Our vision

For UK and Irish national and academic libraries to be second to none in enabling learning and research.

SCONUL's mission

SCONUL supports member libraries to deliver outstanding services to students, researchers and academics, thereby enabling their institutions to achieve excellence in teaching and research. We do this by working closely with those leading national and academic libraries of all missions, to share knowledge and best practice and to facilitate collective solutions where required. We speak for the community in its dealings with national and international bodies and promote the value that libraries bring to their institutions, their users and to the UK and Ireland as a whole.

Context: transformational change

The university library retains its long-established place at the heart of the institution, despite new funding models for HE; rapid, transformative technological change and the move away from traditional methods of delivering resources. The quality of its services is critical for the success of its home institution in terms of learning outcomes, research income and attracting undergraduates, academic staff, taught postgraduates and researchers. For all these groups of users, it provides a set of important interconnected functions: a space for quiet concentration or collective study, a source of expert support (for example on digital and information literacy) and access to the world's knowledge.

As these functions become disaggregated, access is as much virtual as physical. Growth in the availability of digital resources has taken the ways in which national and academic libraries deliver information in exciting and radical new directions. Accessing resources is now possible though diverse routes and devices, broadening out the times and places at which students, researchers and academics can access the library and making possible new ways of learning. The development of discovery tools provides scope for surfacing otherwise hidden resources and the growth of patron-driven acquisition of e-books is shaping collections directly in response to demand. The transformation of the way knowledge is produced and communicated is throwing up new challenges for institutions which libraries are using their skills and knowledge to solve through greater involvement in the research lifecycle, including data curation, and of open access resources. Physical collections remain important for many library users and traditional library skills are still vital, for example for special collections which add to the stature and distinctiveness of institutions in both physical and virtual forms.

The work the library undertakes contributes directly to the institution's academic mission and to equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to achieve academically and to maximise their employability. The number of people using academic libraries is rising and the significant investment made in library space and resources (£700 million in the UK in 2010-11) has helped the UK and Ireland maintain their place in higher education rankings. The popularity of the library as a study space means that for most institutions, the physical footprint of the library will be retained or grow. Increasingly, in the competitive environment for domestic and overseas students, the quality of library spaces is an important factor in attracting new students and we are seeing new library buildings - architecturally daring and highly finished - being developed.

The physical and conceptual boundaries of the library are blurring. Services to students are no longer delivered within traditional institutional silos and are becoming increasingly personalised and user-focused while the internationalisation of higher education both in terms of the flow of students between nations and the establishment of international campuses requires the development of new skills and networks.

The academic libraries community has a strong track record of collaboration with peers both inside and beyond their home institutions, and the heads of library services bring their professional management and leadership skills to the new forms of partnership being developed across the higher education sector. Developments in cloud computing, data storage and computing power make remarkable and transformative changes possible in the way that information is shared and communicated. Political and institutional demand for increased operational efficiency including via shared services adds impetus to members' interest in new models of service provision. The library team's skills base is wider than ever before, incorporating technical skills such as digital curation and preservation; the creation and management of research data but also excellence in customer service.

Our strategic priorities for 2012-2015

Over the coming three years, SCONUL will focus its work in four core areas:

- Collaboration and shared services
  SCONUL will scope out for new areas for collaboration on services and back-office functions, drawing on the collective expertise of the sector to help deliver these. It will continue to shape existing collaborative and shared services including those in development, such as Knowledge Base +. It will take a thought-leadership approach, horizon-scanning and working with vendors and other partners to inform thinking about the next generation of library management systems and discovery tools. It will advise also on the leadership and governance skills necessary for shared services.

- Performance and quality
  SCONUL will work with international and domestic partners on the development of new and existing metrics for performance, shaping these to ensure they are appropriate and enabling members to keep abreast of international standards and comparators for academic library services. We will continue to develop and manage

the SCONUL statistics to ensure that these are fit for purpose and will carry on contributing to the wider national and international discussions about the evaluation of university services, including the process of Institutional Review.

- Academic Content and Communication
  SCONUL will continue to campaign for a healthy scholarly communications ecosystem and support the evolution of open scholarship, open access and new models of publishing and information provision. This includes influencing the markets for e-books and journals and e-licensing for traditional and non-traditional users. We will advocate for the library's role as knowledge manager to the institution, and share best practice in collection development and management. We will members informed of developments in IP and copyright policy, library e-publishing and explore the new opportunities for new models arising as a result of media and technological change.

- User experience and success
  SCONUL will continue to promote and illustrate the input of academic libraries to the success of institutions and their users through our contribution to student experience and employability for home, international and distance learners, and to research and to knowledge exchange. We will develop members' understanding of user needs and behaviour, including non-traditional users. We will also consider library design, space planning and information and digital literacy education. We will work with the community and partners such as CILIP and the library schools to ensuring that members are able to draw on the skilled workforce they need.

Delivering the strategy

We propose to align our work with these four areas above by setting up four new corresponding strategy groups, each led by a SCONUL Board member. They will be charged with developing and delivering a detailed workplan to deliver strategic change on behalf of SCONUL members.

The valuable work of the existing groups will be rolled into these new groups. The exception will be the current Health Strategy Group which brings together SCONUL, RLUK, CILIP and other partners working in the area of health libraries to coordinate the library sectors' response to developments in health policy. We propose that this continues in its current form.

Across these four themes, SCONUL will continue to support its members in six core ways:

Advocacy and lobbying: SCONUL represents the interests and views of academic libraries to national and regional governments, assemblies and other bodies and develops relationships with key partners.

Leadership: SCONUL helps shape public opinion in areas of interest to the sector; keeps members informed of new developments; facilitates new activities and brokers deals on

behalf of its members. It provides information about developments in the models of leadership needed in our changing environment.

Communications: SCONUL facilitates the flow of information about and to academic libraries, and promotes best practice. We will deliver a new website in 2012.

Services: SCONUL provides important services to members, including the Access Scheme and the SCONUL statistics, and will continue to ensure that they are fit for purpose. We will also develop and operate new services as appropriate.

Training: SCONUL will continue to support and help develop the Future Leaders programme run by the Leadership Foundation for HE to help ensure that member institutions have the skilled workforce they need.

Events and networking: SCONUL will put on a series of events for those leading academic libraries and their senior management teams to provide them with opportunities to update the knowledge and share best practice with peers.

SCONUL has reviewed its internal working to make sure that we are directing our resources to best effect to deliver across these areas and ensure value for money for members.

Working with partners

SCONUL has a series of long-standing, fruitful and effective relationships with partner organisations across the UK, Ireland and internationally. Over the course of the next three years, through its Board, Office and Strategy Groups, SCONUL will seek to develop these relationships into a set of strategic alliances to help shape developments in the areas discussed above.

There are a wide range of effective organisations also working in the field of academic libraries, including consortia such as WHELF, SCURL and CONUL, which have representatives on the Board of SCONUL, and others such as RLUK and the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries with whom we work closely on the many areas of mutual interest. We will seek to work more closely with these organisations to ensure effective cooperation and to avoid any unnecessary duplication of effort.

With the national libraries of the UK and Ireland, with JISC and CILIP, SCONUL will develop its collaborative partnership to deliver new outcomes in policy and practice in academic library services, as we also will with our international partners such as LIBER and EBLIDA on international developments in copyright and scholarly communications, value, performance and impact.

Over the last two years we have built stronger working relationships with other professional associations such as UCISA, AMOSSHE, ALT and BUFDG, and will continue to strengthen these links to promote the shared interests of its members and to develop

coordinated responses to issues which affect the many member institutions which we have in common.

Corporate details

If you would like further details about SCONUL, please contact Ann Rossiter on 020 7387 0317 or at ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk

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