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# News from SCONUL

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## 'What's occupying you?' SCONUL top concerns survey 2004



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At its meeting in October 2004, the SCONUL Executive Board (EB) approved a new 'top concerns survey' along the same lines as recent ones run by UCISA ([www.ucisa.ac.uk](http://www.ucisa.ac.uk)) and CONUL (Consortium of National and University Libraries in Ireland).

This was one of a number of consultation exercises undertaken since the summer of 2004 designed to feed into the future SCONUL planning process. The others include the ORC International study and SCONUL Vision 2010 exercise, details of which are all available on the SCONUL website, as well as discussions with Chairs of the various groups.

A 'concern' can be defined as something relating to anxiety and worry, but also to care and support. In carrying out the survey EB members hoped to identify issues high on the agenda of senior management as a means to:

- ensure EB is aware of members' current key issues/concerns
- help identify where there are gaps in current services and so inform our priorities
- help members to know about other people's main concerns
- help towards internal communication

- complement work to set a new agenda for SCONUL activity based round a formal review of groups and committees and a major financial strategy review
- complement work on improving influencing/ partnership
- help plan services/ activities/ events  
SCONUL will engage in over the next two years.

The email survey itself was aimed specifically at directors. Sent out on 12 October 2004, it asked two questions:

- 'From the perspective of your 'day job', please identify what have been your three top concerns over the last three months'*
- 'Do any other professional bodies/groups already support you in handling these concerns? If so, which one(s)?'*

Some 49 responses were received and collated. The key issues raised in the survey were as follows, given in a composite (A-Z, unranked) list. As expected these are wide-ranging but not earth-shattering, but they do give an insight into the wide, and ever-widening, range of things that directors are expected to cope with at the present time:

### 1 Access to services

- o collaborative provision; participation in collaborative schemes; widening access (including diversity, disability, etc.); licensing electronic resources to those not clearly defined as members of the institution. For example: 'how do you cost library support to ensure you are funded to provide services to people who have signed up to a range of inventive contracts with your university?' and 'what should our relationship be with partner institutions and their students?'
- o demand for extended opening hours and changes in the nature of library use: the 'student experience': library as potential whipping boy for institutional shortcomings?
- o delivering remote services (to further education colleges and NHS sites)

### 2 Compliance

- o freedom of information, including the impact on the library service
- o records management

- o copyright: ensuring staff and students keep within guidelines particularly in relation to electronic resources and VLEs
- o health and safety issues in the current legislative environment – local accountability – burgeoning risk assessments

### 3 E-resources, e-learning, e-environment

- o escalating costs, procurement and value for money of e-resources
- o lack of time to evaluate e-deals
- o procuring e-books, particularly for nursing
- o managing user expectations in the context of escalating costs and standstill budgets (and staffing)
- o constructing and exploiting linkages between library management systems and e-resources
- o portal development, including the presentation of hybrid resources to integrate with VLE/MLE concept
- o website management and migration to new content management
- o dealing with the challenge of user behaviour: searching the web, especially via Google, in preference to using library services
- o access to e-resources for courses run at partner colleges; for example 'It causes friction with academic colleagues who don't understand why we cannot get the resources'
- o dealing with the challenge that e-delivery makes access easier, but restricts the public access that was offered in the print environment
- o engaging senior management and academic staff in the library's role in embedding e-resources and information literacy as a component of e-pedagogy
- o VLEs (including procurement) and the impact of e-learning on the library; for example 'I am concerned that our institution has not yet decided on which VLE it will have and has gone the way of e-learning programmes which can sit in any VLE - to my mind they are putting the cart before the horse!'
- o lack of money and staff to exploit the e-learning environment
- o developing a VRE and supporting e-science
- o institutional repositories: raising awareness, and the associated issues (copyright, IPR, open access)

- o uncertainty over the role of the Research Libraries Network in relation to current university library provision

#### **4 Funding and financial management**

- o budget cuts
- o funding insufficient for purchase of resources or to sustain services
- o funding levels affecting staffing and development
- o formulating a development plan drawing attention to relatively poor funding
- o budgets in the context of a library company
- o dealing with new institutional budget allocation processes, and determining an acceptable political solution to allocating funding to a reorganised academic structure
- o fund allocation
- o fundraising: for building developments, cataloguing special collections, maintaining services
- o impact of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report on the future of scholarly publishing

#### **5 Higher Education reconfiguration**

- o establishing a merged service and rationalising provision of information resources

#### **6 Institutional issues**

- o balancing the workloads of the Librarian's library and institutional roles
- o being expected to contribute to/be an expert on data protection, freedom of information, records management, information strategy and institutional repository development
- o retaining full involvement in academic planning and developments at a time of institutional change
- o planning how the library should develop in the light of institutional change: for example 'In the light of the changing character of the University, fundamentally what kind of library is this, how should we develop our collections, both printed and electronic, over the next five to ten years, and how should we allocate funding?'
- o establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with other support services, including working with Estates on large-scale projects
- o convergence of library and IT services

- o the drive to improve the institution's position in league tables (directly related to spend on IT and information resources)
- o dealing with the tensions between institutional competition and the service benefits of collaboration
- o dealing with complex institutional politics

#### **7 IT issues**

- o introduction of a new library management system
- o student access to PCs; laptops and wireless connectivity

#### **8 Management issues**

- o change management issues: new ways of working with academic colleagues; repositioning the library in the university
- o getting communication processes right in a large converged department
- o completing projects on time and within budgets
- o integration of front-line services, including enquiry services and IT support delivery

#### **9 Policy and strategy**

- o collection policies
- o developing a financial strategy
- o information strategy revision
- o reviewing the Library's vision
- o redrafting space and collection management strategy, driven by the need to house ever growing research collections

#### **10 Quality issues**

- o performance measurement, quality measurement, benchmarking
- o preparation for institutional audit
- o preparing for Charter Mark reassessment

#### **11 Space and buildings**

- o space planning and management including
  - (a) capacity and configuration issues; for example 'LRCs were set up to provide a specific approach to support (from desks) and one-size-fits all design. We want to move to a new service culture (issues under discussion are self-service, 24x7, a triage approach to enquiries, etc.). We also want to design different bits of the buildings to support different clienteles, e.g. we've just launched a research sup-

- port area - and if (feasible) the ground floors would become total cyber cafe and group work areas.'
- (b) making headroom in existing space, planning for future demands
- (c) impact of growing student numbers, while research print publishing continues at a high rate
- o building projects - developing case and options appraisal; securing funding, finalising M&E and structural works, preparing tenders for contractors; delays; dealing with a project that went into financial meltdown
- o closing a campus library
- o planning and funding collaborative remote storage
- o defending the need for library and information resources space as a physical entity in a 'virtual' environment

## 12 Staffing and HR management

- o cultural change amongst a wide range of staff, and their ability to respond to it
- o performance management
- o dealing with difficult HR issues including disciplinary issues, redeployment, preparing for redundancy and negotiating with trade unions
- o increasingly seeming to do more and more of what would once have been 'central HR Dept' work
- o new institutional HR policies
- o new appraisal scheme
- o skills development, including IT skills, advocacy, marketing, awareness raising, thinking creatively, communicating effectively; for example 'We need database skills, library system skills, deep data mining etc. E-learning also requires a different and more co-operative approach to service provision with teaching teams, etc.' and 'Creating and maintaining the right skill mix \awareness for all IS staff in order to embrace and develop new technological applications for the delivery of services.'
- o job evaluation
- o leadership and management development, especially for senior managers; succession planning; addressing lack of management expertise at senior/middle levels
- o remuneration, status and conditions
- o transfer to new single pay spine

- o staff restructuring, staffing structures and deployment, job design,
- o staffing levels, especially management
- o failure to recruit - especially professional staff
- o an ageing, and relatively conservative, staff
- o staffing service developments - electronic library services, 24x7, promoting self-service, increasing learner support

EB discussed and rejected a proposal to identify a final list of concerns for issuing to directors for them to rank each in order of importance using a five-point scale, which would then be processed using SPSS (or other) to produce frequency, mean score and standard deviation to provide final results and final ranking of concerns so as to reach an opinion on the importance of each to the whole SCONUL community. The areas were considered too diffuse to be concertinaed in this way.

One clear output from the survey (and other consultation exercises) has been to help EB identify and plan the services, activities and events SCONUL should provide for members over the next two years. The results were fed into the (ongoing) review of SCONUL activity and will inform the activities of many of the Working and Task & Finish Groups. For example, early changes will be seen in the refocus of the Buildings group onto wider issues related to space planning and in the raft of new work related to e-learning.

Lastly, it is now planned to run such an email survey every year – it will be interesting to see whether the areas identified above are repeated or disappear ...and what new issues appear on the horizon.