

Academic Strategy for Oxford University Library Services

As published in the Gazette, 26 June 2009.

The academic strategy for Oxford University Library Services has resulted from an extensive review of reader services and collection management. This review was prompted by the news last September that the University had lost its appeal to build a new book depository at Osney Mead industrial estate. Although initially disappointing, the outcome of the appeal allowed the Libraries to look afresh not only at storage requirements for their rapidly growing print collections but also at how they could offer improved services for readers, such as access to electronic resources and collection management that keeps high-demand volumes on open shelves close to the central reading rooms. It also enabled OULS to look at the methods for providing access to information to meet the needs of its wide range of readers both now and in the future with a goal of providing expedited access to a larger percentage of readers' information needs than is currently feasible.

The academic strategy that resulted from this review consists of six key elements, which are outlined below. In each case, the focus is on improving services to users while protecting the collections, the overwhelming proportion of which are paper-based. These goals have been a major preoccupation for the Libraries in 2008–9 and, in some cases, represent a shift in the way OULS serves its users and manages its collections. When the Libraries complete their strategic planning process at the end of Trinity Term, these goals will be subsumed into the implementation portion of the strategic plan. Following review and approval by the Curators of the University Libraries, the Libraries' strategic plan will be published in the *Gazette*.

1. Increase direct access to high-demand items in the collections

The Social Science Library, which opened in 2004, has been extremely popular, in part because users can consult books directly on open shelves. The transfer of high-demand titles from the Bodleian to the Social Science Library resulted in a sharp decline in the number of items needing to be fetched from the New Bodleian. Building on this successful model, OULS seeks to utilise its existing open shelving as effectively as possible and to convert closed stores to open shelves where feasible.

Currently, staff are in the process of analysing Automated Stack Requests (ASR) to identify the most frequently requested titles. In the Radcliffe Science Library, items are being shifted from closed stores to open stacks, with the dual benefit that users have unmediated access to high-demand works while RSL staff are freed to perform other services.

Further research is being conducted on the New Bodleian collections, with an eye to moving approximately 250,000 volumes, chiefly recently published monographs in the English language, to the Underground Bookstack serving the Radcliffe Camera.

The benefits of such a move would be substantial in terms of increasing user satisfaction, eliminating the delays inherent in fetching, and reducing costs. The feasibility of accommodating these titles in a renovated Underground Bookstack is still being evaluated, but the principle of giving priority on open shelves to the most heavily used stock is guiding the Libraries' strategy.

2. Improve online access to materials by providing access to digital runs of journals

The question of whether the internet rivals Gutenberg as a transformative technology is ongoing, but there is no doubt that the use of digital resources is on the increase at Oxford. In 2007–8, there were 6 million recorded uses of electronic journals, books and databases, an 81 per cent increase over the 3.3 million from two years previously. In a survey conducted by OULS last November, to which over 3,700 readers responded, the demand for more electronic resources was among the top requests.

Electronic access to periodicals has many virtues, of which convenience and the ability to search text flexibly are two. Providing electronic access not only enables immediate access for readers but also allows the Libraries to transfer the equivalent print volumes to an off-site location, since usage of the print version plummets when electronic access is available, thereby freeing up space for high- demand volumes.

It is important to highlight the Bodleian's commitment to retaining at least one existing run of print titles of the e-journals it acquires. Electronic access is a service that is preferred by most, but not all, and the print originals will be available for consultation on request from the South Marston book storage facility. Over £1 million has been allocated in 2008–9 to increasing electronic access in all disciplines, enabling users to save time and locate key information quickly and easily. Among the titles already acquired under this initiative are the entire back- run of *The Economist*, from 1843, and the journals published by Brill, including *Advanced Robotics* and *Mnemosyne*.

3. Enhance user services through innovation

For many users, there is no substitute for consulting the actual printed version. For these readers, the Bodleian and OULS libraries maintain reading rooms with access to books, journals, manuscripts, maps, music, and other collections. Increasingly, however, users are seeking the convenience of access to collections outside library hours. An innovative practice that is becoming standard in many libraries is delivery to the desktop, in which readers are given the option of receiving scanned articles from a journal or a chapter from a book delivered electronically. OULS intends to pilot this service for a small group of users, with the expectation of offering an expanded service in the future. This option will be especially useful in reducing handling and transport once the book storage facility becomes operational and several million volumes are stored outside Oxford.

4. Improve the management of collections

Throughout the twentieth century, the Bodleian has optimised the use of its existing space by organising collections by size and shelfmark. In the past twenty-five years, most libraries with circulating collections have completed retrospective conversion of their catalogues, making their holdings discoverable online. Their collections are barcoded for ease in identification, retrieval, and replacement on shelves. This degree of automation improves the accuracy of retrieval and expedites the handling of books when transferring them into high-density storage. Because of the immensity of the Bodleian's holdings, modernisation of the processing of collections in this manner has been slow due to lack of resources. In recognition of the need to employ modern, automated management of collections, the University has now approved funding to jump-start this initiative. Investment now will pay benefits in the future by reducing book handling costs and avoiding human error. Planning is now under way to barcode a segment of the materials that will move to the South Marston book storage facility and to increase access to items likely to be requested. New acquisitions will now be barcoded routinely.

5. Provide a secure location for high-value collections

Oxford holds irreplaceable collections that are invaluable both as national and international treasures and for their scholarly import. Many of these unique documents are stored in the New Bodleian in inadequate conditions, vulnerable to fire and water damage. Rather than relocating them wholly to the South Marston storage facility during the four-year renovation of the New Bodleian, as had been planned with the Osney Mead depository, the Libraries now intend to house approximately 500,000 items in an upgraded space in the Radcliffe Science Library.

Infrequently requested items from the RSL (many of which are now available electronically) are being transferred to offsite storage to make way for rare books, thus sparing fragile documents the rigours of being transported when requested, as well as expediting access for readers. A portion of the Lankester Room in the RSL will become a temporary special collections reading room, and plans are under way to create a rational assignment of reference works to support the use of special collections there. Current activities include the decanting of the RSL, after which the closed stack area will be upgraded during the Long Vacation to an appropriate level to house archival collections. Depending on progress in the renovation, a portion of the rare collections will be transferred from the New Bodleian to the RSL, under the care of an experienced move coordinator, for use in Michaelmas Term 2009.

It is impossible to undertake a multi-year renovation of a heavily used library and to move millions of volumes, some multiple times, without some disruption of service. The Vatican Library has shut its doors for three years during its refurbishment, while other institutions have curtailed hours or closed for months. The Bodleian seeks to minimise service discontinuity in the coming months and years, but it will certainly need to ask its users to be patient and even forgiving as it undergoes the equivalent

of several seismic upheavals until the New Bodleian reopens in 2014. As specific details of the planned moves and changes in services are finalised, the Libraries will publicise them via the web and e-mail and through paper alerts.

6. Advance a coordinated estates programme

The modern Social Science Library and the transformed Radcliffe Science Library point the way for library provision in the University. The Old Bodleian and the Radcliffe Camera will also remain at the heart of OULS's services for readers. These are iconic buildings and OULS is committed to maintaining the very special atmosphere afforded to scholars by the opportunity to study in working libraries in such historic surroundings. At the same time, the Libraries have three major estates projects under way, which, when complete, will furnish Oxford with a full range of library buildings fit for the twenty-first century. These are:

(a) High-density book storage facility

The University has acquired land in South Marston, close to Swindon, with the intention of constructing a high-density book storage facility on it. Council has recommended for Congregation's approval that the land be allocated to the Libraries for this purpose, and the proposal was approved by Congregation on 2 June 2009 (see *Gazette*, 4 June 2009, p. 1212). Subject to formal planning approval, the Library hopes to break ground in August 2009, with completion of the new facility by September 2010.

The proposed new storage facility, which will have a capacity of approximately 8 million volumes, symbolises the University's commitment to the access and preservation of the printed book. It will provide essential space and better conditions to house the Bodleian's print collections, allowing the Library to fulfil its obligation as a Legal Deposit library and retain print collections for current and future generations of readers, thereby honouring Bodley's legacy.

Like other comparable repositories, such as Harvard's depository, the South Marston storage facility will offer twice daily deliveries on weekdays, with additional service if demand warrants. In terms of book delivery, the aim is to minimise carbon emissions, wherever possible. The use of environmentally friendly transportation will be explored, while the consolidation of collections from off-site storage in both Cheshire and Nuneham Courtenay means that the Libraries will operate more efficiently in the future than at present. In addition, the building will be energy-efficient in its construction and operation: the design incorporates a high level of energy-efficiency measures, such as controlling the use of energy in the building and reducing energy loads, while the majority of construction material will be transported to the site by rail.

(b) New Bodleian Library

The Libraries are developing detailed plans for the refurbishment of the New Bodleian. Among the features will be archival standard storage for over 1 million

volumes of special collections, the replacement of the central stack, the provision of additional reading rooms, and the creation of dedicated floors for curation and conservation. In addition to improving its facilities as a major research library, the ground floor will be opened up to the public with the creation of exhibition galleries and learning space, allowing the local community and visiting public to view some of the University's greatest treasures and gain insights into research activities at Oxford.

Planning of the facility is under way and will continue over the summer involving staff, users, and others, such as members of the local community and Broad Street neighbours. As soon as the book storage facility is completed, OULS will begin transferring low- demand collections to their new location in South Marston, a process expected to take several months. Twelve thousand linear metres of special collections will be transferred to the Radcliffe Science Library, thereby ensuring that high-value and high-demand items remain in central Oxford. Other high-use volumes from the New Bodleian will be transferred to the Underground Bookstore and the Old Bodleian Library. Staff in the New Bodleian will move to new offices, most likely over the course of 2010. Current estimates are that collections will return from the RSL and many volumes from the book storage facility in late 2013, with the New Bodleian reopening in 2014 as the Weston Library in honour of the £25 million donation from the Garfield Weston Foundation.

(c) Humanities Library

The first phase of the plans for the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter will see the integration of the English, History, Philosophy and Theology faculty libraries into a single library. The new interdisciplinary Humanities Library, which will be located on the lower floors of the new Humanities Centre, will ultimately bring together the holdings of as many as fourteen separate libraries and related collections. It will be a state-of-the-art facility, offering the very latest developments in information technology, open-stack access to high-use items, dedicated study space for graduate students, and longer opening hours for readers. Planning for this library is under way, with the new facility expected to open in 2013 or 2014.