transforming the Library transforming

Strategy 2022-2025

RLUK Research Libraries UK
“Libraries bring the world’s scholarship to researchers.”
Introduction

RLUK strategy
2022-2025

This is an incredibly exciting time for the research library and scholarly communities.

Research Libraries UK, an alliance of 37 significant research libraries in the UK and Ireland, is committed to working with, and on behalf of, its members to enable them to face shared challenges and seize collective opportunities.

This strategy outlines the ways in which RLUK harnesses the collective voice, experience, and expertise of its members, its determination to support them as they face current and emerging challenges, and its ability to act as a confident voice on behalf of the community.

This strategy is also an invitation, to like-minded stakeholders, to join with RLUK and its members as we work to transform scholarship and the role of the research library.

Contents

4 The Library Transforming  8 RLUK’s vision, mission and role  10 Transforming the Library
**Research is impossible without libraries**

Libraries provide the vital materials and services that enable research across all disciplines to take place. From forming research ideas through to the dissemination of findings, the process of research would fail without a network of well-run libraries and their informed, expert staff. Libraries enable, participate in, and enhance every stage of the research process.

---

**Libraries provoke and inspire**

Scholarship is cumulative with new discoveries building on work done by others. Libraries provide access to this work, both published and unpublished, allowing researchers to ask what is known, how is it known, what is missing? Without answers to these questions it would be impossible to form new lines of research. The material within libraries, archives, galleries, and museums inspires the next generation of research questions to be asked.

**Libraries enable research**

The collections of libraries are the raw materials of research – manuscripts, letters, diaries, working papers, unpublished reports, theses, various editions and versions, oral histories, recordings and film, photographs, museum objects and art works, and research data. These are the resources that researchers consult and reference in their work. Without these collections – preserved, described, and made available by libraries, archives, museums and galleries – there would be no research.

---

Of equal importance are the spaces provided by libraries and the staff within them. Libraries create spaces - physical and digital - for ideas to be exchanged and tested, and these ideas are enhanced by engagement with expert library staff who bring their own knowledge and experience to the research process.

**Libraries connect**

Libraries bring the world’s scholarship to the local scholar – they select, collect, and preserve materials to be used by researchers at the host institution. They facilitate the discovery and seamless, barrier-free reading of both print and online journal articles, books, and other resources.

**Libraries disseminate**

Increasingly, libraries curate, preserve, and disseminate the institution’s research outputs (articles, monograph, theses, data and more) to a wider world. Through open access repositories and university presses they ensure that the intellectual wealth of the institution is shared for wider civic and public benefit.

---

Newcastle University
“The material within libraries, archives, galleries, and museums inspires the next generation of research questions to be asked.”
"Libraries contribute to the health of society through the preservation and sharing of knowledge: one of the pillars of an open society."
Libraries are transforming and transformative

Digital technologies continue to change society – how we relate to one another, how research is carried out, how we learn. Research libraries are reflecting these changes, expanding their roles as the deepening exploration of the digital environment progresses in parallel with a re-evaluation of physical contexts.

As research methods and data capture evolve, as reproducibility concerns require an understanding not just of data but of the software used to analyse those data, the range of formats handled by libraries has increased. The digital shift has been cumulative, not substitutional. In addition to well-established methods of working with traditional materials, new skills and ways of working are being developed to acquire, preserve, and make available born-digital materials in a wide range of formats. Evolving research methods and data capture require an understanding not just of the data but of the software used to analyse them. More needs to be done to ensure that these new formats will still be available in the decades and centuries to come.

Rare and unique materials in collections have been digitised using increasingly innovative techniques to allow wider access, new ways of seeing, using and re-using, and to aid with long-term preservation. Manuscripts and objects that might once have been rarely seen are now available digitally 24/7 and worldwide for scholars and the curious. However, many resources of potential value to a wider academic audience remain solely in physical form.

As libraries are increasingly taking on the role of disseminating locally-produced scholarship, a new range of skills and processes is required. Libraries are managing repositories and ensuring compliance with rapidly evolving data sharing and open access mandates from funders. They are setting up and reviving university presses and publishing open access journals and monographs. They are supporting open access textbooks and educational resources.

*These are the enhanced roles of libraries.*
RLUK’s vision

Our network of distinctive research libraries will be recognised as influential leaders of research and scholarship through their outstanding collections and services.

RLUK’s mission

RLUK is a consortium of major research libraries in the UK and Ireland, whose purpose is to shape the research library agenda and contribute to the wider knowledge economy through innovative projects and services that add value and impact to the process of research and researcher-training.

We also contribute to the health of society through the preservation and sharing of knowledge: one of the pillars of an open society.

RLUK’s role

The members of RLUK, some of the largest and most important research libraries in the world, have come together in recognition that there are advantages in working collaboratively to ensure that libraries can continue to support research well into the 21st Century.

Through their leadership they are participating in the transformations that are taking place in research, research-informed teaching and learning, and wider civic and global engagement. They see the challenges and possibilities these changes present to libraries. As libraries are vital to the research endeavour they must continue to transform as research practice does.
These five roles define RLUK’s work and shape this strategy. They enable us to promote the research library community as a vibrant and integral element of the scholarly landscape:

1. **Convene**
   RLUK convenes its members around the issues, challenges, and opportunities that affect them. Whether through our networks, working groups, or events, RLUK provides routes through which members can explore their common experiences, share knowledge, and develop and embed collaboration.

2. **Represent**
   RLUK represents the voice of its members. Through its ability to harness the collective experience and knowledge of research libraries, RLUK is able to provide a clear, consistent, and confident voice to the community around the key issues that face it.

3. **Support**
   RLUK actively supports its members to meet the challenges they face and seize the many opportunities available in response to these. RLUK is able to harness the joint experience and knowledge of its members, and those of its stakeholder partners, for their collective benefit. RLUK works to proactively support members in the development and delivery of their activities through its strategic research, benchmarking, facilitation of knowledge exchange, and development of tools and resources.

4. **Advocate**
   RLUK advocates for its members around many of the major issues affecting them, representing them to policy makers, funders, publishers, and the wider research and scholarly communities. RLUK actively participates in key cross-sector discussions and advocates for its members on boards, panels, and working groups.

5. **Collaborate**
   RLUK places a premium on partnership and has created a series of high-performing and impactful collaborations across the research, information, and cultural sectors for the benefit of its members and the wider community.
Transforming the library

RLUK strategy
2022-2025

Transformation sits at the heart of this strategy.

These are uncertain times for the research and scholarly communities. With the medium and long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic still unknown, the pressing need to challenge entrenched biases and unfairness within societies and communities, and with the growing climate emergency, our collective success will depend on our ability to adapt to unexpected changes and seize emerging opportunities. Throughout recent challenges RLUK members have been resilient and innovative, adapting at speed to the changing needs of their users, and rising to meet the shifting and complex demands of scholarship.

This strategy outlines the ways in which RLUK will harness the collective voice, experience, and expertise of its members over the period 2022-2025. It embodies RLUK’s commitment to working with, through, and on behalf of its members to enable them to face shared challenges and realise collective opportunities. It will act as a vehicle through which RLUK and its members can affect change, build consensus, and foster collaboration.

This strategy is also an invitation, to like-minded stakeholders, to work with RLUK and its members as it works to realise the ambition of our strategy and the role of the research library.

Context

This ambitious strategy seeks to drive change, enable dialogue, and promote collaboration across the research, information, and cultural sectors. It confidently asserts RLUK’s key strategic priorities for the period 2022-2025 and outlines our vision for their realisation through the creation of tangible programmes of work and cross-sector initiatives. The strategy will support RLUK’s members as they transform their collections, services, and spaces to meet new and changing demands and is the result of an extensive period of member engagement.

Each **headline strand** identifies a broad area of interest for our members where by coming together the community can make progress, both individually and collectively. They are underpinned by a series of strategic aims which will be achieved through an ambitious programme of events, initiatives, and programmes.

The three **cross-cutting themes** are overarching areas of interest which will run through everything that RLUK does within the strategy. The themes are both a commitment and a provocation to RLUK, its members, and stakeholders, to help us address some of the most pressing challenges facing us as institutions and as a society.

This combination of headline strands and cross-cutting themes enables RLUK to proactively support its members as they transform their collections, services, and operations. They enable flexibility in our work during uncertain times, and the dedication of resource, experience and expertise to the strategy’s implementation.
RLUK’s strategy consists of *five headline strands* and *three cross-cutting themes*. 

Role of the research library

Digital Shift

Open Scholarship

Culture and Heritage

Collective Collections

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Rights, Copyright & Licensing

Infrastructure
Role of the research library

The roles played by research libraries are continually changing: for their users, within their institutions, and amongst their communities. RLUK will work with its members to support and advocate for the diverse roles of the research library as places of experimentation, their role as partners and pioneers in the research process, and as catalysts for change within society and scholarship.

RLUK will work with its members to enable and advocate for the role of research libraries as:

1. **Laboratories**
   As places and spaces of multi-disciplinary experimentation. As homes of diverse collections, a wide variety of skills, and collaborative spaces.

2. **Partners and pioneers**
   As active participants and leaders in the envisaging and undertaking of academic and scholarship research, utilising the unique skills and expertise library staff can bring to original scholarship, and using our diverse collections to enable and support diverse partnerships.

3. **Central to communities**
   Sitting at the heart of local, regional, national and international communities, research libraries are conduits and catalysts of cross-community and societal discourse, and provide an entry point into their wider institutions for diverse groups of people, both users and staff.
What this means

RLUK will:

1. Utilise the experience and insight of its members through its *New Directors Network (NDN)* and *Associate Directors Network (ADN)* to consider the leadership requirements of the research library of the future, as its roles continue to diversify.

2. Invest in collaborative resources to enable RLUK members to gain an overview of how the research library workforce is changing in response to its shifting roles, both nationally and internationally, and how they can take proactive steps to diversify this workforce and its leadership.

3. Convene high-profile events through which the role of research libraries as key elements of research infrastructure can be demonstrated and presented to cross-sector audiences of professionals, researchers, decision-makers, and funders.

4. Develop meaningful measures through which research libraries can better demonstrate the impact of their work within their institutions, communities, and society, and ways in which these can be presented to decision makers, funders, and policy makers.

5. Work with its international counterparts through IARLA (International Alliance of Research Library Associations) to amplify the role of research libraries internationally and coordinate joint advocacy where possible.

6. Explore the role of library buildings, as places of physical and digital experimentation, through the creation of inclusive digital and physical spaces for a wide variety of users.

7. Initiate and develop ambitious partnerships between itself, its stakeholders, and partners to advocate for changes to the UK copyright and licensing framework to better enable experimentation and emerging forms of scholarship.
Digital shift

The rapid evolution and diversification of digital technologies, tools, and techniques will continue to transform research library collections, services, and user expectations. As the fourth industrial revolution deepens, RLUK will proactively support its members to seize the collective opportunities and face the shared challenges that new and emerging technologies and methodologies bring. It will do so with an emphasis on openness, inclusivity, and sustainability.

RLUK will proactively work with members to support and enable the:

1. **Shift to digital**
   The continuing transition from analogue to digital in research library collections, services, and user expectations, and understanding of the implications of this transition.

2. **Shift within digital**
   The proliferation of digital scholarship tools and techniques which are revolutionising the use of research library collections, reshaping services, and changing the skills, infrastructure, and capability requirements of users, staff and institutions.

3. **Equitable shift**
   The creation of digital services and tools that are equitable, accessible, and environmentally sustainable.
What this means

RLUK will:

1. Deliver the contents of its *Digital Shift Manifesto for 2022-2025*, including its cross-sector and high-profile Digital Shift Forum, and support its members to develop *innovative and sustainable* digital services.

2. Harness the experience, expertise and capacity of its members through its *Digital Scholarship Network (DSN)* and seize collective opportunities, face shared challenges, and develop tangible programmes of work through which these can be met.

3. Define how research libraries can equitably engage with *emerging technologies* at scale, including artificial intelligence, advocating for their ethical use, and the need for flexible copyright and licensing frameworks that enable *emerging forms of research and scholarship*.

4. Build programmes, joint resources, and skills-sharing opportunities that enhance the collective *digital skills base* of its members, directed by a *digital workforce development strategy* which has diversity at its core.

5. Work to better understand how the challenges of *digital poverty and exclusion* amongst research library users and communities can be overcome, both institutionally and collectively.

6. Work with its national and international *partners and stakeholders* to explore and advocate for the role of digital content creation as digital research infrastructure and for its sustainable funding as such.
Open scholarship

We are in the midst of a shift towards greater openness in research – in terms of both research processes and access to the outputs of scholarship. However, although there have been significant moves over the past two decades, there are still variations in practice across disciplines and types of output. Policy, regulatory environment (especially around copyright and licensing), and technology all have a role to play in making the shift to open. RLUK will support its members in moving towards an ‘open by default’ setting.

RLUK will proactively work with members to support and enable:

1. **Open access to research outputs**
   As journals and monographs move to open, issues around value and pricing models, licensing, and sustainability continue.

2. **Development of Open Educational Resources**
   As models for etextbooks fail students and libraries, greater emphasis should be placed on further developing and exploiting models for Open Educational Resources.

3. **Processes**
   Support openness and transparency across the entire research cycle to ensure reproducibility, reusable data and ethical approaches to research assessment.
What this means

RLUK will:

1. Work across the membership and with Jisc to deliver sustainable deals with publishers for OA publishing (and continued read access to non-OA material) that promote efficiency, value-for-money, and equality in terms of access to content and publishing venues.

2. Engage with funding bodies to ensure RLUK members are able to help fulfil open access mandates, including ensuring an effective rights environment to enable openness.

3. Continue to work through the RLUK Open Access Publishers Processes Group (OAPP) to reduce friction in workflows supporting OA.

4. Work with new university presses and smaller, independent publishers to develop and support new models for open access monographs.

5. Build on work internationally to bring innovations in Open Educational Resources to the UK and Ireland.

6. Investigate the role of library support across the whole of the research cycle and promote openness in that cycle where appropriate.
Culture and heritage

Research libraries are the custodians and curators of internationally significant and diverse Cultural and Heritage collections. These include multi-format archives and special collections, museum and gallery items, and increasing volumes of digital content, which underpin cross-disciplinary scholarship. These collections, both physical and digital, represent the collective memory and consciousness of societies, cultures, and communities. Research libraries are at the forefront of engaging large and diverse audiences with their acquisition, curation, presentation, and use. RLUK will work with members to maximise the scholarly and societal impact of these collections, support their innovative curation and presentation, promote the role that collections and the staff who care for them have as catalysts for cross-community and disciplinary discourse, and highlight their joint role in addressing key societal challenges.

RLUK will work with its members to enable and advocate for the role of culture and heritage collections and services as:

1. **Catalysts for change**
   Promoting the role of collections in shaping discourse and responding to contemporary challenges.

2. **Research infrastructure**
   Highlighting collections as the bedrock of multi-disciplinary and cross-professional practices.

3. **Shared approaches**
   Maximising the impact of collections through collaborative approaches to discovery, access and use.

### 1. Catalysts for change

In driving scholarly and societal discourse around the key challenges and opportunities we face as individuals, institutions, and communities.

### 2. Research infrastructure

As the bedrock of multi-disciplinary research and cross-professional practices which underpin the role of research libraries as laboratories of experimentation for the arts, humanities, social sciences, and beyond.

### 3. Shared approaches

Through the creation of collaborative opportunities between institutions to enhance the discovery, access, and use of collections by the widest possible audience, and to collectively challenge established biases within their description, acquisition, and use.
What this means

RLUK will:

1. Harness the collective capacity, insight, and experience of its members through its Special Collections and Heritage Network (SCHN), to support innovation, research leadership, and collaboration amongst special collections, archives, and heritage professions.

2. Work with members to collectively challenge established biases in the acquisition, description, and presentation of heritage and cultural collections through knowledge exchange, sharing best practice, and drawing on expertise from across the research library community and beyond.

3. Advocate for the centrality of heritage and cultural collections in enabling cross-disciplinary experimentation and for their contribution to the role of research libraries as laboratories for the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

4. To develop a better understanding of the possibilities and challenges of the digital shift on the presentation, use, and preservation of heritage and cultural collections.

5. Investigate networked approaches to the discovery and use of heritage and cultural collections through the creation of hybrid physical-digital spaces which enable geographically remote scholarship and engagement with diverse groups of users.

6. Work in collaboration and partnership with national and international stakeholders to advocate for copyright and licensing frameworks that enable the digitisation of out-of-commerce works, and for a UK equivalent to the EU orphan works exemption.
Collective collections

The collections held by RLUK members, together with other memory institutions across the world, provide an interconnected network of scholarship. Scholars and students navigate this network to get the full range of materials they need to further their research or learning. By coming together, RLUK members and the wider community can introduce efficiencies into the processes underpinning support for research and look to set up collaborative collection management. RLUK will identify potential areas for collaborative actions, with a focus on those that can best be progressed by collectives at the scale of RLUK.

RLUK will work with its members to facilitate collaboration around:

1. **Collections**
   Investigating commonalities of collections (for example, in print monographs) and develop collective solutions to provide efficiencies and reduce duplication of effort.

2. **Discovery**
   Promoting efficient and effective data flows to ensure that resources are discoverable to readers.

3. **Processes**
   Reviewing existing and emerging processes (for example, systems underpinning inter-library loan, research data management, and institutional repositories) to ensure that they are fit for purpose and match the needs of modern research libraries.
What this means

RLUK will:

1. Work through the *Collections Strategy Network (CSN)* to move towards solutions for print monographs.

2. Review existing and emerging processes through the CSN to look for areas where greater collaboration could bring further efficiencies.

3. Continue to work with Jisc and other partners on Plan M, to enhance bibliographic metadata, streamline cataloguing processes and improve discoverability. Investigate the most appropriate rights environment for metadata to encourage open sharing.

4. Expand the *RLUK SPACE Programme*, particularly in light of evolving ideas around hybrid and blended working.

5. Work to ensure vibrant markets and sustainable community solutions for creating and managing collective collections.
These cross-cutting themes act as both a provocation and an opportunity, to think and work differently.
Cross-cutting themes

Three themes will run throughout RLUK’s work. They represent key challenges to RLUK, its members, and wider society, and require us to be bold in our vision and disruptive and transformative in our activities. These themes act as both a provocation and an opportunity, to think and work differently, build new partnerships, and help to address some of the key institutional and societal challenges we face.

**RLUK will work with its members to incorporate these themes within all aspects of our work wherever possible.**

1. **Equality, diversity and inclusion**
   RLUK members are committed to creating and maintaining inclusive organisations, structures, and spaces which celebrate diversity, welcome difference, and embed positive change. RLUK will work with its members, stakeholders, and partners to take actions across our community that challenge structural inequalities and biases in collections, services, and access.

2. **Rights, copyright and licensing**
   Urgent change is required within the UK’s copyright and licensing frameworks. Whilst preserving the protections of rights holders, RLUK will work with its members, stakeholders, and partners to call for a reformed and functioning copyright and licensing regime for the UK that is appropriate to the complexities of current and emerging forms of scholarship.

3. **Infrastructure**
   Research libraries both contain and act as research and innovation infrastructure. They are places of experimentation for cross- and multi-disciplinary scholarship and collaboration, home to a diverse range of specialist skills and expertise, and hold diverse collections and technical facilities which form the bedrock of research. They are major pieces of cultural infrastructure, providing spaces, content, and skills for creative practice and innovation. In addition, there is a layer of infrastructure that sits above individual libraries and enhances the efficiency of all member institutions.

These cross-cutting themes will run through each of the strategy’s headline strands.

Each **headline strand** will include a number of strategic outcomes to be realised over the period 2022-2025. Specific implementation plans will be published in support of the strategy over the course of its delivery, outlining an ambitious programme of events, initiatives, and activities through which these outcomes will be realised.
Summary

These are uncertain times for the research and scholarly communities, and society more generally. This strategy outlines the key strategic priorities of RLUK and how we intend to deliver against these over the period 2022-2025.

This is an ambitious strategy and will draw on the collective expertise, experience and capacity of our members, RLUK’s convening power amongst the information, scholarly and heritage communities more widely, and the high-impact collaborations we have developed with our strategic partners.

This strategy is RLUK’s invitation to our members, partners, and the wider sectors and communities in which they operate, to join us in realising our ambitious vision of

_The Library Transforming._
The Library Transforming is an ambitious strategy that will draw on the collective expertise, experience and capacity of our members."