

What's in our in-trays? The SCONUL Top Concerns Survey 2008

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INTRODUCTION

The fourth survey of SCONUL members' top concerns took place during the first two weeks of April 2008. As in 2007, the 2008 survey used the *e-inform* web survey platform from Priority Research Ltd. SCONUL is grateful to Priority Research for their invaluable support in developing and in administering this survey.

There were 115 respondents for this year's survey, representing just over two-thirds of the total institutional membership of SCONUL. This is an improved response rate compared to the 96 responses received in 2007.¹

As in previous years, the survey tried to get a picture of the "hot topics" which dominated the work and thinking of SCONUL Librarians and Directors, both over the previous three months and for the next year. As well as giving an interesting insight into the variety of issues lurking in SCONUL director's in-trays, the Top Concerns Survey is a useful tool prioritising SCONUL strategies and in ensuring that these match our members' interests.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The clear top concern for both the last three months and over the next year is space and buildings. 93% of respondents rated this as either a high or a very high concern over the last three months and 94% rated it in the same way over the next twelve months. This was also the case for the sub-groups within the survey (by home country, by size of institution and so on) almost all of whom had space and buildings as their top-rated issue. This issue received corresponding ratings of 84% for both periods in the 2007 survey.

For the next twelve months, the three concerns with the highest ratings were:

- Space and buildings (94%)
- Funding and financial management (84%)
- E-environment (84%)

An additional question in the 2008 survey attempted to get more detail on aspects of the e-environment. The two areas with the highest ratings were:

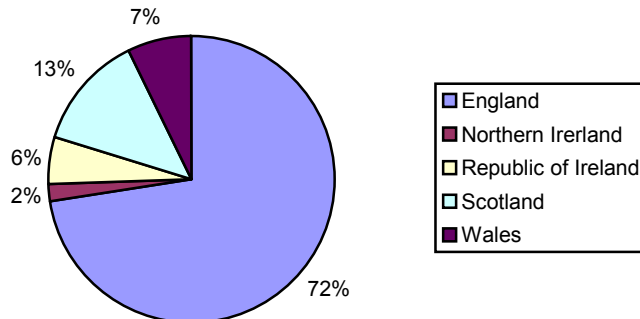
- Access Management (87%)
- Provision of E-Resources (86%)

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The 2008 survey saw a 20% increase in the response rate, with a total of 115 respondents. This represents around 68% of all SCONUL institutional members.

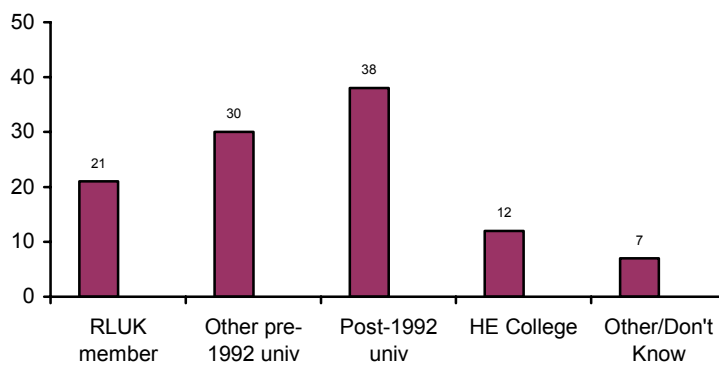
Within this improved response rate, the demographic breakdown of respondents by country, type of institution, size of institution and by type of service was broadly similar to the 2007 survey.

Percentage of Respondents by Country



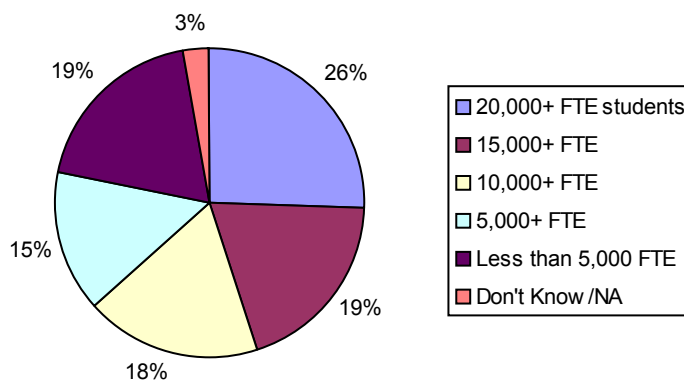
The 2008 survey saw an improved response rate from the Republic of Ireland. Other responses rates broadly reflected the number of HE institutions per country.

Percentage of Respondents by Type of Institution



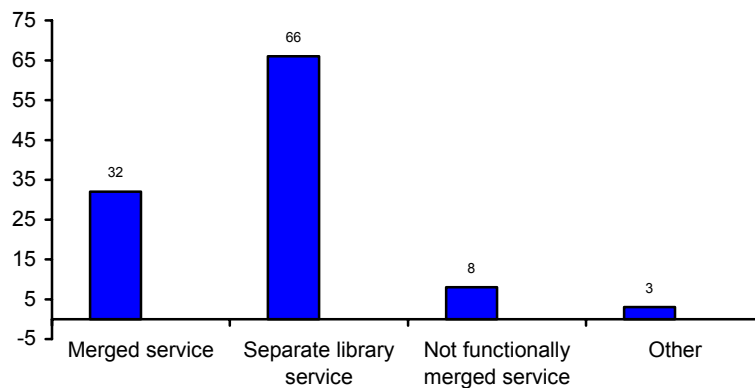
The response rate by type of institution (based on the categorisation in the *SCONUL Statistical Return*) was similar to that in the previous year's survey.

Percentage of Respondents by Size of Institution



Responses by size of institution were broadly similar to the 2007 survey, but with an improved level of responses from the very largest institutions.

Percentage of Respondents by Type of Service



Compared to 2007, there was an increased number of responses from separate library services and a drop in the number of responses from services which are not functionally merged. Once again, these categories are taken from the *SCONUL Statistical Return*.

TOP CONCERNS OVER THE LAST THREE MONTHS

The survey attempted to see what issues have predominated over the previous three months. As in all four of the *SCONUL Top Concerns* surveys, issues were categorised into twelve broad areas, with examples. For example, “Space and Buildings” gave the examples of “building projects, learning spaces and space management”.

The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who rated the following concerns as either “high” or “very high”.

Top Concern Percentages for the Last Three Months



Space and buildings increased as a concern from a rating of 84% in 2007 to a rating of 93% in 2008.

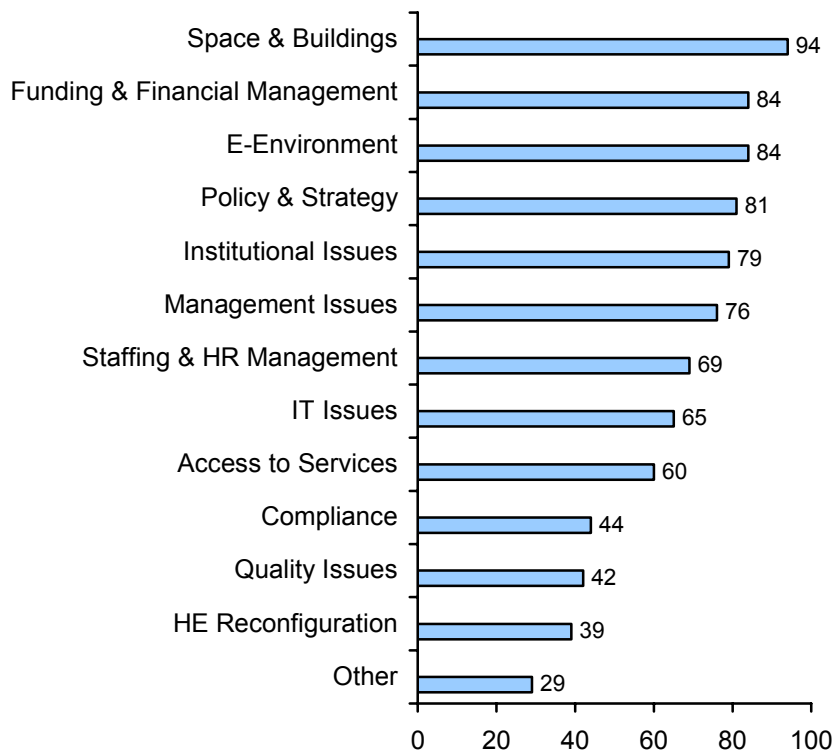
The top four concerns in 2007 were (in order):

- E-Environment (88%)
- Space & Buildings (84%)
- Staffing & HR Management (80%)
- Policy & Strategy (78%)

TOP CONCERNS OVER THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS

SCONUL members' concerns over the next twelve months are, perhaps, more relevant to SCONUL strategic planning.

Top Concern Percentages for the Next Twelve Months



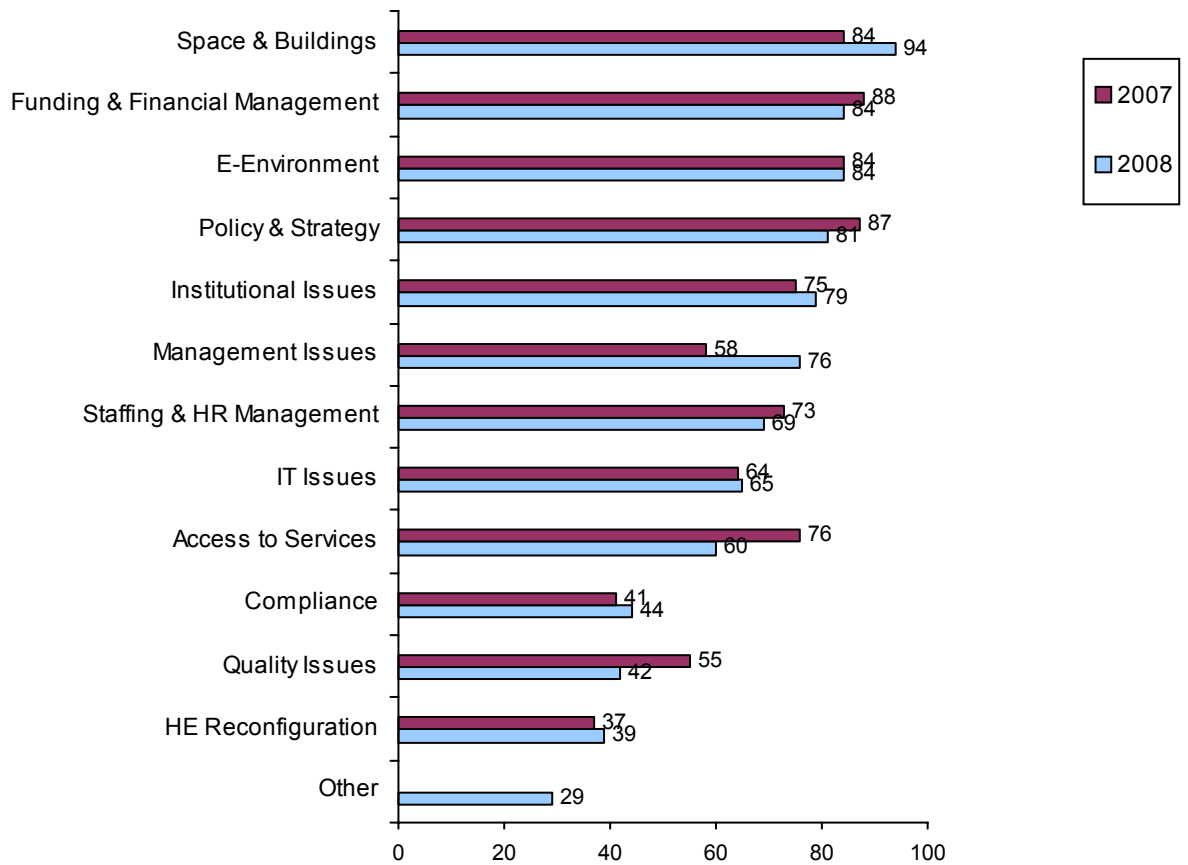
Once again, space and buildings heightened as a concern from an 84% rating in 2007 to 94% in 2008.

The top four concerns last year were:

- Funding and Financial Management (88%)
- Policy & Strategy (87%)
- Space & Buildings (84%)
- E-Environment (84%)

As we run more of these surveys on a regular, annual basis, then it will be interesting to see which issues predominate and which issues become less of a regular concern. Given the relatively small sample size, some caution is needed in interpreting changes in top concerns over the last year. Whilst most concerns have remained fairly constant, space and buildings and management issues have increased as concerns. Correspondingly, issues relating to access to services and quality appear to have diminished.

Comparative Ratings for the Next Twelve Months: 2007 and 2008

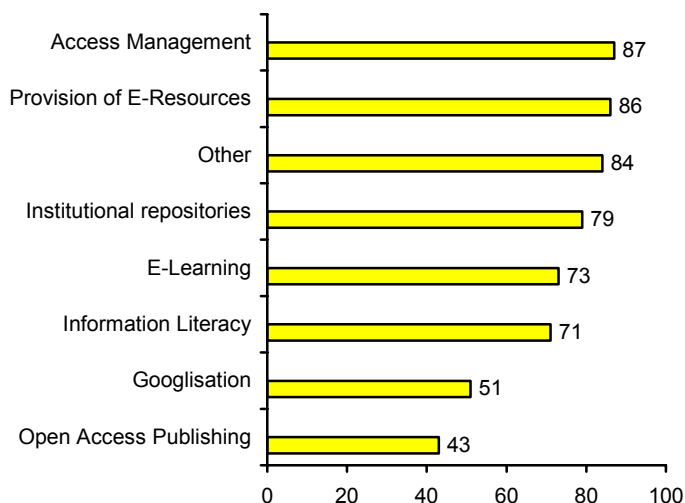


E-ENVIRONMENT TOP CONCERNS

The e-environment was one of the top concerns in the 2007 survey. As this is a wide-ranging area, an additional question was added to the 2008 survey. This attempted to clarify which areas of the e-environment would be major concerns over the next twelve months.

The same ratings scales were used for this more detailed look at a single top concern. 43% of respondents rated open access publishing as either a high or a very high concern, with 87% of respondents rating access management as either a high or a very high concern. The relatively high rating for access management is unsurprising, given that this is a recent and rather contentious issue.

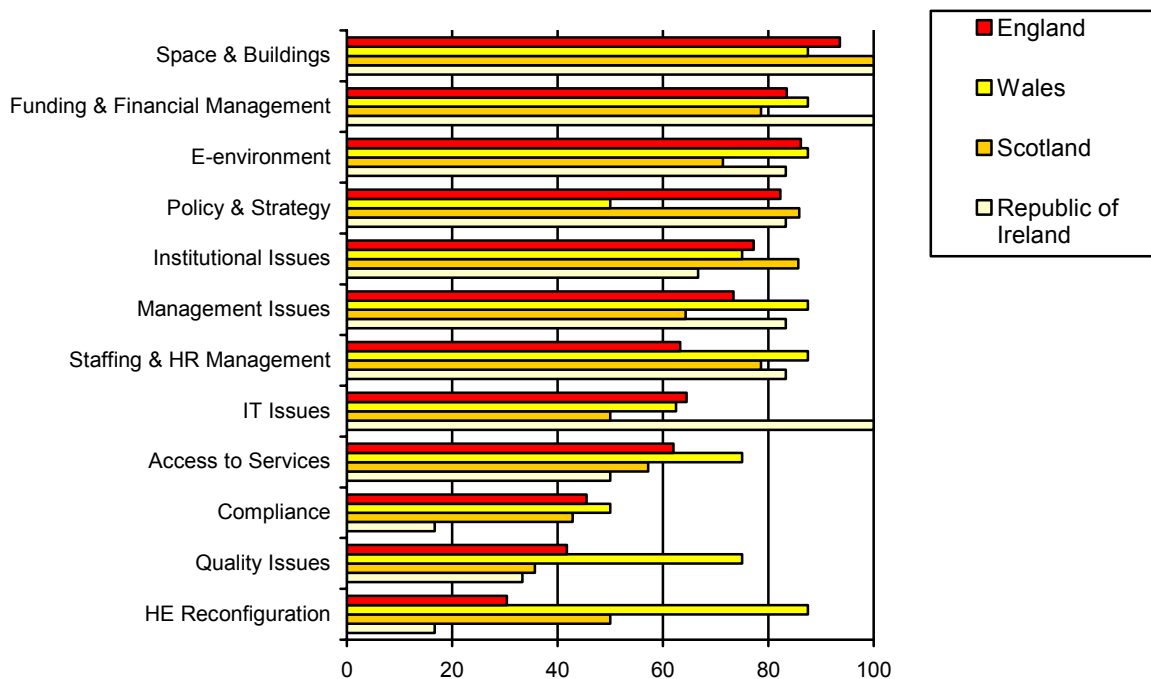
E-Environment: Top Concerns Over the Next Twelve Months



TOP CONCERNS OF SUB-GROUPS

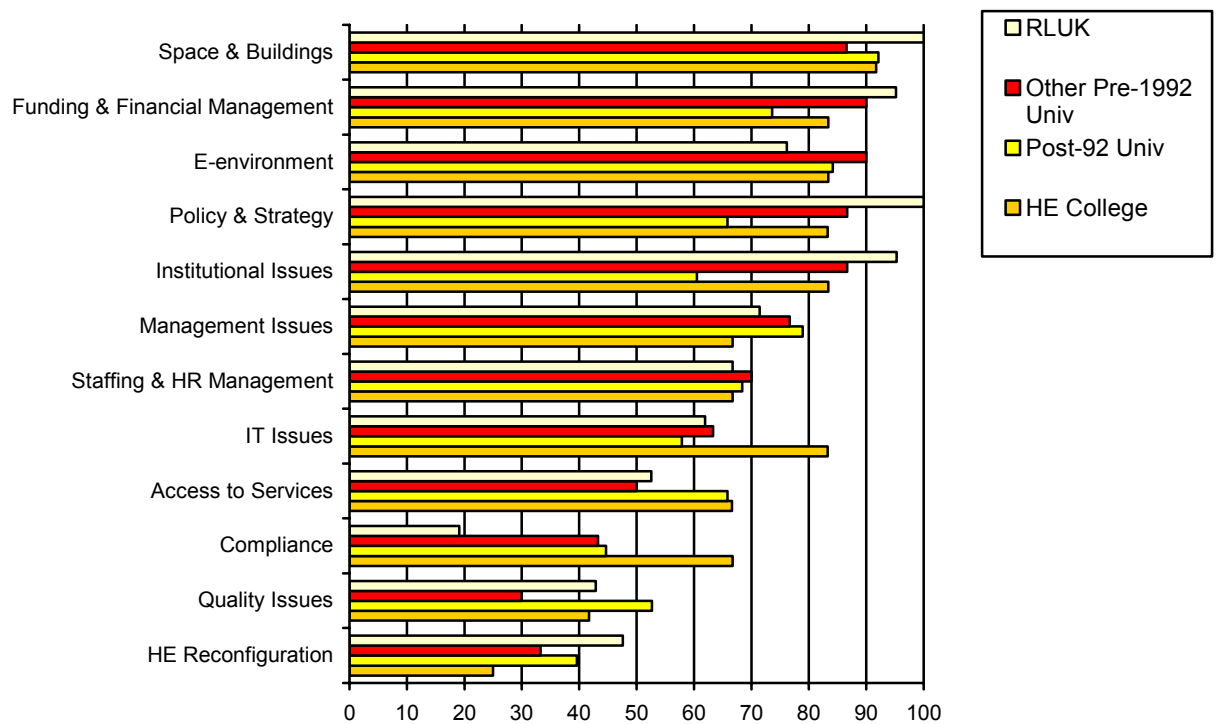
As in last year's survey, the 2008 survey included some demographic questions. Respondents were asked to indicate their home country, their type of institution (based on the SCONUL *Statistical Return*), the size of their institution in terms of student FTEs and their type of organisation. This allowed cross-tabulation of this data against the top concerns ratings over the next twelve months. The demographic response rates broadly matched the make-up of SCONUL members but, inevitably, some of the sample sizes are small, so there should be a fairly cautious interpretation of these results.

Top Concerns Over the Next Twelve Months by Country



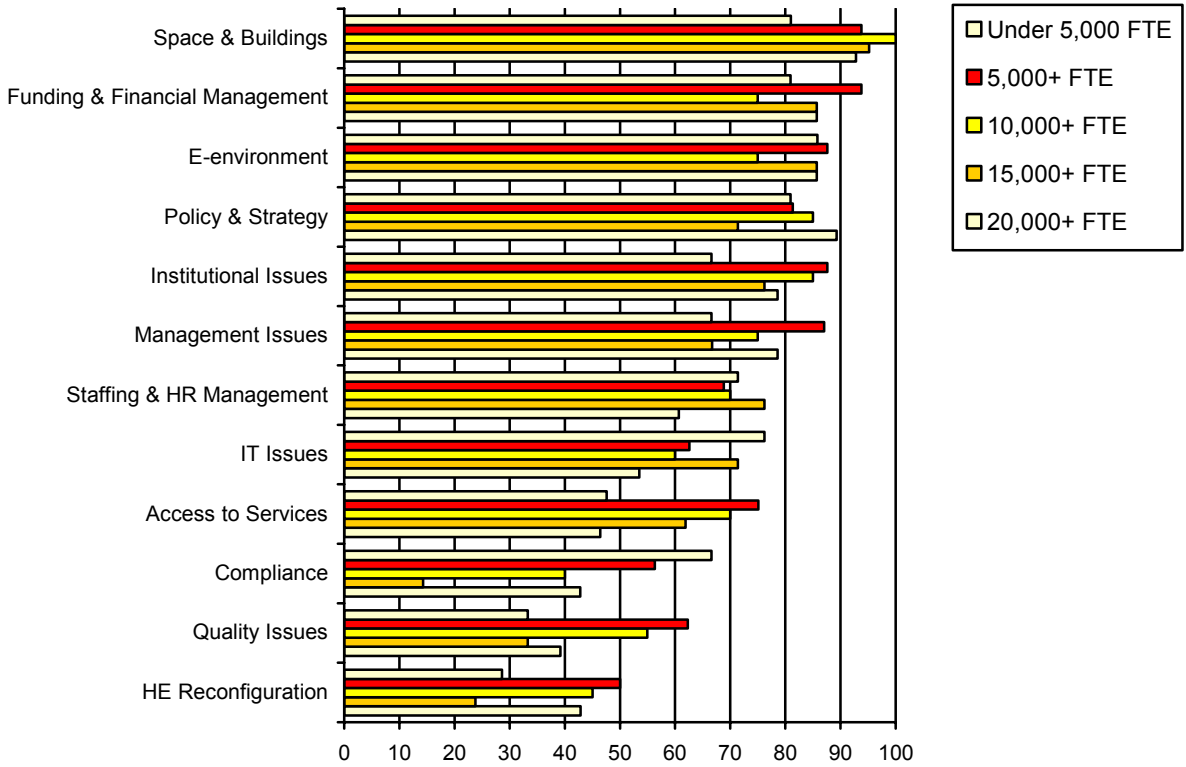
Response rates by country broadly matched the number of SCONUL members in each country. The sample size from Northern Ireland was too small to be included but there was a higher response rate from the Republic of Ireland this year. Most responses were very similar to the overall ratings for these issues. IT issues received a relatively high rating in the Republic of Ireland. Quality issues were more highly rated in Wales, probably because almost all Welsh institutions have had QAA Institutional Reviews over the last two years. Higher education reconfiguration continues to be a more active issue in Wales.

Top Concerns Over the Next Twelve Months by Type of Institution



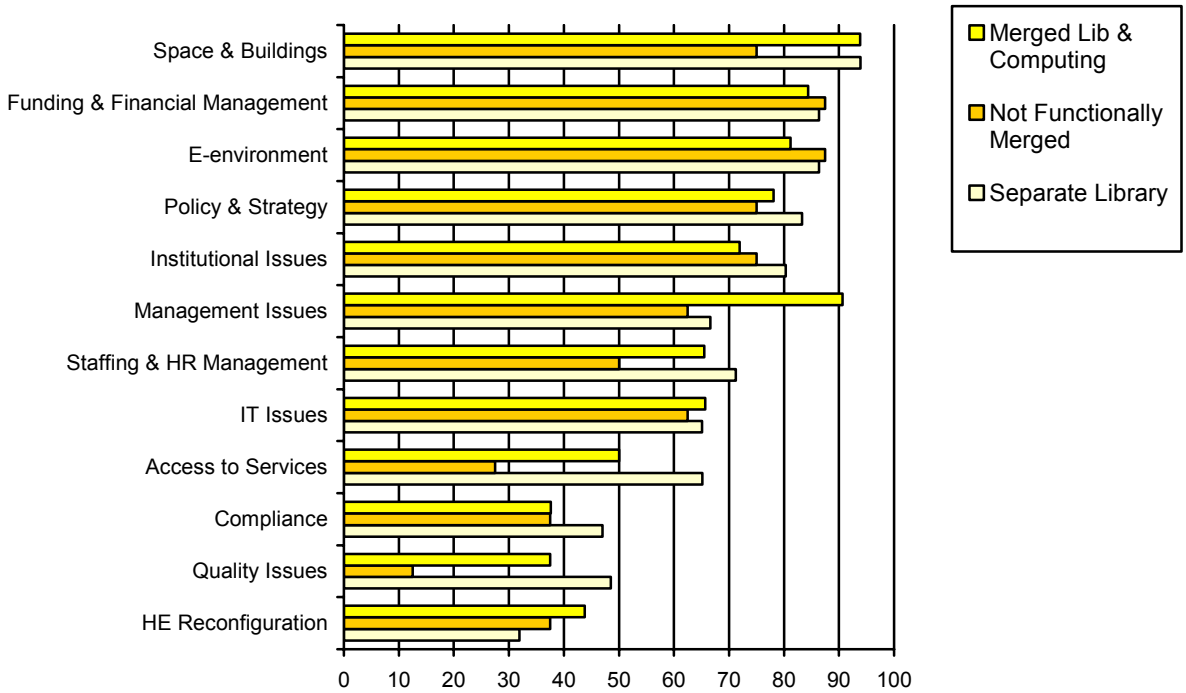
The categorisations are based on the four broad groupings used in the SCONUL *Statistical Return*. Again, the similarities in the ratings for issues over the next twelve months are striking.

Top Concerns Over the Next Twelve Months by Size of Institution



Once again, the same concerns are shared across the smallest to the largest institutions.

Top Concerns Over the Next Twelve Months by Type of Service



The similarities in major issues over the next year are again very similar between separate libraries and converged services.

CONCLUSION

The 2008 SCONUL Top Concerns Survey has provided a useful snapshot of SCONUL Directors and Librarians' current issues and what will be major topics over the next year. Compared to last year's survey, issues relating to space and buildings have become relatively more important. As with the 2007 survey, all of us are balancing a variety of complex and demanding issues. Perhaps even more than last year, there is a striking homogeneity in how we rate these issues. So, we have an interesting variety of concerns in our in-trays but we all tend to agree on their relative importance.

¹ C.M. West 'The SCONUL top concerns survey 2007', *SCONUL Focus*, 41, 2007, pp 79-85