

## Chief Executive's review

The British Library is dedicated to supporting UK research excellence, innovation, education and creativity. I remain committed to continuously improving and finding new ways in which our services, collections and skills can be used to sustain our contribution to social and economic development and cultural life in the UK.

# DEFINING A MODERN LIBRARY

The development of our strategy for 2005-08 has been a key achievement of the past year. We've investigated the future needs of our users and determined how we will reshape our services, collections and skills in order to sustain our relevance. We've reviewed research and disciplinary trends and consulted widely.

The six priority areas we have identified will guide our activities over the next three years as we redefine what it means to be a great library in the 21st century. We have also begun two substantial reviews to address key questions arising from our strategy work. The reviews are looking at the intellectual and practical challenges of determining the right collection development strategy for the Library and the right skills and knowledge mix for our collection experts in the future.

A core element of the Library's role is to guarantee the long-term preservation and accessibility

of the UK's published record so that these materials can continue to be used in centuries to come. We're working with key stakeholders from Government and other organisations to ensure that the necessary technology and infrastructure is put in place to support this aim. The British Library has a vital role to play, and is co-sponsoring an analysis of current provision which will inform future bids for funding in this vital area.

Last year I outlined the foundations we had established for developing the National Digital Library which will store and provide access to the UK's electronic materials in perpetuity. This year we have tested and validated the fundamental design with input from an international technical advisory panel. In this context, last year's launch of the UK Web Archiving Consortium, in which the Library is lead partner, was a significant step towards

ensuring the future preservation of important web materials. Scoping the e-infrastructure, developing the national digital repository and building our digital collections are all essential to ensuring that invaluable scholarly, cultural and scientific electronic resources remain available for future generations.

Following the passage of the Legal Deposit Libraries Act in 2003 there has been a lot of work this year to prepare for the implementation of the Act. This will ensure the perpetual preservation of the UK's digital materials. As co-chair of the Joint Committee on Legal Deposit, which helped steer legislation through Parliament, the Library has played an active role in the Government's consultation exercise prior to the establishment of a Legal Deposit Advisory Panel. The Panel will further define the terms of the 2003 Act. Meanwhile, working closely with the other Legal Deposit Libraries, we've

begun developing the supporting technical architecture and the Library is addressing the complexities of managing e-journals through a pilot scheme with publishers.

We were all encouraged by the positive National Audit Office report which recognised that the British Library was responding well to the opportunities and challenges of providing services in the electronic era. The NAO reported that the Library had undergone significant and beneficial organisational change, and had made important recent improvements to the services it offers beyond its reading rooms. At the same time it urged us to be vigilant in seeking sustainable future services from the investment in our digital programmes.

The information landscape in which we operate is fast-moving and competitive. Players like Google are transforming the way



that information is made available. We are exploring how we can increase access to the knowledge held in our collection through partnerships. This year we've opened up to search engines a significant proportion of our catalogue data and the content information of our 20,000 most heavily-used journals. This means that our collection is more easily discoverable via web searches.

However, the emergence of new routes to information has led to a downturn in the demand for articles we supply remotely via traditional channels. Nevertheless, we've maintained a robust performance in an unpredictable market by rigorously reducing cost through the modernisation of our Document Supply service. Both Government and our users recognise that this service remains vital to UK research. We are working with stakeholders to map a sustainable future for Document Supply. We will continue to

introduce innovative approaches, such as our new portal, British Library Direct, and to pursue appropriate partnerships to meet the changing needs of our users.

We have achieved an enormous amount in the five years since I took up post as Chief Executive of the British Library. It's been an incredible privilege to be at the helm of this great national institution. Given the pace of external change, I am determined to continue to modernise our services and structures and work in partnership to ensure the Library's future relevance.

Looking back over this year there has been an impressive achievement of major targets. We have met or exceeded all of our customer satisfaction measures; we have significantly over-achieved our targets for web and catalogue access; we implemented an integrated library system on time and within budget.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication and professionalism of our staff, whose diverse achievements are highlighted in this report. Our staff are strongly committed to the British Library and have a clear sense of how their own work contributes to the Library's overall success. However, they would like to see more of senior colleagues and have more engagement with our plans. We are determined to act on this feedback. I am confident that the commitment of our staff, coupled with our new strategy, will ensure the British Library remains as a world-class national library providing widespread leadership and support for the cultural, social and economic health of the UK.

Lynne Brindley  
Chief Executive