Scenarios for beyond 2020:

Wild West

The issue facing academic and research libraries today is what should their role be in the changing academic and technological landscape. Scenario planning is a way of addressing such challenges. It is a way of systematically dealing with uncertainty to inform long-term strategic decisions.

The Academic Libraries of the Future project has developed three scenarios which describe possible futures for teaching and research libraries in the UK. They take the economic, social and other pressures faced by the world today and create futures in which Higher Education (HE) and libraries have evolved in different directions. They describe a world some distance away in the future, beyond 2020. The scenarios will help HE institutions and other organisations look at the challenges faced from a fresh focus and help them formulate strategies to ensure the sector continues to be a leading global force. The scenarios are based on the contributions from a wide range of stakeholders at workshops during 2010 and 2011 – librarians, institutional managers, funders, service providers, publishers and government. This flyer describes the 'library' services and organisation elements of one particular scenario. The full scenarios[1] provide additional material including common assumptions across all scenarios, the global environment and UK HE context. It is not intended to be a 'preferred' scenario; it just describes one possible future world.

This flyer is for information only and should not be used to replace the full scenario as a basis for strategic planning.

The Wild West World

In the Wild West scenario private providers compete with each other and the state to offer students educational services, including information services and learning material. The power lies in the hands of the consumer ('student' being a rather old-fashioned term) who is able to pick and choose from courses and learning materials to create a personal educational experience.

The pattern in 2050 for libraries and librarians is of fragmentation, specialisation and reconfiguration with no single model dominating. In 2011 a librarian is someone who works in a library. In 2050, it is difficult to define a common group of librarians who share a common set of skills and values. There are many more disciplines and specialisations than are recognised in 2011.

The 'how to use the scenarios' guide[2] sets out a detailed approach for library strategy development. It also documents issues and insights for the scenarios and for the sector.

Teaching and learning

The separation of the space from the institution facilitates support for students studying different modules from different institutions. Front-line support in these spaces enables a potential student to see what modules are available from which institution on what terms.

The variety of what is considered to be a library is broader than in 2011. A key challenge is to understand the difference between the library as a space and the library as a service. Working in a provided physical space continues to be a critical part of the student experience despite a belief in the power of digital technologies as a learning and research tool. Space management is increasingly divorced from the provision of library services. Many of the physical buildings existing in 2011 as libraries are not fit for purpose in 2050. Many historic library buildings have been repurposed as, for example, hotels. The increasingly diverse nature of the 'information professions' has pulled at the foundations of what is seen in 2011 as librarianship. Despite this the profession has remained 'whole' by striving to create an impact and a strong brand.

When an institution wishes to create a new 'module', it contracts a series of specialists to work together to create that module. The team consist of the lecturers, specialist authors, librarians, technicians and learning support professionals. The package consists of a blended mix of digital resources, social support and project
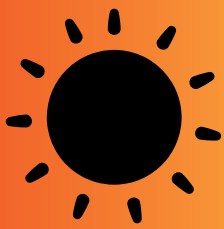
work according to the discipline. To manage costs, most institutions put an emphasis on 'packaged' learning. The elite universities offer greater flexibility but at a much higher cost. The library services are usually bought in from a range of suppliers. Information literacy training concentrates on making sensible buying decisions and how to combine different resources to build an effective learning experience.

Research

When a new research project is being set up, the 'librarian' for the project is involved from its inception to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to support the information management needs of the project and the wider community. The librarian calls upon a wide variety of library specialists to support the project on a consulting basis.

Particularly for multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research fields, the digitisation of information offers the potential for new forms of appraisal on an open basis. A research project in health might for interest be peer reviewed by the medical community, an ethical community, an economic community and a social sciences community.

Librarians and librarianship

Information professionals are increasingly embedded through the lifetime of the research project or teaching development work as members of the team with specialist knowledge on the discipline. In the same way that medical records or legal librarianship have developed as specialist disciplines, the large scale of information capture, process and storage in many fields of research have created new fields for 'librarianship'. The example of ClimateGate in 2010 started the growth of specialist information managers in the research teams rather than in the 'library'.

Academic life in 2050 is increasingly fluid with many academics having multiple posts in teaching and learning, research and knowledge transfer that are short or medium term. Support from librarians has increased over the years. Freelance or contract librarians provide the required often part-time support to academic teams. Within the elite universities these 'personal librarianship' services are a key selling point for an institution in recruiting star teachers or researchers.

For the 'users' of library services, be they researchers, authors or lecturers or students, there is a common theme of the librarian providing 'front-line support'. The design, organisation,

protection of IP, and curation and conservation of materials combine what were seen in 2011 as IT skills with librarianship skills.

For an adult learner, or for someone seeking Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training, the librarian is a professional who is accessed virtually or via an 'EzeeU' who guides them through what is available locally and via distance means and the packages of support available. There has been a constant need for reinvention as 'personal' services are automated to reduce costs and the human value-added services need to be redefined.

From the professional viewpoint there has been considerable change. The library manager has a very broad role with a responsibility for running a diverse set of professionals. Many are not directly responsible for managing physical spaces which are typically contracted out. The library managers are relationship managers, builders of partnerships and heavily networked. Many do not come from a physical libraries background. They manage a series of relationships with shared service providers and with a network of specialists hired in on a consulting basis to tackle specific areas of development.

Library managers are, or report to, a Pro-Vice Chancellor of resources. They are measured on the ability to manage expectations and on satisfaction of the stakeholders in the service, be they lecturers, researchers or students, depending on the HEI. Some work in shared service organisations supporting a locality or a chain.

Entry to the librarian profession is through a short course followed by an increasing array of specialist qualifications and on-the-job experience. Many librarians are freelance or work in specialist bodies providing services to a locality or a variety of institutions. An increasingly ageing society makes home working more prevalent, so that skills in short supply are available from people into their 80s and 90s.

Jobs in the elite universities are highly competitive and sought after by specialist librarians. This is because the expert librarians are working much more closely with lecturers, researchers and students alike. They are the information specialists who shepherd the 'subject' experts and students through the information and knowledge management process.

Further information

Further information on LotF, or help on using the scenarios can be found at **www.futurelibraries.info**

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