


Challenges for academic libraries in difficult economic times

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A guide for senior institutional managers and policy makers

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A new guide from the Research Information Network focuses on how academic librarians are experiencing and responding to financial cuts in the current economic climate.

Based upon data gathered in the UK and internationally, and focus groups with senior librarians during late 2009, the guide looks at the financial position of libraries, their strategies for dealing with challenging economic circumstances, and the value of libraries.

After a decade of growth in budgets and services, academic librarians now expect a sustained period of cuts over the next three to five years. The scale of these cuts means librarians are having to reconsider the kinds and levels of service they can provide in support of their universities missions.

This guide shows how librarians are seeking to balance expenditure between information resources and staffing and how they plan to sustain levels of service, as well as developing new services to meet new needs. It demonstrates that library directors need the support of senior managers across the higher education sector, as well as from publishers and other information providers, to help address the challenges, as well as the opportunities, faced.

The guide has four core messages, see overleaf.

You can download the full guide at
www.rin.ac.uk/challenges-for-libraries

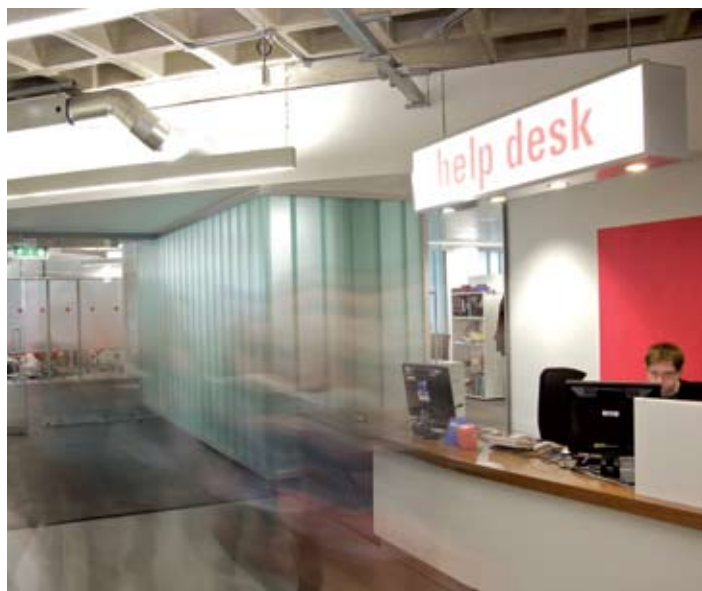
1. **After a decade of growth in budgets and services, librarians now expect a sustained period of cuts.** Library budgets have risen over the past ten years – although not as much as overall university income and expenditure – as both the volume and range of library services have expanded. Librarians from across the higher education (HE) sector now expect budget cuts over the next three years.

2. **The scale of the cuts means that libraries must rethink the kinds and levels of service they provide in support of their universities' missions.** The scope for further simple efficiency savings is small, and so librarians are having to think more strategically about:

- *the balance of expenditure on information resources on the one hand, and staffing on the other.* The balance varies significantly across the sector, and there is a close relationship between staffing and service levels
- *whether and if so how to sustain existing kinds and levels of services while at the same time developing new services to meet new needs.* Many libraries across the sector are considering cuts in services; but they need to ensure that staff focus more on user-facing functions, and to develop a more detailed understanding of the costs of their activities
- *the squeeze on book budgets, and how to meet the student demand for core texts.* E-books could help ease this problem, but publishers' policies on pricing and accessibility are inhibiting take-up, and
- *the costs and sustainability of current levels of journal provision.* Cancelling large numbers of titles or a whole big deal will give rise to considerable opposition. But librarians are looking at various options to reduce the costs of their current portfolios.

3. **Library directors from across the sector are keen to use the current financial difficulties as an opportunity to rethink what the library does, and to do things differently.** But they have as yet few concrete proposals that will transform services or yield large-scale savings.

- *They are seeking to develop a closer understanding of the relationships between library activities on the one hand, and learning and research outcomes on the other.* Library directors are increasingly keen



to find ways to demonstrate and communicate the value of their services in achieving institutional goals.

- *They have been developing new kinds of services to support institutional missions, but lack of resources may constrain further development.* Support for open access initiatives, for data curation and preservation, and for training staff and students in a rapidly-changing information environment are all at risk.
 - *They want to develop deeper co-operation with libraries across the sector.* Such cooperation is probably the only way to achieve significant cost savings while at the same time sustaining momentum in developing new services to meet the needs of their users.
4. **Library directors need the support of senior managers across the HE sector, as well as from publishers and other information providers, in addressing the challenges as well as the opportunities they face.** Sustaining world-class information services is of fundamental importance to UK universities and their success in teaching, learning and research. Libraries and their directors have a critical role to play, but they cannot do it all themselves. Leadership and partnership with champions from across the HE and information sectors will be critical to sustaining the outstanding position of UK universities.

About the Research Information Network

The Research Information Network has been established by the higher education funding councils, the research councils, and the UK national libraries. We investigate how efficient and effective the information services provided for the UK research community are, how they are changing, and how they might be improved for the future. We help to ensure that researchers in the UK benefit from world-leading information services, so that they can sustain their position as among the most successful and productive researchers in the world. All of our publications are available on the website at www.rin.ac.uk