

SCONUL Vision 2005

Introduction

SCONUL is a membership organisation of 157 library and information services in the UK and Ireland. Its members include libraries in higher education institutions (universities and colleges); the British Library and the National Libraries of Ireland, Scotland and Wales; and libraries in national museums and other specialist institutions. (The words 'library' and 'library staff' are used throughout this document as convenient terms to cover the full spectrum of services and facilities provided by SCONUL members, including learning and resource centres.)

During 1997-98, SCONUL formulated and published its vision of the academic library in the year 2002. That vision statement did not claim to be a complete or comprehensive picture of the future, but aimed rather to capture and highlight key themes of relevance to the SCONUL membership. Over the last three years the statement has proved its value as it has been widely used to inform strategy and planning at both national and institutional levels.

In summer 2000 we decided that the pace of change in our operating environment required a new vision to reflect the political, economic, social and technological forces affecting our services. Following the same process as before we formed a small group, broadly representative of our membership, to develop a new statement as the basis for further dialogue with stakeholders. The statement presented here is the result of that work.

We have followed our previous practice of providing alongside our vision statement the set of planning assumptions on which it is based together with a short list of action points for SCONUL. The format differs slightly from the previous statement in that the planning assumptions now precede the vision itself. For both the assumptions and the vision, significant changes from the last statement are highlighted in the respective introductory paragraphs.

Many people have contributed to the development of this statement, directly and indirectly. I am particularly grateful to the colleagues who found the time to attend our workshop in Banbury and to comment on drafts in progress. I am especially indebted to Toby Bainton and Ray Lester as the two other members of the organising team.

Sheila Corrall
January 2001

Planning assumptions

We believe most of our previous assumptions were well founded and merit repetition with only minor amendment or elaboration. However there are some areas where we have made significant additions to or departures from the points previously listed. Under Technology, we draw attention to development of the Web as a medium for communication and interaction, and growth in the range of client devices offering access to networked information. In Publishing, we see the possibility of open e-print archives challenging the commercial publication model, but also anticipate debates and disputes within institutions about intellectual property rights. For Higher education, we predict continuing diversification in the sector, with an increasing requirement to widen participation and extend services to meet the expectations of a 24-hour society. In Learning and teaching, the concept of Managed Learning Environments will expedite interworking of library management and other systems, and the notion of an e-university suggests both collaboration and competition with the private sector. For National libraries, we see renewed focus on their collecting and repository functions, and more formal approaches to working in partnership with the higher education sector.

Technology

- T1 Network capacity, within and between organisations and individuals, will continue to increase and will be able to handle all types of media, including data, text, voice and images.
- T2 The Web will become more important as a communications medium, supporting institutional processes (such as learning) and encouraging self-service administration and transactions.
- T3 Learners and researchers will expect direct access to information resources from not only their libraries, but also their homes, offices and other locations, via a wide range of client devices.
- T4 The hardware and software environment will become standardised around Internet/Intranet technologies and the focus of attention will shift from conduit to content, with the means of reproduction continuing to migrate from photocopying to printing.

Publishing

- P1 Scholarly information will continue to grow in volume and open e-print archives will begin to mount a significant challenge to the traditional dominant position of commercial suppliers.
- P2 Printed materials will continue to be important, but digital delivery of full text and other media will increase (mediated by the Distributed National Electronic Resource) and there will be a variety of e-book suppliers and products targeted at students/learners.
- P3 Access to some research materials may be restricted to closed virtual communities.

P4 The legitimacy of fair dealing in the electronic environment will eventually be confirmed, but rights management will be complex (especially for multimedia and non-textual materials) and will increasingly be determined by licences not legislation.

P5 There will be debates and disputes over intellectual property rights within institutions.

Higher education

H1 There will be a continuing requirement for efficiency savings and diversification of income streams, as well as increasing emphasis on transparency costing, which will put pressure on libraries to demonstrate the value for money of their acquisition and retention policies.

H2 There will be tensions between financial and service imperatives arising from the need to enhance the student experience in a fee-paying consumerist environment and '24x7' society.

H3 Many students will need a considerable level of support to cope with the academic and economic pressures of studying.

H4 There will be continuing growth in student numbers, particularly in part-time and non-traditional entrants, but mostly at foundation and postgraduate levels, involving franchise arrangements, other links with FE and courses for continuing professional development.

H5 There will be growth in consortia-based activities and further institutional mergers, as well as expectations of stronger roles for institutions and libraries within their own regions.

H6 There will be an increasing requirement to serve the widest possible audiences and to work with business and the local community (including public libraries and museums) as part of the national infrastructure for economic regeneration, lifelong learning and social cohesion.

H7 The sector will continue to diversify with significant differences emerging between research-led and learning/teaching institutions and also between the four 'home countries' of the UK.

Learning and teaching

L1 The shift from teaching to learning will continue throughout the sector with the development and implementation of formal learning and teaching strategies, but teaching will remain a significant activity.

L2 Technology will facilitate accelerated development of customised materials and packages, suitable for modular or incremental delivery, which will combine externally-published and institutionally-created elements and require more effort to be spent on rights management.

- L3 Growth of Managed Learning Environments will support the development of cross-sectoral and work-based approaches through distributed learning centres, requiring interoperability between library management systems and other internal and external information systems.
- L4 There will be an official E-university embracing the whole UK higher education sector, as well as various institutional- and consortial-based initiatives, which will all develop both in collaboration and in competition with private-sector provision and work-based learning.
- L5 Growth in mixed-mode distributed learning, on and off campus, will be significant – to improve access and choice, to serve remote areas, and to compete in global and niche markets.
- L6 Libraries will need to develop distributed services, but will still have an important function as central locations where essential services and support for students are brought together, and there will be opportunities for library staff to become more involved in learning support.
- L7 There will be increased emphasis on key skills for students, creating opportunities for library staff to play a major role in the development of information and other learning skills, but they may have to argue the case for information skills and for their involvement in this area.
- L8 The continuous widening of access to higher education will accentuate the diversity of student needs for training in the use of information technology.

Research

- R1 Diversification of missions will increase, accentuating the differences between research-led and learning/teaching institutions; applied research will increase.
- R2 There will be continuing pressure and support at national level for more formal arrangements for resource-sharing through (distributed) centres of excellence.
- R3 There will be tensions between expectations of national co-operation and services to multiple constituencies and institutional demands to concentrate on primary users.
- R4 Training of research students will continue to be emphasised and library staff will have a role in helping research students and research staff to develop their information-handling skills.

National libraries

- N1 There will be a continuing requirement for efficiency savings and diversification of income streams.
- N2 Service development to support academic research will become less important, with the roles of national libraries being concentrated on their collections and particularly associated with fulfilling the functions of national repositories and formulating digital preservation policies.

- N3 There will be an increasing requirement to serve the widest possible audiences and to work with other players as part of the national infrastructure for lifelong learning.
- N4 Relationships with other libraries will be strengthened with formalised agreements underpinning strategic partnerships between national libraries and higher education.
- N5 There will be progress towards the extension of legal deposit provisions to material in electronic and audiovisual formats, but this will not be accomplished within this period.

THE SCOUNL VISION

Academic information services in the year 2005

Our vision for 2005 is not radically different to our previous view of 2002, but there are a few elements that have become more prominent in line with our perceptions of environmental forces. For example, we see web portals developing significantly in the context of managed information environments and formal partnerships underpinning cross-sectoral and multi-national consortia. Both learning and research support will have to be organised on a distributed model to reflect student and staff modes of working, but will need to be delivered as a seamless system, integrating local, regional, national and global resources. As boundaries between functions become increasingly fluid, we can expect staff roles to evolve and expand – or contract – according to institutional circumstances. There will be opportunities to act as rights managers, learning advisers and cross-disciplinary brokers for those who can demonstrate their competence to do so. The ‘library’ will retain its importance as a physical place and will be able to consolidate its position by bringing related services into its space.

Our vision of the future

Information services will operate in a hybrid environment of traditional and digital resources of static and dynamic nature. While support services for learning and research will vary significantly, there are several themes that are common to both areas.

- 1 The development of web portals for students and staff will accelerate in the context of managed environments for learning and research, which has significant implications for the role of library management systems.
- 2 The establishment of formal partnerships within and beyond the sector will become the norm, involving new players with different business interests, who may want to form alliances with institutions or just with support services.
- 3 The complexity of the operating environment will require more effort to be expended on institutional security policies and unified authentication systems, which must allow controlled seamless access for users from any physical location.
- 4 The role of library staff as advisers and trainers will continue to develop, with some scope for expansion and integration with related functions, which in turn may raise questions about future service structures.
- 5 A focus on user needs, for the present and the future, will be critical to service success in a situation characterised by increasing diversity and choice, which creates both opportunities and threats for library staff.

The future positions of academic information services within their institutions will depend on their willingness and ability to take responsibility for continuous development and improvement.

There will be opportunities to extend and develop the role of library staff, as boundaries between functions become increasingly fluid, but this blurring of functions offers similar opportunities to other professionals, and libraries also face the threat of disintermediation through direct service provision to users. The library workforce will have to be more flexible and versatile, with different structural arrangements and management practices to meet changing needs. Significant investment in continuous professional development will be required for all library staff, including development of learning support competencies and continual refreshment of professional and technical skills.

Learning and teaching

Both learning and teaching will be much more distributed than before and will take place around and away from the campus in the local area and at a distance, requiring information and other support services organised to fit a distributed learning environment. Service delivery will have to integrate resources in a seamless way within a managed learning environment that is learner-centred but still includes traditional teaching. The 'library' as a physical place will fulfil an important function as a community hub and social centre, particularly where the opportunity has been taken to bring other related services into the building. New types of e-book devices and handheld PCs connected through wireless networks to information resources within the library will shift the balance of PC provision and provide new opportunities for imaginative use of space.

The success of the service will depend on its alignment with the institutional learning and teaching strategy and on management capacity to exercise leadership, foster innovation and generate cultural change. The quality of learning resources and services will continue to be a central feature of formal quality assurance and assessment systems. Services which do not respond positively to the new learning agenda will run the risk of being marginalised. New forms of strategic alliances and learning partnerships will be common at both service and institutional levels. Such partnerships will include relationships with teachers and other learning providers, with other learning support professionals, and with external clients in the public and private sectors (in the context of learning organisations and learning cities), and may operate at local, regional, national or global levels.

Service staff will need to develop their information and management competencies to deal with the complexities of the digital environment and will also have the chance to deploy their communication and questioning skills in expanded roles reflecting the new forms of support required by distributed learners. Competency in these areas will be critical:

- *resource management* will be more complicated with the range of different forms and formats, an array of payment models and methods, a plethora of access controls and the challenge of quality assurance;
- *academic liaison* will have to ensure strategic alignment and operational attunement, and will need to be managed in conjunction with other support functions, such as educational developers and learning technologists;

- *collaborative working* will be fundamental to the provision of a seamless service and will need to be pursued actively in person and via electronic systems, both with service colleagues and with other players;
- *learning support* will see a further blurring of boundaries between the roles of academic, academically-related and support staff, with opportunities for library staff to act as learning advisers and rights managers, as well as extending their roles as trainers and developers of information/learning skills.

Research and outreach

There will be more research and consultancy activity overall with considerable variation across the sector, but a general increase in applied and commissioned research with a wider range of sponsors and an emphasis on business relevance. This will mean a corresponding growth in confidential reports, leading to a higher proportion of grey literature in the system. The trend from holdings to access will continue and the electronic environment will reinforce the concept of invisible colleges. There will be a risk of access to information being limited by the operation of closed discipline-based communities, but this development should be mitigated by promoting the establishment of open e-print archives, which will also begin to undermine the position of commercial publishers.

The library may be forced into a secondary role as researchers turn to alternative sources of supply and professional associations and commercial publishers compete for their attention. There will be opportunities for service staff to act as independent brokers by creating higher-level portals that cross disciplinary boundaries and incorporate collection-level descriptions covering all types of holdings. Technology will facilitate the rapid formation of worldwide consortia for developing and managing specialist collections of expensive or little-used items. This will require a proactive approach informed by in-depth knowledge of research interests. It will depend on a concerted effort as part of a national strategy based on distributed centres of excellence, with designated institutions assuming a vital repository role for both traditional and digital resources under the leadership of the British Library.

Service staff will need to develop their subject and business understanding to play a significant part in the networked research community but will still have the chance to deploy their information and presentation skills in accepted roles as advisers and trainers, guiding new researchers through the global information landscape. Competency will be needed in these areas:

- *resource management* will involve negotiating acquisition and retention agreements within and between institutions and could include responsibility for managing the institution's intellectual resource/knowledge base;
- *academic liaison* will have to focus on current research interests and will need to be organised around existing or emerging research groups, which may not coincide with traditional departmental/faculty boundaries;

- *co-operative provision* will cover both digital and traditional resources selected to meet identified community needs and arrangements will be planned, managed and assessed on a more formal basis;
- *research support* will be a relatively low-profile role, but with continuing opportunities for library staff to assist with skills development of researchers, especially in relation to new sources and systems.

Actions for SCONUL

The Vision should inform SCONUL's strategic and operational planning and the work programmes of its Advisory Committees and Task Forces.

- SCONUL should use the Vision as the basis for strengthening its relationships with UCISA, JISC, the ILT and Universities UK.
- SCONUL should initiate discussions with BAILER, the isNTO, Library Association and HESDA to inform future provision of education and training for all levels of the workforce.
- The Vision should be communicated to other players (such as ALT, the Learning and Skills Councils, public libraries and Re:source) who should be consulted about its key messages.
- SCONUL should consider organising conferences and workshops on relevant issues, such as Managed Learning Environments and information service structures

SCONUL Vision Group

The following participated in the vision workshop and/or made substantial comments on drafts:

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