Project briefing: Transformation Strategy Group: Why do users love their libraries?

1. About the project

1.1 Increased footfall and growing pressure on library space are well documented phenomena, but why is this? As a community, we may feel we have a good intuitive understanding of the drivers for the increased popularity of our libraries, but what can we point to as evidence for this long-term trend? We theorise that the other elements of the library 'offer' to users: (a) support services, (b) access to content nor available digitally and (c) the library space as a destination are all playing a part in driving this continued demand.

1.2 There is an important issue because, in order to plan the development of their own services, library directors need to make working assumptions about the nature of user behaviour over the long-term, and how changes in those services might affect demand. This applies to the commissioning of new buildings and the configuration of existing buildings, but also to collections management and investment in above campus services.

1.3 However, there has been relatively little published research exploring the issue of user demand for the use of library space in our current hybrid print / digital environment and how it has changed or may change over time under different conditions.

1.4 We are launching a project exploring these issues at the conference with Andrew Cox of Sheffield University. This will include an international literature review on this issue, but the main element of the project is to work with the community to surface data we may hold.

1.5 We are aware that many libraries have carried out their own research with users and we want this project to draw on this wider, hidden, body of learning across the UK library community. We are asking members to share their own research with us.

1.6 Outputs from the project will focus on providing individual library directors' with materials to inform development of their own services and to advocate for further investment. It will also inform SCONUL's work envisioning the library of the future as well the development of shared or collaborative services on behalf of the community. It may also serve to identify gaps in the research base.

2. We need your data: call for participation

2.1 Many of our member libraries will have conducted studies internally which explore these questions at an institutional level. We are asking SCONUL libraries to take part in the project by sharing data and reports from these institutional studies of the use of physical library space undertaken.

2.2 We would be happy to receive any studies which have been undertaken in the last 10 years and the call includes both quantitative and qualitative data. We would also like to receive any related analysis or reports associated with the data.

2.3 The SCONUL Transformation group will take care to ensure that participating institutions are not identifiable in any reports on our work.

2.4 We ask that any data shared with the project does not include personal data, i.e. that the original participants in studies cannot be identified, directly or indirectly, by anyone. The robust anonymisation of data will be further checked by SCONUL prior to analysis. If you do not have the time to anonymise the data internally, we are happy to discuss whether this can be carried out by SCONUL.

2.5 If you are unsure whether research you have conducted addresses the core question, we would ask that you err on the side of caution and include such studies.

2.6 The approach to data reuse has been approved under the research ethics procedures of the University of Sheffield.

2.7 Any questions about the project should be directed to ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk.

3. Next steps

3.1 Immediately following the SCONUL Conference, we will formally issue a call to members to participate, with a deadline of 5 August for providing the data.

3.2 The report's authors will also be undertaking an international literature review during this period.

3.3 Data analysis will be carried out between July and October, with a final report expected in November.