

THE BRITISH LIBRARY'S CONTENT STRATEGY

Summary of responses received to this summer's consultation survey

Introduction

The focus of our work

This report summarises the responses to a consultation survey that the Library conducted over the period April to July 2006. The survey sought views on the content strategy which the Library is developing in two phases. The recently completed survey focused on Phase 1. Phase 1 articulates the overarching principles which govern the content strategy and applies these principles to the areas of Arts and Humanities (A&H) and Social Sciences (SocSci). Phase 2 will apply those same principles to the areas of Science, Technology and Medicine (STM). While our consultation paper makes reference to important related strategies (e.g. on access, preservation, resource discovery and digitisation), these were not explicitly part of this consultation and observations made about them have not been recorded here.

The British Library provides access a) to materials that it collects through legal deposit and purchase, and b) to materials that it connects to via licence or freely available links. The Library's content strategy focuses on the materials that the Library purchases and licenses through its 'acquisitions' budget (which currently stands at c.£16m per year).

What we consulted on

The consultation sought views on:

- The Library's approach to developing a content strategy and the implications of taking that approach
- The Library's approach to managing the print-digital transition
- Key factors (or drivers) that should influence implementation of the content strategy and the implications of applying those factors
- The Library's high level content strategy for A&H and SocSci and preliminary thinking on its high-level content strategy for STM
- The Library's detailed content strategy for research disciplines and special formats of materials in the A&H and SocSci
- The Library's approach to developing a partnership strategy to support the content strategy work
- The Library's approach to developing a deeper ongoing dialogue with researchers.

Why we consulted

The outcome of this consultation exercise will inform:

- Any refinements that we make to the key drivers for our content strategy
- Any changes that we make to budget allocations for purchased acquisitions and licences
- The partnerships that we develop in support of our content strategy
- The means by which we develop a deeper ongoing dialogue with researchers and those organisations that represent them.

Who was consulted

The Library undertook an open public consultation by providing access to its consultation paper on its website. In addition, copies of the paper were sent to over 500 stakeholders representing universities, learned societies, publishers, authors, national and regional museums, galleries and archives, national libraries, legal deposit libraries, government departments and bodies representing the library and information sector.

Who responded

A total of 143 responses was received. 102 (71%) came from organisations and 41 (29%) came from individuals. 27 (19%) of these came from external stakeholders and 14 (10%) came from staff. Overall we received a very good response rate which provides views from across all sectors. This report does not attempt to present the views of individual sectors.

Structure of this report

A summary of the most frequently made comments follows. The report is then structured by the 14 questions that respondents were invited to address. Related questions are grouped together. Each question or group of questions is followed by a summary of general comments made and specific issues raised. Comments on the 38 research areas and 8 special formats, presented as templates in the consultation paper, are summarised in the Annex.

Most frequently made comments

The Library's Advisory Panel, established in May 2005 to assist the Library in tackling the substantial intellectual and practical challenges of determining its content strategy going forward, met on 8 November 2006 to review the responses received. The Panel commented that 'The Library has received a great many quality responses, expressing a commonality of view, to a quality document'.

Respondents themselves welcomed the content strategy consultation. Broad consensus emerged around the following points:

- The transition from a collecting strategy to a collecting and connecting (i.e. content) strategy.
- The elements of the British Library's content strategy that will not change (we will continue to collect material published in countries across the globe, across all disciplines and languages, and we will continue to fund retrospective purchasing).
- The Library's determination to continue to sustain a coherent collection which is not dominated by 'gap-filling'.
- Decisions on what to collect and connect to should be informed by the information needs of the research and business communities (as distinct from other user groups).
- Recognition of the print-digital transition.
- The British Library as the national library of the UK to continue to focus on the information needs of both current and future generations.
- The presentation of the Library's content strategy in terms of broad disciplines rather than in terms of our more traditional approach of geographic areas.
- The desire expressed by the Library to develop an ongoing dialogue with researchers.
- The leadership we have shown in developing a model that other national libraries can adapt to present their own collecting and connecting strategies.

While many supportive comments about the Library's proposals were made, concern was expressed about:

- The challenges faced by the Library in ensuring the long-term preservation of electronic materials.
- The Library's statement that there 'may be a case for some modest downward adjustments' in future intake from certain parts of Western Europe and the Commonwealth.
- Over concentration on the short-term nature of some drivers (i.e. global trends, UK research priorities, demand) to determine in any significant way the future collecting of the national library whose role is to serve both current and future generations.
- Our current and proposed future content strategy for individual research areas appearing to focus primarily on collecting, when the overall intention is to move to a content strategy.
- The lack of clarity about how the content strategy builds on national initiatives for collaborative collection management and storage.
- The extent to which changes to collecting and connecting can be accommodated within a level acquisitions budget.
- The use of the Research Assessment Exercise 2008 Panel Structure as the framework used to present the Library's content strategy, given that this

is not an enduring scheme and does not cover adequately interdisciplinary research areas.

- The lack of explanation given to describe the Library's different levels of collecting.

Several respondents expressed a desire to see the transparency manifest in the whole consultation process carried forward into the future.

Many detailed points of clarification about our collecting policies were made and a large number of practical considerations were put forward. These are not detailed in this summary report but will inform the next stage of the content strategy and its implementation.

Questions 1 and 2

Q1 Please comment on the Library's approach to developing a 'content strategy'.

Q2 Please comment on any of the implications of the British Library shifting its focus to a content strategy.

Sections related to Q1 and Q2

The Library sets out the distinction between a collecting strategy (i.e. building the Library's own holdings) and a connecting strategy (i.e. connecting to content held by others) and states its intention to develop both of these in the light of pressure on resources and the changing information environment. We refer to the combination of a 'collecting' strategy and a 'connecting' strategy as a 'content' strategy.

Through implementation of the content strategy, researchers will gain access to a wide range of materials in an integrated way. The British Library and other information providers will need to work together to provide this connected service. While we cannot guarantee perpetual access to materials that we link to, we will make our best efforts to sustain access by seeking partners' commitment to long-term access provision. We will develop our staff expertise and collaborate with researchers to try to ensure that we provide access to materials that are of an appropriate level and quality for research.

General comments received

There is broad support for the British Library's intention to develop a content strategy in a world full of print and electronic materials. This approach is described as 'the only sensible way forward', 'the only possible policy'. Several respondents particularly welcome the fact that this development is being driven by the needs of the research and business communities.

There was strong endorsement for partnership working in implementing the content strategy. There was also agreement that assuring long-term availability of information in a digital world was an important issue to address.

Respondents recognised the risks associated with the provision of long-term access to materials not held by the Library and would welcome more information about how the Library will make best endeavours to ensure stable, long-term access to content.

Respondents acknowledged the difficulty of ensuring that materials are quality checked for research relevance. The Library's intention to engage with researchers and develop staff skills to deepen knowledge of the different fields of research was welcomed in support of this goal.

Specific issues

- In developing the connecting strategy for print, take into account that many researchers want to consult a very broad range of subjects on a single site.
- Maintain wide-spread consultation and communication to ensure users understand how, why and who is providing information.
- Ensure access to difficult-to-obtain material (especially e-materials) for as wide a range of researchers as possible (e.g. disabled users, researchers who do not have access to HE facilities).
- While focusing on the needs of researchers in determining what to collect and connect to, be mindful of the need to keep informed other stakeholder groups (e.g. public libraries) in the development of the content strategy.

Question 3

Q3 Please comment on the British Library's approach to managing the print-digital transition.

Section related to Q3

The Library sets out the factors that will affect the rate at which it will shift its purchased collecting of materials from print to digital copies in cases where we are currently collecting print only or both print and electronic formats in parallel. We present two categories of material for which a decision has been taken to change the collecting policy and shift to the purchase of digital copies only (wherever possible). These are: purchased UK journals that duplicate print copies held under legal deposit and purchased overseas journals.

General comments received

Respondents are broadly supportive of a cautious approach to managing this transition so long as long-term access and preservation issues are addressed. Indeed, they would welcome more information on how long-term access and preservation will be achieved, especially in the case of overseas material that is in a poor state, or produced in politically unstable environments. The Library was

strongly encouraged to ensure no loss of access through technological obsolescence and to adhere to international standards.

Some respondents questioned the assumption that there could be benefits to be gained from the print-digital transition in the form of potential savings on the purchase price, collection handling, storage and preservation.

Specific issues

- How can the Library make decisions about the collecting of electronic material in the absence of information about access and preservation? (e.g. which items will be preserved for the long-term?)
- Explore the implications on document supply of the shift to e-journals (e.g. the effect on the borrowing of journal issues).

Question 4

Q4 Do you agree with the Library's assessment of the key drivers and practical considerations that should influence its content strategy?

Section related to Q4

The Library sets out a small number of key factors which will enable it to build a coherent collection in the face of changes in the global publishing economy and mechanisms for dissemination. These factors are presented as five 'key drivers' – global trends, relevance to the UK, current UK research priorities, historic strengths and demand - and three 'practical considerations' – provision elsewhere, access barriers, and life-cycle collection management. In developing these drivers, the Library has endeavoured to encapsulate both the immediate needs and the longer term needs of UK researchers, anticipating as far as is possible the content needs of future generations. The drivers are listed in no particular order as their relative importance varies across different research disciplines and we have not tried at this stage to apply any form of weighting to them.

General comments received

In general, respondents consider the key drivers and practical considerations as presented by the Library to represent a coherent and robust approach to the development of a framework for future collecting by the British Library. Respondents recognise the challenge that the Library faces in meeting the short-term preoccupations of researchers and, at the same time, anticipating the long-term needs of future generations. Indeed, there was much discussion about this and it was felt that we should focus our attention on what we are uniquely able to do rather than duplicate what public, academic and commercial libraries exist to do. Tracking short-term developments could lead to a 'patchwork' of unbalanced collections of little contemporary or long-term value.

Specific issues

Of relevance to all drivers

- Undertake regular review and consultation on both the implications of and the weight to be attached to three drivers in particular – global trends, relevance to the UK and current UK research priorities.

Global trends

- To consider global themes from a UK perspective and with a focus on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office priorities may not be a reliable way of identifying global trends and their likely life-cycle. Take a wider range of views into account, from the research community itself, and also from international organisations, charities and non-governmental organisations.

Relevance to UK

- Interpret this in its widest sense to include, for instance, the relevance of the BL as an international resource.

Current UK research priorities

- Incorporate the priorities of research from outside HE (e.g. from industry, charities and government) as well as from HE.

Demand

- Collect when demand is low as no-one else will. Low use may be vital to those working in small highly specialist fields.
- Be alert to the fact that there may be unmet demand for what is not provided.

New practical consideration

- Consider adding a new practical consideration 'publishing trends' to cover changes in publishing output and the globalisation of scholarly publication.

Questions 5 and 6

Q5 Please comment on the British Library's overall proposal for what it should and should not change within its content strategy.

Q6 Within the context of finite Library resources, do you wish to make any suggestions about where the Library should decrease or increase its collecting? Please provide a rationale for any suggestions you wish to make.

Sections related to Q 5 and Q6

This section provides a high level picture of what will and what will not change as a result of the Content Strategy. We will continue to collect material published in countries across the globe, across all disciplines and languages (although in some subjects, English-language material will continue to be given priority), and we will continue to fund retrospective purchasing. We will shift resources to support changing priorities in relation to discipline, geography and format of material. We will accommodate those changes within the context of a flat real-terms acquisitions budget by driving down costs associated with procurement and processing of collection items.

General comments received

There was broad support for what the Library states it will and will not change. There was particularly strong support from all sectors for what will *not* change, with organisations welcoming the proposals as being both sensible and reassuring. There was less support for what will change, with particular concerns expressed about any downward adjustments in collecting from Western Europe. Many respondents felt the strategy underestimated the importance of Europe, in terms of the relevance of Europe to the drivers, the volume and quality of published scholarly outputs from the continent, the strength of the British Library's collection in Western Europe, the importance of Britain's place within the EU, and the requirement for many researchers to conduct research in the original language. Some respondents objected to any potential reduction in intake from Commonwealth countries.

Several respondents welcomed the proposed increase in collecting from one or more of Latin America, India and China, subject to the normal assessment of research quality.

Several respondents recognised the need for the development of a national framework for film/moving image archiving and the British Library having a role in this, in collaboration with the British Film Institute.

Specific issues

- We should make clearer those areas in which we intend to decrease collecting.
- We should provide greater rationale for downward shifts for some geographic areas, partly to inform any appropriate adjustments to be made by other libraries.
- We should fill gaps created by cuts in Western European purchasing since the 1980s.
- Acquisition of research-level materials from China, India, Latin America and Eastern Europe should not be at the expense of the acquisition of materials from West Europe.
- There should be a national strategy to ensure that material excluded by selective collecting is picked up by at least one library.

Questions 7, 9 and 11

Q7 Please comment on any of the draft format strategies.

Q9 Please comment on any of the draft content strategies for arts and humanities disciplines.

Q11 Please comment on any of the draft content strategies for social science disciplines.

Sections related to Q7, 9, 11

The Content Strategy presents details about the Library's current and proposed future content strategy across a broad range of research areas and special formats of materials. 38 research areas and 8 special formats are included. See Annex for comments made on these.

Specific issues

- Suggestions were made for developing additional format templates for early printed books, official publications, microform, digital formats other than sound, moving image and film.
- It would be useful to have an indication of the relative importance in collecting terms of the different research disciplines.

Question 8

Q8 Please comment on the British Library's proposed high-level content strategy for the arts and humanities.

Section related to Q8

The British Library will continue to collect in the arts and humanities as a whole, making appropriate shifts to reflect research trends, key global issues and demand, whilst filling historic gaps, extending into new formats and giving greater attention to its visual and audio-visual collections.

General comments received

There is 'emphatic' endorsement of the high-level strategy – 'sensible', 'extremely sensible', 'very sensible', 'clearly articulated', 'generally appropriate', 'authoritative, comprehensive without being prescriptive', 'commendable' etc. Many stressed that the humanities researcher is very dependent on the depth and breadth of the British Library's collection and agreed that the British Library was an essential laboratory for the Arts & Humanities researcher. All welcomed the commitment to collaboration and partnership. Partnership working was considered particularly important in the development of our visual and audio-visual collection. The AHRC thought that collaborative collection development chimed in with the new emphasis on collaborative research.

Specific issues

There was overwhelming support for the eight priorities outlined in the strategy. These cover the application of our drivers to A&H collecting, and our role in acquiring or providing access to specific types of material (e.g. datasets, British historical archives of research potential, overseas newspapers, and visual and audio-visual materials). Specific comments were made on the following priorities.

- British Library leadership for a national strategy for English literary manuscripts.
 - British Library leadership for a national strategy for English literary manuscripts is welcomed.
 - We should widen the strategy to cover political papers and scientific papers.
- Maintaining three distinct propositions – histories of the book, popular culture and some language-based area studies (e.g. Middle East, Eastern Europe and South Asia).
 - Western European or European (East and West) collecting and connecting should be an explicit priority.
 - Emphasis on histories of the book was welcomed.

Question 10

Q10 Please comment on the British Library's proposed high-level content strategy for the social sciences.

Section related to Q10

The British Library will consolidate its strengths around UK and English-language research-level books, academic journals worldwide, US and UK 'grey' literature, official materials worldwide, and Slavonic and East European materials. The intake of electronic journals and associated resources, including websites and a limited number of datasets, will be extended. The Library will work with ESRC, the LSE, the Institute for Advanced Legal Studies and other key bodies and institutions to understand the changing needs of the social science researcher.

General comments received

The consultation resulted in wide endorsement of the high-level strategy, i.e. 'endorses', 'supports', 'sound', 'clearly articulated', 'strategies are broadly right', 'excellent', 'major step forward'. The intention to strengthen staff expertise in social sciences was welcomed. There was general consensus on the emphasis on partnership and collaboration, both in terms of endorsing and developing existing partnerships, especially with LSE Library and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, and in extending strategic partnerships.

Working with ESRC was welcomed by a number of respondents including the ESRC itself. The ESRC considers the Library as a key strategic partner and endorsed the proposals for more active collaboration with the Council to develop a coherent approach to content development and future information provision within the social sciences. Particular reference was made to the potential for increasing awareness within the social science community of the full depth and breadth of resources available at the British Library.

The willingness to increase electronic and multi-format intake was endorsed, including the intention to acquire more datasets, but the case was made for continuing access to material in paper format as social science researchers continue to make use of book-based materials.

The growing interdisciplinary nature of social science research based around common research themes was noted.

There were numerous responses about grey literature and the need for the Library to increase its collecting of this material which is difficult to access and which has a transient presence on the web. The need for robust structures for long term preservation and access to grey literature and websites was expressed.

Specific issues

- The importance of comparative studies in social sciences was linked to the importance of acquiring Western European as well as East European material.
- There was support expressed for the emphasis on collecting international research resources to reflect the global drivers of economic and social change.

Question 12

Q12 Please comment on the Library's preliminary thinking about its high-level content strategy for science, technology and medicine.

Section related to Q12

The Library outlines a high level strategy for science, technology and medicine (STM). Our strategy states that we intend to continue to provide a baseline collection of books and journals across all STM disciplines. We will consider the changes that we need to make to our collecting strategy in the face of rapid changes in the global publishing economy, publishing formats and demand. At the same time, we will develop a connecting strategy which responds to the increasing importance of primary research data, the creation of open access repositories and new journal business models. At a later stage, we will consult on a well-developed STM strategy.

General comments received

Although the STM strategy was only developed at a high level, there was widespread support for our strategic aims. A number of organisations indicated that they would like to be consulted when a full STM strategy is presented. Respondents commented that we have a good understanding of the external environment and challenges facing libraries in providing information to the STM researcher and our priorities are well aligned with those of other organisations.

A number of organisations welcomed the Library's intention to continue to explore and develop its role in relation to primary data and repository information. The Library was advised to focus upon improving the visibility of, and links to, datasets but not necessarily to duplicate the work of other organisations in the curation of datasets.

Some respondents were concerned about the potential negative impact that any reduction in low-use and duplicate journal titles might have on document supply.

Some respondents wanted more information on the implications of focusing activity initially around a limited number of key areas (biomedicine; energy and climate change; and material sciences and nanotechnology).

Question 13

Q13 What factors do you believe the Library should consider as it continues to develop a partnership strategy that meets the needs of UK researchers?

Section related to Q13

The Library has done much to develop partnerships with other major repositories in a world where no single repository can collect everything. Although we recognise the many challenges inherent in developing successful partnerships, we want to sustain and develop them in order to share responsibilities for acquisitions, long-term preservation and access, while at the same time maintaining an overall coherence within our own collection.

General comments received

Respondents generally welcome the Library's determination to extend and strengthen its collaborative efforts by involving new players as well as continuing to work with existing partners. Several respondents comment that, for partnerships to work effectively, long-term guaranteed free access and preservation must be binding on all parties concerned, with stable funding in place. Development of a national solution to access, storage and preservation is recommended as the way forward, building on generic collaborative collection management models such as the CoFoR (Collaboration for Research) initiative.

While caution was expressed about taking forward the distributed approach to collecting in the print domain, there was strong encouragement for partnership working to facilitate electronic access to materials in a distributed environment.

Specific issues

- Outline more clearly the Library's vision for how partnerships will work, the impact that they will have and the types of partner sought.

- Include libraries in national cultural institutions (i.e. in museums, galleries and so on) as partners.
- Focus on developing partnerships in areas where we intend to decrease our collecting or cease to collect.
- Set out how the Library's content and retention strategies relate to what is going on in research libraries, both nationally and internationally.
- Develop links with the numerous examples of good practice within the HE sector where researchers and librarians are working together to develop value added services.
- Recognise and benefit from exemplars of good practice (including those outside London).
- Offer advice and expertise (e.g. through training courses) that would assist partners in matching or coming close to the collection management practices of the British Library.

Question 14

Q14 Please comment on the Library's proposed approach for developing a deeper ongoing dialogue about its content strategy with researchers. Are there other mechanisms we should consider?

Section related to Q14

The Library recognises that in a rapidly changing information environment in which it cannot achieve comprehensiveness of coverage there is an increasing need to validate the content strategy with researchers on a regular basis. We intend to develop a rolling programme of reviewing our content strategy for particular research disciplines through, for example, panels of expert researchers and online discussions. We will also make use of our new Integrated Library System to analyse our collection intake in new ways.

General comments received

The majority of respondents expressed strong endorsement for the Library's increased commitment to dialogue with researchers, including independent researchers, and for the mechanisms proposed (i.e. through panels of expert researchers and online discussions). This was recognised as being particularly important in cases where the Library intends to decrease its collecting or connecting so that other organisations are able to consider the consequences and take appropriate actions. Several methods for achieving ongoing dialogue were put forward, including developing informal panels/forums and e-enabled discussion to engage researchers at all levels in discussion, and setting up a 'future watch' group made up of researchers from various disciplines plus experts in communication technologies, publishers and others with a stake in the scholarly communication process. The Library's intention to develop better management information about its collection was welcomed.

It was recommended that the Library should work with the wider research community, including specialist libraries, learned societies and funding councils, subject library groups, publishers and other information providers, international organisations, and the business community. Many institutions expressed interest in pursuing opportunities to collaborate over content development and mechanisms for ongoing dialogue.