

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

A Strategy For Library and Information Resources

Introduction

An Information Strategy is conventionally the statement of a set of inclusive principles defining an institution's approach to information in all its forms, and to the processes by which information is acquired, manipulated and stored. This document does not attempt such a wide-ranging approach, but focuses in particular on the library and IT resources that are crucial to the mission of the central University of London.

Both those who fund our central resources – the HEFCE and the Colleges of the federal University - and those who make use of them – members of the academic staff and students of the University of London in the widest sense, but also researchers from other HEIs in London and nationwide, require assurance that the remarkable library and electronic resources at the centre of the University are being developed and made available in a way which is cost-effective, efficient and intellectually coherent. The outcome should be the consolidation and enhancement of those resources to the benefit of the entire research community, nationally and internationally.

One key aspect of this outcome is the convergence between the Senate House Library and the libraries of the research Institutes that form the School of Advanced Study, creating the University of London Research Library Services (ULRLS). This convergence has been under discussion for about a decade, and is finally being enacted according to broad principles approved by the University Council, after a two-stage process of consultation with the Colleges of the federal University and other stakeholders. The views of all those consulted have been taken into account in elaborating this strategy document, and it is hoped that as the strategy is implemented, it will both intermesh with and support the library and IT strategies of the Colleges of the federal University, and position the ULRLS to play its part in future collaborative developments with research libraries in London and on the national scene.

Meanwhile, the broadly supportive consensus observed in the two consultation exercises of 2003 and 2004 has enabled the first important steps towards implementation to be taken. At the level of formal structures, an Information Strategy Board (ISB) has been established to oversee both the University of London Computer Centre (ULCC) and the Library activities; it has strong external representation, and reports to the University Council; key personnel are now in place: a Pro-Vice-Chancellor charged with the task of

overseeing all activities related to library and IT resources under the direction of the ISB, and two new Directors, of ULRLS and of ULCC.

The Strategy for Library and Information Resources

The central information resources of the University of London exist to provide essential support to academic activities across the federal University, and through their scope and depth also to provide distinctive support to research and infrastructure within the higher education community nationally. In so doing they contribute not only to the University's local needs for academic support, but also to its maintenance of academic leadership and excellence on an international stage.

These resources – in particular the Senate House Library (SHL), the seven Institute Libraries and the ULCC, but also the Institutes of the School of Advanced Study and their research resources, human, electronic and bibliographic – represent a major asset for the University as a whole and for the wider academic community. It is in everyone's interest that they be managed, nurtured and developed in the most cost-effective manner; at the same time it is also essential both that those aspects of uniqueness and excellence that characterise and add value to individual institutions within the gathered resource should be fostered and maintained, and that the total resource be made available to as wide a spectrum of members of the University as possible, and to other scholars nationally and internationally.

The strategic objective is to bring these resources together in an integrated organisational structure which will optimise their management and use, and will

- create at the heart of the University of London a clearly delineated centre of excellence in support of advanced learning and research at all levels in the humanities and social sciences, responsive to the needs of the federal University, but also serving the wider academic community;
- maximise the interconnection between the human, library and research resources of the Institutes, the SHL and the ULCC, thereby giving this centre exceptional strength, and making it available for the University as a whole and as a national resource;
- enhance the University's reputation through the development of outstanding competence in managing the technologies to support these endeavours;

- exploit the expertise and other human and technological resources of ULCC creatively and effectively for the benefit of the University at large.

Progress to date

The first virtual step towards the realisation of the intellectual aspects of these objectives has already been taken: a single integrated web-accessible catalogue has been created, making it possible to search the entire collection of some 3.3 million volumes in a single operation.

The physical conditions necessary for the next, and decisive, step will be provided by the relocation in 2005-2006 of three Institutes and their libraries (the Institutes of Commonwealth and Germanic & Romance Studies and the Institute for the Study of the Americas), together with ULCC, in the Senate House/ Stewart House complex.

A further important step has been marked by the acceptance of the Heads of Colleges of a new model for College subscriptions to the central library services to take effect in 2005-06. The essence of this is to replace the banding mechanism which has operated during the last decade with a different pattern of subscription that does not at present increase the total financial support provided by the Colleges for the SHL, but allows access to the Library resources on an equal footing to all members of the University of London, and maintains existing borrowing rights. This model will be tested over the first year of its operation, and the patterns of actual usage will be closely monitored; in the longer run this should make it possible to devise, in consultation with all stakeholders, subscription arrangements that will underpin a sustainable financial model for the SHL and the ULRLS as a whole.

The impact of these three steps will be to provide a real improvement in the accessibility of the resources and the effectiveness of the services, while also offering enhanced value for money for stakeholders.

1. ULRLS

Current situation – description and analysis

All the constituent parts of the University – Colleges, Institutes, and other programmes or activities - have a common interest in creating a properly resourced environment in which research of the highest quality can flourish.

Such an environment is necessary if the University is to maintain standards, reputation, and income, and to continue to recruit and to retain staff and students. Standing alongside the School of Advanced Study, the ULRs will provide essential support for advanced learning and research at all levels in the humanities and social sciences, and will work to complement resources held elsewhere.

The libraries comprising the ULRs are widely recognised as holding research collections of international standing. Promotion of research support through digital initiatives is being pursued actively within the system, but studies have shown that access to print collections remains essential for scholars in non-scientific disciplines.

The consolidation and development of the national and international role of the ULRs will contribute to the best use of the overall national resource, and will help to sustain the University of London's reputation as a pre-eminent centre for academic study and research. The rationale for change rests upon

- the benefits to be derived from bringing together a number of complementary collections, to create a stronger and more coherent whole
- the ability to use resources (money, space and staff) across that whole in a more planned, co-ordinated and effective way
- simplified access for users
- improved liaison and co-ordination with other resource providers within and beyond the federal University
- the increased confidence in the system which all stakeholders should feel as these benefits are delivered.

Convergence of the libraries entails a new and structurally integrated approach. An entirely new entity will be created, with new management, organisational and financial structures: this is essential in order to achieve an effective framework in which to make the best use of resources, and to provide a positive stimulus for continued development. But within this framework, the objective is to guarantee the continuing specialist academic input to the building of collections, and to enhance contacts between librarians and the academic communities that they serve, in and beyond the University. This should not only engender new academic initiatives, but will also create a richer and more diverse environment for the careers of library staff at the centre of the University.

At the same time, it is recognised that the Institute and SHL identities ("brands") are important, and must be protected: they create instinctive loyalties, and are a significant factor in raising income and encouraging

valuable donations. The relocation of the three Institute libraries will give rise to considerable reorganization of collections in Senate House. The issues relating to the identity, juxtaposition and permeability of collections will be addressed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the outcome is advantageous to all relevant parties.

Vision

The essential qualities of the existing library system are

- The depth and richness of the collections and other resources
- Specialist-driven collection development
- A good proportion of collections on open access
- An environment conducive to study
- Borrowing arrangements where appropriate
- Expert staff

The ULRLS will

- sustain collections and services to support humanities and social science research at the highest level
- enhance the teaching and learning resources across the University to enrich the whole, and to stimulate a culture of resource discovery for students at all levels
- be a centre for professional expertise and training in research-led information resources
- seek to maximise the opportunities of new technology in developing digital collections and services
- work with other providers, both within and outside the University, in a collaborative way to maximise benefits to the user community
- develop the role it plays within the wider national and international networks of research provision
- seek to make its collections accessible to a wider public in the interests of sharing cultural heritage for the good of all
- be a unique and potent marketing tool for the University as a whole, and for all its constituent parts.

The way forward

The aim is to maintain and wherever possible to enhance these qualities in a user-led way. In order to achieve this we need to demonstrate to our funding community that efficiency, effectiveness, and access are increased; to our user

community that what we offer them is improved, and that the qualities that matter to them are maintained; and to our Library staff that change has taken place for the better, and that the system is one in which they can enjoy satisfying careers. As the strategy moves towards implementation over the next two years we are confident that these aims will be achieved.

Access: enhancing access to the resources to support research and research-led teaching, while exercising appropriate care over the way in which specialist collections are used, is a key objective. Levels of access enjoyed by different sectors of the libraries' users will be maintained and the physical reconfiguration of summer 2006 will significantly improve and simplify current arrangements. The new subscription model will bring universal access for all members of the University of London to most ULRLS libraries with effect from September 2005.

Borrowing: current arrangements will be maintained and where possible extended, without detriment to the reference-only status of research collections.

Collection development: a coherent collection-building policy involving all the libraries will be developed, so as to continue and where appropriate improve the pattern of complementarity between collections in the SHL, Institutes and College Libraries which has been built up over a number of years. The new organisation will make it possible to reduce unnecessary duplication, at whatever level, while protecting the ability to develop research collections of unique value, which is characteristic of both the Institutes and the SHL. The aim will be full and fruitful collaboration with the Colleges of the University, with the British Library and the wider national community of research libraries.

Consultation: appropriate mechanisms for user-consultation, beyond those already provided by the School, the Information Strategy Board and the University Libraries Committee, will be designed. They will enable Colleges and other stakeholders within the University to be represented as they see fit on bodies designed to ensure that the ULRLS responds to their needs.

Finance: the current funding arrangements for the School and the ULRLS are under intense pressure. Future solutions depend upon a number of factors, including

- the outcome of the continuing process of corporate reorganisation to which the central University is committed;

- the outcome of the HEFCE review of the School of Advanced Study, which is expected to address questions of library funding, and to be published in the summer of 2005.

Now that the principle of universal access for members of the University of London has been accepted, the way is open to a renegotiation of the funding mechanisms of the ULRSL. This will involve discussions with the Colleges of the federal University and other stakeholders, but must first entail a transparent analysis of the costs of the whole library system, as distinct from those of the SHL which are already in the public domain. As a first step in this direction, a system-wide ULRSL budget will be created w.e.f. 1 August 2005 by transferring from Institutes to the ULRSL a quantum of resource corresponding to the cost of their library activities. This, and the outcome of the reviews mentioned above, will open the way to new solutions which will be the subject of detailed reports in the future.

2. ULCC

Current situation – description and analysis

Given the importance of the transmission of electronic information and of web-based communication, and the growing need for effective long-term preservation of digital media, it is essential for the University to have a robust central technical infrastructure, backed by the appropriate expertise, which can both support and help to initiate work which is relevant to the whole academic community. ULCC enables the University to satisfy that need.

Since its establishment in the 1960s, ULCC has had a largely external function independent of the University. Its expertise and experience in networking, web developments and the preservation/presentation of digital objects, for which it has a national and in some instances global reputation have been under-utilised by the University at large, and by academic activities in particular.

This changed with the transfer of responsibility for management of the University data network to ULCC at the beginning of 2003. This has led to dramatic improvements in service quality to the central University: ULCC's advice is now sought by activities and departments of the University on a regular basis on a range of IT issues, such as Web design and site construction, the preservation of digital objects, and the design and operation of data networks and services.

73% of the income of ULCC comes from its services for external customers. The most significant of these in terms of revenue and activity are

- UKERNA, for whom ULCC provides a management service for the JANET network;
- the National Archive, for whom ULCC develop and operate the National Digital Archive of Datasets;
- JISC, for whom ULCC manages the London Regional Support Centre, serving all FE and HE institutes approximately within the M25;
- the British Film Institute, for whom ULCC operates an archival Web site;

In addition there is a range of smaller clients to whom the following services are delivered:

- web site development and hosting
- web site content management consultancy
- infrastructure management
- network services
- e-learning consultancy
- equipment hosting

Vision

Within the central University, and, where appropriate, with the Colleges of the federal University, the ULCC will

- develop and progress cost-effective IT and IS Strategies to improve the effectiveness of the Central University's academic and administrative processes
- aim to deliver economies of scale arising from the greater awareness and use of its services across the University
- provide an effective, value for money service to support academic and administrative activities
- provide advice to colleagues charged with developing and maintaining applications software on how best to use the technology available
- assist where relevant academic colleagues to maximise the benefits of information technology in the development of research projects.
- pro-actively seek to improve service levels whilst reducing costs.

For the federal University, other educational institutions and the wider public sector, ULCC will

- build on its success in the management of JANET for UKERNA to offer similar services where appropriate
- assist in the promotion of relevant and cost effective e-learning and web content management capabilities
- work with the London Metropolitan Network wherever possible to develop services that are mutually advantageous to all partners.
- aim to share its expertise with relevant institutions in the field of digital preservation beyond the current contract with The National Archives
- build on its success in the management of the central University's infrastructure to offer similar services where appropriate
- provide high quality computer room space in Stewart House to meet the varying needs (ranging from simple provision of space to fully managed service provision) of the H.E./F.E. institutions in the Greater London area.
- maintain its ISO9001 status.

Nationally, ULCC will also seek to take a more active approach to UCISA and JISC.