

OXFORD UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY SERVICES
STRATEGIC PLAN 2009/10 TO 2014/15

Strategic vision and guiding principles

[Approved by the Curators of the University Libraries on 15 June 2009]

Oxford University Library Services acts as a vital partner in the teaching and research enterprise of the University. As a designated National Research Library it also serves researchers in higher education and, in the proud tradition initiated by the Founder, Sir Thomas Bodley, it opens its doors to the 'republic of the learned', including scholars from around the world.

For academic research, Oxford University Library Services offers outstanding resources in the UK and ranks amongst a global elite of world-class libraries. Renowned internationally for their superb collections, the research libraries of the University are destinations for scholars who use the information and insights gained through their research to change the world's understanding and perspective on a spectrum of topics across disciplines. OULS leads the UK in levels of student satisfaction with libraries, and its award-winning exhibitions attract around 100,000 visitors annually. Over 60,000 readers enjoy the exceptional mix of rich holdings, inspiring spaces in which to study, and expert library staff. In recent years, as a result of its progress in digitization and electronic access, OULS has greatly expanded its audience and its services beyond the physical confines of its buildings.

Strategic vision and guiding principles

The University of Oxford's *Strategic Plan 2008-9 to 2012-13*¹ states that:

"The mission of the University of Oxford is to achieve and sustain excellence in every area of its teaching and research, maintaining and developing its historical position as a world-class university, and enriching the international, national and regional communities through the fruits of its research and the skills of its graduates."

In 2008/9 Oxford University Library Services² undertook, on behalf of the Curators of the University Libraries, the creation of a strategic plan with the aim of developing a shared vision of the direction for library services. The plan is closely linked to the University's *Strategic Plan* and incorporates the values and aspirations of the wider University, aligning its priorities with those of the University in its core activities of learning and teaching, research, and a wider engagement with society. In providing library services of the best possible standards to Oxford's

¹ http://www.ox.ac.uk/gazette/2007-8/supps/1_4845.pdf

² Oxford University Library Services (OULS) comprises many libraries, with various histories and contributions to the library service which now bears this name. For consistency, this document refers to OULS throughout but readers will, of course, recognise in certain references the particular contribution of the Bodleian Library.

students and academics, and to the national and international community of scholars, OULS aims to match the ambition of the University and contribute to its pre-eminence.

Strategic plans provide a clear and coherent focus for investment of resources. They communicate to users, staff, and the wider world those goals and related activities that are of overarching importance to achieve the results critical for a successful organization.

The process of formulating the OULS plan included discussions with key stakeholders, notably the readers, staff, University administrators, and the Curators of the University Libraries. Contributions from nearly 4,000 survey respondents also inform the plan, which replaces the *Vision for 2011* approved by the Curators in January 2006³. Its goals and objectives remain consonant with those expressed in 2006, but are recast and updated to reflect the current environment and to take into account emerging trends in the creation of knowledge and the dissemination of scholarship which are relevant for libraries.

The mission of OULS is to **provide the most effective university library service possible, in response to current and future users' needs; and to maintain and develop access to Oxford's collections as a national and international research resource.**

In the strategic plan, our vision is to maintain and enhance our position as **a world-class library service, knowledgeable, professional and innovative.**

Universities have in the past prided themselves on the numbers of libraries, the millions of volumes held, and the investment of resources in staffing and building their library collections. In the 21st century, these measures are yielding to new assessments of quality which focus on the effectiveness of services. Increasingly, readers expect ready and rapid access to information whenever and wherever they need it. The excellence of Oxford's libraries has long served as a magnet in recruiting students and scholars to the University. Today and tomorrow, the leading libraries of the world will excel at connecting readers with information in its myriad manifestations. They will facilitate the transformation of that information into knowledge by organizing collections so that books and other materials are easy to find, by eliminating barriers to access, and by providing the tools and environment in which readers can work productively and with the necessary satisfaction and enjoyment that imbues

successful research and learning.

OULS will draw strength from its roots and vigorously uphold traditional scholarship, while pioneering and developing modern practices of information management and delivery.

³ http://www.ouls.ox.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/22919/vision2011.pdf

These six guiding principles will serve as the basis for developing policy and practices and for setting priorities for investment of time and resources on behalf of our readers. In the following section of this document, we elaborate these guiding principles, to serve as the basis of our implementation plan – the practical expression of these principles, which will act as a map for collective action and our progress into the future.

Our guiding principles:

- 1. We will provide a consistently excellent quality of service to readers, using common approaches and policies, while supporting diverse group and individual needs, where appropriate and when this contributes to the strength of the service as a whole.***
- 2. We will listen to and understand our users and staff and will be professional and innovative in developing and delivering services.***
- 3. We will build on the investment in content and service provision of earlier generations, to support learning and research today and in the future, at the highest level.***
- 4. We will adopt a strategic approach to fostering and deploying staff talent, including the provision of opportunities for learning and applying new skills.***
- 5. We will provide effective leadership that delivers its strategic goals, demonstrates effective corporate governance and manages resources efficiently.***
- 6. We will collaborate and form partnerships within the University and with other leading organizations that will enhance the quality of services offered and build on the organization's reputation.***

1. Providing an excellent quality of service to readers

We will provide a consistently excellent quality of service to readers, using common approaches and policies, while supporting diverse group and individual needs, where appropriate and when this contributes to the strength of the service as a whole.

The services provided by OULS incorporate the values and aspirations of the wider University and align with its core activities of learning and teaching, research, and a wider engagement with society. OULS will maintain and develop excellent services in all three areas. In particular, the University aims to provide ‘an exceptional education for both undergraduates and graduates’. More rapidly changing syllabuses, technologies and user expectations, combined with the traditional depth of engagement with academic material, pose an urgent challenge to OULS in building on the successes of the past.

OULS is a single organization within the University and will develop agreed policies and common standards across all its functions, to enhance efficiency, transparency and reliability for both readers and staff, and to ensure that resources, services and collections are shared sustainably and flexibly across OULS. Readers will experience familiarity, confidence and ease of use as they visit different sites or services.

Where local variants or additional services are required, they should add to the quality of the user experience and benefit the system as a whole. Equally the framework should be sufficiently flexible to allow for innovation and pilot initiatives, leading to the development of new policies and standards.

Specialized professional support services, such as digital preservation, conservation and IT support, are most effective when shared across the system and available to all. The mix of a common approach, shared specialism, and targeted local diversity will create an environment which caters for both the very general and the highly specialized requirement.

In following this guiding principle, we will:

- 1.1. **provide innovative library and information services** in physical and digital form to the researchers and students of the University of Oxford and to the wider community of scholarship, making best use of technology to deliver content tailored to meet academic need;
- 1.2. **design effective training tools for users**, to furnish them, increasingly online and on demand, with the appropriate skills with which to make best use of the information and services provided;

- 1.3. **align our resources with our priorities** by understanding the needs of readers and staff as individuals and groups;
- 1.4. **manage specialist resources and skills** in a sustainable way, so that they can be shared across the system and be of benefit to as many readers and staff as possible;
- 1.5. **capture best practice and determine common policies and service standards**, in close liaison with users and with due respect for the complex processes managed by highly skilled and specialized staff throughout the library service;
- 1.6. **promote the work of the University and of OULS** through our programme of exhibitions, publications and welcoming visitors to our historic buildings;
- 1.7. **engage in continual research and innovation**, to provide the most effective management and curation of content and to develop services which keep us at the forefront of the evolutions and revolutions in the information landscape and responsive to changing user expectations.

2. Listening, learning, and communicating

We will listen to and understand our users and staff and will be professional and innovative in developing and delivering services.

Understanding thoroughly the needs of our users is a key principle that will ensure we design and deliver services of the highest quality, using the most effective methods. The routine collection and collation of information about our users goes hand in hand with listening to our staff, who have the most extensive experience of how and where the service works best. Data will be analysed, further developed, and applied to creating innovative services as well as to maintaining and refining existing ones.

Working in this way with our users and staff will provide satisfaction and good results for both, enhancing the professionalism of all library staff. It will set the framework for OULS as a learning organization where a culture of continuous improvement is embedded in day-to-day operations.

In following this guiding principle, we will:

- 2.1 **take the position of the reader** as the starting point for evaluating all aspects of the service, being informed by representative reader feedback and constantly checking to ensure that changes connect effectively with user needs;
- 2.2 **develop our professional engagement and ethos** to encompass, in both behaviour and attitude, consistency and good judgement on the part of staff at all levels in the organization;
- 2.3 **be flexible in solutions and attitudes** by learning what is needed, understanding the principles behind the policies and applying solutions within that framework, instead of simply communicating policies and allowing or denying services;
- 2.4 **be positive in responses** by empowering staff to say yes rather than no and, where solutions cannot be determined immediately, to refer cases for further investigation so that users can be understood and their needs met;
- 2.5 **act as a learning organization** in which education and continuous improvement underpin every project and new initiative as well as enhancing the design and delivery of services, allowing us to exceed our present capabilities because people will be willing to venture into the unknown, to engage with what is not understood, and to accept improvement as a way of life;

- 2.6 **employ evidence-based librarianship** reflecting what we learn about our readers and drawing on the corpus of professional literature;
- 2.7 **identify and phase out obsolete services**, to allow the most effective use of limited resources by aligning them to the demonstrable priorities of readers and of the organization;
- 2.8 **communicate effectively** with both staff and users, so that news of new initiatives is clearly and swiftly disseminated and organizational flexibility is maintained, without compromising users' understanding of services and systems.

3. Building and preserving our collections

We will build on the investment in content and service provision of earlier generations, to support learning and research today and in the future, at the highest level.

The libraries of the University have been innovative institutions for hundreds of years. They have a proven track record of building world-class collections of books and other materials in support of advanced scholarship and of devising innovative services to match. OULS will continue to underpin service provision through the acquisition, management, and preservation of world-class collections and content for long-term accessibility and use. This will continue to be enabled by expert subject and technical staff, coupled with the use of trusted agents to provide value-for-money services. The effective management of the legal deposit privilege will remain a key component.

OULS will continue to build collections and services that will have an enduring capacity to facilitate learning, teaching and research in depth across the disciplinary range, and to support the interdisciplinary initiatives now expected by the University. The advent of electronic publishing and the digitization of printed materials requires the creation of new shareable infrastructure, supporting the growth of an international collective research base. OULS will maintain and enhance its ability to deliver new tools for academic study and research.

In following this guiding principle, we will:

- 3.1 **ensure the maximum possible investment in the acquisition and provision of information** content in both printed and electronic forms, in response to the explicit needs of current learning and research and in anticipation of the needs of future generations;
- 3.2 **use our depth of experience and research to ensure the preservation and long-term accessibility of the content** we manage on behalf of the University of Oxford and the international research community;
- 3.3 **enhance scholarship based on our unique collections** by enabling curatorial staff to carry out research and develop specialist knowledge;
- 3.4 **identify, develop and retain the skills and facilities** to support preservation and continued use of physical materials;
- 3.5 **lead and innovate in digital curation** to ensure the continued availability of content over time;

3.6 **collaborate with other institutions and organizations** so that the costs of ensuring long-term accessibility of content can be shared and that necessary standards are developed and adhered to.

4. Developing the talents and skills of our staff

We will adopt a strategic approach to fostering and deploying staff talent, including the provision of opportunities for learning and applying new skills.

A service-driven organization derives its strength from its people and derives tangible benefits from investing time and money in them, and from providing them with opportunities to develop. Without excellent staff the library service will be unable to achieve its goals.

A long-term strategy with a commitment to motivating and developing the team is required. This includes planning and preparation for both the organization and the individual, and commitment by managers and staff to learn and apply new skills. The benefits will be apparent over time as staff members are deployed in satisfying and effective roles. The organization will reap economic benefits and cultivate institutional knowledge and loyalty by reducing turnover and maximizing the potential of each person. Staff morale will be enhanced and opportunities expanded.

An organization that values and invests in its people sets up an environment that enhances possibilities, maximizes performance and, most importantly, delivers on its commitment to excellence and quality.

Specialized professional services should be shared across the system and be available to all. Typical services include support services such as digital preservation, conservation and IT system-support, as well as the administrative functions, such as human resources, finance, staff development, and health and safety, which underpin the operational effectiveness and efficiency of OULS.

In following this guiding principle, we will:

- 4.1 **develop an understanding of future skills requirements** by forecasting the needs of the organization and the expectations of a complex institution with long traditions and deeply held values, in the context of a rapidly changing library profession and information landscape;
- 4.2 **construct a skills plan** that will cover staff at all stages in their careers and at every level in the organization, constituting a guide to investing in each person and to deploying them to make effective use of the skills they develop;
- 4.3 **realize staff potential**, in seeking new staff and reviewing existing staff, through managers paying close attention to talents, natural aptitude and interest in learning

new skills, and through raising standards for everyone so that excellence and quality are normal and potential is nurtured;

- 4.4 **provide effective training for staff** to furnish them with the appropriate skills with which to make best use of their time, including general skills, understanding of procedures and policies, technical and technological skills, and the ability to stay current with rapid developments in information technology;
- 4.5 **pursue succession planning** so that as individuals move within and beyond the organization, disruption is minimized and a structure is provided within which change can maximize the potential of individuals and enhance the overall performance of the team;
- 4.6 **promote flexibility and increased mobility** across the system, using a sophisticated human resources management system to facilitate the flexible use of competent and qualified staff;
- 4.7 **motivate and reward staff** to help everyone to adjust to new expectations, especially by giving recognition for progress and by celebrating the group's achievements over time;
- 4.8 **refresh our culture** and transform it into one in which confidence, training, and recognition are foremost and any uncertainty or anxiety about skills and future prospects is accommodated in a constructive and secure environment;
- 4.9 **engage in library collections research** using what is understood about our readers, existing and potential, to design and propose new ideas and concepts, thereby demonstrating the ability and excellence of the library service and attracting the most qualified staff to join us.

5. Leadership and Governance

We will provide effective leadership that delivers its strategic goals, demonstrates effective corporate governance and manages resources efficiently.

Effective leadership is crucial to the decision-making process required to deliver against a strategic plan. Effective governance requires a transparent process for consideration of issues by the Curators of the University Libraries, taking into account the views of the University and its academic divisions, the colleges, library readers and library staff, while allowing the senior management of the library service to make decisions in a timely fashion. Senior staff are needed who combine proven competence with a bold and innovative philosophy of library services.

Securing adequate funding for the work of OULS is essential. As well as demonstrating our contribution to the success of the academic divisions in Oxford, we will earn the support of donors and advocates both in the University and the wider world by demonstrating our commitment to efficient and effective stewardship of resources. OULS will also continue to seek outside sources of funding to develop new capabilities and services and will demonstrate its ingenuity and originality by bidding successfully for such funding.

In following this guiding principle, we will:

- 5.1 **ensure that the senior management body develops strategic priorities for consideration by the Curators**, agrees clear objectives and service standards, and communicates these to its readers, staff and other stakeholders in a timely fashion;
- 5.2 **secure and deploy financial resources effectively to meet the objectives of the library service**, including developing business strategies to attract funds to support specific projects, to increase earned income, and to encourage benefaction;
- 5.3 **provide effective tools for measuring performance** in the delivery of library services in order to inform decision making and to monitor the progress of specific projects;
- 5.4 **ensure that the maximum possible staff time is focused on the efficient provision of services to readers**;
- 5.5 **see that decision-making structures are transparent** and mesh effectively with the governance of the collegiate university;
- 5.6 **engage positively with users and staff** through direct conversations with individuals, with divisions, faculties and departments of the University and with the colleges, and by engagement with their academic activities;

- 5.7 **define clear roles with identified accountability** and responsibility for resources, allowing effective delegation of decision making and resource allocation;
- 5.8 **actively engage with other institutions and professional bodies** to gain additional experience and to develop external peer relationships, in order to prevent the library service from becoming stale or insular;
- 5.9 **validate the strength of our services and ensure they are consistent with best practice**, by benchmarking with peers and by conducting other comparative reviews;
- 5.10 **ensure that OULS complies with relevant legal and institutional requirements** such as health and safety and the formal processes for the review and recording of risk.

6. Collaboration and Partnerships

We will collaborate and form partnerships within the University and with other leading organizations that will enhance the quality of services offered and build on the organization's reputation.

As a national research library in a collegiate university with collections of world significance, OULS will actively seek and engage in collaborations and partnerships both inside and outside the University that provide benefit to the library services as well as to our partners. Many benefits emerge from such collaborations, including outward-facing relationships, shared expertise, and strength in numbers for gaining funding, piloting new ideas, and supporting the innovative delivery of services.

Such collaboration is increasingly important as the rise in volume and complexity of physical and electronic information sources renders it more difficult for individual institutions to cater for all requirements. Partnership with academics and information professionals, inside and outside the University of Oxford, will allow us to realize benefits from the exchange of knowledge and to share costs which cannot be borne alone.

In following this guiding principle, we will:

- 6.1 **work collaboratively** with others, and influence and motivate by building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships both inside and outside the University;
- 6.2 **negotiate agreements successfully**, by framing them with clear scope, objectives, deliverables and outcomes, and, as a partner, by operating with integrity and honouring commitments;
- 6.3 **articulate the skills and competencies of the team** so as to recognize and assess both internal and external strengths and gaps, and thereby be able to construct successful collaborations and partnerships;
- 6.4 **build on successful and mutually beneficial collaborations and partnerships** and realise the potential of enhanced reputation to provide a foundation for further collaboration and new partnerships;
- 6.5 **demonstrate the value of innovation** by ensuring that the products of these collaborative initiatives are evident.