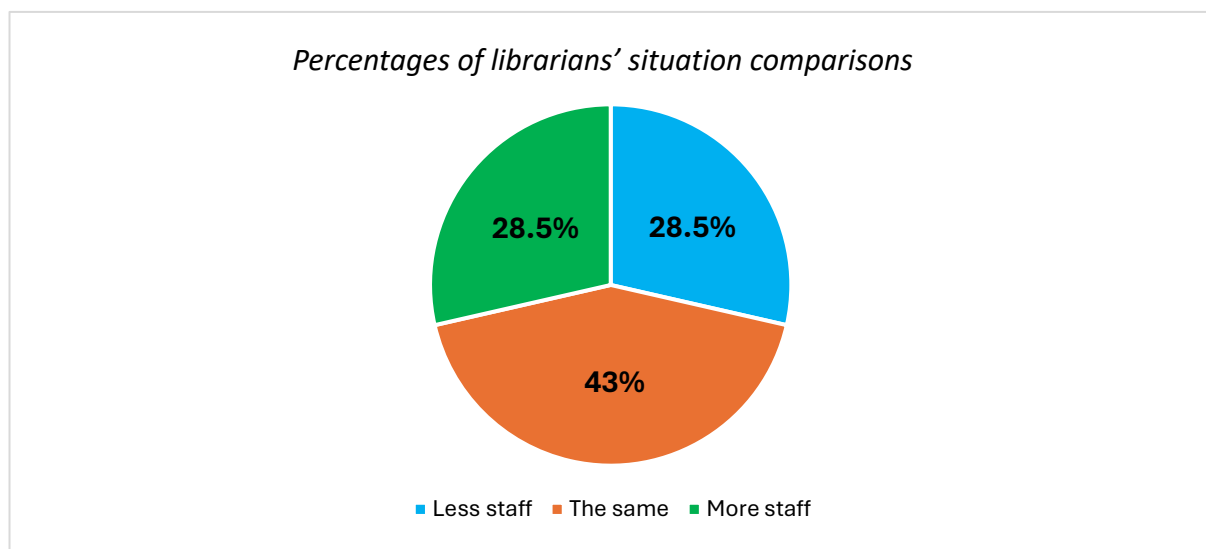


Figure 15

Managers were also quite balanced. Half of them stated their situation remained the same. Like librarians, government entity managers are equally split. Some respondents justified having less staff because usage has also decreased. The situation at the legal library remained the same notwithstanding a major shift in staff, whereas religious libraries were varied. One entity recently replaced a full-timer with a part-timer, but the sense of initiative and

enthusiasm among present staff has kept the service equally efficient. One religious entity previously had more help from youths and friars, but when some professed members moved to another priory some years ago, the situation changed. The new prior involves himself less than the previous one, and youths were not involved again, so there is less staff. Contrastingly, at another religious Order no one looked after the library for years but today there is a team of volunteers. The remaining religious Order had a qualified friar librarian in the past, with another friar and a volunteer helping out, whereas today just one volunteer offers ten hours a week. Interestingly, however, the provincial pointed out the situation feels better, with “quality over quantity”, because the former personnel had many other commitments and little time for the library. The managers’ opinions are represented in Table 21 with their percentages in Figure 16.

Library category	Less staff	The same	More staff
Government entity	2/4	2/4	–
Theological/religious	1/5	2/5	2/5
Legal	–	1/1	–
Total	3/10	5/10	2/10

Table 21: Managers’ comparison of the present and past situations

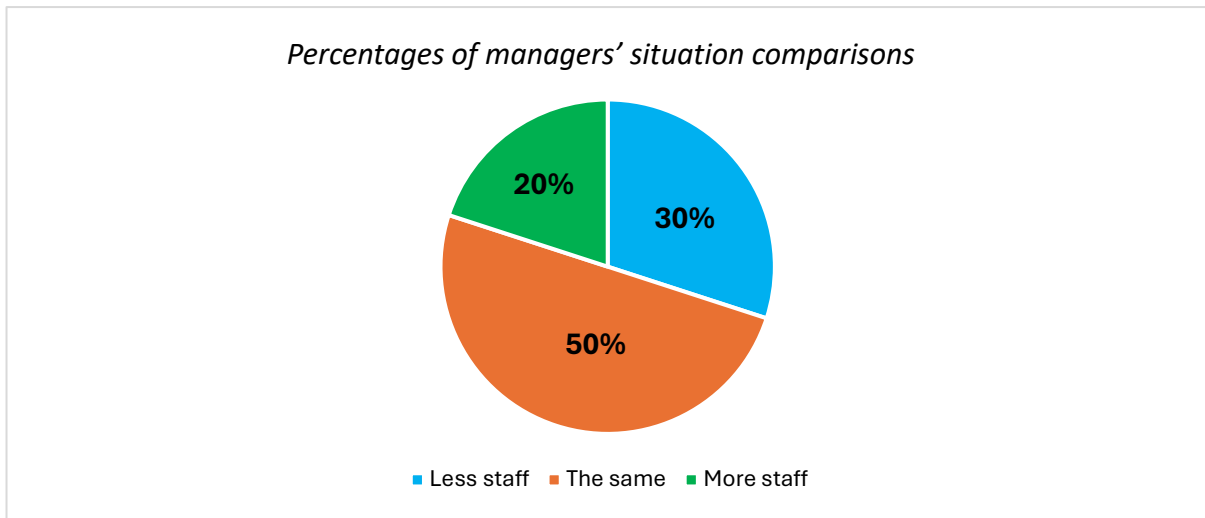


Figure 16

4.3.4 Reasons behind the staffing situation

The study intended to identify the reasons behind the staffing situation being as it is, so the subject was referred to in librarian interviews. Those who think staff is lacking pointed at the lack of funds predominantly. Only the librarian at the legal firm, the most profit-making parent organisation, did not mention finances. Other noteworthy reasons were the lack of vocations (mentioned by religious librarians), the lack of volunteers, unreplaced retiring employees, headcount limitations and minimal library usage. Table 22 represents these reasons.

	headcount limitations	lack of funds	lack of graduands in library studies	lack of space	lack of vocations	lack of volunteers	minimal usage	other priorities	retired employees not replaced
Academic		x							x
Governmental	x	2							x
Trade unionistic		x							
Political		2	x	x		x			
Theol./religious		x			2	x	x	x	
Legal									
Total	1	7	1	1	2	2	1	1	2

Table 22: Reasons given by librarians who think staff is lacking

Librarians at government entities who answered they have enough staff said today's needs do not require more personnel. They manage requests adequately. Meanwhile, colleagues at religious libraries praised the management for their positive situation, saying their managers appreciate the prestige of the library and recruit volunteers efficiently when needed, as shown in Table 23.

	enough staff for today's needs	good management	managing requests well	prestige of the library	recruited volunteers
Academic					
Governmental	x		x		
Trade unionistic					
Political					
Theol./religious		x		x	x
Legal					
Total	1	1	1	1	1

Table 23: Reasons given by librarians who think they have enough staff

4.3.5 Consequences of the situation

The study also strived to identify the consequences which might result from the present circumstances. A very common consequence among various categories, particularly religious and political librarians, was the accumulation of work or work left undone. Other mentions were coworker assistance, demoralization and demotivation of staff, less opening hours, availability outside working hours, and clients waiting longer for assistance. Table 24 gives the whole list given by librarians.

	accumulation of work – work left undone	coworkers must assist	demoralization and demotivation of staff	digitisation left undone	disorganised library	fewer opening hours – closed library	forgetting items' location	online librarian assistance outside working hours	panic and worry among users	pressure on staff	research difficulties – users must wait	travelling between different locations
Academic		x	x							x		
Governmental	x	x					x	2			x	x
Trade unionistic	x											
Political	2					x					x	
Theol./religious	3		x	x	x	x						
Legal									x			x
Total	7	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2

Table 24: Consequences mentioned by librarians

Entity managers also referred to various consequences, with the accumulation of work again the commonest where staff is lacking. Contrastingly, at a theological library with a comprehensive staff complement, work is duly carried out and completed on time. Other similar answers to librarians were coworker assistance and demotivated staff, while one manager mentioned stress. An interesting response was book infestation, by a manager at a religious Order which is presently conducting a disinfestation exercise of thousands of items. Meanwhile, a good number of staff brings collaboration, enthusiasm and positivity, which

contrast with stress and demotivation when staff is lacking. Table 25 gives the managers' negative and positive consequences.

	accumulation of work – work left undone	coworkers must assist	demoralization and demotivation of staff	infestation of books	library not accessible	library not taken care of	stress among employees	users must wait	collaboration	enthusiasm and positivity	work duly carried out and finished on time
Governmental	x	x				x	x	x			
Theol./religious	x		x	x	x				x	x	x
Legal											
Total	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Negative									Positive		

Table 25: Consequences mentioned by managers

Library users, mainly government employees, said the worst consequence of a shortage of staff is that it makes it harder to maintain the collection. Political library clients mentioned the lack of creative ideas, while religious library users complained about limited opening hours. When the staff cohort is sufficient, as in one theological library, clients are more inclined to visit the library, sensing the positive atmosphere, good organisation and cohesion of their library. Clients' responses are shown in Table 26.

	documentation may be lost	fewer creative ideas	hard to maintain collection	less continuity	library becomes less relevant	limited opening hours	research is done online	more inclined to visit library
Governmental			3		x		x	
Political	x	2		x				
Theol./religious						2		x
Total	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	1
	Negative							+ve

Table 26: Consequences mentioned by clients

4.4 The financial situation

An important consideration when analysing staffing is the financial aspect. Finances are a key determinant in staffing issues, decisions on acquisitions, prioritising tasks, and more. This applies to various library types. In their preface Dowd et al. (2014, p. xv) say “people must get creative about funding them”. Thus, librarians and managers were asked to describe their financial situation and say what part it plays in determining staffing at their libraries.

Situations vary between different library categories. The academic librarian said the financial problems of the academic institution at large impact the library. At the trade unionistic and political libraries funds are also lacking, hindering new full- or part-time employment. Particularly in political libraries this results in a huge reliance on volunteers, although interviewees believe a sound investment in the library is crucial to offer a decent service to

the party and the public. In government entities the situation is more fluid. Respondents did mention a lack of funds, but it seems headcount rules, exigencies and priorities play a bigger part in staffing decisions. Religious library participants also spoke of being hard on finances, moreover considering other priorities like infrastructural restoration such as roof repairs and water leakages, the missions and paying for elderly clergy to stay at Dar tal-Kleru. Contrastingly, the legal library has no financial issues, not surprisingly considering the firm's long history of success.

4.4.1 The relation between the financial and staffing situations

When asked about a possible relation between finances and their staffing situation, librarians and managers differed significantly in their answers. As shown in Table 27 and Figure 17, eleven librarians (79%) stated finances heavily influence staffing decisions, whereas only three managers (30% – see Table 28 and Figure 18) said the same.

Considering this huge difference it seems the two groups of interviewees have different views. While librarians focused primarily on library needs, managers had a wider perspective and considered the library situation within the wider context of the whole organisation, which often has overlaying priorities that take precedence over library staffing issues. Another fact to consider is that no academic, trade unionistic or political managers participated in the study, and librarians from these sectors said funds were the key factor for their staffing situation. The legal library answered with a clear No to the question, but other sectors were more balanced. Religious and legal librarians and managers mostly agreed in their replies, whereas government employees differed greatly, with three librarians (75%) saying finances play a huge part in staffing and all managers stating the opposite.

Library category	Yes	No
Academic	1/1	–
Government entity	3/4	1/4
Trade unionistic	1/1	–
Political	2/2	–
Theological/religious	4/5	1/5
Legal	–	1/1
Total interviews	11/14	3/14

Table 27: Librarians' opinions about finances influencing staffing decisions

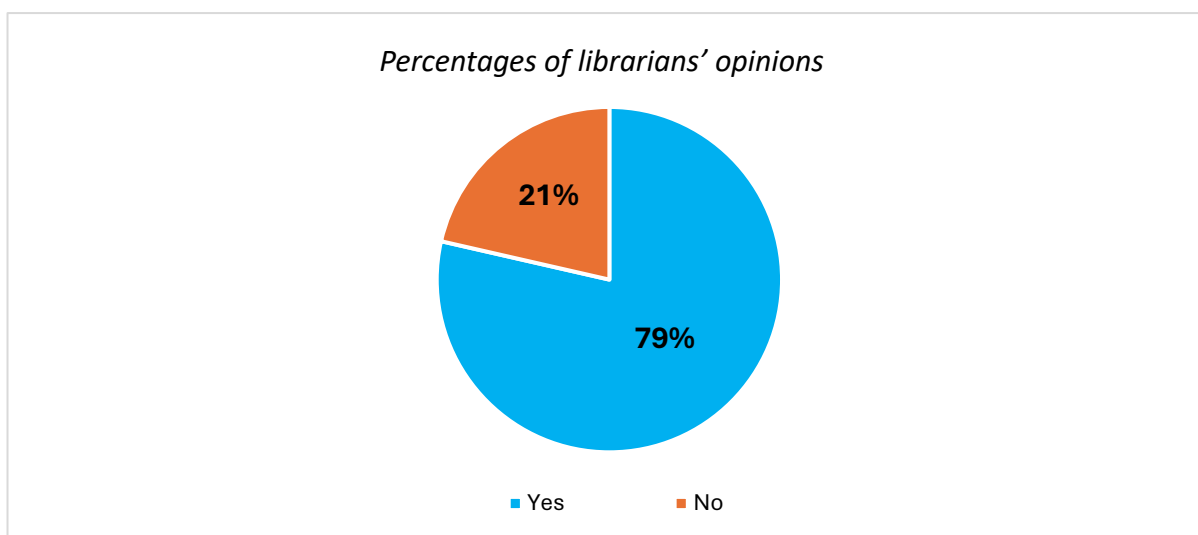


Figure 17

Library category	Yes	No
Government entity	–	4/4
Theological/religious	3/5	2/5
Legal	–	1/1
Total interviews	3/10	7/10

Table 28: Managers' opinions about finances influencing staffing decisions

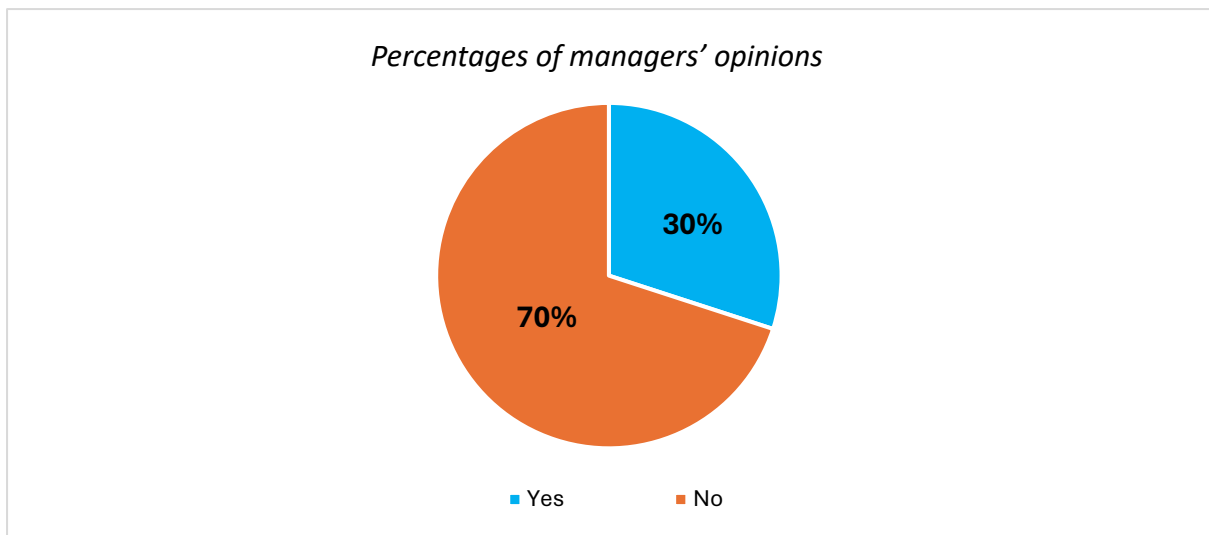


Figure 18

Among respondents who think finances are not the only reason behind the staffing situation, librarians at government entities noted the shift to online information has decreased the need for human interaction. They also listed benchmarking exercises and other priorities within the entity. Priorities were also mentioned by librarians in political and religious entities. Legal and governmental employees referred to the level of requirement, while religious librarians highlighted the many donations they receive, which alleviate the need to purchase new books.

Among managers, the majority of which think finances are not the main issue, religious administrators spoke about the number of opening hours and their responsibility to promote theology and education. Other religious managers mentioned their priority to the missions and infrastructural renovation. Managers at government entities referred to efficiency, the entity's needs and priorities, and the headcount. However, one manager criticised this reasoning, especially since vacancies for other posts hardly take headcount into consideration. This could be a point of contention in the entity, perhaps a sign of different levels of importance given to libraries in different contexts. The legal manager thinks

competitiveness and recent technology (such as AI) are more determinant factors rather than finances.

4.5 Managers' commitment, enthusiasm and support

Since special libraries form part of bigger organisations, much depends on the sense of appreciation and commitment of entity managers. Their enthusiasm for the library and the support they offer are key determinants in motivating staff to hang on and stay in the job. Librarians and managers were interviewed about this factor and their views are described in this section.

4.5.1 Librarians' opinions on their managers' support

Librarians were first asked about their managers' level of enthusiasm and whether they feel appreciated. Most responses (64%) were positive. Most governmental employees commented that considering the exigencies, priorities and finances of their entities, they feel their managers do their best to conserve and enhance the collection. One entity invested in two digitisation machines worth €30,000 each and four machines to transform reels into mp3s, while the same and another entity invested heavily in fire and intruder alarms. Another government entity, however, receives little attention from top management, according to its librarians, who think much depends on those in charge. A similar comment was given in a positive sense by a political party librarian, who hailed the new impetus and energy to preserve their information treasures, following changes in the party's higher ranks.

Most librarians at religious entities (80%) are positive about the support they receive. One religious Order has established a commission to maintain its "Beni Culturali", which include the provincial museum, archive and library. The same Order recently sent representatives,

including its librarian, to a conference abroad, and plans to dedicate a section for the library on its new website. Meanwhile, the legal librarian was also positive and spoke of the management's commitment – the management often suggests new acquisitions.

Other librarians had mixed feelings. At the trade unionistic library the librarian is approaching retirement age and plans to replace him are lacking, as are plans to invest in modern IT systems. One political party librarian lamented the struggle to convince the management of the library's worth notwithstanding its minimal use, while a religious librarian mentioned other priorities which take precedence. Meanwhile, the academic librarian is happy with the understanding of the library's senior management but disappointed with the institution's top management, who takes very long to issue calls and do not always heed to the library's needs.

Table 29 depicts the distribution of responses and Figure 19 gives the percentages.

Library category	Yes	So and so	No
Academic	–	–	1/1
Government entity	3/4	–	1/4
Trade unionistic	–	1/1	–
Political	1/2	1/2	–
Theological/religious	4/5	1/5	–
Legal	1/1	–	–
Total interviews	9/14	3/14	2/14

Table 29: Librarians' satisfaction with managerial support

Percentages of librarians' satisfaction with managerial support

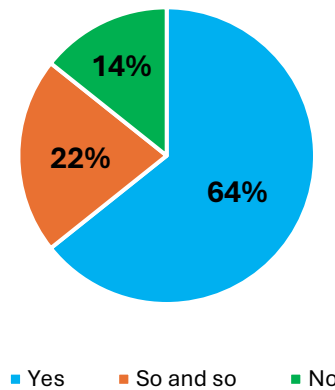


Figure 19

Librarians were also asked if they feel their needs are duly supported by their managers. The overwhelming majority (86%) answered positively, including all governmental, political, religious and legal interviewees. Governmental employees affirmed their ideas are usually taken on board – managers just ask for a purchase order and proceed. Political librarians admitted having to convince party management of the library's worth, concurring with Rossman (2020, p. 641) that "the value of special collections must be clearly communicated to decision makers and funders if they do not have a background in special collections". Eventually managers normally endorse new projects. At one political library they installed basic needs like air conditioners and drinkable water, engaged volunteers and approved a plan to establish a foundation to be able to apply for funds. Simple amenities like tea and coffee are appreciated by the staff and were mentioned even by religious librarians, one of whom regularly dines with the friars. Such forms of appreciation strongly enhance the librarians' performance, productivity and behaviour (Martin, 2020).

Whereas religious and legal librarians have no problems with the management, sometimes academic librarians feel demoralised with the institution managers' "dragging of feet". As

highlighted before, the librarian said recruitment processes are bureaucratic and long. The trade unionistic librarian feels somewhat disillusioned because not much is being done for new recruits to take his place when he retires. Table 30 and Figure 20 depict answers and percentages in graphic format.

Library category	Yes	So and so	No
Academic	–	–	1/1
Government entity	4/4	–	–
Trade unionistic	–	–	1/1
Political	2/2	–	–
Theological/religious	5/5	–	–
Legal	1/1	–	–
Total interviews	12/14	–	2/14

Table 30: Librarians' assessment of managerial support

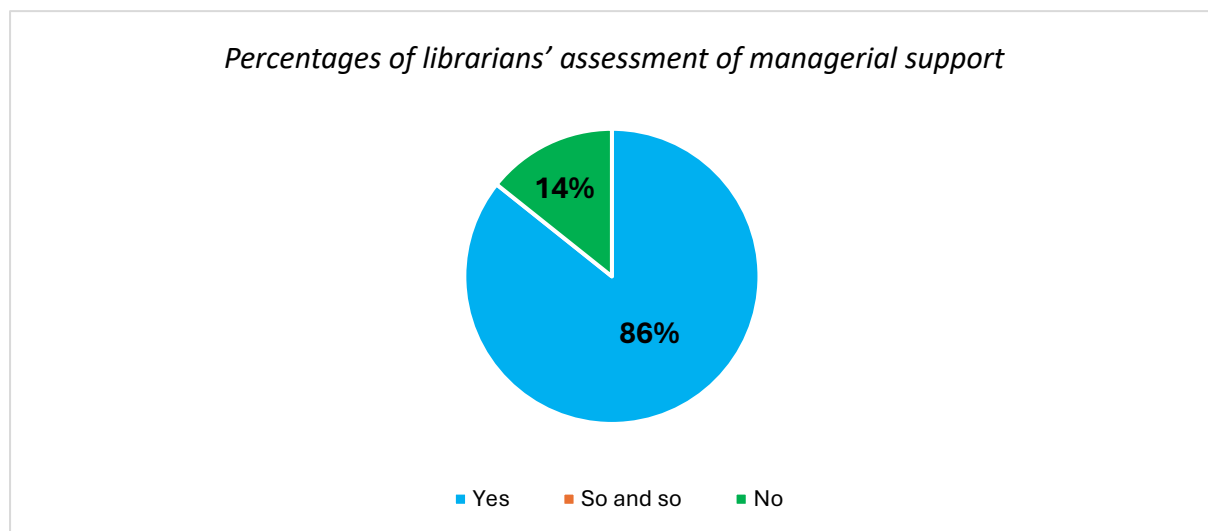


Figure 20

4.5.2 Managers' views on the level of their support

Managers too gave their input regarding their type of support to libraries. The most common way, mentioned by half the respondents, mainly from religious libraries, is moral support. One religious manager claimed he acts "like the confessional" for staff members. Managers in all categories offer support through acquisitions. Other managers, mostly religious interviewees, support infrastructural needs. This makes much sense considering the old history of ecclesiastical places of worship, treasures and libraries. A graphical representation is given in Table 31.

	acquisitions (printed and/or online)	advocacy with higher authorities	created CMS & DMS	created Commission for Beni Culturali	digitisation	disinfestation	infrastructural needs	moral support	restoration of items	scholarships to employees
Governmental	x		x		x			2		x
Theol./religious	x	x		x		x	3	3		
Legal	x								x	
Total	3	1	1	1	1	1	3	5	1	1

Table 31: Ways how managers support their librarians

Most managers (80%) declared their willingness to invest in library services. However, the same respondents lamented the financial state of their entity, which hinders them from proceeding with the desired enhancements. Such responses are still being considered as

positive answers in Table 32 and for percentages in Figure 21, although it looks unlikely that ideas will come to fruition.

To prove their good intentions, managers described how their entities are already investing (or are planning to invest) in the knowledge sector and are open to new eventualities in the future. In certain libraries having paid librarians is proof enough. Some entities are investing in the digitisation of invaluable old items, to reduce manhandling and increase accessibility, while a governmental entity is investing in IT systems, including a Data Management System (DMS) and a Collection Management System (CMS). Impressively, the legal manager described various initiatives, like paying thousands of euro for subscriptions in specialised journals every year, restoration of old items, and monitoring systems to regulate humidity and temperature, besides purchasing items required by patrons.

Other entities, especially governmental ones, are sceptic about future investment. One manager sees little scope for physical items, since information is constantly updated online. Another manager criticised the feeble efforts of superiors to address their dire staffing situation and recruit personnel.

Library category	Much	Not much
Government entity	2/4	2/4
Theological/religious	5/5	–
Legal	1/1	–
Total interviews	8/10	2/10

Table 32: Entities' readiness to invest in their libraries

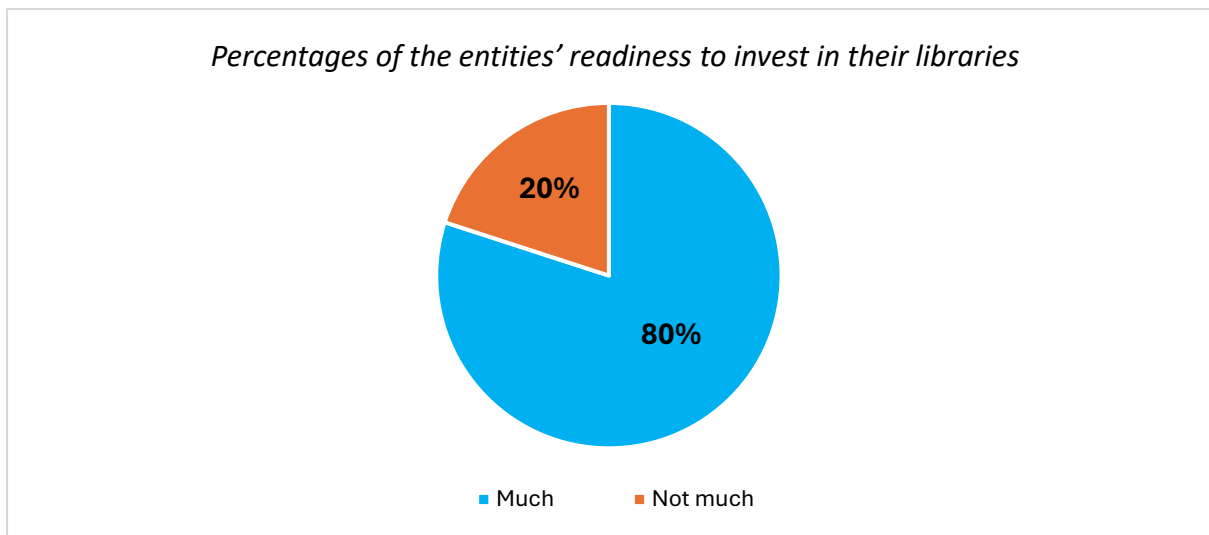


Figure 21

4.6 Maltese special librarians and the service they offer

One study aim was to assess how special librarians are recruited, their performance, the most important skills they need, and what their clients expect from them. This section describes the findings on these matters.

4.6.1 The recruitment process

The way librarians are chosen for the job depends on the library category. A crucial factor is whether they would be joining as volunteers or getting paid. If they are being employed, the process will be more formal, transparent and prolonged. That is what happens at the academic, legal and governmental libraries when a full- or part-time post is vacant. A call is issued, with a job description and a set of requirements, and advertised on newspapers and social media. Applications are received and evaluated, applicants are interviewed and shortlisted, the chosen candidate is called for a second interview in some cases (as always happens at the legal library) or contacted to check if they are still interested. Then they are hired.

In cases involving volunteers, sometimes valid or experienced people are approached personally by librarians, organisation members or managers – as happens in political and religious libraries – or they offer their services voluntarily and wait to be accepted. At one governmental library and one religious library volunteers are also interviewed and evaluated before being accepted, to ensure candidates are trustworthy and knowledgeable.

4.6.2 Important skills for special librarians

All sets of participants enlisted the qualities they expect special librarians to possess. Table 33 gives the list which librarians themselves came up with, Table 34 shows the managers' responses while Table 35 highlights the users' choices. Some skills were mentioned by all, but it suffices to compare and contrast views from different categories of respondents.

The most important skill, mentioned by half the librarians from various sectors, is knowledge of the parent organisation's area of expertise. Almost equally important, and listed by various categories of librarians, were a qualification or knowledge of librarianship, passion for the job and work ethics. These qualities are spot on in special librarianship, an often-lonely job in a specialised environment. Patience, attention to detail, meticulousness and precision, trustworthiness and passion for books and documents were also mentioned. The fact that various librarians pointed out these qualities shows they are in touch with what is required of them.

Other qualities were communication, relationship skills, confidentiality, understanding users' needs, IT and social media skills, knowledge of the collection, and organisation. Special librarians would benefit to have a mix of soft and hard skills, considering they often have a wide range of responsibilities as solo librarians or part of small teams (Davis & Saunders, 2020).

Considering the skills mentioned by managers, there were great similarities with the librarians' list. Managers too mentioned librarianship skills (or qualifications) and knowledge of the subject as topmost requirements, particularly in religious entities. Also important was passion for books and documents, which is very positive considering the prestigious, unique and confidential documents some libraries often possess. Other qualities include initiative, IT and social media skills, meticulousness and precision, relationship skills, teamwork and willingness to learn.

	attention to detail	calmness	communication skills	consistency	creativity and innovation	initiative for tasks and priorities	IT and social media skills	knowledge of the subject	librarianship knowledge/qualification	literacy	love for the entity	meticulousness and precision	passion for books, documents etc.	patience	professionalism	relationship skills	teamwork	willingness to learn
Governmental	x	x	x	x				x	x	x		2	2	x	x	x		x
Theol./religious					x	x	x	2	4		x		x			x	2	x
Legal						x	x	x										
Total	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	4	5	1	1	2	3	1	1	2	2	2

Table 34: Necessary skills mentioned by managers

At the receiving end of the service spectrum, library clients also listed their choices, most of which were similar to qualities mentioned by librarians and managers. However, their frequency and priorities varied notably. For instance, knowledge of the collection was mentioned by half the respondents, more than once in all categories. This suggests library users expect librarians to know their job and assist them quickly and efficiently. Maintenance

and curatorial skills are also key qualities, especially among government employees. Organisation was frequently mentioned. Other important mentions were efficiency, guidance and knowledge of the subject. Interestingly, librarianship skills or qualifications were only listed once, by a governmental library client. This could indicate users prioritise an efficient and quick service rather than personnel being professionally qualified.

	communication skills	comprehensive up to date collection	efficiency, guidance and quick service	knowledge of the collection	knowledge of the subject	librarianship knowledge/qualification	love for books	love for knowledge	maintenance and curatorial skills	organisation	workshops and training
Governmental	x			3	x	x	x	x	3	x	x
Political			x	2	x					2	
Theol./religious		x	x	2							
Total	1	1	2	7	2	1	1	1	3	3	1

Table 35: Necessary skills mentioned by clients

4.6.3 Clients' satisfaction with the service

When asked to rate the service they receive, clients were all highly or quite satisfied. Religious users were equally split, all political users expressed high levels of satisfaction, while 71% of government employees were quite satisfied. Not a single respondent described a low level of satisfaction. However, users might have felt a little awkward acknowledging an unsatisfactory service, since most of them passed their questionnaires to the librarians themselves, despite

the researcher's and the supervisor's email addresses being indicated on questionnaire sheets. This limitation was counteracted by requiring users to give a reason for their choice.

The users' reasons for their choices are represented in Table 36, while Figure 22 shows the percentages of their choices.

Library category	High	Medium	Low
Government entity	2/7	5/7	–
Political	3/3	–	–
Theological/religious	2/4	2/4	–
Total	7/14	7/14	–

Table 36: The clients' levels of satisfaction

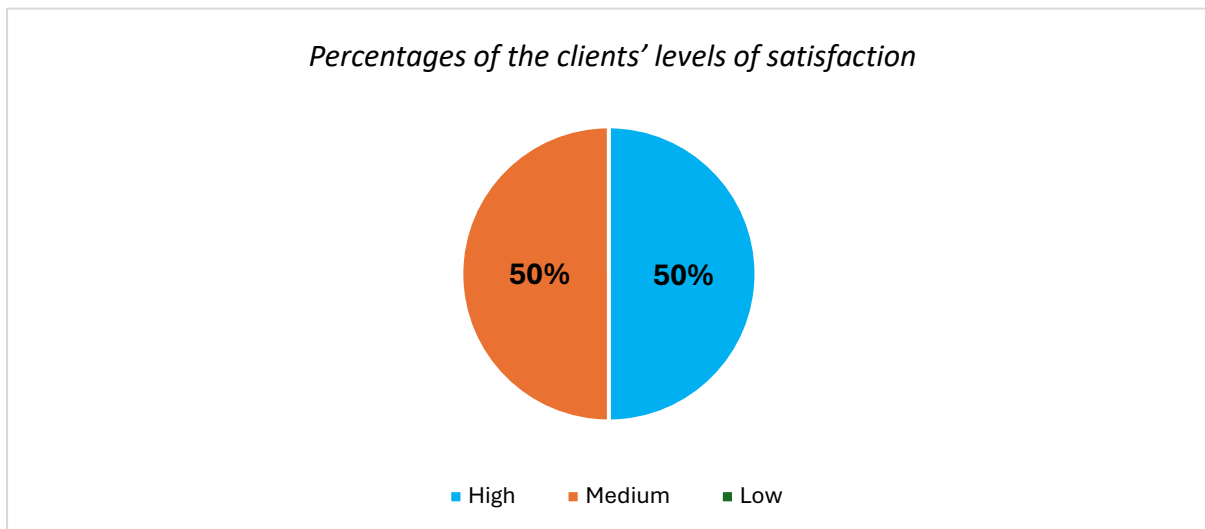


Figure 22

Library clients are satisfied because they receive a good service from helpful, knowledgeable and friendly staff. Precious items and resources and good organisation in libraries are also important. Particularly in governmental libraries, self-service is appreciated and almost a must when no staff is assigned for the library; otherwise clients would not be able to avail themselves of resources. Reasons given by clients are shown in Table 37.

	good service (often despite limited staff)	library holds precious items	library holds various resources	library is well organised	staff is very helpful	very knowledgeable staff
Governmental		x				x
Political	x	x			x	
Theol./religious	x		x	x		
Total	2	2	1	1	1	1
Highly satisfied						

	good service (often despite limited staff)	library holds various resources	self-service	staff is very helpful and friendly
	x	x	3	2
	x			x
Total	2	1	3	3
Quite satisfied				

Table 37: Reasons for clients' levels of satisfaction

4.7 General staffing issues

This section concerns staffing issues encountered everyday by librarians and managers, who identified their main difficulties and how they compensate or overcome them, sometimes through innovative and practical solutions. Interviewees were also asked about technology and how it helps overcome difficulties.

4.7.1 The main staffing challenges

Librarians from all categories identified a variety of staffing challenges they face regularly. Certain difficulties are specific to particular situations, depending on factors like the library type, space, staff complement, usage levels and more.

The academic librarian holds a managerial position and other employees respond to her; thus, she said her biggest challenge is keeping staff motivated or else they leave. The trade unionistic librarian is concerned about the management's lack of recruitment plans. He predicts the longstanding ever-growing database of newspaper articles he built could stop when he retires, which would be a great loss for information services. At the legal library the challenge is to track items taken out of the library. This library requires patrons to fill a logbook of borrowed items, which is not always adhered to. Another challenge this librarian faces is consulting university theses – the only way is to log in through a university account.

Libraries from the same category may face different challenges. For instance one governmental library needs an environmental upgrade to make it more appealing, while librarians at another library are concerned about the vacuum that would be created if they leave, reminiscent of the trade unionistic library. Another library is striving to settle documents in their place after moving from one headquarters to another. Keeping abreast with technological advancements also creates challenges for governmental libraries. On one hand some entities are embracing digitisation to decrease damage to documents while other librarians lament the impracticality of technology – one librarian believes it is easier to access and use physical items.

The digital era was also mentioned by a political party librarian, together with effective use of space and library restructuring. This library thrived in the past but was abandoned for some years, before a director was recently appointed to regenerate it. Another political party librarian says the challenges are to conserve and restore documents, to find the right volunteers and to instil pride and passion in party members, which would hopefully also generate interest in the library.

Religious librarians working in large libraries with thousands of items find it difficult to get familiar with the whole collection. Event organisation is another challenge faced by a large theological library. Another religious entity is striving to make the library's presence felt, to create a love for knowledge within the community. It is also challenging to stay up to date with recent academic literature and to enhance accessibility to the library through digital systems. Meanwhile, different religious librarians struggle with finances and have little time to organise the place and finish what they started.

4.7.2 Practical and innovative solutions

Librarians were not only asked about challenges but also to come up with possible solutions, while managers described how they address staffing problems. This section analyses answers from both sets of interviewees. Librarians offered more solutions than their managers, which may suggest special librarians, being hands on in libraries everyday, are more aware, and perhaps concerned, about the challenges they face daily. As explained earlier, some managers feel their library situation is positive enough.

One popular solution among librarians, especially in religious and political libraries, is to recruit volunteers. Outreach exercises are equally important for the same two categories. Their way of thinking and *modus operandi* are similar in many respects. Both categories lament the lack of funds and rely on the passion of volunteers for the entity and what it represents. Religious librarians mentioned event organisation as another solution. Events can take more of their time and accentuate staff shortage problems, but the reasoning behind them is an outreach exercise through social, cultural or literary events like exhibitions, book launches and open days, as some political and religious libraries are already doing. Libraries themselves and events could serve to spread the message and draw people to the parent

organisation itself. The Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Patrimony of the Church issued a document in this regard in 1994 (www.vatican.va). Another political library suggestion is to create a foundation, to be able to apply for funds and enhance its ways of income. Similar efforts, like establishing a friends' association, should be encouraged, as they garner awareness and interest and could also generate funds. The Friends of the National Archives and the Notarial Archives Foundation are two successful examples.

Stakeholders from various categories said digitisation is a solution, for different reasons. It can tackle staffing problems, as it makes it easy and practical for users to access information, especially at out of office hours or if library staff is unavailable. Digitisation would be highly beneficial in the trade unionistic library, for example, as it would be easier for journalists and researchers if they had newspapers and other literature in PDF format and could search information electronically instead of having to visit the library physically to access items. Digitisation can enable entities to save on paper, time and manpower and reduce costs, so a government entity librarian is advocating for it as his entity regularly prints photocopies for free for researchers. The same librarian also suggested charging small fees for printouts. The legal librarian too is all for digitising documents, primarily the *Codice Civile*, which is heavily consulted and only available in hard copies.

Other practical ideas include changing tasks or alternating between librarians from time to time and giving promotions to employees who deserve them, in the hope that a pay rise instils new motivation. These were mentioned by the academic librarian, who has managerial duties. Certain solutions were specific to unique circumstances of particular libraries. For instance the legal librarian suggested creating a tracking system for borrowed items and striving to reach an agreement with third parties for access to information, such as these

submitted to the University of Malta. Other noteworthy ideas include marketing the library and social media presence. Some librarians admitted they are still behind in this regard. Table 38 gives all solutions offered by librarians.

	alternate tasks between staff members	be on the ground with staff	charge small fees for photocopies and prints	communication	create tracking system for borrowed items	digitisation	form a foundation to be able to apply for funds	gather items in one place	increase the purpose of the library	market the library on magazines etc.	organisation of events	outreach exercise	reach agreement with other entities for access to information	recruit volunteers	restructuring	social media presence	teach students to help with basic tasks	upgrade the computer system	use space for relaxation and reading
Academic	x	x		x															
Governmental			x			x		x									x		
Trade unionistic						x												x	
Political							x					2		x	x				
Theol./religious									x	x	3	2		3		x			x
Legal					x	x							x						
Total	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	4	1	4	1	1	1	1	1

Table 38: Librarians' solutions for challenges

Only two religious and one government entity managers offered suggestions to tackle staffing problems, as shown in Table 39. Communication, only mentioned once by librarians, seems

more important to managers. Interestingly, the librarian who mentioned it was the academic librarian with managerial duties. Similar to librarians, volunteers were mentioned as a solution by religious managers. A related idea is to engage new staff, even members of religious communities. However, as one religious manager explained, sometimes solutions are hard to implement, and libraries would simply remain closed.

	close the library (for users)	communication	engage other members of staff	find new volunteers
Governmental		x		
Theol./religious	x	x	x	x
Legal				
Total	1	2	1	1

Table 39: Managers' solutions for challenges

4.7.3 Compensating for lack of staff

Notwithstanding all suggestions and good intentions there are always situations whereby certain issues result in a shortage of personnel. In such situations staff and clients must find ways to compensate for that, to keep the library service going. All participants were asked to describe what they do when library staff is unavailable. Answers are shown separately in Tables 40, 41 and 42 for librarians, managers and clients respectively, while similarities and comparisons are discussed below.

The most common way librarians tackle lack of staff is by seeking help from other staff members. Five respondents from four categories rely on colleagues for assistance in time of need. Setting priorities was equally frequent in librarians' responses, while four interviewees mentioned time management (including both political librarians). Three respondents simply accept the limitations of the situation and adjust accordingly. These answers may sound theoretical, but setting priorities is a key factor in strategic planning (Johnson & Lindsay, 2006), as it sets goals, determines what should be done first, and keeps minds on track when work accumulates. Likewise, time management is crucial to set the librarians' minds when on duty.

Other doable suggestions were asking clients to make appointments and engaging volunteers. Some government entity librarians do overtime or assist clients online when on leave. Adjusting mindsets also helps librarians, by not setting deadlines and proceeding with the most urgent or important tasks.

	accepting the limitations of the situation	asking users to make appointment	call forwarding/messaging when on leave	engaging volunteers	help from other staff members	not setting deadlines	overtime	see to most urgent/important tasks only	setting priorities	time management
Academic		x			x					
Governmental	x	x	2		2		x		x	x
Trade unionistic								x	x	x
Political	x				x				x	2
Theol./religious	x			2		2			2	
Legal					x					
Total	3	2	2	2	5	2	1	1	5	4

Table 40: Librarians' ways of compensating for staff problems

Among entity managers from all categories the predominant way to compensate for absent personnel is to appoint other members of staff to take the librarians' place. Engaging volunteers was suggested by two religious managers, whereas two of their colleagues simply accept their limitations. A government entity manager said they normally wait for their librarian to return before using library services. Interestingly, a religious manager suggested employing a full-timer to fill more opening hours and take the place of two part-timers would probably be cheaper for the entity.

	accepting the limitations of the situation	employing a full-timer	engaging volunteers	help from other staff members	wait for librarian to return to work
Governmental				2	x
Theol./religious	2	x	2	2	
Legal				x	
Total	2	1	2	5	1

Table 41: Managers' ways of compensating for staff problems

Library clients provided various solutions. 43% of respondents from all categories revealed they help themselves with library items when staff is absent. This is a practical solution instead of keeping libraries closed, presuming trust abounds between librarians and users. Meanwhile, three clients use online resources, which is obvious in today's digital age. Two government employees mentioned searching items on the electronic catalogue, whereas their colleague and a religious library client just wait and revisit the library when the librarian returns. Individual respondents said they resort to other users for help, send an email to the librarian, use the University library or buy the book themselves.

	ask another user	ask another volunteer to open	buy the book	go to the University library	help themselves to the service	leave a note or email	search item on catalogue	search item on HyDi	search item on library portal	use online resources	wait and go back later
Governmental	x				2	x	2		x	x	x
Political			x	x	x			x		2	
Theol./religious		x			3						x
Total	1	1	1	1	6	1	2	1	1	3	2

Table 42: Clients' ways of compensating for staff problems

4.7.4 Technology and staffing issues

Technology today dominates all aspects of life. In librarianship it could be a crucial solution to overcome staffing issues. Librarians and managers were asked to provide valid suggestions and observations regarding its importance for their libraries and how it can assist their job.

Online cataloguing is one way in which technology is already being highly beneficial to libraries. In fact this was the most common answer among librarians. Other popular uses for technology were for promotion, advertising and outreach exercises (especially in religious libraries) and for quick online searching for information (most common among government employees). Digitisation was enlisted by various categories, while three librarians from different groups said technology makes life easier.

Librarians referred to various advantages of technology, including information being easily accessible, reducing paper and the handling of documents, and reducing reliance on the

human element. Religious librarians hailed the possibility to connect with users and the world. While some librarians emphasised technology should not replace the human input, one government employee noted the possibility of technology creating the need for new skills yet unknown in the future, for which experts would be needed when highly specialised technological systems go bust. Indeed, as Momoh (2018, p. 5) puts it, while unemployment is “one of the core challenges of information technology” even in librarianship, it is at the same time creating a variety of new jobs. The whole spectrum of librarian responses is depicted in Table 43.

	accessibility	attracts youths	automatic emails (e.g. overdue books)	cataloguing & online catalogue	collegiality (working together online)	connectivity with users and the world	digitisation	higher efficiency	library promotion, advertising and outreach	makes life easier	quick searching for information	reduces paper use and handling	reduces reliance on humans	self-check-in/out system	visibility
Academic				x						x					
Governmental	x			x	x		x			x	3	2			
Trade unionistic							x	x							
Political		x							x				x		
Theo./religious	x		x	3		2			3	x	x		x		x
Legal							x							x	
Total	2	1	1	5	1	2	3	1	4	3	4	2	2	1	1

Table 43: How librarians think technology helps address staffing problems

Entity managers listed fewer technological advantages. The most frequent answer, given by 60% of respondents from all categories, was the quick searching and retrieval of information through electronic means. The same as librarians, managers highly appreciate the benefits of digitisation. Online cataloguing, most popular with librarians, was mentioned by three government and religious administrators, as were accessibility, the ability to promote the library, and outreach. Two religious managers, the same as two religious librarians, said technology connects libraries with users and the world. In fact it was revealed that certain religious Orders around the world are working on a comprehensive worldwide online system on which to upload items from libraries and archives in all their provinces – a massive but priceless project for researchers and scholars. Table 44 shows all advantages given by managers.

	accessibility	cataloguing & online catalogue	connectivity with users and the world	digitisation	library promotion, advertising and outreach	quick searching for information
Governmental	2	x		2	x	2
Theo./religious	x	2	2	2	2	3
Legal						x
Total	3	3	2	4	3	6

Table 44: How managers think technology helps address staffing problems

4.8 Plans for special library staffing

The study investigated the level of importance and priority stakeholders give to their libraries and attempted to predict the way forward for Maltese special libraries. Plans and investment depend much on how stakeholders look at libraries and the service they provide.

4.8.1 The importance and need of libraries at parent organisations

Special libraries depend much on their parent organisations (Murray, 2013), so much depends on managers to determine the need for such libraries and the level of investment they deserve. Meanwhile, if libraries are not used or users do not find them central for research, work or study, there will be little scope for their existence. Therefore the study included questionnaire and interview questions to analyse their centrality.

60% of managers, particularly at government and religious organisations, feel the library is fundamental for their needs. Two government entity managers said it is the backbone for their personnel in their jobs, since it contains unique, priceless items, not only printed literature but even artefacts, maps and plans. Their libraries are in fact part-archives and part-museums. The staff constantly studies the collections to keep abreast with new research. Another government entity holds prestigious books and documents which should be preserved for posterity so any researcher would have access to information. Meanwhile, two provincials revealed libraries are mentioned in their rule or constitutions, as a means of education for members and the public. They singled out unique, old manuscripts and documents which enrich their collections and are central in the friars' formation. One Order established a commission for its Beni Culturali, which include the library. Another religious manager appreciates their library for its great spiritual and cultural value, as a central place for clergy formation, as a contribution to society and as a space for reflection and discussions.

Other religious managers were rather sceptic about their library’s importance. Doubts circled around the limited usage of some libraries and the budget cuts by senior management. Another religious manager said the library is important to preserve the Order’s identity but not a priority regarding lending of books. The legal manager referred to AI and modern technological advancements, which are competing with physical items, and the limited usage for his mixed feelings regarding the library’s worth. He says it risks becoming an artefact museum. At the same time the firm remains committed to preserve and restore its collection, at least to give something back to the profession. Only one government entity manager stated the library is not important, since material has become obsolete, is available online or can be found at the National Library.

Table 45 and Figure 23 show how the managers’ opinions were distributed and their percentages respectively.

Library category	Important	So and so	Not important
Governmental	3/4	–	1/4
Theological/religious	3/5	2/5	–
Legal	–	1/1	–
Total	6/10	3/10	1/10

Table 45: The managers’ levels of importance of their libraries

Percentages of the managers' levels of importance of their libraries

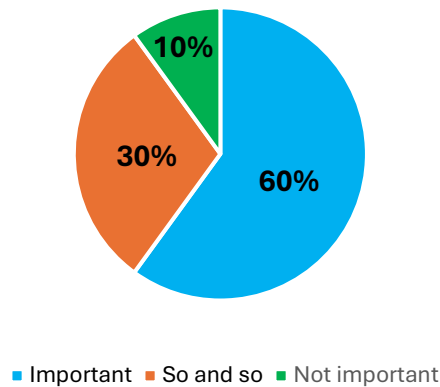


Figure 23

Meanwhile, most library clients from all participating categories also think their library is very important, but their distribution varies. While all political respondents and 71% of government employees ticked the “very important” box, only 25% of religious library respondents did the same. In all, 64% of clients think their library is very important while 36% have mixed feelings. No respondent said it is not important. Figures are presented in Table 46 and their percentages in Figure 24.

Library category	Very Important	So and so	Not important
Government entity	5/7	2/7	–
Political	3/3	–	–
Theological/religious	1/4	3/4	–
Total	9/14	5/14	–

Table 46: Clients' levels of importance of their libraries

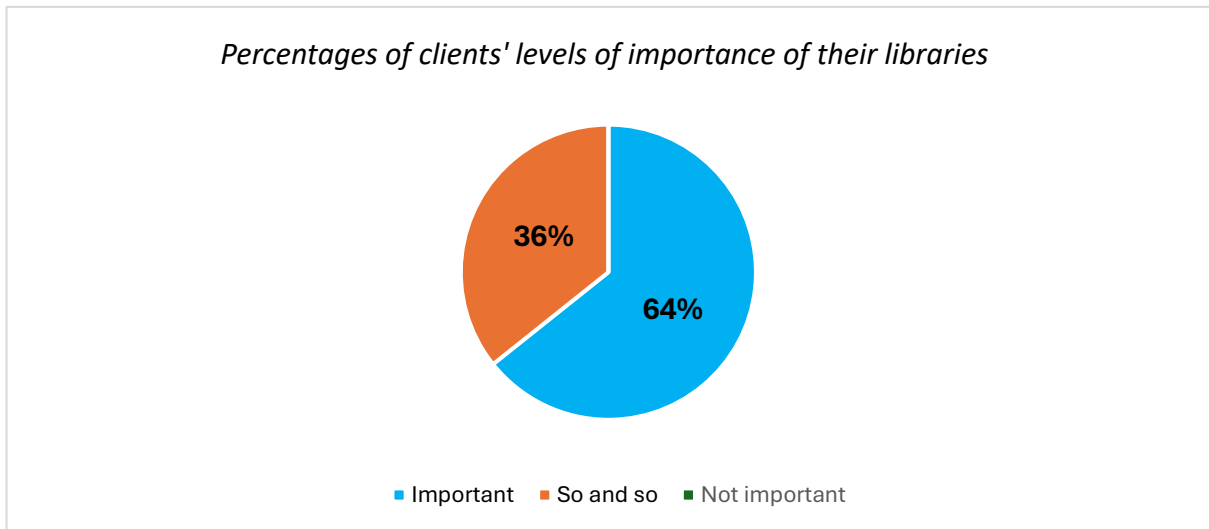


Figure 24

Questionnaire respondents gave reasons for their choices, which are presented in Table 47. The most common reason, mentioned by all participating categories, was that the library holds various resources which facilitate research. Religious clients also appreciate information related to their jobs or study.

Contrastingly, four respondents from religious or governmental entities are sceptic about their library's worth because online availability of information diminishes the physical library's relevance.

	enhances knowledge	focused on entity's expertise	holds job/study related information	holds precious items	holds various resources for research	information is available online	work/study today is more remote friendly
Governmental	x	x		x	2	2	x
Political			x		2		
Theol./religious			x	x	x	2	
Total	1	1	2	2	5	4	1
	Very important					So and so	

Table 47: Clients' reasons for libraries' levels of importance

Respondents were then asked about the centrality of their libraries, to analyse whether they have a crucial role within the parent organisation or are considered important only for minor reasons. The managers' replies were more balanced than the users'. As shown in Table 48 and Figure 25, 40% of managers said the library is central while another 40% said the opposite. 20% had mixed reactions. Contrastingly, as Table 49 and Figure 26 suggest, most clients from all categories (64%), including all political library clients, feel the library is crucial. Governmental employees were more equally balanced. Interestingly, 75% of negative answers and the only response in the middle were from this category.

Library category	Central	So and so	Not much
Governmental	3/4	–	1/4
Theological/religious	1/5	2/5	2/5
Legal	–	–	1/1
Total	4/10	2/10	4/10

Table 48: Managers' opinions about their libraries' centrality

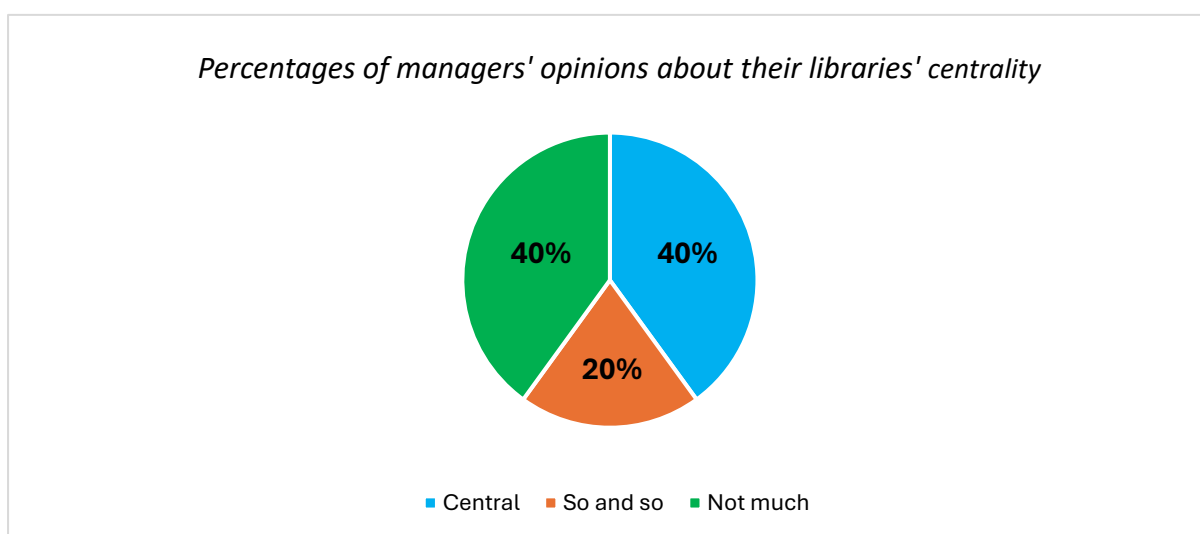


Figure 25

Library category	Central	So and so	Not much
Governmental	3/7	1/7	3/7
Political	3/3	–	–
Theological/religious	3/4	–	1/4
Total	9/14	1/14	4/14

Table 49: Clients' opinions about their libraries' centrality

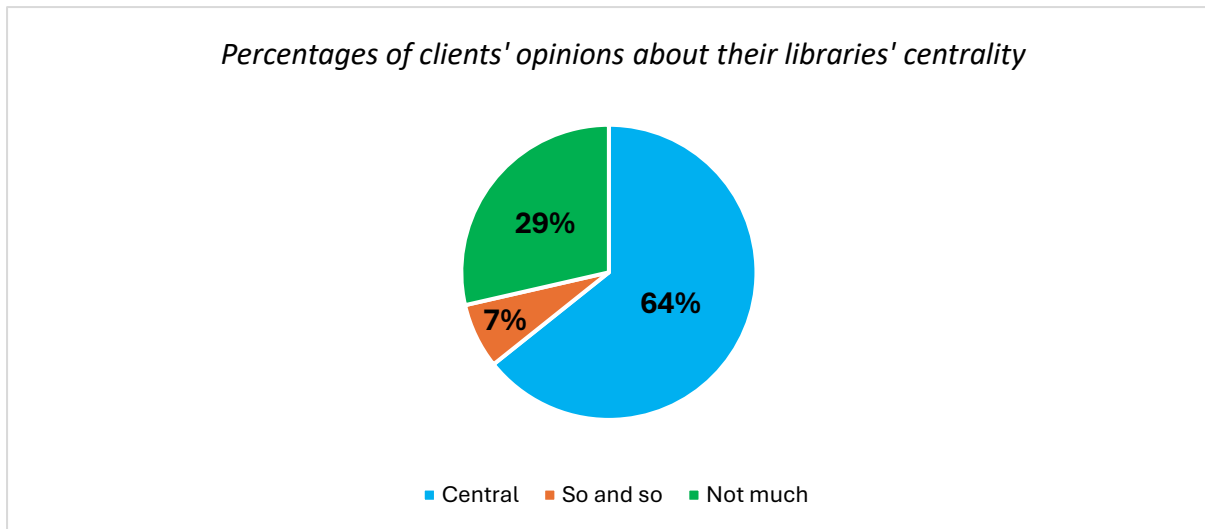


Figure 26

Managers who believe their library is central do so for various reasons. Government employees said it augments the entity’s prestige, depicts professionalism, holds valuable items and is focused on the entity’s area of expertise. Religious managers focused on its pastoral aspect as a space for quiet reflection and encounter. It is even mentioned in the constitutions of at least two religious Orders. However, two managers of the same library opted for medium importance due to its minimal use and because other priorities, like infrastructural works, take precedence. Other religious managers think their libraries do not serve much purpose today except to respect their entities’ history and legacy, because information is available online. Similarly, a government entity manager said books quickly become obsolete because the entity’s area of expertise is very contemporary. The legal manager observed that research is becoming decentralized, and several patrons have gradually built small libraries in individual offices. All reasons are depicted in Table 50.

	augments the level of the entity	depicts professionalism	helps in the welcoming aspect	helps reflection and decision making	holds unique valuable items	is focused on the entity's area of expertise	is referred to in the constitutions	provides space for encounter	respects and reflects entity's history and legacy	library is seldom used	there are other priorities to consider	contemporary subject – books easily obsolete	information is easily available online	research has become decentralized	use of satellite libraries instead of main library
Governmental	x	x			x	x						x			
Theol./religious			x	x			2	x	x	x	x		x		
Legal													x	x	
Total	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Central									So and so		Not much			

Table 50: Managers' reasons for libraries' centrality

Library clients were much more focused on certain reasons for their choices. The most common answer, given by three government library users and all political respondents, was that the library offers important resources related to their jobs. This is understandable, considering the participating libraries are highly specialised and mainly used by select clients from parent organisations (Williams & Zachert, 2009). In fact, two government employees said the library is not important since information is not related to their jobs. Religious library users remarked that the library helps them in their studies by offering them related information. However, some users did remark that online resources could diminish the library's importance, while a government employee commented that the library's centrality

depends on the tasks at hand. Table 51 shows the clients' reasons for their libraries being central or not.

	helps in research and study	offers important resources related to work	offers information and knowledge			
Governmental	-	3	-	x	2	x
Political	-	3	-	-	-	-
Theol./religious	2	-	x	-	-	x
Total	2	6	1	1	2	2
	Central			So & so	Not much	

Table 51: Clients' reasons for libraries' centrality

Therefore, in general, most managers and clients agree that libraries are valuable assets for parent organisations, for various reasons. Finally, on this topic, managers were asked whether their entity needs a library. In line with previous responses, the vast majority answered Yes, as shown in Table 52 and in the percentages of Figure 27.

Library category	Yes	No
Governmental	3/4	1/4
Theological/religious	5/5	–
Legal	1/1	–
Total	9/10	1/10

Table 52: Whether managers think their libraries are needed

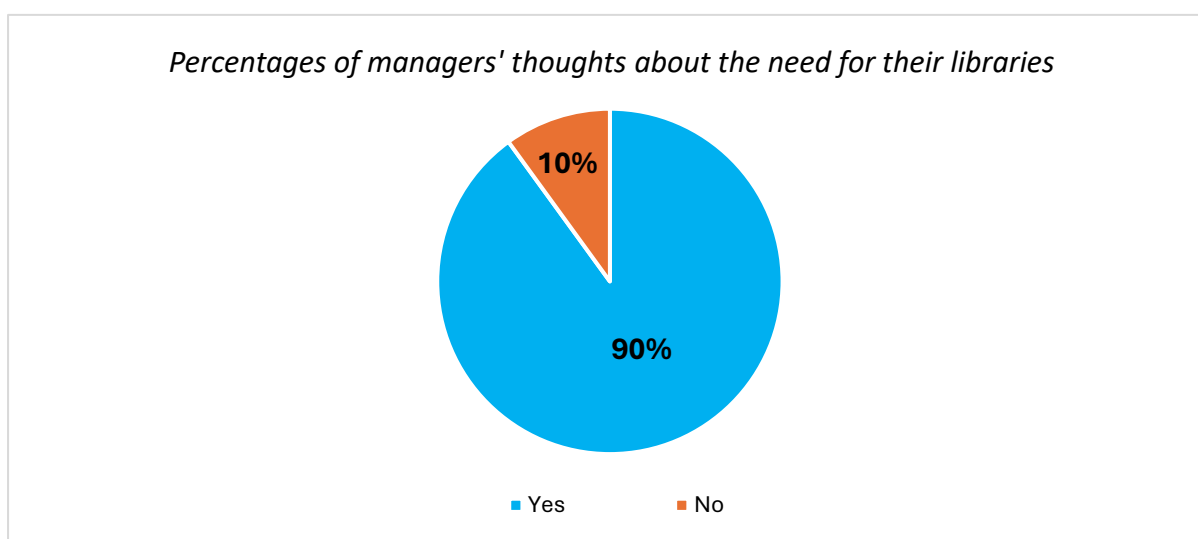


Figure 27

Most reasons for these positive choices are similar to previous answers, including the formation of the clergy, for reflection and understanding the origins and heritage of religious Orders, for fraternity and evangelisation in line with the constitutions, and to reach out to the faithful, in the case of religious libraries. Comments about heritage and research assistance were corroborated by the legal manager. Government entity managers appreciate the library for offering information to their staff and for preserving key items for posterity.

4.8.2 Benefits of the library

Decisions on investment are directly linked to the benefits stakeholders foresee in their library. As the people responsible for decisions, managers were asked to identify such

benefits. Most answers were close to other responses for previous questions. Their breakdown is presented in Table 53.

The most mentioned benefits were information availability, facilitating research processes and precious resources in the library. Governmental and religious managers mentioned the preservation of items for posterity; building a repository; prestige; specialised collections; helping with evangelisation; the appreciation of heritage, legacy and history; and the use of space for discussion.

	evangelisation	for posterity	heritage appreciation	knowledge and information at hand	legacy and history	opportunity to outreach	prestige	repository	research	service to users	set of precious resources	space for discussion	specialised collections
Governmental		2		2			x	2	2		2		x
Theo./religious	x		x	x	x	2			x	2	2	x	x
Legal				x					x				
Total	1	2	1	4	1	2	1	2	4	2	4	1	2

Table 53: Benefits managers see in having a library

4.8.3 Investment in staff

This study looks into the future by exploring the libraries' intentions and possibilities of investment in staff. Managers were quizzed about their readiness to invest, with 80% of respondents saying they are in favour, as suggested in Figure 28. This majority includes all

religious and legal interviewees. Managers at government entities were split, as shown in Table 54.

Various managers emphasised they have already invested a lot. However, many positive answers were hypothetical, more in principle than a form of concrete plan for investment. For instance two religious managers declared that if their financial situation got better they would invest even in paid librarians. The legal manager stated that the firm purchases books and subscribes for expensive journals, restores items and has invested in a system for environment control. Two government entity managers declared they are ready for new eventualities and referred to digitisation and system upgrades.

Library category	Much	Not much
Government entity	2/4	2/4
Theological/religious	5/5	–
Legal	1/1	–
Total interviews	8/10	2/10

Table 54: Managers' readiness to invest in their libraries

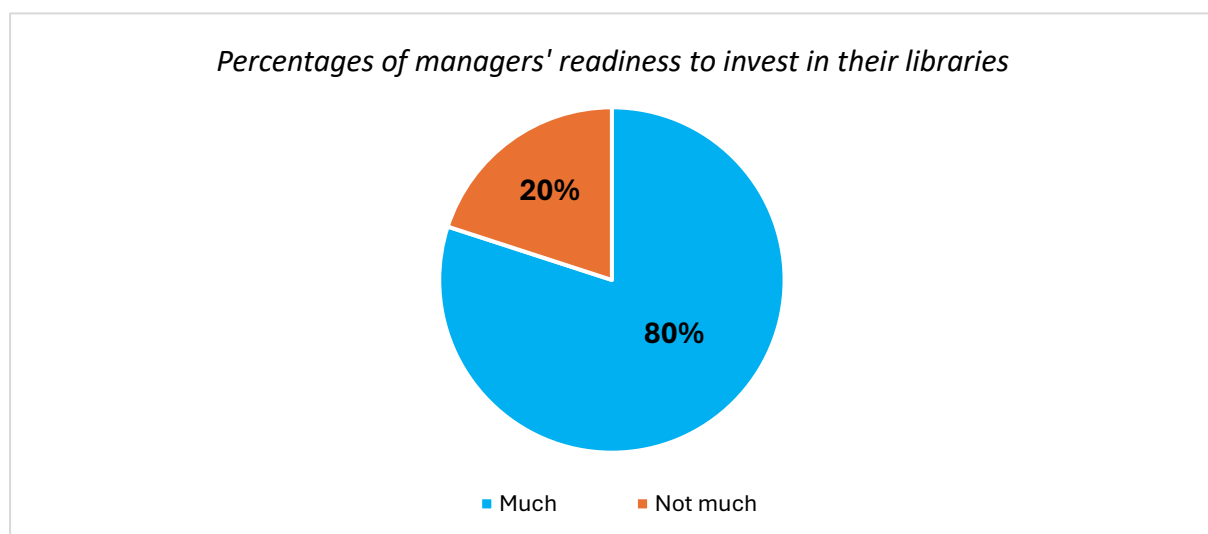


Figure 28

Participants were asked if there should be more (or less) staff at their libraries. One may think librarians and users would easily say more personnel is needed; however, their answers were balanced. Academic, trade unionistic and political party librarians favour more staff (see Table 55 and Figure 29). Work at the academic library is always increasing. One political library has a restructuring plan which would be completed earlier with more staff, while the other political librarian is approaching potential volunteers. Most religious librarians also favour increasing staff, except those whose library involves three paid librarians and a volunteer.

Contrastingly, no librarians from government entities or the legal firm think they need more staff. Most government employees said they are enough for present demands, and additions would require sound justifications and detailed projections. They would, however, appreciate help and welcome more staff for certain projects, even temporarily, but understand their entities' exigencies, priorities and limitations. This stark contrast between these two sets of categories could be due to financial reasons, whereby legal and government entity librarians get paid while religious and political libraries rely heavily on volunteers.

Library category	Yes	No
Academic	1/1	–
Governmental	–	4/4
Trade unionistic	1/1	–
Political	2/2	–
Theological/religious	4/5	1/5
Legal	–	1/1
Total	8/14	6/14

Table 55: Librarians' opinions about the need for more staff

Percentages of librarians' opinions about the need for more staff

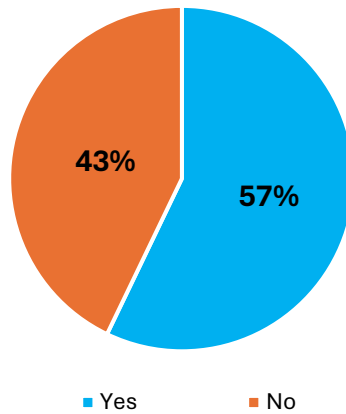


Figure 29

Library clients were equally split about investing in staff. Users differed notably in political and religious entities, the former favouring more investment with the latter saying otherwise.

Government employees were equally split, as shown in Table 56 and Figure 30.

Library category	Yes	No
Governmental	3/7	4/7
Political	3/3	–
Theological/religious	1/4	3/4
Total interviews	7/14	7/14

Table 56: Clients' opinions about the need for more staff

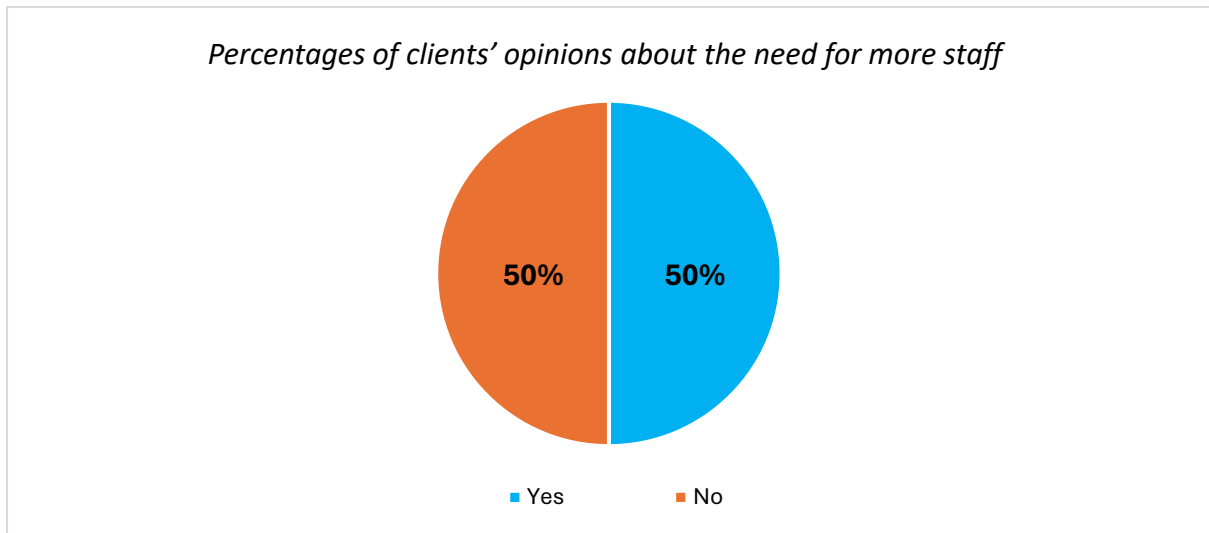


Figure 30

Table 57 gives the reasons why clients think their libraries should invest in staff or not. Two governmental library users favour more personnel because staff is lacking, while two political library users said manpower is always needed. A religious library user said staff is needed to succeed in respecting all opening hours.

Contrastingly, 71% of respondents who said No believe there is already sufficient staff at their entity library. The remaining government employees admitted the library is not used much and that other priorities should take precedence.

	lack of staff	library is an important asset	manpower is always needed	to have a qualified librarian	to keep library open at all opening times	library is not used much	there are higher priorities	there is sufficient staff to meet the needs
Governmental	2			x		x	x	2
Political		x	2					
Theol./religious					x			3
Total	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	5
	Yes					No		

Table 57: Clients' reasons for more staff or not

The final consideration regarding investment was whether entities have plans to increase or decrease staff, and the result was unequivocal. Whereas managers strongly advocate for investment in libraries (see Table 54 and Figure 28), in reality, where staff is concerned, almost none of them thinks of increasing personnel. The only manager actively looking to increase staff is a religious provincial, whose aim is to recruit volunteers, meaning no plans whatsoever to recruit paid staff members exist in any participating library. Table 58 and Figure 31 present this reality.

Library category	Yes	No
Governmental	–	4/4
Theological/religious	1/5	4/5
Legal	–	1/1
Total interviews	1/10	9/10

Table 58: Parent organisations' plans to increase staff

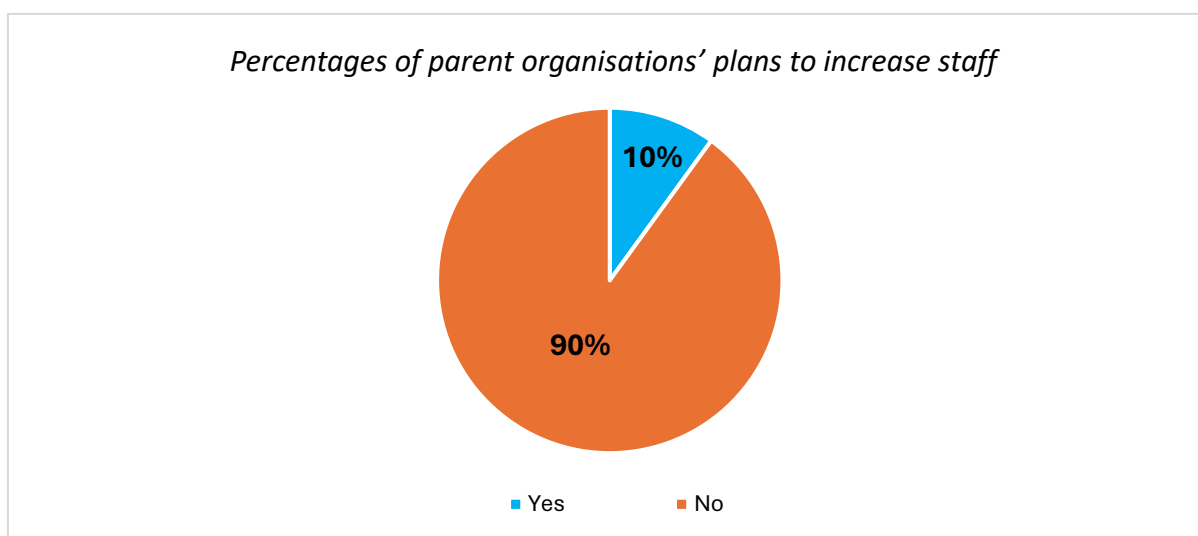


Figure 31

According to most managers the situation at present is adequate. At a theological library which employs paid staff a part-time post has just been filled. Some managers at government entities and religious Orders admitted more work would be carried out if more staff is hired, but since funds are lacking there are no concrete plans, except perhaps for volunteers.

4.8.4 What influences staffing decisions

All participants were asked to identify what influences staffing decisions, and their answers were very relevant. The librarians' and managers' feedback were very similar, while clients differed. An obvious determinant, mentioned very frequently, is funds. Most librarians in government and religious entities mentioned funding, but while in government entities users

– but not managers – agreed with librarians, in religious libraries the balance tipped the other way.

However, funds were not the topmost determinant among librarians and managers. All manager categories and various librarian categories referred to the library situation and workload. This means that even if there were enough funds but little work for staff, personnel would still not be hired. Government entity librarians in particular often made this observation. Users also mentioned the workload but to a lesser degree. Very common among clients was library usage, which is somewhat linked to the workload, although requests are only a small part of what librarians do everyday. Meanwhile, three librarians from different categories spoke about justifying the need for more staff. They believe if there are enough reasons to engage personnel and they manage to convince the management, further help could be brought in.

Other determinants, listed sporadically, include the library opening hours; the management's appreciation and the users' level of satisfaction; the purpose of the library and the entity's priorities and population; the headcount; technological advances; and a sense of justice, vision and responsibility. Figures are displayed in Tables 59, 60 and 61 for librarians, managers and clients respectively.

	funds	justifying the need for more staff	library opening hours	management's level of appreciation	priorities of the library and the entity	purpose of the library	situation and workload of the library	statistics	users' level of satisfaction
Academic							x		
Governmental	2	x					3	x	
Trade unionistic									
Political	x	x							
Theol./religious	2	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Legal							x		x
Total	5	3	1	1	1	1	6	1	1

Table 59: What librarians think influences staffing decisions

	funds	headcount	justifying the need for more staff	level of usage	library opening hours	management's appreciation	online shift of information	priorities of the library and the entity	sense of justice, vision and responsibility	situation and workload of the library
Governmental		x	x				x			x
Theol./religious	2			x	x	x		x	x	x
Legal										x
Total	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3

Table 60: What managers think influences staffing decisions

	appreciation of the library	attractiveness of the library	entity's population	funds	library usage	management motivation	opening times and availability	priorities of the library and the entity	technological advances	workload
Governmental				5	4			x	x	2
Political	x			3		x		x		
Theol./religious		x	2		2		x			
Total	1	1	2	8	6	1	1	2	1	2

Table 61: What clients think influences staffing decisions

4.9 Conclusion

The interviews and questionnaires provided a sound description of the present situation of Maltese specialised libraries in six different categories.

The methods used for data collection established the extent of staff at participating libraries. Managers seem most convinced that requirements are being met by the present complement. Government entity libraries seem adequately equipped for their level of usage. The legal library is in a similar situation, according to both librarian and manager. The number of staff at the academic library is comprehensive but the accumulation of work constantly requires more personnel. Bureaucracy and lengthy recruitment processes are huge disadvantages in this case.

Most libraries at non-profit organisations, like religious Orders, and others owned by political parties and trade unions are seriously short on staff. A common factor between religious and political libraries is their reliance on volunteers. Religious and political convictions play a huge part in convincing individuals to assist voluntarily. A good number of volunteers is presently engaged in these libraries.

All categories identified the lack of funds as a key factor in staffing, especially trade unions, political parties and religious organisations. Only at the legal library funds are not a problem. In academic and government entities funds are often limited but the headcount and justifications for staff recruitment play a bigger part in staffing decisions. Notably, fundraising ideas were very lacking among interviewees. Only two religious libraries mentioned book sales, while a political library is considering small contributions from users. No other participant described any fundraising efforts, which depend on the nature of the organisation. In their very nature, political and religious entities survive on fundraising and donations.

The study also analysed what qualities and skills are required in librarians. The main competencies mentioned were knowledge of the library expertise and a qualification or sound knowledge of librarianship. Familiarity with the collection is crucial, especially when clients require assistance quickly and efficiently. Passion for books and librarianship are big assets, as are patience, meticulousness, attention to detail and communication skills. Respondents also expect librarians to be organised.

The prosperity and success of special libraries depend on their parent organisations and the management's attitude and appreciation. Most librarians feel they are supported by their managers, who are normally ready to give their input to help librarians and keep them motivated. Still, in some situations the management does not seem fully aware of the true benefits of the library, its need for more staff and the dynamics of a librarian's job. Some managers linked the library's worth and staffing demands solely to the level of usage, which is obviously fundamental for a library but should not be the only determinant to establish its importance and the number of staff it requires. Several other tasks define a librarian's daily job.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The study aim was to investigate the staffing situation at Maltese special libraries and identify and analyse issues related to personnel. This concluding chapter brings together the key findings and offers further reflections and suggestions for a good way forward for Maltese special libraries. This should help librarians and the management of parent organisations to appreciate their libraries' worth and rediscover or redefine their purpose in an uncertain future dominated by technology and new ways of acquiring information.

5.2 Objectives and achievements

The study objectives included establishing the staff complement in Maltese special libraries and comparing the present situation and numbers to those described in the 2006 report and the 2013 directory of Maltese libraries. Other objectives were to discover staffing challenges and explore the causes and consequences of the present staff situation. The final objective was to offer practical suggestions to sustain libraries for the future.

The staff complement at the participating libraries is varied. The academic library has a satisfactory number of personnel, religious and political libraries have mixed complements, the trade unionistic and the legal libraries have a solo librarian, whereas government entities vary from two full-timers to no assigned library staff. The study describes in detail what other objectives were achieved and how, such as identifying staffing issues, which is highlighted in the next section. Among the causes of such issues the study identified the lack of funds, the lack of volunteers and vocations (for religious libraries), and headcounts. Among the consequences, the worst preoccupation is the accumulation of work, which makes it hard to

maintain the collection, demotivates staff, hinders research efforts and decreases the number of opening hours, among others.

5.3 Research method and main outcomes

Since special libraries form part of bigger organisations, besides being qualified in librarianship their staff needs to be trained also in the area of expertise as described in the mission of the parent organisation. In the 2013 MaLIA directory most libraries reported a lack of staff or minimal cohorts. Among the causes mentioned were the lack of appreciation by entity managers and the lack of funds, while the lack of training, accumulating work and staff demotivation were among the consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic and vast technological advancements greatly impacted the special libraries sector. Hence the study's contribution is significant as it compares the present staff situation with the previous one, using a mixed method approach through interviews and questionnaires.

The study found a high number of professionally qualified librarians employed at the academic library, although the accumulation of work still leaves the library under-resourced. The legal firm and government entities also employ professionals, although some of the latter have no assigned staff and distribute tasks between employees qualified in other areas. However, considering the level of usage, the size of the collections and the number of users, most governmental libraries seem adequately equipped. The situation is similar at the legal library. Political and religious libraries heavily involve volunteers with mixed knowledge of librarianship, experience and qualifications. In general, managers are more convinced than librarians and clients that requirements are met by the present staff complement. The libraries lacking staff most are at non-profit organisations (mainly religious Orders), political parties and trade unions.

One key outcome was the confirmation that funding is the most determining factor in staffing, especially in non-profit organisations, political parties and trade unions. Only the legal library did not complain about funds. In academic and government entities, recruitment depends more on the approved headcount and detailed justifications for the creation of new posts. Fundraising ideas were very scarce. However, funding does not seem related to neglect from management, although some librarians commented that certain managers are not fully convinced or aware of the library's worth – some managers think the need for a library depends solely on usage. Librarians are generally satisfied with the level of commitment and support from managers.

The study established a list of skills stakeholders think a special librarian should possess, including knowledge of librarianship, the library specialisation and the collection; a passion for books; patience, meticulousness; attention to detail; communication and organisation skills.

5.4 Comparisons with previous studies

Comparing past and present situations, funds are still the most prevalent issue, to varying degrees and with different effect on staffing and libraries. Similar to 2006, commercial libraries cope best financially, whereas non-profit organisations, political parties and trade union libraries struggle the most. The second worst problem two decades ago was the lack of staff, mostly in religious and voluntary organisations. Nowadays opinions on the matter are balanced. No stakeholder thinks there is a surplus of staff at any library. Managers are generally satisfied with the present complement while librarians and users are split. Libraries facing financial difficulties tend to lack staff, and when librarians are absent would resort to self-service, other staff helping with queries or closing the library. Most libraries compensate

by engaging volunteers, which depends on efforts to find trustworthy and knowledgeable personnel and some level of persuasion and persistence.

In 2006 appreciation for the librarians' job was lukewarm among managers, particularly in government entities. The situation today seems slightly better – in the government and legal sectors and even in non-profit or political organisations, librarians are generally satisfied with the management's level of appreciation. However, staff today still feels demotivated sometimes, when personnel is lacking and work has no end in sight. Other unsolved issues are the lack of training for librarians and unfinished work. There was a lack of IT support in 2006, but today even elderly volunteers seem more tech-savvy.

5.5 Recommendations

The last objective was to offer practical suggestions for a sustainable future for Maltese special libraries. Among the listed solutions are the following:

- Librarians need to be more proactive in their advocacy within the organisation, especially with senior management, to get across the message that having a library is not a luxury but a core business operation.
- New sources of funding, such as EU funds and fundraising activities, should be explored.
- Special libraries should endeavour to build bridges with other stakeholders in the occupational sector, to enhance visibility, collaboration and the service provided, especially through sharing of resources.
- Special libraries should intensify their outreach efforts, possibly offering their services outside their parent organisations, utilising the power of social media, which today is the most basic way to promote the library, its services and possible uses. Organised events also help to generate interest.

These are all ways to strengthen the future of Maltese special libraries. Most entity managers speak highly of their library and strive to see it prosper and increase its usage. However, a new purpose and *raison d'être* may be needed for some special libraries to survive, especially in light of the challenges brought about by advancements in technology and AI.

5.6 Further research

The study gives a clear picture of the structure of Human Resources in specialised libraries and how they function. It also paves the way for further studies that can be conducted to enhance the findings of this study and overcome its limitations, because there is room for more analysis which could enhance knowledge about the subject. For example future studies can focus more on certain library typologies or span over client perspectives and delve into more detail. Other studies can focus on staff training or funding, both of which are still generally lacking.

5.7 Concluding remarks

Libraries have always been considered as information centres. However, in the digital age, when information and resources are often readily available at the click of a button, libraries risk losing their significance and importance, moreover if librarians, entity managers and clients do not adapt to discover a new purpose. Special libraries enhance the prestige of their parent organisations and are signs of respect for their history and heritage. Besides this, such libraries deserve to be showcased, promoted and visited because of their richness in the specialised information and artefacts they offer. Their very nature of focusing on a particular subject and their concentration of items about a specific area of study are testament of their unique value.

Maltese special libraries have their own characteristics, backgrounds, situations and issues, also regarding staffing, depending on the category, the clientèle and mostly on parent organisations and their management. Still, a lot needs to be done to enhance their visibility and awareness, which will boost their prestige and usage. Issues such as the lack of funds, awareness and the level of usage need to be tackled effectively to ensure special libraries remain relevant and special librarians keep offering an optimum service.

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Appendix A

Information letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Christopher Giordano and I am a student at the University of Malta, reading for a Master of Arts degree in Library and Information Sciences. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled “Issues relating to professional staffing in Maltese Specialised Libraries: An analysis”. This is being supervised by Dr Charles J. Farrugia. Kindly consider this letter as an invitation to participate in this study. Kindly also read the following information about the study and what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to analyse the situation of professional staffing in a number of specialised libraries in Malta and Gozo. Among other things, the research will strive to determine whether there is a problem of lack of staff in these libraries, or whether there is enough staff or even more than is required in every particular library that takes part. At the same time the study will try to identify the reasons that led to that particular situation, and what consequences there could be on the librarians themselves, the libraries and the parent organisations they form part of, especially where there is a lack of staff. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will enhance the research by shedding light on the main issues that the study is trying to delve into, namely those described in the previous paragraph, with your valid reflections, opinions, comments, complaints and suggestions.

As part of my research I will be recording the interviews so that I will later be able to transcribe them on a Word document. I will then analyse and compare all responses, anonymously as much as possible, to be able to identify certain issues, tendencies or problems related to professional staffing in Maltese specialised libraries.

Data collected will be anonymised and treated confidentially, although there will still be the possibility that participants may be identified indirectly. Apart from myself as the researcher, only my supervisor and the examiners will have access to original data, and only upon request.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. This means you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without the need to give a reason. Once you accept to take part you are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without the need to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be deleted immediately and will not be used in the study, should you wish so.

If you choose to participate, please note there are no direct benefits to you. However, please rest assured that your participation will not entail any known or anticipated risks.

As a participant please also note that you have the right, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, to access, rectify and ask for the data concerning you to be erased, where applicable. All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form for 5 years, on completion of the study. A copy of this information letter is being provided to you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration to take part in this study. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor via the email addresses listed hereunder.

Yours,

Christopher Giordano

Appendix B

Consent form

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the research study mentioned above, which is being conducted by Christopher Giordano. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the nature and purpose of this study. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any queries, all of which were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to accept to participate or to refuse or stop my participation at any time, before the interview starts, while it is being conducted or even after it is done, without the need to give any reason and without suffering any penalty. Furthermore, should I choose to participate, I will still be free to decline to answer any particular question. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me may be kept for up to five years after submission of the dissertation.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview which will take between 30 and 45 minutes, and that the said interview will be conducted at a place and time that are convenient to me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. However, I appreciate the fact that this research may be beneficial to me or to others by identifying issues that need to be addressed or by suggesting positive changes in different types or places of work.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify and ask for the data concerning me to be erased, where applicable.
7. I understand that all data collected during the study will be stored in an anonymised form for 5 years on completion of the dissertation.
8. I have been given a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.

9. I give my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and transcribed to text as it has been recorded, to assist the researcher in his data analysis.
10. I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview questions for special librarians

1. How many professional (qualified) librarians and staff members are there in this library?
2. How many of these are full-timers, part-timers and volunteers?
3. How many librarians and members of staff are professional (graduated in library and information sciences)?
4. How would you describe the staffing situation at your library?
5. What are the principal roles of the members of staff that you mentioned, and how are responsibilities distributed? Could you kindly provide a simple organigram?
6. Do you feel there is a lack of staff at your library, that there are just enough members of staff or that there are more than is required? Why?
7. How does this situation compare to the situation last year, two years, five years and ten years ago? What is the reason for this change?
8. What do you think is the reason for this lack of staff / being just enough / being more than enough members of staff?
9. What consequences do you think are brought about by this lack of staff / being just enough / being more than enough members of staff?
10. Do you think that your staffing situation at present is related to the financial situation of the library and the parent organisation?
11. Are you satisfied with the level of commitment and enthusiasm shown in the library by the managers at your entity?
12. Do you feel your needs are duly supported by your managers? Why?
13. What is the usual recruitment process for new librarians at your library?
14. What are the most important skills for a specialised librarian at your library?
15. How do you compensate lack of staff problems, and how do you address the situation?
16. Do you feel there should be more/less members of staff in this library? Why?
17. What influences most such a decision (to increase/decrease staff members)?
18. What are the main challenges your library is facing regarding staffing?
19. Do you have any practical and innovative solutions to tackle staffing problems?

20. Do you think technology could help mitigate staffing problems somehow, or would it make things worse?

Appendix D

Interview questions for entity managers

1. How do you describe the staffing situation of the library at your entity?
2. Do you think there is a lack of staff at the library at your entity, that there are just enough members of staff or that there are more than is required? Why?
3. How does this situation compare to the situation last year, two years, five years and ten years ago? What is the reason for this change?
4. What consequences do you think are brought about by this lack of staff / being just enough / being more than enough members of staff?
5. How much does the financial situation at your entity determine the staffing situation at your library?
6. How important do you feel your library is for your entity?
7. What type and what level of support do you managers offer the library?
8. What is the usual recruitment process for new librarians at your library?
9. What are the most important skills that you seek in a librarian, as managers of this entity? Why?
10. How do you compensate lack of staff problems, and how do you address the situation?
11. Do you have plans to increase/decrease the number of staff members at your library? Why?
12. What influences most such a decision (to increase/decrease staff members)?
13. How much do you think the library is central in light of the biggest challenges that your entity is facing at present?
14. How much is your entity ready to invest in your library staff? Why?
15. As an entity how do you address staffing problems at your library?
16. How much does technology help mitigate staffing problems, or does it make things worse?
17. Do you, as a manager, believe there is a need for a library at your entity?
18. In your opinion what are the benefits of such a unit?

Appendix E

Questionnaires for library clients

Dear library user, I am presently reading for my Master's degree in Library and Information Sciences at the University of Malta, and at present I am carrying out research for my Master's dissertation about *Issues relating to professional staffing in Maltese Specialised Libraries*. My tutor is Dr Charles Farrugia.

I would be very grateful if you could spare a few minutes to answer some questions regarding the use of the library at your entity and your views about it. I have chosen your entity, among others, as part of my research because of its highly specialised collection and expertise.

Many thanks in advance!

1. As regards the staffing situation of the library, do you think there is:

- a lack of staff
- just enough members of staff
- more staff than is required

Why? _____

2. What consequences do you think are brought about by this situation of staff?

3. What do you do to avail yourself of library services when library staff is absent?

4. How important is the library for your entity?

- Very important
- Of medium importance
- Not important

Why? _____

5. What is your level of satisfaction with the service given by the librarians at your entity?

Highly satisfactory Quite satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Why? _____

6. Are the library and the services it offers central for your job at your entity? Why?

7. What skills or services do you expect librarians at your entity should offer?

8. Should your entity invest more in library staff? Yes No

Why? _____

9. What do you think influences most such a decision (to increase/decrease staff members)?

Thank you so much for your time in answering these questions!

Christopher Giordano