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# The British Library's Annual Report 2009/10: proof of an essential investment in the UK knowledge economy



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In the current economic climate the pressure is on for libraries to show their worth, and as editor of the British Library's Annual Report 2009/10 I knew that this report could effectively show how this international research library makes a vital contribution to the UK's knowledge economy.

In addition to the report and accounts, each year the library's core achievements are presented within an overarching theme, and it was most pertinent that for 2009/10, the report's theme should be 'The value of knowledge'. Users ranging from scientific researchers to budding entrepreneurs and from young learners to higher education institutions had benefited from the services offered by the British Library over the previous 12 months, and their stories in the Annual Report showed how the library delivers an impressive return on investment.

We were particularly keen to show our value to a variety of sectors, and highlighted this with examples of our achievements from the year. For instance, we know that our Business & Intellectual Property Centre delivers £11 million of value to the UK small business sector<sup>1</sup>, and we cited our user Anthony Yau as a case study. Anthony has used the centre to turn his idea into a winner: his award-winning design turns street posts into cycle stands, and he used the centre's advice and services to launch his successful Cyclehoop Ltd

firm. Since using the centre the company has grown from working with three councils to over twenty.

The digital sector is fast moving, and investing in the nation's digital memory is a critical public service of immense value that only the British Library can offer. In her review of the year, the library's Chief Executive, Dame Lynne Brindley, said, 'No one can fail to notice that the development of digital activity in every area of our lives is driving ever faster innovation. Our users increasingly expect digital services and digital engagement with content of all kinds. We recently launched the UK Web Archive – a growing collection of thousands of websites, collected by permission of their owners. We have supported the Government this year in its work towards producing regulations which would enable us to collect and preserve for ever the UK's digital heritage.'

Ambitious digitisation activity was a key theme. July 2009 saw the culmination of a four-year collaboration between the British Library, the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg, the University of Leipzig and St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, in completing the virtual re-unification of the Codex Sinaiticus, the earliest surviving Christian Bible. All 800 surviving pages of the 1600-year-old manuscript were made accessible online to huge acclaim, evidenced by some 100m hits in the first two days of its appearance.

The library passed a major milestone in November 2009 as the 500 000th item was added to the digital library system. The long-term storage facility now contains e-journals, digital sound recordings, born-digital material received through voluntary arrangements with publishers, more than 65 000 digitised nineteenth-century books and more than three million pages from historic newspapers.

The library underpins the UK knowledge economy through its world-class collections and its unique role in increasing these through legal deposit. The report offered the chance to highlight some of these important acquisitions, including:

- the archive of eminent writer, thinker and critic John Berger
- Sir John Narbrough's Naval Journal – a rare manuscript containing the account of the explorer's voyage to South America from 1669 to 1671
- an archive of 821 digital audio recordings acquired from shellac discs held in the Berliner Lautarchiv at the Humboldt Univer-

sity – including the oldest known collection of English dialect sound recordings, recorded at German prisoner-of-war camps between 1916 and 1918

- the archive of writer and artist Mervyn Peake – best known as the author of the Gormenghast trilogy
- in addition to these new acquisitions, the manuscript memoir of Soviet spy Anthony Blunt was made available to readers for the first time, after the expiry of restrictions on public access stipulated by the donor 25 years ago.

The report allowed us to highlight the value of our scientific information resources in particular; more than 115 000 academic, commercial and public sector researchers are registered to use them, and we supply all the top 20 000 journals to the science, technology and medicine sector. Individual users include Peter Cartwright, a researcher and author who specialises in probiotics, providing evidence-based health advice to patients in plain English. Researching his latest book, *Probiotic allies*, Peter drew upon a wide range of biomedical journals, books and supporting texts held in the library's science collections. Describing the library as 'a great place to work' he said: 'As an independent researcher, the British Library is essential in providing access to an extraordinary breadth and depth of good quality information.'

Our corporate customers find the British Library just as vital: more than 80% of the highest-spending UK research and development companies use the library's services. In the pharmaceutical industry alone, the British Library supplies documents to the top fifty companies, generating £1.3 million in income.

Jill Maddox, of Pfizer's European Medical Information Leadership Team, said: 'If we cannot fulfil the request in-house we are confident that using British Library services we shall be able to do so within one to two working days, 95% of the time. We had an urgent situation recently where a physician was requesting information to assist him in remedying a serious complication in a patient. He needed the information within two hours. Using the library's Urgent Action Service, we managed to get the necessary information to the physician in under an hour. In cases such as this, the library's rapid response could be life-saving.'

The British Library's sources and expertise are a major asset for the creative industries, including

film, television and publishing, which contribute £60 billion to the UK economy. Among the highlights in 2009/10 was the BBC documentary series '*Empires of the seas: how the Navy forged the modern world*', each episode attracting over two million viewers. The series made extensive use of rarely seen manuscripts, filming key items in the library, with footage included in the online Annual Report. The historian and presenter, Dan Snow, confirmed that 'From conception through to execution, the British Library was our workplace, inspiration and location. It is a place to treasure.'

The report enabled us to prove our worth in the culture sector. Spectacular highlights from the library's collections were showcased in a series of highly acclaimed exhibitions. '*Henry VIII: man and monarch*' attracted nearly 68 000 visitors: guest-curated by historian and broadcaster Dr David Starkey, the exhibition marked the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne. It was the first paid-entry exhibition at the British Library for seven years. Among the 250 exhibits were important items including correspondence, key official documents, maps and books from the King's own library.

'*Points of view: capturing the 19th century in photographs*' was the library's first major photographic exhibition and examined the development and influence of photography from its invention in 1839 up to the growth of a popular amateur market in the early twentieth century. Rarely displayed items from the collection showed how photography had assumed a critical role as the primary means of visual expression. Of course 'value' is applicable as financial savings, and we were able to show how the British Library, in a shared service, will save the higher education sector £37 million over five years. In one of the year's key developments, it was announced that membership of a pioneering shared-service model for preserving and distributing research journals had doubled. Fourteen additional higher education institutions joined the UK Research Reserve (UKRR), bringing the total to 29 when membership closed at the end of 2009.

Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and managed by a partnership between the British Library and the higher education sector, the UKRR safeguards the long-term future of printed research journals. The library stores low-use journals and makes them available through state-of-the-art ordering and delivery systems at our Boston Spa site, ensuring quick and easy access for researchers, who can

choose select journal articles in printed or electronic format. By eliminating duplication of their research journal collections, higher education libraries can reclaim journal storage space and use it for other priorities. By 2013, it is estimated that they will have saved 100 km of shelf space, contributing to savings of £37 million.

‘Value’ can also be interpreted in the complimentary services that we offer, and so we stressed that with more than 1.2m people visiting our learning website each year, they are gaining access to free resources worth more than £1 million. This year saw the launch of an award-winning online interactive timeline for students and teachers, with Sir Andrew Motion endorsing the learning website as ‘a wonderfully rich and wide-ranging resource’, containing ‘an extraordinary wealth of information providing ready access to many of the library’s treasures.’

Naturally, the actual design, production and distribution of this annual report needed to show excellent value for money; produced in both print and online format, as required by the Government and our key stakeholders, we carefully investigated all aspects of how we presented and distributed the it. Keeping the eye-catching element from previous years, including videos where appropriate, we managed to produce the report with a budget 40% lower than the year before. It certainly caught people’s attention, being short-listed for the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants 2010 annual awards.

In the report, Dame Lynne Brindley concluded her review of 2009/10: ‘As we end the year we move into a much tougher financial climate for public sector institutions. We have over many years been vigilant about efficiency savings, about continuous improvement in our processes and ensuring value for money all round. We do not underestimate the challenges ahead to continue to deliver high quality services despite budget cuts, but we remain committed to innovation in the way we approach these challenges as we seek to ensure that the British Library remains world-class for the long-term.’

#### **NOTE**

- 1 Net present value of £11.3 million according to an independent report conducted for the London Development Agency and the British Library, published in February 2010.