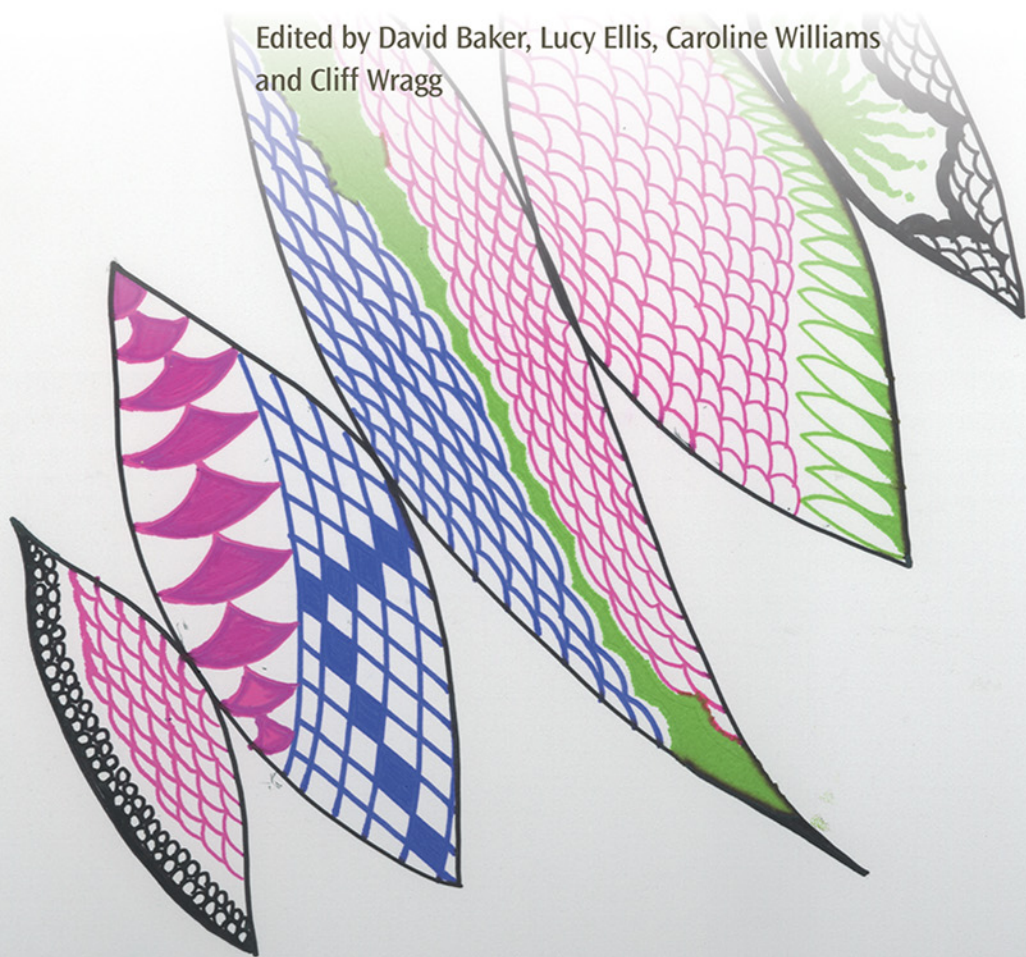


Benchmarking Library, Information, and Education Services

New Strategic Choices in
Challenging Times

Edited by David Baker, Lucy Ellis, Caroline Williams
and Cliff Wragg





BENCHMARKING LIBRARY, INFORMATION, AND EDUCATION SERVICES

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Chandos Advances in Information



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New Strategic Choices in Challenging Times

Edited by

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Rebekah Okpoti lectures in music at Liverpool Hope University, United Kingdom, and is an associate organist at Leeds Cathedral, United Kingdom. She studied at Chethams School of Music, the Royal Northern College of Music, and then completed her MA and PhD in sonic installation art and composition at UCLAN. In 2020 she saw the release of the Finding Home Collection in the United Kingdom, United States, and China as a Reimagined Last Supper of Miniature 1:12 scale of Sonic Installation Art Pieces. In 2021 Set Foot Press released her experimental organ album "Dressing" on both cassette and digital. Recently, she ran the Arts Council-funded "Organs of Anne Lister" Project (BBC's Gentleman Jack) where she was commissioned to write a contemporary Organ sonata. Anne Lister's Organ Sonata was published in July 2022 by

Tim Knight Music Publishers. Her scholarly work includes a thesis on the Repatriation of Domesticity within Sonic Installation Art and the topics of space, void, poise, and composition.

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Henriëtte Swart holds a master's degree in library and information science from Stellenbosch University and a postgraduate diploma in education from UNISA. She has been employed by the SU Library and Information Service (LIS) for more than three decades in various positions

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Ellen Tise is the senior director of library and information services at Stellenbosch University since January 2006. She previously held the positions of University Librarian at the University of the Western Cape and Deputy University Librarian at the University of the Witwatersrand. She holds a BA, a higher diploma in library and information science, and a BBibI Honours from the University of the Western Cape, and an MPhil in science and technology studies from Stellenbosch University. Among other notable leadership roles, she served as the first president of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) from 1998 to 2002 and president of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, for the years 2009 to 2011. She also served as chair of the Board of the National Library of South Africa (2012–15) and on the OCLC Board of Trustees (2014–18). She has just started a second 2-year term as chair of the Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression Advisory Committee of IFLA. She is a recipient of several awards for distinguished leadership and outstanding contributions to librarianship, including honorary membership of LIASA and an honorary IFLA fellowship. She has published various articles in professional journals and is a regular speaker at national and international conferences, seminars, and symposia.

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Evgenia Vassilakaki is an SNE in IT project management at the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA). She was awarded a doctoral degree in May 2011 from the Department of Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom, on Multilingual Information Retrieval and Users’ Information Seeking Behaviour. For the last 10 years, she took part in research projects in various contexts (i.e., business administration, public/private sector, cultural heritage, refugee crisis); ranging from national (i.e., THALIS DOCCULTURE, Consultant to Greek Ministry of Education) to European level (i.e., CrossCult H2020, Erasmus + Lib(e)ro, Europeana “Rise of Literacy”); from different positions (i.e., member, coordinator, team and working package leader, deputy to management board) and responsibilities. Her research interests lie in information-seeking behavior, LIS roles and information services offered, information literacy, and multilingual information retrieval and access. She has published in international peer-reviewed journals, namely, *Library and Information Science Research*, *New Library World*, *Library Management*, and *Program and Library Review*.

Gabrielle Wong is the head of Research Support Services at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library (HKUST Library). Before taking the current position, she was responsible for managing teaching and learning space, including the Learning Commons in HKUST Library. She is active in research, with interests covering information literacy teaching, instructional design, intellectual development, and communication skills. Her publications span over these topics as well as learning space assessment and library services for research support. She is also an EdD candidate. Her thesis topic is leadership development of academic librarians. In this area, she has published three journal papers,

including a literature review, a case study, and a conceptual paper. She obtained her BSc at the University of Hong Kong and her MLIS at McGill University, Canada.

Caroline Williams is a university librarian at the University of Queensland (UQ), Australia. UQ is a member of the research-intensive Group of Eight universities in Australia and has over 50,000 students. The focus of her role is enhancing the student experience, developing partnerships and collaborative ways of working, and building support for research. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, she has led the transformation of services and scaling up of all things digital. Prior to UQ, she was the director of Libraries, Research and Learning Resources at the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, and the deputy director of Mimas, a national data center at the University of Manchester. At Nottingham, she and her team implemented new systems, services, and space developments, and at Mimas, she led the delivery of a portfolio of national services and projects for the library and information community funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). She has also worked in a range of library roles at Manchester Metropolitan University, the Open University, and Nottingham Trent University. She has written and presented about change management and digital transformation and is currently writing up a PhD thesis, “What is the role of the library in a modern university: a Bourdieusian analysis” for submission to the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom.

Cliff Wragg started his career in the sound engineering field and then developed his career in the UK polytechnic sector, rising through the human resources area (specializing in staff development), becoming director of HR, and then Polytechnic Secretary (incorporating Company Secretary and Clerk to Governors). This, in turn, became University Secretary, a role he fulfilled for 10 years. In 1995 he left to become a freelance management consultant for HE, and one of his early projects was to take on the development and management of a benchmarking program, on behalf of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. He ran this program successfully for 24 years, involving universities from around the globe. He also undertook a broad range of consultancy work for individual universities and HE organizations (such as the Leadership Foundation and the Higher Education Academy, now Advance HE). He is a Licensed

International Tennis Official. He worked as a chair umpire at Wimbledon for 20 years before concentrating on his role as a chief umpire and referee.

Sayed Zain has been working in higher education for more than 20 years. She worked for the British Council in Pakistan for 7 years as a manager for Education UK. She is currently working as dean of studies at Mont Rose College in London. She has four master's degrees: PGCert Learning and Teaching from the Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom, 2019; MSc International Management from the University of Wales, Newport, United Kingdom, 2008; MSc Strategic Human Resource Management from the University of Glamorgan, United Kingdom, 2007; and an MBA from Al-Hajvery College of Business Administration, 1994. She has a Level 8 qualification in Strategic Direction and Leadership from the Chartered Management Institute and is also a fellow of Advance HE. She has completed a high-impact leadership course from the University of Cambridge Institute of Sustainability Leadership and Strategic Alignment course from the University of Oxford. She is a member of the Mont Rose College Board of Governors and the Academic/Quality Assurance Board. She initiated the formation of the MRC Research Centre and the associated research journal published biannually since 2015.

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Foreword by Paul Greatrix

So much in the world, and in the world of higher education, has changed since the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic. What has not altered though is the need for universities to focus on improving the services we deliver to all of our stakeholders. More than ever, we need to look and learn from practice across the higher education sector, not just in our own countries but across the globe.

For organizations primarily concerned with learning, universities are generally poor learning organizations. We are often reluctant to learn from ourselves, our own practices, successes, and failures but even more so from others. And while we might occasionally be willing to cast a critical eye over the strategies, plans, and actions of other universities, we often spurn the potential offered by learning from other kinds of organizations.

And even when we do, perhaps grudgingly, design to examine the work of our peers, we will often focus on the data first and foremost as a means of both argument and avoidance of the fundamental issues. We do not know all or indeed many of the answers ourselves which is why hearing from others is so instructive and should be a fundamental element of everyday life in our universities.

Benchmarking then should be core to our planning and inform our everyday practice. In this fascinating book, the authors have given benchmarking a makeover, and the core of the book is a report of the results of an international benchmarking exercise which they carried out in April 2022 covered in one of the four substantial sections and titled *Education, Library, and Information Services: Leadership and Management Benchmarking*. This section provides the cornerstone of a wide-ranging survey—with a group of senior and highly experienced participants from across the globe—dedicated to strategic thinking of all forms in library, information, and education services. The framework deployed for the exercise encouraged qualitative reflection and, rather than focusing on “best practices,” enabled managers to share practices that work for them and sought to “inspire one another to draw beneficial practices into their own strategies.” The methodology is intentionally simple but is rooted in theory and sufficiently robust so that it generates a rich dialogue among participants.

The fresh approach in this groundbreaking book and the strong emphasis on the importance and value of qualitative benchmarking are particularly welcome and should help us all move on from sterile arguments about the validity or otherwise of the numbers. The qualitative focus also makes it easier to avoid introspection—the richness of the qualitative data is always both more interesting and less threatening to those looking outward. This is not benchmarking by anecdote though. The authors offer a genuinely robust framework for their qualitative comparisons.

What is most striking about the pieces here is the willingness of participants both to share and learn and their enthusiasm for benchmarking. Some of the sector-leading ideas arising from the benchmarking exercise include the power of place, leveraging benefits from the pandemic experience, embedding a one library approach, and cultivating agility and resilience.

A host of new applications of benchmarking is presented by contributors, including in relation to partnership, learning from leadership in third-sector organizations, libraries in the forefront of disruption, benchmarking an academic online e-Library, and supporting research information management. In addition, there is a specific focus on vocational aspects of higher education, from microcredentials to digital dimensions in creative arts.

While the focus of the book is on library, information, and education services, which may look at first glance to some to be rather limited in scope, the effectiveness of these services is of critical importance to the core university activities of teaching and research. Enhancing the delivery of these services to ensure that our students, scholars, and researchers have outstanding libraries and information service provision is absolutely fundamental. And this book is a valuable new tool to help those working in these services to make it happen.

But the applicability of the benchmarking approach here goes way beyond library, information, and education services. These are challenging times and all parts of universities—in line with the rest of public services—are expected to do more with less. There is ever greater pressure from stakeholders, resource holders, and users in particular to provide high-quality services. The findings and information presented here, although focused on only a narrow slice of higher education operations, offer clear direction for the wider application of qualitative benchmarking in universities across both professional services and academic activities.

The contributors offer a range of sustainable approaches, informed and underpinned by research. It is a genuinely strategic approach but also very focused on practical steps and indicators of opportunities for efficiency and enhancement.

What shines through here is the powerful desire to improve the quality of services in the interest of all stakeholders and users and of a cadre of professionals committed to enhancement for everyone's benefit. A bit idealistic perhaps but there is also real recognition of the serious nature of the challenges. However, the genuine keenness to learn and share is engaging, infectious, and wholly commendable. Something of this enthusiasm and exuberance for learning, improving, and achieving has been lost in our highly competitive and often cynical higher education environment—this distinctive benchmarking approach seeks to bring some of that positivity back.

So this book really represents a core element of the antidote to the problem of the benchmarking deficit within and beyond HE. While the starting point is libraries and information services, the applicability of this work stretches through all parts of universities and further.

The authors are to be applauded for taking on this important task, undertaking such a valuable survey, and assembling such a strong cast of contributors. The new light they have thrown on the essential activity of benchmarking, at this particularly critical time for higher education, is especially to be commended.

Paul Greatrix

Registrar, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

July 2022

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Foreword by Ruth Murray-Webster

I write this Foreword as a customer of academic libraries—a student not so many years ago and a mother of students in arts and humanities; a member of faculty at a university; an organizational change consultant with experience of supporting academic library services through transformational change; and a researcher who chose the context of library services subject to radical change as an in-depth case study for my doctoral research. More importantly, I write as a friend and champion of library and information services.

For all of you reading this book, you will be already “sold” on the value of library services. But maybe your stakeholders have different views? It seems to me that you are often seen as a hygiene factor by your student and academic customers on the assumption that “you will be there when they need you.” Maybe, the services you provide are also seen as a massive cost to your institution with the constant pressure to achieve the double hurdle of doing more for less. The value you can provide to your institution and to your customers’ learning and research is huge, and it is great to see through this benchmarking exercise that this value is explored through multiple lenses, considering strategy, partnerships, digital and physical collections and services, spaces, people, and more. The chapter titles in themselves are a feast of richness, and hopefully, like me, you want to dive in and learn more.

The beauty of this text for me, however, lies in the ethos of the benchmarking exercise itself—the willingness for contributors to really share their thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences in the spirit of collaboration and learning.

My guiding motto for many years has been inspired by the Willem de Kooning installation in Rotterdam¹—“I have to change to stay the same.” In these times of massive disruption for the world, education and learning remain cornerstones for our progress, with libraries and information services core to our education and learning.

¹ <https://straatpoezie.nl/gedicht/i-have-to-change/>

I hope that you are inspired by the generous collaboration evident through these pages and can shape and embed your own changes to the way you serve humanity in this most fundamental way.

Ruth Murray-Webster^{1,2}

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Preface

This is not just a book, it is a tool to help managers, especially those working in the field of library and information services, and enhance the effectiveness of what they do. It may also inspire other ideas or ways to deal with specific issues.

Running through the book, there are frequent references to COVID-19 and the effect that it has had on day-to-day operations, but time has moved on, and COVID is no longer the major and overriding threat that it was initially. Similarly, the move toward a digital world is now a fact of life, but how organizations react to and refine what they do is a continuing challenge for senior strategic managers. There are chapters here that will be beneficial in helping to understand the issues and to consider potential ways forward.

At the core of the book is Part One, a description of a qualitative benchmarking process, which was undertaken by a selected group of professionals from around the world, which generated a set of good practice statements that can be applied in differing situations, depending on contexts such as culture, funding, strategic directions, and political reality.

The book starts with some background and contextual information, to set the scene for the benchmarking exercise itself. A series of surrounding chapters have been written by experienced practitioners in the field of library and information services who provide international sector-leading insights by applying the principles of qualitative benchmarking in its different forms and in different contexts. In many cases, these authors were participants in the benchmarking exercise and were reflecting on issues touched on throughout the process. These chapters include an analysis of third-sector organizations, e-libraries, marketing information services, vocational training in higher education, the creative arts, and the role of partnerships in organizational openness. Within these chapters, readers can make their own minds up whether qualitative benchmarking was conceived as a tool for working across dissimilarities or whether, in practice, similarities are needed and context is everything. Both sides are discussed in the book. A host of similarly interesting issues is discussed within the surrounding chapters.

Part Two of the book reveals the structure of the process and the framework of prompts used to guide the participating senior managers in

the review of their own operation. It then goes on to describe the conclusions drawn and the statements of good practice derived from the responses of the participants.

Some of the issues that were highlighted in the discussions between the participants of the benchmarking exercise seem to cut across all elements of library and information services activity. For example, the balance between collecting material and simply having access to it, the discipline required to control how copies are made and stored, and the nature of space and how it is used are all exposed within these chapters and provide the reader with some insights into how best to gear up for the future.

The final part of the book takes a preliminary look at what qualitative benchmarking could potentially do in the future to enhance the effectiveness of library and information services activities. It is even worth reflecting on whether there might be scope for a wider field of review.

Options to be considered could include:

- repeating the same exercise with a new group of participants;
- repeating the same (or similar) exercise with the same participants 4 or 5 years later, to evaluate the progress/difference achieved and to identify any external trends; and
- addressing a wider group, whether still within the broad learning resources area, or perhaps selecting areas such as human resource management, financial management, or governance.

One key feature of qualitative benchmarking is that to be effective, it has to be strategic in its focus, and it has to engage the senior managers who will have sufficient influence to make changes and make things happen following the exercise.

Cliff Wragg

Acknowledgments

The editors are especially grateful to all who made this book possible: the authors of the chapters for their contributions and their interest in this topic, to the 10 international benchmarking participants who gave so much of themselves professionally, and personally to this project and to all those who contributed thought pieces.

We would also like to thank Glyn Jones for his support in establishing the book proposal, Sara Valentino for her help in the preparation and production of the book, Francis Vaughan who provided the index and the list of abbreviations, and Laura Wilson who organized the time zones and logistics to enable leaders around the world to enter into the benchmarking exercise.

David Baker, Lucy Ellis, Caroline Williams, and Cliff Wragg

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Acronyms

A F-DEMATEL	Abstract Fuzzy Decision-Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory
ABEF	Australian Business Excellence Framework
ACRL	Association of College and Research Libraries
APQC	American Productivity and Quality Center
ARUP	Associated Regional and University Pathologists
BAME	Black, Asian, and minority ethnic
CAUL	The Council of Australian University Libraries
CD	compact disk
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CITE	Copyright Information and Technologies in Education
CLA	Copyright Licensing Agency
CMF	Common Micro-credential Framework
CONAMED	National Commission of Medical Arbitration
CPD	continuing professional development
CRIS	Current Research Information System
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
DCS	Digital Content Store
DEA	data envelopment analysis
DfE	Department for Information
DOI	digital object identifier
DVD	digital versatile disk
EBA	European Banking Authority
EELS	East of England Lifelong Learning Support
EHEA	The European Higher Education Area
EHES	Enhanced Higher Education Supply Service
ELFSC	English Language and Foundation Studies Centre
EMA	Electronic Management of Assessment
EOI	Expression of Interest
EQF	European Qualification Framework
EUNIS	European Nature Information System
FAIR	findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reuse
FHEQ	The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications
FQHEIS	The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland
FTE	full-time equivalent
HE	higher education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HKUST	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
ICMP	Institute of Contemporary Music Performance
ICT	Information Communication Technology

IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IFs	Infrastructure and Facilities
IGI	Idea Group Inc.
ILP	individual learning plan
iOS	iPhone Operating System
IRs	institutional repositories
IT	information technology
ITIL	Information Technology Infrastructure Library
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
JPEG	Joint Photographic Experts Group
K&IM	Knowledge and Information Management Group
KEC	Knowledge Exchange Centre
LACMM	The Library Assessment Capability Maturity Model
LAN	Library Advisory Network
LC	Learning Commons
LIBER	Association of European Research Libraries
LIS	Library and Information Service
LISTA	Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts
LMS	library management system
LMS	learning management system
LRCN	The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria
LTEE	learning, teaching, engagement, and enhancement
MBE	Order of the British Empire (Member)
MOOCs	massive open online courses
MS	Microsoft
NCL	Nelson College London
NUC	The National Universities Commission
OA	open access
OBS	Open Broadcaster Software
OCLC	Online Computer Library Center
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OER	open educational resources
OfS	Office for Students
OLL	University of London's Online University
PDP	personal development plan
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental
PNG	Portable Network Graphics
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RACI	responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed
ROI	Return On/Of Investment
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SITS	Student Records Online
SMEs	small and medium enterprises
SSO	Single Sign-On

STEEPLE	Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal, and Ethical
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TQM	total quality management
UCEM	University College of Estate Management
UEL	University of East London
UG	undergraduate
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USB	Universal Serial Bus
UX	user experience
VLE	virtual learning environment
VPL	validation of prior learning
WAMS	widening access mature students
WFH	work from home

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Qualitative benchmarking: an introduction

David Baker^{1,2} and Lucy Ellis^{2,3}

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1.1 Introduction

Because of recent global turbulence, individuals, leaders, and whole institutions have been keen to learn how to develop stabilizing and sustainable solutions to both immediate challenges and longer-term environments in the light of the pandemic. Education, library, and information services around the world faced hard challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and are still facing them. The virus resulted in significant and often devastating effects that will continue to be experienced around the globe for some time to come. Nevertheless, individuals, organizations, sectors, and countries responded, often with significant success in difficult circumstances, as Ellen Tise and Henriëtte Swart describe in Chapter 6. Uncertainty provides opportunity and challenge for education, library, and information services to step up and innovate to provide better services to their clients. This is the major theme underpinning this book and its focus on benchmarking in general and qualitative benchmarking in particular.



1.2 The need for frameworks

There is a crucial requirement for information on how to survive and respond positively to the challenges of providing access and services in an uncertain future, and to capture all the good work done, the many lessons learned, and the multiplicity of innovative practices developed and

implemented, as described in this book and as evinced by the outputs from the benchmarking exercise at the volume's core.

The opportunity to understand the experiences of others and compare to one's own experience and learn and adapt one's own practice is especially important in this regard, for there is a pressing need to understand what the experiences of the pandemic and major disruptive change mean. Frameworks therefore need to be created that will provide analysis and examples from around the globe on how organizations are currently delivering—and how they are planning to do so in the future—access and services.

Such frameworks must aid the planning and development of sustainable services and operations for the future. Approaches need to highlight innovative ways of collection development, service provision, use of physical space, increased reliance on digital provision, and much more, as leaders prepare for a “new normal,” bearing in mind that what has been successful in the past may not give any indication of future success. Those frameworks need to do it now. As one of Stephen Akintunde's survey respondents commented (Chapter 14):

A lot of lessons were learnt. We do not need to wait for another pandemic. We should have standards to be enforced by regulatory authorities so that there is a minimum requirement for each library to operate.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a “reality check,” as described in Chapter 14, across all sectors—public and private. Consideration must therefore be given to how others responded and how they will continue to respond, to current and likely future challenges, so that leaders can make the most of all the vast experience and know-how already available and yet to be created. “The lessons learned from the pandemic will need to be brought together. Business continuity planning is required and should include modelling of operations; capturing the learning must take place to grow and strengthen organizations” (Baker and Ellis, 2021, pp. 321–322). “The opportunity to understand the experiences of others and to compare to one's own experience, to learn and adapt one's own practice is important” (Baker and Ellis, 2021, p. 335).

Ready for Action

I feel strongly about the message and aims of benchmarking and best practice at this time of massive global challenges whether pandemic, climate change, or war and terrorism. My weakness, however, is that I have been in

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retirement from my professional role as a library director for 2 years during which time the nature, function, and challenges of running libraries have changed significantly. I am certain that during this time librarians have developed new and creative ways of working to address the constraints brought about by the pandemic restrictions, remote working, and delivery of service.

Retrospectively, I wonder whether significant strategic and disaster planning has been too inward-looking. Missions, visions, 5-year plans, and accompanying risk registers have been submitted year after year to senior management and committees and have ended up as tools for budget control; e.g., can we afford the rising costs of electronic content again and what can we cut? There has been huge investment in library build in the academic sector to meet the demands of 24/7 opening (not necessarily suitable in the pandemic environment), high scores in the National Student Survey, and competition to maximize student numbers.

Student-First initiatives have been undertaken, and libraries and librarians have played a significant role in joining up student-facing services. As for the heritage collections and supporting curricular revision, librarians have grasped the nettle to address issues of colonization, marginalization, and diversity. National and regional consortia and groups have worked closely together. There has been consortial disaster planning and protocols for avian flu, student occupations, fire, and floods.

I feel that the day-to-day requirements are such that the unexpected on a small scale can be addressed and absorbed but is then put aside with a sigh of relief. The massive global challenges that are currently confronting us, each with its own historic perspective, meet with unpreparedness.

Watching the horrors and human rights issues taking place in Ukraine and TV interviews with individuals in the Baltic States, I was struck by the answer a lady in Riga gave to a question about refugees: "what would you do if this happened to you?" Immediately and simply, she said that her bags and those of her friends and family were packed and always had been. Preparedness such as this on a global scale is vital.

Looking at the LIBER website, I came across details of the third edition of the LIBER Journées, to be held in Budapest this year (<https://libereurope.eu/event/liber-journees-2022/>). Its function is "a tailored scientific program designed for 20–25 library directors who are already in leadership positions in their institutions and who are looking ahead at delivering strategic change as libraries and institutions redefine themselves in an ever-changing information and social environment." It extends beyond Europe with speakers and participants from across the globe.

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It is this kind of structure that is necessary whereby leaders have the space and time to set down principles and priorities that could be highly effective whether the challenge is war, human rights, climate change, or pandemic. It should be feasible for bodies such as this, working also with publishers, to unite across the continents and to agree and maintain basic principles that will be packed and ready to go.

John Tuck

Former Library Director, UK



1.3 Benchmarking

It is argued that one of the ways in which this is best achieved is by a return to the technique of benchmarking, helping leaders and managers make good strategic choices for the future, post-COVID, and providing some of the foundations of ongoing research and contributing to practical outputs of general benefit.

In dealing with approaches to strategic change management, [Baker \(2007, p. 172\)](#) wrote:

Benchmarking is a technique whereby other institutions within (or possibly also outside) [a] sector are used as comparators against which [an] organization can test itself and identify areas where it needs to improve its own performance. In order to ensure that there are appropriate comparisons not only between the organization and its benchmark group but also that progress towards a new level of performance or achievement can be measured, a baseline is established. This summarizes the current state of the organization, using a number of measures.

As Caroline Williams stresses in Chapter 3, there is no single approach to benchmarking. Indeed, she describes a “plethora of ways that organizations are measured both internally and compared to each other.” Rather, benchmarking is a tool that “has developed into a range of approaches and methodologies which answer or respond to different questions or objectives. It is multifaceted with different utilities.” Moreover, benchmarking is only one of many tools available to strategic leaders, as described, among others, by Lucy Roper in Chapter 15 (see also [Baker, 2007](#), *passim*). This book is underpinned by a reimagined qualitative

benchmarking approach, based on the Association of Commonwealth Universities Programme, as described in detail in Part Two, where “we share the methodology and present the major findings and outputs, the good practice statements generated, and the outcomes and review” of a seven-stage international exercise. This was carried out virtually with an approach that hovered “between informal and formal engagement, with enough structure to generate and manage a high volume of written and verbal input, but not too much to stifle or unnecessarily limit. The outputs can be applied by all those in decision-making roles . . . although we acknowledge that they are not applicable in every context and that some of the contributions will lose some meaning without a deeper contextual knowledge of the participant institution.” It is suggested that the feedback from the exercise contained in Part Two of this book speaks for itself in terms of the value and effectiveness of the activity and, we would argue, the qualitative benchmarking approach more generally.

Academic library effectiveness and strategic planning: do not forget to consider what is difficult (or impossible) to measure

In editing a book on quality and academic libraries (Atkinson, 2016), I carried out a detailed content analysis of the case studies included in the book as well as journal articles, books, and conference papers. This led to the production of a relatively simple, top-level framework for looking at academic library effectiveness and quality. I have personally used this framework in consultancy in UK universities and written it up in a form that library strategists and practitioners (or external reviewers) can use in strategic planning and in assessing quality (Atkinson, 2017).

The framework takes the form of 46 questions library staff should ask themselves when considering their service effectiveness. The questions are arranged under eight topic headings. There will be a wide range of evidence and documentation that can be used to help answer these questions, including internal and external customer surveys, quality tools, outcomes from focus groups and suggestion schemes, performance against standards and charters, and extensive library and university documentation.

However, there are some of these questions that can only be answered partly, or possibly not at all, through the use of the available evidence and documentation. They are important questions which focus on activities critical to library success and effectiveness—strategy and planning, collaboration, engagement with customers, and management and leadership. They are often subjective questions that can only be answered honestly by the library staff themselves or by candid

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and frank critical friends. Some of these questions are given below under the eight topic headings. A full list of the questions and the evidence and documentation is given in my 2017 paper. This approach highlights the emphasis that needs to be placed on the “soft” issues of integration with customers and the university, customer care, communication and consultation, and embedding cultural change in order to understand current effectiveness and to identify the areas where libraries can improve and enhance service quality.

How effective is your engagement in strategy and planning?

- How well aligned are library strategies and services to university goals and strategies and learning outcomes? Are library staff involved in the development of appropriate university strategies and policies?
- How well connected are library staff to university managers at all levels, including academic managers?
- How closely involved are library staff in university processes, both corporate and academic?

How effective is your engagement with customers?

- Are library staff aware of the different ways in which their users work and search for information?
- Is there regular and effective liaison with academic staff and researchers both formally and informally?

How effective are your communication and promotion of services?

- How do academic staff make students aware of the value and benefits of library use and how effective is this?

How effective is your collaboration with partners?

- Are there processes for developing collaborative provision with other university service providers, either within converged services or separately?

How effective are your services and do they meet customer needs?

- From a customer perspective, are the library services provided the right ones? Are new services required?

How effective are you at responding to internal and external changes and developments?

- Is the library effective at identifying institutional and external requirements and developments?

How effective is your management and leadership?

- Do library senior managers demonstrate to their own staff and to the rest of the university a commitment to quality, performance measurement, and continuous improvement?

How effective are your quality processes?

- Does the library seek to identify and adopt best practice from other sectors, including services that their own customers would use?

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As part of my CILIP certification, I compared my library tasks and experience to the standards defined in the Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB). This is commonly depicted as a wheel with three key sections—professional development, organization and environmental context, and wider library, data, information and knowledge sector context. Each of these is then divided into further subsections—e.g., technology and communication, information management, records management and archiving, etc.—where each has a number of targets for a candidate to work on. Not all areas are mandatory for improvement as they may not relate directly to their area of work, but the wide range of options allows them to choose a few areas to focus on.

At the beginning of the certification process, candidates give themselves a starting score for each target and set goals. I myself felt I had some strong knowledge of the day-to-day workings of libraries, but limited sector experience meant I struggled with the wider context. The level a person wishes to reach—defined as a number between one and four—can also be set by the candidate. As such, each individual establishes their own benchmark. In this way, the standards, while set in an established framework, remain flexible, in order to cover the breadth of the information sector and not exclude any professional role.

As it happened, I went on to change jobs during my certification—moving from the academic sector to the legal one. I broke down all of my daily tasks in my new role to compare them against the PKSB, as well as against my previous work, and found that I was covering a lot of ground: more than I had initially realized. For example, learning to use new catalog and information access systems covered a lot of technology targets, and I had started new duties that allowed me to develop research skills—something I had not done in any of my previous library roles. Consequently, these two areas became a key focus of my certification development.

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The job move between sectors, by its very nature, also increased my knowledge of wider library context, but I also developed this further by attending a number of free webinars offered by CILIP. I was supported through the entire process by a very kind, supportive, and learned mentor [Professor David Baker].

At the end of the certification process, candidates score themselves again before submitting their portfolios. This helped me to realize that I was a lot more skilled and knowledgeable about library work than I had considered myself to be, given that I do not currently hold a librarianship qualification.

I am grateful to CILIP for offering certification, as it allows everyone in the profession, regardless of job level, to achieve a form of recognition by a chartered body—even if university study is not currently a viable option for them. While the process was hard for me at times, due to the job change and other external factors, I found it very rewarding, and it has helped me to access resources and opportunities that I continue to use for my ongoing professional development and revalidation.

Hannah Myers

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1.4 Qualitative benchmarking

Most of the benchmarking approaches described in Chapters 3, 14, and 15, and other parts of this book, take a quantitative approach. While such methods have their value, and their disadvantages, as discussed by Lara Skelly in Chapter Four, this book focuses on qualitative benchmarking as a practical approach to sharing expertise about the effectiveness of organizations, services, or teams and how the current challenges can be converted into opportunities to improve the value and efficiency of services. This is done, at least for the purposes of this publication, in the context of the five key elements, as identified by Williams in Chapter Three: people, turbulence, learning and vulnerability, collective wisdom, and strategic perspectives.

The tool is applicable at a range of levels, from the operational to the broad strategic. It can offer ideas for how to improve or enhance present practices, and it should be stressed, regardless of how well institutions

currently perform: even the best organization can still find areas in which to improve. As demonstrated by the many case studies, and especially the report of the international benchmarking exercise carried out as part of the editors' work to prepare the title for publication, it will be of special value to leaders at a time of major decision-making in the context of the challenging and uncertain futures described both here and in the rest of the book. The development of route maps through the present turbulent environment across the globe will clearly be of paramount importance.

Qualitative benchmarking works, at least partly through allowing organizations to identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses, formulating possible routes to (further) improvement, but, as Williams stresses in Chapter Three, in a collegiate and supportive environment where institutional weaknesses can be exposed so that, if done well, the exercise can move beyond superficial analysis.

Qualitative benchmarking, then, as practiced by those contributing to this book, is a way of finding, analyzing, developing, and adopting good practices with a view to improving management processes by understanding how effective differing approaches are in improving the experience for customers, users, clients, and stakeholders. It provides an opportunity to involve individuals and groups outside an organization and, indeed, across different sectors (unlike, say, quantitative benchmarking, as noted by Lara Skelly in Chapter Four). It facilitates the review of external and internal aspects of an institution's work, to bring "a new and refreshing dynamic to the change management process ... as a partnership [and] a way of bringing to the surface sensitive issues that would otherwise not emerge" (Baker, 2007, p. 95). Indeed, given the ways in which the library, information, and education sectors responded to the pandemic and the lessons that were transferable between different types of organizations, cross-sectoral qualitative benchmarking has significant potential in this regard.

Wilber's Four P's model—practice, policy, personnel, profession—as described in Chapter Four – could be used in support of the exercise, not least in terms of the provision of prompts which, as with qualitative benchmarking more generally, is important in terms of getting those involved in the process to respond strategically and operationally. The broader the involvement of people in developing answers to "prompts," the more likely it will be that the responding organizations will be able to formulate the best strategies for change, not only because the richest possible picture will have been drawn but also because it will have been achieved through a

high degree of consensus. Coral Black affirms this approach in Chapter Eight. In addition, the best environmental knowledge—especially in relation to long-term trends – will allow organizations to anticipate and even help to create the future.

The outcomes of a qualitative benchmarking exercise (which typically emphasizes strategic exchange of “good” rather than “best” practice, a topic discussed in Chapter Four) can then be used to identify areas for change, set targets for improvement, and identify a range of actions to help achieve new goals, including through effective institutional policy-making. A successful exercise will result in a set of statements of good practice that can be used as the basis of a checklist that participants will be able to employ to determine which ideas might best be adopted in their own institutions as part of their strategic and performance management and development processes.

On the Bench: a questioning analysis of benchmarking and best practice approaches

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for widespread innovation in library and information services as they have had to adapt to changing circumstances and adopt new ways of working both internally, within the organization, and externally with their patrons and other stakeholders. In many ways, they have had to completely reinvent who they are and what they do so that they continue to meet their patrons’ needs and fulfill their strategic aims and obligations. When COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic in March 2020, most libraries were shut, and staff were told to stay at home. Library managers and their staff were confronted with questions of how they were going to provide remote services now that their customers could no longer access on-site resources, services, facilities, and activities. Out of that, process of crisis and consideration of alternative models of service provision emerged a great deal of creativity and innovation. There have been many reports both in the general news media, professional press, and scholarly journals of library programs and services moving exclusively online, new approaches to materials and resources delivery, new partnerships with other organizations to ensure continuity of service to specific groups, and new ways of supporting users’ information, academic, leisure, and creative activities. The flexibility stimulated by the extraordinary circumstances of COVID-19 has led to a situation in which libraries have had the opportunity to transform services and approaches, reconsider their priorities and push forward changes that they perhaps have long desired but found impossible for whatever reason in the pre-COVID era.

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As a result of this period of rapid innovation and transformation, library and information services now have a rich store of collective knowledge and wisdom that has been shared across the sector through conferences, publications, and formal or informal networking. Libraries seeking to make improvements or address challenges they are facing are able to draw on the practice of others in an attempt to emulate their successes. Learning from other organizations' innovations and best practices is common and is the essence of benchmarking, a widely accepted technique in the library and information sector and in industry more generally, which compares one organization's processes and practices with those of others, usually with those considered to be the best in the industry. Considered an efficient and more rapid method of making improvements, many organizations search for and try to apply best practices and innovations developed elsewhere as a way of enhancing their own performance. Following the practice of others who have succeeded in making changes desired by one's own organization seems a logical, timesaving, and relatively straightforward approach to improvement. Some notes of caution should be raised about rushing headlong into adopting the innovations of others, however.

The most important issue to be aware of is the extent to which we are comparing like-with-like when benchmarking against another organization. Generally, libraries and information services try to compare themselves against other "like" organizations when undertaking more formal benchmarking exercises, but it is not clear that they do the same when considering the adoption of innovations or service developments from elsewhere. Context really is everything, and library and information services seeking to introduce other organizations' innovative practices should consider the cultural and contextual boundaries within which they operate. There is also a larger question about when benchmarking just becomes copying and whether this could in fact diminish the capacity for innovation and creativity within organizations. Instead of generating original solutions to problems or service developments, there is a danger that we turn automatically to what others have done which, in time, could diminish the creative capabilities within our own organization.

A similar criticism could be leveled at some aspects of evidence-based practice which has been the focus of considerable attention in library and information services since the early 2000s. Part of the evidence-based process involves searching the literature and drawing on external knowledge to try to learn lessons and identify possible solutions to problems by learning from others' experiences. Through this engagement with evidence, some practices are identified as "best practice" and held up as exemplars for others to follow. Best practice is not always easy to emulate or implement, however, one issue being whether

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the solution or development proposed is, in fact, “best” practice and, again, whether it is appropriate in the specific context of the adopting organization. A larger, more philosophical question is the extent to which there is ever a “best practice.” From a postmodern perspective, the whole concept of best practice, with its focus on valuing certain types of institutionalized knowledge, is exclusionary and hierarchical, marginalizing individual practitioners’ knowledge and experiences. Similarly, an insistence on the implementation of only the best practices can seem inflexible and dogmatic, the very opposite of the approach needed for the cultivation of innovation and creativity.

That is not to say that library and information service organizations should not look outside themselves to consider how to improve or develop their services. We should be as wary of those suffering from the “not invented here” syndrome as of the best practice evangelicals. A parochial and inward-looking culture can be a barrier to innovation and knowledge transfer. We need to try to find a balance between the “cookie-cutter” approach to the adoption of innovations from elsewhere and the complete reinvention of the wheel as we consider how to ensure our library and information service take advantage of the spirit of invention and creativity unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has implications for a range of organizational factors and arrangements, from human resource management to the organization of work and the encouragement of ideas sharing and open communications—a culture of ideas.

The most exciting and effective innovations usually come from a deep engagement with the needs of our communities and clear understanding of our organizational capabilities, within our own contexts. External inspiration can be a catalyst, but the implementation of new ideas requires equipping staff to turn novel approaches or ways of working into useful services and work processes. This should draw on their ideographic, lived experiences of working with and for their user communities alongside using best practices appropriately.

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1.5 Conclusion

This opening chapter has set the scene for the rest of the book. It focuses on a specific tool—qualitative benchmarking—which the editors and authors propose as a way of making strategic sense of all that has

recently happened and its aftermath and of creating robust, sustainable, and innovative frameworks that will create viable futures for the library, information education sectors, and beyond.

There is a cost to undertaking a qualitative benchmarking exercise, as is evident from Part Two and those surrounding chapters that focus on case studies where the approach has been applied in practice. “Any exercise in benchmarking is only as good as the participants are willing to make it,” as Lara Skelly stresses in Chapter Four and Caroline Williams confirms in Chapter Three, based on her experience of leading the international benchmarking exercise described and analyzed in Part Two.

But there is also, potentially, a considerable benefit, not least in those countries and sectors where benchmarking is still relatively undeveloped. Stephen Akintunde’s case study of Nigeria (Chapter 14) is a good case in point. It is argued that the nature of qualitative benchmarking is just as relevant and valuable to such situations as to that in other countries, as demonstrated by the very different backgrounds and situations of those participating in the international exercise.

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PART ONE

Qualitative benchmarking: process and concept

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Qualitative benchmarking in context: environment and outlook

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2.1 Introduction

No organization exists in isolation. Any changes that are planned will have to be made in the context of the overall environment in which the organization operates and to ensure that it is better placed for future success within that environment. It is therefore essential that there is a full and clear picture of the environment, the opportunities and threats that face the organization, and the options and constraints that need to be considered when deciding on what changes need to be made, as well as when and how they should be introduced. Without such knowledge, either a wrong change will be made, or a right change will be implemented in an inappropriate way. External benchmarking will be particularly useful in this respect, for it can assist the change manager in asking key questions about existing approaches and attitudes and enables the organization to see where it is currently positioned ... where it could be, and where it needs to be (Baker, 2007, p. 52).

This chapter reflects on the context in which qualitative benchmarking might be a useful tool. It looks at the work done by Baker and Ellis (2021a,b) in their last two edited books. The authors worked with a range of researchers and practitioners internationally to capture experiences, reactions, successes, and failures and to identify trends, future scenarios, frameworks, and solutions in the field of library and information services, initially as a summation of recent work in the field and then in the wake

of COVID-19, not least as a way of sharing information and gaining knowledge as the pandemic took hold.



2.2 Libraries, digital information, and COVID

Libraries, Digital Information, and COVID: practical approaches to challenge and change (Baker and Ellis, 2021b) described the significant and often devastating effects that have already been experienced—and will continue to be experienced—all around the globe. It told of the way in which individuals, organizations, sectors, and countries have responded, often with significant success in difficult circumstances and of the opportunities that were—and are—being created and seized for innovation and development in ways and at a pace that few would have predicted.

The book brought together the work of 43 authors from 13 countries and concluded that while the threats of COVID-19 were common to most sectors, many libraries and educational systems around the world not only responded well but seized the opportunities to develop or re-engineer their services to best effect—and to do so rapidly—often in difficult and unstable circumstances. However, while the pandemic was an unforeseen event, institutions which had already made some form of “digital pivot,” as described in [Chapter 7](#), had an advantage (if not a head start) as they prepared for life during, if not after, COVID-19. This is evident from the experiences described, for example, in [Chapter 6](#) (Ellen Tise and Henriëtte Swart in South Africa), [7](#) and [8](#) (Caroline Williams and Coral Black in Australia), and [9](#) (Gabrielle Wong and Diana Chan in Hong Kong) and the summary and analysis included in [Chapter 12](#) and [13](#).

Libraries, Digital Information, and COVID asked if the pandemic would be seen as a catalyst for change or a brake on development: on the one hand, the move to digital provision speeded up significantly thanks to the pandemic (as discussed in many chapters in this book, and as reported in Part Two) and where, in many cases (as discussed, for example, in [Chapter 12](#)), the quality of delivery was deemed to have improved; on the other hand, post-pandemic financial turbulence and possible economic depression may make it difficult to sustain current technological trajectories, as discussed notably in [Chapter 7](#). Martin Hamilton explores tensions such as these in [Chapter 12](#). Nevertheless, the general view of the

contributors to this book is that in Coral Black's words ([Chapter 8](#)) "we are now operating in an environment where change is unstoppable and transformational, and as senior leaders we are often drivers of that change." As Caroline Williams sums up in [Chapter 7](#):

Will our COVID-19 responses and experience remain relevant into the future?

The answer is apparent in changed ways of working, new relationships, greater visibility of the library within the university, and service developments. learning.

The general view of those participating in the international qualitative benchmarking, as described in Part Two, is that the world is now at a watershed moment, and there are many opportunities for positive change to be seized.



2.3 Place and space: physical, digital, hybrid

The serious need for sustainable off-premises access was evident from the start of the COVID-19 crisis, not least because of the rapid shift to digital learning and the wholesale adoption of online communication. The pandemic triggered a significant shift toward off-site working and study, making online access crucial. Libraries were already providing extensive access to digital information, serving to eliminate the need for direct contact in physical space. In some sectors, for example, academic and research institutions, the transition to digital was already well advanced *before* COVID, notably in the field of academic journals.

Collections were made more discoverable and, as far as possible, digitally accessible; more virtual communities were developed. There was a "lift and shift" to online learning; "digital" became "normalized." Martin Hamilton ([Chapter 12](#)) stressed the importance of "edtech"—all its forms—as a way of not only coping with COVID and its aftermath, but also building new forms of provision that are much less time-critical and space-dependent. The same is true of the development of micro-credentials, evidence of a growing and broadening fragmentation of traditional educational provision. All this has led to a realization that digital could replace physical completely, not least because, as Richard Maidment-Otlet argues, the format of the book is no longer the "truth-bearing information source that it has been

for the last two millennia” (Maidment-Otlet, 2021, p. 105). Because of his experience during COVID, Tim Wales was able to ask: “dare we return to the . . . concept of a true ‘just in time’ model in which the e-library is the norm, underpinned by a small backbone of national or specialist research libraries providing scanned or loan access to original, seldom used materials?” (Wales, 2021 p. 79).

Some went further, describing how the pandemic was accelerating the move toward “Education 4.0,” with all aspects of academic endeavor being supported and delivered primarily online, overcoming “geographical, physical and time restrictions enabling services anytime, anywhere and on any device” (Vasilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, 2021a,b, p. 147). Is there a future for libraries within the Education 4.0 environment? To date, education has tended to selectively adopt technologies, while resisting any wholesale transformation. Will this continue to be the case, or are we ready for Libraries 4.0? Much depends on the extent to which organizations can be more agile and able to seize the opportunities post-COVID, as noted—in terms of digital developments in particular—in Chapter 17.

The move toward digital provision first and foremost, then, was accelerated during COVID, and many of the services restructured or developed during the pandemic are here to stay (Maidment-Otlet, 2021, p. 110). Nevertheless, as a kind of normality emerged, users returned to the library building, recognizing that there was still a need for it. Diane Bruxvoort talks in Chapter 5 of the “power of place”: how, despite all the changes and developments of the last 25 years, the physical library, especially as a “shared space,” has demonstrated its “staying power,” at least for students if not academic staff, even though “resources are largely available digitally and study can happen in a park or a coffee shop.” Based on the evidence to date—including from our benchmarking exercise and the experience of authors such as Gabrielle Wong and Diana Chan (Chapter 9)—the requirement for the library as place will continue, not least to meet the core objective. Vasilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou (2021b, p. 210) describe this as being to serve “as a meeting place for collaborative learning and community interaction and engagement.” Oldenburg’s (1989) concept of a third place, “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1989) remains valid, despite—or perhaps even because of—the many changes since then, and not just those brought about by COVID,

especially, as is argued in [Chapter 9](#), the resource is capable of being used flexibly.

But are we looking at a *re-creation* (or at least a “rejuvenation,” as suggested in [Chapter 9](#)) of public space in a blended environment that recognizes the importance of interaction and community building, underpinned by expert staff? In such a hybrid model, institutions also need to create “digital space” in the same way they provided “physical space . . . digital . . . space now needs to embrace the notion of place” ([Vasilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, 2021b](#), p. 211), where a user can do all the things that would once have been done in a physical library. While “digital provision has been shown to be a strong, future-oriented element” ([Johannsen, 2021](#), p. 46) there is still a long way to go. “The transition to digital or online library provision is far from straightforward at the best of times . . . successful digital libraries must have a robust digital infrastructure to host all [their] digital collections, provide tools to support the efficient retrieval, access, and use of all the resources, as well as provide extensive . . . support services” ([Brenton and Tury, 2021](#), p. 83).

[McNaught and Alexander \(2021, p. 72\)](#) lament that “the reality of digital text can be far removed from the promise. The reasons behind a poor digital experience are varied, and this variability has a significant impact on end-users.” Similarly, remote access may be near-universal in developed economies, but that is certainly not the case in, for example, Africa, and there remains a significant digital divide globally and regionally, as was starkly demonstrated during the pandemic. Statistics on the extent and detail of the digital divide within higher education in Commonwealth countries are presented by [Shackleton and Mann \(2021\)](#), also discussed by Stephen Akintunde in [Chapter 14](#) and Martin Hamilton (also with reference to Commonwealth countries) in [Chapter 12](#). It should be noted that there are often in-country digital divides (many exposed and deepened during the pandemic) as described by Sayeda Zain in [Chapter 20](#).



2.4 People

Not surprisingly, the last 2 years have been difficult for working people across the world, almost regardless of their circumstances. Caroline

Williams comments in [Chapter 7](#) that “there is no longer an expectation that one size fits all in the way we work . . . there is an expectation that flexibility will stay.” Similarly, service users increasingly require diverse and divergent types and levels of provision, for example, in the growing move toward micro-credentials, discussed by Sayeda Zain in [Chapter 20](#). All this requires not only changes to working structures and patterns, but also new approaches and cultures, with a recognition that collaboration and partnership will be ever more necessary in the future ([Chapter 17](#)).

Future Consequences of Hybrid Working for Employers

Hybrid working is a flexible working model where employees can work either in the physical workspace provided by their employer or remotely (either from home or from another workspace).

From my experience in the human resources sector, smaller organizations are nervous of hybrid working, and for those larger organizations that possess a staff handbook, very few mention hybrid working in it, as a permanent working arrangement. Despite the issues to be identified, negotiated, and solved by employers described in this piece, hybrid working has become something of a recruitment tool in certain contexts, an attractant offering flexibility to new staff and generating new choices in estates management for organizations and offering a work–life balance for the workforce.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many employers are giving up the rental of physical workspaces or selling their estates. Why pay for a building that is used once a week for a team meeting? This is happening at an astonishing rate.

Employers must consider their statutory responsibilities toward their employees. Full remote working requires contract changes, clarity on operational issues such as travel expenses, expectations around communications with colleagues, clear ways in which performance can be managed, and how to ensure that information and IT systems remain secure (both in terms of personal data and commercially sensitive information). The immediacy of the “work from home instruction” at the start of the pandemic allowed employers to put in place temporary fixes, but 2 years on, employers have to ensure that working remotely arrangements are as robust as they would have had in a physical workspace. All of this requires careful risk management.

Unfortunately, hybrid working appears to have created a division in the working population between low-paid, less-skilled workers and white-collar workers. A nursery worker, for example, cannot work from home, and they still must pay travel costs to get to work. Cleaners and abattoir workers also do

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not have the option to work remotely. A national debate is needed about this two-tier workforce. It is a socioeconomic issue and a social class issue.

Health and safety at work do not go away when employees work from home. Musculoskeletal problems, back injuries due to lack of ergonomic monitoring, depression and anxiety brought about by social isolation could form claims against the employer in the future. The high costs of heating homes during the winter months are problems which will be emerging, and will employers be expected to meet the costs of higher energy costs as part of their employment offer, for hybrid workers?

In terms of team identity, employers need to work harder at conceptualizing and operationalizing this in the context of hybrid working. Is it merely a training issue to ensure there are clear goals for workers or do employers need to start again on the definition of team identity and team cohesion? For those at the start of their career, the benefits of learning from simply being around more experienced colleagues are reduced. This could lead to a disengaged workforce and a loss of experience and knowledge, particularly in more specialized sectors.

Productivity-measuring tools and techniques for WFH are in their infancy as is the formulation and reformulation of bonds of trust between employers and employees. There is much to think about as we enter these uncharted waters.

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2.5 Financial sustainability: paying for it all

The move to digital has been happening for many years, but the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent move to remote learning have accelerated this shift. This has introduced an almost limitless number of challenges for most institutions at all points of the supply chain, but it also provides a great opportunity to learn about what is really working and calibrate strategies along the way. [McNaught and Alexander \(2021, abstract\)](#) stress that “digital ecosystems evolve organically. Like any ecosystem, this can result in unplanned complexity.” [Hamilton \(2021\)](#) comments: “practitioners and institutional leaders also need to be

especially cautious about new technologies that are at the peak of the hype cycle, and often presented as revolutionary and magical.” Hamilton develops this idea in [Chapter 12](#).

Many of the contributors to *Libraries, Digital Information, and COVID* ([Baker and Ellis, 2021b](#)) talked of the “new normal” and the need for “normalization” not only of the ways of working that took hold during the pandemic, but also those approaches that are most likely to provide a sustainable (in all senses of the word) future. A case in point is the development and uptake of online higher education, “held back in part by a resistance from traditional institutions to disrupt their current business model . . . the imperative of moving quickly to online and blended learning because of the pandemic is now challenging deeply held sector beliefs and approaches to the delivery of higher education” ([Kirkham, 2021](#), abstract). The pandemic has thrown up the challenge of financial sustainability across whole sectors. Certainly, the move online has highlighted the unsustainability of present business models in terms of digital library provision.



2.6 Conclusion

Graeme Hawley reminds us that, “prior to COVID-19, there was wide global agreement that the Earth was facing urgent climate and ecological crisis: rising global temperatures, ice melt, extreme weather events, species collapse, resource scarcity, pollution. That crisis has not gone away” ([Hawley, 2021](#), p. 291). But is digital the answer? In part, a much more holistic approach will be needed. Martin Hamilton notes ([Hamilton, 2021](#)) how the COVID pandemic has given us a very stark insight into the wholesale changes to our lifestyles and ways of working that may be required if climate change is not addressed with radical action. Climate scientists also advise ([Kellogg and Schware, 2019](#)) that significant disruption to normal life can be expected from climate change—related developments such as rising sea levels, large-scale and long-lived wildfires, crop failures, and water shortages.

Digital developments will need to be sustainable—socially and economically as well as environmentally. The evidence to date suggests that steps are being made in the right direction, but there is a long way to go,

and more holistic, integrative thinking is required. The post-COVID-19 world is going to demand radical, disruptive change. Many of the developments that were accelerated during the pandemic were already in train or being planned. The virus made us work together, and work together quickly. Will climate change and an ever more pressing need to achieve net zero targets motivate us to adopt similar approaches now that the pandemic is receding?

Brenton and Tury (2021, p. 79) note that “it is always difficult to judge when one era ends and another begins—the join is never neat, applying historical perspectives to the present is a risky business, and ideological shade can obscure clear sight of the real intents and effects of present changes.” Nevertheless, COVID-19 will surely come to be seen as a break point in humanity’s development and, more importantly, a wake-up call for the future. Let us hope that the “practice run” of the pandemic prepares us well for the challenges of creating a truly sustainable future for our successors.

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Why qualitative benchmarking?

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3.1 Introduction

Benchmarking is not simply qualitative or quantitative. From its contested origins, it has developed into a range of approaches and methodologies which answer or respond to different questions or objectives. It is multifaceted with different utilities.

In their overview of the academic literature on benchmarking, [De Castro and Frazzon \(2017\)](#) describe the origins of benchmarking in organizations citing the methodology developed by Xerox in 1983 and approaches born in the 1940s in Japanese industries. Their review also explores the question of best practice in relation to benchmarking. Different methods of benchmarking are characterized and summarized, from case study approaches, survey approach, statistical analysis, mathematical programming, direct comparison between companies, to qualitative data focus and quantitative data focus. [Anand and Kodali \(2008, pp. 282–285\)](#) also comprehensively consider the numerous methods and models of benchmarking and proposed a universal benchmarking model with 12 phases and 54 steps.

Francis and Holloway draw on practitioner-orientated literature as well as the academic body of work. Their 2007 review of the benchmarking field is rich and wide-ranging. They structure their discussion into major themes which include criticisms of benchmarking, the effectiveness of benchmarking, and the notion of best practice. On the latter, they note the gradual decline of the use of the phrase “best practice” in favor of an acceptance that there is no one best way given different circumstances and environments. “Full-blown ‘best practice benchmarking’ does seem to have faded from the limelight, but the principle of comparing data in the pursuit of performance improvement has become an increasingly normal

management activity” (Francis and Holloway, 2007, p. 185). For them the response to the question “why benchmark?” is integral to the benchmarking method chosen. Therefore, the “why?” can be anything from identifying activities which “could be more efficient and/or effective by comparison with other relevant organisations’ performance” (Francis and Holloway, 2007, p. 172); “examination of practices (processes)” (Francis and Holloway, 2007, p. 173) to “performance enhancing activity” (Francis and Holloway, 2007, p. 173), and beyond.

From a university library practitioner perspective, benchmarking in its various forms can be used for service development and improvement, for demonstrating efficiency and or effectiveness, and for organizational and leadership learning. This chapter is not a systematic review of the literature, but rather a context-setting piece. It sets out the background and context for benchmarking practice in university libraries, the range of approaches and applications, and then describes the approach to qualitative benchmarking taken in the international benchmarking exercise reported in Part Two of this book and its distinctive benefits.



3.2 Background and context

At its most fundamental benchmarking is about setting a level from which to compare. A benchmark is a surveyor’s mark to show height of a building or landmark; it serves as a reference point from which to make calculations. In management practice today, the term benchmarking is widely used in relation to performance improvement and service development. From benchmark to benchmarking, it becomes a certain kind of comparative analysis of processes and practices.

For the higher education sector, there is now a plethora of ways that organizations are measured both internally and compared to each other. Changes in policy facilitated by technological advancement have brought new forms of assessment and accountability. In the UK and Australian context, the most high-profile constituents of this are the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA), the UK National Student Survey (NSS) and Australia Student Experience Survey (SES), and the UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). These tools and assessments influence university planning, strategic development, and investment. They also determine university rankings, or league tables, which turn comparative positioning into a reputational asset.

While feeding into university league tables, the REF, ERA, NSS, TEF, and SES all grow in influence. Universities devote resources to improving performance in relation to the metrics adopted. Of course, there is much value in seeking to improve research, teaching and learning, and the student experience. However, league tables in themselves have been much criticized. More broadly, commenting on the UK public sector, Francis and Holloway state that “knowing an organisation’s position in a league table does little to enable that organization to understand how better performers achieved their status and hence how to move up the table, perhaps overcoming external obstacles or unequal inputs along the way” (Francis and Holloway, 2007, p 176). In league tables, we move from accountability and improvement to comparison for choice and reputation. Setting aside the way tables are compiled, as stated by Merrifield (2018), there is an “intrinsic shortcoming of the very idea of a league table,” and in making comparisons between institutions in this way, we are

...combing the basket of metrics that go into constructing these league tables into a single quantity. When combining them, there is fundamentally no objective way to decide how much weight to give to, say, overall student satisfaction in the National Student Survey versus staff-to-student ratio: is an institution where the students are all happy but taught in large classes better or worse than one where they are miserably individually tutored?

The next set of tools and frameworks to consider in the higher education context are the quantitative benchmarking and comparison tools available to universities. Uniforum is the tool of choice at my university (<https://www.cubaneconsulting.com/uniforum>). Its members engage in an annual cycle of data collection in relation to staff time spent on discrete areas of university activities, and there is normalizing (e.g., for scale and research intensity) of data and intra-university comparisons made. One aim is to highlight areas where efficiencies can be found, and another is to shine the light on the balance of effort afforded to different functions and support activities. Again, there is criticism of these tools; they do not measure effectiveness or satisfaction, only the inputs into functions.



3.3 Benchmarking in library and information services

There is a history of benchmarking practice in library and information services. Of all the different types of benchmarking including process,

functional, strategic, competitive, collaborative benchmarking and from what we see in the wider HE context, library and information science literature on benchmarking is situated in service improvement and measurement, in demonstrating value, and in learning from others. The boundaries around these bodies of work are blurred.

Particularly important is the work of Stephen Town. [Corrall \(2016\)](#) captures him well as “a thought leader and change agent.” Of his contribution to the field, it is his work on benchmarking, LibQUAL + , impact, and value which are most relevant to this discussion. LibQUAL + is a survey tool which captures the voice of the library user across libraries. Libraries are then able to compare their findings. It is a web-based survey offered by the US Association of Research Libraries and used internationally and aims to help libraries assess and improve library services, change organizational culture, and market the library (<https://www.libqual.org/home>). [Town \(1995\)](#) in his early paper on benchmarking and performance measurement opens with evocative and informative benchmarking definitions. He expands the discussion by making connections to Total Quality Management (TQM) literature and argues that processes for service improvement should be customer focused and include customer satisfaction measures. This is core to his support for the LibQUAL + model which, as [Corrall \(2016, p. 104\)](#) states, moves “beyond ‘traditional counting’ to consider qualitative data.”

Another approach combining the qualitative and quantitative in use in library and information services is the [Kaplan and Norton \(1996\)](#) balanced scorecard. Application is mainly specific to an individual institution; however, there is some evidence of the framework being applied across libraries to compare and learn. One example of the balanced scorecard applied as a library benchmarking tool is reported by [Wimmer \(2009\)](#), as fundamental to the Bibliotheks-Index (BIX) methodology. Wimmer describes it as providing “data on four different dimensions,” namely, resources, usage, efficiency, and development, and thus allows an in-depth view of the performance of each library. This BIX methodology has evolved and is now applied beyond Germany and across public and academic libraries ([Pausch et al., 2015](#)).

In the United States, UK, and Australia, for example, there are well-honed data collection programs through national university library bodies, such as the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), and the US Association of Research Libraries (ARL) statistics program.

They enable the comparison of many measures, from the use of digital collections to the use of physical library spaces and more, on an annual basis. One way of using this shared data that is particularly useful is by linking it back to national university assessment tools. SCONUL has done this by connecting data gathered from the NSS data on student satisfaction with library services and resources, an important feature for university libraries. NSS student satisfaction scores can be linked to the numbers of study seats, spending on collections, and staffing levels, for example. The practice of gathering and sharing this data across university libraries enables the presentation of satisfaction or outcome data with quantitative input data in relation to all or subsets of similar university libraries in order to offer comparisons. This is sometimes helpful when making cases for additional resources to university decision-makers.

In addition, there are examples of qualitative benchmarking in targeted focus areas which compare activities, processes, or services. These range from library approaches to developing performance measures (Hart and Amos, 2014), spaces for research support and faculty/librarian partnerships (Kavanagh Webb, 2020), and quality assurance improvements in Libraries of the Australian Technology Network (LATN) (Tang, 2013). Beyond these examples, there are others which take statistical and analytical approaches. Reichmann and Sommersguter-Reichmann (2010) provide a review of studies which bring a strong quantitative approach to “derive an aggregate performance indicator based on the analysis of the overall performance of university libraries.” They introduce data envelopment analysis (DEA) as a method for library performance evaluation and benchmarking. They tell us that the “concept of DEA is founded on the comparisons of actual with best observed productivity, where productivity is measured as the proportion of services produced to inputs used” (Reichmann and Sommersguter-Reichmann, 2010, p. 312). Another example of a different kind of approach is the Copac Collections Management (CCM) tools project reported by Elder and Massam (2016). The project facilitates a comparison of library collections in the UK through the national catalog in order to identify collection gaps and strengths in different institutions.

There is much utility in all of this whether it be quantitative or/and qualitative, or national or international, bringing together like or different organizations, holistic or themed, for considering efficiency and effectiveness or aiming to inspire improvement. It is worth noting the dates of the publications referenced here, over the last 10 years. Our professional

discourse around performance improvement and learning from others has taken different foci in more recent years, for example, the body of work on evidence-based practice (EBP). EBP is defined by [Thorpe and Howlett \(2020, p. 2\)](#) as “an approach to professional practice that involves a structured process of collecting, interpreting and applying valid and reliable research and evidence to support decision-making and continuous service improvement in professional practice”. Therefore, benchmarking sits inside and alongside other methods of performance improvement.



3.4 Why qualitative benchmarking?

Given this background and context, the question then becomes “what more is there that qualitative benchmarking can offer?” and why did we embark on an international qualitative benchmarking exercise for library and information services? First, a few words about the exercise itself which is fully reported in Part Two of this book. It took place in early 2022. Ten organizations from around the world participated, and the focus was on strategic development and management practices of library and information services.

Second, [Tasopoulou and Tsiotra \(2017\)](#) provide a commentary on the benefits of benchmarking more broadly in higher education from a case study exercise of 20 universities from around the world. They asked participants—who were senior administrators—to consider the main advantages of benchmarking. The employment of benchmarking has led to ([Tasopoulou and Tsiotras, 2017](#), pp. 628–629):

- competitive advantage, but seldom to reduced costs;
- reorganization of the support of the organization and a reduction of the overhead of national universities;
- improvement of quality in both research and education;
- high decrease in administrative costs;
- reduction in total costs of student attendance;
- grant application costing in the support for research and also to the sharing of certain costs with other local universities;
- increased success in recruiting and improvement of enrollment management;
- better service and consistency in getting a question answered or resolving a service issue;

- a much higher level of competence than the financial resources imply (retained equity, or endowment); much higher efficiencies than those of other local institutions;
- increased improvement and more satisfying evaluations from departments taking part in benchmarking projects;
- specific indicators in the field of research and use of this information during re-accreditation processes;
- determination of position among peer institutions, as data are used to ensure that they stay competitive in attracting, retaining, and graduating students;
- staff reduction by about 30%, when redesigning the internal financial function by implementing external benchmarking, and reduction of space by using UK benchmarks on the amount of space used by university functions; and
- reduction in costs by benchmarking professional services (project) and competitive advantage by benchmarking in terms of quality of research and education.

The advantages as stated above are a far cry from the aims of the international qualitative benchmarking exercise for library and information services. The qualitative approach adopted allowed for the exploration of service improvement and strategic development opportunities, but it was not concerned with cost reduction. Further, in terms of what we hoped to achieve from the exercise, which is distinctive, there are five key points to bring into the discussion: people, turbulence, learning and vulnerability, collective wisdom, and strategic perspectives. These points cannot be taken in isolation as they blur into each other.

People and participation are essential ingredients to qualitative benchmarking. This is very much in line with the thinking of Yarrow et al. “benchmarking is not all about the technicalities of advanced ‘best practices’ and statistical comparisons. It is also (and mostly) about people, learning and improvement” (Yarrow et al., 2004 cited in [Francis and Holloway, 2007](#), p. 183).

On the issue of turbulence and learning, the turbulence in the context of this book is essentially the environment of the global COVID-19 crisis. Navigating this kind of environment can generate learning. The rapid changes for individuals, leaders, and whole institutions have challenged many of us, and to navigate this turbulence, we have been keen to share and learn from others. We have been doing this through webinars, online conferences, and publications. The library and information profession is

full of people who are learning; we are developing and sharing sustainable solutions not only to the immediate challenges but also for the longer-term scenarios that are already emerging. As strategies, approaches, and new ways of working are shared, people are being inspired and are supported by others as they try new things. There is collective wisdom, shared strategies, and practical examples of how best to respond to turbulence.

However, to share and learn in public can feel risky and vulnerable. This sense of risk is lessened if we move from a public stage to a private safer space. How much more can we generate and harness if we do it with smaller groups in confidential environments in ways which enable reflection and sensemaking through dialogue, and the sharing of the good and not-so-good practice.

3.4.1 A method for learning and sharing strategies, challenges, and practice

In the international qualitative benchmarking exercise for library and information services reported in Part Two, we sought to create an environment for sharing and learning. We found a good fit with the methodology used by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) in its Strategic Management Program. The Strategic Management Program (formerly known as the University Management Benchmarking Programme) was launched in 1996. Since then, more than 50 universities have participated, from countries including Australia, Botswana, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the UK.

This program offered the opportunity for participating universities to compare their key management processes with each other. The aims were to help identify areas for change, assist in setting targets for improvement, and identify a range of actions to help achieve new goals. The approach focused on the bigger picture—incremental institutional change. Its key points of difference are strategic focus and a learning opportunity in a supportive environment. The emphasis is not on league tables but rather on the strategic exchange of good practice and how to achieve improvements, the latter a particular point of contrast to other benchmarking approaches. The approach to this goes beyond the comparison of data-based scores or conventional performance indicators; it looks at the processes by which results are achieved. Through undertaking a series of activities, the method enables participants to learn from each other's

successes and difficulties. Feedback from the program participants painted a picture of something unique which generated learning and change:

Benchmarking is burgeoning in the administrative area of post-secondary institutions worldwide now. It is, however, mainly based on quantitative measurements which require intense work normalizing the basis of comparison and correcting for different organizational responsibilities. Qualitative benchmarking steps around that intensive and often fruitless exercise to concentrate on the essence of effective delivery in administrative areas.

I valued the format of discussion among peers [senior administrators] who were frank given the non-disclosure framework. That part was the most useful aspect in my opinion; sharing solutions to similar problems with people in comparable positions and contacting them on an ongoing basis for guidance.

I found qualitative benchmarking immensely valuable because of its methodology and the application to all aspects of administration.

When I participated, I found qualitative benchmarking teased out a spectrum of best practice in policy and process. Then, it added the texture of experience from the very astute assessors. It helped me choose the best practice fit for the purpose of my university considering size, resources, and culture.

I had at least two valuable takeaways for my staff to integrate into their areas leading to improved service or higher efficiency. We became a better institution at a granular level often ignored in sweeping change exercises.

3.4.2 The opportunity to learn together for senior library and information service professionals

The ACU methodology was adapted for the international qualitative benchmarking exercise. Senior library and information service professionals were invited to come together to share ideas and increase awareness of alternative approaches to strategic development and service delivery. At a time of global crisis and change, the international approach gave depth and breadth to the exercise, as we glimpsed different national challenges. Sharing such a base of experience and innovation generated much learning from success and setbacks. It filled a gap between conference and webinar sharing and current benchmarking practices by providing a reflective and social learning opportunity. It is a tool for dialogue and relationship building. Yes, it is a methodology to review and improve service delivery, strategy development, and strategic alignment, but it is an approach which does something more and which sits well in the library and information professional's tradition of sharing, of coming together in

our formal and informal networks to share what we do (including our innovations and the things that are not going well) with our closest peers. It expands this internationally and generates new and different kinds of relationships. This kind of qualitative benchmarking therefore has a foot in two camps: one in professional learning and organizational development and the other in strategic planning and service improvement.



3.5 Concluding remarks

In considering the background and context for benchmarking practice in university libraries, the range of approaches and applications, the qualitative benchmarking method of the ACU, and the international library and information services benchmarking exercise and its distinctive benefits, there is an opportunity for readers to reflect on their own situations. Library and information services around the world are changing, and we need many frameworks to help us understand and manage change. In different approaches, we seek methodological fit with our objectives, as do our senior administrators. From a university library practitioner perspective, benchmarking in its various forms can be used for service development and improvement, for demonstrating efficiency and or effectiveness, and for organizational and leadership learning.

Qualitative benchmarking in the way we have used is social and exploratory, and it is reliant on trust and safety. Creating the right kind of environment does not guarantee a great outcome, but the participants and the efforts they put in and the ways in which they engage with each other are the key determinants of success. Even then, the impact and value of qualitative benchmarking can only be judged by learning which changes practice. At its best, as part of a library and information services change management and leadership toolkit, qualitative benchmarking is distinctive and can deliver much which is of high value.

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The four P's framework: benchmarking across dissimilarities

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4.1 Introduction

If a strategy is a path toward an organization's goals, then benchmarking can inspire not only the goals set but also the path.

The generic definition of benchmarking is where “an organization's business practices are purposefully compared with organizations having demonstrably superior performance from broadly similar practices or dispositions” (Moriarty and Smallman, 2009). The earliest cases of benchmarking point to the importance of benchmarking between physically similar organizations, organizations that were alike in size and shape but not necessarily similar with regard to their products (Yasin, 2002).

At its core, benchmarking is an assessment exercise. Assessment is a broad term, but for this context, it is “translating or aggregating observations and evaluations into digestible reports or data sets intended for specific audiences” (Graf and Harris, 2016). Assessment can be from a variety of perspectives; perhaps, the most common in our current practice is that of LibQUAL, which attempts to assess the level of user satisfaction.

Typically, benchmarking has been undertaken from a quantitative perspective, perhaps informed from the first standards established almost a decade ago (Heath, 2011). Qualitative benchmarking tools remain elusive among librarians, and yet, they offer the great potential to inform strategic choices.

Benchmarking between libraries can differ from benchmarking undertaken for for-profit organizations in that it aims to bring libraries into a learning conversation with one another (Gehrke and Britz, 2004).

...because reflection is not an end in itself, but for the purpose of action, communal dialogue is essential (Valli, 2009, cited by Graf and Harris, 2016).

Despite the popularity of this management tool (Francis and Holloway, 2007), benchmarking has several shortcomings.

First, there is an understanding that one should only benchmark similar organizations. Among libraries, this is particularly limiting as libraries are dissimilar in several dimensions. Libraries can differ fundamentally in the user groups that they serve: public libraries, school libraries, special libraries, national libraries, and academic libraries are all vastly different. Libraries differ in size, resources, and maturity. It has been suggested that benchmarking is only appropriate for those libraries which are relatively mature (Wilson and Town, 2006). Thus, current benchmarking methods do not allow vastly different libraries to share knowledge.

Second, benchmarking typically examines internal factors, such as tasks, processes, and outputs (Gehrke and Britz, 2004; Anand and Kodali, 2008, p. 259), and pays little attention to the impact on stakeholders, internal or external. It is a narrow practice, which needs to be broadened to reflect the library's wider role within society.

Third, benchmarking focuses on learning from "best practices," but what makes a practice "best" is open to guesswork and speculation (Francis and Holloway, 2007), a topic that has been noted in the literature on benchmarking in libraries too (Druery et al., 2013).

Fourth, benchmarking typologies are complicated, and none provide guidance on what to benchmark beyond "internal processes" (Anand and Kodali, 2008; Moriarty and Smallman, 2009).

Finally, there is a strong criticism that benchmarking is atheoretical (Francis and Holloway, 2007). The academic community has been criticized for not providing frameworks to integrate benchmarking practices (Yasin, 2002). No system-wide approach exists (Yasin, 2002), although some recent attempts have been (Moriarty, 2011). The lack of theoretical foundations limits the engagement from the academic community, demoting its perceived relevance to practitioners only.

This chapter introduces a simple yet robust framework that provides dissimilar libraries with a structure by which they could enter into a benchmarking conversation. It moves benchmarking into a reflective

position where the focus is on dialogue and is suitable for any level of maturity.

The framework is based on theory and shifts the focus away from “best practices” to interesting or useful experiences. A consideration of the impact of library practices is central to the framework, widening the value that a benchmarking exercise can provide.

The proposed Four P's Framework allows libraries to identify what to benchmark with any other library. The collection and analysis of benchmarking data, as well as the execution of action steps, remain as described by other authors (see [Moriarty and Smallman, 2009](#) for some examples of the benchmarking process).

As this is a conceptual chapter, it does not follow the structure expected of empirical reports. Following this framing of the problem, the Four P's Framework is introduced. A hypothetical case serves as an example of the Four P's Framework in practice. The chapter concludes with a call for future library managers to test the framework.



4.2 Integral vision

Wilber's Integral Map is his attempt to create a theory of everything, a theory that allows for the complete integration of all knowledge into one understanding ([Wilber, 2005](#)). It is a multilevel framework with four quadrants at its simplest level. One dimension looks at the internal/external, and the other looks at the individual/collective. Within these quadrants, Wilber allows for “lines of development,” “states of consciousness,” and “types of consciousness.” These graduations provide a nuanced approach that allows Wilber and those that use his framework to fit “everything” within it.

Wilber has applied his Integral Map to various fields, including politics, governance, medicine, education, and business. Others have applied it in mediation ([Perloff, 2010](#)), strategic management ([Landrum et al., 2013](#)), law ([Batdorf, 2015](#)), and strategic change ([Landrum and Gardner, 2005](#)). Few, if any, have applied it in the context of libraries. LISTA's only mention of Wilber's work is in book reviews (as was the state in November 2021). This chapter thus provides the library fraternity with a new perspective with which to consider and report on strategy.

Wilber's Integral Map and related theory are new to the literature on libraries, so the full complexity will not be explored in this chapter.

Table 4.1 Wilber's integral framework.

Upper Left "I"	Upper Right "it"
Interior-Individual	Exterior-Individual
Personnel	Practice
Lower Left "we"	Lower Right "its"
Interior-Collective	Exterior-Collective
Professional	Policy

This chapter offers an introduction, and those interested in this introduction can take Wilber's thinking further on their own. [Table 4.1](#) shows briefly the visual construction of his Integral Map.

4.2.1 Upper right

Starting with the upper-right quadrant, the considerations of how a library impacts its individual users should be familiar to most library managers. The core of this quadrant is to report on what impact the library has had on the *practice* of its users. Academic librarians regularly comment on how their work contributes to student endeavor, public librarians report on simple readership, and corporate libraries show how they support the mission of the organizations they serve.

4.2.2 Lower right

The impact on a collective user group is best understood through examples of librarians' impact on *policy*. There are numerous reportings of libraries, including corporate libraries ([Sherwill-Navarro, 1998](#); [Zhong and Watters, 2020](#)), fighting censorship or implementing censorship ([Steele, 2021](#)). Other examples are libraries that have contributed to information literacy policies, either at a public level ([Julien and Breu, 2004](#)) or an institutional level ([Lockhart, 2011](#)), open-access policies ([Otto and Mullen, 2018](#)), or acting as advocates to the LGBTI+ communities ([Carter, 2019](#)).

4.2.3 Upper left

On the left side of the matrix, the focus is internal: the community of librarians. Part of any library's strategy should be to include opportunities for its *personnel* to develop their own skills or, at the very least, keep up with professional trends. This professional development will ensure that the service offered to the user community is maintained and perhaps grown.

4.2.4 Lower left

Keeping the focus on the internal: the community of librarians, the lower left quadrant considers a broader community. It should be the responsibility of all librarians to contribute to their *profession*. A simple example would be participation in national professional associations or presenting at conferences. Libraries that offer internships would report on that contribution to their professional community.

Reflecting on these quadrants gives rise to some suggested prompts that library managers can use to report current activities and create a strategic map for future activities. These prompts are included in [Table 4.2](#). Each quadrant also includes a question of what to stop doing, which is possibly a more important question, for those who have constrained resources, than what to start doing.

Table 4.2 Four P's framework with reflection prompts.

Upper Left "I"	Upper Right "it"
Interior-Individual	Exterior-Individual
Personnel	Practice
What activities have we undertaken to maintain our professional knowledge?	Who is using our library?
How have we developed our professional knowledge?	How are our users using our library?
What professional development areas require attention in the future?	What benefit are they deriving from our library?
What areas require less attention in the future?	Where are we doing well?
	Where is there room for growth?
	What should we stop doing?
Lower Left "we"	Lower Right "its"
Interior-Collective	Exterior-Collective
Professional	Policy
Are we part of any professional association, and how have we contributed to it?	To what policies (local, organization, national, or international) have we contributed our voice?
Have we participated in any professional discussions, be it in online forms or formal events?	To what policies should we be adding our voice?
How can we further engage with the professional community?	How could we enter into a policy dialogue?
What engagements should we cut back on?	Into what policies should we reduce our voice?

4.2.5 Interactions

The four quadrants should not be thought of as entirely independent. Many interactions could occur, and managers should reflect on this in their strategic planning. For example, participation in a professional association could play the dual role of growing the library personnel and contributing to the profession. Presenting at a conference is a learning experience for both the presenter and the audience.

Policies frequently dictate practice. For example, a change in user policy, making it easier for different groups to access the library services, would change who uses the library.



4.3 A hypothetical case method

4.3.1 Introduction

A hypothetical case is a helpful method of showing the framework's value, particularly where no example currently exists in reality. Such a method has been long used within the library and information science literature. An example can be found in [Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science \(1931\)](#), where the laws engage in fictional conversations with other characters in the style of a play, through to more current examples that imagine a library with artificial intelligence as assistants ([Balleste, 2007](#)), explorations into moral dilemmas at the reference desk ([Lenker, 2008](#)), and a teaching tool that shows how public library resources can be used to start a small business ([Pankl, 2017](#)).

In the hypothetical case below, the benchmarking libraries are purposefully designed to be as different as possible to show that the integral framework provides a basis for a conversation that bridges dissimilarities. The guiding structure for this case is based on the five-step generic benchmarking process given by [Spendolini \(1992\)](#), who distilled the practices of 24 companies into one model.

4.3.2 Peter's problem to place the plans

"Our plans are getting out of hand; we need a better system to organize them," Jerry told Peter. Peter had come into his boss's office for their usual Monday morning meeting. He had expected the usual discussion on

what client projects he would need to focus on for the week. A document system would be a much bigger job. Peter, a draftsman, only had one idea of where to start: get someone else to assist.

"Is there any funding to hire an assistant? This task will definitely be time-intensive, and I still have five other projects on the drawing board," Peter replied.

"Sure, I can approve funds for a grad student for two months. That should do it," Jerry glanced at his computer as it pinged. Peter knew that meant that this meeting was over, and Jerry's next one would start in five minutes.

Peter stood, "Thanks, I'll get right on it," and pulled out his phone as he left.

He googled as he headed for the break room. "How to set up a document system?" The first result referred to a document library. That sparked an idea. Peter knew a librarian at the National Library, Chris, who was the partner of one of his wife's friends. Perhaps she could help. Following the train of thought, Peter decided to also reach out to the local university and see what library science students would be interested in assisting. As he made his coffee, he felt more confident in undertaking this task that Jerry assigned to him.

Two days later, Peter had a virtual meeting with Sonja, a library science student who had responded to his query. She explained that while she was new to libraries, she had a corporate background and knew of a benchmarking framework that they could use to gather information from Chris, the special collections librarian. Looking over the Four P's Framework that Sonja shared, Peter felt more assured of how to have the conversations with Chris. It clearly outlined what he should focus on (*Spendolini's Step one: determining what to benchmark*). In chatting with Sonja, she had asked who should be part of their conversation with Chris. Peter considered asking Jerry but decided it should only be himself and Sonja (*Spendolini's Step two: form a benchmarking team*). He noted to ask Chris whom she would like to add to the conversation.

Peter and Sonja made their first visit to the National Library to meet with Chris the following week. She had a large team in her special collections department to perform various roles, from document restoration to research assistants. However, she had a managerial overview. Chris had been skeptical at first about having a benchmarking conversation with Peter. Their two situations could not have been more different: Peter was in the initial phases of setting up an electronic document system; Chris was

the custodian of an exclusively print collection, which dated back centuries. Peter's budget was nothing more than what he was paying Sonja for her assistance; Chris's budget was government-funded and included a sizable portion to obtain rare and expensive items. Peter's document collection would only be accessed by colleagues at his firm; Chris had visitors from all corners of the globe, some of whom planned their visits months in advance. However, when Peter shared the Four P's Framework, Chris understood that the benchmarking exercise would transcend these differences. The differences between their circumstances could inspire her to think of new ideas that would not typically be applied in her environment and reevaluate old ideas to see how relevant they are. She agreed to the meetings (*Spendolini's Step three: identify benchmarking partners*).

The three met each week for 4 weeks, each conversation focusing on a quadrant of the Four P's Framework. Sonja had been tasked with documenting and presenting Peter and Chris with an analysis, which she did 5 weeks after Peter was first assigned this task (*Spendolini's Step four: collect and analyze benchmarking information*). Thanks to the robustness of the Four P's Framework, Sonja was able to structure her notes efficiently.

4.3.3 Quadrant 1: Practice

Peter: The users of the plan library will be his colleagues. They typically talk about the client, the type of structure, and the time. All these points need to be included in the metadata. His colleagues would need to upload and download their own files. There needs to be some training material made available so that others can be onboarded to the same system easily.

Chris: User help files have not been updated in nearly 10 years. Many of the questions they get could—and should—be updated.

4.3.4 Quadrant 2: Policy

Peter: No apparent connection to policy, but to make the document library more useful, there could be greater advocacy for standardization, starting with the documentation and then perhaps flowing into other areas of the business. Looking ahead, there would be the potential to be involved in standardization within the industry.

Chris: The National Library is the physical result of the legal deposit laws of the country and enacts the policy of collecting the written cultural heritage of the nation. The special collections department is not as involved as the rest of the National Library in this regard; however, they

are active in the International Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and will continue to be.

4.3.5 Quadrant 3: Personnel

Peter: To keep up with new ideas to improve the document library, provision should be made for Peter (or one of his colleagues) to develop in this area. This provision should be in terms of both inclusions in the job description and financial backing.

Chris: Staffs in the special collections department are encouraged to attend conferences, but no particular attention is given to building knowledge that would contribute to strategic objectives.

4.3.6 Quadrant 4: Professional

Peter: By contributing to the standardization within the industry, his organization could be contributing to the professional as a whole, particularly if he could share with others the process that Sonja had facilitated. He would ask Jerry to present on this topic at the next industry conference that he was planning to attend.

Chris: The other librarians in the special collections section regularly presented at conferences. Reflecting on Sonja's work in helping Peter, Chris decided to consider partnering with the local university to get some intern library science students to assist with some of the strategic projects.

As Sonja reviewed her notes, she jotted down action points for Peter and Chris that came out of their discussions (*Spendolini's Step five: take action*).

4.3.7 Peter's plan of action

- Sonja to assist Peter to create a document library in software that is freely available—like a reference manager.
- Sonja to provide training to Peter's colleagues.
- Peter to write a report to recommend standardization within the industry.
- Sonja to look at industry bodies interested in standardization and relay it back to Peter.
- Peter to recommend that resources (time and personnel) be allocated to the upkeep of the document library.
- Peter to present at the next industry conference on the process of setting up a document library.

4.3.8 Chris's plan of action

- Arrange for the update of user help files.
- Continue to contribute to the International Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works.
- To link conference attendance to strategic objectives.
- Partner with a local university to set up an internship agreement.

When Sonja shared her action statements with Peter and Chris, both reported that the benchmarking exercise was helpful to think of where strategic actions could be taken to feed into their departments and organizations. Chris added that benchmarking with a library that was different from hers inspired her to reflect more deeply on what they could be doing differently. Sonja reminded Peter and Chris to build in an evaluative exercise to see if the proposed actions had the desired effect.



4.4 A word of caution

Whether in relation to the Four P's Framework or another, benchmarking is not without cost. As the case shows, it takes time to perform a benchmarking exercise at the very least and would cost more if an outside consultant is hired to assist.

Without taking the actions specifically decided upon during the benchmarking exercise, the costs incurred during the process would be wasted. Particular attention should be given to a reflection on the outcomes of the benchmarking exercise.

Any exercise in benchmarking is only as good as the participants are willing to make it. As with any strategic practices, the information collected can be beneficially used or abused ([Francis and Holloway, 2007](#)).



4.5 Conclusion

As the hypothetical case shows, the Four P's Framework is robust enough to provide the structure for dialogue between dissimilar libraries, allowing them to learn from each other. The Four P's Framework encourages a qualitative reflection, a counterpoint to the more quantitative benchmarking advice that prevails in the literature.

Rather than focusing on “best practices,” managers of dissimilar libraries can share practices that work for their cases and inspire one another to draw beneficial practices into their own strategies. There is no need for an exemplar. The Four P's Framework is simple, and it can be used with a little introduction. However, it is robust enough to elicit a rich dialogue.

Finally, the Four P's Framework is rooted in theory, which provides an entry point for academic authors to engage with benchmarking practices. Further practical exercises would be required to test the robust nature of this framework thoroughly. Considering its simple and inclusive nature, there should be no shortage of candidates who would be willing to try.

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Part Two—The international benchmarking exercise

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1 Introduction

Part Two presents the Education, Library, and Information Services: Leadership and Management qualitative benchmarking exercise. The exercise was conducted at the beginning of 2022. Ten organizations from around the world participated. This report is the core of the book. We share the methodology and present the major findings and outputs, the good practice statements generated, and the outcomes and review of the exercise. The outputs can be applied by all those in decision-making roles in library and information services.

In writing this part of the book, our challenge has been to do justice to the effort, energy, and enthusiasm generated by the participants in the benchmarking exercise. At every stage of the process, from formulation of inputs to adaptation of ideas and consideration of opportunities for adoption, we have experienced lightbulb moments, authentic dialog, and empathic acknowledgment of shared challenges. By creating a safe space to generate discussion, we opened disclosure and offers of support. In sharing practice, the participants generated an atmosphere of exploration and improvisation and ideas developed.

Practically, the exercise produced good practice statements which we believe to be more widely applicable and summaries of key topics which give us all pause of thought. We believe that these will inspire readers to ask questions of themselves, questions such as:

1. How does my work or service compare?
2. What resonates, and what is different for me and my organization?
3. What can I learn from and put into practice here?

For the participants of the exercise—spanning five continents, from a range of not-for-profit organizations (mainly universities) and varied in terms of primary focus within the ICT and library and information science domains—the different perspectives provide an exciting and rich opportunity to connect and learn with and from others.



2 Our approach to qualitative benchmarking

The approach used in this exercise has its origins in the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Management Benchmarking Programme. It has been reimaged with an international scope and adapted methodology, we also took advantage of the now-normal adoption of online communication technologies. The approach hovers between informal and formal engagement, with enough structure to generate and manage a high volume of written and verbal input, but not too much to stifle or unnecessarily limit.

2.1 The qualitative benchmarking methodology

The benchmarking methodology used has seven stages:

1. The first was to select the participating institutions and their representatives. In this case, the focus was on education, libraries, and information services. We did not seek to formally develop a sample, instead we sought geographical spread, different kinds of institutions in education, and different perspectives. We considered all our contacts and sought those people we knew to be great leaders and practitioners in library and information services. Of those approached, the majority agreed to participate.
2. The second was to develop a series of prompts or questions to generate responses from participating institutions. These prompts were grouped into five topics.
3. The third was to familiarize participants with the approach and share the prompts and gather responses or self-assessments from participants within a framework.
4. The fourth was to read and consider all these responses and to draft good practice statements and a summary report. The report identified a new set of cross-cutting topics for further discussion. The good practice statements and summary reports were shared with participants. The set of discussion topics generated was included in the report.

- 5. The fifth phase was a workshop discussion to gather feedback and generate further thinking in response to the report and statements. There was an opportunity to comment widely on the summary report before the discussion on each of the new topics was introduced.
- 6. The sixth phase consisted of a refinement of the good practice statements and the report in the light of the workshop discussion. This was then shared with all participants.
- 7. The seventh and final phase was the opportunity for participants to rate themselves against the good practice statements with a view to offering advice, support, and further information to any of the other participants who would like to learn more in relation to that good practice area. In effect, this established a facilitated network of the participants.

The outcome of each of these stages is reported below. First, we offer some background information on the participating institutions.

2.2 Summary of participating institutions

The table of the key features of the participating organizations below provides information to help with the application of the outcomes of the benchmarking exercise for others. We note that one person’s context might be so different to another that a best practice statement could present on the one hand a significant opportunity to innovate or on the other be irrelevant. Information is provided on participants which situates everyone in their institutional context, for example, their department(s) in the context of their institution.

	Organization/ department descriptor	Organization/department primary focus	Primary user/client base
1	Medium-sized research-intensive university in Asia	Library and information services	Students and academics
2	Medium-sized public university in Nigeria	Library and information services	Students and academics
3	Large research- intensive Australian university	Library and information services, IT support	Students and academics

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Organization/ department descriptor	Organization/department primary focus	Primary user/client base
4	Research-intensive South African university	Library and information services	Students and academics
5	Established Kenyan university	ICT infrastructure, services, and support	Whole university operation
6	Large UK old-established university	Library and information services	Students and academics
7	National shared services membership organization	ICT infrastructure, services, and support, library and information services	Higher and further education organizations and individuals
8	An American research university	Library and information services, IT support	Students and academics
9	Regional Australian university	Library and information services	Students and academics
10	Major national research library	Library and information services and associated ICT infrastructure and services	Education and cultural organizations, businesses, libraries, the public

2.3 The framework for prompts and data collection

The aim of the framework is to enable participants to describe simply and objectively how each organization tackles each of the management processes under review. These are:

1. Principal principles and values of your institution and your department(s).
2. Strategic planning and managerial objectives.
3. Significant changes in response to COVID-related issues and opportunities.
4. Staffing qualities, culture, structure, and change management.
5. Impact monitoring and review (including change management mechanisms).

For each topic, the framework suggests several issues or questions which prompt responses and help structure responses. Participants were invited to add links to relevant supporting documentation and data.

For example, in the “principal principles and values of your institution and your department(s)” section prompts include:

1. Is there education and/or knowledge management, library and information service, or other tailored institutional strategies? If so, describe the process of developing these including who was involved, and how often it is updated?
2. To what extent are the service strategies based on environmental analysis, understanding of the wider information society, and future trends? How has this analysis been carried out?
3. What are the key drivers for information/service strategy/ies? Why are these drivers key? Are there any explicit links to wider or higher-level organizational strategy/ies?
4. Where does strategic direction and leadership come from? How connected or rooted is it in wider organizational leadership and direction? How and by whom is it conveyed?

Again, by way of example, in the “strategic planning and managerial objectives” section prompts include:

1. Describe how strategic decisions are made, and how priorities are established and agreed and the systems/mechanisms for governance and oversight of service activity and performance within the service and at the wider organization level?
2. What mechanisms (e.g., planning and projects) do you use to implement strategy and new initiatives? Who gets involved in planning and implementation? To what extent are these organization-wide or siloed?
3. What mechanisms (e.g., planning) do you use to manage service delivery and service improvement? Who gets involved in planning and implementation, and how do they contribute?
4. How do you use data and insights from your clients/users to inform your objectives and service development? Do you identify, anticipate, and consider any changes in client/user behavior in your planning?

These are not questions that require specific answers. The aim was to look at many aspects—including the darker corners—of participants’ operations and strategies to understand fully what is happening and to look for how organizations operate through the responses sent in. Inevitably, there is an overlap between these review areas. Operations do not stand in isolation from strategies.

In addition, we collected information about the context within which each participating organization operates and developed a summary of the key

institutional quantitative data. A complementary narrative (an environmental scan) identifying any critical factors (e.g., political, cultural, economic, historical, etc.) affecting the operation of the organization was also collected. The purpose of this was to help us understand alignment with context and to understand any nuance due to the circumstances that they have to operate within.

2.4 The responses

The exercise involved each of the ten institutions selected carrying out an initial institutional self-review process, using the framework of prompts, and providing contextual information, including the environmental analysis. All ten institutions provided a full response. They ranged from 3 to 30 pages. Many provided supplementary documents and links to other materials. The supplementary documents included annual reports, organizational structure charts, collection management policies, change proposals, and strategic plans. This material provided a rich and large dataset for analysis. In total, over 200 pages of submissions were received, read, reread, and considered.

2.5 Creating the summary environmental analysis

For the environmental analysis, the submissions were synthesized. Duplicate points were removed, and wording was changed to enable grouping and summary of points. It includes issues which are widely relevant and niche or local issues. No weighting was assigned to the level or extent of relevance of the issue.

2.6 Generation of the summary report and topics for discussion, and good practice statements

For the summary report, the topic groupings of the prompts were used, and a summary of responses was created. These summaries indicate similarity, difference, and any implicit and explicit key points. These key points were arrived at by the Expert Advisor who used her own experience as a reference point to identify what to highlight.

In addition, from the Expert Advisor reading and interpretation of the responses, five cross-cutting topics were identified. These then became the discussion topic themes for the next-stage workshop. The Expert Advisor was also able to draw on the responses to create a new set of question prompts for each of the cross-cutting topics, again to provoke thinking and discussion.

The good practice statements were generated by the senior higher education (HE) management consultant and reviewed and edited by the Expert Advisor. Reviewing statements involved referencing against summary statements and a further review of the entire dataset.

The summary report, good practice statements, and topics for further discussion were reviewed by the chair of the qualitative benchmarking project and then shared with the participants.

2.7 The workshop and final iteration of the report and good practice statements

Institutions represented were invited to take part in a workshop (conducted virtually, with up to two delegates from each institution) to discuss aspects of good practice, after which the report and set of good practice statements were further developed and shared in the final report.

The participant workshop was a vital part of the qualitative benchmarking process. The workshop aimed to:

1. Share and familiarize participants with best practice statements and summary reports.
2. Identify any omissions or errors in the best practice statements and summary reports.
3. Refine the best practice statements and summary report.
4. Discuss the key issues which had been identified by the Expert Advisor.
5. Provide the opportunity for participants to learn from each other and make new/renew and develop professional connections and relationships.

Where time zones challenged us, technology enabled the workshop discussion, which gathered feedback and generated further thinking in response to the report and statements. There was an opportunity to comment widely on the summary report before the discussion on each of the new topics was introduced. Each discussion topic was introduced by a participant who had been selected by the Expert Advisor based on the strength of their submission in that topic area. All participants were invited to contribute their experiences and ideas in response.

Those institutions which carried out the self-review, but were unable to participate in the workshop, received the final report, set out the statements of good practice, and received the full set of outputs for managers to use as tools to enhance their work. The statements of good practice that were identified

during the process can be used as key guidance tools for senior managers as they seek to enhance the effectiveness of their own institution's operations.

All participants were asked to ensure confidentiality. Of course, all could inform others in their institutions about relevant anonymized data, providing it is not subsequently made available for external use. During all discussions within the group of participating organizations, we observed the Chatham House Rule of confidentiality, and all findings arising from the benchmarking process have been anonymized for publication.

As mentioned above, in the sixth stage of the process, there was refinement of the good practice statements and the report in the light of the workshop discussion. It includes a record of the cross-cutting topic discussions, and—wherever the subject of debate at the workshop developed—additions and amendments were made to the report. This final report was then shared with all participants.

2.8 The ratings

The seventh and final phase was the opportunity for participants to rate themselves against the good practice statements with a view to offering advice, support, and further information to any of the other participants who would like to learn more in relation to that good practice area.

Each participant was assigned a number to represent their organization, and they were asked to place a number against each statement of good practice to reflect the extent to which they have experience in that good practice statement. A “5” indicates that they have followed that practice for some time and are willing to share their experiences of introducing the approach and operating in that way. A “1” indicates that they have no experience at all with that good practice statement.

Once completed, the ratings were shared. There have already been several follow-up conversations independent of the exercise facilitators.

2.9 Concluding remarks on the approach

We had the pleasure and privilege of working with participants in different ways and shared a stimulating, inspiring, and rewarding experience. Participants carried out a self-analysis, participated in the workshop, heard presentations by the exponents of good practice, considered the key issues, and agreed on good practice in the processes under review. Overall and after all, the findings generated include a summary report of the current

situation of our ten participants, a synthesized environmental analysis, discussion topics, and the key points of the discussion.

This benchmarking exercise operated as an international collaborative activity through which institutions can use benchmarking methodologies to examine their own performance in a comparative context. Its outputs are for application in practice, reflection, and self-assessment, generating ideas. They are relevant beyond the benchmarking participant group, although we acknowledge that they are not applicable in every context and that some of the contributions without a deeper contextual knowledge of the participant institution will lose some meaning. The outputs now follow.



3 Major findings and outputs

3.1 Outputs

This section provides the outputs of the benchmarking exercise. The outputs are multifaceted: the environmental analysis, the report generated by the self-assessment inputs and the report of the participant workshop.

The context in which everyone was working is one of disruption and acceleration of digital development. There are shifts in strategies, services, resources, relationships, and positionings of library and information services within our organizations and in the context of national bodies and in the eyes of key stakeholders. To situate the outputs, we share the summary environmental analysis in the table.

3.1.1 Summary—environmental analysis

Political

1. Assessment/scrutiny of research outputs and funding.
2. Assessment/scrutiny of teaching standards and student satisfaction.
3. New forms of teaching and learning, for example, microcredentials.
4. Focus on employment outcomes of teaching and learning and the role of employers in the system.
5. Globalization/international reach of higher education and transnational education models.
6. Changing funding models favoring STEM disciplines.
7. Geopolitical changes and tensions and war.
8. Increasing sensitivity to national sovereignty and security.

Economic

1. Economic recovery and supporting business and entrepreneurial activity.
2. Research funding to support national supply chain priorities and research commercialization/translation to industry.
3. Boosting local and national skills shortages.
4. Increasing competition in digitally enabled landscape.
5. Delivery of public good outcomes and social license to operate. Demonstrating economic and societal value.
6. Growing complexity and diversity of funding models: government, student fees, public and private universities, etc.
7. Mergers and growth of big publishers and software and hardware suppliers—monopoly conditions and “digital giants.”
8. Changing demographics in different countries and impact on student recruitment.

Sociological

1. Mental health and wellbeing of staff and communities postpandemic. Resilience of staff and students.
2. Social justice and equality, diversity, inclusion (EDI), and accessibility.
3. Movements mobilizing for racial justice, for example, Black Lives Matter and Reconciliation in Australia.
4. Supporting students from low social and economic backgrounds.
5. Digital and data poverty of students and staff.
6. Digital upskilling of staff and students.
7. Research integrity and transparency.
8. Remote working and flexibility.
9. The big resignation and seeking meaning in work.
10. Portfolio careers and retaining, lifelong learning.
11. Universities and public institutions ability to retain staff with technical skills.
12. Growth in open access and open science movements.
13. Changing teaching and learning pedagogies including social learning, experiential learning.

Technological

1. Big data and data-driven research.
2. The exponential rise of the cyber security challenge.
3. The dominance of hyperscale cloud-based solutions. Cost savings, increasing capacity but risk—high costs and less control.
4. Transforming learning data and infrastructures including learning analytics and immersive technologies.

5. Experimentation and investment with artificial intelligence.
6. New digital tools and practices for research.
7. Innovation of education and research through technological advances.
8. Smart buildings.

Legal

1. Legal reform of national higher education environments increasing accountability and setting new boundaries/directions.
2. Increasing regulation in the digital marketplace.
3. Copyright reform.

Environmental

1. Sustainable buildings and campuses.
2. Responses to the climate crisis in services, for example, information collections and fake news.
3. Renewal with sustainability and net zero targets.

3.2 Summary of responses to self-assessment prompts

The summary of responses below was generated from the analysis of the written responses and submissions to the benchmarking prompts submitted as part of the self-assessment part of the exercise. It provided a context for and commentary on the good practice statements and the workshop discussion.

The aim of the prompt framework was to enable participants to describe simply and objectively how each organization tackles each of the management processes under review. These are:

1. Principal principles and values of your institution and your department(s).
2. Strategic planning and managerial objectives.
3. Significant changes in response to COVID-related issues and opportunities.
4. Staffing qualities, culture, structure, and change management.
5. Impact monitoring and review (including change management mechanisms).

3.2.1 Topic 1: Purpose/mission, vision, and values

Many respondents have their own departmental-level articulation of purpose or mission, vision, and values. Some stated that they considered themselves integral to their university mission and/or values and therefore did not articulate mission, vision, and values at the department level. All statements—either at the highest organization level or own department level—pointed to the public good and/or contribution to the education mission. For some, the library and information management or ICT

purpose were articulated clearly at the vision and purpose level, and for others, it was at the next level within the strategic aims. Some visions looked forward 10 years, some focused on ambitions for the organization/department, and others on what outcome is desired. Examples include:

Mission

To offer leadership and expertise in providing remarkable ICT services which empower our university community to exploit knowledge, information, and technology to achieve excellence in teaching, learning, research and enterprise and business activity.

We will enable our community to flourish through people-centered environments and access to knowledge, expertise, and opportunities.

Vision

To be an internationally ranked library that is technology-driven and managed by competent, creative, and innovative staff.

Our vision is for the UK to be world leaders in technology for education and research.

To inspire information and knowledge exchange and stimulate creativity through the provision of world-class ICTs.

Values

Transparent, accountable, sustainable, professionalism, openminded, pro-activity, inclusive, customer-focused, innovative, committed, flexible, ethical, and responsible.

Our values are:

Innovation—to be open to change and new ideas.

Excellence—to be the best and world class in what we do.

Empowerment—to advance development and professionalism.

Inclusivity—to improve equal access to opportunities and resources for all.

3.2.2 Topic 2: Strategies, strategic planning, and managerial objectives

This topic generated much commentary and supporting links and documents. In this summary, a range of subtopics include strategy development, funding and budgets, service delivery, and associated challenges and opportunities.

3.2.2.1 Strategies

Most strategies included some six goals or aims with additional enabling goals. All were supported with plans and many with key performance indicators

(KPIs). Some were presented on one page and used infographics and graphical layouts, and some were succinct and memorable, for example, “Imagine2030” and “Expand, Enrich, Enhance, Engage.” Objectives were specified which capture initiatives and specify timeframes and key performance measures. Themes across strategies¹ included:

1. Engaging proactively or partnering or being interconnected with the user/client/customer/academic communities.
2. Providing and creating inspiring spaces and facilities for learning and research.
3. Responding to opportunities and threats in the ICT environment.
4. Digital-first and cloud responses, and innovation through automation and technological advances.
5. Responding to changing teaching and learning pedagogies and practices, particularly online learning.
6. Supporting the development of digital capabilities in user communities.
7. Taking a leading role in recording and reporting on research activity.
8. Supporting and developing open access for the benefit of community.
9. Influencing culture and community spirit broadly and delivering cultural experiences.
10. Aspiring to be a leader in equity, diversity, and inclusion, and working to overcome digital inequality.
11. Consideration of preservation and the role of custodian to preserve data, collections, and knowledge of the past for the benefit of the future.

Supporting strategies and/or policies included research data management strategy, marketing strategy, collections management policies, and people or workforce development plans. In addition, there was some commentary on significant incidents, for example, fire and cyber security, and the need for incident management and disaster management plans which are regularly reviewed and could easily be enacted.

3.2.2.2 Strategy development and review process

There were many engaging and well-structured strategy development and review processes. Some triggered organizational change projects and initiatives. In developing and reviewing strategies:

1. There was consultation—sometimes extensive—between staff, managers, users/clients/customers/students, other departments, and stakeholder groups.

¹ In addition, in the workshop the important theme of race-related social justice was highlighted.

Developing the strategy was a 6-month process involving extensive stakeholder engagement with discussions at college/school executive committees, with key services areas, for example, IT service, campus infrastructure, careers, learning support and learning technology. We engaged with the student body through focus groups, feedback walls, 1–1 interviews and with the main student representative body.

2. There is a regular environmental scanning process which ensures that strategies and action plans remain current and which monitors a range of key global issues. In addition, reading lists are put together and shared with all staff.
3. Initiatives to utilize automation and technology to the best effect are regularly reviewed.
4. Review of service data and feedback and evidence-based practice (EBP) approaches were used (see also evidence-based practice and client feedback).

In addition, some strategy review processes involved:

- an external facilitator to help steer the extensive consultation process in identifying and refining strategic goals/aims and objectives, and/or
- an annual retreat when all staff have an opportunity to review the previous year's achievements and to consider goals of the forthcoming year.

More broadly, to develop and maintain strategic thinking and focus:

- When developing or refining strategies, key issues are “adopted” by senior managers who take on the role of coordinators or champions.
- Every team has strategic theme champions who actively promote strategic issues.
- There are regular events organized to celebrate key achievements in relation to strategic priorities.
- There are regular weekly meetings of the executive team which address both strategic and operational issues.

3.2.2.3 Strategy and service delivery, service development, and monitoring

Participants spanned national organizations, ICT, and library departments in universities. As a result, this section includes material which may not be considered relevant to everyone. The widely applicable comments relate to risk management, KPIs, project management, customer/client/user feedback, equality diversity and inclusion (EDI), budgets, and fundraising. The more specific service and asset management areas are collections management, smart spaces, library spaces, and ICT service delivery and development.

3.2.2.3.1 Project management, risk management, and targets The frameworks and methodologies for project management were particularly mature in those participating organizations which were large, national, or ICT-focused. They either had their own Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) or worked very closely with institutional EPMOs. Staff with project management, business analysis, and change management expertise are part of these teams. As well as adopting the practice of a range of methodologies including Agile, the practice of defining the benefits and targets to be delivered was well established. There were a number which described clear project, program, change management frameworks which help to achieve consistency and effectiveness in management, and there was clear governance and risk management of all project activity:

We set a number of targets each year to drive and measure our performance and report on these monthly. These include measures such as customer satisfaction, funder satisfaction and grant funding, income targets, operating surplus, media coverage, staff engagement, completion of audit and risk actions, etc.

Also worthy of note is that some participants stated that the organization's risk or audit committee pays attention to organizational resilience; one stated:

We are constantly planning for the future, so organizational resilience is part of our everyday thinking. The university works with us closely on health and safety and is starting to take wellness seriously.

Some participants stated that when developing a new initiative, a project team is set up to ensure that the best and most appropriate staff can contribute to the planning. There are very clear policies dealing with health and safety issues.

3.2.2.3.2 Evidence-based practice and client feedback For other participants, some, but not all, of the practices described above were referenced. The majority discussed client/student-focused development and gathering insights from users. Of all the approaches mentioned, the most widely used were surveys and feedback. This, with analysis of usage data, enables service development and identifies any key concerns and future needs. Some mentioned the importance of evidence-based practice. There were a few lighthearted comments about incentives, with one service fondly referring to its “donut surveys.” In addition, there were some strong statements about how important this work is:

The biggest driver is to remain customer-centric in terms of providing innovative services/products and being responsive to any changing demands. There is a

deliberate effort to use data as a strategic asset informing decisions on services and products not just at the departmental level. A similar data emphasis has been placed at an institutional level to specially form an institution-wide culture.

We gather data and insights through focus group discussions, user surveys, and client surveys such as LibQUAL, UX activities, etc. We are in the process of implementing a dashboard system to assist us in projecting changes and identify new services. We are also planning collaboration with the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking to strengthen our data analysis capacity. This is one of our key strategic actions for the past couple of years. It included building skills capacity among staff in data analysis and data visualization.

3.2.2.3.3 ICT and digital fundamentals There was an explicit recognition of the interconnectedness of library and IT strategies and work. One respondent was comprehensive in their articulation of this fundamental link. Several library participants note the intent to work toward a digital-first library service and experience. The ICT participants referred to opportunities and challenges (see below), and at least two libraries provide their own IT infrastructure and services to students.

The following extract is representative—from a library lens—of some of the deep engagement with digital transformation:

A key opportunity is to offer students a complete digital experience in supporting their academic program, whether by offering relevant online services or provisioning technologically rich physical spaces which are conducive to study and learning.

In terms of issues, a broad array of ICT resources, both financial and technical, are needed to ensure the library service remains in step with the technological advances in academia and research, while at the same time meeting the needs of users to innovatively use smart technologies in a digital-first library setting. These resources need to be provisioned from within, and remain aligned with, the larger ICT institutional environment. The pace of technological development in the library service is intrinsically coupled with the ICT and Facilities Management services available elsewhere at the institution.

Technology and systems underpin all facets of the library service, for offering both client-facing services and managing back-end workflow processes.

The library service's IT strategies and strategic plans are guided by the overarching objective to innovatively use smart technologies to enable a digital-first library service and experience. This objective finds practical voice through the inclusion of ICT-related strategic actions in the library service's strategic direction and action plans, which are updated annually and reviewed every 5 years. The ICT-related strategic actions are focused on facilitating the process of information discovery and use for students and staff and providing technology-enhanced support services for researchers.

The opportunities presented by recent advances in robotic and artificial intelligence automation processes hold a lot of potential for the library service. We can see enormous potential in utilizing these technologies to enhance our digital collections, improve library workflows, and build on our already excellent service provided to our clients. Technological breakthroughs in combating false information and enabling easy access to trustworthy resources for our clients hold great opportunities for the library service over the next 10 years.

3.2.2.3.4 Equality, diversity, and inclusion; accessibility, racism,² and reconciliation Some of the respondents highlighted institutional priorities and missions in relation to equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), accessibility, racism, and reconciliation. There was a strong drive for this to be reflected both in services and staffing, and indeed specialist staff, projects, and initiatives are already in progress to further EDI. For many, care is taken to engage stakeholders (internal and external, top-down and bottom-up) to ensure key decisions are founded in an inclusive process. Some of the more mature work described is represented below:

[We are] tackling vital questions of representation at senior levels of our workforce, the inclusivity of our spaces and services, and the way we explain the origins and legacy of different parts of the collection. We have created an Anti-Racism Project tasked with producing a 3-year plan of practical action for the organization, at every level, to implement. Our action plan will reflect our values as well as our belief that libraries can be powerful sources of social cohesion in the post-pandemic period.

Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility are not new concepts for our libraries, but with the revived interest in these concepts and their day-to-day application we have set up a Diversity Council, cataloged the work we are doing, and are paying special attention to hiring practices.

Within Australia, there is also an increased focus on reconciliation. The decolonization of our institutions and the move toward true reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including closing educational achievement gaps, is an important part of our operating environment.

3.2.2.3.5 Budgets and fundraising All institutions have robust budget-setting process and budget management³. Income for at least one is directly tied to student numbers, another is a membership organization, and another

² In the workshop, it was noted that the important theme of race-related social justice requires further commentary.

³ In the workshop, it was noted that the challenge and opportunity are often in relation to creatively organizing and repurposing resources. This is potentially an area which could benefit from further benchmarking work.

received government (federal) funding and significant philanthropic including endowment funds. Some generate income in different ways, and some have well-established fundraising strategies and dedicated staff. Development funding is often supported by active alumni and partner engagement program. Other funds come in the form of project interventions by agencies of government or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Many participants have access to innovation funds to provide grants for new projects, and there are well-established mechanisms for applying for investment or capital project funds.

Many participants had experienced falls in income and budget cuts. Some participants were accepting of this acknowledging the economic impact of the pandemic. The greatest concern was expressed in relation to ICT costs and collections budgets, for example:

With budgets either staying flat or shrinking and price increases from publishers in the horizon of real concern is how we continue to provide access to resources while also supporting open access.

3.2.2.4 Services, managing assets, and capital investments

In terms of commentary on specific services and the management of asset and capital investments to deliver service, the responses have been grouped into four areas: collections and access to information, digital capability development, smart and library spaces, and ICT service delivery. First, there are several widely applicable statements in relation to service delivery and development and that which underpins it:

1. There are dedicated and tailored services offered to different groups.
2. There are support services for researchers including metrics and research data management, and for teaching staff.
3. There are specialist support services specifically designed for different student groups, for example, on medical programs, and international students.
4. There are dedicated initiatives to support indigenous students, staff, colleagues, clients.
5. There are many examples of mature operational planning processes. Many participants pointed to annual planning processes and departments/sections developing their own operational plans which reflect the objectives and priorities that flow from the overall institutional strategy. Some mentioned service-level agreements which set out

service standards to be expected. Staff were engaged in service development, regular workshops were mentioned, and they focused on teams to ensure that all staff have an opportunity to provide input. Project leadership is used to provide development opportunities for staff with appropriate expertise. However, there were at least two participants who expressed the challenges of arriving at consensus, adopting shared decision-making practices, and a whole department approach to service delivery and development. The aspiration held by many was expressed by one as follows.

We have a “one library” approach bringing staff into the conversation at all points of the discussion and support a “leading from everywhere” way of working to encourage people to step up and move beyond their role. On the whole, this works well, but not all staff are fully onboard with this approach, some lack confidence, and others would rather just do “the day job.”

Services are developed wherever possible using a blended approach, utilizing digital and virtual tools, with in-person support as required. Many offer staffed help points and online “chat” services. Some have taken on the role of a “one-stop shop” for user/student support. Some see successful delivery at its most effective when services and support are embedded within academic/stakeholder departments, and these and others have found opportunities for services and spaces to facilitate peer-to-peer collaboration.

3.2.2.4.1 Collections and access to information Many library participants shared collections policies and were participating in:

1. resource-sharing schemes,
2. managing local/regional/national archives,
3. developing Open Educational Resources (OERs),
4. open access and open science initiatives and managing repositories,
5. managing and digitizing cultural and special collections.

Many stated that they are actively working to “right-size” the physical print collection while maximizing space on campus for the use of students. Some had off-campus warehouses or stores for physical collections. Management practices include having a collection management team which looks after physical collections and handles interlibrary loans. At least one collection management team has developed a set of best practices for negotiating deals with publishers, suppliers, and providers, a manifesto for expectations of library vendors, and a webpage entitled *Transparency in Library Subscription Prices* where

prices of journals are published. All libraries are actively involved in consortia which support negotiations with publishers. Open access and open science are key goals for most participants.

Regarding special and cultural collections, more than four participants shared details of their collections of significant import. They are used in research and teaching and learning, and for exhibitions and events. The questions of preservation both of digital and physical content were raised as a challenge, and there was some mention of digital preservation of born-digital archives. One participant pointed to their work to “build a network of foundations and institutions that support funded projects to grow and develop digital collections and infrastructure.”

There was for many a clear focus on access not ownership, except where distinct advantage can be achieved. One content strategy was particularly clear with a strapline “enabling access for everyone” and included statements such as “connect rather than collect” and “we aim to have coherent collections that are capable of supporting research, not to collect everything.”

Other information provided pointed to a wide range of materials media, artworks, and other media as being part of the material collected and managed.

3.2.2.4.2 Digital capabilities Most library participants included information about their digital and information literacy frameworks and work. It is widely regarded as an important area of service delivery.

Our services to support information skills and digital capabilities are key service offerings, and as our environment keeps changing, the need for these services continues to increase. This is directly aligned with the university strategic goals around digital literacy which we hope will soon be reflected in our graduate attributes.

Some libraries have a “student digital capabilities framework” which outlines the skills and attributes that students need to be able to live, learn, and work in a digital society. There are online guides, videos, and webinars to enable students to develop digital skills at their own pace during their studies. Specialist staff work with academics to deliver digital and information literacy instruction.

3.2.2.4.3 Space: smart spaces, libraries, and learning commons The need for technology-rich spaces was highlighted. The extract below from

one respondent highlights the key points in this area:

There is a push to an integrated approach to modification or addition of real estate and spaces to accommodate the digital transformation agenda. There has been a disjoint in the past leading to spaces that are not smart or that do not provide necessary digital provisions.

This mainly is to provide spaces that have internet connectivity both wired or wireless as well as power for the user (student or staff) constantly using their gadgets (phone, tablet, and laptop). It cuts across classrooms, offices, lounges, gazebos, and other staff and student sitting areas

The importance of and the transformation of library spaces were covered by all library participants. Everyone discussed the opportunities and issues in managing and developing physical spaces. Learner and user-centered developments were shared, and the importance of sustainable developments and buildings was stressed. There were many kinds of zones or spaces referenced: postgraduate reading spaces, makerspaces, digitization labs, spaces for children, accessible rooms and facilities, exhibition spaces and galleries, and so on. The aim is to provide users with a safe and welcoming space where they can be inspired, meet, study, or simply relax.

The Learning Commons was noted as a key facility for the library and its users. Learning Commons provides versatile space to support group work as well as curricular and extracurricular activities.

One library is clear that library spaces are vital and unique:

A unique selling point we use on a regular basis is the third-place concept. This concept was articulated by Ray Oldenburg in his book The Great Good Place. Here he posits that for a healthy existence every person needs three places: a safe home, an interesting workplace, and a third place where other needs are met. This third place should be safe and welcoming, with long hours and few barriers to entry, and provide comfort. This may be a church, a pub, a bowling, or a community center. My belief is that for students on campus this third place is the library. They have the classroom and a dorm room, but we satisfy their needs for meeting, studying, or just relaxing. They come here for information or study; interaction or introspection; the buzz of the activity or the quiet of the stacks.

Some serious and significant challenges of space management were referenced and include incidents of sexual harassment and assault, floods, and fires.

3.2.2.4.4 ICT service delivery and development Respondents pointed to a wide range of ICT-related services and support. Mapping out the

needs of different user groups and user profiling is considered important. Providing consistently high levels of service and support across different products or services was also considered to be something to strive for. Service improvements which involve system downtime are carefully planned and scheduled for times when the impact on users is minimized. There are many new demands requested by users, and good practice involves customers in codesign of new products and services. In addition, innovation is self-generated:

Thought leadership work seeks to help to drive the sector forward when it comes to innovative use of technology, to help demonstrate the art of the possible, for example, our artificial intelligence support service.

Self-service has been adopted by many when planning for new IT-related services, and users have a range of channels to seek help, for example, telephone, email, online chat, walk in. For one organization, first-line support for hardware-related issues is outsourced to the vendor. For at least one participant, including the cost of internet, technology, and other services in the consolidated student tuition fees “ensures equality and inclusion which is especially key in bridging or avoiding the possible digital divide. For instance, scholarships which make up for a huge percentage of the allocation of the university’s income, when provided to an undergraduate student, allow them to own a laptop by default.”

Significant service improvements are planned and invested in through project funding, for example, ensuring that a network is fit for purpose in the future given developments in network technologies, for example, 5G and software-defined networking.

One participant outlined the complaints process in operation:

We operate a customer service desk which triages queries and complaints from customers. We are currently recruiting more resources into the customer complaint process. Customer complaints are tracked and analyzed for common causes and trends in order to continually improve our service. We produce a monthly customer insight report that collates feedback from our customer account managers to feed into the business.

There are many challenges and opportunities in relation to advances in ICT. In addition to those discussed previously, the environmental analysis above provides further commentary. However, it is worth noting here the significant matters of cybersecurity and the international and national cybersecurity approaches and plans.

3.2.3 Topic 3: Significant changes in response to COVID-related issues and opportunities

The challenges of service delivery and staff management in these pandemic times were described, and there was a sense that all the work on digitization, automation, developing online services, and investment in ICT positioned many participants well. Notwithstanding this, there were comments about the need to learn lessons and be better prepared for disruption:⁴

In order to survive or navigate through disrupted environments, it is imperative to develop strategic plans for disruptions of short and long terms.

Many participants stated that they were proud of their response and the work of their staff. However, three participants expressed some frustration in relation to senior decision-making, which was on occasions inconsistent, nonconsultative, and poorly communicated. There were some who considered that their response was not optimal, and one poignant reflection of “our response was poor” and “never disappoint your clients for any reason.” The pandemic impacted participants in different ways, and its severity was different depending on geographical location. Nevertheless, there is much commonality in the responses, all experienced new demands, and many rose to the challenge of these despite budget cuts. Five key themes emerged.

3.2.3.1 Demand for all things digital and ICT

The vital role that technology played in enabling teaching, learning, research, and service delivery to continue is clear with the move to online meetings and teaching, home working, and online chat. Providers of support and infrastructure for these online services saw greater appreciation for the work they do; their role increased in visibility and status and was clearly valued:

If there was ever a doubt about the significance of [the] department and the services they offer, COVID has come to dispel them and to remind everyone that technology is the engine that enables all else. It brought an urgency that has led to acceleration of digital projects across the university. Prioritization of ICT projects went up, and generally, the voice of [the department] has more weight in management circles and newfound respect from staff in general.

⁴ At the workshop, there was some commentary on the longevity of COVID responses and what will be most useful is identifying new practices which persist beyond the pandemic. This is another area for future exploration.

As the library is responsible for digital capability training development, we had to increase our support in this area to ensure that staff and students had support to use new digital tools being rolled out in teaching and learning, including technologies for digital assessments.

A range of technologies and tools were adopted and/or scaled up, for example, MS Teams, Adobe Forms and Adobe sign, Zoom, Camtasia. These new tools and ways of working online were adopted while mindful of cybersecurity. In addition, a focus on ICT and digital strategies intensified:

The adoption of a cloud-first strategy to provide always-on services and a gradual acceptance of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) that are cloud-based especially to gain on speed of rollout of digital services.

Mobile-first strategy equally continues to be an area of focus.

In the [new strategy] inclusion of objectives such as increasing the provision of digital content, optimize the use of virtual services tools by library staff, and innovatively use smart technologies to enable a digital-first library service, and experience shows the shift in focus that was brought on by managing COVID during 2020.

3.2.3.2 Management, strategies, relationships

[I have a new] appreciation of how crucial management decision-making process and leadership is on technology matters.

The alignment with larger institutional decision-making processes, the need to have a whole organization view and a seat at decision-making tables, and the need to be prepared with appropriate plans, and management approaches were all clearly stated. Specifically, plans for risk management, disaster management, and business continuity planning were all mentioned. Agile project management and juggling multiple projects were also stated as necessary in these COVID times. Relationships, partnerships, and connections to colleagues outside organizational boundaries were scaled up and considered important for delivering the pandemic response. For many participants, the establishment of “COVID response” working groups made up of a range of staff supported planning, adjustment, and communication of service changes and business continuity.

Most of the submissions stated that post-COVID there will not be a complete return to the way it operated pre-pandemic and that this is positive. For example, cross-university specialist teams shared good practice in online learning and engage with sector-wide organizations to understand better what future online learning might look like.

3.2.3.3 Library spaces and providing services in physical spaces

Where library spaces could remain open, they were valued and seen as safe environments for accessing the internet, finding some quiet and a space to study, research, and/or work away from home. This was particularly important for students who do not have a home away from the university and who needed support in the absence of family. A range of actions were taken at the start of the COVID pandemic to maintain a clean and functional environment for clients/users and staff. These included:

1. Removing chairs to enable physical distancing.
2. Booking of visits and study spaces.
3. Staff working at service points protected by plexiglass screens.
4. All library staff and users being required to wear a mask.
5. Monitoring of all entrances to the library by a thermal camera to detect anyone with a high temperature.
6. Increasing the ventilation airflow.
7. Regular cleaning of all surfaces with antiviral wipes, and the increasing the frequency of general cleaning.
8. Closing all drinking fountains whilst maintaining refill points for water bottles.

3.2.3.4 Print collections

For library collection access and management, book pickup, appointments to access collections, and scanning services were introduced. One participant was able to deliver packs of print materials to schools where they did not have the internet connections required for online learning remotely. There were some mentions of book quarantine and the risks of surface transmission of COVID. Largely, the difficulties in access in print were offset by digital access. Access to special collections was most impacted and managed through appointments and careful new hygiene protocols.

3.2.3.5 Services

For some, the change in demand for and the creation of new services were significant, and for others, it was an achievement to have any level of business continuity. The new and growing demands were triggered for many by the shift to online learning:

E-learning support was escalated as lecturers started to request assistance with obtaining copyright clearance for YouTube videos. Some faculty librarians checked terms of usage and provided codes to embed the videos. Copyright

and online learning material were explained in a copyright webinar, and the recording was widely distributed.

There was a need to shift our services to an online mode to interact with clients. This required staff to increase their digital capabilities and make changes to service delivery, ranging from small adjustments to reimagining services to developing new services. As the library is responsible for digital capability training development, we had to increase our support in this area to ensure that staff and students had support to use new digital tools being rolled out in teaching and learning, including technologies for digital assessments. This is one thing we can be particularly proud of, our willingness to step up and fill gaps or create services to make sure that students were supported—examples of this were laptop loans and exam support services.

For some, the library remained the main access point for online activity for many users/clients/students. New services were introduced which played to their location and positioning as a public/community service. One organization went as far as establishing a COVID-19 testing center on-site.

New and key services impacted include:

1. virtual reading rooms, group rooms with Zoom screens, and programs delivered by webinars.
2. increased its support for both staff and students in using new digital tools that were introduced to facilitate teaching, learning, and assessment.
3. collection was augmented by a significant number of e-books.
4. live “chat” to provide additional assistance to users.
5. work to make the online services more interactive and resources more readily discoverable.
6. website has been adapted to make remote services more prominent and easier to connect with.

In terms of communication with clients/user, chat, posters, social media, and information sheets and LibGuides were developed and made available online providing regularly updated details of available services and contact information.

3.2.3.6 Staff

The pandemic triggered several staffing challenges, some of which have turned into opportunities to do things differently, while others require ongoing management. On the latter, at least two participants discussed skills shortages and not being able to provide competitive rewards. This is most actuated in ICT, for example, information security experts, and

software developers. For one organization, this triggers the opportunity to develop a shared service. Well-being and mental health of staff were also key concerns mentioned, and the need for staff development and training in ICT tools.

In terms of opportunities, the move to remote working or working from home has been considered a success for many and will persist but not for all staff. One participant has made a successful shift to hybrid workforce:

When preparing to return to campus, we were given the option to allow hybrid remote and on-campus work with approval needed from the provost for anyone working over 50% remote. Few services/departments on campus took up this opportunity. They decided to simply make everyone come back to campus full-time so there could be no complaints of favoritism. We took a different tack. We looked at every position and asked three questions: Does this position lend itself to remote work? Is the person in the position capable of being fully productive in a remote environment? And does the employee wish to continue some amount of remote work? Eventually, only a handful of positions in public services came back to 100% on-campus work, 22 continued with 100% fully remote work, and everyone else has a hybrid schedule. This has been very successful. Our turnover is lower despite relatively low salaries, and productivity is extremely high. Our users do not see any difference as the services and resources they need are available as they have always been.

Shift working has been adopted within teams/sections to enable safe physical/social distancing in the offices. (In some areas, where feasible, alternating staffing groups were rostered to provide extra resilience in the event of individual sickness.)

During the pandemic, the dedicated COVID response teams—as well as leading the management of business continuity—also addressed health and safety issues and gave clear and regular messages to staff which they found reassuring.

Informal and social activities were organized on a virtual basis, and team meetings and check-in online were more frequent and, in some cases, more effective.

3.2.4 Topic 4: Staffing qualities, culture, structure, and change management

Some participants were very positive about staff and culture and clear about their objectives, for example:

Culture is a big determinant of whether a strategy will be achieved or not and so there has been a lot of effort to ingrain culture across the institution. [Our aim is to] develop and sustain competent, diverse, and agile staff. [We] continuously review its organizational structures, workflows, and processes with the

aim of improving effectiveness, and to prevent stagnation in the way things are done. The staff component is vibrant and diverse in terms of gender, race, culture, and age groups. With more younger staff members entering the profession, it also enables a culture change

Others pointed to the challenges of maintaining a workforce with the right skills at the time, particularly technical developers, and those with the digital and data skills required to build and deliver new services and support to clients. Building a workforce fit for the future is a focus for many. One organization is reviewing pay and reward to ensure we can attract the right talent for the organization: particularly important given the costs of living rise. Some participants have “people strategies” and dedicated HR experts for their departments. Some carry out engagement surveys to gather insight into staff concerns and satisfaction. Recruitment practices, induction programs and onboarding, and exit interviews were all mentioned. There are—as standard—induction programs for all new staff which include health and safety training which is then updated and reinforced on an annual basis.

At least three participants have designed and implemented major organizational change in recent years. For one, more than half of the workforce has been refreshed. For others, change is incremental and continuous. New staffing positions have been created to cover specific responsibilities such as data specialists, copyright, learning spaces, and student engagement. For ICT cloud, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and data science skills are important, and “the plain old, systems development skills are in very high demand.” There are graduate, apprenticeship, and other schemes aimed at growing talent, particularly in technical areas where the employment market is pushing out not-for-profit organizations.

There was evidence of well-planned and considered change management processes. These drew on support from HR departments as well as organizational psychologists and others outside experts and facilitators. One shared a new approach which aimed to engage staff:

We have recently moved to an approach of sense making when it comes to changes. While we do have key messages and information to share with staff, managers within teams are asked to do sensemaking conversations around changes with their staff in smaller groups. This allows people to talk through what is happening, and for the managers to link back to strategic goals in a way that makes sense to their teams. We are aware that change is now going to be a constant part of staff lives so need an approach that will help support staff with this. This sensemaking approach allows staff to share feedback in an environment

where they feel comfortable, and then their input is captured by team leaders or managers and shared back to the executive team.

Most respondents stated a view that change is constant. It follows that there is a clear need for constant communication between management, staff, and users around whatever change is currently underway. One participant reflected on the need to engage more with staff. Others discussed the range of tools used for internal communication.

Before launching a new initiative, there was evidence of detailed and deep work to consider issues such as context, staff capacity, and culture. Many were able to involve managers at all levels, and there was acknowledgment that they play a key part in bringing about change within the organization and the culture. One respondent mentioned a staff working party which was investigating the need for organizational structure changes. After any significant organizational change, at least one participant stated that there was a post-implementation review involving staff which is used to assess progress and success.

Many organizations were purposefully working to build a culture of high performance, accountability, and excellence which is seen as vital to delivering organizational strategies, providing a foundation for the new organizational approach. Most participants stated that an annual performance and development review were in place and working well; one also mentioned team reviews. For many, staff were encouraged to develop beyond their current role limits and develop their careers. The staff development budget can support this and is considered a priority when budget setting. Development opportunities offered are open to individuals and groups, and they are wide-ranging: mentoring, coaching, conferences, online training, secondments, etc. The challenges of calling out poor performance and managing it were also mentioned by some. All staff had, as a minimum, a monthly one-to-one with their supervisor.

There is also significant effort going into encouraging collaboration across the whole organization/university to avoid “silo-thinking” and promote interconnections. There were some reflections on what it is to be a visible and connected leader in building collaborative and open cultures. One organization had a one-page documented aspiration for organizational culture developed by the staff. Challenges discussed were also within departments and divisions between staff groupings highlighted. Many stated that management teams work collaboratively with the other institutional directorates, such as finance, estates, IT, and HR.

Other points of note included:

1. The role of subject/outreach/liaison librarians was considered, for some being embedded in faculties is the norm and working well.
2. Health, safety, and wellness and creating a culture of inclusivity were significant areas of development for many participants.
3. Staff are encouraged to volunteer in support of selected charities as part of a corporate social responsibility.

3.2.5 Topic 5: Impact monitoring and review

There is some discussion in Topic 3 above on measuring impact. Impact monitoring and review is widely regarded as routine. Examples of activities and outputs shared included:

1. Service statements or service-level agreements are published, and there are clear service delivery measures which are used to monitor performance.
2. Performance data (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed) is routinely collected and monitored by the senior management team.
3. Service reviews are carried out, sometimes with external facilitation and/or input, as part of the strategic plan review phase.
4. To gather feedback from its users/clients/customers, there is a major survey exercise every few years with occasional small-scale surveys organized around particular initiatives or issues.

There is a range of techniques used to gather specific data, such as user satisfaction and researcher needs surveys and focus groups, as well as ethnographic studies and staff exit interviews. In addition, clients/users are invited to provide feedback via feedback forms which are readily available at service points, and there is a suggestion box to encourage feedback from all users. The library/department/service organization:

1. makes its operational data available within the sector to enable comparisons between comparable organizations.
2. engages with and takes note of league tables covering issues such as international ranking, citations, sustainability, grants, etc.
3. participates in national associations to identify and understand best practice.

Other points made were that staff keep up to date by both actual visits to other organizations and by reading professional journals and that external consultants are used to carry out periodic value-for-money studies.

Some respondents stated that they

1. produce an annual report which displays the service level achieved and demonstrates the contribution made by the library to the wider institutional strategic plan. It may also highlight quality assurance procedures and any significant initiatives in support of teaching and learning and research.
2. keep track of performance using a balanced scorecard approach, which includes data from an annual customer survey.
3. make use of the Plan, Implement, Review, Improve (PIRI) model in order to track performance effectiveness.

3.2.6 Topics for workshop discussion and summary of the discussion

During the consideration of responses to the benchmarking prompts, it was clear that there was blurring across the five categories. The Expert Advisor—drawing on her own experience and knowledge of the current operating environment—identified five cross-cutting topics for our workshop discussion. For each of these, participants pointed to achievements, challenges, and opportunities for future development. The themes were inspiring, inclusive, and smart spaces; building and maintaining a diverse and healthy workforce and culture—fit for the future; technology is changing our lives, how do we navigate the challenges, ensure no-one is left behind and take the opportunities; collecting and collections—costs, concerns, decolonization, and connections; power and positioning—influencing the top table and maintaining strategic alignment and funding. Participants who commented on these areas in depth within their written submissions were asked to provide introductory remarks in each of these areas before the discussion was opened up to all. The topics, with some questions used to prompt discussion, and key discussion points are presented below.

These topics and questions are not prescriptive; they were used as prompts to aid thinking and discussion. Different discussion points arising from the report were welcomed.

3.2.6.1 Workshop Topic 1. Inspiring, inclusive, smart spaces

3.2.6.1.1 Discussion questions

1. What does third place thinking mean for our space redevelopments?
2. What opportunities do smart technologies bring to enhance our spaces?

3. What technologies should we provide in our spaces and what spaces do clients/users need to engage with technology?
4. What is changing and what could we be more radical about or what might no longer be required?
5. What support and help should be delivered face to face and how?

3.2.6.1.2 Key discussion points The topic was introduced with a talk about the third space (Oldenburg, 1991) and how it applies to libraries, particularly for students who do not have a place to call home. The characteristics include is open for long hours and that everyone is treated as equal. A key takeaway was the phrase being “alone together” in the library; another was around hive mentality. The move to off-site book storage to free up space for students in libraries was widely accepted and experienced.

It was considered important for students to see peers employed in libraries; it is easier for students to ask for the help of someone who looks like them and provides much-needed employment.

Others described their innovations with space including the GlamX Studio for Digital Humanities, a facility embedded into students’ courses.

There was agreement that new spaces have great potential for integrating technology. They are places for staff and students to play and experiment. Technology can be used to facilitate student connections. To us, technology is an add-on, but to students it is integrated. Other great spaces for students described included the living room concept and spaces with sleep pods.

An important question “who *doesn’t* use the third space?” was raised. The discussion considered conducting surveys outside of libraries elsewhere on campus, often with only one or two questions—usually about opening hours or technology—to maintain attention.

Later in the workshop, a point was made about the challenge of delivering welcoming third spaces which are staffed with people.

3.2.6.2 Workshop Topic 2. A diverse and healthy workforce and culture—fit for the future

3.2.6.2.1 Discussion questions

1. How do we recruit and retain the staff we need?
2. Maintaining training and development budgets and activity: is it challenging, and are we finding ways to develop the right skills?
3. What mindsets do we need for the future?

4. How are we approaching culture development and change, what are the difficulties, and what more can we consider?
5. What is the impact of remote working, and how can we take the opportunities it brings?
6. Moving to interconnectedness and away from silos within our departments and beyond, what are the steps that take us forward?

3.2.6.2.2 Key discussion points The opening talk highlighted that there has been a major shift in the last 10 years in terms of workforce and culture. There is a move toward hybrid and virtual services and ways of working. New positions are being created especially around research data management, digital service managers, and data curators. The importance of developing staff holistically was stressed; they must be kept productive and provided with enrichment opportunities. Wellness is an institutional priority.

COVID has helped focus on staff retention and introduced more flexible working practices. These practices are different across institutions with many opportunities for positive outcomes. Staff retention and recruitment are impacted by the good things—positive workforce management practices—that are happening in institutions. These include internship opportunities, training and development, and flexible working.

Comments included the importance of workforce culture, for example

1. Culture should be nurtured so that staff see themselves as part of the organization.
2. Silos must be avoided.
3. Maintaining momentum and effort when there is great pressure of work and budget/resource cuts.

However, one participant reminded us that teams are still needed and can be overlapping. Staff members can have several team identities. It is not necessarily desirable to get rid of all silos. And question 5 was reframed as: will remote working support this need to retain teams on some level? What will be the impact of hybrid working on all this?

An example of good practice shared was an organization with two culture development streams: Stream 1 is professionally based where professional development is the focus and includes a once-a-month talk over lunch. Conferences and project-based work might be discussed. Stream 2 is about social sharing and is fun. Topics have covered making bread, soap, a new language, Italian cooking, dieting, traveling, and volunteering. These help to break down barriers among the staff body.

Other major points of discussion included the upskilling of staff particularly in relation to digital skills. Skills development could be focused on the latest trends such as Wikithons or mashups, and software carpentry was considered a helpful approach. There was a consideration of culture change. Many leaders reported looking for a one-library approach and deploying technology to help with engagement, going beyond communication. One shared their experience of setting up communities of practice at their institution and using annual performance and development reviews as a channel for culture change. There were two other important points made. First, the recognition that for some institutions, the reality is that people are not paid enough and access to training and development opportunities go some way toward compensating for this. Second, the major shift in staff training and development to prioritize cultural awareness. The need to change mindsets so as to change practices of the library is considered vital to addressing and raising awareness that the library is not neutral and instead a product of the colonial environment.

Finally, seeing library and ICT services/departments in the wider institutional context is important; we are interconnected and interdependent. A new model—different from the current departmentalization across institutions—is needed; we need more opportunities to forget our departmental orientations to focus on delivering across institutions.

3.2.6.3 Workshop Topic 3. Technology is changing our lives

3.2.6.3.1 Discussion questions

1. How is technology changing our services and education more broadly?
2. What is the impact of technology on staff and the clients we serve, and how can we develop everyone's digital capability?
3. How do we navigate the challenges that technology presents?
4. How do we ensure that no-one is left behind?
5. What are the real opportunities now, and how can we take them?

3.2.6.3.2 Key discussion points The opening talk set the context as being the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the need to come up with ways to ensure that everyone is “plugged-in.” It was stressed that there needs to be value in the technology for everyone. The takeaway phrase was “bringing everyone to the fireplace” to gain the benefits of the digital world. Other key opening points were:

1. Digital innovation in the academic world lags that of other industries, and there are many lessons we can learn from others.
2. Mobile-first strategy.
3. Keeping up to date is a challenge, given the speed and urgency of digital transformation.

Facilities and services referred to included

1. Self-service lockers also provide spaces where valuable items can be left securely. These valuable items are growing in number such as phones, laptops, HDMI cables, webcams, etc. Students believe the library to be a safe place! This is a misconception.
2. Facial recognition at the entrance to the library.
3. One institution has 800 laptops for loan. This number is very high because the richest college in the university is business which turns technology over the fastest. Surplus tech then comes to the library.
4. A vending machine for high-demand books.
5. Balancing desktop computers with laptops for loan. Providing facilities so students can just plug in! Desktop computer usage is decreasing, but we still need them for the big screen capability. It is a balancing act.

Other discussion points referenced the persisting digital divide and how we engage with students to inform our digital developments. On the latter, points were made that students are being constantly surveyed and that different technologies are appropriate for different purposes, for example trying to read a research article on a phone doesn't work.

Two important questions were asked. First, what do we need now and what do we need tomorrow? Second, how do we create digital leadership with nondigital leaders? Responses included, relying on and employing experts, understanding our business models deeply and how technology can then enable them, good governance structures, IT champions plugged into schools and so getting advice from our own university experts.

Finally, this discussion topic looped back to the spaces (Topic 1) with consideration of whether a highly technological space is a contradiction to the concept of a third space. The answer eluded the group but, in the discussion, important questions were raised:

1. Where does it not add value to have someone there (even just a smiling face)?
2. Are we employing the right people with the right technical expertise?
3. Where can we employ students to deliver service?

3.2.6.4 Workshop Topic 4. Collecting and collections—costs, concerns, decolonization, and connections

3.2.6.4.1 Discussion questions

1. How do we best navigate our histories, and how they have shaped our collections and practices?
2. Where are we now with our practices, what challenges do we face, and what more can we and should we do?
3. What are the challenges and aspirations of sustainable collections?
4. Moving from collecting to making connections and how do we take our clients on the journey?
5. Preservation and publication, what are the infrastructure and user challenges and opportunities?

3.2.6.4.2 Key discussion points The topic was introduced with a talk about the key challenges and current good practice in collecting—print, digital, special, and legal deposit. Highlights included:

1. The emphasis in many cases can be on connecting rather than collecting. Where there is not a preservation need, connecting can be the preferred approach. If connecting is the route, then digital literacy becomes very important. How do you reflect user needs in your service when the environment and technologies continue to change?
2. Interlibrary loans are on a downward trend.
3. Decolonizing the collection means, for example, research on provenance and “surfacing our collections and displays” and co-collecting with community groups.
4. Sustainable collections are important because people want sustainability, and it means a lot to them.
5. There are staff, user groups, and life-cycle costs to consider. With print, we can calculate the cost to keep a book for 100 years. It is very difficult to do this for digital versions, particularly if you are focusing on connecting rather than collecting.
6. Digital has a carbon cost. How is this calculated? You cannot just carry on making multiple digital copies of everything. There is a lack of discipline in this regard. There is a carbon cost to consider, and this should be part of our public accountability.

3.2.6.4.3 Discussion points

1. We need to understand the public/institutional value of our collections.
2. Digital collections are core not an add-on.

3. We need to help users understand open access.
4. The library is seen as a trusted authority; as such, we should connect to content which is appropriate to our users.
5. Collections require continual investment; how do we decide what must be preserved and kept in perpetuity?

3.2.6.5 Workshop Topic 5. Power and positioning

3.2.6.5.1 Discussion questions

1. We have nailed our strategic alignment and our strategic development processes, but can we do more to be influential, secure additional funding, maintain and develop greater strategic alignment, and demonstrate value?
2. Are our consultation and stakeholder engagement processes and practices fit for a more competitive future?

3.2.6.5.2 Key discussion points In the benchmarking prompt responses, there were implicit and, in some cases, explicit references to senior colleagues and institutional position. There are challenges in navigating politics and being able to influence decisions. In the opening talk for this discussion, the following key points were shared:

1. University librarians can report to different senior members of universities and must work with many, across different portfolios including administrative units, student experience, teaching and learning, and research.
2. Extensive stakeholder consultations mean that funding proposals and new strategies do not come as a surprise and are well understood and supported.
3. Proactive responses to crises—most notably COVID—have positioned the library well within universities as vital to the student experience and as responsive service departments. We have moved from “do not forget us” exchanges to being at the forefront of everyone’s mind.
4. Libraries are traditionally good at engaging with other departments, at consultation, and at partnership.
5. It is important to help decision-makers understand the scale and depth of what we do.

Several further points were made. They included acknowledging developments—beyond our COVID response—which makes libraries more visible, namely new buildings, Open Access developments and working in partnership with university research offices. Also included was discussion on efforts to develop our staff for new library roles, to create the workforce for the future.



4 Good practice statements

What follows are the statements of good practice. A senior manager would be able to reflect on each of the statements and consider whether or not they might apply to their own circumstances or context. Some statements might be considered “low-hanging fruit” and be very easy to implement, and others may require more planning and preparation and consultation.

a Principal principles and values of your institution and your department(s)

The library’s/department’s/service organization’s:

- i. vision, mission, and goals are reviewed, and if necessary refined, on a 3-yearly cycle.
- ii. strategy feeds into the institutional or wider strategies which in turn are approved regularly by the organization’s board or other overseeing body.
- iii. values include transparency, accountability, sustainability, professionalism, open-mindedness, pro-activity, inclusivity, customer-focused, innovative, committed, flexibility, ethical, and responsible.
- iv. the senior management team is well connected and involved in all the significant senior committees and groupings.
- v. management’s involvement in the wider organizational committee structure ensures that key priorities are relevant and promulgated widely.

In developing and reviewing strategies,

- i. The review process involves extensive consultation between staff and managers.
- ii. Users/clients/customers/students were consulted extensively.
- iii. There is a regular environmental scanning process which ensures that strategies and action plans remain current and which monitors a range of key global issues.
- iv. An external facilitator was engaged to help steer the extensive consultation process in identifying and refining strategic objectives for the following 3-year period.
- v. There is an annual retreat when all library staff have an opportunity to review the previous year’s achievements and to consider the goals of the forthcoming year.

- vi.** There are regular events organized to celebrate key achievements in relation to strategic priorities.
- vii.** Each year goals are specified which in turn shape the overall direction of the department and capture initiatives and specify timeframes and key performance measures.
- viii.** There are regular weekly meetings of the executive team which address both strategic and operational issues.
- ix.** When developing or refining strategies, key issues are “adopted” by senior managers who take on the role of coordinators or champions.
- x.** Every team has strategic theme champions who actively promote strategic issues.
- xi.** Initiatives to utilize automation and technology to best effect are regularly reviewed.

The library’s/department’s/service organization’s purpose and principles include:

- i.** Engaging proactively with the user/client/customer/academic communities to facilitate new techniques and approaches to teaching, learning, and research.
- ii.** Providing space and facilities for learning (in a “Learning Commons”) that supports inclusivity and aims to overcome digital inequality.
- iii.** A core mission is to utilize both physical and/or virtual spaces to complement the teaching and research and academic excellence.
- iv.** Taking a leading role in recording and reporting on research activity.
- v.** Recognizing its role in influencing culture and community spirit.
- vi.** Aspiring to be a leader in equity, diversity, and inclusion
- vii.** Using its role as custodian of archives to preserve knowledge of the past for the benefit of the future.
- viii.** The service is committed to supporting and developing open access for the benefit of the research community.

b Strategic planning and managerial objectives

- i.** There is a governance framework in place which clarifies key decision-making groups and methodology. (The Board of Governors approves significant strategic decisions for implementation by the executive.)
- ii.** Project finances are closely monitored, and forecasts of outcomes are regularly reviewed.

- iii. There are regular user/customer surveys aimed at identifying any key concerns and future needs.
- iv. Targets are used to help measure performance, including customer satisfaction, grant funding, media coverage, staff engagement, and audit/risk reports.
- v. Activity is regularly monitored to ensure that it remains strategically driven.
- vi. Each department/section develops its own operational plan which reflects the objectives and priorities that flow from the overall institutional strategy.
- vii. Every service department is required to have a service-level agreement which sets out its services and standards to be expected.
- viii. Customer/user feedback is used to help prioritize and plan new initiatives.
- ix. There are regular workshops focused on teams to ensure that all staff have an opportunity to provide input.
- x. Project leadership is used to provide development opportunities for staff with appropriate expertise.
- xi. The organization/library makes use of any opportunity to generate income from projects such as exhibitions and sales.
- xii. A range of KPIs are used to evaluate effectiveness against specified goals.
- xiii. All projects have a risk register developed and monitored as part of the project.
- xiv. The library/department works closely with the organization's risk management department on issues around business continuity, risk, and incidents.
- xv. The library/department has a business continuity plan.
- xvi. There are very clear policies dealing with health and safety issues.
- xvii. The organization's risk or audit committee pays particular attention to organizational resilience.
- xviii. The library/service participates in resource-sharing schemes and manages local/regional/national archives.
- xix. There are dedicated support services for researchers, teaching staff, medical programs, and international students.
- xx. There are specialist support services for researchers as well as services specifically designed for students.

- xxi.** There are dedicated initiatives to support indigenous students, staff, colleagues, and clients.
- xxii.** The service/library recognizes the opportunities presented by technology developments such as AI and robotics.
- xxiii.** There is a program to improve skills capacity within the library staff in the field of data management and analysis.
- xxiv.** Services are developed wherever possible using a blended approach, utilizing digital and virtual tools, with in-person support as required.
- xxv.** There is a “Student Digital Capabilities Framework” which outlines the skills and attributes that students need to be able to live, learn, and work in a digital society.
- xxvi.** There are online guides, videos, and webinars to enable students to develop digital skills at their own pace during the course of their studies.
- xxvii.** Specialists work with academics to deliver digital and information literacy instruction.
- xxviii.** The library is actively working to “right-size” the physical print collection while maximizing space on campus for the use of students.
- xxix.** There is a plan to work toward a digital-first library service and experience.
- xxx.** There is a collection management team which looks after physical collections and handles interlibrary loans, etc.
- xxxi.** The collection management team has developed a set of best practices for negotiating deals with publishers, suppliers, and providers.
- xxxii.** The library is actively involved in consortia which support negotiations with publishers, and open access is a key goal of the library service.
- xxxiii.** Services and support are embedded within academic/stakeholder departments.
- xxxiv.** The library/service offers a “one-stop shop” for user/student support.
- xxxv.** Services and spaces facilitate peer-to-peer collaboration.
- xxxvi.** Both a staffed help point and an online “chat” service are offered.
- xxxvii.** The aim is to provide users with a safe and welcoming space where they can meet, study, or simply relax.

- xxxviii.** There is exhibition space available which is well used and regularly attracts high attendance and positive feedback.
- xxxix.** The Learning Commons is a key facility for the library and its users. The Learning Commons provides versatile space to support group work as well as curricular and extracurricular activities.
 - xl** The library works closely with the facilities division to ensure that the buildings remain in good condition and fit for purpose.
 - xli.** Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are reflected both in the services and in the staffing. (There are specialist staff trained to work in the field of EDI.)
 - xlvi.** Care is taken to engage stakeholders (internal and external, top-down and bottom-up) to ensure key decisions are founded in an inclusive process.
 - xlvi.** There is a development director who has specific responsibilities for library fundraising.
 - xlii.** The library has access to dedicated endowment funds.
 - xlii.** Development funding is supported by an active alumni and partner engagement program.
 - xlii.** Staff are encouraged to volunteer in support of selected charities as part of a corporate social responsibility.
 - xlvii.** The service/library is an active member of regional, national, and international consortia.
 - xlviii.** The library seizes every opportunity to introduce change and improvement into its operation. ("Never waste a good crisis.")
 - xlix.** There is an innovation fund available to provide grants for innovative projects.

c Significant changes in response to COVID-related issues and opportunities

Management, strategies, relationships

- i.** The library recognizes the importance of developing strategic disaster management plans.
- ii.** The changes brought about by the pandemic have accelerated thinking and action focused on sustainability and the library's aim for carbon net zero.
- iii.** While developing the remote working culture, the issue of cyber security remained at the forefront of planning and technological developments. (The need for skilled information security experts is fully recognized.)

- iv. The service/library accepts that post-COVID there will not be a complete return to the way it operated pre-pandemic. This has resulted in some changes in the strategic direction and consideration of continuing flexible working arrangements.
- v. Sharing good practice in online learning should enable academic staff to focus more on guiding, mentoring, and passing on wisdom and insight.
- vi. The service/library has adopted a “cloud-first” strategy to provide a reliable and readily available service.
- vii. Specialist teams engaged with sector-wide organizations to understand better what future online learning might look like.

Library spaces and providing services in physical spaces

- i. A range of actions were taken at the start of the COVID pandemic to maintain a clean/safe/functional environment for clients/users and staff.
- ii. The library was seen as a comfortable and quiet environment for online work.
- iii. Seating capacity was reduced during the COVID crisis in order to facilitate social distancing.
- iv. The only group study rooms open for use were those with glass walls to enable monitoring of behavior and enforce social distancing and mask requirements.
- v. Staff working at service points are protected by plexiglass screens.
- vi. All library staff and users are required to wear a mask while present in the library environment.
- vii. All entrances to the library are monitored by a thermal camera to detect anyone with a high temperature.
- viii. The ventilation airflow has been increased.
- ix. All surfaces are regularly sprayed and cleaned with antiviral wipes, and the frequency of cleaning has been increased.
- x. All drinking fountains have been closed, though there are refill points for water bottles.

Services

- i. The service/library remained the main access point for online activity for many users/clients/students.
- ii. There was a program to provide laptops to those who needed them to connect with online activities.

- iii. The service/library has had to accelerate its service transformation, for example, virtual reading rooms, group rooms with Zoom screens, and programs delivered by webinars.
- iv. The library will be exploring the extent to which it can continue to support the new modes of study in a post-COVID environment.
- v. During COVID, the library increased its support for both staff and students in using new digital tools that were introduced to facilitate teaching, learning, and assessment.
- vi. The library produced an information sheet made available online which provided details of available services and contact information. This information sheet was regularly updated.
- vii. During the COVID pandemic, the library's collection was augmented by a significant number of e-books.
- viii. The library escalated the level of e-learning support to cover copyright clearance for videos that staff wanted to embed in their programs.
- ix. There were workshop webinars arranged to support those new to the increased reliance on technology.
- x. The library launched a live "chat" facility to provide additional assistance to its users.
- xi. There is work to make the online services more interactive and resources more readily discoverable.
- xii. Website has been adapted to make remote services more prominent and easier to connect with.

Staff

- i. Wherever possible, working from home was facilitated.
- ii. Shift working has been adopted within teams/sections to enable safe physical/social distancing in the offices. (In some areas, where feasible, alternating staffing groups were rostered to provide extra resilience in the event of individual sickness.)
- iii. The library is addressing the well-being issues that arise from the isolation of working from home.
- iv. During the pandemic, there was a dedicated COVID response team which could address health and safety issues and clarify policies and messaging.
- v. Informal and social activities were organized on a virtual basis.

d Staffing qualities, culture, structure, and change management

- i.** The library/department/service organization:
 - is attempting to build a culture of high performance, accountability, and excellence providing a foundation for the new organizational approach.
 - invests significant effort in encouraging collaboration across the whole university to avoid “silo-thinking” and promote inter-connections.
- ii.** Staff are encouraged to develop beyond their current role limits.
- iii.** There is an active staff development program which helps to create a culture of inclusivity.
- iv.** There is an additional staffing budget to cover overtime and strategic projects which may require the bringing in of external expertise.
- v.** New staffing positions have been created to cover specific responsibilities such as data specialists, copyright, learning spaces, and student engagement.
- vi.** There is a regular staff performance review program to ensure that individual and organizational goals are suitably aligned.
- vii.** The pay and rewards structure is regularly reviewed to ensure that the right talent and skills can be recruited and retained.
- viii.** There is a graduate and apprenticeship scheme to help “grow our own talent,” especially in technical and cybersecurity areas.
- ix.** There is a graduate scheme providing a 2-year rotational program involving a number of specialist teams within the library structure.
- x.** Staff development activity has always been given a high priority within the library.
- xi.** There is a wide range of online training resources available to staff.
- xii.** Staff are offered development, mentoring, and coaching to support their growth within the library. (This may include periods of secondment to different roles.)
- xiii.** Part of the staff development program is to encourage staff engagement with conferences, workshops, and seminars.
- xiv.** There is a strong budget for staff development which is used for both individual- and group-based initiatives.

- xv.** The staff development policies and the performance review system are designed to achieve a workforce that is fit for the future.
- xvi.** There are several “hot desks” to facilitate cross-campus working.
- xvii.** All staff have, as a minimum, a monthly one-to-one with their supervisor.
- xviii.** The induction program for all new staff includes health and safety training which is then updated and reinforced on an annual basis.
- xix.** Health and safety, sustainability and climate action, and EDI are all included in every job description and in the performance review process as targets and standards to be met.
- xx.** EDI policies are institution-wide, and the library follows these policies and has produced locally relevant guidelines.
- xxi.** Everyone is encouraged to report if they witness any problems with EDI. There is a whistleblower protection program in place.
- xxii.** There is a staff engagement group which provides a forum to explore and develop initiatives to create and enhance a positive and supportive culture.
- xxiii.** There are regular reviews of behaviors and feedback to monitor progress toward culture change.
- xxiv.** There is a welfare committee which monitors institutional-wide concerns and emerging issues.
- xxv.** All staff above a particular grade are eligible to attend 6 months + courses on management and leadership.
- xxvi.** Succession plans are in place to be proactive in addressing the needs where experienced staff members are likely to be retiring in the near future.
- xxvii.** The staffing profile is diverse in terms of gender, race, culture, and age.
- xxviii.** There are clear guidelines on how to manage poor performance.

e Impact monitoring and review (including change management mechanisms)

- i.** The library/department/service organization:
 - produces an annual report which displays the service level achieved and demonstrates the contribution made by the library to the wider institutional strategic plan. It may also highlight quality assurance procedures and any significant initiatives in support of teaching and learning and research.

- keeps track of its performance using a balanced scorecard approach, supplemented by an annual customer survey.
 - makes use of the Plan, Implement, Review, Improve (PIRI) model in order to track performance effectiveness.
- ii.** The management and staff take the view that change is constant. It follows that there is a clear need for constant communication between management, staff, and users around whatever change is currently underway.
 - iii.** The communications team keeps activities visible through social media and generates a range of virtual marketing materials.
 - iv.** All new projects and initiatives will have identified measures of success (both quantitative and qualitative), and all strategic projects are monitored and measured against the initial plan.
 - v.** Prior to launching a new initiative, senior managers would consider issues such as context, staff capacity and culture, etc.
 - vi.** A range of project and program management techniques are used and matched to the nature of each project/initiative.
 - vii.** When developing a new initiative, a project team is set up to ensure that the best and most appropriate staff are able to contribute to the planning.
 - viii.** There is a clear project, program, and change management framework which helps to achieve consistency and effectiveness in management.
 - ix.** Managers at all levels play a key part in bringing about change within the organization and the culture.
 - x.** The management team works collaboratively with the other institutional directorates, such as finance, estates, IT, and HR.
 - xi.** All new strategic initiatives will have identified “champions” in areas such as finance and facilities who will support the project throughout its lifetime.
 - xii.** There is a formal HR/consultative system in place to manage any significant organizational/staffing change program, which generally results in positive engagement.
 - xiii.** After any significant organizational change, there is a postimplementation review after 12 months (involving a detailed staff survey) which is used to assess progress and success.
 - xiv.** Each service area publishes service pledges, and there are clear service delivery measures which are used to monitor performance.
 - xv.** Performance data (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed) is routinely collected and monitored by the senior management team.

- xvi.** A service performance review is regularly carried out, using an external facilitator, as part of the strategic plan review phase.
- xvii.** In order to gather feedback from its users/clients/customers, there is a major survey exercise every few years with occasional small-scale surveys organized around particular initiatives or issues.
- xviii.** There is a range of techniques used to gather specific data, such as:
 - User satisfaction surveys,
 - Researcher needs surveys,
 - Ethnographic studies,
 - Focus groups, and
 - Staff exit interviews.
- xix.** Clients/users are invited to provide feedback via feedback forms which are readily available at service points, and there is a suggestion box to encourage feedback from all users.
- xx.** The library/department/service organization:
 - makes its operational data available within the sector to enable comparisons between comparable organizations.
 - engages with and takes note of league tables covering issues such as international ranking, citations, sustainability, grants, etc.
 - participates in national associations in order to identify and understand best practice.
- xxi.** Staff keep up to date by both actual visits to other organizations and by reading professional journals.
- xxii.** External consultants are used to carry out periodic value-for-money studies.



5 Review and reflection

For the facilitators and authors of the benchmarking exercise, bringing together a group of senior people from around the world and asking for their time required a firm belief in the value of our approach. It also came with expectations; the benchmarking participants were from great institutions and as individuals had track records of success. They offered a range of impromptu feedback after the workshop element of the exercise. Two examples are as follows:

Many thanks once again for such a stimulating and thoroughly enjoyable workshop. I certainly learned a lot.

I just wanted to drop a note of thanks for a fantastic meeting. Even though it was in the middle of the night, I can honestly say it was the most engaged and interested I have been in a meeting in quite some time.

As facilitators and authors, our reflections fix this experience as something unique and valuable.

5.1 Caroline's reflections

As University Librarian at the University of Queensland, engaging with a professional community in dialog in a supportive and appreciative way is poles apart from the painful consideration of numbers in quantitative benchmarking in universities. For me, I anticipated that in sharing current practice we would find what is good and great, and I hoped that we would go further and generate new thinking which could take library and information services development further. And we did.

To facilitate the exercise as a peer in the role of expert advisor was reenergizing. It was an uplifting and cathartic experience. What we experienced and report here is a real-world optimistic expression of the contribution of library and information services to education. The professional ethos and service ethic implicit in contributions are affirming and inspiring. To know that difficult experiences are shared by peers—and that however differently we feel, think, and respond to them—in these challenging times I am not alone.

5.2 Cliff's reflections

As a senior HE management consultant and the designer and leader of the Association of Commonwealth Universities Benchmarking Program, I came to this exercise with a proven methodology to reinvent and apply in a new way. It is important to understand that it is nonprescriptive; what we look at is practice that is happening in the participating organizations, and we distill from that statements of good practice. These statements are, if you like, the benchmarks, which the managers can use after the event to improve the effectiveness of their operation. We are looking at strategic improvement, and the process is designed to enable us to share good and bad experiences.

The statements that we end up with will be, in effect, a set of options for managers; they will be able to look down the list and decide which ones might apply particularly to their own circumstances, recognizing that some will not. They will also be able to work out which ones are what you might call low-hanging fruit, very easy to implement, and can be achieved overnight. Some of the options in the statements of good

practice will be rather more challenging and may require longer-term planning before introducing them.

It is also important to understand what our program is not; we will not be creating, and it does not facilitate the creation of league tables. Because again, I know, as a senior manager myself, there would be half a mind on how it would affect our standing in relation to our competitors and funding. Because it is a qualitative, rather than quantitative exercise, we steer well clear of that. This is purely designed to produce a mechanism to help senior managers plan and enhance their strategic management.

5.3 Lucy's and David's reflections

As co-chairs of the qualitative benchmarking project and editors of recent publications *Future Directions in Digital Information: Predictions, Practice, Participation* (Elsevier, 2020) and *Libraries, Digital Information and COVID: Practical Applications and Approaches to Challenge and Change* (Elsevier, 2021), the qualitative benchmarking approach offered something different. As we shared key elements of these books in international webinars, we were very impressed by the numbers who wanted not only to learn from the experiences of the last few years, but also to create ways of determining to best effect the major strategic choices for the future. And this qualitative benchmarking approach seemed the most obvious place to start, hence, this project, and the follow-on book.



6 Outcomes

In this challenging environment, participants—wherever they are in the world—are delivering great service and support and are adapting to disruption. There is much to be inspired by and to learn from and many examples of good—and indeed best—practice, as evinced by the benchmarking statements which were themselves drawn from the institutions' own work.

It is obvious that the participants involved have developed strategies, systems, processes, and practices that integrate with other key areas of their institutions or the education and information services landscape they serve. In particular, strategic development and review practices are mature and exemplary. We hope that the relationships forming across this benchmarking group will be long-lasting.

In terms of responses to COVID, there are many examples of getting it right, and when we feel that we have fallen short, there is reflection and learning. This benchmarking process is for leaders, every participant pointed to resilience, adaptation, and future focus, all vital qualities of great leadership. It was also clear that there is a deep commitment to service and to delivering value and public good.

The impact of the pandemic is felt across everything we do and has the potential to continue to revolutionize our workforce and services. Many of the participants see now as a watershed moment, where we can seize the opportunity to introduce more change. In the words of one:

Planning in a disrupted environment was certainly heightened during the pandemic, but prior to the pandemic there was already recognition among the leadership team that we needed to change both the services we delivered and the way we delivered them. COVID forced us into making changes in a shorter timeframe, but many of the things we were responding to were already on our minds. What COVID has done has helped us refine some of the ways we can plan quickly and refine our knowledge around what we can go fast with and when we need to go more slowly. It has also given us increased knowledge and expertise around iterating services on the fly. All useful skills to have in an increasingly disrupted world.



7 Further areas for discussion

Beyond sharing good practice within the exercise and beyond, the benchmarking group in their workshop discussion identified further topics that emerged for future exploration. They are:

1. How do we best approach work to change our mindsets and practices and develop cultural awareness so that we move toward race-related social justice?
2. How do we create digital leadership with nondigital leaders?
3. Is a highly technological/connected third space a contradiction?
4. What are the persistent lessons learned and new practices resulting from our COVID experience?
5. What is good practice in relation to the challenge and opportunity of creatively organizing and repurposing resources?
6. What is good practice in relation to technology—no longer simply a tool—as our coworker?

7. Within our universities/institutions, libraries and ICT departments are interconnected and interdependent. What does a new model—different from the current departmentalization across institutions—look like?



8 The review

In order to establish the extent to which participants have put learning into practice a follow-up email was sent to participants requesting feedback on implementation and follow-up. The full set of responses, for those participants who responded, is shown in Table 1. Responses were positive and include

I found it a very useful process and can see lots of benefits both now and in the future for us as we develop our services, systems, approaches, and strategies as we use the benchmarking result to establish best practice. It was great to also connect with others on an international level, and I anticipate using those networks in the future.

Lots of it I am still digesting. Initial thoughts are approaches to managing change, some examples from the impact measuring. I have used some of the approaches to managing flexible working looking at the role/person.

Extremely useful and positive experience. The exercise validated the strategies and processes that we have undertaken over the years and especially during the pandemic. On the other hand, it also made me aware of new ideas/good practices that we can adopt.

[Ideas I am taking from the workshop and good practice statements] a leading role in reporting on research activity; services such as virtual reading rooms and group rooms with Zoom/Teams screens; new staffing position for student engagement; graduate and apprenticeships schemes around growing talent; encouraging staff to volunteer for charities and corporate social responsibility.

I am planning to include the discussion points/questions when we review our strategic actions at the end of 2022 for 2023–24.

It was very useful to work on the responses as this encouraged us to have discussions internally and get a joint understanding of our approach in some areas. The workshop itself was inspiring, and it was eye-opening to understand the different approaches and issues that are experienced by the diversity of organizations that were participating. Where we shared similar issues, it was useful to understand that we were not alone.

Appendix

Postbenchmarking exercise—rapid review responses

	Q1 Overall, how useful was your participation in the benchmarking exercise?	Q2 Did you take any ideas from the statements of good practice or the discussion at the workshop?	Q3 Have you maintained contact with any of the other participants?	Q4 Have you implemented or begun to implement any ideas with a view to enhancing your operation?	Q5 Would you be likely to engage with another benchmarking exercise in the future?
Participant 1	I found it a very useful process and can see lots of benefits both now and in the future for us as we develop our services, systems, approaches, and strategies as we use the benchmarking result to establish best practice. It was great to also connect with other on an international level, and I anticipate using those networks in the future.	Lots of it I am still digesting. Initial thoughts are approaches to managing change, some examples from the impact measuring.	Not at this point with the participants.	Lots of it I am still digesting. I have used some of the approaches to managing flexible working looking at the role/person.	Yes
Participant 2	Very useful and thought-provoking.	Yes, the statements of good practice were helpful in thinking about how they applied to our organization. Sadly was not able to attend the workshop.	No; largely because I did not attend the workshop and our organization was not a typical participant.	Yes, we are continually trying to improve our approach to strategic planning in particular and prioritization.	Yes

(Continued)

(Continued)

Postbenchmarking exercise—rapid review responses					
	Q1 Overall, how useful was your participation in the benchmarking exercise?	Q2 Did you take any ideas from the statements of good practice or the discussion at the workshop?	Q3 Have you maintained contact with any of the other participants?	Q4 Have you implemented or begun to implement any ideas with a view to enhancing your operation?	Q5 Would you be likely to engage with another benchmarking exercise in the future?
Participant 3	My participation in the benchmarking exercise was very useful because it exposed me to gaps in the provision and evaluation of library services in my environment and afforded me the opportunity to learn best practices from colleagues worldwide.	Yes, severally, but essentially the ideas of business continuity, creative fundraising, policy to manage, impact measurements, and managing library services during disruptions.	Not yet, but hope to do so as I am already working with my colleagues who are University Librarians in the country to make a case for benchmarking as a critical requirement for library services. Then we can organize a meeting with input from participants at the benchmarking exercise.	Yes. The idea of entrenching benchmarking in the delivery of library services by university libraries in my country. This was mooted during a focus group interview, and the participants agreed to list benchmarking as the focus of discussion in their next national conference. Other ideas are not fully implemented because of the closure of universities in the country due to a trade dispute since February 14 this year.	Yes. Most likely.
Participant 4	Quite useful and valuable	Yes I did. I tapped into new perspectives and insights.	Not at the moment. I hope to do this in the not so far future.	Yes, some ideas have informed how I do things.	Yes I would.

Participant 5	It was very useful to work on the responses as this encouraged us to have discussions internally and get a joint understanding of our approach in some areas. The workshop itself was inspiring, and it was eye-opening to understand the different approaches and issues that are experienced by the diversity of organizations that were participating. Where we shared similar issues, it was useful to understand that we were not alone.	No specific ideas.	No	No	Yes
Participant 6	Extremely useful and positive experience. The exercise validated the strategies and processes that we have undertaken at our organization over the years and especially during the pandemic. On the other hand, it also made me aware of new ideas/good practices that we can adopt at our organization.	Yes, a few. Taking a leading role in reporting on research activity; Services such as virtual reading rooms and group rooms with Zoom/Teams screens; new staffing position for student engagement; graduate and apprenticeships schemes around growing talent; encouraging staff to volunteer for charities and corporate social responsibility.	Not yet, but I plan to.	Not yet, but I am planning to include the discussion points/questions when we review our strategic actions at the end of 2022 for 2023–24.	Yes.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Postbenchmarking exercise—rapid review responses					
	Q1 Overall, how useful was your participation in the benchmarking exercise?	Q2 Did you take any ideas from the statements of good practice or the discussion at the workshop?	Q3 Have you maintained contact with any of the other participants?	Q4 Have you implemented or begun to implement any ideas with a view to enhancing your operation?	Q5 Would you be likely to engage with another benchmarking exercise in the future?
Participant 7	I found the benchmarking exercise to be extremely helpful. It is good to get outside your own organization and compare and contrast what others are doing. There is always so much to learn.	Most of my learning was around attitude and approach—how to work with the larger organization and how others present their service.	Not yet.	Nothing specific, except for improved confidence in how I approach our organizations administration.	I would.



9 Concluding remarks

To facilitate and participate in this qualitative benchmarking exercise was to take time out of our existing busy schedules. In making all our contributions, the aim was to deliver new and valuable insights. We believe that this was achieved and that now readers can also benefit. An unanticipated outcome for many of us was a reenergizing born of self-reflection, sharing, and connection. Something worlds apart from the quantitative approaches and a salient reminder that to learn and grow we must take the time and find a supportive environment to do so.

As well as delivering learning and tangible outcomes, the qualitative approach adopted allowed for the exploration of service improvement and strategic development opportunities. Our approach enabled reflection and sense-making through dialog, and the sharing of the good and not-so-good practice. As strategies, approaches, and new ways of working were shared, people were inspired and felt supported by others. The outcomes are collective wisdom, shared strategies, and practical examples on how best to respond to our turbulent environment.

Reference

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PART THREE

Sector-leading ideas arising from the exercise

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The power of place

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With the rise of the internet, the demise of the physical library—school, public, or academic—was not just predicted, it was expected. Yet school librarians still host classes of students to use their physical and electronic resources; public libraries remain at the center of their communities, bridging the digital divide, teaching literacy, and introducing children to the joys of the book; while academic libraries see thousands of students a day before, between, and after classes. It has become obvious that libraries have staying power, but how do we ensure that this place that generations have cherished remains viable to users today? What do students want and/or need from a physical library when resources are largely available digitally and study can happen in a park or a coffee shop?

We often speak of students as “living online,” but this is a metaphor, not reality, so where will they spend their time on campus outside the classroom? The consistent flow of students into academic libraries tells us that the library is often their initial choice, but our experience with these students indicates that we need to go beyond an open door and a table if we expect them to return and if we hope to enhance their learning experience.

We are speaking here of service to students by colleges and universities, but we should take a minute to consider who this discussion does not address—the faculty of our universities. At first glance, this could be considered a major oversight, but we are speaking here of the physical library, and that changes everything. A few years ago, when I first accepted my position as the dean of a large academic library a faculty member asked to meet with me. He wanted to discuss the fact that library administration had given the building over to the students at the expense of the faculty. I listened politely and then bluntly disagreed, positing that the faculty had ceded the library facilities to the students once libraries met all their needs through online journals, digital collections, electronic interlibrary loans, and book delivery to their offices. He was shocked to hear it described from that viewpoint, but we had a good discussion, each giving the other something to think

about. Faculty today agree that they get great service from the library, but the power of place associated with the library facility no longer holds for them. This gives us a great opportunity to concentrate on our students, but we return to the question of deciding what this looks like.

How do we make decisions around space in our libraries? We constantly need to create a balance between a place for books, faculty, staff, computers, printers, individual study, group study, makerspaces, collaboration spaces, and classrooms. While we may believe at any given point that we do understand student needs, in reality it is a constantly changing picture. How then do we know what they need and want? Well, we ask. A clear trend we have seen is that students do not respond to emails, and access to their phone numbers for texting is limited for many legitimate reasons so sending them a survey is not an option. They are just as unlikely to complete a paper survey available in the library building, so how do we get their attention? A savvy team in our information technology division studied this issue through a Dean's Innovation Grant and ultimately devised the Donut Survey. The survey is done in person, on a tablet, with one or two questions and takes less than a minute—and the reward is a donut or a banana—simple, directed, and efficient. While they often administer the Donut Survey just outside the main library building, they also move around campus to get information from different segments of our community.

These surveys told us that the one thing students valued most was space. There was a preference for individual space over group study space, but both were needed. They were clear that they wanted to be able to socialize in the space even as they asked for more individual study spaces. We consistently found that student needs run a wide gamut: some need technology, while others bring their own; some want concentration and quiet, while others need a buzz of activity; some want open spaces, while others want a secluded nook. The common theme seems to be that they want these things in a shared space. [Montgomery and Miller \(2011, p. 233\)](#), tell us “Learning has become more social and collaborative. In addition, there is greater recognition that much of the learning is occurring outside the classroom, in informal learning spaces where students are comfortable and feel welcomed.” The need for group study spaces is clear, and the spaces we create are well used, but there is a second more individualized need: a place for individual study where they are not alone.

I walked onto a library floor a few years ago at the University of Aberdeen to see that a separate, spacious, quiet study room was completely empty, while 40 or so students crowded around the small

tables on the open floor working in complete silence. Out of curiosity, I checked the same room on four other floors and found the exact same configuration. They wanted quiet, but they did not want to be set apart. I have dubbed this the “alone together” concept. Studying alone in your room is isolating, but studying alone with your peers—even if you never speak to them—makes you part of a community.

This data was available to consider along with the anecdotal data seen on a daily basis by faculty and staff. We had our strategic directions which we updated every 3 years to direct our work. What we then added was a big-picture framework for decision-making specifically around student services and our facilities—the third place concept.

In 1989, Ray Oldenburg wrote a book entitled “The Great Good Place.” Here, he posits that everyone needs three places. The first and most important throughout life is the home where we have comfort and safety, and the second is the workplace where we are equally challenged and supported. These are ideals, of course. The third place “is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 16). Your third place could be the bowling alley, a local café, your church, a pub, or a bookstore. Starbucks wants to be your third place. For our students, we believed it could be the library and adopted the third place concept as our framework for decision-making around our physical spaces.

Third places have shared characteristics: they are neutral ground, all who enter are equal, the facility is accessible and accommodating, conversation is welcome, they have regular users who bring life to the space, the facilities are low profile, even plain, to discourage pretension, the mood is playful, and they are a home away from home. While these all describe a library, the “home away from home” characteristic resonates strongly with the needs and wants of our students. Oldenburg uses psychologist David Seamon’s criteria for assessment of a “home away from home” explaining that the home roots us in a “physical center around which we organize our comings and goings” (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 39). It also gives us a sense of possession and control, regenerates and restores our spirit, and provides ease and freedom along with warmth built from friendliness, support, and mutual concern. As students navigate a day on campus, they can use the library to come and go, regenerate, and find support.

Our students are under a great deal of pressure to perform while also just coming into their own as adults. They live in a dorm or flat where

they may or may not find comfort and support, and their work is the classwork in their academic department that may be more challenging than supportive. It is crucial then that our students have a third place where their needs can be met. Some suggest that the student union should provide the third place, but their hours are limited and there are few places to study. This may work for some students, but for many the library can better provide long hours and accessibility, where all are equal, their needs for interaction can be met, and they can work alone or together in a supportive atmosphere. We speak of the benefit to individuals created by third places, but there is also a larger community benefit. In *Libraries in the USA as traditional and virtual "third places,"* Lawson writes "Third places nourish relationships and a diversity of human contact by helping to create a 'sense of place' and community. . . Third places, in their highest form, enrich public life and democracy" (Lawson, 2004, p. 125). The need for students to be part of a community is well documented. Our students who do not connect on campus are our most vulnerable and least apt to stay at university.

How did we then use the third place concept as a framework for decision-making? We began with data gathered from various means identifying who our students are and what they want and need, along with a plan to renovate the ground floor of the main library building. We then applied the third place framework: service and policy decisions were made first, based on the third place characteristics integrating data about our students. Some changes were made, while other policies were already set as needed. The library is open 24/7 during the primary semesters, and long hours were kept even in the summers. All food and drink restrictions were finally taken off the books. Telling someone they cannot have a water bottle or a bite to eat is not welcoming. Fortunately, we were able to add janitorial staff during the day to supplement the university's overnight crew, and cleanliness has not been an issue. We reviewed our offerings of equipment for disability access and updated some of the computer equipment.

Turning our attention to the renovation of the ground floor we quickly realized that major changes were needed. We are in a 1970s brutalist building in which the ground floor had over time been carved into a warren of public computer workstations, meeting rooms, offices, and services hidden behind closed doors. Roughly, one-third of this prime space was available for student use, including only minimal open seating. Other floors of the building may have become a home away from home for students who found them, but the ground floor was certainly not that.

The decision to completely open up the ground floor—we literally took out all walls except the bathrooms and mechanical rooms—meant the displacement of library faculty and staff to less salutary workspaces and the loss of a large meeting room. While these were not popular decisions with everyone they fit within our third place framework. We needed our students to walk in the doors and be welcomed, to immediately see a need being filled, and to imagine that this is a place where they could spend productive time.

Some technology, such as printing and scanning, remained on the ground floor where it was readily available, but other public computers were moved to the second floor. The primary service desk was moved from a far corner to the space adjacent to the entry, and the makerspace came out from behind closed doors to live on the floor where their services could be easily found. The seating on the ground floor now includes tables and chairs of various configurations and heights, lounge seating, and comfortable segregated seating where one can be easily seen, but also have a sense of privacy. We chose not to create a separate graduate student space on the ground floor as this violates the characteristic of equality, but may add this later on an upper floor. This is not one of the quiet floors, so there is a constant buzz of activity.

A brutalist building has few windows, so lighting has always been an issue. Fortunately, the renovation of the ground floor coincided with a 30-year EAP. This is a complete inspection and updating of all electrical, air conditioning, and plumbing systems in the entire building. We were able to collaborate with the EAP work to remove the drop ceiling on the ground floor and change all lighting from fluorescent to LED, greatly increasing the comfort level on that floor. The color palette was kept simple with grays and muted greens, solid colors on walls, laminate and carpet with little pattern, and simple patterns in the upholstery. Wooden columns and beams create an area of warmth on one side of the floor, while the other end is slightly more industrial. Six sets of double swinging doors were replaced with double automatic glass doors. In a secondary project, we are currently renovating all 21 restrooms.

The goal was to accommodate a wide variety of needs in a welcoming and open third place, and the reaction has been fantastic. Most of the work was done during the pandemic, so while the library remained open for limited hours throughout that time few students had seen the results of the construction. I witnessed one student walk in, stop, and comment to their friend “Wow, the library is modern!” We have not carried that

label in many years. Most importantly, that young person immediately saw the appeal of that place.

Space on any university campus is precious. As libraries have decreased the number of branch libraries and moved collections to off-site storage, we have consistently needed to justify the on-campus space that remains in our purview. The third place concept not only provides a way to framework our decision-making, but it also gives us a way to tell our story. It also makes a great elevator speech: There is a book, there are three things people need, and here is how we provide the third to our students. The other benefit of the third space is that it works well with other campus support services with whom we collaborate: accessibility, tutoring, first-year experience, and advising. A primary point of the third place is that it is where needs outside of home and work are met. The libraries working with these services in our third place are a natural collaboration.

The power of place is a reality in our daily work. While we provide many services online through a variety of electronic formats, we also have people who walk into our libraries every day who need us to play a significant role in their on-campus experience: in their learning and research, but also in helping them build the culture they want to live in while a student. This may be a simple need for scanning or a place to meet a friend. It may be as complex as a home away from home, or a respite from the pressures of university life. In any case, our goal is to provide a place that meets their needs individually or as a group and is available to them throughout their university career.

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Resilience, retention, and return of staff: the case of Stellenbosch University Library

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6.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on some of the strategies used by the Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service (LIS) to successfully navigate major issues regarding staff retention, the resilience, and return to work on-site of staff, and how the lessons learned can be applied going into the future.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic left a path of destruction in terms of the economic well-being of institutions leading to higher-than-normal staff turnover (Lai et al., 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2020). Under normal circumstances, limited opportunities for professional growth or career advancement, dissatisfaction with remuneration, and unpleasant and rigid “normal” working arrangements contribute to high turnover of staff. However, during COVID-19 this was further exacerbated by increased health challenges and higher rates of death. For example, Statistics South Africa (2020) attributed the loss of more than 600,000 formal jobs in South Africa between March and September of 2020 directly to the COVID-19-enforced lockdown.

In addition, many employees worldwide could not successfully make the transition back to the workplace even with the lowering of the COVID-19 lockdown levels, and the decreasing potency and infection rates of the disease, because of what they perceived to be “unpleasant” working conditions and fear of exposure to COVID-19 (Sandhu, 2021).



6.2 South Africa’s national lockdown levels

During COVID-19, South Africa implemented a five-stage alert level system aligned to the COVID-19 threat, infection, and mortality

rates (South Africa, 2022). The alert levels are such that the higher the alert level, the more stringent the lockdown rules imposed on the society (South Africa, 2022). For example, under alert level 1, almost all normal activities can return provided that people follow normal COVID-19 protocols such as social distancing and hand sanitizing, while level 5 would see the most stringent measures being implemented to contain the virus.

COVID-19-enforced lockdowns in South Africa started on 23 March 2020, when the country's president announced a national lockdown (South Africa, 2020). This had a huge impact on Stellenbosch University library staff who were sent home to adhere to the national lockdown directive and protocols.

At this stage, nobody could foresee the challenges awaiting the LIS. What was supposed to be a short 3-week period of working from home, became a prolonged period of adapting to the demands and uncertainties of the pandemic, while continuing with seamless service delivery to the academic community. With each adjusted lockdown level, changes had to be made to the number of clients allowed in the different library spaces, the seating arrangements, opening hours, the type of services rendered, and staff utilization.

The library had to suddenly deploy strategies that would ensure the efficient management of its 102 staff members, working remotely with different job descriptions, technical skills, unequal home environments, and IT equipment. When some staff returned to campus when it was allowed with the lowered lockdown levels, there were new challenges such as dealing with social interaction, rebuilding the working teams, adapting to fixed working hours, rotation of staff, and reckoning with the physical, emotional, and psychological impact of COVID-19.



6.3 Management of staff during various phases of lockdown

In order to manage the disruptive tide of COVID-19, the management at Stellenbosch University Library relied on a number of strategies.

6.3.1 Strong and decisive leadership

It was important for the library's senior management to provide strong and decisive leadership. Senior management had the added responsibility

for staff and patron health, well-being, and safety, while also dealing with the uncertainties of the pandemic. The management team had to make difficult decisions without a well-trodden roadmap to lead the way. They had to navigate between the instructions and protocols of the government and university, while continuing to guide the staff in providing a seamless service to all clients. The team ensured the fair and consistent application of the institution and library's policies at all times that ensured buy-in when staff had to manage their own activities during the challenging times of the pandemic.

6.3.2 Managing with compassion

Many staff members expressed that they were uncertain, anxious, felt insecure in their jobs, stressed, had negative emotional feelings, and concerned over safety of workplaces. Although none of the SU library staff members lost their lives, many of them were infected and fell sick to the diseases. Others either had close family members or friends who succumbed to the disease. Fear was pervasive as some staff expressed a wish to take early retirement.

In these circumstances, it was important for the library management to put strategies in place to assure and retain staff (Ashiq, et al., 2022; Cowell, 2021). Staff retention is generally defined as the degree to which the current employees remain with the company over a given period. Put simply, it is the organization's ability to retain quality employees.

Strategies to retain staff included encouraging managers to act as mentors and build healthy relationships within their teams. As a result, the line managers played a crucial role in the retention of staff in the LIS during this period. Emphasis was put on listening to staff's challenges, being empathetic to their plight and trying to allay their fears. Everybody's opinions were valued, and changes were made based on collective input. The other issue that was considered was the distribution of workloads to ensure that they were reasonable and fair to everybody. Good work–life balance was encouraged.

6.3.3 Open and transparent communication

During times of uncertainty, communication is critical. This was the case during this pandemic where open and transparent communication was crucial. It was an intentional effort by the senior management team to maintain open communication channels with staff that took the form of regular SharePoint announcements, virtual MS Teams meetings, creating spaces for reflection or

socializing within those meetings as well as more informal means of demonstrating mutual support and care for each other (such as WhatsApp groups within divisions). The effective communication by management had a reassuring effect on staff and negated any uncertainties, misunderstandings, or rumors in the workplace during COVID-19. Hosoi et al. (2021, p. 704) state that there need to be clear expectations regarding deliverables. Communications need to be thoughtful and regular, and it was even more important as we developed hybrid teams (staff working from home and on-site). Further, the study by Hosoi also highlights that flexible work arrangements require effective managerial communication.

6.3.4 Creating a positive organizational culture

The management team took great effort in promoting a positive organizational culture and morale and strengthening the resilience of staff. The positive organizational culture that already existed in the LIS before COVID-19 contributed greatly to the resilience of the staff during the pandemic. More than ever, there was evidence of strong support and collegiality between staff. They shared lessons learned and encouraged each other emotionally through the tough times. We continued to celebrate and recognize the achievements of staff during COVID-19 by having a top performers breakfast and special mention of divisions that walked the extra mile. Hosoi et al. (2021) agree with this approach by articulating that, in addition to conveying clear expectations, it is important for managers to express their appreciation for employees' contribution (Hosoi et al., 2021).

6.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation of work

In terms of monitoring and evaluating performance, staff were continuously monitored and guided. Staff had to send monthly work-from-home (WFH) reports for senior management to monitor performance. Where possible, the line managers allowed staff to take on additional responsibilities that ensured that staff felt empowered, engaged, and motivated throughout the pandemic.



6.4 Staff development and empowerment

Linked to the important strategy to retain staff was the renewed focus on providing ongoing training and development opportunities. Staff

were encouraged and supported to learn new skills (such as the optimal use of virtual services tools such as MS Teams, Zoom, LibChat, LibGuides, etc.) and attend virtual conferences, workshops, and short courses. Facilitating the training and development of all staff during COVID-19 contributed to the morale of the staff and empowered them to excel and contribute to the strategic goals of the LIS.

Flexible work-from-home arrangements and support were provided. As pointed out, at the beginning of the pandemic, all the library spaces were closed off, and staff were sent home to continue working remotely. This arrangement served as a temporary safety measure to reduce contact and to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. The LIS responded quickly to the challenge by equipping staff who could do at least 80% of their work from home, with IT infrastructure (such as laptops). Throughout the pandemic, options were provided for flexible working arrangements, such as rotation, that reduced the risks of the pandemic, alleviated fears of staff, and met the need to balance home and work responsibilities. Working remotely has allowed the LIS staff to try new formats for training (such as webinars and MS Teams sessions) and service delivery (book pick-up services and scanning-in of material). The value of the remote work was not just about being remote, but also about new ways of working and empowering staff to be creative and innovative. According to [Hickey and Tang \(2015, p. 186\)](#), "...successful organizations benefit from engaged employees since these are the individuals who come up with the most entrepreneurial energy." They further state that the more engaged your employees, "the less absenteeism and turnover an organization experiences."

Frequent feedback and encouragement were given in terms of staff performance. Caring for the psychological and emotional well-being of staff was also a high priority for the LIS and contributed to their resilience. Sessions were organized about dealing with grief and loss and mental health in the workplace. Staff were encouraged to seek help for burnout, stress, and other psychological challenges.



6.5 Return of staff to work on-site

In terms of the return of staff to work on-site, a healthy and safe-working environment for returning staff was a top priority. Many staff had concerns about their health and safety, especially when they had to

return to work full time. The LIS addressed the fears by ensuring that all health and safety protocols were strictly followed. All the library spaces were assessed and prepared (with workplace plans) for the return of staff and students in terms of placing Perspex shields between workstations, ensuring masking and social distancing, limiting the number of staff in the different libraries, and provision of sanitizing equipment. Staff expressed that they felt safe and satisfied with the overall health and safety practices put in place in the LIS throughout the pandemic. It made them feel supported and valued by the organization.



6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, COVID-19 was/is a challenging time for the Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service. This was one of the biggest crises that the library has had to deal with in its history. However, through various strategies including strong and decisive leadership, managing by compassion, open and transparent communication, and fostering a positive organizational culture, the library has managed to navigate through the worst effects of the crisis. The library will come out of this crisis having learned some lessons both positive and negative. As a result of this crisis, new services have been developed and workflows redesigned.

Although circumstances differ by country and context, the authors are of the view that the practice at Stellenbosch University can serve as an important benchmark for academic libraries dealing with crises in the future.

As has been said many times, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the pace of change and ushered in new methodologies that will shape the future of work. Yet libraries and librarians have demonstrated their agility, adaptability, and resilience, realizing that change is here to stay.

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Benchmarking on the fly and new ways of working: leveraging benefits from the pandemic experience

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7.1 Introduction

The University of Queensland (UQ) Library was a participant in the international benchmarking exercise reported in Part Two of this book. This chapter is inspired by a question raised during the workshop “will our Covid-19 responses and experience remain relevant in the future?” This paper presents a case study of the UQ Library experience 2020–21. We position qualitative benchmarking as a social and immediate practice and share our new ways of working born in response to the pandemic. We believe that these new ways of working can persist. We share our reflections so that others can consider leveraging benefits from the pandemic experience.



7.2 Context and background

For more than a century, UQ has delivered knowledge leadership for a better world. The most prestigious and widely recognized rankings of world universities consistently place UQ among the world’s top universities. UQ has also won more national teaching awards than any other Australian university. This commitment to quality teaching empowers our 56,000 current students, who study across UQ’s three campuses, to create positive change for society. Our research has a global impact, delivered by an interdisciplinary research community of more than 1500 researchers at our six faculties, eight research institutes, and more than 100 research centers.

The Library is part of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic (DVCA) portfolio. This portfolio includes the Library, Student Affairs, Academic Services and the Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation (ITaLI). The Library supports research, teaching, and learning. Collections are extensive and include special collections incorporating the Fryer Library and UQ Archives. Library branches are spread across a variety of locations across the main UQ campuses and satellites. The Library employs approximately 200 staff.

The University is operating in a complex and disrupted environment. The student profile has and is changing as international students continue to find it difficult to travel and as the federal government funding for domestic students changes. The pandemic has triggered massive growth in online learning. UQ is also looking to pursue transnational education strategies that will involve offering courses and programs of study through a combination of online delivery and global partnerships. Within Australia, there are many other universities that have been delivering online learning successfully for many years, UQ was required to pivot, and we have caught up quickly.

There is continued pressure on research funding. Further, research funding is skewed to disciplines that are seen as vital for the future of Australia, primarily in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) disciplines. The government is also focused on funding research that can have a broader impact via knowledge translation and commercialization, and there is an increasing focus within the University on partnerships with industry. Research quality and the extent to which research involves end-user engagement and delivers impact beyond the traditional scholarly community to benefit society and the economy are high priorities for the University, a reflection of the national Australian Research Council Excellence in Research for Australia and Engagement and Impact exercises.

The pandemic has also accelerated the open access and open research movements, areas where libraries are active advocates. While this move to “open” is welcome, it also means that publishers are looking for ways to maintain and increase their revenue streams. With collection budgets under increasing pressure and either staying flat or shrinking, and price increases from publishers on the horizon, of real concern is how we continue to provide access to resources while also supporting open access.

Added to all of this are the disruptions caused by technology: there is an increased demand for all things digital, new technologies emerging, opportunities for artificial intelligence, the question of how to use the big data enabled by technological advances, blockchain, and more. The way

we interact with technology and the way it is implemented in organizations are ever-changing and influence our strategies and operations.

Within Australia—and long overdue—there is an increased focus on reconciliation, in UQ we have a Reconciliation Action Plan to guide our work. The decolonization of our institutions and the move toward true reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including closing educational achievement gaps, is an important part of our operating environment. Our new Prime Minister on taking up office made a commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Uluru Statement seeks a First Nations' Voice in the constitution, and in the Makarrata, a Yolngu word with a similar meaning to treaty, referring to the process of conflict resolution, peacemaking, and justice.

7.2.1 Research question

Will our COVID-19 responses and experience remain relevant in the future?

To answer this question, the method—which evolved—had three steps with blurred boundaries. Underpinning this method was the assumption that the answer is apparent in changed ways of working, new relationships, greater visibility of the Library within the University, and service developments. This assumption dictated the approach used which was qualitative and exploratory. Our aim in terms of outcome is to share Library practitioner learning.

Step 1 Review and reflect

- Review all of UQ Library COVID-19 communications, both to Library staff and to our clients.
- Review the service changes and developments that took place during 2020 and 2021 in response to the pandemic.
- Review data and presentations on our experiences shared within UQ and beyond by Library staff.
- Share our informal reflections.

Step 2 Shape, connect, and develop

- Generate and develop themes, group and refine the themes, and create commentary in relation to these themes.
- Connect with the UQ Library Leadership team, Communication and Engagement Manager, the former Health, Safety, and Wellness Coordinator, and Resilience, Health, Safety, and Wellness Manager to gather input and commentary on the themes.
- Refine and develop themes and commentary based on the input received.

Step 3 Consolidate and develop conclusions

- Further iteration of themes, and development of lessons learned and further reflection.
- Drafted conclusions with consideration of the wider application to others.

7.2.2 Themes

We identified six themes. There is some overlap between these themes. They are:

- learning from others quickly;
- good management is health, safety, and wellness risk management;
- business continuity planning and prioritizing;
- service development becomes business as usual;
- connected and situational leadership and decision-making; and
- engagement not communication.

For each theme, we set the scene, describe our work and response, and share reflections and lessons.



7.3 Theme 1—Learning from others quickly or “benchmarking on the fly”

In Queensland during 2020 and 2021, the must-watch TV was not found on Netflix, and did not feature any famous actors. The must-watch TV that would cause people to leave meetings, stop social events, and rush to find a screen was the daily press conference held by State Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and the then Chief Health Officer Jeanette Young. Each day an update would be provided on COVID-19 case numbers and restrictions. While Queensland as a whole and Brisbane did not see the large case numbers like other areas of Australia and the rest of the world, during 2020 and 2021 we were subject to lockdowns and physical distancing measures that limited capacity and access to venues as well as national and international border closures.

Each time a press conference was held, Library staff would have to recalibrate both their personal and work lives and work out what the impact would be for the days and weeks ahead. If you missed the news coverage, within minutes you would ask a colleague “what did Jeanette say?”

Once the press conference ended, there was a rush to the Queensland Health website to determine what the measures meant for libraries—did we have to close, could we stay open with limited services and capacity, were the rules around mask-wearing changing? Our way to make decisions quickly was to share information and thinking as it emerged with colleagues faced with similar decisions. We engaged with peers in libraries across the same region faced with the same regulations, and it felt like we were benchmarking “on the fly.”

Through benchmarking on the fly, we were able to work through the many implications of dealing with COVID-19, for example, determining the Library’s role in providing a safe space for students with power and Wi-Fi, in providing access to print and physical collections while mitigating the risk of virus transmission and, critical in subtropical climates, in air-conditioning versus the health risks of community transmission of COVID-19. While the State Government made some decisions for us, the implementation of restrictions often left us interpreting rules and making our own decisions. More detail about decision-making can be found in theme 5.

This was not only about sense-making with Library peers but also University colleagues who were making decisions about student support and the campus environments. Previously self-contained conversations across risk management, health safety and wellness, property and facilities, and student communication all opened into University-wide dialogue. As the internal UQ-wide response to the changing environment emerged and developed, there were cascading decisions from meetings held by the UQ Crisis Management Team, and we needed to facilitate a two-way stream of information. To do that quickly and persuasively, we drew on the discussions with peers in UQ and from the broader library community. This was also about getting arguments and data together to influence senior members of our own institution who had many variables to consider and many decisions to make. The Library was just one voice in a cacophony within our institutions, to be able to cut through quickly to decision-makers was critical, and to be compelling was to be connected.

While the UQ Health, Safety, and Wellness team became the go-to for advice and direction, it is worth mentioning the work we did in terms of student communication led by the UQ Student Services team. The Director of this team quickly secured the support of our public health academic colleagues, and we joined together to work through student guidelines and messages. The Library’s role as a key communication channel was recognized, and we became a component of the shared hive of thinking which shaped UQ communication with students.



7.4 Theme 2—Health, safety, and wellness (HSW) risk management is good management

So much of our COVID-19 response was grounded in health, safety, and wellness, with our Library staff at the forefront of our minds, and deciding what level of service was safe to deliver and how was key. We formed a COVID-19 response team made up of representatives from across the Library and connected this work with the other UQ COVID-19 response groups. This team brought together staff from all levels with the expertise of the Library HSW Coordinator and Library Engagement Senior Manager. Chaired by a member of the Library Leadership Executive (LX), they came together to discuss health and safety issues, ranging from ensuring workstations were physically distanced to changing signage around mask requirements in our public spaces and everything in between. We responded to some challenges quickly, and for others, we worked together with colleagues from around UQ. The ensuing dialogue developed shared understanding, which in turn, led to joining forces to provide solutions.

The move to working from home came quickly for us. To some extent, we had to retrofit our policies and requirements for risk assessments and authorization for home working setups. To mitigate the potential impact of this, our Library Technology Service team rose to the fore and ensured everyone had access to the equipment they required from monitors to laptops to computer chairs.

Risk management has always been part of our business practice, but we have tended to do this for separate functions within our Library—space, people, technology, etc.—and outside the Library in different functional units of the University. COVID-19 forced us to think about all these functions simultaneously, bringing different voices into the room, and to do the same with physical health risks and mental health and well-being impacts. Integrating risk management across all our core functions—Library and beyond—enabled us to be more proactive in the face of ongoing uncertainty. What we know now is that if we continue siloed ways of thinking in managing health, safety, and other business risks we are likely to be ill-prepared to respond to changes within our organization, the education sector, or indeed the world. An integrated approach to risk management provides a unified viewpoint to improve decision-making across our business. An organization is made up of individuals and

teams, and we know the importance of positive workplace culture. This unified approach means we can consider the strategies needed to address changing circumstances or risks in one area and respond in ways that consider well-being and health of our people and our culture at the same time. During the height of COVID-19, the work of the HSW team on well-being and mental health rose exponentially, and regular check-ins with colleagues have since become the norm.

With this in mind, we decided to create a new role which went beyond our established health, safety, and wellness coordination within the Library and connection to the UQ HSW committee. We explored faculty responses and engaged beyond the UQ HSW leadership into the risk and governance University portfolio. We could not find exactly what we had in mind but secured lots of interest and buy-in to our new ethos. Ultimately, we created a new role of Resilience, Health, Safety and Wellness Manager. By calling out resilience in both the job title and the position description, we are committing to taking a wider perspective and embedded support for organizational resilience.



7.5 Theme 3—Business continuity planning and prioritizing

One of the key conversations that happened at UQ was around service continuity, and with this, service priorities. Over the course of 2020 and 2021, we created, reviewed, and iterated business continuity plans in response to the changing environment, continually asking ourselves “what are the most critical services?” and how we could redeploy staff to keep them going.

Adding extra complexity to our business continuity planning was questions around working from home. For some staff, such as those dealing with physical collections, not being able to come to campus meant part or all of their duties could not be done. We had to work out how we could use their skills and knowledge to support other areas during lockdowns, and when campus did reopen, we had to work out how to have staff safely return to campus considering ever-changing physical distancing requirements.

Specifically, we identified some services that were seen as “high risk,” such as those services which in the past had required face-to-face interaction

with Library clients. We had to ask ourselves questions about whether we could offer these services virtually and balance any loss of service to clients with the safety of our staff, adding to this feeling from some that all staff should be treated in the same way when it came to working from home. This call for all to have the same access to working from home, even when duties required a presence on campus, was in direct opposition to University Human Resources (HR) policies which only allow working from home when it does not impact operational requirements.

More complexity was added by the fact that we had three different frameworks to adhere to which outlined what could be open or closed (or somewhere in between) depending on the number of people in the community with COVID-19. We were operating under State Government and University tiers of lockdown and for our libraries on hospital and health precincts different layers of restriction. The University had a range of lockdown scenarios ranging from 1 to 5 in severity, and each service needed a business continuity plan for each level. Planning for each service, at each level, taking into account the ability of staff to come to campus was already a daunting task—we added to this by changing our services and introducing new ones in response to client needs.

In the past, we found business continuity complex and considered it a necessary evil. Now, we are very much more skilled at it and consider it valuable. In terms of prioritization of services and work, we have acceptance that it is just a fact—services are not all created equal. This difference—highlighted in this time of disruption—requires nuanced working arrangements and flexible people. In prioritizing our services, there was a real risk that some staff would feel that their work was not valued. Instead, our staff rose to the challenge of working across teams within the Library and beyond during the pandemic, and we were justifiably proud of their response. The challenge now is to ensure this willingness to change, reprioritize, and work in new ways continues among staff, and we discuss this in the themes below.



7.6 Theme 4—Service development becomes business as usual

As we planned for multiple levels of continuity, we found that to deliver business as usual we had to develop our services, at a faster pace

than ever before. Some of the developments we made were initiated by the Library, and when we did not look up and review what others were doing, we often found that if we had consulted with our colleagues we could have moved more quickly. Others triggered new dialogue and thinking from other areas, and our actions helped develop collective understanding of what was vital to our student experience.

Like many other Universities, UQ had to flip teaching and learning to an online mode at very short notice. There was a need to shift Library services to an online mode to interact with clients. This required our staff to increase their digital capabilities and make changes to service delivery, ranging from small adjustments to reimagining services, to developing new services. As the Library is responsible for digital capability training development, we had to increase our offering in this area to ensure all UQ staff and students had support to use new digital tools being rolled out in teaching and learning, including technologies for digital assessments.

Two key examples of new services for us were the development of laptop loans and exam support services. We realized early in the pandemic that there were some students who either did not have access to technology at home or who had to share technology with parents and siblings who were also required to work or study from home. Within 2 days of identifying this need, we had a very basic laptop loan service up and running, relying on laptops removed from computer labs all over campus. This was new to us but tried and tested in many other university libraries and beyond. Our trajectory from idea to service was rapid, thanks to the shared knowledge of those who had gone before us.

UQ had to move all invigilated examinations online, using a third-party company that provides proctored online exams. This was a steep learning curve for the academics setting the exams, the exam administrators, systems and IT staff, and critically the students now required to use new technologies to sit exams. The Library took on the role of providing online exam support to students across UQ, redeploying staff from across three different teams to run the new service. This support involved two different elements—physical space and infrastructure, and online real-time support via chat and phone. This service was also designed “on the fly” and iterated/improved in real time in close collaboration with colleagues in our Examinations Office, Information Technology Services, the Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation, and beyond.

Both services were brand new, still being fully developed, and were critical in our business continuity planning. Having to shift resources

rapidly from established services that were no longer critical to new services that were being iterated as they operated required leaders and staff to think in new ways and adapt quickly. There was minimal time to adjust to service changes, as we had an immediate need to support students in new ways.

Where we scaled up significantly was our support for students and staff with new digital technologies to improve student learning. To support the move to online learning, we developed and delivered multiple training sessions to help students use online conferencing technologies and created the “how to study online” website with key study tips to help students stay focused and organized to successfully complete their course online. We saw an increase in attendance at online training sessions and received positive responses from both students and staff. Online and blended learning is here to stay, and we will continue to support students and deliver training online.

Like other libraries across Australia, other service adjustments included study space reductions in our Library buildings in response to physical distancing measures, and the reduction in seats for students was from around 4000 seats to approximately 1800 seats. We have reintroduced some of these study seats but have taken the opportunity to consider ventilation and opted for reduced density to improve the study environment.

Keeping our libraries open reminded us and demonstrated to our UQ colleagues that libraries have an important part to play as both a safe space for students seeking support and as highly visible and open spaces for learning from which all can access the University.

Keeping buildings open did not necessarily mean keeping staffed service points open. We increased our chat services, undertook risk assessments, and made adjustments on service areas to mitigate risk, and are piloting other technologies which connect our information assistance staff to clients. Many of our staff were deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on students, from mental health to ensuring students had access to support using technology. Staff at UQ Library strongly value the support and service they deliver, and the difference they make to their clients’ lives. For some that translated into getting back on campus as soon as possible, for others it has manifested as embracing their own digital capability development.

Again, like so many other libraries we have and had well-developed digital collections. The pandemic has shone a light on publishers and what is available openly and what is still behind increasingly expensive paywalls.

We needed a hard discussion on textbooks—who is writing them in our institutions, who is publishing them, and who is charging us to get access again. We have seen the power of collaboration at all levels. We can work together and learn from each other and make change happen—at the University and within the Library community, to respond to publishers and information challenges. During the pandemic, we launched our Open Textbooks @ UQ platform, and this has grown quickly, driven by the move to digital and our conversations that exposed the problematic nature of some publishers' offerings.

Maintaining access to print required some new solutions in times of lockdown, and again, we were reminded of how important our print and special collections are to researchers and students in the humanities disciplines. The service ethic of staff who work with physical collections—including our special collections—meant that they balanced their needs and the needs of our clients and generated the ideas for new ways of working which led us all to the best decisions for everyone.

Planning in a disrupted environment was certainly heightened during the pandemic, but prior to the pandemic there was already recognition among the leadership team that we needed to change both the services we delivered and the way we delivered them. COVID-19 forced us into making changes in a shorter timeframe, but many of the things we were responding to were already on our minds. COVID-19 has helped us refine ways we can plan quickly and refine our knowledge around when we can go fast with changes and when we can go more slowly. It has also given us increased knowledge and expertise around iterating services on the fly which are all critical skills to have in an increasingly disrupted world.



7.7 Theme 5—Connected and situational leadership and decision-making

Our experience during the pandemic showed us how important it is for leaders to be visible and present, and we saw leadership outside of organizational hierarchies. Leadership was everywhere, and those staff who were able to respond quickly to situations became thought and emotional leaders in their teams. New leaders emerged when we were directed with little notice to pack up offices and work from home; those

who were able to adapt to changing circumstances supported their colleagues regardless of hierarchy. This ability to adapt was a key trait in leaders at every level. Those who did not have a management role but could quickly adapt and act were key to setting up and changing services quickly and to supporting others to remain grounded. At the time our Staff Development Senior Manager acted quickly and instigated opportunities to share new ways of working across teams, so that those teams and managers who quickly established great ways of working as a team remotely to get the job done in a supportive way, shared their knowledge to inspire others. As we reflect now, we consider these emotional and well-being leaders and feel that the recognition for the role that they have played has not been enough.

The established leadership and management team quickly realized that as well as being adaptable, being visible, and giving clear direction were important. We had to respond very differently to changing circumstances and found ourselves using the [Hersey and Blanchard \(1996\)](#) model of situational leadership, both consciously and unconsciously to ensure our staff felt both supported and clear about what and how to deliver Library services. Situational leadership breaks leadership styles into four groups, directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. In moments of uncertainty and crisis, we found that our staff wanted directive leadership, and they wanted the leaders to make clear decisions about operations. This was a challenge for the LX who had—influenced by the work of [Haywood \(2016\)](#)—previously been developing their approach as collaborative and connected leaders, working closely with staff to come to a shared understanding of issues and making decisions with staff input. Early in the pandemic, it became clear that this collaborative style could exacerbate stress and tension in staff, who were also struggling with changes in their personal lives ranging from working at home with children present to being unable to see family and friends in different states or countries. While we had to move toward a more directive and supportive leadership style in many circumstances in the first year of the pandemic, the second year did provide more opportunities to delegate and coach. Constantly present and underpinning all of this was a commitment to authentic and values-based leadership.

As a leadership team, we became even more attuned to the strengths of our colleagues, for example, cementing our knowledge that certain members of the team should handle communication, while others were able to lead on logistical decisions. This connection also had the added

benefit of supporting members of the team who are not naturally directive and would prefer to consult and collaborate, and talking through with peers gave them a chance to make sense of the changing environment before talking to their staff. Our development of a connected leadership approach is significant, and it provides a wide-reaching communication channel by which we can reach all staff effectively and know that everyone is given a chance to find out crucial information and provide feedback.

In terms of decision-making, prior to the pandemic we had made a commitment to evidence-based practice (EBP) as articulated by [Koufogiannakis and Brettle \(2016\)](#) to inform our decision-making. Their work proposes a process model which facilitates questions about practice, gathering data, and using information wisely to make decisions. This can be visualized as a cyclical process which encompasses five elements: articulate, assemble, assess, agree, and adapt. While we had a commitment to EBP, we were operating in unprecedented times, and we had no time to test and gather data on before implementing new services. Our response was to be very tightly bound to the University needs emerging “in the moment.” So our “data” became less about what was collected and curated over time to help inform decisions, but rather the knowledge acquired on the fly in the DVCA meetings and from student requests or attendance on online events. We were much more acutely switched on to what was happening within UQ and then what that meant for us—and always with a student lens. It felt like we were real-time data gatherers, analyzers, and synthesizers—allowing rapid decision-making—and tapping into different data sources from those we would typically have sought or been exposed to.



7.8 Theme 6—Engagement not communication

Coupled with leadership everywhere, there was the need to ensure our communication was clear and emotionally intelligent. The Library COVID-19 response team was sense maker, guide, and litmus test. Members of LX and the COVID-19 response team spent hours reading through various pieces of information to crystalize and contextualize it for their colleagues—to be able to communicate what changes meant for

them. As the team was making sense of the daily and weekly changes, the expert Library Engagement Senior Manager was drafting and developing key messages to communicate. This required great skill. Clarity of message was important as was speed. We had to work quickly so that the Library staff were reassured that we were aware of and acting on everything.

As well as timeliness and the words chosen, the tone used and how messages were delivered provided support and information to staff. Our messages helped to provide a sense of calm and get staff buy-in for changes that had to be made quickly whether that be developing new services or moving furniture. Many of the response team, managers and colleagues, explicitly demonstrated empathy for staff which helped get us through the most difficult times. And, once again we learned from others as team members shared messages and videos circulated in other organizations—often via partners and friends—to give us something to benchmark against.

We were aware that even though our staff are information professionals, the high-stress environment of the pandemic coupled with the sheer amount of information coming out from governments, the University, and the media meant they were overwhelmed at times. We also learned the importance of repeating messages. Our rule of thumb was to get key information out three times in three different ways to ensure that all staff were able to engage in a way that suited them.

Often during the pandemic, it was critical the University Librarian delivered the message. With regard to major changes, there was a desire from staff to “hear it from the top,” with full staff briefings led by the University Librarian, the chair of the Library COVID-19 Response team, and the HSW Coordinator. While this type of communication worked very effectively in crisis, we also found ourselves exploring a sense-making communication style to allow staff to work through large pieces of information in smaller groups. While we do have key messages and information to share with staff, managers within teams are asked to lead sense-making conversations with their staff in smaller groups. This allows people to talk through what is happening, and for the managers to link back to strategic goals of the Library and the University in a way that makes sense to their teams. We are aware that change is now going to be a constant part of our lives so we need an approach that will help support staff. This sense-making approach allows staff to share feedback in an environment where they feel comfortable, and then their input is captured by team leaders or managers and shared with the Library executive team.

Online meetings during lockdown gave us glimpses of each other at home and under great stress. We have seen each other juggling caring for children and enjoyed the impromptu appearance of cats, music practice, etc., in our online meetings. We have seen each other on bad days when emotion was close to the surface and found words of support. That compassion for and celebration of humanity is another positive of the COVID-19 experience. We hope that there will be an ongoing impact of this on the Library culture. Even before COVID-19, we had developed a statement of aspiration for our culture, the UQ Library Way, and were being more mindful of our behavior and mindsets. This can grow into something even stronger as we face future challenges; we have come through something life-changing together, not just organizationally, but as our whole selves.



7.9 Leveraging benefits from the pandemic experience

The impact on UQ Library of our experience of the pandemic is wide-ranging. There are positives; none of us want to go back to the way we were. We have changed and will continue to change our services, but more importantly we have changed the way we work and repositioned the Library in the University. Sometimes, this feels shaky and not yet fully anchored. The coming months and years will determine whether the changes we have made will stick.

One thing we can be particularly proud of is our willingness to step up and fill gaps or create services to make sure that students were supported—examples of this were laptop loans and exam support services. While we delivered these services, there are still some staff in the Library who believe these services are beyond our remit and should be delivered by others in the University while there are others who embrace the changes in the role of the Library. Some are happy to go further; in the lockdowns, members of the Library team volunteered to join with student services colleagues in administering financial and food aid to students in need. To be a good University team player is simply part of our service ethic. We know that it has been noticed and is valued by senior staff which is rewarding. The ongoing debate about our purpose and remit—given stretched resources—continues to run among our staff. Meanwhile, we go on helping out and stepping up.

One difficult part of this experience is that we began a major organizational change and restructure in December 2020. This was to address the changes needed in staff profiles and team design to meet the demands of the changing information and higher education environment. While the COVID-19 pandemic was not the impetus for the change, the huge growth in demand for digital support and services meant that we had to move quickly, rather than evolve over time which would have been our preferred approach. The Library's strategic direction now has an even greater focus on supporting digital capability development and delivering support and services for new ways of teaching and learning. Library staff continue to develop and reskill to meet these demands. These demands continue to grow, and we are racing to build capacity.

Our whole University view is now deeper; we have greater understanding. It is vital that we continue to take whole institutional approaches to delivering support and services which span faculties and schools and professional services—for example, timetabling and examinations. The need to change and respond rapidly has revealed that a deeper level of mutual understanding is necessary to best support students. Reflecting on lessons learned will support this. Systemic issues will take time and investment to address.

There is no longer an expectation that one size fits all in the way we work. The recognition that flexible working arrangements are beneficial to staff has been made clear by the pandemic, and there is an expectation that this flexibility will stay. We also have recognized the importance of personalizing working arrangements where our business needs and health and safety protocols allow us to. To deliver Library services, we work in a “hybrid” way, combining the best of online and on-campus for UQ staff and students, aligning with how they want to work and study. We know now more than ever that different cohorts and disciplines require different service levels from us and that our humanities scholars rely heavily on the Library.

As mentioned above, we know that we still need to make incremental changes to make sure the Library is fit for the future, and this will include bringing people with different skills into the organization, as well as upskilling current staff. We see needs across areas as diverse as business process management and service improvement through enhanced skills in dealing with data and data visualization. We have not yet developed a plan that looks at skills development over the next 2–3 years, but we do have an outline of the areas where new skills are needed. Staff have and will

continue to adapt; our pandemic experience gives us confidence in our ability to learn and grow.

Our relationships in and outside of UQ Library are stronger and deeper. These relationships enabled collegial sharing which in turn enabled us to make tough decisions quickly: benchmarking on the fly. Given the turbulent environment and the big issues in the social and geopolitical environment, we expect to continue to draw on the wisdom and thinking of others as we respond to new challenges.

Our COVID-19 experience has highlighted social inequality through digital and healthcare divides. We have been awakened to this and have become more active in seeking solutions. In UQ Library, we are driven to improve our cultural competencies and be more active and holistic in equity, diversity, and inclusion. Again, working collectively across the University and beyond will support and strengthen what we deliver.

We are beginning to manage health, safety, and other business risks in an integrated way and see it as core to the development of our organizational culture. Many Library staff are becoming more comfortable with the challenges of faster-paced adjustments to work and service arrangements. There is acceptance that to be responsive to changes in our environment we must make decisions quickly. For those that find this challenging, we have new management and communication approaches to support them. We know now more than ever the value of people who care for our Library clients and who are willing to adapt to deliver the services our clients' needs, and we value them and their well-being.

Planning in a disrupted environment was certainly heightened during the pandemic, and services have changed. COVID-19 forced us into making changes in a shorter timeframe, and we know when required we can change things quickly. COVID-19 has given us increased knowledge and expertise around iterating services on the fly which are all useful skills to have in an increasingly disrupted world. COVID-19 also showed us that publishers can be open and can also produce more online, and we hope that this positive change persists and that we continue to build new understandings with publishers.

Libraries are knowledge and innovation hubs, and we have had the opportunity to rethink the way we provide services, our structures, and resources, to reflect the new digital reality. This and our new understanding of ourselves, our colleagues, our peers, our students, and our academic community give us a resounding "yes" in response to the question "will our COVID-19 responses and experience remain relevant in the future?"

We have the ability to benchmark on the fly; we have key learnings in health, safety, and wellness risk management, business continuity and service development, leadership, sense-making, and staff engagement. We have adaptive staff who are open to learning, we are working on our culture, and we are taking care of each other. Only time will tell, but right now we are optimistic that this will stick.

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One library within one university: embedding a one library approach and vision

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8.1 Introduction

Change in libraries is not new, many have written about it and shared their experiences and perspectives. The level of change we are all experiencing has been amplified during this pandemic time with the need to respond to drastic changes in budget, the need for new delivery models, and a demand for all things digital. We are now operating in an environment where change is unstoppable and transformational, and as senior leaders, we are often drivers of that change.

I write from the position of University Librarian and as participant of the benchmarking exercise published in this book (Part Two). From this experience, what I offer in this chapter is a perspective which is rooted in knowledge and understanding of good and best practice in the sector, but shines the spotlight on what, for me, is key to change which sticks—understanding your University and aligning with it as one library team.



8.2 The one library imperative

This chapter will explore the concept of a “one library approach” in the development of the library’s strategic plan. Extensive stakeholder engagement provided data that delivered strategic themes and underpinning principles that functioned as enablers. Library staff contributed at key points in our process, strongly influencing the final outcomes. As is often

the case, the new strategy resulted in a major change to the library's organizational structure, with new models of service delivery requiring new roles, a different team structure, and a change in focus for the work of many people.

To implement this strategy and realize the opportunities of the new structure, our mindsets and culture had to change. Aligning and working “as one library” is often our biggest challenge. How do you get everyone in your library to act and think like one team? Is there a solution to the silos mentality that would reduce the frustrations and barriers that often result? And if we did operate this way, imagine the possibilities this would bring. A truly nimble team could easily adapt resulting in increased creativity, greater problem-solving, and delivery of real client-centered services (Winter, 2016).

Through development, implementation, and transition, a change in culture has taken place as we embed a “one library” approach and way of thinking. Rather than leading from the top, a “leading from everywhere” way of working encourages staff to step up and move beyond their role. To really bring about change, it has been important to have both the right strategy and the right team culture in place, you cannot do one without the other, and both need ongoing work and attention.

In addition, this chapter will provide a quantitative and qualitative evaluation that examines the impact and progress of this approach.



8.3 The case study

8.3.1 University of Newcastle, Australia

The University of Newcastle was founded in 1965, bringing together the Newcastle Teachers College (1949) and Newcastle University College (1951) (University of Newcastle, 2022). The University is a member of Innovative Research Universities Australia and the Council of Australian University Libraries (CAUL, 2022). The University is in a small metropolitan area of New South Wales, serving 39,000 students and 2859 staff. The University of Newcastle stands as a global leader distinguished by a commitment to equity and excellence. Our vision is to be a world-leading University of our regions for our regions, creating a better future

for addressing local concerns and issues, knowing our work can have global impact.

Underpinned by this vision and our values of excellence, equity, engagement, and sustainability, the University's strategy to 2025 outlines the University's commitment to delivering an exceptional student experience and serving our communities ([University of Newcastle, Annual Report, 2021](#)).

The University library sits within the academic division and plays a pivotal role in supporting the learning and research needs of the University community. Library staff work in partnership to provide convenient access to high-quality information resources, tailored programs of student and researcher support, access to cultural and regional collections, and first-class learning environments. Incorporating archives, rare books, art and museum collections, and services operates across four libraries, two galleries, and a museum. There are nearly 90 FTE staff plus a large team of student staff members employed through our students as partners program ([University of Newcastle Library, 2021](#)).



8.4 Developing our one library approach

In 2019 and with a new University Librarian in post, the library started work to develop a new vision and strategic plan that would position the library as a strong partner, one that could respond and contribute to University priorities, always looking forward and considering new possibilities. With a new University strategic plan recently launched, the timing was perfect to ensure we were in step with the University's changed direction.

In considering our approach, I felt it was important to be highly collaborative, engaging with our team so that together we could start to build a culture where *all staff* worked together to shape services, tackle key issues, thinking about solutions from an all of library perspective rather than an individual or team perspective. This approach brings together our best ideas, expert knowledge, and skills to deliver the best solutions. Over time, this has been called our “one library” approach, and through our strategy development work, organization restructuring, and everyday work practices, it is increasingly becoming the norm.



8.5 Developing a new library strategy

Five key stages over a 6-month period set our direction and approach to developing the new strategic plan for the library. A project manager was appointed through an internal expression of interest (EOI) process to lead the work. A small project group was put in place, again through an EOI process so that staff could step up and be involved alongside their substantive job. This approach was successful; staff from six teams formed our project group, developing new skills, broadening their understanding of the library's role, and forming new working relationships. The group functioned as a great conduit to the rest of the library team, providing updates, discussing ideas, and bringing their thinking back to the group discussion (Fig. 8.1).

8.5.1 Setting the foundation

Foundation work involved a self-assessment of our current state with a deep dive into our statistics, survey results, and any other forms of feedback over the recent past. Coupled with an extensive environmental scan, the team understood the landscape both nationally and internationally. Several site visits followed which further stretched our thinking and understanding of what the future needed to be.

8.5.2 Emerging themes—bringing the team into the mix!

We intentionally brought the whole library team into the process early, so they felt part of our journey. The team attended a 1-hour focus group with nine sessions held across three campuses. The option to complete an online survey or contribute to a physical “wall of ideas” was given to those members of the team unable to attend in person. In the sessions, staff were provided with the context around why we needed a new strategy, our approach, timelines, and the significant role they had to play in its development. They were divided into small groups and asked two questions. Where time permitted, they were given a third bonus question:



Figure 8.1 Five key stages in developing the new “one library” strategic plan
Author’s own artwork.

- What are current trends or big issues that will drive change for the University in the next 5 years?
- Imagine our libraries in 5 years, what is our purpose and what will it mean for our users?
- If you were the University Librarian and had an unlimited budget, what would you do?

Staff in leadership roles attended a further session. A summary of staff feedback was presented, along with two slightly different questions designed to tease out any gaps in the staff's vision and to focus on the evolution of services and support for our stakeholders:

- What is impacting us that drives us to evolve?
- How can we best support our students/teachers/researchers over the next 5 years?

The findings from the self-assessment, environmental scan, and workshops with staff were synthesized into four key themes, each with a clear goal statement and examples of what this would look like for our students, researchers, teaching staff, and community members.

8.5.3 Stakeholder engagement—are we aligning and do we want the same things?

8.5.3.1 *Talking to our students*

We engaged with students in a variety of formats and forums, online and across three campuses and four libraries over a 2-month period (Table 8.1).

• Focus groups	• Online surveys
• Coffee conversations	• Whiteboard Wisdom (question of the day)
• Spot polls	• Meetings with student associations

Student consultation questions for the development of “one library” strategic plan.

8.5.3.2 *Engaging with faculty and professional partners*

University staff and partners were asked for their feedback on the emerging themes. The project team presented at Faculty Executive meetings across all five faculties and met with partners from Infrastructure and Facilities (IFS), IT, English Language and Foundation Studies Centre (ELFSC), the Wollotuka Institute, Research and Innovation Services,

Table 8.1 Student consultation questions for development of “one library” strategic plan

Questions we posed to our students	Forum
What do you love about the library?	Spot polls Coffee conversations Whiteboard Wisdom
What could we do better?	Spot polls Coffee conversations Online surveys Whiteboard wall
Why do you come to the library?	Focus groups Coffee conversations Whiteboard Wisdom Whiteboard Wisdom
What would an amazing library look like/give you?	
What do you value most about the library?	Online surveys Whiteboard Wisdom Whiteboard Wisdom
If you wanted to improve the library, what would you suggest and why?	
What can we do to better support your teaching/research/learning?	Online surveys Whiteboard Wisdom Whiteboard Wisdom
What areas of the library do you use most and for what activities?	
What do we do now that supports you and your learning?	Focus group Coffee conversation Online surveys
How often do you come to the library?	Focus group

Student Central and the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Along with general feedback, discussion centered around three questions:

- What do you value about the library service now?
- Where could we improve what we do?
- What are the major things you are thinking about that would impact the library?

8.5.3.3 Engaging with our broader community

Our community was anyone who engages with the University and/or the library, but who is not a student or staff member of the University. We engaged with our community members using four methods:

- Short surveys of potential students and their families during Open Day;

- Focus group workshop held at the Hunter Living Histories group meeting;
- An online survey emailed to volunteers and promoted via social media; and
- Face-to-face discussions with volunteers in the GLAMx Digitisation Lab.

For potential students, we asked what they thought they would need from a University library and what they thought an amazing library might look like/give them.

8.5.4 Closing the loop. Have we missed anything?

Throughout the project, a project office was the center for activities; it provided a place for staff to add suggestions to the “ideas wall” and talk to the project team. This resulted in free-flowing discussion with staff actively engaged and sharing ideas. It created a feeling of anticipation as to what the final vision and plan would look like, and in addition what opportunities would that bring for them individually. Alongside this, a SharePoint project site provided a single place for all project information, and the team provided regular updates at staff forums, team meetings, and through direct email.

A final all-of-team workshop was held with over 80 staff in attendance to share the findings from the environmental scan and the feedback from the stakeholder engagement activities and present the final four emerging themes. This provided a final opportunity to contribute final thoughts, seek clarification, and identify any gaps. Staff were also asked to work in groups to develop vision and mission statements.

8.5.5 Finally—the launch

The new University Library Strategic Plan 2020–25: Your Future Library was launched to the library team, followed by a cross-institution launch via the central news channel with follow-up communication and discussion with faculties and professional service units ([University of Newcastle Library, 2020](#)).

With library staff, we took a team approach to the launch so that we could continue the conversation and talk in more detail about the impact on their work. We took the opportunity to also seek feedback on the process and how it worked for them. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and staff felt engaged in the process and felt that we had listened

and taken on board their views and ideas. One person commented that “they had been so involved in the process that in the end nothing in the new strategic plan was a surprise.” Another said, “they could see their ideas and suggestions in the plan.” On reflection, this was the point that we started to build real trust across our team, both horizontal and vertical.

In those talks with staff, we clearly signposted what the future looked like, what we needed to stop doing or do less of, and what we needed to start doing or do more of. This included the need to look at our team structure, roles, and resourcing which was supporting functions.



8.6 Building our new team

Our new organizational structure—developed in partnership with the whole library team

In November 2020, the library introduced a new organization structure. This followed a 10-month period of data gathering, modeling, formal consultation, finalization, and transition. Known to staff as the Library Change Project, we took a highly collaborative, project-based approach. It was important to me for everyone to feel part of the process and for the whole team to actively engage at key points, rather than presenting a new structure as a “done deal” at the formal consultation point. The whole team became a big part of the process as “co-designers.”

We initiated a series of workshops at the start of January 2022, open to all the team including those on fixed-term contracts and in casual positions. In the workshops, we started by setting clear expectations and by signposting the change that was coming. We set out the timeline, our approach to communication, and importantly how the whole library team would be involved.

A series of questions were developed for staff to consider and discuss. They were asked, “when reflecting on our current staffing structure, roles and team fit”:

- What is working well?
- What gaps do you feel are missing in the current structure, and where are we missing skills/expertise?
- Where do we have capacity due to changing priorities and work practices?

- Where are we building new services and need additional resourcing?
- Where could teams/functions be more closely aligned?

With each question, we asked staff to reflect on the new strategic plans in their discussions. Over 80% of the team participated in these sessions, many submitting further information, or meeting with myself or the project manager to discuss further. All this information was valuable and helped shape our thinking. The information was collated and presented back to staff outlining key themes that were starting to emerge. Again, they had an opportunity to respond.

Alongside this work, a high-level environmental scan was completed, and visits and discussions with other University Librarians were undertaken.



8.7 Keeping people informed and supported

To ensure success, we needed an effective communication plan to keep people informed on what was happening, when it was happening, and what we expected from them. A central SharePoint site was set up as the focal point, a “one-stop shop” for everything relating to the change project. The project manager provided a weekly update email, attended team meetings, and I included a discussion item in the monthly “All Staff Forum,” including opportunities for staff to ask questions. This allowed us to respond to any misconceptions, reduce potential “scaremongering,” and provide staff with the same information at the same time. It resulted in a fully transparent process.

In addition, as University Librarian I had an “open door” policy, anyone could come and talk to me in confidence about the project. Prior to the formal consultation, across a 3-month period 62 meetings with staff were held, both teams and individuals. During the formal consultation period, 52 open door consultation took place with staff wanting more detail about specific changes to roles, teaching functions, or to just provide a verbal comment. All were asked to submit formal written feedback as part of the process.

We also recognized the need to support staff throughout the process. Training for staff on navigating change and building resilience was provided early, followed by a recruitment support program which offered

workshops, online modules, and 1–1 coaching with a recruitment expert. A total of 85 staff attended the change and resilience workshops, and 65 attended the recruitment program.



8.8 Engaging with our stakeholders

While proactive engagement with library staff throughout the process was our top priority, we also recognized the need to do the same with stakeholders, particularly the academic community. Many of them were supporters of the library, and they valued our services and were on the receiving end of some of the changes proposed. We proposed a move to a team approach to support our researchers, creating a specialist role to drive our open access and strategic publishing agenda, a copyright officer role, with a team of Research Liaison Librarians to provide discipline-specific support. For the School of Law, a move away from having one dedicated law Librarian to distinct roles focusing on support for teaching or research was proposed. Twelve stakeholder meetings took place to explain the proposed changes, the benefits they would bring, and to answer questions and allay any concerns.

The formal consultation process lasted 3 weeks with 204 submissions received. This was the highest of any University change process, and while you may think that indicated a problem with people being against the changes, we saw it in a positive way, as a direct result of our active engagement campaign and an indicator of the importance of the library in the University.



8.9 Successful transition

Many instances of organizational change often end at the point when the new structure is approved, followed by a period of recruitment and redundancies. In our case, we had a multi-phased approach to the transition, which in total lasted 18 months. Partly, this was due to navigating the challenges of the pandemic, but really, we also wanted to make sure everyone transitioned well into the new structure. It was important

that along with the new Library strategy everyone understood their roles, where their team fitted, and what was different.

The transition plan covered several areas:

- Introducing the new structure—recruitment, personalized onboarding, knowledge transfer, and support for staff leaving;
- Establishing new functional teams—identify strategic priorities;
- A tiered approach to communication with strong reinforcing of key messages;
- Staff location and working environment;
- “Onboarding for all programs.”

In developing the transition plan, it was important to continue an “all-of-staff” approach, so that all staff, not just those who moved into new positions, were onboard, engaged, and moving in the same direction. With the new team structure, we took the opportunity to move all teams around with everyone having a new desk/workspace. At the same time, we upgraded work environments to include break-out spaces, technology-enabled meeting rooms, new ergonomic desks, and a refresh of informal/kitchen spaces. This provided a great boost for staff and certainly started to build a stronger team spirit.

The main area of focus was our “onboarding for all” program, a series of activities and workshops that all staff engaged in. The program was delivered over a 4-month period and included:

- A workshop series covering:
 - the new structure, team, and role responsibilities and priorities;
 - the four pillars of the strategic plan and its alignment at a University level;
 - the concept of leading from everywhere in your role;
 - developing a strong team and work culture;
 - working well together sessions introducing reframed expectations around working in open plan in the new open plan office environments;
 - being “one library”—what does that look like?

Workshops were interactive with discussion and group activities, and staff were asked to reflect and think “what does this mean for me in my role, and what does it mean for my team?”

- Individual meetings between staff and their supervisor to outline their role, review the position description, and formulate a personal training and development plan. This happened for all staff, even for those in unchanged roles/functions.

- RACI plans for each team were developed to help staff understand changes to service accountabilities and responsibilities.
- A new governance structure to guide and clarify decision-making. All groups had clear terms of reference, articulated memberships, and where possible drew in people from across teams and levels of the library.
- Communities of practice were introduced to increase cross-team engagement, foster innovation, and support our continued learning culture.
- For those coming to supervisor/manager positions, additional sessions introduced topics such as understanding the EBA and probation and performed review and developing individuals and teams. An annual program of leadership training is in place for this group supplemented with our “leaders in conversation” program that sees them discuss topical issues, share good practice, and learn from each other.



8.10 Where are we now—18 months on?

It would be wrong for me to paint a picture that this was all plane sailing, there have been many challenges along the way as comes with a major change. The transition phase took longer than we had planned, due to the need to respond to the pandemic, but also realizing that change on this scale takes time and not everyone moves at the same pace. Slowing some things down meant that no one in the team got left behind.

We continue to have a consultative approach, engaging staff in decision-making, work planning, and discussions about library business. This is multilayered, at an “all-of-library” level, at team level, and with individuals. Staff attend sessions each year where we share the annual program of works and facilitate discussion on our priorities, what this means for them and their team, and how they contribute. The Library Workforce Plan ensures we are building capacity and capability across the team, library-wide priorities for training and development, and aligning with our strategic direction. This feeds into performance, review, and development objectives for all our library teams.

Staff are encouraged to excel in their role and are offered support through training, mentoring, and coaching. Staff are encouraged to step beyond their role, working on projects, shadowing other positions, and undertaking secondments across the library and beyond. Supervisors have regular “career conversations” with team members to understand how best to help them reach their goals and aspirations.

We are into our third year of the strategic plan, and reflecting on our progress, I feel we have done amazingly well considering everything going on. Engaging our stakeholders through the strategy work has resulted in a higher level of trust and increased collaboration and support. Improving our physical spaces and technological infrastructure has moved at an accelerated pace with successful capital requests and commitment to future funding. The library has been given the responsibility to lead the University’s centralized fund to support researchers to publish in high-quality, open-access journals by paying their article processing charges. In recognition of our approach to people leadership and workforce development, I sit on the University’s Inspiring People Program board, steering the work to improve our performance and culture.

This year the library had the highest score in the University’s Student Satisfaction Survey with over 85% of those responding indicating satisfaction in library services. Our new Students as Partners Framework has increased our partnership with students, through the introduction of paid internships, more students as staff positions, and students collaborating with us to codesign existing and new services. The end of 2021 saw the library team nominated for four awards at the University Annual Excellence Awards, winning the awards for Student Experience and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.



8.11 What about the library team?

The library has a strong and more united culture post-structure change. Staff have high levels of satisfaction, a pride in the place they work, feel supported in their roles, and have opportunities for development. Eighteen months on from our organizational change, the Post-Implementation Review was conducted to assess the change process, as mandated by our Enterprise Agreement. This presented an opportunity

to extend this and conducted a more holistic “health check” on the transition, team culture, progression to professional goals, and engagement.

The review included a staff survey, with a 91% response rate from the team:

86% indicating the need for change was clear.

77% provided feedback through the consultation process.

65% indicated they had been well supported by the library throughout the process.

In relation to the transition:

62% agreed that the onboarding sessions were helpful in their transition.

74% were happy with the support they received from library leaders.

90% confirmed they received sufficient communication about the change.

Taking a more broad look, the library data from the University “Your Voice” employee experience survey conducted in May 2021 was analyzed. Again, engagement was high with 82% of staff completing the survey, evidence of a strong commitment to the library and University. Results showed significant improvement since 2019 across several areas, including:

- Respectful workplace;
- Our mission and vision;
- Opportunities for learning, development, and career opportunities;
- Communication and cooperation;
- Our people—colleagues, supervisors, leaders.

In many instances, our results indicated a higher level of satisfaction and engagement than the rest of the University community, an indication that the work has paid off. Where results indicated further focus was needed, conversations with our team have guided what this work involves. Final actions have then been incorporated into our workforce plan.



8.12 Conclusions

It has become increasingly self-evident that to succeed in our complex, increasingly disrupted world we need to have both strong strategic direction and a team who all work together. In taking a highly

collaborative approach, we put our library team and our stakeholders at the center of our strategy work and library change. This has built trust and new partnerships and has accelerated our progress and transformation. In looking to the future, would I do anything differently? It would have been to conduct more targeted stakeholder feedback and more work socializing and explaining the strategy post-launch to really develop a deeper understanding of our value. Our library team culture is very much evolving post-change, and I would summarize this as “our work on team effectiveness and connectedness continues as we strive to build a culture of high performance, accountability, and excellence.”

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Cultivating agility and resilience over time

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9.1 Introduction

As the saying goes, “Rome was not built in a day.” For academic libraries, it takes a long time to build up robust mechanisms and a culture that enables a library to face crises, to handle volatilities and uncertainties. How long does it take for a library to get that agility to respond to turbulence and the resilience to restore balance?

At the time of writing, in May 2022, Hong Kong was recovering from the Omicron wave of Coronavirus. It was the worst wave that hit us since the beginning of COVID-19 in 2020, with over 70,000 infected cases in a day at its peak. It was the most disruptive one to university activities and library operations. At the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), the library resumed all operations in April 2022, when the restrictive measures in the city gradually eased. When we looked back to our actions since the beginning of the pandemic, we were humbled to find that we had survived the disruptions well. With a deeper reflection, we realized that our agile responses could be attributed to some organizational good practices and the culture that we built up in the past 10 years. These practices in fact are not unusual among academic libraries; yet, recognizing their power manifested in our pandemic responses was a rewarding discovery.

We will briefly describe the measures we took during COVID-19 and then elaborate on how various organizational practices helped us build up agility.



9.2 Pandemic measures at HKUST library

Different cities and regions in the world have their own pandemic stories. In Hong Kong, although the COVID-19 cases were mostly under control for most of the time since the outbreak in early 2020, daily life in the city had been disrupted to various degrees throughout the period. Following the rapid changes in situation, universities inevitably went between physical and online teaching with short notice. At the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), the library responded with quick adjustments in operation hours, staff deployment, and service provisions; we aimed to maintain the optimal support for our users under this uncertain and volatile environment.

Our COVID-19 measures are similar to those in many other institutions ([Connaway et al., 2021](#)). We can summarize them in the following four areas:

9.2.1 Space and environment

We took a variety of actions to maintain a clean, safe, and functional environment for users and staff. A thermal camera was installed at the library entrance. It uses software developed at our university for visual and auditory highlighting of users with higher temperatures. We increased the airflow with stronger ventilation and increased air volume replacement. All surfaces and keyboards were sprayed with a long-term antiviral and antimicrobial coating. Cleaning schedules were strengthened, especially those for washrooms. Water spigots on drinking fountains were capped; bottle refill outlets remained accessible. We provided hand sanitizing gel for staff and users and installed plexiglass barriers at service points to protect both counter staff and users.

9.2.2 User behaviors and communication

Following the rules of the campus, all users and staff have been required to wear a mask while using the library. To maintain physical distance between users, we removed one-third to half of the seats, depending on the social distancing rules at the time. This could be easily implemented because most of our seats are movable chairs rather than fixed seating. We closed many group study rooms but kept those with glass walls open for users. This allowed library staff and security guards to enforce masking and distancing requirements. We used multiple physical signs, electronic posters, and library web pages to inform users and remind them of the rules.

9.2.3 Collections and services

When the library had to be closed in early 2020, we designed a “library materials pick-up” logistic to let users request physical items online, and then pick them up at the library entrance. The service was maintained even during the periods that library access was not restricted. This helped us to keep the base level of service with continuity despite the fluctuation of pandemic situations.

We put further emphasis on acquiring electronic resources and ensuring their accessibility. We identified high-use print books and sourced their e-versions. We made sure remote online access was reliable; we created online guides to help users navigate available resources during this special time. The e-resources downloads in 2020 and 2021 were phenomenal.

Before the outbreak, we created our virtual reference services to replace the physical reference desk. This move proved timely at such a disruptive time. Library instruction was primarily conducted online, even during the periods when the university allowed face-to-face classes.

Library space became even more important for our community when teaching and learning moved online. Many students relied on library space and equipment for online classes, taking advantage of our comfortable, quiet environment, with strong and reliable WiFi connection. At the same time, course tutors reserved our group study rooms to conduct online tutorials. While some courses had to hold proctored online examinations, our e-learning classroom equipped with over 30 computers, cameras, and headsets became a convenient venue; a few teaching departments booked the classroom for this purpose.

Maintaining long library hours was a challenge during the peak of the Omicron wave in spring 2022. Although the number of users had decreased, we had to maintain a certain service level since the library was considered an essential service on campus. However, many staff members had to work from home, and student helper manpower was not available. To manage opening hours, including regulating the hours to the 24x7 study area, we prepared multiple contingency plans that were deployed according to the government’s restrictive measures, which changed in response to the severity of the pandemic. When services gradually resumed in April 2022, the opening hours extended gradually in three phases covering early and late hours, weekends, and holidays phase-by-phase.

9.2.4 Staff arrangements

We tried to provide library staff with basic needs for working under pandemic measures. During the early phase of the pandemic, masks and sanitizer were in short supply. We secured supplies to provide for frontline staff. When rapid tests became common, the university started to provide a basic supply, while more could be purchased at a discount.

We adopted various work-from-home arrangements depending on the government and university guidance. Some library units divided themselves into two teams that took turns to work in offices. To support colleagues' remote working, we purchased extra sets of webcams and headsets for them to borrow. Staff installed OCLC Connexion and enabled OneDrive and other relevant software at home. Systems staff provided a roster for the helpline to provide technical support to users and staff.



9.3 Practices that cultivate organizational agility

Looking back over our journey since the beginning of 2020, we are confident to say that we managed to keep up our services through the difficulties. Some of the physical-to-virtual leaps came smoothly for us because, for many years before the pandemic, we had already been prioritizing electronic mode in collections and service delivery. During this pandemic time, there were numerous moments that the library management team had to make complex decisions with little information and time available. Speaking overall, most of our decisions and actions turned out to be constructive, thanks to our understanding of users' needs and behaviors, and our commitment to service quality assurance. In addition, our library teams are used to adapting to changes while keeping our eyes on strategic goals. When we reflected on our experience riding through the pandemic waves, we realized that we had benefited a lot from some organizational practices and mindsets that we cultivated in the past 10 years.

9.3.1 Strategic planning and decision-making mechanisms

Libraries use strategic planning to align their activities with those of the parent institution and to keep themselves accountable for the achievement of their goals (Saunders, 2016). In 2012, we started organizing an annual

strategic planning retreat. The upcoming one in July 2022 will be our 11th run. The event gathers the whole library staff to review the achievements of each functional unit in the past year and to share strategic goals and tactical actions in the coming year. Gradually, this annual ritual has created a culture of open communication across teams, collaborative spirit, and goal-oriented mentality. It helps all staff to touch base on their units' priorities every year and hence ground their actions on common objectives even when the operation environment changes. Such a mode of decision-making turned out to be instrumental when we faced the volatile COVID-19 situations. It helped us surf through many waves with agility and composure.

During uncertain times, we often have little information, data, and time to make deliberated decisions. Yet, many of our quick choices of pandemic responses were not haphazard but were based on our knowledge of user behaviors and needs. For example, when planning partial closure of the library building during a term, we decided on which floors should remain accessible and on the opening hours using occupancy data at a similar time during previous terms. Enclosed spaces for small groups were considered unsafe during the pandemic; however, we understood that students had high demand for study rooms, especially for attending online classes. Balancing numerous factors, we chose to open those rooms with glass walls; users must comply with physical distance and mask rules, and the glass walls allowed library staff and security guards to enforce the rules. Our confidence in knowing our users comes from a systemic gathering of usage data, transactional data, behavioral observations, and user feedback over the years. Like many academic libraries, we systematically collect usage statistics such as collection access and checkout, reference inquiries, gate counts, and room bookings. From time to time, we conduct thematic user studies on specific areas of library services; examples included a survey on study carrels, a focus group on rover services, and a focus group on research data management. Every few years, we participate in the LibQual survey together with other university libraries in Hong Kong. Collecting data is only one side of the story; it is important that we make use of the data. We actively use the data to make evidence-based decisions, we interpret the data to make sense of user behaviors, and we take actions to address the feedbacks from users. As our colleagues often say, "we close the loop." This tradition of using data builds up a pool of explicit as well as tacit knowledge about our users; it became very

instrumental when we had to make snap judgments during the fast-changing situations of the pandemic.

9.3.2 Quality assurance systems

Our practice of collecting users' input and understanding users' needs through multiple channels goes together with the quality assurance systems at our university. We use performance assessment to manage and demonstrate service quality and effectiveness; we strive to build an assessment culture using a learning organization and systems thinking approach (Lakos and Phipps, 2004).

The university requires academic and supporting units, including the library, to submit an annual report on how we ensure quality in teaching and learning. This exercise prompts us to review critically the outcome of the services we provide and the mechanisms on quality assurance. Through years of rigorous reviews and subsequent improvements, we have implemented a wide range of sound mechanisms to assess service effectiveness, users' perception, and satisfaction.

As we describe in the previous section, we use surveys and focus groups to proactively solicit user feedback, which provides evidence of service quality and direct improvements. Apart from assessment, we built in quality assurance in the way we work. For example, we actively seek partnership with other units when organizing programs such as exhibitions, talks, and cocurricular activities. Partnership generates synergy and increases impacts and quality of our programs. Another example is our engagement with our information literacy teaching collaborator, the Center for Language Education in HKUST. We have regular discussions with them on teaching quality, share class ratings and students' comments with them, and work out adjustment from term to term.

Soliciting inputs from external sources is essential for quality assurance. They may come as an endorsement of our service quality or as new perspectives beyond librarianship or our own institution. For example, when we had a major migration of integrated library systems in the mid-2010s, we hired a change manager from the corporate sector to oversee the re-engineering. On the other hand, for developing our special collections on antique maps, we engaged experts and map connoisseurs to form an advisory committee. We also benchmark our service quality with other academic libraries in Hong Kong.

The annual reports submitted are reviewed by a committee on quality assurance. Comments and recommendations received further help us to improve. Over the years, some of our practices were considered as good practice and were commended to other units:

- Offering tailored-made research workshops for different schools and departments;
- Using Course Enhancement Funds to engage faculty in raising students' skills in research and resources;
- Applying objective criteria and evidence-based data to renew subscriptions;
- Seeking feedback and engaging stakeholders for service enhancements, e.g., furniture and facility upgrade, facial recognition, and technology devices.

9.3.3 A forward-thinking mindset in service planning

In spring 2020, when COVID-19 restricted physical access and contact, our transition to online services was not as disruptive as others. In February 2019, our reference service was moved from a physical desk to a virtual service. When the pandemic hit, the service was not affected; we only had to enable staff taking their shifts from home. All instruction librarians already had experience teaching online, as we started adopting Zoom teaching in November 2019. With our proficiency in conducting online classes, we were comfortable to explore more complex ways to deliver other events online, such as mixed-mode guest talks and multi-speaker seminars.

In terms of access to collections, the library has prioritized electronic format in collection development as a strategic goal since 2013. This turned out to be a great strength when physical access became difficult.

When we opened physical space for users while maintaining compliance with COVID-19 guidelines from the university or the government, flexibility turned out to be crucial. In all space rejuvenation projects in the past decade, flexibility has been our guiding principle (Chan and Spodick, 2015). This enabled us to allocate appropriate distribution of seats, tables, and spaces at various times of the pandemic.

9.3.4 Trust within and beyond the library

We observe and experience a good amount of trust among library staff members; we also established good collaborations and relations with other

campus units. In the COVID-19 times, communications across different library teams and within teams had to go through email, mobile messaging apps, and online conferencing platforms. Yet, issues were always addressed promptly, decisions were disseminated quickly, and actions were taken efficiently. On the other hand, library responses to the rapidly changing COVID-19 situations could not have been successful without the strong support of other campus units, particularly our campus management office, security office, and health and safety office.

This trust and support do not come overnight. We can trace its origin to a people-oriented, service-oriented culture that we built over the last 10 years. The year 2012 was a pivotal time for our library to transform beyond a collection-centric service modality—our Learning Commons (LC) opened. To promote the LC as a brand-new service, we reached out to many units on the campus, including academic departments and non-academic offices. As a result, many departments recognized the library as a partner in teaching and learning. When they had to conduct online examinations for the first time during COVID-19, they knew we were there to support. We maintain good working relations with all campus units, not only because we support them in their work through LC and other services, but also because they know the library is a trusted partner.

Within the library team, we develop trust with open communications, capacity building, and appreciation of individuals' contributions. As described in a previous section, we hold an annual retreat for strategic planning. The gathering is an open platform for all staff members to participate in planning; it is also our annual celebration of achievements as we arrange group lunches. In 2012, we started new mechanisms for peer learning and team building. The former, called Library Connect, invites librarians to present new topics, either from recent projects or learning in conferences they attended. The latter, called Fun-Fun Café, is a more light-hearted mode of social gathering, which invites all staff to talk about their personal passions. We have had sessions about Chinese dumpling making, catholic paintings appreciation, Italian cuisine and culture, hand-crafts, and many more. These professional and social gatherings connect staff members with a sense of togetherness and equality: we learn from each other; discover and respect each other's talents and passions; grow together and laugh together.

At critical times like the pandemic, such "togetherness" became a sentiment to support each other. The library management team used a

mobile messaging group on WhatsApp connecting unit heads and front-line team leaders; it facilitated timely discussions, quick responses, and actions. All members in the group managed to stay alert and be responsive even beyond office hours. This is a manifestation of the mutual trust we built up through the years.



9.4 Conclusion

The pandemic has affected all levels of society around the world. The commercial world is particularly hard hit. The impact on education is no less. While at higher education in Hong Kong, instruction continued but the mode has changed to online or hybrid. Library services are essential to continuously support learning, teaching, and research even during the pandemic. The Chinese saying, “crossing a river by feeling for stones,” describes well our approach at the beginning of the pandemic. We gained experiences and insights through trial, errors, and experimentation. After two and a half years of unsettling times, we discovered that we did a fair job in fulfilling our mission. Some of the good practices bear fruit and help us through this turbulent period. We realized that our agile responses were grounded in organizational practices and culture which we gradually built up in the past decade. We traced how agility silently grew in four areas. First, the strategic planning and decision-making mechanisms prepare us with thorough and holistic considerations based on data and behavioral factors. Second, quality assurance systems help us to assess service effectiveness and users’ perception. Third, a forward-thinking mindset compels us to plan proactively and flexibly in service planning. Finally, trust within and beyond the library garners the strong support we need, especially during stressful times. We are uncertain of future challenges, yet we believe these strengths will enable us to surf in future waves.

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New applications of benchmarking

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SECTION A

Benchmarking in different contexts

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Library partnerships in an age of openness

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10.1 Introduction

David [Lankes \(2011\)](#) has stated that “the mission of Librarians is to facilitate knowledge creation in their communities.” In our post-COVID world as we move toward the “next normal,” a challenge and an opportunity are how we as librarians work together with each other and with our communities in a world of “open.” Embracing openness in terms of access to libraries, their resources, staff, and services and considering how partnerships can help to deliver this will be a key element in delivering our agenda.

[Dempsey \(2019\)](#) acknowledges that library “collaboration is hard” and that it needs to be a deliberate strategic focus. Nevertheless, librarians are strong collaborators. Writing about the academic sector, [Jolly and White \(2016\)](#) noted that libraries across the world have a long tradition of collaboration and that this may occur within the sector, across sectors, or with vendors and suppliers (see, for example, [Harrasi and Jabour, 2014](#); [Ullah, 2015](#); [Marks, 2005](#)). The focus of this article is on library partnerships with particular reference to the British Library (BL), the national library of the UK.

National libraries have “well established...cooperation and collaboration functions” as [Landry \(2017\)](#) noted in a 2016 survey for the International Federation of Library Associations and Conference of Directors of National Libraries (IFLA/CDNL). These functions could mean anything from government mandate to lead public library services to a range of informal partnerships.

However, national libraries are still, to some extent, largely fixed in space in physical terms, despite having grown their digital offer both long before

and considerably during the COVID-19 period (such as the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#), [Gallica](#), n.d., and the Australian [National Library of Australia](#), [Trove](#), n.d.). Through partnerships with public and academic libraries, the BL has improved access to its content services and programs.

As reflective practitioners, we are long used to sharing our learning and ideas within our professional and our broader community, through formal and informal collaborations and partnership working, and these approaches would seem to have definite potential in delivering more equitable and sustainable services in our new normal. [Carnwell and Carson \(2009\)](#), writing about the health sector, suggest that it is “worthwhile to distinguish broadly between what something is, that is a partnership, and what one does, that is collaborate or work together” and note that “collaboration. . . is what we do when we engage successfully in a ‘partnership.’”

Much of our current professional debate is around open scholarship. We (rightly) focus on the publishing aspect of the scholarly communications cycle, on the publishing model, and our relationships with publishers. But if scholarly outputs still remain inaccessible to large sectors of our communities—national, regional, local, and international—are we developing a truly open society and how can a national library work in partnership across sectors to contribute to openness in its broadest sense?



10.2 The British Library and its partnerships

The British Library is a relatively young national library, founded by an Act of the UK Parliament in 1972 and operational since 1973. Its predecessor institutions include the National Central Library (started in the early 20th century to loan books to students who could not afford to go to university), the National Lending Library for Science and Technology, founded in 1967, the Patent Office Library (1885), and the British Museum Library (1753). While the British Library does not have the mandate to lead public library services in the UK, the Act does enable the library to contribute to the “efficient running of library services” ([British Library Act, 1972](#)) and to make its services available to other libraries. The BL’s strategy for 2015–23 is called “Living Knowledge” ([British Library, 2014](#)). Within this, the library’s mission states “we make our intellectual heritage accessible to everyone, for research, inspiration, and

enjoyment” and do this via six purposes of custodianship, learning, research, business, culture, and international. It has a long history of working in partnership with libraries including the UK interlibrary loan service which was dependent on working with libraries of all sectors. Current work on the development of a new strategy for 2024–30 will focus on planning for the continued delivery of the library’s mission in a context of openness and collaboration.

Examples of more recent partnerships with academic libraries include the UK Research Reserve (which allows institutional libraries to de-duplicate their journal holdings and save space while maintaining access via the holding of the British Library) and the EThOS electronic thesis service. In the past few years, the BL has also developed a strategic emphasis on partnership working with public libraries as a way of delivering its strategy. These are the Living Knowledge Network, the Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC), the BIPC National Network, and the Unlocking our Sound Heritage project.

The Business and Intellectual Property Centre was started in 2006, working in partnership with the Intellectual Property Office, and supports people to start up, protect, and grow their businesses. At the heart of the service is free access to vital market intelligence and intellectual property advice and guidance as well as free and low-cost training, 1:1 advice, mentoring and talks, and networking in a trusted and accessible space. In 2012, the BIPC national network was started in collaboration with regional/city libraries and smaller local public libraries across the UK. An independent economic evaluation in 2019 showed that the BIPC network was creating £6.95 of public value for every £1 invested ([ERS Research & Consultancy, 2019](#)). In the spring of 2020, a £13 m grant from the UK government was announced to expand the national network from 12 to 20 centers and to deploy a hub and spoke model to reach a further 90 local centers.

The Living Knowledge Network (LKN) is a UK-wide partnership of national and public libraries. It was initiated as a 2-year pilot in September 2016 by the BL with founding partners the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales and 21 public library services from around the UK, funded jointly by Arts Council England (the sector development body for public libraries in England) and the BL. The network was created to explore new ways for libraries to work together, and its stated aim is that “Together, we aim to facilitate knowledge exchange, provide joint offers to our audiences, and act as a shared voice to gain the

benefits and power which come from being in a network.” It further aims to strengthen collective capacity, capability and impact, and deliver “library services to diverse communities through partnership working” ([British Library, Living Knowledge Network, n.d.](#)). In 2018, the network was formally launched as a subscription partnership. The LKN is centered on exchanging knowledge and developing memorable experiences for public library users – from author talks and simultaneous UK-wide exhibitions with local flavors to staff leadership and development days.

The Unlocking our Sound Heritage (UoSH) project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund aimed to create sustainable centers of excellence in digital audio preservation around the UK. It also aimed to transform access to and preserve the UK’s most vulnerable and at-risk audio heritage, raising awareness of the importance and value of the nation’s sound heritage and involving new audiences in engaging with their audio heritage in innovative ways. The program established a network of audio preservation centers across the UK, with expert staff in place to catalog, digitize, and preserve sounds. The project preserved rare and at-risk sound recordings and improved discoverability with the use of improved catalog records. A program of learning and outreach activities was delivered across the UK including workshops, learning events, public tours, and websites.

The BL was commissioned by the Arts Council England to develop its vision for “one national platform that can host library-curated content and services, showcase exhibitions as well as promote two-way traffic with local library websites, giving national visibility to local events and collections” ([Arts Council England, 2021](#)). A Single Digital Presence was a recommendation of [Sieghart \(2013\)](#). The first phase involved extensive research and consultation with libraries and communities about what such a platform could be and how it might work. The current phase of funding to March 2024 will enable the library to develop and test a public-facing version of the platform.



10.3 COVID and post-COVID

The COVID-19 global pandemic both exacerbated and laid bare existing societal inequalities. Library responses in the UK during the

pandemic generally resulted in more open programming and service delivery. BL exhibitions and BIPC and LKN events and webinars were available digitally to a much broader reach than previously to those with digital access.

Now, in rethinking rebuilding our services for the next normal and with the inclusion of considerations of equity, sustainability, and openness, there is an opportunity to “build back better,” and libraries have a key role in working collaboratively to do this ([IFLA Library Advocacy and Policy Blog, 2021](#)).

In the months following the first lockdown, the BL revisited Living Knowledge with a view to setting out our role in societal renewal and addressing longstanding inequalities following both the pandemic and the worldwide protests following the death of George Floyd. The library has a clear contribution to both economic growth and innovation and social cohesion. The result was the document Living Knowledge: For Everyone. “We will bring people together through libraries” is a major element of the document and a clear statement of the link between openness and inclusivity and entrepreneurship and economic growth, with libraries having a clear role as engines of economic growth ([British Library, 2020](#)).

Developments have included a new “Reset. Restart” service for entrepreneurs and small businesses across the country, which is being delivered through the BIPC national network. This was an urgent response to the immediate challenges being faced by one of the library’s key user groups and built on the Treasury-funded expansion of the national network mentioned above.

A key objective of BL plans for the near future will be to strengthen the infrastructure it provides to its networks as they respond to current challenges, while at the same time opening up content, services, and spaces to more people and communities across the UK and beyond. This will include work on the SDP project, further expansion of the Living Knowledge Network, and development of a UoSH network of project participants to help widen access to project outputs. To ensure effectiveness at strategic level, the library has reviewed governance of its work with public libraries and is instigating a Public Library Partnerships Board to ensure strategic alignment and effectiveness and to optimize benefit from the four strands for all.

Both BIPC and LKN pivoted from hybrid to digital-only delivery during the pandemic (UoSH already had a digital focus) and in many

ways were more open to more people. Despite the fact that people reported missing face-to-face contact, statistics showed more people accessed events and courses than could ever be possible with limitations on physical space. All three of these initiatives have already helped to open up the national library to both the communities that we service and the professional library community through delivery of talks and events and staff development and knowledge sharing. Those who have been involved, community and staff, may previously have felt that the BL was not for them, physically or digitally. The national library is now part of a professional community of practice with advocates based across the UK from whom it can learn so much about the needs of people in communities it may not have served previously. With a post-pandemic return to hybrid, how do we carry this increased openness and accessibility forward while balancing with important human interaction elements and build these into long-term benefits for our communities?



10.4 The future

Technology has the potential to change service delivery, both in individual libraries and through partnerships through projects such as the SDP. Membership schemes, inquiry services, information literacy programs, and cultural events, all have potential here, on top of the increasing availability of digital content. Building on existing partnerships such as UKRR, it may be time to revitalize old services such as UK-wide cross-sectoral interlibrary loan, to enable lending not restricted by vendor-specific systems. Together with increasing resource license prices and the need for efficiency gains in sectors such as public libraries and higher education, we may finally begin to fully consider the development of a truly national collection, print and digital, that will link to the nation's legal deposit collection. Artificial intelligence will facilitate collaborative collection building, metadata creation and access, and the use of such collections as well as supporting communities in their use.

The environmental impact of digital—due to the energy-intensive nature of digital systems and storage—has the potential to be mitigated by partnerships, perhaps most obviously through collaborative collection building at national and sectoral levels, together with, as noted by

Pendergrass et al. (2019), well-promoted cross-organizational discovery tools and descriptive metadata linkages. Chowdhury (2016) recognizes that more research on user behavior, in this context, is needed. Library partnerships could also have a powerful role in promoting, developing, and delivering carbon literacy: “an awareness of the carbon dioxide costs and impacts of everyday activities, and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis” (The Carbon Literacy Project, 2022). With the publication of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the sustainability agenda has a broader focus on social justice where social inequality is seen as inherently unsustainable. IFLA, as a partner of the UN, has taken a strong lead in advocating for the role of libraries in attaining the SDGs (Bradley 2016; United Nations, n.d.). In the UK, the BL has worked with partners including CILIP and Julie’s Bicycle to develop the Green Libraries Manifesto (2022), launched at the CILIP Conference in 2022. This aims to bring libraries together to work toward a shared vision and commits signatories to “Bring environmental sustainability to the heart of decision making . . . to working with communities [and] to working in partnership” (Green Libraries Manifesto, 2022).

Equity, diversity, and inclusion issues, particularly those of race equality, must be fully explored in the context of intersectionality. Librarians are axiomatic and active members of the conversation about what an inclusive library, promoting a sense of belonging for our community, in its broadest sense needs to be, rather than the neutral observers we have perceived ourselves to be, and as a profession, we need to be willing to confront our biases. In the UK, our services are developed and managed by a profession that is overwhelmingly white (Hall et al., 2016). As a profession, we need to prioritize equity of access to collections, service, and staff which truly reflect the diversity and intersectionality of our communities, particularly those we have previously underserved. Work on our collections will include collection development and management, reviewing and redeveloping metadata and classification schemes that do not reproduce existing inequalities and assumptions. This can also involve exposing physical and digital items in our collections to communities outside our buildings more regularly and to more diverse locations, building on, initiatives such as the British Library’s Treasures on Tour programme (see, for example, British Library, 2021) Currently, loans of collection items to local institutions involve meeting stringent security and preservation requirements. How can we ensure that more local libraries meet

these requirements—via, for example, knowledge sharing or funding of equipment? One way of doing this could be to develop “national library” space in local libraries that would enable local people to further engage with physical and digital collection items and support public libraries in terms of access and security as well as preservation. And if we are truly thinking about an ecosystem, we should enable a single system of access to all types of libraries—another recommendation of [Sieghart \(2013\)](#). Various versions of this have operated at local and regional levels in the UK (see, for example, [Chelin, 2015](#)) and at the national level elsewhere. The time for developing a UK version would seem to be here.

In partnership working, co-creation as a means of successful collaboration is now commonplace. First articulated by [Pralhad and Ramaswamy \(2004\)](#), this emphasized the continuous engagement of employees with customers for better project and service development. This concept has been adopted and adapted in the public policy sphere ([OECD, 2011](#); [Brandsen et al., 2018](#)) and in higher education ([Dollinger et al., 2018](#); [Neary and Winn, 2009](#)) and, I would argue, is more equitable and less didactic than an “outreach” approach.

Our thinking around partnerships, collaboration, and co-creation will expand in line with our thinking about our broader library ecosystem—“the interconnected network of all types of libraries, library workers, volunteers, and associations that provide and facilitate library services for community members” ([American Library Association, 2020](#)). This is both true in terms of the “how” of developing services, which both transforms and transforms its community differently over time, and also because of the “why,” which is enduring: as the ALA states: “A patron of one library is the potential patron of any other library at a different time of life or location.” This definition would benefit from being expanded to include potential patrons or users as well as nonusers and that librarians need to be thinking about their community, as defined by [Lankes \(2011\)](#), holistically. Perhaps, we can consider libraries as a distributed ecosystem enabled by partnerships.

In a distributed ecosystem, a national library can think about its leadership differently, using its convening power to bring together libraries across the country. A longer-term vision would be to do this across sectors and to enable the development of partnerships and collaborations across sectors and regions.

Enabling truly effective partnership working would involve entering into a dialogue of equals with fellow professionals to ensure that our

learning and development enable LIS workers to optimize their effectiveness in a library ecosystem. As [Carnwell and Carson \(2009\)](#) noted in the health context “if partnerships and collaboration are to be new ways of working together, old forms of professional education and training will need to be reviewed.” Librarianship in the UK, at least, is traditionally a hierarchical profession, though CILIP, the professional and validating body, is undergoing positive and transformational change. There are now more diverse ways into the UK profession and an acknowledgment of the importance of a community of practice approach ([Wenger, 1998](#)), with multidirectional knowledge flows rather than didacticism. However, as noted above, there is a long way to go in terms of actively improving diversity and belonging in the UK profession itself. Accepting the challenge of difference in a diverse society and actively committing to reflective practice will be critical. Sennett’s dialogical model of cooperation which “prosper through empathy, the sentiment of curiosity about who other people are in themselves” ([Sennett, 2013](#)) is relevant here, too.

As noted above, [Dempsey \(2019\)](#) acknowledges that library “collaboration is hard” and that it needs to be a deliberate strategic focus. [Gorman \(2015\)](#) expressed hope that librarians would work together to “actualize our commonality of purpose in the midst of the diversity of our missions,” and the [American Library Association \(2020\)](#) states that “no library exists independent of the library ecosystem.” The library community now has an opportunity to build on experience and to think more expansively and collaboratively about what openness means in terms of spaces, content, and staff support for our communities in a hybrid digital and physical world and how we can work in partnership to achieve this—ensuring the enduring “why” and the transforming “how” of libraries in the 21st century.

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Lessons in leadership from third sector organizations

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11.1 Introduction

What is the nature of leadership in the third sector? How do third sector leaders shape their organizations, and what are the specific challenges they face? These were questions that had interested me since I moved from a long-time career in local authority library services to the third sector. This small ethnographic research project was the result. It gave me the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with nine leaders associated with the third sector. When identifying the potential interviewees, I used the National Audit Office definition of the third sector “a term used to describe the range of organisations that are neither public sector nor private sector. It includes voluntary and community organisations (both registered charities and other organisations such as associations, self-help groups and community groups), social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives” (National Audit Office, 2010). The values that emerged through the interviews are not specific to any one sector, and the themes are transferable; thus they present opportunities for any leader to reflect upon and benchmark their own practice.



11.2 A note on report conventions and anonymity

Punctuation has been added to quotes, but I have tried to ensure that this does not alter any meaning. Words and quotes from the interviewees are presented between inverted commas. Interviewees are identified only as subjects 1–9 to protect anonymity.



11.3 Interviews and areas of investigation

This report presents my insights and conclusions from the interviews and is structured by five key areas of investigation:

- How they view the role of CEO/senior leader?
- What is the motivation of the interviewees?
- Managing risk.
- Positioning the charity and change management.
- Being a female leader in the third sector.

The full list of interview questions is included in [Appendix 1](#).

The interviews took place on Zoom between June and September 2021. Each took approximately 1 hour.

- Six subjects are current CEOs.
- One subject had previously founded charities and now works for a different charity.
- One subject had led a charity and now is a consultant.
- One subject is now a consultant but was previously a Director of Culture in a local authority; their career was built in the charity sector, and they are now the Vice-Chair of the board of a community organization.
- One subject is the first CEO of an organization which until this appointment had been run by other organizations.
- Two either were or are CEOs of spun-out organizations from the local authority; one was the first CEO, and the other is the second person in post.
- One subject co-leads an organization with specific areas of expertise.
- Most, not all, of the organizations represented by CEOs are within the cultural sector.
- Three subjects were men, and six were women.
- All were from White backgrounds.
- In terms of the makeup of the research, there was an imbalance between genders, and all the subjects were White. This means that particular issues of discrimination, the barriers of racial prejudice, unconscious bias, and intersectionality were not explored.



11.4 Research findings

11.4.1 The role of the CEO

One of the key reasons for this research was to truly understand the role of a chief executive officer in a third sector organization. Third sector.co.uk describes a Chief Executive Officer thus: “chief executives in charities and other not-for-profit bodies provide leadership and are responsible for the organisation’s administration and financial management. Working closely with the board of trustees, they develop the organisation’s long-term strategy, budget and business plan and ensure it complies with the law and regulations” (Third, 2018). But what does that mean in reality for the CEOs in this research? I asked them all, “what is the single most important thing a CEO or equivalent should do?”

Five concepts dominated the responses. These were:

- To articulate the mission and values;
- To keep a strategic overview of the organization;
- To keep organizational focus—particularly important in a small organization;
- To set the tone and style;
- To enable and support staff to deliver on the mission and values.

Subject six set it out clearly by saying “if we are not here in three years—what will we have done to make a difference?” Subject two agreed, explaining that “the most important thing is to set out vision, objectives and values (not create them necessarily) which will allow the organization to establish itself and determine the difference it needs to make.”

Having defined the mission, five of the interviewees also emphasized that their role was very much about keeping to the mission, not letting the organization lose focus or get deflected. Subject five said you must be “driven by the mission not swayed by ego, funding or excitement.” Subject seven expressed his job as to give “clarity and alignment.” Clarity, meaning to set the direction of travel and alignment, meaning convincing everyone to believe in it. Subject one talked about focusing “relentlessly on the outcomes.” She said, “if you can be really clear about what it is you are doing, then it is quite easy to build a body of work around that,” and it is also about articulating to the rest of the workforce what that

means in terms of the difference they make to people's lives, so everyone has a clear understanding of the direct link between the work they do and the mission.

Subject five described the importance of the overview aspect of the role: "it's being able to stand back and look at all the different aspects and work out where the best use of your energy is."

But the CEOs do much more than just persuade everyone to adhere to the mission and values; two of the interviewees talked passionately about their role in using the mission and values to set the tone and style for the organization. For example, subject six talked about his organization's chosen approach to the Black Lives Matter movement—not a "grand gesture" but small practical steps which felt more in the style of their organization, while subject three, responsible for starting up a new charity spun out from a local authority, placed special attention on the tone of the organization, feeling that it was important to make a new start that gave everyone a fresh idea about the organization. She wanted to set a youthful, ambitious, innovative, and energizing tone and was keen to ensure that fun was a watchword, recognizing the extreme hard work that went into setting up a new charity and ensuring there was time to have fun, to thank people and express how much they were valued.

Interviewees saw their role as enablers, giving away power, and identifying and acquiring the resources to give people the freedom to innovate and achieve their goals within strategic parameters. Subject one described herself as the person "talking in the stands, making money." Subject nine described her role as "to cut a path" rather than coming up with a plan. The most memorable role description came from Subject nine:

"I call myself the jelly in the cat food. I'm the person who is scouting to make it work. I'm listening to what my colleagues are telling me is the direction of travel as they see it. I'm navigating whether that translates to the external environment in which we're operating. If it does, I'm scouting for additional resources and seeing if we can join up the dots a bit, really."

When I asked the interviewees about their approach to the people they led, two words were repeated: **collaboration** and **trust**. In addition, there was much reflection about the importance of ensuring the people in the workforce were genuinely valued for their role and contribution to the organization. Subject seven said:

"Everybody to me is as important in their role as the next person in the organization, doesn't matter whether you're the chief executive or doing something completely different. We've all got a big role to play."

The interviewees pointed out that to be sustainable organizations, leadership needs to be dispersed—more people need to be empowered to make decisions.

And I've realized that even in the most senior positions, you don't need to be directive, particularly if you have good people around you. And perhaps the key is appointing good people around you and developing good people around you, then you have them, and you get out of their way (Subject four).

There was a sincere belief that the CEO's role is about developing the talents of others. One said "modern leadership is less about you, more what you can do for others" (Subject seven), another talked about seeing a big part of her role as "being able to support people's 'passion projects'" (Subject one), and a third described her role as a leader is to enable others to be "the best versions of themselves" (Subject four). There was recognition that this is not always easy; it requires selflessness and self-regulation to be able to "let go," and there has to be a tolerance to mistakes. There was a widespread conviction that people come to work with the ambition to do a good job and that the CEO is key to enabling that.

And that requires the CEO to build a good and trusting relationship with the workforce. Subject six talked about the importance of treating people well, at the same time expecting the best from them, and significantly, role modeling the behavior that they want to see in others. Subject one particularly focused on the importance of building trust to ensure any disruptions or changes do not derail an organization. She said "if you get little things right, and you're treating people properly, then they'll trust you to do the big things."

Emotional intelligence is seen as a vital attribute. One subject emphasized their role in ensuring that the workforce is happy and fulfilled to ensure they can work to the best of their ability. "The most important thing is looking after the team... a lot of my focus in an average week is checking everybody's ok" (Subject six). Subjects two and five both reflected on how to build resilience, especially referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the importance of using empathy to acknowledge that people may not be ok. "There's a lot in this type of position which is about understanding how people are feeling and if you want to achieve a lot you can't pretend that everyone's alright if they're not" (Subject two). Two interviewees described how their own early negative experiences of poor leadership had taught them the importance of caring for staff.

11.4.2 The motivation of the interviewees

I was keen to understand from the interviewees what drove them to become senior third sector leaders, to find out whether it was a career choice or serendipitous chance. The latter was the case without exception.

They described it as “an organic development,” “falling into it,” “being in the right place at the right time.” The question allowed the interviewees to look back at their careers and reflect upon how they got to where they were.

While the nine subjects had very different career paths, I did identify some common strands that gave me an insight into the motivation and commitment of CEOs and senior leaders.

Four of the CEOs started their careers with vocational or specialist roles and moved into policy management roles which developed their experience of strategy and governance—one person described this as “a bridge to a CEO role” (Subject two).

Some CEOs had worked in the voluntary sector for most of their careers and were inspired by the key attributes of the sector; one mentioned how he had developed his leadership skills through a love of volunteer management.

I realized I wanted to do something more people focused—I wanted to be working with people. . . . At that stage, I don’t think I ever dreamed of being a chief executive. But I kind of realized that management generally brought together a lot of the things I was interested in, particularly people management (Subject six).

Subject five had been moved by a cause to found his own charity, effectively learning to lead as the charity grew. A motivation to make a difference was mentioned by further two CEOs. One of these had started as a volunteer and then made the career shift into the sector. Subject four built her career in charity policy, taking her deep expertise into a senior leadership role in a local authority and then to independent consultancy.

Two CEOs spoke with honesty and humility about how circumstance meant that they were simply the best people to take on the role to ensure continuity and support for workforces during major transformations. One described this part of her career as being “purpose driven rather than professional development driven.”

“I was quite reluctant to do it. Because I’m passionate about what I’m passionate about, which is social justice ultimately, I didn’t necessarily

want to be in a leadership organization that had a mixed portfolio basically...but I think the change that needed to happen was the change that I was on the path of enabling the organization to make. So, I would say it was purpose driven, rather than personal professional development driven" (Subject eight).

The second subject said: "And so, it was, in a way accidental, really, I would never have intended to become the chief executive of an independent organization. In some ways, I just got carried along with the flow. And in fact, I remember kind of having a bit of an existential crisis about whether or not I wanted to be the chief exec of this new organization. And basically, I was persuaded into it by my boss who knew that I had to be it. I mean, I recognized that, in hindsight, I couldn't have cast all of these staff into this new organization with somebody new it had to be me, because I had the credibility, because I knew what I was doing in that particular environment...They trusted me" (Subject three).

11.4.3 Managing risk and coping with anxieties

I anticipated that an entrepreneurial mindset would be identified as key to successful leadership of third sector organizations and that would require a confident approach to risk. So, I wanted to find out how each of the interviewees viewed and managed risk, what concerned them most, and from where they drew their support.

All nine interviewees embrace risk, some identified more as risk takers than others, but there was consensus that risk is what allows an organization to develop, but that it does have to be managed responsibly.

"You've got to take risks: that's the nature of being creative and forward thinking and strategic and you just need to flush them out as much as possible and then try to mitigate them, but you can never mitigate them completely, you to have an acceptance of a level of risk all of the time...otherwise you get held back" (Subject four).

Despite describing himself as "a naturally cautious person," Subject six said,

"You just can't control everything yourself; you've got to have a degree of faith in your colleagues and in your systems. And we do things carefully and put things in place. And we do proper risk assessments. And we do financial viability tests, and we diversify our funding, and we try different things, and we experiment, and so on, and they don't all work, and you can't keep it 100% safe 100% of the time, you obviously avoid

doing anything criminal or negligent or disastrous, but you've got to experiment."

There was recognition that sometimes things fail and that it is important not to let this be a reason for not taking risks. "It says a lot more about you I think if you're willing to have a go and fail ...I'd rather make a mistake trying than not try at all" (Subject seven).

None of this is to say that any of the interviewees undertook risk lightly. Subject one described how she assessed whether a risk was worth pursuing using an interesting/important frame. "If it's interesting and important it is likely to be worth taking a risk over." Subject eight said "so I would say we engage with risk, and we plan for risk. And we try to mitigate risk."

The interviewees had all developed their own parameters and mitigations to ensure that risk did not threaten the organization, with the keen awareness that people and salaries could be at stake. Having a framework of proper stewardship also allows organizations to feel more secure about pursuing ambitious goals and seizing opportunities. "So even though the content of themes might be huge and ambitious, the actual doing, I think, needs to be pretty rigorous" (Subject five).

Two of the interviewees talked about the importance of being open about risk, making sure everyone in the organization is clear about the level of risk and why it is worth the investment.

One of the key elements in successfully managing, and embracing risk for the interviewees was building a positive and trusting relationship with their board. They argued that if boards are reassured that due processes such as risk registers are maintained and taken seriously, they felt more confident to explore more innovative ideas, and CEOs also then had the reassurance that once the board had agreed to an idea or plan, they would be supported to carry it out.

Subject seven pointed out that there are different types of risk that will be treated very differently by boards. There are high-risk thresholds and low-risk thresholds (e.g., around safeguarding children), and boards need to be clear about how much risk an organization can safely tolerate.

"I had plenty of people on the phone telling me what an enormous risk it was to continue with []. But I felt confident enough that my board would support the decision to continue. That I was quite happy to bear the risk. It wasn't comfortable, but I was quite happy to go through that (Subject two)."

I asked each of the CEOs what caused them the most anxiety and what kept them awake at night. I was expecting them all to say financial

security. And indeed, this was key for most of them, and they have developed strategies to prepare their organizations as much as possible to weather the financial challenges that they face.

So, I think I suppose the biggest thing I've done is, is ensure the sort of waterproofness of our financial management. So, we never spend money we don't have, we're cautious, we rely on a lot of core funding grants to keep going. Until the money is guaranteed, until we've got the offer letters from funders, we won't start spending it. So much of our budget goes in salaries. We don't have many other costs. We don't have offices, we don't have premises. which means if we lose money, we lose posts or reduce hours... that's the only flex we have. So, all we can do is get rid of posts or shorten them. And all of our staff need to understand that context when they come into the organization. That's just the territory we're in, which is a bit scary, but it just means we're realistic, you know, somebody comes into a 2 year project, we will hopefully try and continue their post, but there's no guarantee. So I think the one thing that I'm confident about is we will never overstretch ourselves. We never spend more than we have because we would just stop the expenditure if we have to (Subject six).

Alongside being prudent, particularly with financial risk, high-quality financial support is also vital, "when we had a shit-hot financial director our attitude to risk was a lot greater because we had trust in him" (Subject three).

But financial risk is not the only anxiety. People are also a source of concern. The most common causes of "people" worry were relationships with partners, the performance of staff, and the well-being of the workforce.

"I was going to say, resource, but I don't think that does really, it's always there, but what I think usually keeps me awake is people, making sure that the people you're working with are happy, fulfilled and working to their best ability so that if things aren't quite going right, with things like that, that tends to be the things that I worry about (Subject one)."

11.4.4 Positioning the organization and initiating culture change

It feels that more than ever, leaders across all sectors need to navigate their way through ever-shifting societal, political, and economic currents. For leaders in the third sector, this requires positive and effective relationships

with their boards and working in a smart and agile way to position their organizations and implement culture change.

When I asked the CEOs how they managed their relationships with their boards, three key themes quickly emerged. These were trust, transparency, and diversity. If a board has trust in the organization, they build a consensual open relationship, and there is a culture of collaboration to deliver on a shared vision rather than assuming an “overseeing” role. But trust needs to be built over time, and this requires transparency in the relationship and regular well-thought-through communication. “The primary thing is keeping the board cycle working, keeping the board informed of things so there are no surprises to them, but not bombarding them with information all the time” (Subject six).

That is not to say that the CEOs do not think that boards should challenge the organization. Subject six reflected on one trustee who acted as a “spark,” pushing the organization to act on a key issue. Subject seven described the board’s role in clarifying the vision for the organization, simplifying, and reframing it. Subject one explained how much she valued the board’s scrutiny: “I think the questioning helps you build the case around it. Then if you can’t build the case, you probably shouldn’t be doing it.”

The CEOs also recognize that investing in board development is important. Subject six describes how he changed the structure and work pattern of the board, to increase their focus on strategy and development and the bigger picture.

One of the things I have introduced is that we do a lot of the functional sort of monitoring, scrutiny, and planning through what we call panels, which involve a couple of trustees and a couple of senior staff, and they do the detailed work and produce a summary version for the board, all of which has helped to make the board meetings a space for more genuine discussion, strategy, horizon scanning, stuff the board should be doing.

Reshaping boards and in particular improving genuine diversity and the planning that goes into recruitment to achieve this were mentioned by several of the interviewees.

“We do have a very diverse board, we intentionally recruited three years ago for a board so that it was representative of the different communities we serve different race and ethnicities, different sexual orientations, different ages (Subject eight).”

Subjects six and seven also described how they had changed recruitment practices to diversify the board.

“The process has given us a genuinely interesting and diverse board which means the discussions in the meetings now don’t feel kind of stuffy and old fashioned, they range all over the place, they’re incredibly difficult to minute because it becomes a really creative, innovative conversation. It’s different ways of thinking, different backgrounds, different experience coming to it. But it makes us have to work slightly differently as a result, which is a good thing. I think” (Subject six).

All the CEOs highlighted the importance of their individual relationships with the Chair and were willing to put a lot of work in to ensure the relationship worked. They recognized that the quality of the Chair was critical to the success of the board. Subject three shared advice given by her first Chair that any disagreements between the Chair and CEO need to be discussed and resolved outside of the meeting so that they present a completely united front in the board meetings.

One reflection that I had not expected was raised by several interviewees. This was the difference between being the founder and the second CEO to work in an organization and the challenge of stepping into a founder’s shoes. Subject seven reflected that he operated in a very different style from the founder but reflected that was probably what was needed in the organization development. He described how moving on from a charismatic founder was changing the organization “in a positive way to try and safeguard the organization by empowering more people.”

Two founding CEOs also talked about the challenge of stepping away from the organizations. Subject five expressed the importance of self-awareness—recognizing the impact of pressurized leadership on health and well-being. Self-awareness was also at the heart of Subject three’s decision to leave. “I felt so passionate about it. I found it very difficult to separate myself from the organisation. I felt like I had to stay, that the organisation would fail if I walked away, and I felt trapped. But I came to realise that of course I could leave the organisation and that it wouldn’t fall apart, but it took me quite a lot to work out it was okay to leave.”

I asked each of the interviewees to describe their strategies for protecting their organizations. They highlighted flexibility and being open to different approaches to ensure structures meet the current needs. Subject one told me: “you’ve got to be thinking about change all the time...change is hard, but organisations and situations change. And God we’ve all learned that over the last year. You know, we have a very very different situation now than we had two years ago. So, the same organisation is not necessarily going to work.”

Subject six talked about the need to be dispassionate when considering the needs of the organization and interestingly described a building blocks approach to the work, packaging up the needs of the organization into roles that can be deconstructed and reconfigured as the needs of the organization change. “So, we didn’t say we needed an information manager and a marketing officer, what we said is we need somebody to do a bit of a comms function which might take two days a week and we need somebody to do a fundraising function averaging around three days a week and then we can use these building blocks to create posts.”

Partnerships are considered critical to the success of each of these organizations. They are important for boosting their reputation, and they are worth investing in.

Partnerships provide support, especially in small organizations. Some of the interviewees reflected on their early days in the role. They described the importance of galvanizing support and building partnerships and using the “sweet spot” of newness to foster those relationships and absorb the advice of more established organizations.

Relationships with stakeholders and partners were also really important to the interviewees, to ensure the effective delivery of shared purpose. Subject two highlighted the importance of complementing not replicating the work of other partners: “we’re all charities and we all want the same thing. So surely we should be working together.”

11.4.5 Reflecting on being a woman in a leadership position

In a third sector world where only a third of major charities are led by women ([Civil Society News, 2021](#)), and as six of the interviewees were female, I felt that it was important to discuss whether they felt that they had experienced prejudice or had been treated differently during their careers because of their gender. Four out of the six women agreed that they had. Subject three described her experience of a misogynistic culture as a young woman and recognizing the way women adapt but can start by “playing a role that is actually very unhealthy, trying to charm them a bit and you just think that it is so dysfunctional.” Subject two reflected on this too, describing experience of misogyny early in her career: “I wondered how much I have internalised this and how it affects how I’ve developed.”

A fifth woman said that while she had not experienced direct discrimination, she was aware of the internal barriers that hold individuals back.

This was a theme that other women in the research also identified. They particularly reflected on the way they used language and the need to be aware of the impact of this on how they are perceived and on their confidence. They also considered the different behavior styles of men and women and what effect that has on leadership.

“I can use qualifying language like, “I just want to say, I just wonder, I know you’re the expert in this but...” I constantly use language like that. I’m only just becoming aware of it, that I try to come across as less, for fear of not being nice or not being feminine” (Subject eight).

Subject four, now a coach herself, said your own internal baggage can be the thing that really holds you back, your presumptions and assumptions about whether you are a proper one—as a leader but getting past the things that might be limiting have probably been key for me.

“I think I impose a lot of barriers and I think that’s possibly conditioning, I worried for a long time about not being founder and that I was an imposter” (Subject nine).

In *Eve on Top*, Baker and Casey (2011) interviewed 16 women who were senior public sector leaders. The reflections from these female leaders were very similar to the views of the six women in my research, and in particular, how people reacted to the way they behaved.

Subject eight said: “if men are assertive, that is seen as a bonus, you’d expect that of a man whereas women very quickly get associated as bossy.” Baker and Casey (2011) record how the women described themselves using language associated with masculine traits such as ambition, hard work, determination, but they also “foregrounded a number of softer qualities such as communication skills, being good listeners and a willingness to recognize their own weakness,” and the women in my research echoed this, recognizing that actually these are the skills that make for effective, emotionally intelligent leaders. But confidence can still be an issue: “I still feel sometimes when I’m in a room full of male leaders, that I’m unconfident about the softer and more delicate approach I may take” (Subject nine).

Subject four identified that the most important thing for a leader is to be authentic: “I’ve learned that in senior roles authenticity is what people respond to, being yourself, bringing your whole self to work.” She also talked about the importance of women leaders making sure their voice is heard: “I’d say never be the person who doesn’t speak at a meeting, because if you watch the dynamic, it will be male voices that ask the questions or comment on the discussion.” Subject four also talked about

the concept of “otherness” in an organization as a positive benefit to a leader as it can disrupt the established dynamic of the group and challenge thinking.

This research also highlighted that being a female is not the only barrier, self-imposed, or otherwise that people face. The three men in the interviews also experienced self-doubt and anxieties around nurturing staff and wanting to lead in a consensual and empowering way. The interviewees were also aware of the positives in their positions: “I’m also aware of my white privilege. That means I’ve not come up against barriers that someone coming from a different race might have experienced. So as a woman I’ve experienced barriers, but I’ve also had doors open to me that would have been closed otherwise.”



11.5 Conclusion

This research afforded a privileged insight into the thinking of nine people with expertise and understanding of the third sector and leadership at a strategic level. Inevitably, the interviewees are focused on raising and maintaining income; strategic direction and investing time and energy into building effective governance structures that help their organizations to thrive. But what made these discussions most powerful and compelling was the sense of humanity and self-awareness woven through the responses, how much emphasis they placed on collaborative relationships to be good partners and to enable those they work with to achieve, thrive, and also become successful leaders. Although priorities, finance, and governance structures may be different, I believe that the themes and values that emerged through the research present a leadership frame of reference which is contemporary, authentic, and relevant for benchmarking within the library, information, and education sectors.



Appendix 1 Interview questions

Exploring the experience of CEOs in building and leading third sector organizations

Dear xxxx

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my CILIP Fellowship research

I confirm the interview will take place xxxxxx

As I work toward achieving my CILIP Fellowship, I am identifying personal areas of learning and development needs (using CILIPs Professional Knowledge and Skills Base).

Three years ago, I moved from a local authority to work for a new charity—Libraries Connected—and as part of my development, I am interested in understanding more about the leadership in the charity/third sector. I am particularly interested in understanding more about the following areas:

- Growing the charity, sustainability and positioning the charity;
 - Change management;
 - Managing risk;
 - Being a female leader in the third sector.
1. The interview will be recorded with your consent, and notes will be taken against a checklist. A transcript of the interview will be returned to you to approve before it is used within the project.
 2. I will draw upon the interviews to identify personal development insights into a brief report which will be presented with the submission for Fellowship.
 3. The interview outcomes will be reported unattributed to any named individual, and the process will be anonymized.
 4. The material from the interviews will be archived anonymously.

The questions I will be asking you are:

- How long have you been in your current post?
- What was the journey you have been on to achieve this role? Was it a role you had always aspired to?
- What do you believe is the single most important function a CEO should undertake?
- Have you experienced any barriers/prejudice as a (woman) in a senior leadership position?
- How do you manage relationships with your board?
- Is there ever any conflict between the requirements of the board and the business you need to deliver? How do you navigate this?
- What is your approach to risk?
- How have you established your operating principles including managing controversial issues?

- What is your approach to change management; e.g., have you restructured the organization during your time in this role? What were the driving principles behind the new structure, and how did you design it?
- How have you established your role within the sector?
- What keeps you awake at night?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Is there anyone else you would suggest I approach?

Thank you again for so generously giving your time for this research.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mears MBE

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Fast forward or digital mirage—benchmarking education system responses to COVID, and what comes after?

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12.1 Introduction

Technology in education is by no means new and has taken many forms over the years. Innovations such as the clay tablet, parchment and quill pens, the chalkboard, and the printing press transformed the education and lives of millions of people centuries before everyone alive today was born. However, as [Evans \(1979\)](#) observes: “The study of the abacus is not at first sight an enticing subject.” Indeed when we think about education technology (often abbreviated to edtech or edutech), we tend to gravitate toward the most futuristic and forward-looking of possible scenarios—robot teachers, 3D printers, virtual reality field trips, and so on ([Hamilton et al., 2018](#); [DfE, 2022](#)).

The reality for most teachers and learners is much more mundane—a significant proportion of edtech is, in actuality, the same as the technology that we all now use in our daily lives. Today’s schools can often seem like miniature open-plan offices as laptops and tablets are brought out to create Word documents, PowerPoint slides, and the ubiquitous Google Docs ([Kerssens and van Dijck, 2021](#)). Even when being taught to code, learners can quickly graduate to programming in languages like Python, which are equally at home in the classroom and powering cutting-edge AI research. [Williamson \(2021\)](#) has coined the term “meta-edtech” to describe this all-encompassing aspect of edtech based on everyday technologies.

While a lot of what we might think of as edtech is really just “tech,” it is also the case that technology-enhanced learning has burst out of

classrooms and lecture theaters in response to a profound demand for life-long learning that the founders of the Open University would have been delighted to see (Fieldhouse, 1998). Some of this takes the form of dedicated apps that have achieved mass adoption, notably in areas such as languages (Guaqueta and Castro-Garces, 2018). However, much of technology-enhanced learning still takes place in silos or walled gardens such as restricted access to Virtual Learning Environments/Learning Management Systems (Lewin et al., 2019; Beggan, 2020).

It is undoubtedly the case that the Cambrian Explosion in online learning has been made possible by quite general and generic systems and services like YouTube and WordPress.com which give everyone the opportunity to become an archivist, a publisher, a writer, a filmmaker, and so on at low or no cost (Power and Vadde, 2022). Additionally, online collaboration tools from Twitter to Reddit, Discord to Discourse, and Wikipedia to StackOverflow have enabled communities of interest to come together and support each other (Auxier and Anderson, 2021).

Very few of these mass communication and collaboration apps and services were envisaged as having a significant educational element. It generally came as a complete surprise to their developers to discover that, for example, the seemingly omnipresent Tik Tok Teens were using their app to share everything from self-care tips to methods for evading algorithmic surveillance when undertaking anti-government protests (Sadler, 2022).

All of the above factors in combination meant that when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, large numbers of people were empowered in ways that they had never been before, with information (and disinformation) traveling at the speed of light down the fiber optic tubes (cables) interconnecting towns, cities, countries, and continents (Tsao et al., 2021). So, how did that turn out? We shall see, but first a quick reminder of the edtech dream and vision that had been promised.



12.2 The promise and peril of edtech

For most people, education technology has become inextricably linked to computers and the Internet, but it is easy to forget that today's edtech is just the latest in a long line of technological advances. While they may not all have enhanced teaching and learning, they have certainly changed it.

“We were promised jetpacks and flying cars” as the saying has it, but in reality many of the most seemingly mundane edtech developments have had profound impacts. For example, the advent of the printing press eventually made it possible for almost everyone to learn to read—although it took several hundred years before mass-market publishers like Penguin emerged and truly democratized the printed word (Banham, 2019).

These things seem mundane to us because we grew up with them and are wholly accustomed to them. By contrast, modern edtech like apps and websites, tablets, and VR headsets can feel somewhat troubling in a school setting as they are not rooted in our own familiar experiences of childhood. We can perhaps see a narrative trajectory here from the shock of the news to the spread of viral scares such as the Momo hoax (Phippen & Bond, 2020).

Furthermore, many of the edtech advances of yesteryear were resisted tooth and nail by educators and education systems of the time. As Saettler (2000) notes, early 20th century attempts to make educational use of film met with stiff resistance, and then just as the medium finally achieved acceptance, progressive educators had to fight the same battles again as silent film gave way to recordings with sound:

Some educators repudiated the old silent films; others rejected the new sound films; still others refrained from either open approval or disapproval until they became convinced that the addition of sound was not just another technical novelty. Many hesitated to accept the sound film because they feared their silent equipment would become useless.

Kivel (2014) provides an insightful overview of the struggles that advocates of educational films experienced, the resistance they encountered, and how this was finally overcome. Many of the criticisms raised of films may be familiar in the context of more modern edtech such as tablet computers, apps, and websites:

1. Eye strain;
2. Mechanical difficulties;
3. Fire hazard;
4. Cost;
5. Films make learning too easy;
6. Films create superficial thinkers;
7. Films reduce reading;
8. Films destroy the sense of perfection in language;
9. Films dull the imagination;

10. Films distract from the lesson;
11. Films tend to replace the teacher—textbook method of instruction;
12. Slides and pictures are better than film;
13. Proper films are not available;
14. Films that are available are inaccurate, vulgar, and crude;
15. Films are too rapid;
16. The benefits of film are still unproven;
17. There is no established method of use.

To understand this resistance to change, we have to keep in mind that there are a number of factors at work—first, there is genuine resistance to change, a well-observed psychological phenomenon. Second, there is the simple fact that education is one of the most heavily regulated sectors of our society—with real consequences for those who flout rules on key aspects such as safeguarding. Third, many of those who shout the loudest about the potential of edtech are the edtech equivalent of social media influencers. Edtech companies are often keen to associate themselves with educators like these as it lends them an aura of credibility and respectability, and of course, the same is true in reverse ([Jarke and Breiter, 2019](#)).

And sometimes, the edtech companies are in dire need of credibility and respectability. Take, for instance, the case of the much-maligned Proctorio ([Coghlan et al., 2021](#)) which developed an AI-based online monitoring system for tests and exams that was reported to have routinely disqualified neurodivergent learners for stimming and fidgeting, and was apparently only able to successfully identify Black students around 50% of the time. It subsequently emerged that Proctorio may also have sold learner data to third parties.

And if you are one of those educators who has climbed onboard the edtech hype train, people will naturally ask you “what is the next big thing?” and you will feel that you owe them a response. This can result in an entertaining yet frustrating mismatch between the connected world’s incessant appetite for the new and novel and the reality of slow and cautious progress, informed by trials, tests, and pilots ([Weller, 2018](#)).

In reality, the education system has by necessity to be conservative about its approach to change, given the pivotal role that it plays in learners’ academic, sporting, social, and emotional development. There have been a handful of radical experiments like Rocketship schools in the United States ([Burris and Bryant, 2019](#)) and the British free schools movement ([Lock, 2018](#)); however, these tend toward the cautionary tale rather than the template of the future.

Thus it is almost inevitable that edtech futurists can be found burbling away about robot teachers and skills pills (Slingsby, 2018), even while the actual schools and colleges in our reality still have to wrestle with existential crises such as funding shortfalls, staffing shortages, and leaky roofs. Notably, Helm (2022) observed that:

Many school buildings in England are now in such disrepair they are a “risk to life,” according to internal government documents leaked to the Observer.

This, then, was the backdrop to the first wave of COVID-19 cases in early 2020.



12.3 COVID-19 and the education system response

Lillie et al. (2020) describe the first recorded COVID-19 case in the UK:

The index case (A) entered the UK on 23/01/20 from Hubei province in China. Initially asymptomatic, this individual, a 50 year-old female with no past medical history and on no regular medications, developed symptoms of fever and malaise on 26/01/20, accompanied by sore throat and dry cough. She had travelled with her partner and reported no infectious contacts prior to travel.

The same day in China travel bans were imposed on over 11 million people in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province. Three days later, on January 26, all schools in Beijing were closed until further notice (Wikipedia, 2022a).

The UK's first COVID-19 fatality, 84-year-old Peter Attwood, occurred on January 30, 2020, but was not identified as such for a further 7 months (Baraniuk, 2021). Two months later, with 104 diagnosed COVID-19 cases, the UK government announced that schools in England would close from March 20, 2020, and all exams would be canceled (Wikipedia, 2022b).

For the next 2 years, there would follow a cycle of repeated lockdowns and reopenings which would have a particularly significant effect on schools, colleges, and universities—and other settings such as workplaces where large numbers of people would normally congregate indoors. Education often had very little in terms of mitigations in place for staff or learners, and this would prove to have clear consequences in terms of the community spread of the COVID-19 virus (Stage et al., 2021).

By autumn 2021, it was clear that education workers were at particular risk, as Carr (2021) observes in a discussion of the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) reporting:

People working in the education sector are more likely to test positive for Covid than any other sector due to high infection levels among school children, according to new official data.

According to ONS analysis between September 20 and October 3, the estimated likelihood of an education worker testing positive for Covid was 0.39.

The ONS adds: "The higher likelihood for those working in education is likely related to the high infection levels among school aged children."

By summer 2022, COVID had led to over 200,000 deaths in the UK and life-changing disabilities due to long COVID for over 1.5 million people. [Martin \(2022a\)](#) notes that: "Teaching and education staff now have the joint highest incidence of long Covid, alongside social care workers." Additionally, [Martin \(2022b\)](#) reports on a worrying rise in mental health issues reported by children who had developed long COVID as a result of repeated infections.

Early in the pandemic public health experts, epidemiologists and virologists had come together as one to warn that non-pharmaceutical interventions would be essential to contain the spread of the pandemic. As [Ziauddeen et al. \(2020\)](#) note:

The UK government has struggled to provide enough detailed information to convince the public, teachers and health practitioners, that effective systems for protection, including test, trace and isolate, are in place to prevent and manage outbreaks in schools. Risks of infection on reopening to children, staff and families must be weighed against the harms of closure to children's education and social development. The potential consequences, if the re-opening of schools is managed badly, is subsequent waves of COVID-19 infection leading to more deaths, further school closures and prolonged restrictions, losing any ground gained thus far.

This statement proved to be sadly prescient.

Non-pharmaceutical interventions around ventilation and the wearing of face masks proved to be highly effective; however, these were not without issue. [Bain-Reguis et al. \(2022\)](#) describe an investigation into ventilation across 20 Scottish primary school classrooms. High carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels indicating poor ventilation were shown to be a helpful early warning sign of elevated risk.

However, as [van der Westhuizen et al. \(2020\)](#) observe, face masks quickly became a polarizing topic. As [Rubin and Wilson \(2021\)](#) note, the decision to wear or forego a mask became widely perceived as a statement about an individual's values and beliefs rather than a public health

measure—put crudely, only pinko commies wear masks, whereas rugged individualists are not going to let anyone tell them what to do. Sadly, many of those self-same individuals would subsequently succumb to the virus, after helping to spread it far and wide.

With education settings frequently closed to nearly all learners, the stage was now set for edtech's finest hour, or was it? Let us take a look at what happened, viewed through the lens of two initiatives that the author was personally involved in.



12.4 Case study—Edtech Demonstrator Program

As part of the implementation of its Edtech Strategy ([Hinds, 2019](#)), the Department for Education (DfE) decided to explore the potential of a series of hubs or “demonstrators” that would provide peer-to-peer support for edtech adoption across England. DfE had invited schools and colleges to bid to become demonstrators, and they would receive up to £150,000 in funding to enable them to employ new staff or dedicate effort from existing staff to the program.

By a happy coincidence, the Edtech Demonstrator Program was about to kick off just as the initial wave of COVID-19 school closures was announced, and it became clear that the demonstrator schools and colleges were perfectly positioned to help with the transition to remote education which would be necessitated by the pandemic. This was effectively a pivot from the original plan for the Edtech Demonstrator Program, which had centered around DfE strategic priorities such as workload reduction.

It followed therefore that the Edtech Demonstrator Program became a sort of emergency service for schools and colleges. This was welcomed by educators who were now expected to become edtech experts in a matter of days, offering a rich online curriculum while continuing to provide pastoral support to learners.

In April 2020, an initial 20 demonstrators were announced; however, due to ongoing COVID-19 disruption to education the program was expanded by a further 18 demonstrators in June 2020, increasing to 48 by October 2020. Demonstrators covered the length and breadth of England, as shown in the [Fig. 12.1](#).

The program was led for its first year by a consortium of LGfL and the Education Foundation with evaluation support from the Sheffield Hallam

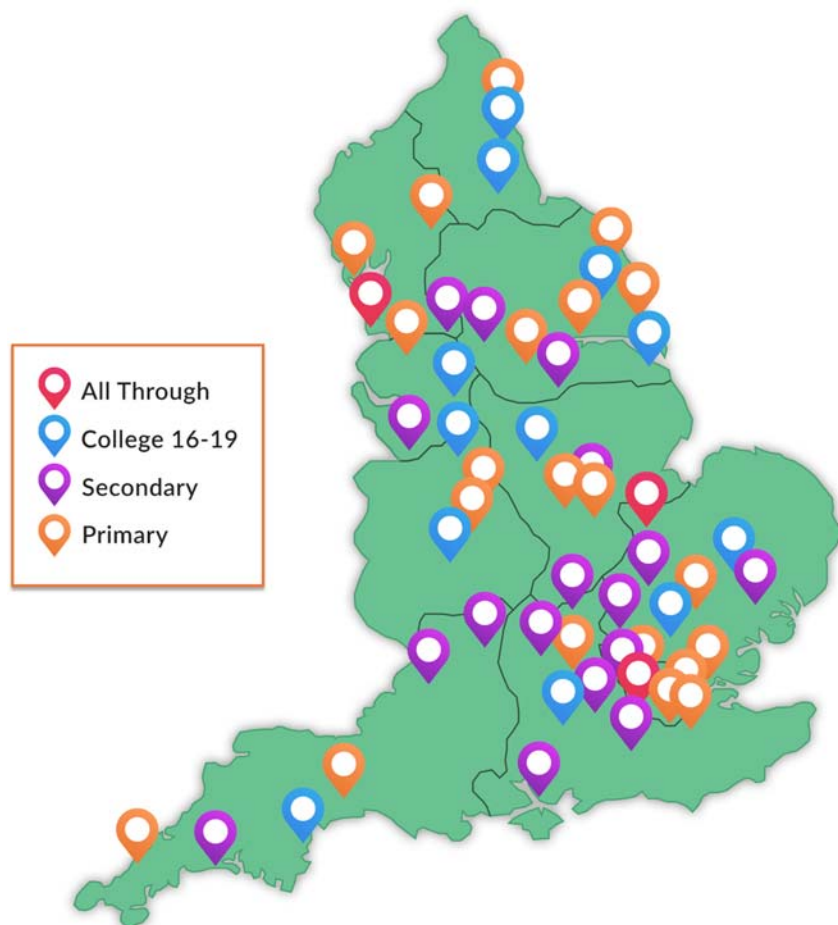


Figure 12.1 The Edtech Demonstrator network, autumn 2020.

University Institute of Education. The author was one of a team of regional leads contracted by LGfL to help coordinate demonstrator activity. This work centered around connecting educators who contacted the program for support with the demonstrators who had the necessary skills and expertise to help them.

The DfE's overall support program for education during the pandemic (DfE, 2020) included other elements, such as devices for learners and support for schools to get online with hyperscale cloud providers Google and Microsoft. For all of the fine words about the potential of edtech which we have discussed in this chapter, the reality was that thousands of the

schools that the program engaged with had not previously used edtech at all in any meaningful capacity.

The program supported schools and colleges through direct 1:1 and group assistance by demonstrators. This human contact proved to be invaluable according to the feedback received from educators who engaged with the program. It was complemented by a bank of over 1100 HOWTO guides and videos, webinar recordings, and other resources created or curated by demonstrators.

Ultimately, the Edtech Demonstrator Program would continue until summer 2022, supporting over 100,000 classroom staff and 1 m learners at around 10,000 schools and colleges across England. These figures show that the Edtech Demonstrator Program met a clear need from educators. However, policymakers feel that this intensive level of support is no longer required and no direct replacement for or continuation of the program has been commissioned. This is unfortunate and feels like a missed opportunity to build on the accumulated knowledge and expertise of the demonstrator network. As Carr (2022) notes:

The scheme's cancellation comes despite a recent government study finding that schools have "some distance to go" to make the best use of available technology. Ministers also recently launched a new set of digital and technology standards for schools.

Another point of note in the edtech demonstrator story is that schools were strongly encouraged to adopt a direct instruction approach to remote education. This means that much of the remote education provision that took place was done in a way which effectively replicated the traditional sage-on-the-stage type classroom approach rather than project or problem-based learning type approaches. As Ralph (2022) observes, there are significant problems with direct instruction in an online environment—however, like face masks it has become a totemic issue in the struggle between right and left, conservatives and progressives.



12.5 Case study—Association of Commonwealth Universities

In the summer 2020, the author was contacted by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACUs), which represents over 500

universities in 50 countries across the Commonwealth. The ACUs were keen to understand the impact of COVID-19 on their member universities. Particular issues of interest were around how ACU members were adapting to the new normal of lockdowns, how the transition to remote education was working out, and how the nature of the staff/student relationship with the physical campus was affected.

This project would end up taking the form of a series of interviews with ACU staff, combined with a survey of member universities, with the results being published in September 2020. From the executive summary and policy brief ([ACU, 2020](#)):

The survey, conducted in May 2020, drew 258 respondents from 33 countries. 44% of respondents were academics, 25% were professional services staff, 17% were students and 10% were senior deans. The regional split was as follows: Africa 66%, Asia 21%, Europe 4%, Pacific 4%, and Caribbean and Americas 4%.

Key conclusions from this work, excerpted from [ACU \(2020\)](#):

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on universities across the Commonwealth and triggered a rapid move online across education, research, and administration.
- A digital divide continues to exist between high-income countries (with generally high connectivity) and lower-income countries (with poor connectivity).
- Gaps in digital engagement at different levels within the university highlight a “double digital divide” in higher education.
- The switch online as a result of COVID-19 is perceived to have improved the quality of online teaching and learning and looks set to lead to lasting change.
- Universities face a range of challenges in migrating their activities online, which vary according to context.
- Universities are providing support for remote working, but with variations between countries and professional role.

Reading the detail of responses from individual students and staff members as part of the survey analysis was quite a profound experience. In some cases, people had become stranded in countries they had been visiting due to travel restrictions, many respondents had access to the necessary infrastructure for remote working but could not afford to use it, and many reported a lack of confidence and expertise in key digital technologies which it had been necessary to adopt wholesale practically overnight. These themes would also subsequently come up when speaking to English schools

contacting the Edtech Demonstrator Program for support, especially the smaller and more rural establishments.

However, it was telling that the ACU members who responded to the consultation felt that the pandemic presented an opportunity for systemic change for the better. From [ACU \(2020\)](#):

- There is some degree of confidence that the online experiment required by the pandemic will lead to lasting change, with 53% of respondents predicting that all or most departments would continue to offer online teaching and learning after the pandemic.
- Responses suggest a clear preference for blended degrees, involving a combination of online and face-to-face learning. While 90% of respondents agreed that a blended degree is equivalent to a traditional degree, less than half of respondents felt a degree earned solely through online learning was equivalent.
- A high proportion of respondents agreed that their institution had the will and the capacity to develop high-quality online teaching and learning. Over 80% also agreed that the quality of online learning and teaching has improved during the past 6 months.

The ACU project is described in more detail by [Shackleton and Mann \(2021\)](#).



12.6 A forward and backward look

In this chapter, we have looked at the hype associated with edtech, which is presented by some as a sort of universal panacea that will improve learning outcomes while reducing costs and perhaps also “beating as it sweeps as it cleans.” We have seen that there is a long history of technological advances being embraced by some early adopters, but also resisted by many educators and education systems.

The move to remote education precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic was a little unusual in that the system had no choice but to adapt quickly—put simply, if we had not embraced edtech then education as we know it would have pretty much ceased to exist for a lengthy period.

We know that some schools adopted novel low-tech approaches to providing inclusive education at a safe distance, such as dropping off worksheets at individual learners’ houses. However, we should be under no illusions about the importance of edtech in providing continuity of

learning and opportunities to stay in touch with classmates, friends, and colleagues in socially distanced times.

This is where the boundaries between “tech which can be edtech” and “tech which is primarily edtech” merge and blur—many general-purpose apps and services which were not intended to be explicitly educational have been adopted with alacrity because they scratched a particular itch. Conversely, some educational apps that were designed for use in classroom settings proved unsuitable for remote and sometimes asynchronous learning.

The success of the Edtech Demonstrator Program showed us that peer-to-peer support is a very powerful model that can be scaled across an entire territory, and it is to be hoped that English schools will find ways to continue supporting each other to make the most of the potential of edtech. Edtech UK’s Hubs initiative (<https://www.edtechuk.org/hubs>) shows us how this kind of thing can happen from the ground up, without waiting for or relying on the central government for support.

At the same time, it is worrying that issues fundamental to our children’s education have become subsumed in the ongoing culture war being fomented by far-right agitators. Should we really have to fight to justify the need for face coverings to protect staff and students from a deadly airborne pathogen? Do we really need to fight for problem and project-based approaches to teaching and learning instead of discredited approaches like direct instruction? I am afraid that right now the answer is yes, we must do these things.

As I write this in July 2022, one thing is clear, though—COVID is not done with us yet. And future pandemics like monkeypox will require many of the same adaptations, whether we like it or not. If that was not enough, we should also keep in mind that global warming is just getting started, and it will surely interfere with a lot of the things that we take for granted. The record temperatures recorded in 2022 in the UK and much of Europe may also be among the coolest temperatures of future summers.

So it is clear that we need to be prepared and adaptable. Let us be led by the feedback from those ACU members who recognized that COVID-19 had presented opportunities as well as challenges. It is time to embrace those opportunities and build a better future.

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Planning for continuity, aiming for sustainability: libraries in the forefront of disruption

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13.1 Introduction

Disrupting events and challenging times are unfortunately not new phenomena in the history of mankind. Only in the last decade, the world has experienced already two disruptive events, the economic recession and the COVID-19 outbreak, while Europe is currently dealing with a war at its borders.

Natural catastrophes, man-made disasters, or other extraordinary events have negatively impacted libraries and other information organizations. Specifically, the economic crisis back in 2010 severely affected libraries' budgets, human resources planning, librarians' professional development, libraries' operations for sustaining and acquiring electronic resources and material (and thus programs and services offered to clientele), facility maintenance, infrastructure, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) upgrade (Guarria and Wang, 2011; Moniarou-Papaconstantinou and Triantafyllou, 2015). Library management had to adjust and reflect further on economically sustainable decisions, identify key service areas impacted, and put relevant measures in place. These measures are related, namely, to prioritizing services and projects, redefining their scope, and delivering with limited human and monetary resources (Guarria and Wang, 2011), as well as building on synergies and collaborations as a way forward for continuing to offer the same added valued information services. Overall, the recession required that all involved parties had to closely cooperate, examine critically and creatively the way to maintain and increase the effectiveness of the information organization while ensuring the same qualitative result or added value service offered.

Libraries have a long history of responding also to other extraordinary situations like earthquakes (Curzon, 2000), catastrophic flooding (Liu et al., 2017), hurricanes (Doolittle, 2007), and different virus crises (Featherstone et al., 2008; McGuire, 2007). Libraries' response was mainly focused on the rescue and recovery of collections, resuming library services, providing information services through social media, staff assignment, and connecting with patrons. Once more, the emphasis was placed on protecting the collections and thus ensuring access to information.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has significantly disrupted the daily lives of societies across the globe. Regarding the Library and Information Science (LIS) sector, it mainly disrupted library services, especially the ones offered at the premises whereas librarians were placed in a "state of emergency." Yet again, libraries responded efficiently to the global health emergency by embracing and quickly adapting to new technologies; increasing their online offering; provisioning reliable health information and addressing fake news and misinformation issues; transitioning or extending their digital, reference services, and interlibrary loan; and finally, communicating internally to raise staff awareness and externally to interact and engage with users and community (Heady et al., 2021; Howes et al., 2021; Moniarou-Papaconstantinou and Vassilaka, 2021; Sheikh et al., 2021).

In response also to COVID-19, libraries implemented health/hygiene-related policies such as social distancing, maximum occupancy per room, quarantine policies for physical resources in an attempt to adhere to the government's rules and laws and thus further safeguard staff and users from transmitting and spreading the new virus (Heady et al., 2021). Overall, it seems that libraries were called on several times to deal effectively with disruptive events. Libraries and librarians have in place disaster plans and long-term preservation strategies and policies. However, libraries' disaster plans are usually only updated when a specific need emerges or threat spurs them into action. It should be stressed that these plans mainly focus on the collection (i.e., manuscripts, rare books, journals, audio–video material, etc.) including detailed instructions and disaster response plans to prevent damage to collections (Lock et al., 2016), whereas the disruptive events affect the whole structure of the information organization and have an impact on staff, technological infrastructure, resources, and services (Sheikh et al., 2021). Therefore, libraries are urged to review their disaster recovery plans also from a business operations perspective as threats become more frequent and impact their business

continuity. Most importantly, these need to be part of the strategic planning and thoroughly reviewed on a yearly basis as well as when significant changes occur which impact these plans (i.e., technological developments, administration re-organization, etc.).



13.2 Libraries and business continuity

Business continuity management is defined as “a holistic management process that identifies potential impacts that threaten an organisation and provides a framework for building resilience and the capability for an effective response that safeguards the interests of its key stakeholders, reputation, brand and value creating activities” (Smith, 2003, p. 27). The term stems from the business world and aims to keep a business open and running during disruptive events. Matthys (2010) further defined business continuity as “systems put in place by companies to protect critical assets and ensure that vital components of the business are functional in the event of an unexpected interruption to the business process.” It is evident that business continuity is not only relevant during a disruption but rather necessary for unexpected events which may not fall in the category of natural and/or man-made but would greatly impact the business operations of an organization. The Business Continuity Institute (2021) has defined it as “the purposeful establishment of management systems and procedures that safeguard the critical operations of an entity to ensure its continuous existence and protect the interests of its stakeholders in the event of a major disruptive occurrence.” In the context of libraries, business continuity ensures that libraries will remain open when a disruptive event happens and will keep on operating and maintaining a continuity of library business throughout the disruptive event.

Libraries’ perceptions on disaster management, contingency planning, and response role in turbulence situations have indeed, since 2000, changed significantly. Libraries’ focus has gradually shifted from an emphasis on protection, recovery, and replacement of library materials and facilities to ensuring service continuity (Hamilton and Brown, 2016). An increased attention was also placed on user safety, on promoting collaboration with outside stakeholders and emergency responders, and on the use of technologies for disseminating simple, clear, and instantaneous instructions to stakeholders during a disruptive event (Lock et al., 2016).

No matter the steps taken in switching between collection to service continuity, libraries still have a long way to go in addressing the need for business continuity plans to ensure business operations, and critical systems remain in use while in disruption mode. Most importantly, this shift in mindset needs to materialize at the management level where the strategic planning is discussed and agreed. The response of the organizational structure, operations, and critical systems in a disruptive event is yet to be defined and captured in a plan that will serve as a basis for further training personnel and maintaining the relevant systems running.

The COVID-19 pandemic put extra pressure on libraries' management to react quickly and efficiently while in lockdown or operating during limited hours and to maintain as much as possible a digital presence and offer services in a virtual environment. Working together but physically at a distance, interacting online and not welcoming library users at the entrance door, organizing community events while avoiding physical interaction, and meeting in person were considerable challenges for libraries. Challenges affected their role as a community place, as a safe and open place for all, as well as their basic principles of offering services to all. The impact of COVID-19 on libraries forced them to quickly react and adjust to digital in order to maintain a continuity of service, but not all succeeded and not all were able to respond as quickly and as efficiently as possible for many reasons.

Libraries are well known for their ability to adjust to change. The COVID-19 virus, as is more clear now from relevant research studies, is here to stay; its spread and persistence continue to affect the world in various ways; it is not only unlikely to be eliminated but according to epidemiologists, new viruses may be yet to come in the next decades (Phillips, 2021). Therefore, libraries based on gained experience should look at this more as an opportunity to thoroughly examine the challenges they face in this emergency, reassess their priorities and innovate, generate, and promote conditions that enable them to face future times of uncertainty with more resilience and sustainable measures.

However, what recent disruptive events taught us is that business continuity needs to be ensured not only for library collections but also for strategic operations and that human resources ought to be well trained and knowledgeable of the continuity plans. Proactive planning at strategic level while in normal times is key to ensuring that responses will kick in during a disruptive event. Identifying libraries' critical operations, critical services, and assets, and drafting and formalizing business continuity plans are bound to ensure a quick and smooth response to disruption.

Along with proactiveness and thinking and planning ahead, adjusting and staying abreast with technological developments are equally important. Current tools mentioned in business continuity plans need to be constantly reviewed and replaced by future better technological advances as they emerge, as well as new tools onboarded to further improve the method and timing of the response.

Business continuity's fundamental elements are: (1) for it to be properly included in the organization's strategic planning and (2) to raise awareness of business continuity in the organization. Sharing the same vision, communicating the importance and significance of proactively putting in place business continuity plans, and making personnel aware of these plans and engaging them throughout the process are key to success when in disruption. However, such plans and policies need to be put in place in advance, discussed, agreed, and constantly updated at a strategic level. It is expected that these plans will lead to structural changes affecting personnel, infrastructure, resources, and services especially in the long run, driving change.

Finally, synergies ensure that business continuity plans are aligned with other similar organizations, and the response to disruption will be common; collaboration and support will be ensured at the initial stages, during and while exiting the disruption event. A business continuity plan among libraries can safeguard essential services in order to remain available to users during times of emergency as well as post-crisis. Benchmarking of key elements of libraries (i.e., organogram, processes, procedures, assets such as services and products, infrastructure, future trends in LIS, etc.) could lead to better formulating and sharing business continuity plans at a strategic level between synergies.



13.3 Libraries, business continuity, and sustainability

Business continuity plans are an enterprise-wide process focused on preparing the organization both at strategic and operational levels for identifying and addressing organizational risk, disasters, and crises (Sawalha, 2011). Libraries are adept at developing and maintaining plans at a managerial level ensuring that collections and services are responsive and accessible 24/7. Availability and accessibility of information is a core

value and the main vision and goal of libraries worldwide. In particular, technological developments further assist the materialization of this vision/ambition by breaking physical borders and reaching even more digital communities.

Proactive planning is key to addressing challenging moments and dealing efficiently and effectively before, during, and after uncertain and risky events (Sawalha, 2011). Adaptive approaches and innovative plans coupled with sustainable solutions are required to reduce and mitigate the impact of disruptive events. Therefore, libraries need to invest more in approaches which optimize the availability of business-critical functions, processes, operations, facilities, communication, and personnel. Senior management change of mindset and the adoption of a holistic approach are now more than ever important and crucial for libraries.

Business continuity plans at a strategic level provide long-term reassurances for resilience and quick recovery response rates within hours of normal operations. Resilience assists organizations to endure discontinuities and disruptions and thus adapt quickly and effectively to rapidly changing business environments while sustaining competitive advantage (Sawalha, 2011). Libraries rely on their collections and information availability and accessibility as a competitive advantage, and thus resilience is grounded in the technological infrastructure and personnel handling it. Therefore, senior management ought to monitor closely technological developments with an interest in future trends and innovative solutions as part of strategic planning. Maintaining an eye for change and for any new technology that could be further adjusted and adapted to libraries' plans would play a vital role in ensuring continuity in disruption.

It is accepted that business continuity mainly relates to 24/7 availability of information, and thus libraries are at the forefront for formulating and delivering efficient and effective business continuity plans. At the same time, it becomes even more evident that libraries need more than ever to identify and place business continuity plans for services and products which are linked with 24/7 availability of digital information.

Business continuity is an added valued process for the organization and thus contributes to the development and sustainability of the organizational competitive advantage in the long run. In addition, it assists in building synergies and creating change through strategic planning. Grounding business continuity in strategic planning, the organization benefits from long-term survival and success by going above and beyond current trends and looking more into the future.



13.4 Conclusions

Regardless of implementing a data recovery plan and/or a business continuity plan, the impetus for libraries is twofold. Libraries first and foremost need to ensure the safety and well-being of personnel during a disruptive event. Then, the focus switches to the recovery of critical business functions. Business continuity plans which are discussed and thoroughly planned during strategic planning by senior management are crucial to ensure resilience, recovery, and continuity of the organization.

It is worth noting, however, that libraries do operate and follow government policies and guidelines, especially, as recent experience showed, during a disruptive event. Business continuity plans do need to provide room for adjustment and flexibility and thus must adhere to relevant laws and regulations announced during the disruptive event (Koos et al., 2021).

It is often the case that the socioeconomic environment in which libraries operate is considered volatile and unpredictable, and it is advisable that uncertainty is treated as part of the strategic management planning to ensure intervention in the event of a disruption (Barnett-Quaicoo and Ahmadu, 2021). Proactive planning and advance preparation with a long-term perspective will ensure the resilience and sustainability of the competitive advantage of libraries which is the continuous availability and accessibility of information.

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Benchmarking for effective services in Nigeria

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14.1 Introduction

Benchmarking has been defined succinctly as “A method of measuring and improving our organizational performance by comparing ourselves with the best” (Stapenhurst, 2009). This means that data from organizations are compared, and organizations seek to discover areas that they can improve upon by observing and analyzing comparative data. The goal of benchmarking is excellent organizational performance and delivery of services, and it is a continuous process. Benchmarking offers opportunities for organizations to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of their services at every level of delivery, with the customer interest as the primary factor (Zairi, 1996; Yeh et al., 2021).

Many organizations have benchmarks for modules of their services because benchmarking provides opportunities to assess progress toward stated organizational goals and mission. The adoption and practice of benchmarking differ from organization to organization and from culture to culture, but the goal of excellence is constant.

In the Nigeria library scene, the need for benchmarking became more obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was because of the diverse responses to the pandemic by different libraries and institutions. Whereas some kept their services running throughout the pandemic, most libraries and educational institutions shutdown. Even after the relaxation of restrictions associated with COVID-19, this trend has continued and shows that responses will continue to be disparate because of a lack of benchmarking culture.

This chapter therefore looks into benchmarking practices in Nigerian libraries and how this has affected and is affecting the delivery of services. The discussion is carried out within the subheadings of COVID-19 in

Africa, methodology, library services during the COVID pandemic, benchmarking in Nigerian libraries, COVID-19 and benchmarking in Nigeria, how benchmarking can affect library services, and then conclusion.



14.2 COVID-19 in Africa

COVID-19 in Africa came in different phases and affected citizens differently. Different countries on the continent also had diverse responses to the pandemic. Countries like South Africa, Tunisia, and Egypt had more cases of infections than countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania. The impact of the pandemic in Africa is, for various reasons, comparatively less intense as witnessed in Europe, Asia, Australasia, and America ([Amouzouvi et al., 2021](#); [Lalaoui et al., 2020](#)). Nevertheless, the effect on library and educational services is lasting and has the potential to affect teaching, learning, and research in the years to come ([Baker and Ellis, 2021](#)). The preparedness of African nations to the pandemic also portends the capacity of the continent to meet global standards in responding to pandemics and human disasters.

Whereas many nations in Europe and America adopted an online environment for teaching and learning with virtual delivery of library services, many libraries in Africa could not transfer their services to online environment because of obvious deficit of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure. Even then, the preparedness for future disruptions or disasters is doubtful.



14.3 Methodology

It was considered necessary to have some evidence from practitioners in Nigeria on their use of benchmarking in the provision of library services. Mixed methods were used to gain more insight into the phenomena. Purposive sampling was carried out online using Google forms as a quantitative technique. This was complemented by focus group discussion among university librarians, a qualitative technique, which was also carried out online. There were 65 respondents to the questionnaire

Your Type of Library

61 responses

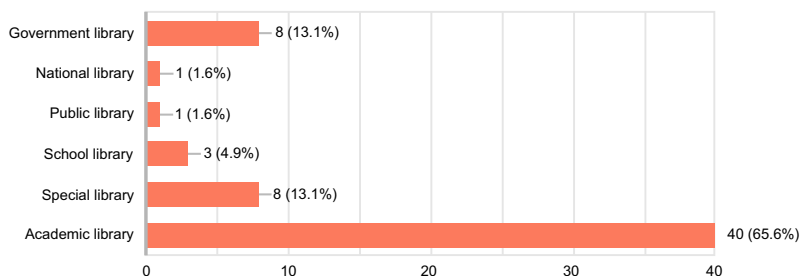


Figure 14.1 Respondents by type of library *here*.

that was administered. Six university librarians participated in the focus group discussion, including three present and past officials of the Association of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities. Libraries represented in the questionnaire administration are shown in [Fig. 14.1](#).

14.4 Library services during the COVID pandemic

Delivery of library services during the COVID-19 pandemic differed from country to country. In some countries, it was easy to switch to virtual services ([Baker and Ellis, 2021](#)); some others struggled, while others shutdown. Most of those that shutdown their services were in the developing countries because of political, economic, and inadequate infrastructure to drive virtual services. Countries of Africa like Nigeria witnessed shutdown of services, even though there were services delivered by institutions that already built some levels of technology infrastructures ([Akintunde, 2021b](#)).

The essence of library services is to support teaching and learning in institutions of learning, leisure, professional development, and continuous learning in public libraries. But, for many organizations and libraries the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality check, as Hamilton succinctly captured it, “The great reset precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic gives us the opportunity to rethink what the library can and should be” ([Hamilton, 2021](#)). The impact of the pandemic on individuals, groups, and societies created opportunities for librarians to try out innovative ways of delivering services. This innovation, predicated on technology,

liberalizes access to library resources and sets librarians and providers of information services thinking of innovative ways of providing services to their target audiences with particular characteristics (Ashiq et al., 2022; Chisita et al., 2022; Ifijeh and Yusuf, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, the pandemic was a wonderful opportunity for institutions to revise their benchmark for library services. For instance, the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) in London established some protocols to guide their services. They termed these “Operating Principles” (Kirkham, 2021).



14.5 Benchmarking in Nigerian libraries

Benchmarking as a normal process in Nigeria is a desirable theme. From findings in the study carried out in the course of writing this chapter, some librarians affirmed that benchmarking would greatly improve the delivery of library services. However, it is interesting to note that only 38% of the respondents in the sample are aware of any standards used in the delivery of library services. Among the “standards” mentioned, it is clear that most of the libraries do not use any benchmark in delivering their services. Standards referred to as their benchmarks include 1976 IFLA Standards, Strategic Plans, university libraries which they cite as models, Library Policy, and the Librarians’ Registration Council of Nigeria, without being specific.

The Librarians’ Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) (Librarians (Registration, etc) Council of Nigeria Act—Laws, n.d.) is the government agency established by law to regulate library practices in the country. Among other responsibilities, LRCN is to determine standards for library practice “from time to time as circumstances may require.” However, LRCN is yet to bring out any statement of practice since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Standards which have been provided and which presently serve as benchmarks for libraries in Nigeria include the *Benchmarks for Library and Information Science Curriculum, Standards and Guidelines for Academic Libraries in Nigeria, Standards and Guidelines for Government Libraries in Nigeria, Standards and Guidelines for Public Libraries in Nigeria, Standards and Guidelines for Special Libraries in Nigeria, Standards and Guidelines for School Libraries in Nigeria*, and *Librarians Code of Ethics*, all produced by LRCN.

The National Universities Commission (NUC), the regulatory body for universities in Nigeria, has also published its own *Minimum Benchmarks for Library and Information Science Curriculum*. It is worthy of note that there has been no revision of these benchmarks since the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the focus group discussion with university librarians, one of the participants declared:

I do not know, but there are many people like me who do not really use any standards. What I mean by that is that we do not refer to any standard for whatever we do. We have benchmarks in the library schools, but do we really apply these at work? No. The standards are there, but the question is ‘Do we really use them?’

Another participant replied:

We make use of IFLA standards. We are aware that change is taking place globally with manual services being replaced by digital services. And, because we do not know of any benchmarks, many libraries in the country are at different levels of automation of their library services, with differential quality of service, especially academic libraries. In my library, we use mostly our instincts and initiatives for collection building, providing services, employing staff of the library and all activities. What we use as guidelines in our organization and services is mainly the regulations of our university, which are not specific or directed at the library.

The response from other librarians confirms the statements of university librarians indicating that most of the libraries sampled carry out services not based on specific library benchmarks or standards as shown in Fig. 14.2.

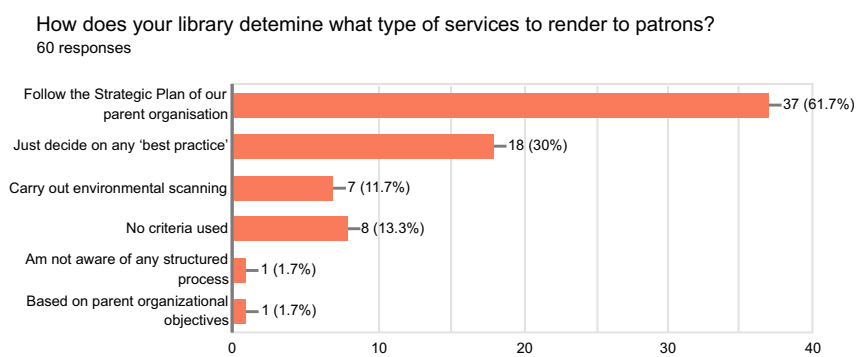


Figure 14.2 How libraries determine their services here.

This is interesting because it shows a huge gap from global best practices of the delivery of library services. With the dynamism that is currently in library and information services today, accelerated by COVID-19, librarians and libraries in Nigeria will need to develop a good strategy of proactive service that ensures the safety of library personnel, covers the format of resources, seamless discovery of and access to resources, and the use of these by library patrons.

When asked about strategic planning, all the librarians except one in the focus group agreed that they draw out strategic plans, even though implementation varies because of extraneous circumstances, poor funding, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation. On funding, one of the librarians cited the example of a university library whose yearly running cost is the students' library fee, making it difficult to perform even minimal services. They all agreed that lack of standards and a body to enforce the standards are critical in resolving this fault. They also confirmed that all their library staff are involved in the development process of the strategic plan. They affirmed that their strategic plans are derived from their institutional plans.

The librarian that did not have a library strategic plan promised to go from the focus group discussion to set up a Library Strategic Plan Committee which will embrace all library staff, based on the sharing of practices from other librarians in the focus group. In her own words:

I do not have a written plan for my library, but my university is developing one. Based on what I heard, especially from the previous speaker, I have a plan to have my library strategic plan committee. Since we have a Quality Assurance Unit, I am sure that we are going to have our plan approved, based on the one being developed for the university.

However, on the development of library's Vision and Mission Statements which are key components of a strategic plan, most of the questionnaire respondents mentioned that these statements are developed mainly by the leadership of the library as reflected in [Fig. 14.3](#). This practice has a potential effect of marginalizing key staff of the library who would be called upon to implement the plan when approved. It is imperative, therefore, to ensure the full participation of all staff of the library in the development of the library strategic plan.

With no standards adopted by many libraries, it is not surprising that a good number of the libraries have no written strategy for the deployment

If 'Yes', which of these are involved in the development of your Vision and Mission Statements?
50 responses

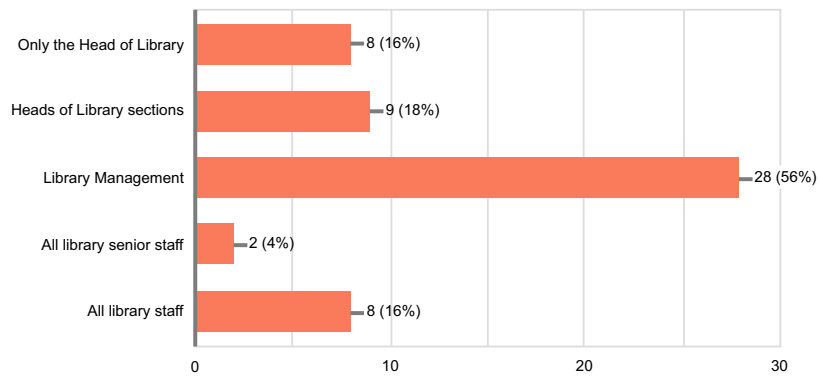


Figure 14.3 Library staff involvement in the development of Vision and Mission Statements *here*.

Does your library have a written strategy for deploying technology?
61 responses

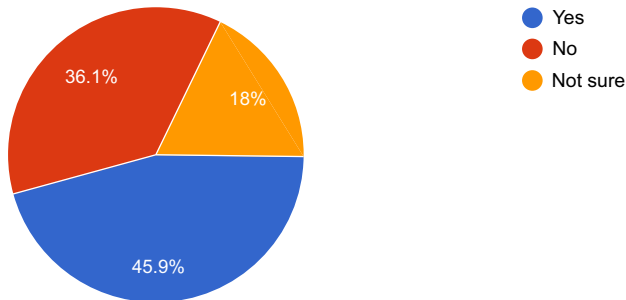


Figure 14.4 Available written technology policy *here*.

of technology in their libraries as gathered from the questionnaire administration and displayed in Fig. 14.4. The implication is that the development of the libraries does not follow a planned strategy, with no standards for performance measurements. Also, a good strategy for the deployment of technology in this digital age would help in adjusting to emerging benchmarks for the effective delivery of library services.



14.6 COVID-19 and benchmarking in Nigeria

During the pandemic, most Nigerian institutions of learning and libraries were shut for the period of the lockdown. Up until now, many libraries are yet to develop measures to deliver services in periods of disaster or health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Figs. 14.5 and 14.6 display the responses received from participants in this study. The responses displayed in Fig. 14.5 indicate that about 60% of the libraries are yet to see COVID-19 and any health emergencies as a threat or disruption that need proactive measures. However, it could be argued that this is possibly the case because the recorded incident and fatality levels of the pandemic were less severe in the country than that was witnessed in other countries in Africa such as South Africa and other countries outside Africa where health records were probably more meticulously kept. Reported cases were low because of perceived factors of cultural attitude, misinformation, and ill-preparedness of medical epidemiologists (Adebawale et al., 2021; Nwakasi et al., 2022; Wonodi et al., 2022).

In the focus group discussion with university librarians, only one librarian reported that his library was able to provide services during the pandemic:

For COVID, we were able to respond effectively because of our online platform and digital platform. We were able to send e-resources to our students. The Library Management System of the university was deployed for this purpose. As time went on, we were able to implement some protocols in the physical library. A lot of lessons were learnt. We do not need to wait for another pandemic. We should have standards to be enforced by regulatory authorities so that there is a minimum requirement for each library to operate.

Does your library have any written strategy for library services during COVID-19 or any future health or other pandemic?

59 responses

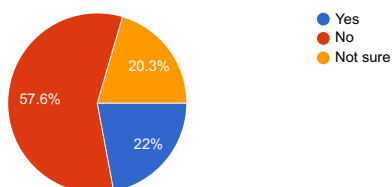


Figure 14.5 Available written strategy for COVID-19 and future pandemics/disruptions here.

Does your library have any written strategy for disaster management?

59 responses

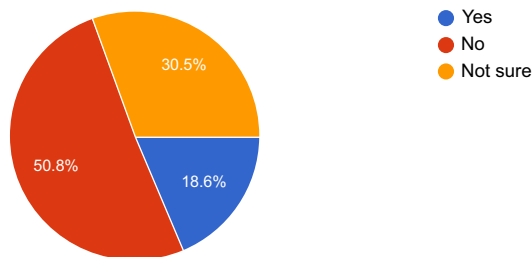


Figure 14.6 Written strategy for disaster management *here*.

The others were not able to offer services during the pandemic because the technology infrastructure in their institutions was not adequate. One of the participants explained that though they had a shut-down, his library was able to support remote access to e-resources of the library by supplying access codes to patrons who called upon the university librarian for help during the pandemic. This affirms the result of previous studies (Akintunde, 2016, 2021a).

Concerning disaster preparedness in terms of policy, plans, and implementation, all members of the focus group agreed that Nigerian libraries perform poorly in this area. One of the participants captures it this way:

For the disaster issues, Nigerian libraries are really not doing well. There are no documented disaster management plans in place. Most of our libraries are not insured. If anything happens, you will have to start from the scratch. This boils down to the paucity of benchmarks. If you have standards, you will know that you have invested millions and that must be insured, with certificate of insurance to show and facilities in place to prevent or minimize fire disaster, with adequate evacuation instructions, etc.



14.7 How benchmarking can affect library services

Benchmarking is therefore a necessary superstructure on which the growth, development, and proactiveness of any organization are based. Libraries can be quite effective when they are able to develop and work with benchmarks. Benchmarks provide measurable standards with which services are developed, deployed, monitored, and evaluated. It also gives

room for projections. All the university librarians who participated in the focus group discussion agreed that benchmarks are needed in Nigerian libraries. They explained that the reason the country was not able to respond adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic is most probably because of this lack of benchmarks. They argued that in securing the future of Nigerian libraries against any form of disruptions in the future, there have to be benchmarks to guide the development of libraries. In the words of one of the university librarians in the focus group:

Benchmarking is very important in delivering effective library services and look forward to the advocacy and enforcement of benchmarks for library services in the country. We need benchmarking to guide us and should be a core requirement for libraries during the accreditation exercise for academic programmes in Nigerian universities.

Benchmarking will also provide a common ground for the evaluation of library services. The evaluation of services as presently carried out in libraries is quite diversified. Some of the measures might not even produce meaningful evaluation; see (Fig. 14.7). From this finding, it would require the development of standards to be able to assess the delivery of services in Nigerian libraries.

In relation to human capital development, benchmarking provides basic criteria by which human resources can be developed to meet global competitiveness. Library staff can therefore become global champions in their local environments, especially now that the internet exposes all libraries and information centers to global information exchange. Training sessions are conducted virtually to equip library personnel with knowledge on how to manage e-resources and carry out services in the digital environment, all adding up to better services with a common threshold.

If 'Yes', how do you evaluate your services?

44 responses

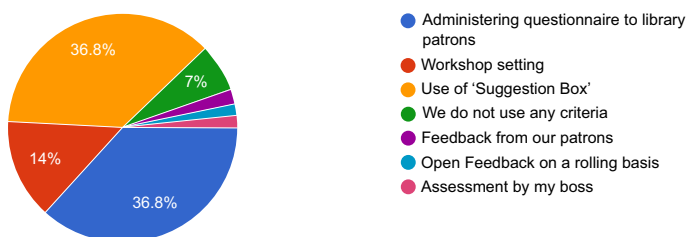


Figure 14.7 Evaluation of library services *here*.

Benchmarking also promotes the standardization of hardware and other library and information services equipment and infrastructure which ultimately aligns local and cosmopolitan libraries in the provision of a common platform for the deployment of services. Benchmarking creates opportunities to have future-orientated plans and growth through projections that take current situations as standards. This helps to alleviate the effect of sudden disruptions and interruptions due to social, economic, or political instabilities.

From all considerations, benchmarking is advantageous, and libraries in vulnerable societies like Nigeria are most likely to benefit maximally from global practices which are shared in the process of benchmarking. Benchmarking creates space for more libraries at opposite ends of development to interact and benefit from pull and push factors. The more developed library pulls the lesser up beyond the present circumstance to a new platform where deficiencies are easily addressed.



14.8 Conclusion

This study of Nigerian libraries has revealed the near absence of adequate benchmarking in Nigerian libraries and the need to have benchmarking in place. The study has also revealed that the benefits of benchmarking are significant and should drive the adoption of benchmarking practices in the design and delivery of effective and efficient library services, particularly in uncertain times. The COVID-19 disruption is only one critical event, and the global response should guide libraries in responding to any crisis situation. Nigerian libraries must engage their regulatory body, the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria, to be more proactive and deliberate in integrating benchmarking as a normal practice in the delivery of services. Academic libraries in the country appear to be on the front burner and should provide leadership in this direction as they have access to global best practices in benchmarking. From participant observation and the study carried out, university librarians in Nigeria are willing to learn more and develop benchmarks in order to be more effective in the delivery of services. The Association of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities should therefore consolidate its leadership in the Nigerian library scene by promoting benchmarking among its members. It was this study that alerted some of the librarians to the criticality of

benchmarking for the effective delivery of library services, and they are willing to embrace benchmarking as a necessary process in delivering signature library services. The development of strategic plans in libraries and evaluation of services are critical needs of the libraries which, if carried out, can lead to the effective integration and implementation of benchmarks. Without reinventing the wheel, libraries in Nigeria have a lot to gain through the digital environment that enables collaboration and sharing of ideas. Benchmarking is a necessary product that deserves marketing for global competitiveness. The time is here for Nigerian libraries to fully embrace benchmarking.

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Benchmarking the impact, quality, and value of an academic online e-Library

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Information Governance, University College of Estate Management, Reading, United Kingdom



15.1 Introduction

At the Higher Education Institution (HEI) where I work, we provide supported online education for the built environment, with over 100 years of experience in providing high-quality learning opportunities. At the point of publication, at any one time, we have more than 4000 students from more than 100 countries and provide flexible and accessible postgraduate and undergraduate degree and apprenticeship programs.

Central to the institutions' strategic vision, both now and in the future, is our HEI's core purpose—to provide leading, vocational, accessible, and cost-effective online education, enabling students to enhance careers, increase professionalism, and contribute to a better-built environment.



15.2 Our vision: to be the center of excellence for built environment education

As the center of excellence for built environment education, our focus is on maximizing its impact and influence on both education and industry. In practical terms, this means a focus on delivering greater impact through student outcomes, widening participation, student satisfaction, and reach, while increasing influence by offering a greater depth and breadth of education, engaging more with education and industry partners, and actively collaborating (UCEM, 2021a,b) (Fig. 15.1).



Figure 15.1 Our strategic vision. Reproduced with permission from UCEM, 2021a. *Welcome – about UCEM* [online]. Available at: <http://www.ucem.ac.uk/about-ucem> (accessed 26.05.22); UCEM, 2021b. *Supported online learning – e-Library* [online]. Available at: <http://www.ucem.ac.uk/e-library/> (accessed 26.05.22).



15.3 Library and information services

Whether you are obtaining qualifications, undertaking continuing professional development (CPD), or researching a particular field, gaining access to a wealth of library resources and information services is essential. At UCEM, we recognize that in an information-rich age, everyone is pressed for time, and it can be a real challenge to keep up to speed with the latest research and find good-quality information when you need it. Therefore, the main objectives within our library and information services are to make finding information that is good quality, credible, accessible, and relevant, easier for all, and to signpost staff and students to the resources that will help supplement teaching and learning materials and support students throughout their studies and career development.

The Library Assessment Capability Maturity Model (LACMM)—a means of optimizing how libraries measure effectiveness—was developed during a series of library benchmarking activities across an international

network of universities. It contains four stages of the assessment cycle that include

1. Objectives,
2. Methods and data collection,
3. Analysis and interpretation, and
4. Use of results (Hart and Amos, 2018a,b).

The “quality journey,” as it is commonly known, provides us with the opportunity to examine all elements of the library including its structures, systems, services, processes, and people (McGregor, 2004, p. 18) (Fig. 15.2).

It should be noted that “Data, Information & Knowledge” involves collecting, analyzing, and presenting data to use in performance measurement and decision-making, that is, input and output measures such as budget quantum, collection growth, circulation, library inquiries (McGregor, 2004, p. 25).

In 2013, I was recruited into the role of Digital Resources Manager, coinciding with our institution’s move from the provision of hard-copy study papers and core textbooks to a fully online delivery model, driven via our

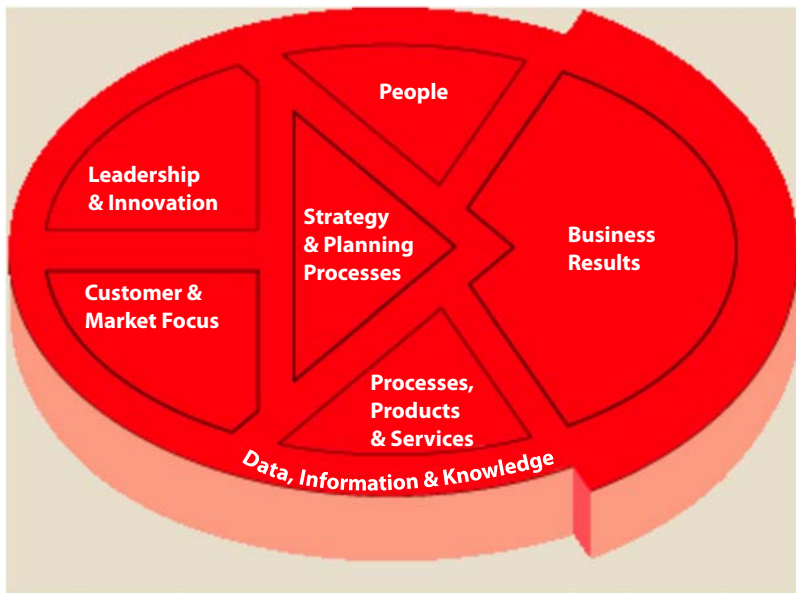


Figure 15.2 Excellent libraries: a quality assurance perspective. *Reproduced with permission from: Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF, 2003, cited in McGregor, F., 2004. Excellent libraries: a quality assurance perspective 2004. [online]. Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/asdpapers/27> (accessed 23.08.22)).*

virtual learning environment (VLE). My role was to create and develop an online/e-Library to house digital versions of all our published material (including published books, research, discussion documents, newsletters, occasional paper series, and study papers). In addition to this, I identified many valuable e-resources available to support the built environment, through searching for benchmarking best practices within industry professional bodies, the educational sector, and wider information profession.



15.4 What is an online e-Library?

The terms “online library,” “digital library,” and “e-Library” have all been used and in a variety of ways, with many differing views and definitions available.

Similar to the University of London’s Online Library (OLL), in this chapter, “e-Library” is used to emphasize the “non-physical nature of the collections and access mechanisms where a user does not have to be physically present” (Brenton and Tury, 2021, p. 81).

In July 2016, the University College of Estate Management (UCEM) moved from rented space within the University of Reading Whiteknights campus and gained their own independent physical building within the town center. A large project was then undertaken to Dewey-classify all the hard-copy published material owned by us and house within a physical library in the new office building to keep this legacy going. An online Library Management System (LMS) incorporating a resource discovery service was purchased to catalog/record these resources for future reference (Figs. 15.3 and 15.4).



15.5 UCEM’s library mission statement

UCEM’s library and information services ensure that staff and students are kept informed of current and best practice, that inquiries received are dealt with in a quick and succinct manner, and that library visitors have access to the quality data that will enable them to undertake their work and studies more effectively.



Figure 15.3 e-Library (see also Fig. 15.6). *Reproduced with permission from UCEM (2021).*

15.6 Benchmarking

To aid the decision-making process in relation to the overall structure and content of our physical and online libraries, I undertook the following list of tasks. These aided the objective of deciding which Library Management System (LMS) and/or resource discovery tool to integrate, the library and information services to offer, and the specific resources to purchase and subscribe to.

- Undertook SWOT, PESTLE, and STEEPLE analysis that required a review of our competitors (HEIs providing online delivery, the same specialist subject areas as us, as well as The Russell Group that represents 24 leading UK universities);
- Spoke to internal and external knowledge and information specialists, librarians, learning designers, learning technologists, and academics through networks;
- Consulted with staff and students regarding their experiences within our own library and other libraries that they have visited, used, studied, or worked at;



Figure 15.4 Photo of the physical library. *Reproduced with permission from UCEM Media Production (2021): UCEM, 2021a. Welcome – about UCEM [online]. Available at: <http://www.ucem.ac.uk/about-ucem> (accessed 26.05.22); UCEM, 2021b. Supported online learning – e-Library [online]. Available at: <http://www.ucem.ac.uk/e-library/> (accessed 26.05.22)*

- Reviewed staff and student feedback through consultation and inquiry service;
- Attended meetings and discussions with key stakeholders including those interested in the public information published by Higher Education Institutions (e.g., QAA, Higher Education Statistics Agency, OfS), prospective students, students, employers, sponsors, and professional bodies;
- Tapped into the subject specialist knowledge of our academic team to ascertain the key resources required for module inclusion and development;
- Regularly undertook desktop research and other forms of continuing professional development that include (1) attending conferences/networking events, (2) library tours, (3) webinars, (4) online training courses, and (5) reading industry, professional body, and educational sector publications.

Throughout the above processes, I frequently benchmark what we offer within our own HEI physical and e-Library against others within educational establishments (especially HEIs and online learning providers) and those within the wider information profession. Through networking, best practices can be shared and cover specialist areas that include accessibility, equality, diversity, and understanding better your audience/library users; intellectual property and copyright; latest developments in library resources and services; effective marketing/promotion of library services using a range of communications channels (that include social media channels); new and ever-changing technologies; measuring outcomes and successes, incorporating changes where possible, always striving for continual improvement.



15.7 What is benchmarking? Reviewing the literature

The corpus of research examining benchmarking and specifically within the library community continues to grow. Much of the literature is written with a business or corporate audience in mind, rather than for public or not-for-profit organizations. However, this literature does provide a source of ideas, theories, and models that, potentially, can be applied further afield.

Hart and Amos (2014) state that “Actual improvements as a result of benchmarking are known to arise from considering and looking at processes, tools, and techniques rather than from simply comparing and reviewing measurements of activity.”

However, Gheres and Gogozan (2010) state that “There is considerable confusion in what the comparison process actually means. Often the process of benchmarking is understood as simply a process of comparing the numbers of different performance levels in various organizations. However, if benchmarking is seen as a tool for improvement, it is more than just a comparison and a classification. This goes further than the benchmarks, standards, and rules, and investigates the practices that support benchmarks.”

The philosophy of benchmarking is well expressed by the following statement:

Benchmarking is the practice of being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something and being wise enough to learn how to match and even surpass them at it... Benchmarking works because it helps you to

understand your own processes and enables you to learn from others. Benchmarking equals innovation. (American Productivity and Quality Center APQC online, 2003, p. 13)

Gheres and Gogozan (2010) go on to say that “Benchmarking is an observation regarding the existence of differences in performance and learning about best practices from others.”



15.8 Further definitions

Brenton and Tury (2021) state:

A successful digital library responds to feedback but proactively seeks and responds to the evidence of the impact of its services by a range of means. Digital library services must also be routinely benchmarked against other libraries, just like physical libraries, in order to ensure the standards of provision are kept and are in line with not only the user needs but also with the requirements of the accrediting and quality assurance bodies. (Brenton and Tury, 2021, p. 83)

Jackson (2001) states that “The term benchmark was originally used in surveying to denote a mark on a survey peg or stone that acted as a permanent reference point against which the levels of various topographic features can be measured. It has also acquired a more general meaning as a reference or criterion against which something can be measured.”

The term is also used to denote excellence or a mark of distinction in a product or service. The first use of the term in an educational sense is accorded to R.K. Melton “standards represent benchmarks with which students compare their ability and performance” (student physician, 1957, cited in the New Oxford English Dictionary). It has been said that the benchmarking concept was introduced and first used by the Rank Xerox Corporation to cope with market competition.

Camp (1989) states that “Benchmarking is the search for industry best practices that lead to superior performance” (Camp, 1989, p. 12). Spendolini (1992) provides a more detailed definition of benchmarking stating that it is (Fig. 15.5):

a continuous (1), systematic (2) process (3) for evaluating (4) the products (5), services (5), and work processes (5) of organizations (6) that are recognized (7) as representing best practices (8) for the purpose of organizational improvement (9). (Spendolini, 1992)



Figure 15.5 The continuous and systematic process of benchmarking for the purposes of ongoing organizational improvement.

In terms of the relationship between benchmarking and best practices, [Simon \(2011\)](#) states that “The identification of best practices is an integral component of the benchmarking process” ([Simon, 2011](#)).

Benchmarking is an often-used modern term associated with a broad range of human endeavors. It is increasingly found to be essential to any serious organizational improvement process ([Chen, 2005](#); [Dawkins et al., 2007](#)), where current states of affairs are deemed undesirable (by dint of inefficiency or ineffectiveness) until replaced by more desirable states of affairs, based on evidence or perhaps a belief that such states are at least partially attainable ([Moriarty and Smallman, 2009](#)).

For example, within our online library, we were finding (solicited through feedback received and statistics showing low usage numbers) that staff and students were missing out on some of the valuable resources. Library users were not scrolling down the full VLE webpage, realizing that there were actually eleven sections making up the library, and therefore underutilizing the full range and extent of resources available to them.

One of our success stories in response to this was to create interactive, quick, and easy access tiles via our online VLE page in order that staff and students could gain direct access to a section that they were referred to (as shown in [Fig. 15.6](#)).

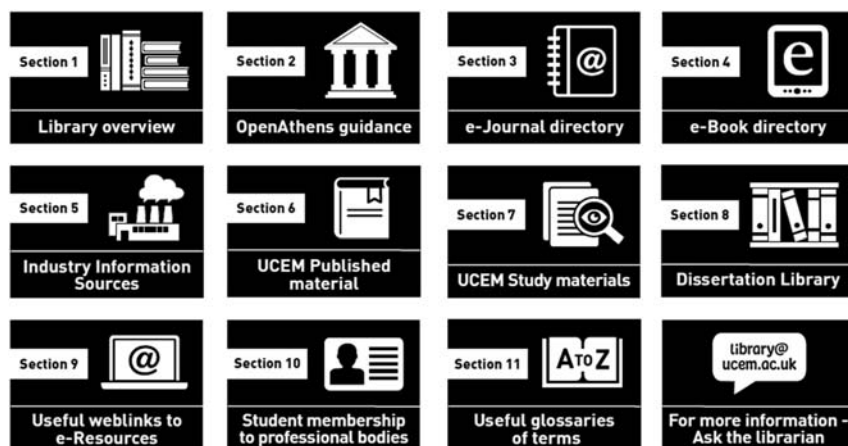


Figure 15.6 Quick and easy access online interactive tiles for the e-Library sections. *Reproduced with permission from UCEM (2021).*

OpenAthens is the membership authentication system we have in place for our staff and students to gain direct access to resources without the need for multiple usernames and passwords. This section provides guidance that includes video tutorials to support all the resources that sit behind OpenAthens authentication.



15.9 Defining benchmarks and statistics

Pritchard (1995) states that the terms benchmarks and statistics are often “loosely applied to a range of numerical charts and data, some of which are actually quite simple. We may be both over-intimidated and over-credulous by our too-casual assumption of what is meant in a given report, standard, management exercise, or research instrument. There are at least six things, somewhat overlapping, for which the term ‘statistics’ is often used:

1. Raw numbers,
2. **Descriptive statistics (e.g., totals, averages, ratios, time series, and pie charts),**
3. Measures indicators, indexes (often compounded from descriptive or raw data),

4. Analytical techniques (correlations, regressions, probability, and inference),
5. Survey results (quantitative and qualitative—not all truly statistical), and
6. Complex models (broad, testable, predictive, multivariate mathematical approach).

It is the second of these categories that is in daily use in the library world, and this is also the common definition of benchmarks.”

In relation to our online library, another great success story was the investment and implementation of “Summon,” a resource discovery tool/service. This service (provided as an e-Library search box at the very top of the VLE e-Library homepage) allowed for the better management and delivery of our online resource provision, and meeting staff and student expectations by allowing library users the opportunity to search and access all resources from one uniform search interface.

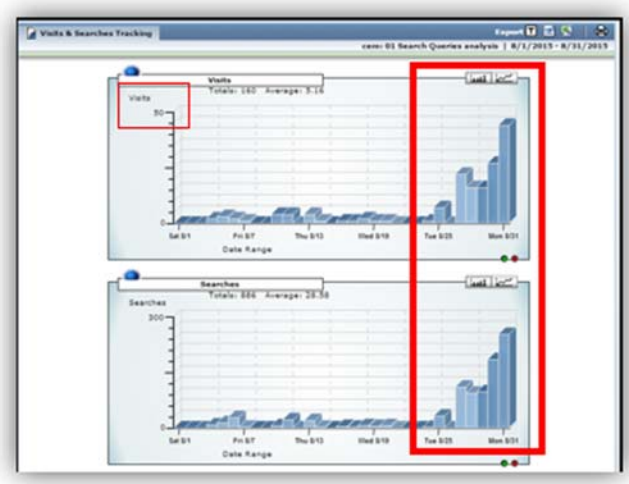


15.10 How do you measure success of change?

Within the first 2 years of purchasing the resource discovery service and placing it at the top of the VLE page, our e-Library saw usage increase by over 875%.

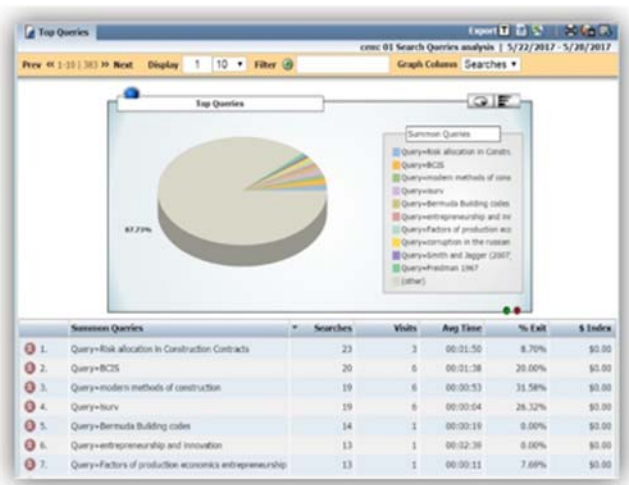
Fig. 15.7 shows when the resource discovery service went live in August 2015 and how library usage sharply increased. Fig. 15.8 shows other great functions that the discovery service offers, allowing the opportunity to pull out a wealth of statistics including pie charts and tables showing the most popular topics searched for.

Further information requests can be made on the resource discovery service to identify “visitor profiles” including the most popular times of day when searches take place and from what geographical location they come from. For example, our second-largest cohort of students, after the UK, is from Hong Kong. These statistics can help shape the decision-making process in providing recommendations in relation to timings and topics for webinars, items to be covered within the library’s monthly current awareness service—*Knowledge Foundations*, or for CPD and business development opportunities. The information obtained can be fed into higher strategic planning for the future development of the library and the



August '15

Figure 15.7 Library usage statistics. Data from Summon, provided by Clarivate (2021). Summon and Clarivate are trademarks of their respective owners and used herein with permission.



May '17

Figure 15.8 Most popular search topics. Data from Summon, provided by Clarivate (2021). Summon and Clarivate are trademarks of their respective owners and used herein with permission.

support services it provides to the institution through the Senior Leadership and Executive Support Teams and can externally influence the wider educational sector and information profession.

Fig. 15.9 shows statistics for the 2020–21 academic year that were extracted from the OpenAthens gateway administrator portal. These statistics show individual resources that can be accessed via the gateway, with peaks and troughs often showing when (1) certain resources are heavily embedded into modules, (2) when assignment due date is close by, (3) for holiday periods, and (4) when study leave is provided before dissertations/work-based projects are to be submitted.

These statistical reports can be provided to show daily, monthly, or yearly usage and can also be broken down to show individual resources or all resources together for comparison purposes (internally and externally, through research). From these reports, those resources that are not being utilized fully can easily be noted and considerations made as to whether the subscription should be continued. Gaps in resource areas can also be identified and new subscriptions considered for purchasing that could potentially replace those underutilized resources. However, it is important to note that while some resources may not be used as extensively as others, this does not necessarily mean that they are not worth continuing. Some smaller modules may still require these resources, and removing them could increase workload significantly in having to find, use, and implement alternatives to replace them, and therefore careful consideration and consultation with key personnel are

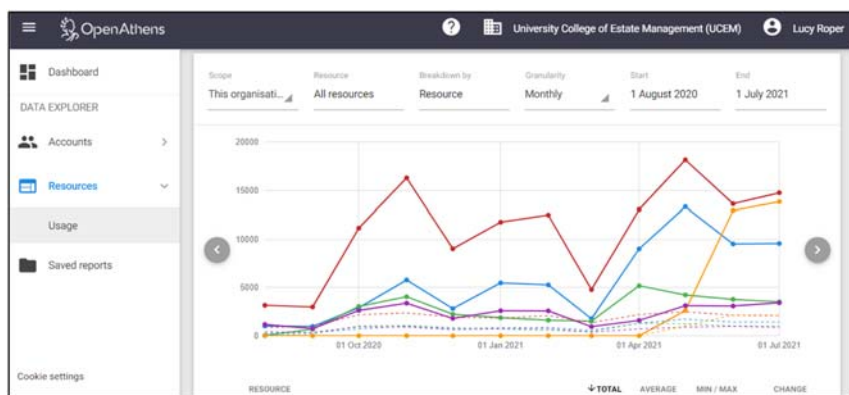


Figure 15.9 e-Library staff and student usage of individual resources available via OpenAthens authentication. *Reproduced with permission from OpenAthens (part of Jisc) (2021).*

required. Also, these underutilized resources may require additional promotion to encourage greater usage within the e-Library to supplement teaching and learning materials and support students' studies.

Fig. 15.10 shows the total number of visits to the e-Library from 2014 to 2021 and incorporates the use of the resource discovery service as well as access through the OpenAthens gateway. It is important to note that the e-Library statistics shown in Fig. 15.10 are not normalized. However, taking into account student numbers for the period 2014–17, for example, in 2014 the total student number was 2614, and in 2016, the figure rose to 2992 (derived from our student record system—SITS), seeing an increase of 14%. Therefore, taking this into account and applying student numbers at the time to total student visits, we saw an increase of 875% over the 2 years.

In relation to Figs. 15.9 and 15.10, it is important to note the peaks, troughs, and fluctuations that reflect when (1) semesters start and the e-Library is promoted as part of the induction module. (2) I provide tutorials to program leaders for inclusion within their introductory webinars, and (3) tutorials/webinars are also provided to dissertation and work-based project module students encouraging greater utilization of the e-Library resources as part of their research. Note the changes in usage over the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–21).

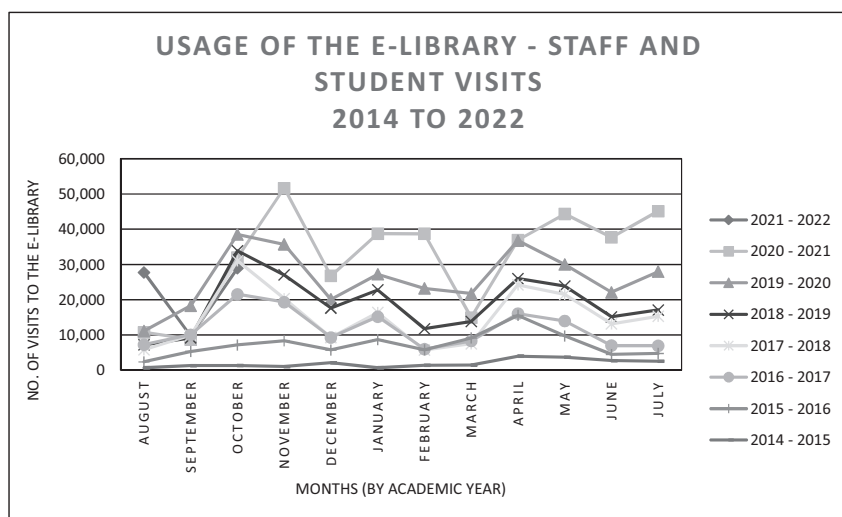


Figure 15.10 Staff and student usage of the e-Library.



15.11 New ways of working—library provision over the COVID-19 pandemic period

With new technologies constantly emerging, the support for and ongoing development of digital literacy skills are vital for the effective use of the online learning and delivery model we have.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown periods, we had to quickly embrace change, adapt to working from home, learn new technologies, and take on additional Line Management and Senior Management, deputizing responsibilities. Upon reflection, while staff had to adjust to remote working, our fully online teaching and learning delivery and IT infrastructure underpinning the e-Library services placed us in a stronger position than our counterparts. As an academic librarian, my role is to manage and disseminate information. However, during this period I made a significant contribution to the wider information profession and educational sector by taking the opportunity to impart my knowledge and experience in assisting/enabling those whose physical buildings had closed and had to quickly transition to a fully online delivery model. A greater emphasis was placed on cross-functional collaboration in knowledge creation. I was able to have a greater presence, via virtual conferences/webinars, e-newsletters/journal articles, and social media channels, to share experiences and support the library, information, and knowledge communities.



15.12 Copyright licensing agency, digital content store

In 2019, we integrated the Copyright Licensing Agency's (CLA) Digital Content Store (DCS) within our VLE. This certainly proved invaluable over the pandemic period, providing an online repository of scanned material supporting tutors and students.

The DCS is a rights, technology, and content platform for higher education institutions (HEIs), developed by the CLA together with HEIs, publishers, and technology partners. At the core of the DCS is a searchable repository of digitized book and journal extracts and a workflow management tool. When extracts are digitized by HEIs under the CLA license, they will be uploaded directly to the DCS. Once an extract is

uploaded and assigned to the appropriate program of study and relevant module, students will then be able to access the extract via a secure link to the content held within the DCS.

The DCS provides many benefits to HEIs by saving them time and effort during the process of checking, digitizing, and reporting on copyrighted material to be used within modules on respective program of studies. The DCS also allows for the annual copyright manual audit reporting under the CLA license to become fully automated through the Digital Content Store. The DCS is available to all HEIs with a Higher Education License from the Copyright Licensing Agency and at no extra cost.

With the DCS you can:

- Verify ownership,
- Check permissions,
- Eliminate census reporting,
- Automate requirement checks, and
- **Share and use content from other HEIs**

This last bullet point is particularly key for smaller HEIs like ours, especially when ensuring the quality and accessibility of scanned material is available on one hand, however on the other ensuring that the right equipment (high-end scanners) and technologies (i.e., OCR—Optical Character Recognition) are in place to achieve the successful outcomes required.

Responding to feedback and the introduction of the new EU Web Accessibility guidelines (WCAG 2.11 AA standards) have meant further developments in ensuring diversity and inclusion in our work/services and make finding, accessible, relevant, and credible information easier for all.

Scans can be obtained from the British Library through their Enhanced Higher Education Supply Service (EHES) and via the DCS. This service provides quality scans with OCR technology. This technology extracts printed or written text from a scanned document or image file and then converts the text into a machine and screen-readable format thus allowing resources to be accessible and searchable online. The DCS will also identify other HEIs that already have scans that are OCR'd or from EHES, and therefore once you have verified ownership, checked permissions, eliminated census reporting, and automated requirement checks, you can select a scan from another HEI, and the DCS will automatically add the relevant cover-sheet to the first page of the scan containing your own HEI's details and logo.

This is a great example of HEIs working together with the CLA to ensure best practice and ensuring that staff and students can gain access to quality, searchable, and accessible material.

Over the pandemic period, the opportunity arose to influence others within the wider information profession, by aiding those wishing to integrate the DCS. With a lot of physical buildings having to close over the pandemic period, the fact that the DCS is available online/remotely allowed for the greater utilization of the vast collection of readily available scanned material from across the education sector and help supplement library and learning materials.



15.13 Quality assurance and benchmarking

A successful e-Library listens and understands the library and information requirements of others and provides responses in a format that suits individual needs. Libraries and information services also have to be proactive in seeking and responding to other forms of evidence that shows the impact that it has on library users. [Brenton and Tury \(2021\)](#) state:

Digital library services must be routinely benchmarked against other libraries, just like physical libraries, in order to ensure that standards of provision are kept and are in line with not only user needs by also with the requirements of the accrediting and quality assurance bodies. (Brenton and Tury, 2021, p. 83)

Brenton and Tury raise the question “What do distance learners want?” Therefore, in the table provided (Table 15.1), I have answered those questions and benchmarked the work we do against each:

Digital libraries for distance learners/researchers must adapt and be able to support their learners’ needs wherever they are. For this to happen, a robust digital infrastructure which supports 24/7 access via a variety of digital devices, and seamless, easy, and secure access to all materials through a single point of entry, a one-stop shop is fundamental ([Brenton and Tury, 2021](#), pp. 83–84).



15.14 The importance of establishing networks and key contacts

Considering the COVID-19 outbreak (2020), numerous organizations came together to support each other during this time and beyond. The library

community helped in contributing and identifying “Digital resources to support Online Teaching” (Secker and Nobis, 2020) that included open access (OA), open educational resources (OER), and openly licensed material. I followed this work up by creating designated pages within our own VLE (made up from this work) as well as providing our own published material, for example, OA current awareness service(s), which include *Knowledge Foundations*, as well as internal and external body blogs.

My objectives for overall management and day-to-day running of the library and information services include responsibilities for disseminating information, and functions include resource ordering, specialist collections, business systems, and library projects. Recently, my focus has been on increasing networking opportunities, enabling the increased sharing of best practices. The COVID pandemic and lockdown period gave me the opportunity to have a greater influence within the wider information profession and education sector especially in relation to the online library and information service delivery we have, while others were having to quickly transition from physical libraries to online delivery models and methods.

There are opportunities for engaging with the library profession and wider sector(s) (including education), providing CPD, networking, and profile-raising that allow for knowledge creation and the continuous benchmarking of the work we do against others. I participate in and contribute to several networks where key topics are brought to the groups attention and discussed, and where effective, best practice, industry-leading examples are identified and shared. These include GuildHE Librarian Network, CILIP—the library and information association, Copyright Licensing Agency, Copyright Information and Technologies in Education (CITE), Emerald Library Advisory Network (LAN), as well as special interest groups such as Knowledge and Information Management (K&IM), and regional networks. I regularly provide follow-up reports and blogs, learning the lessons that can be implemented and shared further. Having gained insights from the wider profession via these networks (and solicited feedback from research and consultation from key stakeholders identified earlier in this chapter) has allowed me to address issues such as the credibility, relevance, and accessibility of our own library and learning materials, implementing changes where necessary, and thus improving the overall quality of resources and meeting/exceeding staff/student expectations.

When it comes to assuring and enhancing the quality of the student online library and learning experience, our library shares best practice and promotes current awareness through the publication entitled *Knowledge*

Foundations. The initial aim of this library current awareness service was to help keep students and staff abreast of the latest news and views, research, and resources, share current and best practice, and identify case studies that will support studying and supplement teaching and learning materials. However, over the years and upon request, the readership expanded to include alumni, professional bodies, internal and external academics, and subject librarians. *Knowledge Foundations* disseminates the latest news pertaining to the built environment as well as the education sector, online learning, and developments in pedagogy, providing research and reference material to underpin written work, and assists in the continual professional development of all those working and aspiring to work within the built environment.



15.15 Recognition, accreditation, and awards

In McGregor's research, entitled *Excellent Libraries: A Quality Assurance Perspective*,

It was recognised that an increasingly complicated, constantly changing library and higher education environment required a management structure to assist in clarifying and managing the complexity. For reasons of competitiveness with other information providers and for positioning within the university, the library sought benchmarks or performance indicators that would measure outcomes and overall organisational performance. These indicators would, desirably, be sufficiently robust to withstand close scrutiny by stakeholders and would enable the library to compare itself with recognised 'best practice' organisations. Within the Library and information sector at the time, benchmarks, and indicators to measure effectiveness as well as outcomes were difficult to find. However, in adopting the ABEF (Australian Business Excellence Framework), there was a clear commitment to evaluate overall performance through application for a quality or business excellence award. (McGregor, 2004, pp. 25–26)



15.16 Matrix accreditation

The Matrix Standard is the Department for Education's (DfE) standard for ensuring the quality of the delivery of high-quality information, advice, and guidance. The DfE supports the Matrix Standard as the

quality framework for accrediting information, advice, and guidance contracts including the National Careers Service (UK), its subcontractors, and other services delivered on behalf of the Education Skills Funding Agency. It helps providers to improve their services by benchmarking against best practice, and it offers accreditation to those that meet the full standard (Matrix, 2021). UCEM was successful in gaining matrix reaccreditation in 2021.

I work closely with all the valuable library subscription services available to our students and staff (via the VLE and OpenAthens Library login), one of these services being Emerald Insight—the online platform for Emerald Publishing. Emerald champions new ideas in advancing the research and practice of business and management and manages a portfolio of nearly 300 journals. Emerald works in close collaboration with numerous academic (including ourselves) and corporate organizations worldwide. Emerald Publishing supports our e-Library's tailor-made research reports—a service provided to our tutors to help supplement teaching and learning materials on subject-specific areas. In 2018, I was invited to sit on the Emerald Library Advisory Network (LAN)—an online librarian community with global representation which provides opportunities to meet and network with like-minded colleagues, discuss, and share examples of good practice and have a say in the future of Emerald's online platform and products. I relayed feedback received and contributed to development research and promotional activities.

As the Information Governance Manager, it is always nice to be asked for my views and input in helping shape and improve the library subscription services that I use on a daily basis and also signpost staff and student toward. It is even better when you see suggested improvements relayed come to fruition and in 2019 received “An Emerald Insight Development Star,” awarded in recognition of the help and expertise I provided in the development of the update of the Emerald Insight platform. I was also awarded the Emerald Engage Winner in 2020 for input into current and future developments.

In 2018, I was shortlisted for the CILIP Information Literacy Award. The CILIP Information Literacy Group is an award for recognizing achievement in the field of information literacy. The award is open to practitioners, researchers, and academics working in the information literacy field within the UK.

15.17 At the hub of things—no student left behind

Our library and information services are based around a simple purpose of providing staff and students with what they need, when they need it, and in a suitable format.

We encourage direct student engagement with their librarian via various communication channels that include announcement forums within each VLE, a direct library email and telephone number, online web chat facility, and by providing the latest industry news and views via the Knowledge Foundations current awareness service.

Fig. 15.11 shows a word cloud generated from responses and quotes received from the library inquiry service as well as marketing material and our mission statement. You will note from the larger words (which are determined by the frequency of mentions) that they include students at the heart of what we do, but also keywords such as valuable, accessible, and credible information. Our institution's core values of support, excellence, passion, and integrity are also prevalent.

By proactively seeking and responding to staff and student feedback received and by analyzing the evidence of the impact the UCEM e-Library has on others (via a range of means), we can strive for continual improvement and be successful in what we do (Table 15.1).



Figure 15.11 e-Library word cloud. Data from: www.vevox.com (accessed 26 May 2022).

Table 15.1 Digital infrastructure—what do distance learners want?

What do distance learners want?	UCEM e-Library's response
Unlimited access to all the resources they need to complete their degree program tasks	One of our unique selling points is that all essential reading (including e-books, journal articles, scans, research, technical guidance, etc.) for every module in each program of study is provided as unlimited access.
Easy access to all the learning resources (including library resources), uncomplicated procedure, simple steps, preferably a one-stop shop	Single sign-on (SSO) for OpenAthens authentication was put in place to (1) provide a one-stop shop for library resources, (2) allow for embedded links to be placed within the VLE module page(s), (3) direct access via the “Summon” resource discovery service, and (4) ensure seamless and easy access links that take students direct to the resource itself.
Flexible access anytime, anywhere, on any device	Students can access (via the internet) the virtual learning environment, e-Library, and supporting e-resources (mobile-optimized) 24/7
Timely access to meet coursework and dissertation deadlines	The e-Library is a comprehensive and valuable resource, available 24/7, and enabling students to access unlimited access e-resources.
Seamless access (where the resource is from is not their concern; whether a library book, course handbook on VLE or interlibrary loan scan)	Each VLE module contains an online “Digital Resource List” highlighting all the resources accompanying that individual module with embedded and seamless linking (via OpenAthens authentication).
One login (do not want to remember multiple passwords)	With OpenAthens as SSO, there is no username and password required.
Robust access method (failsafe, works every time)	OpenAthens can assist in this. However, key 24/7 technical support teams have been identified for all library subscription services.
Consistent (same process every time)	Our implementation of the “Digital Resource Lists” and accompanying student instructions provides consistency across modules.

(Continued)

Table 15.1 (Continued)

What do distance learners want?	UCEM e-Library's response
Personalized (can access resources that are relevant to their specific needs)	The e-Library provides tailor-made research reports/reading lists to aid specific information needs, an inquiry service, and signposting.
Secure, cannot be hacked into (multiple passwords can lead to password loss)	The VLE is on a secure platform/LMS (Moodle) and with OpenAthens SSO in place helps to alleviate having the need for multiple passwords.

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Information users as active prosumers: perspectives from social marketing and sociocultural value for academic libraries' benchmarking processes

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16.1 Introduction

Academic libraries are fundamental entities for contributing knowledge to information users. They provide direct aid in the achievement of informational development, and as an element of human development, through the provision and acquisition of immaterial goods, which involve certain ontological and epistemological aspects, related to the thinking theory and value theory (Da, 2022). Unlike other organizations that measure their performance through manufactured or shipped products, libraries are concerned with information users' growth processes, at the level of their human essence and personality, as a means of contributing to their survival in the society of the future.

Benchmarking of academic libraries should take a different route from that adopted in other types of organizations, especially for-profit ones. As the main input of an academic library, information can be manifested in at least two ways: (1) when it is used and returned as physical documents, and (2) when it is digitally consumed, though ultimately the source

remains active in the databases. This represents a different movement of “products,” where the used product finally returns or remains in the collection as a storage system. In the case of academic libraries, benchmarking goes beyond a quantitative comparison. As such, it helps in finding better ways to record events related to methodological approaches to information, orientating users according to their interests, and using technology in diverse ways for consulting data and developing research processes (Astakhova, 2021).

Today’s academic libraries have the fundamental purpose of searching for innovation. Benchmarking is one of the business tools that can best be adapted to information processes and services. Benchmarking’s ideal and expected result will be the identification of the benefit generated by knowledge through the development of new functions and the measurable impact behind the usage of information resources (Carjaval-Morales et al., 2014). From this perspective, the academic library as one of the main neural centers at a given university becomes the perfect setting for generating ideas and materializing knowledge for the solution of specific problems through the recognition of pertinent alternatives.

It is also important to note that benchmarking in academic libraries can be complex, since, typically, only comparative elements of a quantitative nature are retrieved. Current comparison processes between academic libraries of the same type tend not to involve deeper analyses to demonstrate users’ satisfaction (certainly more demanding in terms of the conditions in which information procedures occur), the application of the knowledge acquired, the demonstration of cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit, as well as all those training aspects that allow an identification of the true impact of the available resources and services.

In order to respond to these expectations, this chapter studies two central themes: the first is based on the importance of the user as a subject of study and the way in which academic libraries socially promote themselves to achieve a position beyond their mere survival or validity, and second, the search for the identification of various necessary elements for benchmarking processes as a means of evaluating and researching for innovation, as well as for positioning and developing academic libraries as sociocultural entities. A simplified and multilevel conceptual model was developed from the literature review, which integrates various elements for applying benchmarking in academic libraries.



16.2 Active users (prosumers) as the central focus of social marketing in academic libraries

The proper functioning of all organizations centers on their staff and clients. The same occurs in academic libraries, in relation to their staff and beneficiaries (users), which form a community or a closed group. Academic libraries are distinguished by the conditions of their beneficiaries in two basic ways: (1) it is easy to identify the population that is served; (2) the user has different purposes for using the information when seeking its consumption, which might include deriving a specific product (and hence they can be considered prosumers).

The development of users as prosumers of academic information does not necessarily emerge from academic libraries, but rather, like benchmarking processes, they arise from business sector initiatives, where the fundamental principles for developing beneficiaries as producers and not as mere consumers have been identified, by defining various elements related to the economy, technology, knowledge, social responsibility, impact measurement, and governance (Moreira and Fuster Morellc, 2020). In this case, universities and academic libraries demand the incorporation of the governance concept, with which they must have the capacity to meet specific needs related to structure, services, people, infrastructure, and decision-making (Giménez-Chornet, 2021).

Across various productive sectors, the prosumer developed a sense of survival. For instance, in their search for self-sufficiency because of the lack of external energy resources, the electricity sector considers that prosumers are not isolated cases, but their development can be described in cascade models, where problems are solved at the group level and by constantly including members, given their exponential growth (Scarcello et al., 2022). Agricultural communities generate food both for their own consumption and for sale, all of which are based on the commitment of the group members, who are chosen according to specific functional characteristics (Jain and Potdar, 2021).

In the case of the use and generation of information, there are numerous examples regarding the constitution of users as prosumers. In the health area, for example, work is being done on innovations that promote and encourage reconceptualizing patients as prosumers of medical care services through the activation, empowerment, participation, and commitment of

patients regarding the use of information on health-care processes (Vincenza Ciasullo et al., 2022). In the publishing industry, tools have been developed to identify prosumers' behavior in universities, including the types of data they demand and, consequently, their decision-making related to their forms of distributing, marketing, and segmentation of contents (De Rosa et al., 2022).

In addition, it is possible to identify various conceptions of the prosumer by observing certain actions, both in areas related to information and in other sectors that could serve as a reference to generate new forms of work that do not necessarily happen within academic libraries. The most obvious evidence to be gathered regarding the current use of information is related to internet usage, beyond the mere recording of frequencies of access and use. We must incorporate variables dealing with information reliability which are characteristic of the processes of publishing original content and sharing others' content. This would allow users to be defined either as consumers, prosumers, or observers (Arribas-Urrutia et al., 2019). In addition, incorporating various emerging technologies opens up significant educational possibilities for training prosumers in information management activities and their acquisition of skills in practical situations, all with the purpose of achieving the intention of using and generating knowledge (Ocampo et al., 2009; Cabero Almenada et al., 2018), as well as developing virtual societies (integrated as brand communities, with similar interests, and without geographical limitations), according to user motivations, the complexity of the information products demanded, symbolic aspects, or from the satisfaction with information products according to their level of quality (ShiYong et al., 2022).

Academic libraries intend to compare themselves with similar entities based on the characteristics of their users. However, they must take into account that they should first identify what is known as the global network and their respective demands, and based on this, measure their levels of consumption and production in clusters by compatibility, generating as many user groups as necessary (Caballero et al., 2019). This results in the separation of the members of an academic community into groups, according to their educational level, professional careers, or working environments (Jamil et al., 2022). In addition, users who produce content in digital format (both of scholarly or scientific dissemination nature, which may be developed by researchers, teachers, or students) must be identified from within these networks, and their common features and

practices should be extracted, taking account of theories of participation (Herrero Diz, 2015).

The promotion of library services, the identification of user communities, and their means of access should be based on social marketing, considered as an organized cycle to impact social change through the recognition of useful environments (Petrescu et al., 2021). Social marketing is not opposed to digital marketing; rather, it is considered the most effective means for benchmarking purposes, promoting services, and predicting user patterns (Saura, 2021). Social and digital marketing currently merge in social media. This even allows us to distinguish various paths for assessing the return on investment, such as social influence, relationships, and collaboration, through indicators of visibility, reputation, community loyalty, and new ways of attracting users, with which academic libraries ensure their permanence, build an image, and avoid the growing loss of their social presence (González-Fernández-Villavicencio, 2015).

Social marketing as a mechanism for developing benchmarking processes goes beyond the investigation of internal or external loans and library events or campaigns, and so it includes the promotion and dissemination of activities in social media, in such a way that it is possible to measure their respective impact (García Cámara, 2003). However, it seems that social marketing actions are not considered as a priority within academic libraries, because of the absence of internal challenges, the lack of skills evidenced from external challenges, and the lack of global reach within library groups and audiences (Akbar et al., 2001). In recent years, the study of social marketing in libraries has focused on the development of theoretical proposals, without registering the strategies used and remaining within an exclusive sense of promotion, in addition to not contributing to research processes on the subject, which are needed to define policies and practices on how to improve the use of strategies (Barbier et al., 2021) and to better interact with the user community (Huang and Chiu, 2020).

The application of social marketing in academic libraries contributes to the quaternary sector, by seeking to innovate in the information services offered, based on users' satisfaction (Amaral, 2015). The quaternary sector is linked to knowledge, information exchange, technology, culture, education, and research, as well as those activities defined as intellectual, which can take place either in traditional or online environments.

The use of social marketing in academic libraries originates in business marketing theory, which is based on assessing the cost–benefits and the return on investment of the products, as well as the best way to satisfy

different consumers' needs. It encourages the cultural change of the target audience as a group, but not individually. It tries to satisfy the needs of beneficiaries and seeks to provide more benefits than the mere calculation of costs (Liao, 2020). This implies that customers' behavioral change will be based on preceding attitudes (optimism, innovation, insecurities, discontent), subjective norms, and perceived behaviors (Rahmat et al., 2022). In our case, it is about generating information about users' commitment and engagement through social marketing. Trunfo and Rossi (2021) consider that these perspectives have a psychological component, based on the following: (1) impulse to loyalty; (2) engagement generation through interactive and cocreative experiences; and (3) intense user participation in information activities.

The development of a sense of belonging in academic libraries, by using social marketing, has become a fundamental aspect to integrate and develop a community of users. It should be considered that this is related to a psychological belonging, which people may feel toward a physical space, most commonly: home as a first place, work as second, with the third place dependent on the social identity developed through the client's (user) participation within and then attachment to other scenarios (Zambrano-Silva, 2008; Joo, 2020). That third place could be the university and, consequently, the academic library as a service provider, since psychological appropriation is characterized by an attachment to spaces in which the user experiences commitment, participation, and satisfaction of their needs.

Social marketing planning usually has three dimensions to specify the causes or influences of social issues or problems: micro, meso, and macro, which is an effective perspective for generating models for academic libraries through the following actions: definition of the problem, causal analysis of the problem, prioritization of influences, identification of stakeholders' perspectives, definition of objectives, development of a specific plan, and its implementation (Wymer, 2021).



16.3 Benchmarking processes and the sociocultural contribution of academic libraries

The sociocultural value of academic libraries lies in acquired and functional knowledge, manifested through the lexicon used by clients

through new social constructions in terms of behaviors, ideology, beliefs, and values (Perez-Cepeda and Arias-Bolzmann, 2022). All this is expressed through information literacy, the idea being that it focuses on ways in which people have access to information within a specific environment, and it focuses on the exploration of theoretical and empirical work in terms of information usage models and information activities' outcomes (Hicks, 2022).

This means that academic libraries develop educational processes as a functional activity, both formally (directly linked to the educational system) and informally (experiences based on societal demands and supported by a frequent and permanent search for information) (Toledo de Araujo, 1989). It is considered that academic libraries do not entirely fulfill their relationship with formal education, since curricular content does not always include them, though their compliance with informal education usually happens more frequently (Porterfield et al., 2020).

From a sociocultural perspective, academic libraries must experience migration processes in their way of working, thereby affecting all traditional models (Haugh, 2021). This is a consequence of radical changes that have occurred in the information market: (1) the information process does not end with the arrival of the product to the user, but in the measurement of its impact; (2) information barriers have disappeared, and their flows become immediate, based on technology, but information overload and the value of the information received are also considered; (3) users must also be knowledge generators, more critical, engaged, and productive; they become spectators, navigators, consumers—producers, and producers—users (i.e., prosumers); (4) teaching, research, and knowledge dissemination are promoted more extensively, as parts of the process of generating a solid scientific culture (García-Alonso-Montoya, 2011; Peterson et al., 2020).

In the study of academic libraries' cost-effectiveness, their social value, the benefits they provide, the cultural dissemination, and their socialization with the academic community served must also be measured (Ross García, 2019). In this way, they should focus on two strategies to assess their sociocultural contributions: assessing their financial value and their impact value, considering that by taking only the first aspect into account, academic libraries would hardly achieve their objectives; however, when including both, it is possible to better identify cost—benefits, by measuring their services and their contributions to education and research, from the usage of the available information resources (Oakleaf, 2010).

Academic libraries must define the reasons why they need to develop benchmarking processes, given that the tool aims to improve operational development, by systematically recording and analyzing the best practices of those organizations that are recognized by their excellence (Franco de Abreu et al., 2006). The Association of College and Research Libraries (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2018) recommends that these processes should be aligned with institutional goals and carried out by comparing similar or equivalent cases, employing precise indicators for each case. If the academic library's purpose in using benchmarking is merely self-assessment for improvement (diagnostic or metric), it is simple to fulfill. However, if the objective is to compare cost-effectiveness, ways of working, and the application of best practices, it could be more complex, especially because this seeks to transform information management into knowledge management, for which a structured model of indicators must be integrated and employed.

When it comes to diagnostic or metric benchmarking, based on the indicators of resources owned or subscribed, and their usage, the most practical solution would be to work with databases or scientific observatories that concentrate pertinent statistics and with that develop comparative analyses, which could result in generating a structured model with its respective limitations (Xaurburu Clemente and Velasco Balmeseda, 2010). An example of this is the Association for Research Libraries (not to be confused with ACRL), which collects annual statistics on expenses, personnel, and services of more than 120 member libraries (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2018). Another viable application is the comparative analysis of academic libraries' websites, identifying qualitative aspects related to their diverse programs (especially for information literacy), learning results, management, and continuous improvement processes, as well as the use of media and dissemination resources such as discussion lists, wikis, tweets, videos, newsletters, and virtual communities (Uribe-Tirado, 2011).

If benchmarking is solely based on collections, systematic mapping studies are recommended, analyzing publications on academic libraries' performance evaluation (Najafi et al., 2020). Beyond that, three basic evaluation aspects are recommended for comparison: (1) library staff conditions (professional and nonprofessional training); (2) physical spaces (dimensions and characteristics); and (3) collection (physical works, electronic services, and databases) (Martín Vega, 2005).

When working with structured models based on impact measurement, the situation may be further complicated by the lack of concordant or

matching data and the absence of uniformity in the indicators among the institutions participating in the comparative study. Therefore, more complex initiatives would be required for generating public policies regarding standardizing criteria for recording such data (especially on knowledge management indicators), through specific clusters, in this case, of academic libraries by type of entity (state or national universities, or research centers), by their size (small, medium, large), or by their disciplinary characteristics (multidisciplinary, natural sciences, social sciences, humanities).

Trying to develop benchmarking processes in academic libraries to demonstrate their economic impact, cost-effectiveness and return on investment is difficult. This is only achieved by calculating the cost of each service according to the effects and benefits they generate for their users and their usefulness to society. In this sense, statistical compilation is not enough; getting the community to value their libraries requires them to know the costs of each of the processes and services, as well as their actual results (Ross García, 2018).

Franco de Abreu et al. (2006) classify the types of benchmarking that are applicable to academic libraries: (1) internal benchmarking, consisting of the comparative analysis of practices within the organization itself. This procedure would work in large libraries and university library systems; (2) competitive benchmarking, which compares processes developed in academic libraries in comparison with similar ones that are recognized for excelling in their operation according to their forms of operation; and (3) functional benchmarking, which compares pragmatic activities among different academic libraries.

The decision to establish a formal and systematic service for the collection of comparative data through benchmarking in an academic library has implications. It requires generating a primary team that collects global results, selects indicators, determines the feasibility of obtaining required data (accessibility), collects such data and develops comparative analyses with similar entities, analyzes the data, and groups the results by dimensions (Plaza Tesías et al., 2005). These comparative work alternatives will happen if the team is able to have a complete vision of the administrative, teaching, and research structures, which will allow for the establishment of a clear management model toward constant innovation (Carjaval-Morales et al., 2014).

Evaluation using benchmarking of information consumption must go beyond mere quantitative indicators and should focus on aspects such as (1) scholars: including teachers, students, and researchers, their

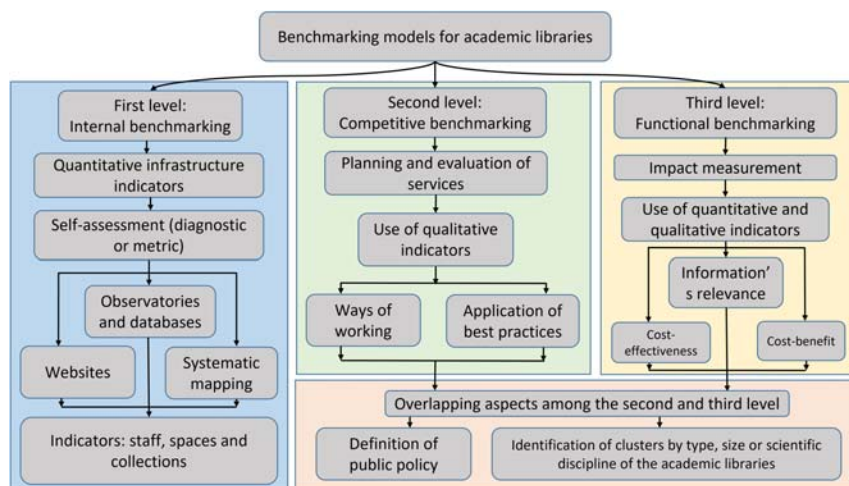


Figure 16.1 Benchmarking models in academic libraries.

consumption of information, for example, counting indicators such as article downloads as well as the relevance of the information retrieved and used; (2) planning and evaluation of library services: used and unused resources; and (3) economic: cost of acquired resources, studying the concentration and dispersion in the use of resources, and the relationships between the global cost versus the quantity of uses (Olea Merino et al., 2012). From this, the effects of the use of information must be evaluated in terms of its success and acceptance by users, and results may be classified as: inefficient (no impact), latent (with possible impact, but without really having achieved it), in development (information is adequately used, but there is no measurement of its impact), and strategic (with real measurement of its impact) (Vidal-Pineda, 2009).

The theoretical proposals reviewed in this chapter allowed to integrate a simplified conceptual model for benchmarking in academic libraries, which is divided into three levels (Fig. 16.1). The choice of a given level will depend on organizational interests and the conditions of available resources.



16.4 Conclusions

In general, benchmarking processes should focus on comparing various aspects of usage and users and of the impact of information, rather

than just counting resources or services offered by academic libraries, thereby seeking users' permanence and loyalty, accomplished by offering strong benefits intangibly embodied in their informational development. Achieving such an aim demands the development of benchmarking models designed according to the needs of academic libraries, rather than through the derivation of proposals from businesses.

Contrary to how benchmarking processes are applied in businesses, in academic libraries it is difficult to renew products and services since the storage of massive quantities of documents characterizes them as strong entities, a paradigm that might need to radically change, especially at present, and with new technologies. Such change should move the focus onto more specific needs of users and society. Qualitative aspects are more complex to identify, register, and compare, since they are almost solely based on intangible conditions, such as quality of services and information, social impact, or on users' learning processes.

The advantage of academic libraries is that they can recognize their user communities relatively easily (unlike public libraries) and they can also directly apply the findings from a benchmarking process, so they might have a clearer vision of their implementation and possible impact. However, a challenge is to cope with increasingly demanding users (students, professors, researchers) in terms of the quality levels of the information services and sources being offered, particularly because they should impact them at a personal and developmental level.

Quantitative indicators are more easily obtained, but they might be less likely to help measuring impact. The collection of quantitative data can be aided by public sources such as observatories or web pages. Qualitative data may be more useful for assessing services, best practices, and impact. These would be available if there is a desire for cooperation between library entities, otherwise, unethical situations might occur, such as those related to issues of intellectual espionage, or using third parties' data without authorization.

Academic libraries are sociocultural entities that are important to society and the communities they serve. Social marketing is used and becomes relevant for promoting library services through digital media, which does not require particularly ample financial resources. When an academic library promotes itself in this way, other similar entities may obtain legal access to the data derived from such activities and can benchmark to seek ways of evaluating their own performance and implement best practices.

Academic libraries' impact is characterized by their sociocultural contribution based on the emotional adherence and the search for the identity

of their users, thereby considering that their training processes, except in the case of information literacy, take as a reference the conditions and principles of informal education. This may complicate maintaining beneficiaries' permanence, as they usually have a finite presence in the library community, particularly in the case of university students.

The definition of benchmarking models in an academic library will depend on its interests, the availability of financial resources, and its infrastructure, as well as data availability. The higher level in the structure of the proposed benchmarking model (functional) requires greater investments of time, personnel, and resources. Conversely, the lowest level (internal benchmarking) is easier to conduct and has greater possibilities of being developed systematically. The situation may be complicated at the highest level of analysis, since measuring impact can be as broad, complex, or abstract as it is possible to imagine.

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Supporting research information management: overcoming the inherent culture gap between traditional library ethics and the management of CRIS systems

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17.1 Introduction: about research information management systems

Science is experiencing one of its greatest upheavals through information technology. But although computers have been part of everyday research for decades, the degree of digitization in most disciplines is still insufficient. Most research information is poorly documented and processed and analyzed using ad hoc methods. At the same time, science faces new global challenges: the reproducibility crisis is exacerbated by incompletely published research information, the duplication of experiments wastes resources, and endangers laboratory animals, and data science is a new branch of science whose success is on the rise and depends crucially on good, global data management. The biggest hurdle to better data management is not technical. Attention must be stimulated, fears of contact must be reduced, old work processes must be adapted, and new incentives must be found.

The term research information includes all metadata that arise in connection with research activities, for example, information about publications, project data and people involved, and so on. Since this information is often stored in different places, research information systems are required to bundle the information in a structured way and to create simplified reports or enable value-added services. Research information

management systems (CRIS)—databases, decision support systems, and similar devices—collect, process, store, and analyze data about research conducted at universities, research institutes, laboratories, and other cognate institutions. Their main purpose is not only to evaluate the research performance at different levels (organizations, people, projects, infrastructures), but also to ensure good scientific practice, the publication of transparent, verifiable research results, the enabling of reuse, and further use of the data, as well as the necessary compliance with the requirements of the third-party funders.

Science Europe (2016) defined CRIS as research information systems for research-performing organizations and research-funding organizations to “collect and use data about their own activities from various and heterogeneous sources . . . for a variety of different purposes, such as monitoring and evaluating research activities and outputs, allocating funding, supporting decision making on their policies and strategies, tracking researchers’ careers, and describing their systemic role to policy-makers, stakeholders and the public.”

They are not really new. With the introduction of CRIS, the amount of research information has increased in recent years. This not only has to do with the fact that researchers collect research information on a large scale, so that its processing, storage, and evaluation can only be guaranteed by highly developed CRIS. It also has to do with the fact that the way researchers work has changed and more and more research information is being stored because there is always storage space. However, these stored data are not only the basis of scientific knowledge processes, they are also related to other data and serve as a database on the basis of which new knowledge can be gained in research (e.g., the data must be maintained and stored securely for meaningful use in further research).

The presentation and processing of different amounts of data, which also come from a wide variety of sources and have been recorded by different instruments, require a comprehensible process of transformation, storage, and transmission. This is the only way to ensure that the data remain accessible for future research and that their informative value is maintained. This is precisely the task of the CRIS. This must be designed in such a way that the stored data can be accessed and evaluated independently of the data producer. This not only includes the technical storage of the research information and the guarantee that it can still be read after a certain period, but also sufficient information for the interpretation of that information must be handed down. The reliability of the data must

be ensured in the same way as the traceability of the processing. In this way, the data remain verifiable and can be used as a basis for further analyses. This type of mapping of research information in the CRIS is intended to meet the general demand for more transparency in research. In the future, the data will only have to be entered into the system once and then used for research reports. The simplification of data collection in connection with access to existing research-relevant databases not only avoids double data storage and multiple entries, but also makes work easier for all users. Increasingly complex research questions also require a higher level of systematic management of research information, especially in interdisciplinary research projects. On the one hand, this includes the networking of researchers and the associated mobility of research information and, on the other hand, the challenges associated with the integration of data from different sources and different contexts.

CRIS has been established at international and national levels for many years. Various projects and initiatives have dealt with the topic in individual disciplines and in an interdisciplinary manner, and possible solutions have been developed. Universities have recognized research information and the underlying information infrastructure as a strategic challenge. At the university level, guidelines for dealing with research information can be issued in many places, and corresponding strategies can be defined and implemented (e.g., advisory and training offers, information and communication infrastructure). For a university, the question arises as to how it can provide researchers with the best possible service and at the same time future-proof digital infrastructure under local conditions. It is a complex task to find the necessary balance between the widest possible distribution of services and technical depth and to constantly realign it.

Universities and their managements are called upon to select the CRIS processes strategically. They are required to coordinate guidelines for handling research information at their universities and to support agreements with other universities, nonuniversity research institutions, and subject-specific data infrastructures. It is the task of the university management to strengthen the information competence of university members and to create reliable prerequisites for an efficient, institutional CRIS. Strategic goals and decisions are as follows:

- Networking and cooperation between universities and nonuniversity research institutions;
- Support for researchers in CRIS;

- Establishment of a central point of contact for all questions relating to CRIS;
- Strategic planning of support for shared services and technical infrastructure.

In the CRIS and data exchange culture, lifecycle models for research information have gained particular popularity. They are a helpful tool for planning and implementing complex workflows that are specifically geared toward the practical handling of research information and research data in the research process. They supplement the phases of the research process and typical project workflows by explicitly addressing the collection, integration, storage, analysis, subsequent use, and archiving of data. In principle, there is broad agreement that research information should be preserved and made accessible to others. In practice, there is no established culture of integrating and publishing research information through CRIS.



17.2 The connection with libraries

Research information systems have been developed for institutional purposes as decision-making tools in the field of research management; their usefulness is focused on performance assessment and the monitoring of research activities, in order to improve impact, visibility, and outreach. So far, libraries and documentation centers are not well represented in the organization of meetings and conferences dealing with these systems. In many institutions, academic librarians are less involved in, or familiar with, research evaluation, and related systems than, for instance, institutional repositories or publishing platforms. Introducing such a CRIS to people working with library holdings, digital libraries, and repositories may be a challenge.

However, there are reasons why academic librarians, not only individually but also as a profession, should be more concerned with these systems. One reason is that CRIS needs information that is produced by library systems about publications, organizations, and researchers. This information is available as data from bibliographic records and in authority files in library systems or as metadata from institutional repositories (IR) or publishing platforms.

Another reason is the potential value of CRIS for academic librarians. As said above, they are not—at least, up to now—a main target group for

the development and implementation of CRIS. Yet, the reports and metrics on research activities produced by CRIS can complete the scientometric information from the usual library resources, such as databases and repositories. At the same time, the validated CRIS data can be helpful to improve the data quality of library systems and repositories.

Nevertheless, the main reason why academic librarians should (and will) be more concerned is the convergence between institutional repositories and CRIS, a development we have described in more detail elsewhere (Schöpfel and Azeroual, 2021). A European survey from EUNIS and euroCRIS shows that 65% of institutions have linked their CRIS and IR (Ribeiro et al., 2016). This means that CRIS must take into account and adjust to library and open access standards. Clements and Proven (2015) described the evolution of an institutional CRIS “from [its] traditional role as a tool managed by the Research Office to manage and assess research towards more widespread uses within institutions, in particular within the Library, to facilitate Open Science.” For this reason, a CRIS is increasingly the primary bibliographic record of the scientific output and must be compliant with the usual bibliographic standards and procedures.

On the other hand, with regard to repositories, the gradual replacement of self-deposits in the IR by data (document files) and metadata (records) imported out of the CRIS, from different origins (self-deposits in the CRIS, library catalogues and metadata from publishers), contribute to a “complex two-way exchange of data” between CRIS and IR (MacGregor, 2019). This already leads to converging repository architectures (Jeffery, 2012), to a more detailed hierarchical organization of collections and communities in the repository (Siciliano et al., 2014), and to improved interoperability and compliance with the FAIR principles (Engelman et al., 2018).

CRIS is increasingly connected to library systems and institutional repositories. Obviously, there are “overlapping areas in the tasks that (both systems) perform and there has been a gradual convergence of these two types of systems” through systematic metadata transfer or “by allowing one of them to take over the features of the other one, thus delivering a single-system integrated functionality” (de Castro et al., 2014). The EUNIS/euroCRIS survey reveals “a wide range of interoperability features between CRIS and repositories and even a new species in the ecosystem that claims to be both a repository and a CRIS” (Ribeiro et al., 2016).

In some places, institutional repositories begin to develop functionalities and services usually attributed to research information management,

such as scientometric assessment of the scientific production of individual researchers, institutions, and departments, the generation of individual CVs, the linking between funded research projects, publications and patents, and so on.

Elsewhere, and more generally, we can observe a kind of “vertical integration” between CRIS and IR at the local level. CRIS systems develop functionalities usually attributed to IR, such as the deposit of documents, the control of embargo periods, and reuse rights. Elsevier’s Pure system (similar to DSpace) moves progressively toward a “single content management system on campus” or repository that ingests and stores not only the data on research but also the related resources (output). Central IR functions have been transferred to the CRIS, upstream of the workflow, leaving to the IR the preservation and dissemination of the documents and records, along with the attribution of a persistent document identifier.

A similar convergence and integration can be observed in the field of research data management where data repositories and data monitor tools are increasingly connected to research information management systems, for research data reporting and showcasing, through the linking of dataset metadata to researchers, organizations, publications, and so on.



17.3 The challenge

As mentioned above, researchers, research organizations, state administration bodies, and the business sector are often described as the main beneficiaries of CRIS projects. CRIS systems are part of policy-making, and this may explain why some academic librarians feel uncomfortable with this kind of system. A recent OCLC survey on research information management in the US reveals that libraries had “consciously distanced themselves from all (faculty activity reporting) and evaluation activities due to concerns that library engagement in these activities could erode faculty trust in the library” (Bryant et al., 2021). Moreover, some “institutions explicitly described a ‘firewall’ between library efforts and faculty review activities.”

Faced with a CRIS project, some academic librarians may experience helplessness, loss of control, and lack of skills. Traditional library ethics include the promotion of open access and transparency, nondiscrimination,

respect of privacy, confidentiality, commitment to neutrality, and personal integrity while CRIS has more to do with performance, competition, assessment, evaluation, and management. This kind of inherent “culture gap” between traditional library values and the management of CRIS systems may create conflicts.

Nevertheless, this “perspective” or attitude is not universal, as the same OCLC research reports confirm. Describing a large diversity of situations and stakeholders from across the institutions, the report insists that “two groups appear as stakeholders across almost all use case categories: faculty/researchers and the library” (Bryant et al., 2021). Academic libraries are part of the game. They may be more or less involved in research information management, more or less motivated or willing to contribute to assessment and reporting, more or less aware of the challenge. But they are part of the system. And being part of the system, librarians should think about CRIS not in terms of a threat to fundamental values but as an opportunity for new strategic choices because library ethics and knowledge bear the potential for unique and valuable support of research information management.

According to recent surveys and case studies, their experience, knowledge, and practical skills are required in at least two domains, metadata quality and privacy. The OCLC report admits that “institutional expectations that researchers will curate their own profiles universally end in disappointment, a reality that necessitates the engagement of library information professionals” (Bryant et al., 2021). Most of the papers presented at the 2022 CRIS conference highlighted the crucial importance for CRIS data curation. For instance, national systems like in Portugal, Finland, or Turkey are connected to a large diversity of data sources, from different providers, with different formats and of different reliabilities (Moreira et al., 2022; Suominen et al., 2022; Tuglular et al., 2022). This diversity requires curation, automatic and manual curation, and institutions should rely upon librarians with metadata expertise to curate this data if they want to mitigate the risk of “garbage in, garbage out.”

The adoption of a CRIS represents another challenge for institutions and people, that is, data privacy, including “data sharing, ownership, retention, right to reuse data, data deletion obligations upon contract termination, user access to privacy policies, and user data controls” (Macken and Iakovakis, 2021). Few CRIS require explicit consent; often, the system considers a sign-in through an authentication and authorization infrastructure (AAI) as a kind of implicit consent. Here again, academic

librarians' expertise appears vital, their profession being deeply committed to privacy and transparency (see the IFLA Code of Ethics).



17.4 Not a threat but an opportunity

Therefore, this challenge should not be considered as a threat but as an opportunity for academic librarians to develop new services and skills, demonstrate their mastery of metadata, curation, and standards, insist on fundamental ethical principles, and to improve their relationship with academic communities and research management. CRIS is here to stay. Supporting research information management should never be an “abandon,” a surrender of library skills and values in favor of “new public management” based on key performance indicators. Overcoming the culture gap does not mean capitulation. On the contrary, the specific library contribution and support should act as a kind of corrective against misuse of CRIS systems.

Research information is stored and made available in a CRIS and tagged with persistent identifiers. When storing research information in CRIS, researchers are obliged to declare their affiliation with the organization in accordance with the provisions of the affiliation guidelines. To maintain the integrity of research information, it must be stored correctly, completely, in an unadulterated form, and reliably. With the introduction of CRIS, a very high organizational need in terms of data quality and standards is identified. If these issues are not discussed at the outset of implementation, or ideally defined in a CRIS, numerous problems can arise. Under certain circumstances, cooperation in the project teams is made more difficult, processes slow down, work steps have to be carried out several times, or a lower data quality has to be accepted if it is not possible to repeat the data collection. In addition, according to the FAIR principles, they must be traceable, accessible, interoperable, and available for reuse where possible. The storage is to be provided with a date, and later changes are to be kept separate from the original data as far as possible. When handling personal data, the applicable data protection regulations must be observed. Unless there are any third-party rights, legal obligations, ethical aspects, or property regulations to the contrary, research information should be provided under a free license. The minimum retention period for research information is contingent upon the

issuance of a persistent identifier or the publication of related work upon completion of a research activity, whichever comes later. The administrative documents accompanying the research activity must also be archived. If research information and records should or must be deleted or destroyed, this may only be done in a standardized manner, taking into account all legal and ethical aspects. Principal investigators or their legal successors must be informed and offered opportunities to release the research information. All measures taken must be documented and made accessible for a possible later check.

Because of this presumed dependency between the actual reusability of research information and the type and scope of quality assurance, the task of data curation in open research data is becoming increasingly important ([Azeroual, 2021](#)). With the increasing complexity, variety, and number of data sources, data curation plays an important role in CRIS today. As more CRIS professionals make data-driven decisions, facilities need to ensure accurate data and data analysis. Organizations and libraries address the data management and governance challenges that come with increasing data access with data curation. It is the way an organization collects, cleans, defines, and reconciles disparate research information. Curating bridges the gap between the data and its applications in the real world.

Today, organizations and libraries are already investing heavily in technology to integrate data definitions into the analysis tools used to analyze research information. This is intended to create clarity and uniqueness across teams in the organizations. Accordingly, data curation tools and processes (such as data catalogues and semantic governance) are increasingly merging with CRIS, which places data in a business context. A data catalogue works like an enterprise-wide business glossary of data sources and common data definitions. Professionals and data stewards can add descriptions and definitions to data sources and fields, use tags to make them easier to find, and even add useful data quality indicators—for example, notifications about certification of trusted content or maintenance and eventual downgrading of data assets. The librarian does not need to know the exact location of research information in a data source. However, it is important for them to understand which part of the real world the data reflect. As essential as data catalogues may be, metadata governance has even greater potential in the area of semantic governance. Semantic information not only aids in contextualizing research information, but also in understanding the user intent behind specific analytics

actions. When these processes are brought together, the rest of the analytics experience can benefit from data curation and semantics. So far, more scattered components of a data environment, such as cleansing and downstream analysis, enable more reliable automatic recommendations for tables, joins, and data models.

Quality assurance based on professional standards is indispensable for the goal of making research information available and reusable in the long term. The way to develop these standards is through the everyday practice of data curation, data cataloguing, and the exchange of the respective subject-specific problems and proposed solutions which already exist. The study by [Azeroual \(2021\)](#) was able to show that early consideration of central aspects of curating within the research process promotes the reusability of research information. The topic of informed consent from the area of data protection, the agreement on exploitation and usage rights in the publication, and the linking of text and data publication have also made it obvious that research-related infrastructure plays a central role here. It remains to be seen how much standardization curating will ultimately allow. In view of the variety and complexity of the topics referred to here, there is already no question as to how great the need is for expertise and support services from CRIS.



17.5 Skills and ethics

Academic librarians have a long-standing and recognized practice with cataloguing and bibliographic standards and rules. They have a good knowledge of academic users' needs and behaviours, and they have experience with service levels and developments. The key to CRIS management is metadata, and metadata is part of academic librarians' core competencies. Their expertise with persistent identifiers, standard protocols, and data formats is required for the development of CRIS as a central part of the research service environment.

The OCLC research report on US research information systems emphasizes the academic library as an "essential stakeholder in enterprise (research information management) practices, contributing expertise in metadata, scholarly communications, and bibliometrics that are essential for successful . . . implementations." The report documents the "extensive role of libraries," and advocates for a role for libraries in all research

information management implementations, “to ensure that publications metadata is rich and fit for purpose” (Bryant et al., 2021).

However, the contribution of academic librarians is not limited to the richness and fitness of publications metadata “for purpose.” It includes the engagement for the compliance with core principles of resilient research information systems, such as openness (no siloing or closing data, no paywalling of research activity data), interoperability (open standards for the identification of funders, grants, and researchers, common exchange formats, etc.), and FAIRness (Science Europe, 2016). Different types of classification systems represent a specific challenge for research information management, and academic librarians are well skilled to contribute to the harmonization of and cross-mapping between those systems.

Another traditional feature of academic libraries that should be mobilized for CRIS projects is the role and self-understanding as a research support service provider. CRIS, as has often been mentioned during conferences, must not be an additional administrative charge but should reduce researcher burden, following a rationale than can be described as data entry minimization (“enter once, reuse multiple times”). This emphatic attitude is part of the academic libraries’ core values, and as stakeholders in CRIS projects, they should (and will) promote and defend this “service mantra.”

Last but not least, as said above, traditional library ethics should not be considered as a barrier or a threat to involvement with CRIS projects but as a necessary and crucial contribution to well-functioning research information management. CRIS systems represent a specific and double ethical challenge, especially in the environment of open science (Schöpfel et al., 2022). As Budroni (2021) says in a very simple way, open science does not need unethical tools—ethics is not only important in open science, but it should be the source of innovative activities.

A recent paper from the US Educopia Institute reminds us that “individual intermediaries, such as cataloguers and indexers, also work to maximize access and minimize harm” and argues for a “sustained reflection on the appropriate ethical standards that protect all persons” (Skinner and Wipperman, 2020). This position of Educopia rejoins a statement made by Fox and Reece a couple of years ago, that “all persons acting in the collective must be committed to a shared, living conception of goodness, which, in the case of (information organization), is access without harm” (Fox and Reece, 2012).

A “shared, living conception of goodness”: this is perhaps the best way to express the specific and most important ethical and professional

contribution of academic librarians to research information management. Being able not only to produce and process data and metadata “fit for purpose” but also to act as a kind of guardian or custodian of ethical standards of CRIS data practice. This is more than data curation, and it includes a critical reflection on data processing and usage. Librarians are aware of the need for an ethical framework for data handling: “a lack of clear and consistent policy, improper handling and storage of the data, misuse of the data, and lack of proper informed consent procedures can all compromise patrons’ privacy and present threats to patrons’ trust in the library” (Lund, 2022).



17.6 Conclusion

Our suggestion is that academic librarians should apply their professional values and skills to the field of research information management. As a stakeholder in CRIS projects, they need not play a leading role or enthusiastically promote the implementation and rollout of those systems. But their critical and skillful support and contribution, especially for data quality and ethical data processing, are required for a well-functioning and “good” research information management system. Examples like those cited in the OCLC research report (Bryant et al., 2021) or presented during the euroCRIS conferences may serve as good practice and as a benchmark for the profession.

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Best practices for developing and disseminating audiovisual contents to promote library and information services

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18.1 Introduction

Libraries and information services may use alternative formats to promote their services, train their users, and develop information and digital literacy in addition to carrying out dissemination tasks. This chapter considers the making of videos that can be used to establish benchmarks. It is divided into the four key stages of video production: (1) preproduction; (2) production; (3) editing and postproduction; and (4) dissemination and sharing. The following recommendations are derived from Project Juantífico (<https://www.youtube.com/juantifico>), the author's own experience making videos about scientific research, publication, and dissemination, with a touch of technology and pop culture, aiming to increase reach and visibility as well as additional helping to promote activities. The lessons learned may be transferred to libraries and information services, as educational videos are created.

The types of audiovisual content include: (1) tutorials for using technologies, systems, or digital services; (2) answering frequently asked questions from students, colleagues, or users in general; (3) providing theoretical explanations, but in a concise and dynamic way; (4) promoting reading and the use of information resources; (5) comments on relevant news; (6) presenting cultural works or places; (7) interviews or podcast-like conversations; (8) recordings of lectures or conferences; (9) summaries of research or publications; and (10) raising awareness about social and environmental issues.



18.2 Preproduction

The preproduction or planning stage is important, as in any other activity. To plan a video, we can start from a general idea, something interesting, curious, or a tutorial that we know our colleagues or users may be needing. The audiovisual format allows us to provide asynchronous responses or tutorials not requiring a personal visit to the library. By starting an idea and then narrowing it, we can fragment large topics into several parts to avoid publishing videos that are too long.

We must decide if we prefer writing a script versus improvising. Improvisation could lead us to say interesting things that we did not plan at first and allows us to be more spontaneous, but it requires that we have a certain facility to speak once we turn on the camera. Conversely, scripting the videos allows us to take care of the smallest details, including the video's length, preventing errors, and enabling high levels of synthesis. I suggest aiming for a maximum length of 10 minutes per video (approximately four pages), from 3 to 7 minutes is a "sweet spot" for educational videos (interviews, podcasts, lectures, or conferences will be much longer).

If you choose to write a script, consider that one page will be approximately equivalent to 3 minutes of video, although this is not a precise measure, as it depends on the format of the page and how fast you will read the script. Also, a simple 5-minute video might need at least 5 hours of production and 10 hours of postproduction, which will also depend on its complexity (e.g., if you include footage from other sources and visual effects). Given the importance of scripting, take your time, edit it, go back to it, read it aloud, edit it again, have someone else read through it, and edit it again. Make it simple, easy to read, and to understand. If you wish to delve deeper into the topic, consider making a series. Be sure that you have a final version before filming it. When scripting, another important choice to make is whether you wish to have the cast showing on camera (if you film the person or persons) versus recording only voice-overs and playing them over stock footage (or photos) that you may film or use royalty-free options. A good source of free-to-use stock footage is <https://www.pexels.com>.

The script may very well be written in a basic three-act dramatic structure: introduction, climax, and conclusion, or setup, confrontation, and resolution. The introduction should present the topic in a simple manner, stating why it is important to learn more about it and hinting at what will

be covered in the video. This may be followed by an introductory sequence if we are establishing a series in the same style. Then, we provide the bulk of the contents and end with a conclusion, providing some interesting questions related to the topic and asking the audience if the video was useful, to engage them and invite their comments. The script should also specify where we are going to film, if we need to shoot any footage of a particular action, who is going to talk, and if we wish to insert fragments of cultural works (of movies, animations, series, songs, memes). It is also important to think about the practical and digital effects we wish to use and about how we are going to film them.

There are some important extras that should be considered apart from the main contents of the videos. I started making videos from my office at the university, but when the pandemic and the lockdowns came, I resumed filming at home, and when watching the news and assessing the overall emotional well-being of people, I came to the conclusion that I should include more humor in the videos, to provide some lighthearted touches on the topics and to include some jokes that, although silly, would make someone smile or laugh, even in educational and more serious videos. Humor will reduce the presenter's rigidity, while providing more dynamism and improving the attention of the audience (particularly younger audiences), especially if we are discussing topics such as information, methodology, and research, which might be inherently boring for most people. Managing humor may be difficult: think about silly situations, common criticisms, or misconceptions toward the topics discussed; you should not direct a joke at anyone (including groups) but yourself (or the characters you create), to avoid offending anyone.

Working with colleagues or students may help identify or develop some jokes, use memes, or use fragments from cultural works. Memes can be already existing, or you can transform them with your own text. You may find the latest memes at sites such as <https://knowyourmeme.com>, and make your own over existing images at <https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>. If using the latter, include less than 5-second excerpts and present them in such a way that it seems you are interacting with it (presenting it, showing it, and then reacting or answering to it), which will allow you to use them under "fair use." Copyright material is allowed if the use is transformative, it is limited (very short fragments), and it is being done with the purposes of analysis, review, criticism, or parody. Avoid overloading videos with too many elements and an extended length; "less is more."

It may be useful to create characters for your videos. It allows you to get into other "persona." This may help introverts to present themselves

and talk at ease, as it might not be easy to feel comfortable in front of the camera. Creating other characters will also facilitate having discussions or counterpoints (even if you play all characters). Counterpoint is a common expressive resource in music, and it is typical in Latin American folklore narratives (such as the Venezuelan poem “Florentino and The Devil,” which has been adapted into film, television, music, and theater formats), to present a debate between (usually) two characters. Other characters may also serve the function of “comic relief,” leaving most of the jokes to them, for using them as vehicles for demonstrating the importance of the topics or for developing an underlying narrative behind the educational contents of the videos, in a sort of story within a story. You might find the most typical example of comic relief characters in “C3PO” and “R2D2” from “Star Wars” or in “The Hidden Fortress” by Arika Kurosawa, which inspired George Lucas. These kinds of characters provide most of the comical situations and drive the story forward, even if they do not seem to be as important as other characters. For creating characters, some useful references are the Jungian archetypes and work such as “The Hero with a Thousand Faces” by Joseph Campbell. Comic relief characters help provide a humorous touch and can make videos more enjoyable.

Introductory and closing sequences provide a sense of periodicity and continuity. Provide a series with a short and catchy title. In YouTube, create a playlist for each of the series to add any new episodes there, sorted by newest first. Create an introductory sequence for each series, and design a closing sequence, which may be shared among all series. The latter can include credits, links, special thanks, and an invitation to support the channel, subscribe, comment, and watch other videos. For YouTube, it is useful to have the last 10–15 seconds of a closing sequence without any text or voice, as it is possible to use the “end screens” function to add buttons over the video, which may link to other specific videos, playlists, and/or to the subscribe function; in this way, the audience can continue engaging with our content.



18.3 Production

It is recommended that the cast be aware of, and manage, their presence on camera, including a good and steady tone of voice, projecting confidence and enthusiasm toward the topics presented. When speaking

to the camera, perhaps we think that we are overacting, but when looking at the filmed results, it seems that some exaggerated gestures, voice volume and tone, and enthusiasm may work better, or else we will have the typical educational audiovisual content that does not stand out because it is dull! It is vital for the cast to have a good rest the night before recording, especially if they appear on camera (as opposed to just voice-overs). I suggest that you host auditions to see who is willing to be on camera and who has “that presence.”

Before filming, be sure to test all your equipment, charge batteries beforehand, and take some time to rehearse the script. When filming a script, print it. Sometimes, something good may come out of errors or improvisation. If you modify anything on the script, write over it; the editor will need it at the next stage of production. Try filming the script in order. You may alter it if there are several locations, people or angles involved, but film it in script order and make annotations if needed. It will be more time-effective, and your editor will thank you. Some production ingredients to remember are:

- Video recording equipment, preferably a camera, but a good smartphone may suffice; add an external microphone for best results in audio.
- Screen recording and live broadcast software: Camtasia is a proprietary software, but it is the best for recording computer applications; a good option to record smartphone applications is XRecorder (both for Android and iOS), and Open Broadcaster Software (OBS Studio) is a very robust open-source solution for broadcasting live on YouTube, Facebook, or Twitch. You can also set it up to record computer applications, as well as for including several cameras, graphics, and audio sources. When at different places, StreamYard and Zoom are good options for recording podcasts or interviews.
- Recording resolution and frame rate: film at HD video 720p (minimum) or 1080p (ideal), you may also shoot at 4K (3840p × 2160p) if you have a very powerful computer for editing; work within the possibilities of your equipment (recording and editing). You may see the option to film or edit at 720i or 1080i, which is the interlaced specification, never use it! Always use the progressive (p) option. Movies are usually recorded at 23.9 frames per second (fps) (although some are shot at other speeds to give them a different look), but software and video games are usually recorded at 60 fps; fps must be set to constant, as well as the quality. When choosing resolution and frame rate, use

the same specifications throughout all the footage, otherwise, you must downsample everything to the lowest specification within the group of files.

- Video compression: especially when using dedicated video cameras, because of the size of their raw files and when using iPads and iPhones (and some others), because they film at variable speeds, use the open-source software HandBrake. This will let you normalize resolutions and frame rates and synchronize audio and video, while keeping file sizes as small as possible. For instance, it is possible to film at 4K resolution and 60 fps, and by using HandBrake, you can convert that to 1080p 23.9 fps, and you will get better results than by filming at the latter specifications. Keep in mind that you can always downsample, but upscaling is not a good idea (e.g., you cannot upscale a 1080p video to 4K or try converting it from 23.9 fps to 60 fps, the original files will not have the information to do that!).
- Video editing: fortunately, there are free versions of good software for editing, including DaVinci Resolve and Filmora. On the commercial side, you can choose between Adobe Premiere (professional option) or Adobe Spark (amateur option). Nonlinear digital video editing software is easier to use than ever, although the learning curve is steep, as they have many options and effects.
- Other sources of footage: there are many places on the Internet where you can get audio, video, images, memes, and fragments of cultural works. Be sure to use royalty-free or Creative Commons sources or work within the boundaries of fair use when using copyrighted works.
- Where to upload videos: YouTube is not the only platform, but it is the largest; also consider Facebook pages, Instagram, and TikTok; choices which are not mutually exclusive.
- Optional special equipment: a green screen (chroma) for filming under controlled conditions while replacing the background (e.g., filming at home, but replacing the green screen with video from the beach), additional microphones, and cameras. If choosing to work with scripts, a teleprompter is a good addition. These are normally seen in television studios, but there are affordable options which consist of a piece of plastic with mirrors inside that attach to most cameras; they are used to reproduce the script in front of the person so they can read it instead of memorizing it, and because the text is reproduced in front of the camera lens, reading from it does not look artificial (provided that you test the equipment, see the results and adjust eye/face movements accordingly).

- Other relevant ingredients include working with well-defined topics, playing with creativity and good taste, and reviewing material about audiovisual language and oratory. It is important to vertically center the subjects on frame (approximately, it does not have to be perfect), and most importantly, set the camera parallel to the person; do not set the camera at an angle below or above them, as this means that the person filmed is superior or inferior to the audience, respectively. Finally, record in a quiet environment without fatigue or any rush; it would be ideal to have a soundproof studio, but this will rarely be our case.



18.4 Editing and postproduction

Start by compressing and normalizing files with HandBrake; get any images and additional footage under the same resolution and frame rates (when possible). If audio is noisy or has some minor defects, you can add music, keeping in mind that the music must have a significant lower volume than the main audio. (Some YouTubers offer their music for adding it to their videos if we support them on their crowdfunding pages and/or provide credit. There are also dedicated channels and websites with royalty-free music.) When using different sources, audio can be normalized in the editing software, so nothing sounds much louder or quieter. In editing and postproduction, practice is key; there are always more effects that you can try out, and there are many tutorials online on how to use this type of software and effects. It is important to identify weaknesses and develop an efficient workflow to take advantage of our limited time. As with scripts, editing should be also fast and dynamic.



18.5 Dissemination and sharing

We need four main products, and it is good to think about them from the preproduction stage: (1) videos; (2) covers; (3) metadata and description; and (4) memes.

1. Videos (in two aspects): to save time and effort, I recommend filming and editing the main full-length videos on 16:9 (typical movie aspect

ratio, classic television was filmed on 4:3) 1080p (which is 1920p $\times$ 1080p) that can be published on YouTube or Facebook, while also extracting attractive, interesting, or amusing fragments from the full-length videos, to publish them as teasers in YouTube Shorts, Instagram, and TikTok. These videos must be presented on a 9:16 aspect ratio (the inverse of 16:9, meaning, 1080p $\times$ 1920p), and they must be under 1 minute long. There are at least two ways of making them: (1) in the same file you are editing the main video, create another sequence with the 9:16 aspect ratio and paste the footage that will be reused for the teaser fragment, there might be the need for adapting it to the new aspect ratio (e.g., important things are not always centered and may also occupy the full frame, so moving the position of the footage, reducing its size, and redrawing some elements such as text box might be needed); and (2) if there is no need for adapting the footage and it might be resized to the new aspect ratio without issues, it is possible to use HandBrake to cut out the fragment from the full-length video file using timecodes (i.e., cut from a particular minute and second to another specific moment of the complete video, for making a new file with the contents present on that particular range of time), and then use an online conversion tool¹ for changing the aspect ratio. I also recommend creating an ending sequence for the teasers (in 9:16), inviting you to watch the full video on the channel and/or to visit other social media sites.² Fig. 18.1 shows the difference between aspect ratios and where they should be used.

2. Cover (in two sizes): when posting videos, the systems will automatically draw from your video a cover for it (YouTube provides three random frames), but they are usually not appropriate. A best practice that the infamous algorithms “like” and that these sites will tell you that draw attention to your videos is to create a custom cover (or promotional image, also referred to as thumbnail) that you can upload. Moreover, it is believed that YouTube and audiences prefer covers in a “US” style, meaning that they must include very little text and feature faces prominently. Google search the posters or covers of your favorite movies, animation, or video games from different regions, and in most cases, you will surely note that the “American” poster features

¹ A good option is <https://www.freeconvert.com/crop-video>.

² If using an online conversion tool for resizing the video, it is possible to append the ending sequence easily with <https://express.adobe.com/es-ES/tools/merge-videos> which also allows merging several video files in one video.

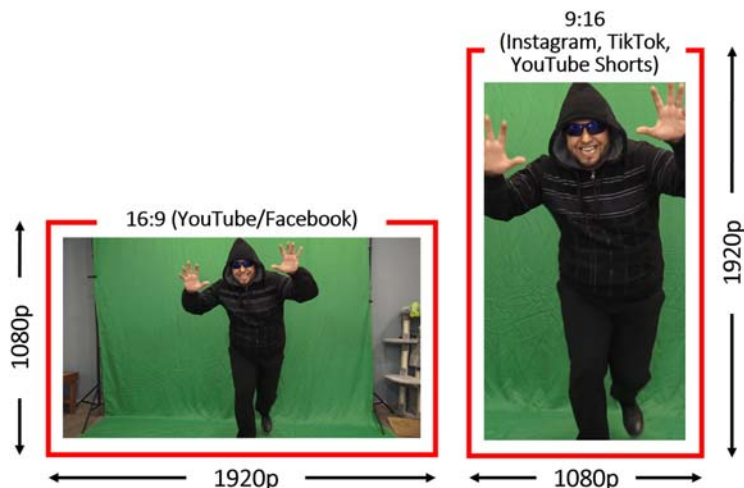


Figure 18.1 16:9 versus 9:16 video aspect ratios and where to use them.

the faces (or shots from the waist up) of the main characters, while European and Asian covers tend to be more abstract and artistic. You can extract the cover from your video or take pictures when filming it for this purpose, add few words, and edit it for best results with the image editing software you feel comfortable with; whenever possible, work with PNG files instead of JPEG. Two versions of the cover might be needed, depending on the social media sites you wish to publish it in (Fig. 18.2 shows the recommended sizes and where to publish them). It is vital that you set up the cover before sharing the video on other sites. When sharing it, the cover that was set up will display automatically, but it is very difficult to change it.

3. Metadata and description: YouTube has the most robust options to add a description and hence the metadata for videos. The recommendations reflect the features available at the time of writing (May 2022), please note that these sites may make changes. For this reason of robustness, I center exclusively on them; the most important are the following: (1) title (keep it short, so it displays properly on smart-phones); (2) a general description (for which I suggest using or adapting the template on Table 18.1); (3) under thumbnail add the cover image (1280×720 p, PNG, under two megabytes); (4) use the play-lists function to establish series of videos; (5) unless creating family-friendly content, choose that the content is not made for kids; (6) in tags use the same hashtags as in the description without the “#” sign,

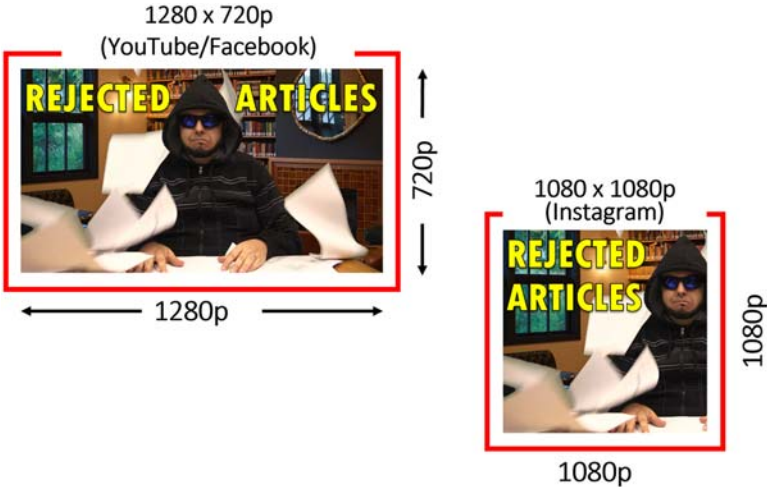


Figure 18.2 Cover sizes and where to use them.

Table 18.1 Template for description/metadata for a video.

[Title of the video]
[Short description of what the video is about]
[If the video deals with any publications, include their references and Digital Object Identifier (DOI), for altmetrics purposes]
Watch more videos like this at [link to the YouTube channel and/or Facebook page]
[Name of the series, if applicable]
[Credits]
Contains fragments from [any additional footage from TV series, movies, video games, together with their creators, directors, or publishers, and year of publication]
[Fair use notice example: All audiovisual material from third parties included in this video is the property of their respective artists and producers; they have been limitedly used under the purposes of analysis, review, criticism, and/or parody (fair use)]
[Music credits, if applicable]
If you enjoyed this video, give it a like, share it, comment, and follow us at [social media links, crowdfunding links, organizational links]
[Hashtags, locate them always at the end, so YouTube puts the first three under the video title automatically]

separated by comma; (7) use the Creative Commons – Attribution license, so other people can embed the video elsewhere; (8) under category, you may use the education category and subcategory

Table 18.2 Template for sharing the video and its fragments on social media sites.

For promoting the full-length video on social media and crowdsourcing sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WordPress, Patreon, etc.)	New video! [Title of the video] [link to the full video] [hashtags]
For publishing fragments (teasers) extracted from the full videos (YouTube Shorts, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok)	[Title of the video] Watch the full video at: [link to the full video] [hashtags, use the hashtag #shorts by default on YouTube Shorts, both in the video title and the description]

“edutainment,” you may also choose the specific educational levels at which the video is intended; (9) correct the automated subtitles or add your own for hearing-impaired audiences and it would be great if you can add subtitles in other languages; (10) use the end screen feature to add buttons over the last seconds of the video, which may be links to other videos, playlists, and/or to the subscribe function; and (11) use cards to include, at any point of the video, links to other related videos.

Apart from posting the video, it is useful to post links to it on other social media sites for broadening the audience. I suggest posting the links together with some text and hashtags. Table 18.2 contains a template for this and also for posting the teaser fragments.

4. Memes: these will be optional, to aid promotion. The recommendation is to take known memes and add text related to our videos’ contents, while also inviting the audience to watch them and subscribe to our channels, to visit the library, or to follow our social media sites. Square images (1080 × 1080p) work best throughout all sites.



18.6 Conclusion

After presenting all these recommendations, you may realize that this represents a lot of work, but it might be worth it, as it can be a very effective and powerful vehicle to engage with users, to improve the image of services and promote them, to better build community, and to provide helpful and more dynamic training options for our users, while also creating greater visibility online. Audiovisual projects can also break the

routine and represent fun activities for engaging the team (and even users!) to make something different and more creative. If our audiovisual initiative is very successful, it might open funding alternatives for operations if we exceed monetization requirements on platforms, or by using crowd-sourcing alternatives, such as Patreon, a microfunding website where you set membership schemes at certain monthly costs and provide users with early access, behind the scenes, and exclusive contents as a reward for their funding.

This may represent an area of opportunity to support researchers in promoting their projects and publications. It will provide them with more visibility and hence may open new opportunities. Videos are sources of altmetrics if they are posted together with the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) of the publication they are based upon.

Some might argue: why bother, when most of the audiovisual content on social media is frivolous (to say the least)? If we do not attempt to create educational contents with good production values, there will not be other kinds of content. We might be producing material that can be useful for users, teachers, and other colleagues, regardless of their geographical location. If we teach ourselves or are trainers within information literacy initiatives, we can bring the best of our “on-camera style” to the classroom and hence provide more dynamic and enjoyable sessions.

Benchmarking vocational elements of Higher Education

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Life experience of mature students and its relevance to leaders in making good strategic choices in higher education

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19.1 Introduction

Teaching and training sharp adult minds are routine “bread and butter” matters for the higher education (HE) sector. Many wish to pursue HE in later life. Universities are considered places for inquiry and academic freedom; places that push the frontiers of knowledge, promote intellectual debate, and encourage critical questioning of public opinion; and places that guard scholarship. These societal expectations have shaped the recruitment and admission strategies of universities which traditionally welcome students with a good academic track record to “gain enlightenment and precious knowledge” (*hinc lucem et pocula sacra*), as Cambridge University’s motto indicates. However, the purpose of universities in modern times has become much more varied in scope. Universities are also deemed to be places of social mobility, drivers of the local and national economy, training grounds for labor markets, and springboards to success.

This chapter focuses on adult students who are over the age of 21, without having appropriate prior qualifications but have the intention and ability to pursue HE. Henceforth, these students are referred to as Widening Access Mature Students (WAMS). To support the access agenda, HE providers should open their doors to these WAMS. However, opening access will not be operationally sustainable if the providers do not have the strategy, structure, and systems to support WAMS in successfully taking part in the learning opportunities presented to them. Designing learning opportunities is a monumental challenge, given that they require a unique set of approaches, in

contrast to those required by young adults in relation to their sources of motivation, their transition through the adulthood stages of their life, their social and professional circumstances, and their experience and expectations.

It is argued here that because of the unique characteristics of WAMS, more knowledge needs to be developed about how such students are assimilated into a canonical HE environment so that leaders can create effective strategies for their successful participation in higher education. This chapter presents a set of qualitative benchmarking questions to help develop this field of inquiry and show exemplars of how Nelson College London (NCL) supports their WAMS to retrain, reskill, and reinvent themselves.

The chapter describes the characteristics of these adult students and how NCL identifies and describes the epistemological characteristics of the life and work experience of WAMS so that they can make their educational journey and their learning more meaningful. It asks how the work and life experience of WAMS relates to the curriculum, citing examples from NCL's own strategic approach and referring to the work of educational philosophers and learning theories such as David Kolb's theory of experiential learning and Mezirow's transformation theory.

Educational leaders can use this material to consider various factors in their strategic choices relating to retention and participation of this increasingly important student body to ensure that the choices they make not only harness the benefits of the rich and wide-ranging experiences of WAMS but make WAMS aware that their experience should not become their sole reference point. In other words, they do not become prisoners of their experience and that life experience does not become an epistemic obstacle.



19.2 Rationale for the benchmarking questions

To ensure WAMS are successfully integrated within the HE environment, providers must have systematic and deliberate structures, systems, and strategies in place, and their staff must have or be working toward having the capacity, capability, work culture, values, and behaviors to implement the strategies to support WAMS. Alignment of mission, strategies, structure, systems, and staff is needed to ensure long-term success. The qualitative benchmarking questions presented here have the breadth to cover these key areas, including support for staff so they have the ability and intention to support these students.

The benchmarking method enables an organization to measure and improve organizational performance by comparing itself with the best (Stapenhurst, 2009). It provides formal and deliberate opportunities for academic leaders to reflect on comparable data and assess how effective their current arrangements are in meeting the needs of WAMS. As part of a planned larger study, these benchmarking questions will be further developed and used to undertake a systematic qualitative benchmarking exercise with other providers who recruit WAMS in their undergraduate courses. The aim will be to gather detailed data and exemplars demonstrating providers' approach to the place of life experience in HE and how they support iterative interactions between academic content and work experience.

Benchmarking Questions

1. Does your institution have in its mission or strategic plan, at institutional or departmental level, a commitment to widen access to undergraduate courses to WAMS and to support them to succeed and progress from the undergraduate course?
2. What mechanisms/methods/approaches do you use to gather data/information on who the WAMS are and why they undertake a particular course at a particular institution? Does your data/information provide granular data at an individual level (such as by drawing personas on or developing case studies of some typical students) and describe the characteristics of WAMS in terms of motivation, self-concept, etc.?
3. Do you provide dedicated services for WAMS? What are they and to whom are they targeted? How do they evolve and develop? How do you manage and allocate resources to these services?
4. How does your institution conceptualize the relationship between work experience and academic content via high-level statements or scholarly work by staff?
5. Does your institution have learning and teaching strategies to provide students with opportunities to connect their work experience with the academic content?
6. Does your institution have an explicit staff training and development plan so that the staff have the commitment and capabilities to support students to establish connection between work experience and academic content?
7. Does your institution offer a personalized academic development plan for each WAMS?

The first question considers the institutional priorities and strategies necessary to design systematic and deliberate learning opportunities for WAMS. The second question looks at whether the organizational structure supports these priorities or strategies. The third and fourth questions ask whether the institution or department has appropriate strategies and systems which give mandates to educators to connect work experience and academic theories in day-to-day teaching interactions with students. The fifth and sixth questions are designed to prompt information on the organizational commitment and strategies to staff development to support WAMS. The seventh question aims to elicit information on the monitoring and oversight arrangements to support the WAMS.



19.3 A unique set of characteristics

With over 94% of mature students having nontraditional educational backgrounds, Nelson College London (NCL) is not a typical HE institution. On average, 57% of students come from BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) backgrounds; 39% are White, and the remaining 4% belong to other backgrounds ([The OfS, 2020](#)). They are not typical HE students with uniform educational backgrounds. The contextual data given within the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Metrics for the College show that 92% of NCL students have nontariff entry qualifications, 2% have HE-level tariff, and the remaining 6% have low-tariff qualifications ([The OfS, 2019](#)).

NCL is one of several HEIs offering HE opportunities to WAMS. For instance, the University of East London (UEL) is a modern university in the same geographical area. Approximately 50% of undergraduate students at UEL are mature students; 18% are over the age of 30. In total, 26% hold nontariff and 35% hold low-tariff qualifications. The ethnic makeup also shows a diverse picture: 30% of the students are White, Asian (21%), and Black (36%); the rest are classed as White or Other or Mixed. These two data sets show us that there is a demand for undergraduate courses from mature students.

Recruitment of WAMS has its own challenges in relation to retention and successful participation by virtue of their unique characteristics which need to be considered by providers. These characteristics are described below.

19.3.1 Motivation

This section attempts to outline some of the motivational drivers that push or pull WAMS into pursuing HE. In a subsequent section, a case study of an NCL student gives an insight into the characteristics of WAMS in terms of motivation, self-concept, learning approach, and style.

Personal statements provided by WAMS and information collected during the admission interviews at NCL show why they study at NCL. Their reasons range from fulfilling an unmet aspiration to improving career chances and compensating for a lost opportunity in the past to better prepare for the future. The main reasons for going into HE are extrinsic in nature. These observations largely validate the findings of Zeit (2014) who argues that non-traditional mature students are likely to enroll to gain job skills, obtain a specific degree or certificate for employment purposes, or enhance their status in life. Seeking to pursue HE for such reasons is not surprising as extrinsic motivations (driven by external stimuli) such as better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and skills play a vital role in their decision.

While extrinsic motivation directs individuals to undertake a certain path, intrinsic motivation provides the mental energy that pushes an individual to go down that path. However lucrative a course can be for one's career, if one finds it not interesting or if one does not find the mental energy to study at HE level, it would be hard for an individual to succeed. Hence, intrinsic sources of motivation are also immensely powerful. Intrinsic motivation refers to one's inherent tendency to seek experiences that generate feelings of interest and enjoyment through task novelty, challenges, and mastery (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivators (such as the desire for self-esteem, recognition, increased job satisfaction, and quality of life) help WAMS to remain committed to their study. When WAMS are intrinsically motivated, they study out of interest, and they find their academic materials inherently enjoyable, producing spontaneous satisfaction.

Nontraditional mature students have high internal motivation standards for success (Tilley, 2014). They can be intrinsically motivated to engage with the learning if the learning content itself can be related to their experience. In this sense, "purpose" is "fundamental to successful cognitive functioning" (Guggenmos, 2012; Kelemen, 1999, p. 1440). An unpublished survey of staff and students at NCL looked at what motivated WAMS to study there. The participants cited several extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. Extrinsic motivational sources highlighted in the survey include the dream of transformation, a better career with future financial benefits, enjoying the subject content itself, and satisfying curiosity.

Whatever the nature of the reasons for undertaking HE, providers should spend time and resources to identify why WAMS undertake a particular course at a particular institution so they can align their learning opportunities and resource deployment strategies to ensure the expectations of WAMS are met. A word of caution is called for here as identifying reasons are also fraught with challenges; errors can be made in ascribing a purpose upon objects and events with non-intentional causal forces (Guggenmos, 2012).

19.3.2 Biological development

Just like motivation, biological factors also can play a vital role in WAMS participation in higher education. The biological and material aspects of the body, brain, nervous system, hormones, and other aspects of the brain affect our memory and capacity for learning. For example, the brain's plasticity tends to decrease with age (Knudsen, 2004), and this is particularly evident when adults attempt to learn a second language, as mastery of speech sounds and grammatical structure is generally more established in those introduced to a second language before puberty compared with later in life (Johnson, 2001; Andresen, 2003; Lenroot and Giedd, 2006; Shaw et al., 2008). The wide-ranging age profiles of WAMS need to be considered in designing the teaching strategy and learning environment. In the case of NCL, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) data show that 6% of students are under the age of 21, 31% are between 21 and 30, and the rest 63% are over the age of 30 (The OfS, 2019).

19.3.3 Strong self-concept

Considering the psychological maturity of adults, their deep-rooted desire to maintain their self-concept, and their own subjective interpretation of their wide-ranging experiences, we need a learning environment which is different from the traditional learning environment. Fasokun et al. (2005) argued that there should be a distinctive learning environment for adult learning capable of motivating adults to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies for their survival in their target environment. Additionally, we need to make learning psychologically safe as adults have their own needs, for example, the need for autonomy, self-esteem, self-concept, achievement, acceptance, and belonging.

19.3.4 Social and professional circumstances

WAMS' social and professional circumstances can act as barriers for their successful participation in higher education. They can face a wide range of issues such as stress from financial obligations, responsibility to provide family support, childcare, transportation, demands from employers or the workplace, demand for time from family members, work and family life balance, and looking after and accompanying children to schools (Grabowski et al., 2016). Adult students have personal, family, and academic circumstances to contend with, and their community and social roles often differ greatly from those of the traditional students who attend further/higher education straight after secondary school (Osam et al., 2017). Significant challenges and obstacles to student success and degree completion include environmental factors, external roles, and responsibilities of nontraditional learners, such as the need to provide family support and housing (Grabowski et al., 2016). These difficult personal circumstances test the resilience of adult learners.

19.3.5 Experience and expectations

As adult educators in our classrooms, we come across WAMS who as a group have rich and wide-ranging personal and work experiences, and it is impossible for us as academics to experience so many varieties of life backgrounds. Each student may have a different mental schema and hypothesis as to how the world around them operates. These varied experiences can pose problems as WAMS educators may not have similar backgrounds through which to empathize with students, nor to make sense of their circumstances and examine their experience in relation to the curriculum. If we are unable or unwilling to understand and/or connect with our students' experience and circumstances, we might struggle to achieve an important purpose of education. John Dewey (1859–1952), an educational philosopher, argued that education should help human beings to act more effectively in life by helping them to make sense of their world, actively engaging in the problem of life, and finding practical responses to the problems we face (Buckingham et al., 2011, pp. 453–462).

The unique characteristics listed above are not an exhaustive list, and not all WAMS will possess them as common characteristics. In this chapter, we aim to analyze in further depth only one WAMS characteristic, which is how HE providers can harness their work experience and their goal-directed behavior to ensure that learning takes place.



19.4 A case study of a selected NCL student

In addition to entry profile data (such as age, gender, work experience, prior qualification, location, economic profile) captured during the admission and enrollment stage, institutions could also take initiatives to create personas or case studies for WAMS with qualitative information on career journeys, aspirations, priorities, self-concept, learning expectations and styles, and their skills and competencies.

Benchmarking question two listed above encourages institutions to reflect on their approach to gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. In this section, then, a case study of an NCL WAMS is provided. Case studies such as this enable institutions not only to capture rich insights about these individuals as warranted by benchmarking question two, but they also support institutions to conceptualize the relationship between work experience and academic content (benchmarking question four) and to develop learning and teaching strategies that can connect work experience with academic content (question five).

AJ was born and raised in Sri Lanka. His hobbies and interest in drawing and assembling things had a causative connection to his ambition to be an engineer. After being trained as a sub-degree level diploma engineer following completion of his GCSE in Sri Lanka in 1976 (at the age of 16), in 1978 he started work as a quantity surveyor at a construction firm. His budding career came to a sudden halt in 1983 when the ethnic riots in Sri Lanka broke out. These had devastating consequences for his personal, family, and work life. In fear of his safety because of an extended family member's association with freedom-fighting groups, he resigned his job, stayed at home for a few months, and then emigrated to the UK in April 1985.

Uprooted from his native land and settling in an unknown foreign land where his qualification and experience were heavily discounted, AJ started working straight away to make ends meet. He had three separate low-profile jobs concurrently (McDonalds, a fuel station, and a wholesaler of fancy goods) for about 2 years (from 1985 to 1987). As career progression was limited, he became a cashier at a Mobil Franchise in 1987, later becoming a manager. He continued working there until 1989. Long hours, low pay, burn-out, and limited career progression left AJ feeling disenchanting. He pivoted to a job in the foreign currency exchange business (Travelex) until 1992.

Then, at the age of 32, AJ got married and purchased his own home, never anticipating that a financial and economic tsunami was on its way, when in 1992 the UK crashed out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). At the time, interest rates were unexpectedly and dramatically raised to 15%. Nevertheless, with determination, AJ continued to work and managed to keep his house despite paying a high-interest rate; he worked in two jobs (Waitrose and Texaco).

In 1998, AJ got the opportunity to tap into the world of entrepreneurship and acquired the franchise of three Texaco fuel stations, along with Esso in 1999. After this early success, he decided to set up a 100-seater restaurant adjacent to his Texaco station in January 2000. AJ's restaurant was remarkably successful in attracting many local customers. Two months into the venture, AJ's main chef left. AJ's relative, who was managing the restaurant business, recruited a replacement chef without properly undertaking the selection process. This affected the quality of the food, customers deserted the restaurant, its reputation deteriorated drastically, and AJ's business fell apart. The handsome profits of the previous few years turned into massive losses. His personal finances imploded (he had guaranteed personally to pay the rent during the lease tenure lockdown period). To honor his obligations, AJ sold his second home and somehow managed to escape the business, albeit with huge financial liabilities.

Despite unimaginable adversity, AJ demonstrated spirit and the capacity to triumph over his financial challenges. He pulled out his career chart and devised a new course underpinned by his desire to provide financial stability. AJ found a job with the University of Bedfordshire supporting its student accommodation provision. He then switched career again and joined a logistics company in 2005. He was made redundant in 2012 when the company became bankrupt. Thereafter, he was out of full-time employment, resorting to various temporary and unstable jobs.

In 2013, at the age of 53, AJ met a member of Nelson College London (NCL) staff who persuaded him to take the Higher National Diploma (HND) course. He enrolled onto the HND Hospitality Management course for a multiplicity of reasons: reorientation of his skill set, an opportunity to work and study flexibly, personalized support provided by the college, a friendly environment for adults; the course would not require him to forgo his jobs or put family and professional life on hold. The study and financial arrangements gave him an incentive to engage with HE for the first time in his life. AJ did not conduct much research about his course but his instinct, experience in dealing with customers and knowledge of the hospitality industry, not to mention his skills, interests, and attitude motivated him to undertake the course.

AJ completed his course in 2015. Since then, he has been a senior officer in marketing and sales, as well as establishing a successful fast-food restaurant. In several interviews with him in 2022, AJ reflected on his past intention to pursue the HND course and his study journey at NCL. Seven years on, his feedback provided an opportunity to explore and speculate on the relationship between life experience and learning strategies and structures in HE. AJ claims that his study helped him profoundly in many ways. He still vividly remembers his active participation in workshops, field trips, and competitions organized by the college and how these learning engagements changed his work attitude and skills for the better. When asked about which academic theories and concepts he remembers, he could not recollect any, but instead provided the interviewer with a list of abstract rules he developed and now follows. These were honed during his studies. They are grounded in various academic theories he learned during his study at NCL. He remembered lecturers who provided practical and real-life examples and how he found their teaching sessions inspiring, and with whom he shared his personal and work stories. He wished all lecturers had more practical and industry experience and were given information on each student's previous experience and skills. This would allow them to use such knowledge as an educational resource to relate to the academic theories and concepts being discussed in the course.

In response to a question about how the course had changed him, AJ noted that he now thinks and reflects more often, routinely researching and evaluating different options. He listens attentively and has developed more confidence in tackling challenges.



19.5 Harnessing work experience for learning

Life and work experiences of WAMS can be used as a resource by academics but can also be a learning barrier. Education leaders should remain conscious of this paradox. We argue here that knowledge drawn from experience alone can be fallible in nature, being a possible source of epistemic obstacles and cognitive constraints. As a counterargument, we also argue that we cannot ask students simply to ignore their life experience as human beings tend to rely on experience as a means of acquiring knowledge (Buckingham et al., 2011, pp. 263–264). This conforms to the view of David Hume (1739, 1748), who observed that we have a

habit of drawing patterns based on our previous experiences and assume that these patterns will be retained and applied in a future experience. Unsurprisingly, even in deriving scientific knowledge, we use the results of our experiments on smaller samples to predict a pattern in the population or offer a generalization. This habit is a case of classical enumeration. In inductive inference, the generalized conclusion goes beyond the content of the original observation. This raises an important issue; a student may be tempted to project to the future based on their experience, but if these inductive inferences are not underpinned by reason and if they are not always grounded in justification, then the inferences can be considered as not entirely reliable or credible.

Although not all students share their work experiences, those who do often describe these with a subjective lens and the assumptions implicit in their opinions associated with the experiences remain arguable. They would often benefit from further scrutiny. Lecturers and students can then engage in the evaluation of the experience as part of the educational discourse and discuss various aspects and factors that shaped the experience. This discourse provides students the opportunity to critically interrogate and evaluate these experiences objectively. In the case study presented above, the loss of key staff was considered by AJ as the main reason for the failure of his restaurant business. However, when his lecturer and colleagues probed deeper into the causes by asking questions such as whether there were any succession and/or training plans in place to cover resignations, leave, or sickness or they inquired about the rigor of the selection process for the replacement chef or what quality control mechanisms were in place to check the presentation, freshness, and quality of the food served to the customers, AJ reflected on the questions and the different perspectives underpinning them and realized that business problems are seldom made up of a single factor.

Devoting time to real-life cases such as AJ's during a teaching session allows individuals to engage in post-action, postmortem reviews to analyze the experience and determine context-specific factors. In the case of AJ's restaurant, it was noted that HR, risk management, quality control, and leadership issues all contributed to the failure of the business. Case discussions allow students like AJ to question their own position, review and analyze their own experiences, learn from them, and develop insights that ensure they are not prisoners of their own experiences. If we do not objectively interrogate their working lives, students can adopt uncritical and unsystematic approaches to understanding their experience (Usher, 2018, p. 201).

Designing curricula which harness life experiences can be challenging for some subject areas. In curriculum design and delivery of undergraduate courses, there will always be some subjects that are founded upon hard logic and/or a high degree of reasoning (such as mathematics, statistics or computer programming) which are broadly indifferent to our own experience.

The use of life experience, then, has its limit in many subjects, but there are some subject areas, such as entrepreneurship and business in which we can use it to justify or even construct knowledge. The use of life experience as a pedagogic tool can be a matter of degree. It is not the only tool to teach WAMS. As a pedagogic tool, life experience allows educators to have an in-depth appreciation of a student's particular circumstances in their own real-life settings. However, to use life experience as an effective tool, it requires careful conceptualization and to be thoughtfully managed for it to yield relevant insights. We should make WAMS aware that work and life experience is a particular learning resource that relates to HE in a specific way.



19.6 Experiential learning

How have learning theorists approached the use of life experience in learning? Experiential learning is not a new concept. John Dewey (1859–1952), a prominent education philosopher and learning theorist, argued that the task of teachers should not be to communicate knowledge and skills to learners but to use learners' experiences as a teaching tool (Bates, 2019, p. 20). There are several theories that can support educators to help students learn by transforming experience into knowledge. David A. Kolb's notion of "experiential learning" explicitly refers to Dewey's concept of experience (Bente, 2018, p. 70). Kolb (1984, p. 38) viewed learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." Another notable theory is that of transformative learning, as proposed by Mezirow. This is essentially a learning process of making meaning of one's experience. Mezirow (1978) argued that it is in fact, "the central process of adult development" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 155).

The table below provides a brief list of important theories and models educators can use to support WAMS to establish connections between their work experience and academic theories (Table 19.1).

John Dewey wrote prolifically on education and a broad range of other social and political topics. Some of the important publications of John Dewey (1915, 1917, 1938), David Kolb, and Jack Mezirow are listed in the references.

Table 19.1 Lessons from Dewey, Kolb, and Mezirow on experiential learning.

Author	Theory/model	Approach
John Dewey (1859–1952)	Inquiry-based learning, experiential learning	Educators to nurture students' ability to question, reason, think, and reflect on practical experience in life.
David Kolb (1939–)	Experiential learning theory	Educators to encourage students to identify experience, reflect, conceptualize, and experiment.
Jack Mezirow (1923–2014)	Transformative learning theory	Educators to enable students to critically review past experiences to recognize and reassess the structure of assumptions and expectations which frame their thinking, feeling, and acting.



19.7 Case study: NCL teaching practices framework

19.7.1 Context-dependent and context-independent knowledge

To harness the benefits of extrinsic motivation and rich life experience in learning and teaching, we need to think about how we can position learning and experience in an interactive dynamic so that WAMS can problematize and interrogate experience as well as question the utility and relevance of knowledge in the light of these life experiences. To facilitate this, educators should not simply act as knowledge reproducers, but should support WAMS to understand the justification and utility of knowledge and to question the epistemological base of the theory and models relevant to their studies. This should allow the adult students to reflect on and relate their experience to the theoretical and conceptual position so that learning does not only simplistically derive from experience; rather, experience and learning are mutually positioned in an interactive dynamic (Usher, 2018, p. 191). Through an educational discourse, WAMS can come to recognize that their experience is simply an anecdote, not evidence, and any conclusions and insights drawn can be fallible, superficial, and unreliable in nature. Although life experiences can help us to understand certain actions, they are not sufficient to draw inference about life.

To explore how NCL supports its WAMS in making the learning relevant to the student's individual life and to ensure that learning is grounded in

their experience, let us now discuss what is considered the cornerstone of teaching practices of NCL. We also explore how NCL uses life experience as a pedagogic tool in the classroom so that WAMS can comprehend and construct knowledge in a subject area.

19.7.2 Benchmarking questions—NCL case study

The chapter will now return to the benchmarking questions listed in Section 19.2. A set of exemplar answers is presented.

19.7.2.1 Mission or strategic plan: NCL has an institutional mission and commitment to support WAMS

An institutional mission statement provides a map of the organization's goals and the strategies required to achieve those goals. In the case of NCL, the mission is “to offer access to higher education to people from the widest possible range of backgrounds,” with a commitment to widen opportunities for degree-level qualifications to students from a wide variety of backgrounds and with varied abilities. NCL supports them in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their chosen careers. The college's strategic plan for 2020–25 outlines its mission, strategic priorities, and performance indicators (Nelson College London, 2022a). While the plan translates the mission into strategic priorities, objectives, and performance indicators, it is less developed in terms of articulating its arrangements for achieving successful participation for WAMS.

19.7.2.2 Structure, systems, strategies, and staff at NCL for creating impact on WAMS

Priority two of the strategic plan provides a clear commitment to supporting adult students using a variety of learning opportunities and materials and by the development of individual learning plans. NCL's Teaching and Learning Strategy and Policy (Nelson College London, 2022b) sets out the underlying structure within which educators are encouraged to establish connections between academia and the world of work. Practices two and three in the framework call for NCL lecturers to design their teaching sessions to be career-oriented and skills-centered and to apply the academic theories and models to students' own experience and career. The Policy on Student Personal and Professional Development (Nelson College London, 2022c) requires the college to ensure that all students are in possession of a tailored Personal Development Plan (PDP) by involving students in recording, reviewing, and discussing their development toward career objectives. While the course aims

and learning outcomes encapsulate various generic, transferable, and vocational skills and competencies, the college also aims to support students to gain employability skills supported by a number of NCL teams—Career Hub, Career Advisory Service, and the Knowledge Exchange Centre (KEC).

19.7.2.3 Services for WAMS and how they are managed

For academic support, the college has a separate team of academic support tutors which operates under the Personal Tutoring and Student Support Policy (Nelson College London, 2022d) which requires the Student Support Team to work through the “Students at Risk Register” and design customized Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) so that they can succeed in their course.

19.7.2.4 Learning and teaching strategies to establish connections between work experience and academic content

The NCL Teaching Practices Framework (Uddin, 2022, p. 142) is intended to assist educators to improve their teaching practices, encourage interaction, and use life experience as a pedagogic tool. Practice Three (apply theories, models, and frameworks to own life and career) of the framework was intended to allow educators to support students to accommodate academic knowledge into their existing cognitive apparatus and mental schemas as argued by Piaget (1954), so that they can change in response to the theories and knowledge they study.

19.7.2.5 Conceptualizing the relationship between work experience and academic content?

In Practice Three of NCL’s Teaching Practices Framework (Uddin, 2022, p. 142), the college expects educators to link various theoretical concepts or frameworks discussed in the course into the context of each individual student’s career choice and suggests educators maintain a balance between generalized, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge and concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge. Educators are encouraged to allow students to relate context-independent theories to their experience. For example, the selection process used by AJ for hiring the replacement chef can be used in discussions of HR theories on recruitment and selection process in the HR module of the HND Hospitality Management course. As part of the discussion, it may be prudent to say that theoretical frameworks and models we study as part of the course are designed to shape and structure our thinking (not constraining it) and provoke discussion, but the theories are often generic and simplistic as the realities might

be much more subtle and complex with many limiting factors (e.g., time, finance), forcing individuals to trade off and reach suboptimal decisions in their decision-making (e.g., hiring the replacement chef).

19.7.2.6 Staff training and development plan

The Teaching and Learning Strategy and Policy ([Nelson College London, 2022b](#)), the annual Learning, Teaching, Engagement and Enhancement (LTEE) conference, and a comprehensive Teaching Practices Framework support staff development, helping them to obtain a professional accreditation through a Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowship. The college encourages its students and staff to undertake small research projects to encourage them to promote knowledge exchange between NCL and small- or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating near the college. It also allows staff and students to develop a deeper understanding of how SMEs operate in this competitive world ([Nelson College London, 2022e](#)).

19.7.2.7 Personalized academic development plan for each WAMS?

NCL policies require the college to ensure that all students are in possession of a tailored Personal Development Plan (PDP) and an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for all students at risk of withdrawal/failure as a tool for early intervention.

19.7.2.8 Services for WAMS and how they are managed

For academic support, the college has a separate team of academic support tutors which operates under the Personal Tutoring and Student Support Policy ([Nelson College London, 2022d](#)). This requires the Student Support Team to work closely through the “Students at Risk Register” and to design customized Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) so that they succeed in their course.



19.8 Conclusion

NCL is not the only provider that encourages its students to connect life experience with theoretical knowledge. Many HE providers in the UK use authentic scenarios, case studies and real-life problems in their teaching and assessment to establish connections with and between academic theories so that students can engage with opportunities for relevant, varied, and insightful discussion. In various formative and summative tasks, institutions

also allow students to demonstrate their ability to apply academic concepts, frameworks, and theories to these scenarios and case studies. What NCL does is not unique; most providers give students opportunities to apply theories and connect with real-life cases. However, the college does make these scenarios relevant to individuals' own lives (be it personal or family or work-related experience). Using real-life examples is highly authentic, and if relevant, they provide students with opportunities to extract vital information and draw real-life insights. Teaching in such a lively learning environment is informed by scholarship, academic research, and practical experience. The students can use the examples/real-life experiences to develop critical thinking by considering a multitude of perspectives, shared by a cohesive group of students and academics. They also get the opportunity to challenge or abandon those personal prejudices that are grounded in their personal experience or their underlying assumptions. When people share their authentic experience in a classroom setting, we can ask clarifying questions and dig deeper with probing questions, thus allowing us to be clearer about what the experience is about. This familiarity with the scenarios and examples makes the cognitive load on knowing and relating to theories much more manageable.

This all requires personalization of education, which is highly resource-intensive. Considering that no two individuals will have the same life experience, finding a good-quality mentor and developing a tailor-made learning plan to meet an individual's needs require an elevated level of investment. Will the provider have enough resources to personalize education to meet every student's unique needs?

Despite a high resource and investment cost, the NCL Teaching Practices Framework shows how educators can use life experience as a pedagogic and inquiry tool. However, we should note that as a new proposition, we have no evaluative data with which to judge the success of the framework. Nonetheless, it can stimulate benchmarking questions for educators and leaders so that they can consider their own context and develop their own learning and teaching strategy with particular references to WAMS.

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Micro-credentials: need to be benchmarked across institutions

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20.1 Introduction

After the COVID-19 pandemic, economies, sectors, organizations, and their workforces are at crossroads. Public and private sector institutions are concerned about graduate skills and competencies; learners are frustrated because of the lack of job opportunities and need job advancement and mobility in their career paths. These factors are acting as a catalyst to HE providers to develop a broader credentials continuum than previously.

Because of the pandemic, unemployment crises, and rapid technological changes, skills requirements in the marketplace have changed. Around the world, micro-credentials are seen as a possible solution to a range of economic, labor market, and social challenges. These courses are fast, cheap, flexible and accessible and can be used to fill skill gaps.

For a long time, micro-credentials existed outside formal qualification frameworks, but now, they can be a means of assessment and validation. “They may or may not be stackable or combinable toward higher qualifications and in some cases may be accepted into formal certificate and/or degree credit programs” (McGreal and Olcott, 2022). Learners want them to be part of formal credentials.



20.2 Defining micro-credentials

Micro-credentials have been around in different guises for some time. Various education providers have been delivering short courses with

or without credit for many years. “Micro-credential” is a new name for this provision, which is offered to bridge gaps and build strong links, between HE providers and the workplace. Universities want to reassure employers that they are responsive to their needs in a competitive and highly dynamic market.

The European Commission offers the following definition:

A micro-credential is the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards. Courses leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills, and competencies that respond to societal, personal, cultural, or labour market needs ([Education.ec.europa.eu, 2021](https://education.ec.europa.eu/2021)).

They may be offered as a standalone course or can be combined into larger credentials and are underpinned and assessed by the quality assurance standards followed in the relevant sector or area of activity.

There are various types of micro-credential, though all are based on attaining a skill or a competency. The certificate issued as proof of attendance is not considered a micro-credential. When a badge is based on the attainment of a competency or skill and is linked with credible assessment, it can be considered a micro-credential. Other examples are the EdX certification of Micro-Masters or the Nanodegree by Udacity in computer science. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are also often linked with micro-credentials.



20.3 Rationale for micro-credentials

Higher education institutions deliver both credit-bearing and noncredit-bearing micro-credentials. They can be offered in different ways, such as face-to-face, online, blended, and so on. They may be standalone units or structured to be embedded as part of a course. Higher education institutions offer micro-credentials for various reasons. A few of them are:

1. To respond to the needs of society and thus part of an institution's societal mission.
2. To increase the institution's visibility and reputation by widening geographical reach and attracting more diverse groups of students.
3. To increase their responsiveness to students' and labor market demands.

4. To experiment with new pedagogies and technologies.
5. To generate additional income or reduce costs ([University World News, 2020](#)).

The cost of HE is increasing, and earners want a low-cost option to support their education and training to get better jobs. Employers want better-skilled employees who can give them a competitive advantage in the market. In this situation, HE providers want to offer better employment opportunities for their students, supporting them to contribute to the modern, dynamic, work environment. A clear and robust validation of micro-credential is likely to offer a value-added benefit to all stakeholders ([McGreal and Olcott, 2022](#)).



20.4 Challenges

Many employers still do not fully understand what these credentials mean and how to compare them with conventional programs and qualifications. HE institutions offering micro-credentials need to ensure clarity and transparency for both learners and employers so they will be able to understand their value and utility in the marketplace.

Using micro-credentials to fulfill employer demands is not that easy. There is a significant variation across occupational levels and sectors and a variable response from the labor market. Micro-credentials can provide specific skills to fill gaps in short-term demand. But these skills have limited currency; research shows that transferable skills like leadership, team-working, analytical thinking, and communication are more valuable to individuals in their long-term careers.

A lack of regulation and meaningful quality benchmarking will inevitably lead to hidden stratification within the micro-credential market. Employers will place different values on different credentials in ways that may not be apparent to individuals investing in the courses. Learners who are from disadvantaged backgrounds may invest in training that is not actually valued, whereas more advantaged ones who already have degrees and good jobs will be stacking up micro-credentials and reap the rewards. Micro-credentials thus have the potential to deepen social inequalities. There is a need for systematic regulating and benchmarking of micro-credentials and to examine the role they play in the global skill formation system ([OECD, 2021a,b](#)).

Though many institutions are offering micro-credentials, they perceive them differently. For some, they are short courses designed in the same way as traditional courses. They are typically competency-based and often not assessed in any traditional way. But micro-credentials require assessment of competence in the way that traditional courses have assessment methods.

Another concern relates to how “the institution relates to for-credit micro-credentials and how they can be effectively laddered into a diploma or degree programs, and how they can be mapped to occupational requirements” ([The Evollution, 2021](#)). Some businesses also offer micro-credentials; should these be mapped to post-secondary programs?



20.5 Recognition

Most countries are offering or developing micro-credentials, but the understanding of what they constitute varies greatly, with different approaches to regulation. While, for the most part, national regulatory frameworks allow for the provision of micro-credentials, in a few cases, they are explicitly regulated or mentioned in the legislation. Many countries have developed policies related to the recognition of micro-credentials, and many do not have any policies. In almost half of these countries, learners can accumulate micro-credentials to build up to a degree course ([University World News, 2021](#)).



20.6 Quality assurance

Many countries have implicitly covered micro-credentials in their quality assurance system. But still, others do not have a record of micro-credentials offered at the national level, neither do they have any list of providers offering them, nor do they have any quality assurance policy or a procedure for them.

Micro-credentials need to be quality assessed externally and internally. Quality assurance processes need to be transparent, accessible, and properly

documented to meet the needs of all the stakeholders. External quality assurance should be conducted in line with the relevant quality assurance frameworks like the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. It should be in line with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code within the UK. Internal quality assurance should cover the quality of the course, learners' feedback on the learning experience, and peers' feedback, including other providers and stakeholders, on the learning experience leading to the micro-credential ([Education.ec.europa.eu](https://www.education.ec.europa.eu), 2021).

According to the QAA, micro-credentials have a credit against a recognized level of the Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ) and are subject to standard quality assurance mechanisms; they should be considered as an award in their own right ([QAA](https://www.qaa.ac.uk), 2021). Many job opportunities require the candidates either to have a degree or equivalent. It is difficult for someone to progress who has collected various micro-credentials which are not recognized as a qualification.



20.7 UK-based micro-credentials models

According to the QAA, there are five models of micro-credentials:

Model (A) Independent: The learner completes a series of micro-credentials to build relevant skills and knowledge that meet the requirement of their individual or employer needs. Successful completion and/or assessment outcomes are categorized and recorded in a digital passport.

Models (B) and (C): Micro-credentials are used to gain admission to various degree courses either by allocated tariff points or credit exemption as part of the accreditation of prior learning.

Model (D) Embedded (noncredit): Micro-credentials, including digital badges, are used by learners to develop skills and competencies from a variety of global providers that scaffold a core of reflective, applied practice-based, capstone project, or real-world learning leading to a recognized university degree/postgraduate qualification.

Model (E) Embedded stacking ([QAA](https://www.qaa.ac.uk), 2021).

Micro-credentials are offered by various UK universities such as:

20.7.1 Open University

They offer a range of micro-credential courses to help in building career skills and knowledge so learners will be able to stay up to date with relevant and emerging practices in growing industries. These are flexible online courses comprising from 10 to 12 weeks ([Open University, 2022](#)).

These courses are awarded by The Open University and have a credit value at either the undergraduate or postgraduate level and can be used toward qualifications at The Open University or potentially at another university ([Open University, 2022](#)).

20.7.2 University of Birmingham

They offer a range of postgraduate micro-credential certificate courses for working professionals and recent graduates. These courses are designed to upskill or reskill the learners for work in rapidly growing industries. The learners can also gain an official University of Birmingham award and credits when courses have been successfully completed. The learners who successfully pass these courses may be admitted for a full master's pathway ([University of Birmingham, 2022](#)).

The specification of these micro-credentials is aligned to the Common Micro-credential Framework (CMF) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF), a common European reference framework whose purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems ([University of Birmingham, 2022](#)).

20.7.3 University of Glasgow

Learners can equip themselves and develop their careers through these online courses, which are assessed in a range of innovative ways to meet the quality standards set by the MCF ([University of Glasgow, 2022](#)).



20.8 Private company learning platforms

Apart from HE education institutions, private companies whose main business is not education and training are also offering certified training for users, for example, Google ([OECD, 2021a,b](#)) ([Fig. 20.1](#)).

Box 6. Micro-credential initiatives by Google

In 2020, Google announced that it would remove the requirement for job applicants to have higher education degrees, and launched a range of professional training qualifications that it would treat as equivalent to a degree in its recruitment processes for certain roles. These “Google Career Certificates” are accessible through a Coursera subscription, take approximately six months to complete and are in areas of high employer demand, such as IT Support, Project Management, Data Analytics and User Experience (UX) Design.

The career certificates are provided on a not-for-profit basis, and scholarships are available to support access for disadvantaged students. Students are also able to access free resources for career coaching and mock interviews while studying, and upon graduating they will be included in a special candidate pool that is available to the consortium of employers participating in the initiative with Google.

Following the 2020 launch of Google Career Certificates in the United States, the programme was launched in the United Kingdom in May 2021, as a joint initiative with the Department of Work and Pensions.

Google also offers a number of other micro-credentials related to its education software tools and technologies, such as Google Workspace for Education. Its range of teacher training micro-credentials allows teachers to use the software to become certified Google for Education Trainers, Innovators or Coaches, upon completion of a number of training modules.

OECD EDUCATION POLICY PERSPECTIVES © OECD 2021

Figure 20.1 Google microcredential initiatives (awaiting permission).



20.9 Regulation and benchmarking of micro-credentials

According to the QAA, all three credit frameworks in the UK can support micro-credentials and the recognition of prior learning:

- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (2015),
- The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (2019), and
- The Higher Education Credit Framework for England (second edition—draft as of December 2020) (QAA, 2021).

All these frameworks have information about credit transfer and recognition of prior learning. The Higher Education Credit Framework for England has a section about micro-credentials. Micro-credentials are more regulated in New Zealand than in the UK. The greatest obstacle in the UK is the sense of coherence of the award. HE providers can recognize micro-credentials awarded by each other’s institutions through recognition of prior learning, but in making an award of an end qualification, they do need to have confidence in the overall coherence of that award. A way forward to resolve this issue is for the institutions/providers to form consortia and recognize the micro-credentials of each other (QAA, 2021).

Professor Sue Rigby is the Vice-Chancellor of Bath Spa University. She is also a QAA Board Member: “Imagine a degree built from micro-credits or a blended offer, where microcredits scaffold a core of more reflective learning made up of larger credit units. If we can design such entities, we add long-term value to short-term expediency and open the door to the quick design of useful learning residing in a framework that encourages lifelong engagement with learning. It works for employers—they get the quick fix they need. But critically, it also works for the people who are being upskilled because each part can build to a larger whole bespoke for their life goals or career aspirations.” It will be easy to regulate such qualifications through the respective quality frameworks.

Many countries reported that regulatory framework at the national level needs to be adapted, and micro-credentials should be integrated into national legislation. Many countries do not have policies concerning the digitalization of the credentials, which is important for the benchmarking and regulation of these courses. Validation of prior learning as a route to achieving a formal qualification or credits can be used to regulate micro-credentials. These Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) arrangements can be offered by a public or private organization acting as a recognized validation body under four conditions:

- The competencies they assess are part of a recognized professional qualification.
- The assessment tools should be developed in line with the standards for VPL.
- The organizations have a quality label at the organizational level.
- The validation bodies accept regular quality control.

A successful assessment of competencies leads to a full professional qualification certificate (EHEA, 2021).

According to some experts, every institution is autonomous and does not require legislation to provide micro-credentials; therefore, they must be subject to institutional validation and national quality assurance guidelines. There are different approaches to the micro-credentials regulatory side, though most countries emphasize the need for a national regulatory framework that should allow the provision of micro-credentials, and the second important factor is the RPL policies and procedures. There is a lack of a common definition of micro-credentials as well as the issues of quality assurance. Another important factor is the digitalization of micro-credentials; many countries do not have policies on digitalization of credentials. All these issues need to be addressed.



20.10 Conclusion

HE and industry experts have different interpretations of micro-credentials. But they all agree that the concept has emerged as a solution to fill the skill gap caused by technological advancement and help in the upskilling of workforces in the wake of COVID-19. Private companies are also offering micro-credentials. In the future, employees might be able to stack these credentials together in place of a university degree.

Traditional degrees will remain valuable assets in many professions, but micro-credentials can offer additional options or pathways for employees across experiences. They are going to be an important part of the relationship between HEIs and employers. They represent an opportunity to engage with new employers and build up additional offers to drive economic growth by upskilling the workforce. That is why there is a requirement to benchmark them across institutions so the learners achieving these qualifications should not feel disadvantaged relative to those who have completed a 3-year degree course. Micro-credentials have the potential to remove social inequalities. There is therefore a need for systematic regulating and benchmarking of micro-credentials and to examine the role they play in the global skills formation system.

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Strategic planning for digital submissions for institutions with creative arts programs: considerations, challenges, and routes to benchmarking

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21.1 Introduction

Think of the paintings in prehistoric caves. Thanks to them, we now know what certain prehistoric mammals looked like! [Cave paintings] preceded the invention of writing by 30,000 years! Those people left us with veritable archives of the fauna of their time (Renning, 2000).

When in January 2020 creative arts students returned to university following the Christmas break, reports of COVID-19 were filtering into the mainstream news. At this point, the processes for submission were broadly unchanged for creative arts students submitting their degree portfolios, coursework, and performances. Recent literature reviews have focused on how higher education (HE) institutions and degree programs adapted to online teaching and learning (Bao, 2020; Quezada and Quezada-Parker, 2020; Yu et al., 2020) and how students experienced it (Demuyakor, 2020). However, Hill and Fitzgerald (2020) found that:

online experience entailed many challenges that may have resulted in students' reduced engagement and disrupted learning opportunities. The authors identified positive aspects regarding online learning experiences, including flexibility of learning, such as performing activities at students' pace and being able to learn at a location which was convenient for students. They also suggested that a hybrid approach could be positive in the future with increased staff and student engagement through interactive activities.

The shift to online teaching, learning, and assessment resulted in a number of challenges and disruptions at a variety of levels (Alibi, 2020), specifically in the areas of remote teaching and assessment. Around the world, students in universities regularly face the deadline challenge: performances/audios are recorded, edited, and bounced as MP4, AIFF, and WAV files, ready for the last-minute rush of uploading these large files, through the night, in the library, onto the university server for marking. Perhaps in smaller departments, students are required to submit these large files on a flash drive, CD, or hard disk drive directly to the examinations or subject department office. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns required staff, students, and institutions to function remotely with HE courses now being delivered in full online mode. Performances were recorded and videoed at home, and e-portfolios were submitted by creative arts students on a much greater scale than before.

Digital submissions are here to stay, post-pandemic. Given that, what will be the challenges, considerations, and future practices? How will the submission process be benchmarked in creative arts subjects? This chapter focuses primarily on degree programs that include the submission of large video, audio, and/or archive footage of performances in performing arts, dance, music performance, music production/technology, media, moving image, game design, animation, and film studies. Special consideration is given to the viewpoint of the student as a consumer. Of relevance to the creative arts is Sheffield Hallam University's 2019 report:

It has been the norm across the University from academic year 2017/18 that the vast majority of coursework prepared in an electronic form will be suitable for submission online. However, it is recognised that there may be some specialist coursework or assessment types, which cannot be submitted, online, for example: presentations/exhibitions/installations. In-class submissions including lab tests/phase tests, physical artefacts, file exceeding 250MB, some dissertations/theses.

Online submission (sometimes referred to as “electronic submission” or “e-submission”) is the process of submitting assignments electronically online. It allows the student to submit a digital copy of their work and for their tutor to retrieve students’ work in their own time through Blackboard, normally as an attached file, or a series of files. As more students produce digital work it is important to provide them with a way to submit this for assessment quickly and easily. Technology allows us to do this through integrating the submission and feedback process within systems familiar to the student on Blackboard module sites.

21.2 Electronic management of assessment

In UK universities, Electronic Management of Assessment (EMA) supports the assessment life cycle from the electronic submission of assignments to marking and feedback, for example, that produced by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) (Fig. 21.1).

As part of their assessment and feedback cycle, HE institutions provide students with “generic” online guidance about online submissions. This is typically accessible through websites and virtual learning environments (VLEs). These guidelines incorporate statements such as “students will primarily submit work online and will have access to feedback and their marks, online from a (single) point of access.” This is a paraphrase of 12 universities’ statements regarding online submissions.

There are many benefits to an EMA system:

- Remote submission,
- Automatic proof of receipt,
- No printing costs,
- Time-saving,
- Improved confidence/reduction in student anxiety provided by the privacy, safety, and security of e-submission,
- Confidence in knowing work is backed up,
- Electronic reminders about deadlines and improved clarity about turn-around times for marking,
- Realistic timing of submission deadlines (e.g., a 23:59 deadline at the University of Huddersfield),
- Meeting expectations—this is normal practice in a digital age.

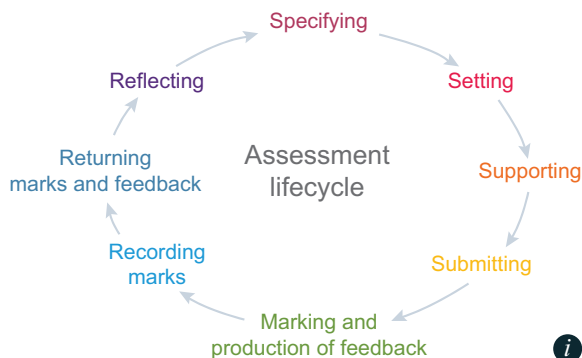


Figure 21.1 The assessment and feedback life cycle. ©This diagram is based on the original by Manchester Metropolitan University.

Gray (2013) lists some of the many staff benefits of EMAs, including, but not limited to:

- Reduced workload allowing staff to assess learners' understanding more frequently,
- Reduced administrative burden, leaving more time to focus on individuals experiencing difficulties,
- Not having to collect and carry large quantities of paper,
- Filing is electronic,
- Work is backed up online,
- Increased speed and efficiency,
- Ability to undertake originality and plagiarism checking in the same environment as marking.

Gray nevertheless comments that EMA systems are easier to apply to traditional forms of assessment, for example, essays. Performance-related submissions that use musical notation and large video or audio files are more problematic.

Jisc, a UK-based company that provides digital resources in support of HE institutions and research, has the following view of e-portfolios:

There is no one type of e-portfolio system. Since e-portfolios can serve different purposes and are intended for use in different scenarios, a variety of system types are possible, ranging from VLE-based tools to commercial systems and open-source products. Bespoke solutions offering similar functionalities can also be developed to meet particular needs, sometimes by combining Web 2.0 tools, and some commercial systems allow customisation of the interface by organisations purchasing a licence. A further possibility is a portal-based e-portfolio system, which aggregates services of relevance to a particular purpose and learner profile.

The relationship between VLE and e-portfolio systems is complex, with no benchmarked standard between institutions. The purpose and use of the VLE or e-portfolio as a tool for teaching, learning, and assessment differentiate the various creative arts courses. For example, a photography student's use of an e-portfolio will be different from that of a music student; the submission requirements can be individually tailored. It is possible for a student in photography to upload their image (a relatively small file) without compromising the integrity of the work. Arguably, it is not essential for the photograph to be exhibited "in person" to be a fully realized piece of work. This contrasts with a video of a recital, where there is

little atmosphere created, the audio will be distorted and automated, students may not be able to perform on a high caliber instrument if students are completing their submissions remotely, and the live performance, including the skills associated with it (performance anxiety can be reduced if there is an option to rerecord), does not happen in a real-world environment.

Dillon and Brown (2006) comment as follows:

In the Performing Arts, assessment is problematic because the product and experience are ephemeral and time dependent. In the visual arts, the product is often tangible, however the meaning may not be clear or literal. To assess or evaluate the arts, both product and experience reach into the philosophical realm of aesthetics and to evaluate these we need to identify the qualities of artistic knowing. This is indeed the first step for any discipline in the creation of educational activities, including e-portfolios. The Creative Arts are inherently media rich, and this provides us with problems in capturing a suitable artefact of the performance.

Jisc provides guidelines for institutions using e-portfolio systems or tools. These include a generic version, with alternatives for different user groups, for example, managers, practitioners, and students.

What is key, is that the system selected meets its intended purpose. This is of increasing importance as the functions required of an e-portfolio system diversify, or when one system is implemented across a wide range of subject disciplines. Perhaps it is not even desirable that a single system should incorporate all the functions needed to support the increasingly personalised nature of 21st century learning (JISC, 2005).

There are no small number of platforms that offer various challenges and solutions. The appendix to this chapter lists and comments on the eleven most used video-uploading sites. The platforms are readily available to users. Students can maintain access to, and control of, their submissions. Receipting is not required by the institution as the student has control/access to this. The student would only be required to upload a link to the submission/content for the institution to access it for marking. However, HE institutions are not in favor of these tools as they are “social media.” Nevertheless, until institutions are able to provide a consistent approach that does not compromise the student’s work should policies not include some of these platforms as accessible and viable solutions to the issue of large digital submissions within the creative arts?



21.3 Benchmarking for digital submissions in the creative arts

With the increase in students learning and staff working remotely and courses including more digital-based modules and assessment models, the area of digital submissions within creative arts requires benchmarking, but there are several challenges.

21.3.1 Legacy

Many institutions block students and staff from accessing their VLE/email after graduation, though sometimes there is a 12-month extension, depending on the policy. Should students in creative arts maintain access to their portfolio work to support their employability and future career plans? In 2005, the Department for Education, UK stated that

a personal online learning space which is accessible throughout a learning journey has become established as an important objective. Where the chosen tool or system cannot support lifelong access, alternatives include providing learners leaving a course with their e-portfolio content on a CD-ROM or on a USB drive, or developing a regionally supported e-portfolio service, as demonstrated by the East of England Lifelong Learning Support (EELLS) project.

21.3.2 Accessibility

Accessibility issues have been identified, such as the lack of resources and infrastructure, the commitment of students to submit assessments (Guangul et al., 2020), the difficulty in assessing practical knowledge and skills, and the need to ensure fair treatment of test takers and the risk of a technical failure (OECD, 2020). Most submissions are suitable for digital transfer. Files over 250MB cannot be submitted directly as attachments to the main VLEs such as Moodle/Blackboard/Microsoft Office, which are the most prevalent platforms used in HE. What are the challenges with a VLE's accessibility and longevity? What are the alternatives to allow students to submit large or medium files electronically for marking? Often students will be given a folder with their student or staff ID. There may be precedents set whereby students can only see their own folder and upload the files that they need to submit; they cannot access any other students' folders. The member of staff, however, can access the files within them. The issue of accessibility arises as, in common with the VLEs

discussed above there is no restriction on uploading files on-campus; however, when accessed off-campus there is often an upload restriction of a maximum of four files totaling 2GB. What are the options available and their limitations? The following is a summary:

Panopto, Blackboard, and Moodle can be used for the submission of popular media file formats. This has the benefit of uploading files to a central publishing point and delivered back as streaming media, automatically transcoding content to work across a wide range of devices from Blackboard and accessing submitted work via the Grade Centre enabling staff to view or listen to student video or audio assignments and provide feedback without leaving Blackboard.

OneDrive: For institutions that use Microsoft Office, this is a viable solution, though some of the limitations are student/staff accessibility post-graduation. Receipt of submission is not possible automatically; it requires a staff interaction to confirm receipt. IP/copyright sharing of this work is on a centralized system; arguably, the submission could be deleted, lost, or overshared.

Other Mechanisms—DropBox/GoogleDrive/Zendto: Third-party mechanisms have become necessary where the nature of creative arts submissions requires large digital files to be hosted. Pre-COVID, many institutions would allow a physical submission of large/media files; this could be through a USB, flash drive, hard drive, CD, or DVD when the digital uploading option was not feasible.

21.3.3 Key areas for development

The creative production submission context exposes the complexity and difficulties that may be encountered when working with large digital submissions. The following areas will require consideration during the benchmarking process:

- Access and control—who controls the use of the portfolio and how much control is appropriate?
- Ethics and rights management—confidentiality, intellectual property, copyright. Who sees and owns the work?
- Implementation—what are the technical constraints that prevent quality representations from being uploaded or who has the skills of access to the technological gateway? What policies prevent or enhance this access?
- Representation and recognition—how is the work to be represented and what is the quality of the work that is acceptable as an artifact? Can the

collection of artifacts capture the qualities of artistic knowledge effectively? A person creating the submission may see that as a creative act. Potentially, a large digital submission could evolve into a new art form.

- What is the financial process? The Office of National Statistics, UK reported in 2022 that 67% of students are in employment alongside their studies.
- What is the engagement process?
- What is the access process? Has your institution undertaken localized surveys with creative arts cohorts, student union representatives, and staff to assess what options students are proposing as viable solutions?
- How does the current system affect the quality of the submission? Are the students satisfied that their submission process is as direct as their teaching, learning, assessment, and feedback processes?
- Are the service costs being considered appropriately? Is the current process accounting for student engagement if working from home?
- Are digital library information services able to provide appropriate resources for creative arts submissions?
- Is the creative arts digital submissions process being considered in tandem with new modes of education delivery post-COVID-19?



21.4 Conclusion

In the introduction, reference was made to paintings in prehistoric caves that have left us with an archive of the fauna of the period. When considering strategic choices in planning and undertaking benchmarking for digital submissions in the creative arts, the task is not only about finding a solution that is viable and has an immediate impact on the process and practice. It is also a question of institutions providing a process of archiving that can provide a legacy outside large research repositories. The primary issues are accessibility, social media platforms, IP, copyright, and cost. The question of digital submissions needs to be addressed primarily from the perspective of the consumer or client. Many VLE/EMA infrastructures are focused on efficiency for staff bodies and internal processes only. This chapter is a small step toward creating an accessible and sustainable benchmarking process or indeed system that has the student at the center.



Appendix : Social media platforms

The details in [Table 21.1](#) were accurate as of May 2022.

Table 21.1 The 11 most internationally used video-uploading sites, detailing the platform, cost to the student, features, and overview details.

Platform	Cost to student	Features	Overview
YouTube	Free to users	Download: Android/iOS Upload limits: 20GB/15 min (without verifying your account), 128GB/12 h (after verifying your account) Supported video formats: MOV, MPEG4, MP4, AVI, WMV, MPEGPS, FLV, 3GPP, WebM, DNxHR, ProRes, CineForm, HEVC (h265)	YouTube makes the best use of machine learning for indexing and compiling suggestions for users and has support for up to 8 K as well as HDR content that can be uploaded in any of the popular video formats. It means that there are many possibilities for creators to make money via YouTube. To be able to earn through pre-roll and mid-roll ads, which are facilitated through AdSense, creators must have at least 1000 subscribers, with a minimum of 4000 hours of viewership in total from the past year. These rules came into effect at the beginning of 2018. Besides that, creators with at least 50,000 subscribers can now

(Continued)

Table 21.1 (Continued)

Platform	Cost to student	Features	Overview
			offer exclusive content and other merchandise in exchange for a monthly subscription fee of \$4.99 from the viewers.
Twitch	Users can stream 15 min of video at one time for free.	Download: Andriod/iOS Upload limits: Maximum streaming bitrate of 3500 bits/s Supported video formats: MP4, MOV, AVI, and FLV file formats, AAC audio, h264 codec, up to 10 Mbps bitrate, and up to 1080p/60FPS	Twitch is an online video streaming service.
Vimeo	Premium plans and pricing: Vimeo Plus (\$84/year), Vimeo Pro (\$240/year), Vimeo Business (\$600/year), Vimeo Premium (\$900/year)	Download: Android/iOS Upload limits: Weekly upload limit of 500MB for Basic Free plan, 5GB for Vimeo Plus, and unlimited uploading with a 25GB limit per file for Vimeo Pro. Supported video formats: MOV, MPEG4, MP4, AVI, WMV, MPEGPS, FLV, 3GPP, WebM.	Allows creators to upload HD videos and has a maximum upload limit of 500MB/week for the Basic Free plan. The only downside to using Vimeo for video content creators is that most goodies are available for Vimeo Pro users as the Basic Free plan is quite limited. It supports uploads in multiple file format.

(Continued)

Table 21.1 (Continued)

Platform	Cost to student	Features	Overview
IGTV by Instagram	Free to users	Download: Android/iOS Upload limits: 10 min (650MB) for everyone; certain renowned creators get up to 60 min (3.6GB). Supported video formats: MP4	Integrated with Instagram, IGTV serves the class of users looking for short-form video content in portrait (vertical) format. This is targeted at smartphone users, and its easy scroll and tap gestures feed you a platter of easily consumable content. You can either use IGTV directly using its standalone app or from within the Instagram app.
TikTok	Free to users	Download: Android/iOS Upload limits: Up to 287.6MB (iOS) and 72MB (Android) in size. Video length max: 15 s. Up to 60 s for combined story videos	One of the highlights of TikTok is the rapidly growing community of creators who keep on producing fascinating videos that you may never get tired of watching. And with a large quantity of free music and sounds at your disposal, you also get the desired freedom to craft your clips to your heart's liking, not to mention, all the attractive filters, real-time effects, and a wide range of AR objects.

(Continued)

Table 21.1 (Continued)

Platform	Cost to student	Features	Overview
Facebook Watch	Free to users—no pricing or premium plans	Supported video formats: 3G2, 3GP, 3GPP, ASF, AVI, DAT, DIVX, DV, F4V, FLV, GIF, M2TS, M4V, MKV, MOD, MOV, MP4, MPE, MPEG, MPEG4, MPG, MTS, NSV, OGM, OGV, QT, TOD, TS, VOB, WMV. Upload limits: Maximum 240 min or 10GB, whichever is achieved first.	Facebook, the largest social media platform, is also the home of one of the most diverse catalogs of video content generated by both users themselves, brand pages, and creators. And to compete with offerings from YouTube, Facebook Watch comes with several notable features, including the ability to watch any video with friends. There is a dedicated platform called Facebook Creator Studio to help publish and moderate original video content besides managing subscriptions.
Dailymotion	Free to users	Download: Andriod/iOS Upload limits: 2GB of file size and 60 min of video length. Supported video formats: 0.3gp, .avi, .divx, m4v, .mkv, .mov, .mp4, .mpeg, .mpg, .ogg, .wmv, etc.	Dailymotion is another popular video-sharing site on the web. The site allows users to view, upload, and share videos through the network, with a file size limit of 2GB and a video length limit of 60 min per video

(Continued)

Table 21.1 (Continued)

Platform	Cost to student	Features	Overview
byte	Free to users	Download: Andriod/iOS Upload limits: 6 s	6-s video-sharing app byte This video-sharing app is the fully personalized feed curated by human editors.
LBRY	Free to users—no set payment	Download: Andriod/iOS Upload limits: No time limit	Videos are stored in smaller chunks over a decentralized network, and they cannot come under the umbrella of regional censorship. LBRY offers a convenient browsing experience that is similar to YouTube.
Metacafe	Free to users	Upload limits: 100MB file size	Each video can be uploaded only once, ensuring that there are no duplicates.
VEVO	Premium plans and pricing: \$20/year for an active VEVO channel.	Upload limits: Not publicized	Artists can set up their premium channel on its platform. VEVO is more of a distribution network that allows users to upload their content through Vydia media and get them distributed across VEVO and other networks.

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PART FIVE

Conclusions and the future of benchmarking

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Qualitative benchmarking and the future

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22.1 Introduction

Chapter Two summarized the many trends evident before COVID-19 struck and which were accelerated during the pandemic. As noted there and throughout this book, there were—and still are—many significant challenges to be embraced: the sorts of things that “keep leaders awake at night,” to use Sarah Mears’s words from Chapter Eleven. This final chapter aims to comment on the key themes identified throughout the book in terms of likely future developments and requirements.



22.2 Key themes

Reference was made throughout our work to a “new” kind of provision, though as Otmane Azeroual and Joachim Schöpfel stress in Chapter Seventeen, sometimes, in practice, it is more a case of novel applications of preexisting technologies and approaches. The emphasis during and since the pandemic has definitely been on digital—first and typically foremost—while recognizing and respecting the continuing need for a “third” physical, shared, space, and in the case of national-level provision (as at the British Library—Chapter Ten), there always will be a need for hard-copy storage and more. “Hybrid” approaches are likely to remain popular for some time to come.

Many contributors to this volume stressed that there was still a long way to go in terms of digital provision, whether in terms of comprehensiveness or global (as opposed to regional or sectoral) coverage. Digital divides remain as prevalent as ever across a whole range of provision and activity, including new areas such as micro-credentials (Chapter Twenty). Remote access is not yet easily achievable in many parts of the world, another continuing need for blended approaches.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an implicit consensus that harnessing technologies will be ever more important to future well-being—and equity and openness of access—at all levels. The environmental impact of digital will need to be a high priority in this context, though, as Liz Jolly (Chapter Ten) articulates, there are significant opportunities for the relevant sectors in terms of shared approaches, including in terms of developing carbon literacy as a matter of urgency.

The rhetoric of “normalization” and “the new normal” has yet to be fully turned into a present or likely future reality. In particular, the question of sustainability—economic, financial, environmental—remains to be fully answered, not least in terms of the real benefit of digital solutions, as discussed in many of the chapters in the second half of this book. Then there is the question of significant culture change, with further development still needed, sometimes in the face of continued resistance, as discussed, for example, in Chapters Twelve, Sixteen, and Seventeen. Much change has already happened, but will it “stick”; is it “fully anchored,” to use Caroline Williams’s terminology (Chapter Seven)?



22.3 Key attributes and approaches for the future

How should leaders leverage “benefits from the pandemic experience” (Caroline Williams, Chapter Seven) and “set the tone” (Sarah Mears, Chapter Eleven) for the future within and between their organizations and sectors? Chapter Seventeen, among others, stresses the many opportunities available and urges the challenges to be met positively and imaginatively, not least because, as Martin Hamilton argues in Chapter Twelve, the world will face more major crises in the future.

Many lessons have been learned in recent times, not least in terms of the context and environment in which activities take place. There has been a greater degree of collaboration within and beyond institutions and

across sectors which has much to offer if maintained for the longer term. It would be a pity not to draw on so much collective wisdom through collaborative partnerships in the future, “embracing openness,” as defined, and demonstrated, by Liz Jolly in Chapter Ten and Sarah Mears in Chapter Eleven. There is a long, honorable, and effective tradition of collaboration in the education, library, and information sectors, and there is no reason to believe that this will not continue, even though it is not always the easiest thing to achieve effectively.

Many more people have been empowered than ever before over the last 2 years (Martin Hamilton, Chapter Twelve). There are references throughout this book to the prevalence and significant benefit of ethical, professional values, the adherence to reflective practice, and the many skills employed, underpinned by a “shared, living concept of goodness,” as described in Chapter Seventeen, and an openness and trust inside and beyond institutions. All these attributes have clearly been put to good use and with obvious impact already.

It is evident from the experiences of the contributors to this book and the participants in the international benchmarking exercise that those who want to be integral to future positive development will need the “forward-thinking mindset” described and exemplified by Gabrielle Wong and Diana Chan in Chapter Nine and the resilience demonstrated by Ellen Tise and Henriëtte Swart’s institution in Chapter Six; all this coupled with the flexibility and agility discussed especially in the case studies, such as those central to Chapters Seven and Eight and especially as summarized in Chapter Thirteen.

Major, rapid disruption requires rapid and effective responses that, at least initially, may seem to fly in the face of longer-term strategy application, though robust, ongoing systemic planning and development processes (obviously and impressively evident in this book through “gained experience,” often over many years) are always likely to place institutions in the best possible position for the future, whether that be the next six months or the next 6 years.



22.4 Strategic choices and the new qualitative benchmarking

What, then, are the best, most effective, longer-term responses to the environment and outlook described in Chapter Two and elsewhere in

this book likely to be? That question is not primarily the one for us to answer, other than to draw attention to, and recommend the use of, qualitative benchmarking as a significant resource and a valuable way of determining and creating the future.

As noted in Chapter One, qualitative benchmarking is but one tool for leaders and managers to use in the development of post-COVID strategy. But, given the need to focus on strategic improvement, the results, and outcomes of the international exercise described in Part Two, along with the experiences described in many of the surrounding chapters, it is argued that qualitative benchmarking will be a vital approach to support the necessary holistic, integrative thinking (as recommended by contributors to this book) in the future. The report of the exercise (Part Two) states that:

As well as delivering learning and tangible outcomes, the qualitative approach adopted allowed for the exploration of service improvement and strategic development opportunities. Our approach enabled reflection and sense-making through dialogue, and the sharing of the good and not so good practice. As strategies, approaches and new ways of working were shared, people were inspired and felt supported by others. The outcomes are collective wisdom, shared strategies, and practical examples on how best to respond to our turbulent environment.

Qualitative benchmarking is a mature technique with a long and successful track record. As has been demonstrated in Part Two and elsewhere in this book, it is also capable of being refreshed and adapted for present-day circumstances. Later chapters demonstrate this: new applications of the technique are proposed in specific contexts and situations where it is believed the approach will be of value, including in a variety of fast-moving environments, as noted below:

The benchmarking exercise operated [as] an international collaborative activity through which institutions can use benchmarking methodologies to examine their own performance in a comparative context. Its outputs are for application in practice, for reflection and self-assessment, and to generate ideas. They are relevant beyond the benchmarking participant group, although we acknowledge that they are not applicable in every context and that some of the contributions without a deeper contextual knowledge of the participant institution will lose some meaning (Part Two).

The ability to see, compare, and contrast different perspectives to “provide an exciting and rich opportunity to connect and learn with and

from others” (Part Two) was—and is—deemed to be especially beneficial. To quote from the report:

Participants carried out a self-analysis, participated in the workshop, heard presentations by the exponents of good practice, considered the key issues, and agreed on good practice in the processes under review . . . the findings generated include a summary report of the current situation of our ten participants, a synthesised environmental analysis, discussion topics and the key points of the discussion.

There is much to be inspired by and to learn from and many examples of good—and indeed best—practice, as evinced by the benchmarking statements which were themselves drawn from the institutions’ own work.

The role of the strategic plan in digital transformation of any department or service area.

A strategic plan is the de facto management tool that sets at a high level the objectives (s) to be aimed at by a unit, school, or service area and should coherently speak to the corporate strategy through meaningful cascading and linking of objectives. It is the document that encapsulates success measures and targets, while laying out a plan of action complete with tactics and required resources.

It is within a department’s or service area’s strategic plan that the digital transformation agenda should feature, capturing how people, process, and technology will be used to achieve the set objectives.

However, this may initially present an egg and chicken scenario depending on how you look at it. Incorporating tactics for achieving digital transformation within a unit/department strategy does require a level of knowledge on digital innovation and/or technology. This may therefore not happen for most leaders given they lack a background in technology or digital innovations or transformation.

Nevertheless, we can use this strategic plan mold, as a set of mental lenses through which to consider the various tactics that can be employed as part of the action plan.

How do you inculcate, adopt, and sustain an institution-wide digital culture?

One of the ways is for those in leadership positions to embrace a digital mindset that would then permeate downward to those they lead directly or indirectly, or horizontally influence peers in leadership. The desired goal is to within a relatively short period attain a critical mass of employees especially in

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supervisory positions, who are sold to the digital idea and are willing to adopt digital practices in their day-to-day work and dealings.

The next logical question is how do you obtain or convert this initial cohort of leaders, to then catalyze sustainable change toward an institutionally pervasive digital mindset and set of practices?

In appreciation that you first and foremost must catch their attention, one of the best ways to change people's attitudes is by appealing to their hearts and minds. We must evoke in them a desire to want to change. Some ways that have been proven to work include,

1. Storytelling,
2. Fear of missing out (FOMO),
3. Seeing is believing,
4. Reverse mentoring.

Is the adoption of digital in an organization strictly a top-down process? The answer is no. There are instances where an organization has had pockets of digital innovation in the form of a functional unit or department that has taken the lead to adopt digital practices and approaches to working and better-achieving results. Irrespective of whether this occurs by chance or by design, there certainly lies an opportunity for other units and departments in an organization to tap into the learnings and go through the motions to adapting them into their context. This as a tactic will be expounded in the following paragraphs.

Other ways to promote and achieve digital leadership include,

1. Governance and leadership committees led by someone who is knowledgeable on digital matters,
2. Hiring a senior digital transformation executive or consultant,
3. Innovation hub/unit within the organization,
4. Department or service area adopting bimodal work.

Martin Njogu

Digital Business Leader, Kenya



22.5 Conclusion

In sharing current practice, we anticipated we would find what is good and great, and ... hoped that we would go further and generate new thinking which could take ... development further. And we did ...

It was an uplifting and cathartic experience. What we experienced and report here is a real-world optimistic expression of the contribution of library and information services to education. The professional ethos and service ethic implicit in contributions is affirming and inspiring. To know that difficult experiences are shared by peers—and that however differently we feel, think, and respond to it—in these challenging times [we are] not alone (Part Two).

The international benchmarking exercise was carried out at a particular point in time—arguably at a “watershed” moment. The work is ongoing, and the outputs are now being turned into objectives, targets, and much more both by the ten participants and the other contributors to this book. Further questions have been posed and will be answered in the future. It will be good to return to qualitative benchmarking exercises in the coming years, in the knowledge that we have a robust, effective, broadly applicable, and flexible tool at our disposal, come what may.

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Benchmarking Library, Information, and Education Services: New Strategic Choices in Challenging Times

Because of the current global turbulence, individuals, leaders, and whole institutions are keen to learn more about what is happening and how they can develop sustainable solutions to both immediate challenges and longer term scenarios. People are looking for inspiration. This book provides it through the theme of Qualitative Benchmarking (QB), a practical tool for sharing expertise and enhancing the effectiveness of organizations, services, or teams. The centerpiece of the book is a description, report, and analysis of a major international QB exercise, culminating in a set of good practice statements. A series of surrounding chapters provide international sector-leading insights through the application of QB in different contexts. These include an analysis of third-sector organizations, e-libraries, marketing information services, vocational training in higher education, the creative arts, and the role of partnerships in organizational openness.

This book will help leaders and managers to make good strategic choices for the future. It will provide a practical tool for sharing expertise and enhancing the effectiveness of library and information organizations, services, or teams through an international base of experience and innovation, learning from others what works and does not work, especially in the digital world in which we operate. It will help to provide the foundations of ongoing research in the development of collections and services. It contributes to practical outputs of general benefit to the sector, including customers, clients, or stakeholders, offering ideas for how to identify comparative strengths and weaknesses and to improve or enhance present practices, regardless of how well institutions currently perform: even the best organizations can still find areas in which to improve.

The benefits of the QB methodology are applicable to individual institutions and across broader partnerships or consortia within the public sector, including beyond libraries and educational institutions. The key benefits are summation and understanding of institutional responses, creation of sustainable long-term strategies, identification of key practical approaches to future provision, information on current and future good practice, collective ways of learning lessons for forward planning, a framework for the evaluation of systems and services, and improved effectiveness through shared development.

Key Features and Benefits:

- Qualitative Benchmarking – what is it?
- The opportunity to understand the experiences of others and to compare your own experience; to learn and to adapt your own practice
- What does this experience mean and how does it help you to re-think and question your own and your organization's professional identity, value, and purpose?
- What is the future of library, education, and public services more broadly, whether in a physical or a digital space

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