

---

# Envisioning future academic library services: initiatives, ideas and challenges

Edited by Sue McKnight

London: Facet Publishing, 2010  
(ISBN 978-1-85604-691-6), £44.95

Reviewed by Valerie Stevenson  
*Head of Research and Learner Support*  
*Liverpool John Moores University*  
Tel: 0151 231 3178  
Email: [v.stevenson@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:v.stevenson@ljmu.ac.uk)

---

This book provides an extremely thoughtful and stimulating contribution to current debate on how libraries will have to evolve to meet the challenges of the very near future. Aimed at senior managers and future leaders in the sector, it provides much food for thought on the main strategic areas we are all involved in. There is a great deal of work going on, in SCONUL and elsewhere, on what academic libraries and their services will look like in five, ten, or even forty years' time, and anyone currently leading change or moving into a role as a strategic decision-maker will find this book helpful in shaping their thoughts on future planning.

The twelve chapters, each covering an area of strategic change, are written by international leaders in their disciplines. Broadly, they cover the changing needs of the new generations of library users (the digital natives *et al.*) in both information provision and physical space; changing technologies and virtual realities; the pressures on scholarly publishing; the impact of the globalisation of higher education; and the financial climate. It is recognised that there are many significant 'wild-card' influences over which we have no control but which will shape the academic library of the future whether we like it or not. The aim of the book is not to provide answers, but to provide a sound basis for thinking about how to manage the transformations required of us. I certainly feel that it succeeds in this objective and that, in the extensive references, it provides a useful overview

of the key literature that managers need to be aware of.

Individual readers will find it easy to pick out the chapters that discuss the subjects high on their particular agenda. I instinctively found myself turning to Penny Carnaby's essay on citizen-created content and Martin Lewis's chapter on the management of research data, but if space planning or Web 2.0 is your key area of concern, go straight to the chapters by Andrew McDonald or James Neal and Damon Jagers. I particularly enjoyed Liz Wright's chapter on leadership of the future, which provides predictions about the workplace and the nature of leadership and some suggested models.

One of the key messages in this book picks up a theme I have heard discussed many times this year at conferences, workshops and other events. We are living in a radically unknowable world of 'supercomplexity' in which the challenges are never resolved and professional leaders cannot apply simple algorithms to a situation, but must learn to react swiftly, drawing on their experience. We have to be ready to seize the benefits of the seismic shifts in the information landscape, and this book provides many strategies and ideas to help us prepare. As Lynne Brindley says in the foreword to the book, 'there has never been a more exciting time to be in libraries: it is both daunting and empowering'.