

## Spotlight on research support 2017–18

The development of open access (OA) in the United Kingdom (UK) following the Finch Report and the increased emphasis on research dissemination and impact within higher education (HE) over recent years has deepened and widened the role of libraries in research support. This spotlight on the 2017–18 SCONUL Annual Statistics investigates the role of the library in a range of research support activities in the UK.

For the first time this year, and for one year only, new questions were included in the SCONUL survey in order to capture a snapshot of the current situation and to explore any significant differences between the sectors. This report examines both traditional and new roles that libraries are undertaking to support the research agenda of HE institutions, including OA and the management of article processing charges (APCs), responsibility for research data management (RDM), overall library staff time spent on research support in general, as well as time spent on information literacy training that focuses on research support. In addition, it will examine the provision of academic journals, explore the level of holdings in institutional repositories and the shifting reliance on inter-library loans.

### Key findings

- There are increasing pressures on library staff time, with Research Libraries UK (RLUK) members and the other 'old' (pre-1992) universities more likely to spend more than 5% of overall staff time supporting research compared to the 'new' (post-1992) universities.
- The library was responsible for the institutional repository at almost three-quarters of responding UK SCONUL members in 2017–18, and half of responding UK SCONUL members indicated that the library had at least partial responsibility for RDM.
- Journal provision continues to grow and as a result the library's reliance on inter-library loans appears to be lessening, with the average<sup>1</sup> number of applications satisfied currently 56% lower than ten years ago for UK SCONUL members overall.

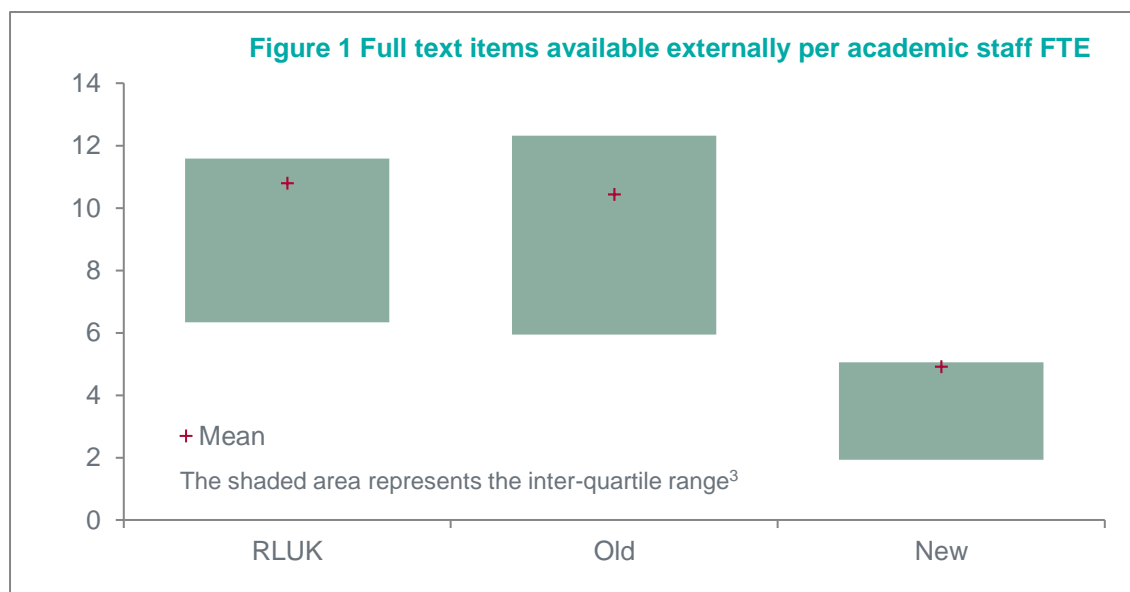
### Open access

The move to OA publishing, backed by research council mandates, has shifted the institutional repository from 'nice to have' to a compulsory element of provision to enable academics to provide free access to publicly funded research.

Whilst there are various approaches adopted by the UK HE sector in terms of repository management, with different departments assuming responsibility depending on institutional organisational structures, the library is the preferred option in the majority of cases. SCONUL first collected data on institutional repositories in 2007–08, when 71 UK

respondents (50%) indicated that the library was responsible for the repository at their institution. By 2009–10, this had risen to 90 UK respondents (61%) indicating that the library was responsible for the institutional repository, with an average of 1.2 full text items available externally per academic staff full-time equivalent (FTE).

The changes to the SCONUL survey in 2013–14 meant that data was no longer collected on whether the library was responsible for the institutional repository. However, data continues to be collected on the number of full text items available externally in repositories, with the information required only from those institutions where responsibility for the repository sits with the library. In the most recent year, 117 UK institutions (78% of respondents) reported an average of 9.0 full text items in the repository, available externally, per academic staff FTE. There were statistically significant differences between the averages of both the ‘old’ universities and RLUK members compared to the average of the ‘new’ universities in 2017–18; this is highlighted by Figure 1<sup>1</sup>. The differences between the sectors are perhaps not surprising given the research-intensive nature of pre-1992 universities.

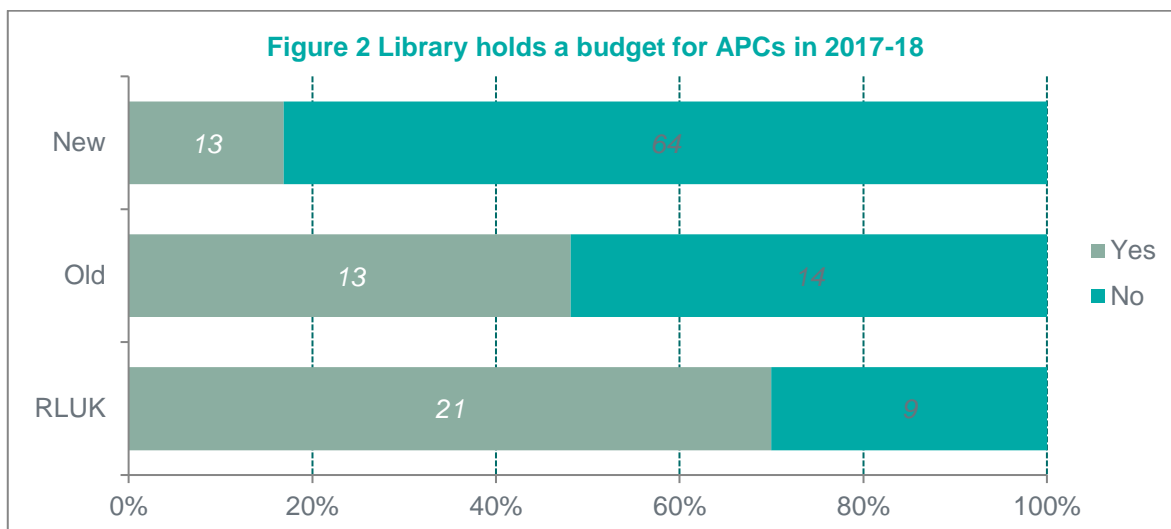


Recent years have also witnessed the introduction of APCs, whereby the author, the author’s institution or the research funder pays to ensure that an article is available through OA. This trend may be linked to research funders requiring that their funded research be made freely available. The 2013–14 changes to the SCONUL return saw the inclusion of APCs for the first time, with 31 UK respondents (21%) indicating that the library budget included an allocation for APCs. Since then, there have been some changes to the format of the data collected; however, in 2017–18, 49 UK respondents (33%) indicated that the library held the budget for the purchase of APCs – ranging from £2,700 to almost £4,000,000. Figure 2 illustrates that there are statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the sectors in 2017–18, with both the ‘old’ universities and RLUK members more likely to

<sup>1</sup> The number of HE colleges has reduced over recent years as institutions have gained university status, and so they are not included in any charts where there were fewer than five respondents in any of the relevant years.

<sup>2</sup> The interquartile range illustrates the area where the middle 50% of responding institutions are positioned.

indicate that the library holds a budget for APCs than the 'new' universities.



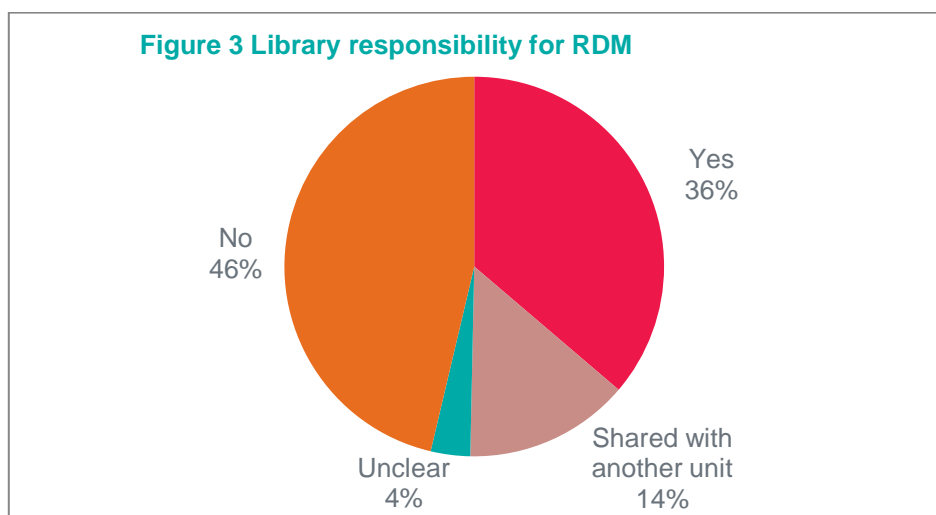
Regardless of whether the library holds the budget for APCs, there is often related administration due to the impact on e-resource subscriptions, which require library staff to develop expertise in this area, for example, to ensure that their institution avoids so-called 'double dipping'. Further complexity in this area is on the horizon with Plan S (<https://www.coalition-s.org/>), which advocates that publicly funded research should be made available immediately through OA. UK funders such as Wellcome and United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) are aligning their policies with Plan S. The move to a fully OA world may have substantial consequences for the current publishing market, potentially pushing costs from the user end (e.g. journal subscriptions as they currently exist) to author pays, and requiring library staff to disentangle the impact on their subscriptions administration. The SCONUL Statistics Working Group will be monitoring the situation carefully in terms of understanding the impact on the sector and the data needed for planning purposes.

### Research data management

The changing scholarly communication landscape over the last twenty years, largely as a result of the growth of e-resources, has been well documented; however, more recent years have witnessed a growing call for transparency and OA to all scholarly outputs, including research data. As a result, UK HE institutions are facing new challenges, and are confronted with the task of assigning responsibility for these emerging areas to new or existing departments within their organisation.

Owing to the differing characteristics of UK HE institutions, there is currently no standard organisational structure or process for RDM, with some institutions choosing to allocate responsibility to the research office, the library, or a combination of departments, whilst others use another department.

Figure 3 shows that, out of 149 UK respondents in 2017–18, 50% have indicated that they are responsible for supporting RDM to some extent, with 36% indicating that the library was wholly responsible for RDM at their institution. Out of the 21 UK respondents indicating that the library shared responsibility with at least one other department, fifteen indicated that they shared at least partial responsibility with the research office (or its equivalent) and five respondents indicated that they shared responsibility with IT services. It is important to note that in those cases where the library has not assumed responsibility for RDM, this does not necessarily mean that it has no involvement in the process.



Jisc have developed the open research hub (<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/open-research-hub>), which is a fully managed and interoperable research system designed for managing, preserving and sharing institutional digital research data. It is not clear at the moment how many institutions will sign up for this service, nor the role the library will play. RDM may potentially create significant new demand for library-related skills within UK HE. RDM is an area that will continue to evolve over the next few years and it will be interesting to see how the extent of the library’s involvement changes over time.

### Staff time on research support

The emergence of OA, the management of APCs and the curation of research data are all indicative of the range of new challenges faced by library staff in UK HE over the last ten to twenty years. However, whilst undergoing these changes, overall library staff FTEs have dropped by 10% between 2007–08 and 2017–18, while both student and academic staff FTEs have increased over the same time period (by more than 10% and 20% respectively). As a result, there is growing pressure on staff time, coupled with an increasing focus on research throughout the UK HE sector.

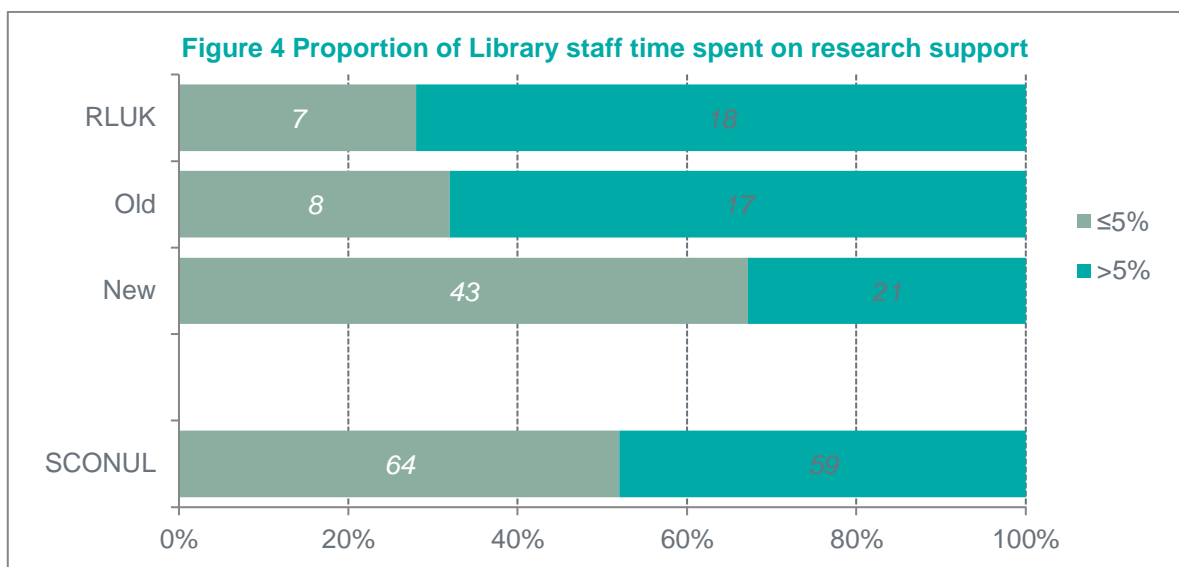


Figure 4<sup>3</sup> shows the average proportion of library staff time spent on research support in 2017–18, and highlights that, perhaps not surprisingly, the ‘new’ universities are significantly less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) to spend more than 5% of library staff time on research support than either RLUK members or the ‘old’ universities.

There are also significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the average of the ‘new’ universities compared to the averages of both RLUK members and the ‘old’ universities when we consider the proportion of staff time spent providing information literacy training that focuses on research support. In 2017–18 the average proportion of staff literacy training hours spent focusing on support for research was 11.0% for the ‘new’ universities compared to averages of 18% for the ‘old’ universities and 22% for RLUK members; the average for SCONUL members overall was 15%.

### Library resources

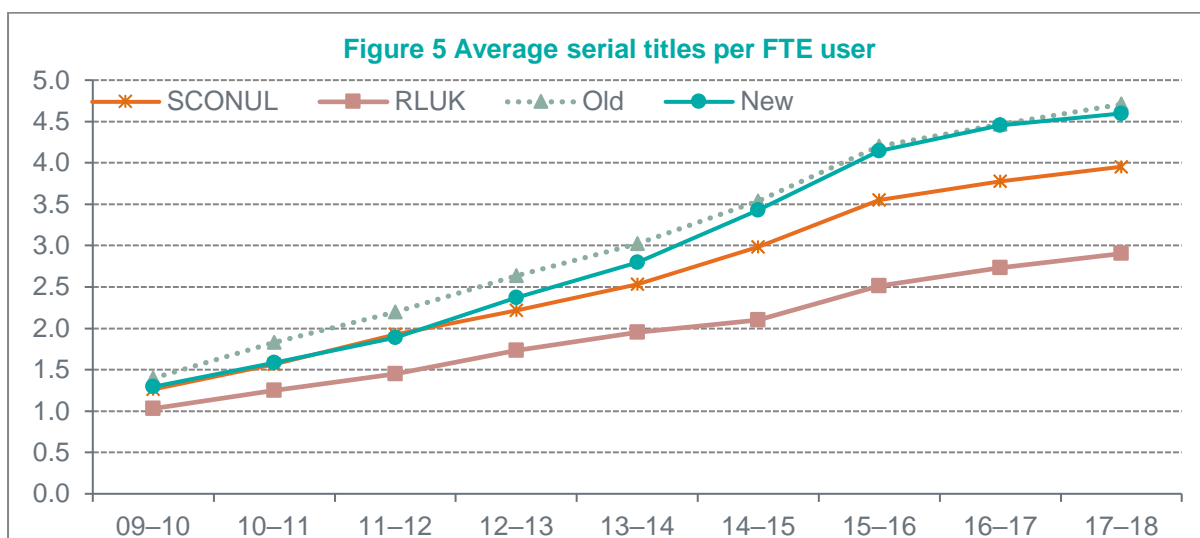
Providing users with access to a wide variety of research outputs, including through access to formal publications, has become progressively more feasible as a result of the increasing availability of electronic resources, and is one of many ways that the academic library continues to support research in their institution.

The 2009–10 SCONUL survey saw changes in the way that data on e-resources were collected, with those titles available in databases included in the counts for the first time. Figure 5 illustrates the trend in the average number of serials titles purchased per FTE user<sup>4</sup> over the period 2009–10 to 2017–18 and highlights that both the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ universities appear to have had a higher uptake of deals that are available for electronic journals compared to RLUK members with well-established print collections; they have provided access to around 4.6 serial titles per FTE user, on average, in 2017–18, compared

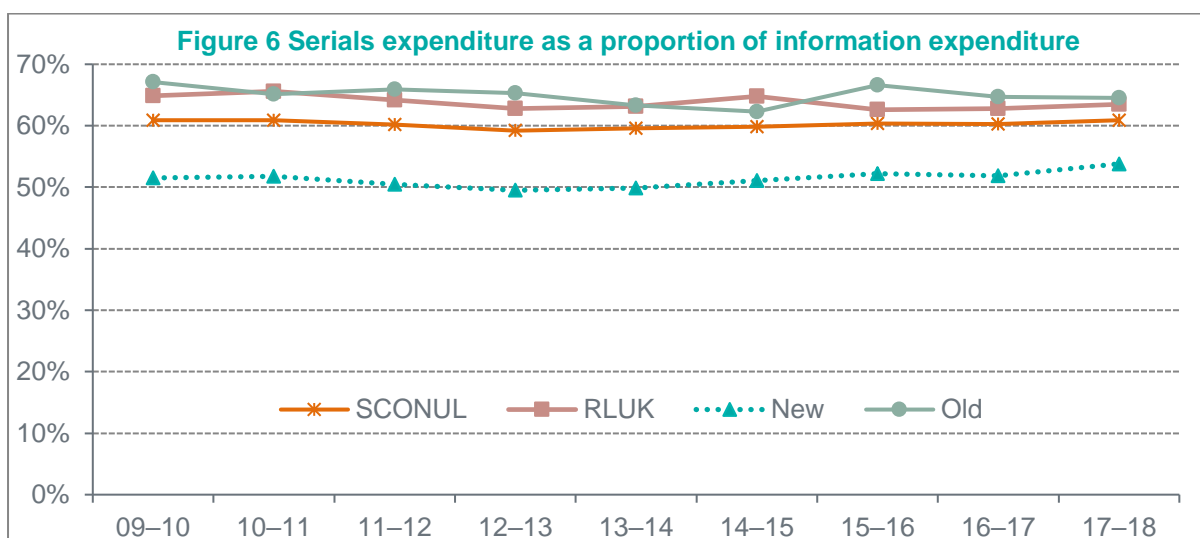
<sup>3</sup> Note that ‘n/a’ responses have been counted as 0 in Figure 4

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this report FTE users are calculated as FTE students + FTE academic staff.

to an average of 2.9 serial titles per FTE user at RLUK member institutions.



Despite the overall increase in the average number of serial titles per FTE user throughout the UK HE sector (Figure 5), Figure 6 illustrates that serials expenditure (including expenditure on those available in databases) as a proportion of total information expenditure remained relatively stable over the period 2009–10 to 2017–18, possibly as a result of the increasing number of e-journals available in collections and databases. It is also interesting to note that, despite providing more serial titles per FTE user than RLUK members in each year since 2012–13, the average proportion of information provision expenditure accounted for by serials at the ‘new’ universities is at least nine percentage points lower than the average of RLUK members throughout the ten-year period. It is important to note that the averages in Figure 6 are based on the number of respondents completing the optional breakdown figures in each year since 2013–14.



### Inter-library services

Inter-library loans remain an important aspect of the service provided by academic libraries. Given the overall growth in resources available either via subscription or OA, it is perhaps not surprising that, despite some fluctuation over the ten-year period, the overall trend has been one of a decrease in the number of inter-library loan applications satisfied per 100 FTE users (Figure 7), so that the average currently stands 56% lower than in 2007–08 for UK SCONUL members overall.

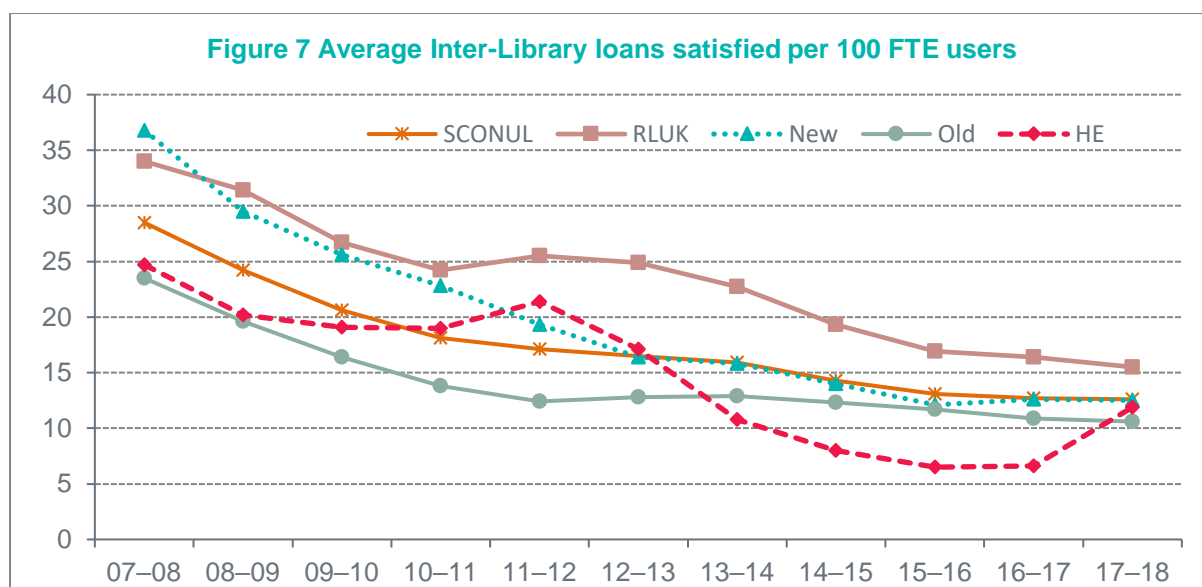


Figure 7 illustrates that similar decreases have been recorded throughout the UK HE sectors over the ten-year period, and shows that RLUK members have recorded more inter-library loans satisfied per 100 FTE users than the averages of the ‘new’ universities, the ‘old’ universities and UK SCONUL members overall, in each year since 2008–09. This is perhaps not surprising given that they are primarily research-led institutions.

### Conclusion

Examination of the trends over the last few years highlights that academic libraries continue to diversify to ensure that they provide support to the academic community. The academic library has continually supported research within the UK HE sector in areas such as stock provision, inter-library loans and information literacy training. However, this has evolved over recent years as an increasing number of academic libraries have assumed responsibility for areas such as institutional repositories, RDM and APC budgets. The inclusion of OA mandates in both research funder policies and the Research Excellence Framework 2021 is likely to place an increasing emphasis on the dissemination of research outputs – both within academic libraries and the UK HE sector overall.

## **Acknowledgements**

The above report is an excerpt from the 2017-18 SCONUL Annual Library Statistics, prepared for SCONUL by Sonya White at the request of SCONUL and published by SCONUL in 2019. If you are not a member of SCONUL and would like a copy of the full report, contact SCONUL [www.sconul.ac.uk/page/contact-us](http://www.sconul.ac.uk/page/contact-us)

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